Lil' Eva Discovers her Alternative Identity: An Adventure in Gender, Identity, and Cuba

Elizabeth C. Salerno

University of Miami, elizabethcsalerno@gmail.com

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LIL’ EVA DISCOVERS HER ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE: AN ADVENTURE IN GENDER, IDENTITY, AND CUBA

By

Elizabeth C. Salerno

A THESIS

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LIL’ EVA DISCOVERS HER ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE: AN ADVENTURE IN GENDER, IDENTITY, AND CUBA

Elizabeth C. Salerno

Approved:

________________
Lillian Manzor Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Spanish

________________
Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

________________
Sumita Dutt Ph.D.
Joint Lecturer, History and Women and Gender Studies

________________
Traci Ardren Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Anthropology

________________
Richard Simpson Ph.D.
Lecturer, English Composition
Traveling is a way of expanding your perspective, which allows you to experiment with different genders of identity. Cuban children in Luyano spend much time outside of their home, or traveling "in the sense that they are exposed to worlds outside of their immediate family. Using the character of Lil Eva as a literary device. I hope to demonstrated the ways in which travel influences your identity. Simultaneously her adventures in Luyano demonstrate the fluidity of interaction between people of different ages and lifestyles. While this sort of fluidity exists in many cultures, I believe the economic pressures present in Cuba create an elevated level of tolerance and sympathy for people whose lifestyle is dependent on illicit activities. This tolerance is tangible throughout Cuban society, kind of...Ultimately the use of Lil Eva to convey the anecdotes serves to keep the reader conscious of the fact that no research is unbiased, and there is no way for the researcher to isolate their research from their personal experiences.
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Chapter 1: In Which Both You and I Become Familiar with Lil’ Eva and Some of the Themes of this Thesis

In the midst of writing my thesis I happened to attend a discussion with Nilo Cruz. Besides acquainting me with Cruz’s work, the discussion also introduced me to a very special young lady not completely unlike myself. This would be Lil’ Eva. Like me she had never read any of Cruz’s work, so I encouraged her to visit the Cuban Heritage Collection in the University of Miami library. I was working there at the time, and assured her that Nilo Cruz’s works could be found there. The following is a transcript of the discussion that transpired between her and me on the day she came to request a few of Cruz’s works.

Me: Hey
Lil’ Eva: Hey

Me: I’m glad you came. When she sent me to get these books out of the back I figured it was for you, because I was like “oh hey, these are the two that I would have picked.” (I gestured to *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* and *A Bicycle Country*.)

Lil’ Eva: Oh, you would have picked these two too?

Me: Yeah. I have a funny relationship with the name Hortensia, because it’s what my parents would have named me. My brother wanted to name me Tuna.

Lil’ Eva: Oh, yeah, it’s an interesting name, Tuna. I rather like it. Hortensia is kind of sweet as well. I always thought Ladle would be a very pretty name.

Me: Yeah, you would . . . and I like the idea of a museum of dreams, but I always thought museums were for dead things, or inanimate things.

Lil’ Eva: I always felt that everything in Cuba sort of felt like a museum.
Me: Oh, is that something they say?

Lil’ Eva: It’s something they say. You have not been?

Me: No, no I work here and I do a lot of reading about it, and I know a lot of Cubans between working here and my neighbors. I thought what you said to Nilo yesterday was interesting, about Cuban artists not being pressured to supply what audiences want to see.

Lil’ Eva: There are some good things to say. I don’t know how you feel about it, what I said to Nilo is of course very idealistic. There are lots of downsides to artists being supplied money by the state.

Me: I mean of course. They have to produce things with certain feelings I’m sure.

Lil’ Eva: It makes a lot of the art very ironic. A lot of it has interesting commentaries on affluence, a certain disdain for it, but simultaneous enchantment.

Me: Yeah. I’ve read some things written here by Cubans. José Mijares, the painter, ridiculed the modern contrivances that were available to him here, and Eugenio Florit, the poet, hated them too: metal chairs, glass tables, thermostats.¹ Yeah, I have certain disdain for affluence as well.

Lil’ Eva: Oh, you should, everyone should, but at the same time. It’s a . . . in this country it’s easier because you have it and if you’re really privileged you can have a disdain for it, but if you don’t have it, it’s more difficult. Some people just want to have enough dishes to necessitate a dishwasher, and of course they want a dishwasher as well.

Me: Amen to that. Did you enjoy *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams*?

Lil’ Eva: Yeah, yeah, there were a lot of things that I agreed with a lot. I marked some of them down. I find it’s good for me to take notes.

¹ Eugenio Florit Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.
Me: Yeah I do that too.

Lil’ Eva: On the side

Me: Yeah.

Lil’ Eva: Helps you interact with the text.

Me: Hah, of course, that’s marginalia.

Lil’ Eva: margi...what?

Me: nalia. The things on the side of things.

Lil’ Eva: Ohhh...

Me: You know I was wondering where you’re from.

Lil’ Eva: Oh, hah, um, well . . . well . . . I usually tell most people I’m from Cuba. That’s where I was last, but before then I was from Florida, I suppose, from the United States. Made in the U.S.A. I umm lived under a rock as they say.

Me: You don’t have to answer. I know it can be a touchy subject. I get touchy about where I’m from. When I tell people I’m from Jacksonville they look at me and say “but where are you FROM?” I was doing some interviews in Houston and I had to ask everyone where they were from. One man tried to evade the question and said “Crecí aquí en Texas.” When I asked him where he was actually from he said emphatically “Yo tengo papeles!” I felt so bad. I mean, when we ask people where they’re from we’re really just trying to understand more about their perspective. I grew up under a rock too, very sheltered you know, but everyone grows up sheltered in some fashion or another, without knowledge of something. We’re all sheltered.

Lil’ Eva: Yes, we are, aren’t we? I, uhh . . . I don’t know why I feel okay telling you this, but I’m from a cupboard.²

² See image 1.0
Me: Oh, yesss, I, uh, I knew that actually.

Lil’ Eva: You did?

Me: I sort of began to suspect it just because you seemed to be on the same page as me.

Lil’ Eva: On the same page?

Me: Well yes, I, there’s no easy way to say this . . . Eva, but, I, ummm I made you up.

Lil’ Eva: Oh, right.

Me: But, the curious thing is that you’ve had experiences now which you can share with me and with everyone, and they are truly your own.

Lil’ Eva: Right

Me: I mean, I feel like you’re freaking out a little bit, but don’t, it’s not a big deal, it’s the same as anyone. I mean, everyone sort of lives in a cupboard and only gets to interact with their owners.

Lil’ Eva: Owners?

Me: Well, I mean your parents aren’t your owners, but they do keep you, shelter you, restrict...control what you hear.

Lil’ Eva: Yes, yes that’s just how I feel about the lady whose house the bowl is from. It’s such an awkward title to give her; I don’t even really like to say it because it’s so awkward.

Me: Yeah, I know, who you mean. It’s much less sentimental than a title you’d give your parents. But that’s good. You really have nothing to do with her, or them. It’s more important with whom you choose to be around. Clearly you’ve left your cupboard now.

Lil’ Eva: Yeah, honestly, I don’t know that it’s been better for me that I went away. Sometimes, sometimes I wish that my life were just that cupboard.
Me: Right?! I know what you mean sort of. You meet others and you have to care about them, and it makes you not care so much about the first things, because you see there are lots of things that people care about.

Lil’ Eva: Like that bit in Nilo’s play. Let’s see, oh yeah, when he said, they were talking about traveling and they said what we just said, “nobody can ever tell you how it affects you inside.”

Me: And I think Nilo felt that way too. Right? Cuz he was talking about going back and forth and it didn’t seem like he wanted to.

Lil’ Eva: No it certainly didn’t. I went to visit the boto’s cousin when I came back, and no, she didn’t feel very well about it either. She said that she went back once and she didn’t want to go back after that because it made her feel too heavy when she got back here.

Me: Yeah, you know I saw that in a movie I watched in a history class. It was a silly sort of documentary and the woman who went back was very silly, but when she returned to the United States she was very depressed.

Lil’ Eva: Yeah, I also liked the bit where it said “Any serious traveler looks forward to these moments when itineraries cease to exist- when you get deliriously lost and the thrill and the fear of the unknown take over.”(Cruz 16)

Me: Yeah.

Lil’ Eva: That’s how I felt when I had the incident on the bici-taxi.

Me: Mmmhmmmmhmmm

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4 The boto is a dolphin from Brazilian myths that transforms from a dolphin to a man to impregnate women. Even though he becomes a human he retains his blowhole, so he always wears a hat to cover it. He is a recurring character in my sculptures.
Me: Eva, I see you’ve developed a British accent.

Lil’ Eva: Well, if I keep talking the way I did, I end up just imitating you, and that’s awkward because then we have the same voice.

Me: (slight British lilt begins) You’re right that’s very true.

Lil’ Eva: Don’t you start with a British accent now either, because that will just confuse things.

Me: Goodness, you get very saucy when you have a British accent.

Lil’ Eva: Yeah, well, you do too.

Me: What did you think about the bit in *A Bicycle Country* where they talked about limbo?

Lil’ Eva: Limbo?

Me: (British accent again) Yeah, some bit about limbo.

Lil’ Eva: I think all of Cuba is in Limbo.

Me: How do you figure that?

Lil’ Eva: Well, people are just kinda waiting for something to happen. And everyone seems sort of divided against themselves on whether they want to hate communism or not. I mean, people talk a lot of shit about Cuba, but they talk a lot of shit about the U.S. and all that goes on here. They have too many of those dateline type shows available, you know the ones where someone gets arbitrarily and brutally murdered in their home and the show investigates it. They play a lot of those in Cuba.

Me: I’m afraid I’m not familiar with those shows. Not something my parents encouraged me to watch probably.

Lil’ Eva: Well rightfully so, they still give me nightmares...
Me: You know what freaked me out, was the way the brothers in the book would uh, masturbate and talk about it with each other.\(^5\) Do guys do that, is that really common? Lil’ Eva: In Cuba? Yeah, it seemed fairly common from my experiences. I masturbated with other people.

Me: Yeah, I’ve never done that.

Lil’ Eva: You have, with your boyfriend I’m sure.

Me: That’s another story. Not with another person who’s just a friend or relation of mine...maybe guys always do that together and then we just don’t talk about it here in the States.

Lil’ Eva: I wouldn’t know. I like the bit “waiting is a form of fighting.” I have feelings about waiting.\(^6\) They have to wait for everything. That’s part of what makes it surreal.

Me: Surreal, but not like a dream, you don’t wait in dreams do you?

Lil’ Eva: Sometimes...You might...You wait for dreams...

Me: I like when she talks about running away from herself.

Lil’ Eva: Yeah! Well I like that too. I was running away from my bowl and my cupboard for a long time. I don’t see what it has to do with miracles though.

Me: What?! It’s a miracle you got away from your bowl. I’m sure I don’t understand how it’s possible. You, read also, \textit{A Bicycle Country}?\(^7\)

Lil’ Eva: I liked the bit about the coast guard and the balloons.

Me: Now that, balloons.

Lil’ Eva: The lady in whose cupboard I lived had parties with balloons.

You know, they talk about limbo in a bicycle country too. I liked that a lot.


Me: Why’s that?

Lil’ Eva: Um, that’s what I used to call the boto’s house when I first went there, limboland because I felt wrong about being with him.

Me: Because he was married.

Lil’ Eva: He wasn’t married. It just felt like an in between space, when I was with him I almost felt like a grown up.

Me: Explain.

Lil’ Eva: Well, it made me feel like...if I was with him people would listen to what I said. I don’t know so many things and...Also it was in between morality and immorality.

Me: Yeah, because he was married.

Lil’ Eva: Why do you keep saying that? You’re driving me crazy now.

Me: You are crazy. I made you up. I made the whole thing up.

Lil’ Eva: You know what it was. It was in between legal, that’s it. I wasn’t supposed to be staying there, and I knew that, and he knew he would be looked on poorly if he had me there, because I was a foreigner. People would assume things.

Me: People would assume that you were with a Cuban who was taking advantage of you financially.

Lil’ Eva: It wasn’t that way. I didn’t have any money. But yeah, it was still a status thing. He used to like to pick my brains about things outside of Cuba. His mother would too, and all his friends.

Me: What kind of things?

Lil’ Eva: Oh, like had I ever eaten one of those enormous bags of potato chips, and did people really sue each other, and how much do converse all star’s cost, and how much
does such and such a video game cost. It’s hard because sometimes they don’t understand that even though I have access to these things because I’m in the U.S., that doesn’t actually mean I have access to these things.

Me: Yeah, not from your cupboard."
Chapter 2: On Genders and their Fluidity

Fluidity is important to me; plasticity if you will. I work with clay. It is malleable for a while. With clay you start with a plan, roughly sketched on a piece of paper. It may be neat, meticulous, but it is rarely exact. As you enact the plan, you will have to modify it as you are now working in a new medium. I made a pitcher recently and in the drawing the handle was made of one continuous piece of clay. When I made the pitcher with clay the proposed handle looked awkward. I feared it was too thin to support the weight of the pitcher. I had both a functional and aesthetic problem. Instead I created one of multiple coiled disks pushed together. It was better, but I could not know for sure whether it would actually support the weight of the pitcher until it was fired. Now that it has been fired, the handle still bothers me. I wish the pitcher was not solid, and was still clay so I could change the handle. But now it is done, solid, imalleable. People are much the same way. We have a plan as to what we are going to become, but as we interact with others, with time we too develop differently than we had planned. As we realize that we need to make adaptations we change from our original form.

Lil’ Eva Escapes from her Bowl

Little Eva spent most of her days sitting primly on the edge of a soup bowl, or in some cases, rather submerged in it. She was well acquainted with soups and other foods served in bowls. She also had fairly extensive knowledge of table manners. Her knowledge of intellectual matters is probably not what yours is, but it was quite vast. She was not formally educated, but she had listened to the polite dinner discussions of many

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9 See image 2.1 and 2.2
10 See image 2.3 and 2.4
formally educated people. She was pukka sahib in that sense. And with her refined knowledge came many banalities, which she knew far too much about.

One day she found herself tired and of a somewhat disinterested humor. Grouchy, as it were. No doubt it was the banalities that got to her. She grew fidgety and could not hold her erect position. The ceaseless chatter of the dinner table lulled her into oblivion. The sort of sensation you have when you drift off to sleep in the company of many people. She slouched lazily and then stared into the depths of the pea soup. The green liquid trembled and she leaned in for a closer look. Suddenly, from the center of the bowl something bubbled. A plant of some sort began to protrude. Eva had heard of seaweed, so imagined this must be peaweed.

She reached for it inquisitively. It seemed to jump towards her, but Eva assured herself that this was impossible. She draped it over her shoulders like a shawl and imitated the fancy ladies who came to dinner.

Suddenly it stiffened, revealing that it was not peaweed at all, but some sort of tentacle which was a part of a larger, unseen entity. It moved towards its ultimate ends. With her hands locked behind her back, Lil’ Eva was rendered helpless. It wrapped her body to keep her from squirming and little Eva disappeared. First her little pink bow clad head sunk below the rim of the bowl, then beneath the surface of the pea

See image 2.5
See image 2.6
See image 2.7 and 2.8
See image 2.9
See image 2.10
See image 2.11
See image 2.12
soup, and eventually through the very bottom of the bowl. While perhaps traumatic, leaving the bowl to which she was rooted would be an experience that broadened her mind.

**Gender**

Identity is fluid. Hume tells us that identity is really just a bundle of experiences and perceptions. Most people understand gender in a very binary way. However, gender too, is fluid. The definition of gender is not being male or female, but the “state,” or *character* “of being male, female, or neuter.” The word gender is even more ambiguous in Spanish. *Género* is more accurately genre. A genre is defined as a group with common characteristics, or a type to which certain people or things belong. This suggests that a gender is really composed of various qualities, which people associate with it. Much like genres of literature are identified by reading and studying textual examples I think genres of people can be identified through careful comparison and analysis. Let us for the moment draw a comparison between gender (*género*) and literary genre (*género*). Jameson says the following about literary genres.

> Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact. The speech acts of daily life are themselves marked with indications and signals (intonation, gesturality, contextual deictics and pragmatics) which ensure their appropriate reception.

Genders are also institutions based on social contracts between a person and their public. These contracts can vary greatly depending on the public, so one person may have many different contracts or many different genders. While Jameson is explaining

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18 See image 2.13, 2.14, and 2.15
genres, and not genders, he actually crosses over into the realm of the personal in addressing the ways that “speech acts” also bear indications of the specific comportment, or institution to which the enactor belongs. Sexual géneros are specific sexual comportments, like fetishes. Sexual fetishes are generally associated with sexual deviance, which is unfortunate, because in order to truly understand one’s own género one must experiment with different de(ri)vations of sexual comportment. Gloria Anzaldúa addresses this need to understand oneself in her book Borderlands: “I had to leave my home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me.”

Gender qualities vary from culture to culture. This is an aspect of “world travel.” I do not mean the sort of travel you do with a suitcase, although that sort of travel also demands experimenting with different gender comportments. Lugones explains “world travel” as the way that we change ourselves when we go between worlds. Every sub-set of society is its own world, and when you travel between them you have to adapt yourself. By analyzing Lil’ Eva’s adventures in Cuba I hope to demonstrate the way in which children in Luyanó, Havana, Cuba are required to “travel” as a matter of daily routine.

Different Comportments for Different Compartments

Gender is not just manifested in interactions between a person “and a specific public,” but also between a person and a specific physical space. All of our physical

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24 Ironically, or perhaps appropriately, the anecdotes in this thesis I have sorted by their topic and sometimes their audience. While in Cuba I kept a journal of impressive things I saw or heard. When I had acquired a significant number of stories I wrote each of them on a note card and began placing together stories that I felt illustrated similar things. When I had the stories grouped thus, I tried to pinpoint exactly what it was that was illustrated in those stories, and thereby I labeled them into what are now my chapters and sub-chapters.
spaces have been genre-ed, which dictates our relation and composure with and within that space. We have the idea of family restaurants where the atmosphere is meant to be appropriate for children. Some places require business attire, and although there are many different types of businesses which require different types of attire, “business attire” expresses something about the composure that is expected. In Cuba the demarcation of physical spaces is almost institutionalized. The two currencies which circulate help categorize people’s comportment in different spaces. The CUC is a convertible form of currency, which means it has value on the international market. It is also the currency that tourists are expected to use when they are in Cuba. The moneda nacional is the money which Cuba creates with no backing. It therefore has no value on the international market. Government jobs are paid in moneda nacional, while jobs associated with the tourist industry are paid in CUC. If a restaurant has its prices listed in moneda nacional, rather than in CUC’s people will have a perception that it is worse. This will change their behavior within that restaurant. Like all places, people behave differently in more familial informal settings; however in Cuba the informal area has a larger jurisdiction than in other places. While this is true of Cuba in general it is particularly true of Luyanó due to its semi-marginalized status. Cubans are more dependent on one another, so they have a larger circle of people that they consider their intimate friends or family. This allows for many different sorts of “social contracts,” meaning people regularly practice a variety of comportments. It is not just the way people modify their behavior, but also the way in which they do NOT modify their behavior that is intriguing. In the U.S. people from marginalized neighborhoods may

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25 I hesitate to use the word marginalized, because I think many would assume that it is dangerous. Rather, it has structural insufficiencies and is located some distance from the more touristic areas.
find they have little common ground on which to base their interactions with people not from those neighborhoods. In Cuba there is a base line of poverty that gives all people certain commonalities. Kids are brought up not just witnessing all of these interactions, but partaking as well. Especially in Luyanó, kids are frequently sent as messengers/couriers, and develop their own interpersonal relationships from a young age. This exposure kids have to the adult world gives them a wider range of gender models outside their nuclear family, and allows them to experiment subtly with different gender comportments.

In each of the bowls I have created Lil’ Eva has a different comportment, or interaction with the bowl. Some involve Lil’ Eva being playful, and others involve a certain playfulness from the bowl. While each bowl is not fluid, they depict various states in a fluid range of comportments. Eva has a different social contract with each bowl. I have positioned her and created scenes that evoke different sentiments. These depict different genders, or comportments. She is traveling throughout the bowls and her comportment changes accordingly. Many times people will begin to look at the bowls and at first they say “Oh, how cute!” but as they inspect some of the other bowls they change their mind. Two people were looking at the bowls together, and one said “She wants to be friends with a snake!” The other looked at a later bowl “I don’t think they’re friends,” she said emphatically. When something is gendered, it can only be gendered in opposition to something else. A person alone in a vacuum has no gender. Gender is invoked by an action with an opposing force, or an interaction between entities. Being able to adapt one’s gender indicates an ability to travel and adapt oneself.
Lil’ Eva goes to Cuba

Freed from her bowl by the entity that lurked beneath the pea soup, Eva set sail for Cuba upon a vessel crafted of pumice stones and a napkin for a sail. The distance from the U.S. to Cuba is not so far for a regular person. Many a Marielito\textsuperscript{26} has made the trip in a watercraft less well crafted than that of Lil’ Eva. However, because of Eva’s tiny size, the peril of the journey was far greater. Not to mention, the currents make the journey much more difficult when going from North to South rather than vice versa. Eva had been afloat merely four hours, when that same creature from the soup bowl accosted her boat. Rather than become its prey, Eva hurled herself overboard. She did so just in the nick of time, because the creature proceeded to smash her little pumice boat to smithereens. Unfortunately Lil’ Eva’s ceramic body began to sink quickly to the bottom of the sea. She was beginning to regret her hasty decision, and wish that she had instead opted to grapple it out with the creature, when she saw what appeared to be an orange balloon floating quickly upward from the bottom of the sea. Eva was well acquainted with the properties of balloons as she was frequently brought out of her cupboard for birthday parties and the like. Eva grabbed for the string and was carried up towards the surface with the balloon. When she finally broke through the surface of the water she was afraid that the balloon would continue carrying her upwards, but the balloon seemed to change direction and Lil’ Eva found herself being dragged across the surface of the water. Before long she spotted a larger clump of balloons, and this seemed to be the destination of her balloon. As she drew closer to the bunch of balloons she realized that

\textsuperscript{26} This a name used for Cuban refugees who left from Mariel Harbor, Cuba in 1980 after the downturn of the Cuban economy and Castro decreed that anyone who wanted to leave could, but they would not be welcomed back. He referred to these people as \textit{escoria} (scum) and sent convicts, homosexuals, and people who were mentally ill.
they were also being held by what appeared to be a dolphin wearing a top hat. When her balloon caught up with the dolphin, he did not seem in the least surprised to see her. He simply smiled and said “Dios los cria y el diablo los une eh?” Eva was surprised to discover that she understood Spanish, but she was puzzled by his statement nonetheless. She was unsure as to whether he was referring to the balloons or to the two of them. She had a vague sense of familiarity with this dolphin. He handed her all but one of the balloons, and kept swimming. The balloons continued to follow him, but at a more rapid pace. It was not long before Eva could see a lighthouse growing larger and larger on the horizon.

When they reached the shore, Eva was surprised to see that the dolphin had disappeared, but there was a man there who seemed to have stolen the dolphin’s top hat and balloon. The man noticed Lil’ Eva scrutinizing him and whipped off his top hat to reveal a blowhole. “It’s still me,” he said with a wink. “You may have gathered that I am not just a regular dolphin. I am a boto, which means I can transform from a dolphin to a human, but I always keep my blowhole, so I always keep this hat nearby to cover it.” Eva was sure she had heard this story before. She began to wonder if maybe the Boto had also been a ceramic figurine. He helped her up onto the malecón. Lil’ Eva got a slight feeling of nostalgia, but it was different from any sort of nostalgia she had felt in the past. Being permanently attached to a soup bowl she never really missed a place before. She would miss times, or people who had eaten from the bowl. She frequently got nostalgic for that silly friend who would eat ice-cream out of her bowl, and then the lady in whose home Eva’s bowl resided would yell and say “those bowls aren’t for ice-

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27 See image 2.16 and 2.17
cream!” Those were the sort of things she felt nostalgic for, but sitting there on this balcony looking out at the salty drink she felt strangely nostalgic for the edge of her bowl. There was a group of children passing.\textsuperscript{28} The boto was trying to pull himself up onto the malecón as well. Lil’ Eva worried that he might startle them if he were to appear suddenly popping up onto the ledge. He looked slightly menacing in his top hat. He bent down preparing to leap. “Wait! You will frighten the children.” He smiled and waved the balloons. “Soy un muñequito bueno.” This sent Lil’ Eva into peals of laughter, which as it would happen, drew the children’s attention to her and her hat-clad boto. He called himself a good little doll! She thought. How silly! I’m a good little doll too. What a jolly thing to be called! He must certainly have been a figurine once as well. And so little Eva and the boto exchanged tales of from whence they came. The boto had been a ceramic weeble. This is really a terrible thing to be made out of ceramic. Weebles wobble and should not fall down, but if a ceramic one did, that would be the end of it.

So it had come to pass with him, and his owner’s mother tucked away his pieces. When his owner grew older he asked for the pieces of his beloved toy, and in a symbolic farewell and apology he glued them together, and then threw them into the sea. This is when the boto became a moving creature. “I too sank to the bottom of the sea, and was only saved by a passing balloon. The balloon led me to an Eskimo in a canoe. She too had been a figurine.”\textsuperscript{29} Eva liked the idea of being part of an ongoing tradition. She felt suddenly that she had a family. The only family she had known previously had been the users of her bowl, and the inanimate dishware that also resided in

\textsuperscript{28} See image 2.18
\textsuperscript{29} See image 2.19
her cupboard. The boto puzzled her though, because he was no longer made of ceramic. He was a flesh and blood dolphin and a flesh and blood human respectively. “When did you stop being ceramic?” she asked. “It happens slowly and you almost don’t notice it.” He reached out and touched her. “You’re a bit softer than you used to be. I don’t think you’d float yet, but you won’t break into a million pieces if you fall either.” They ended up talking well into the evening, and as the sun was coming up, the boto told Eva he must be off. “I’ll see you again soon.” He said. Eva tried to ask when, but he just tipped his hat and swam off. So there she was, alone and not entirely sure what to do next. She looked up to the balloons for comfort and noticed that one of them seemed to have a piece of paper in it. Although it made her sad to pop it, she was very curious about to see the note. With a bang, the note fluttered into her lap revealing a silly poem, which hinted at a guardian most unlike the lady in whose house her bowl resided.

**The Old Lady Potato**

She’s kinda round

and kinda browned,

But I guess that’s just her fate oh!

When she takes her teeth out,

her cheeks flap about

making her good company for a steak oh!
Hospitable yes!

(Though scantily dressed)

You can find her where most people wait oh!

**Ludic Play and Fluid Identities**

Children are socialized largely through play with their peers. They must obey norms of the playgroup and be subject to the power hierarchy of the group. Also they learn how to assert their desired roles within a game. Lil’ Eva missed out on this sort of socialization. However, these aspects of socialization are visible in interactions between grown-ups as well. Eva had witnessed such interaction between grown-ups at the dinner table. The supposition is that for grown-ups these norms, hierarchies, and roles are not playful or ludic as they have specific aims. However, the category of youth extends much further in Cuba, and has more plasticity. Many grown people continue living with their parents, and in other ways fulfilling the role of children. They are unemployed, unmotivated, and most importantly they have no guilt about this. This is not as accepted in the U.S. Adults who still take on these childlike roles are stigmatized, or at least subordinated. I have many other friends who are graduated and not yet employed, but even so there is certain guilt about this position. It is liminal. I recently went to hear a speaker during “Coming Out Week.” She was encouraging everyone to come out in a way that reminded me of the religious speakers who used to come to chapel at my high school. They would ask everyone who had accepted Jesus in their life to stand, or come to the front. This makes it seem as though those of us who remained sitting were heathens. There was no liminal space. You either were, or you were not. So it was to
the speaker, you were either out, or in hiding. I told my friend about the Coming Out speaker, and her fervor that everyone come out. My friend’s response was “to whom? And how frequently?” The other day I was talking about Hispanic Heritage month, and this girl became very apologetic about not knowing it was Hispanic Heritage month. I realized what was going on, and quickly came out to her. “I am not Hispanic.” I also have an informal job, the duties of which entail playing the piano, preparing lunch, and helping an elderly blind lady around her apartment. She lives in a gated community, and when I drive there I am given a parking permit. The security guard writes my job on the permit even though there is not a space that requires it. Sometimes she writes “maid” and other times she writes “nurse.” Do I need to come out to her? Profess myself as a pianist? Perhaps tell her my salary? There is more tolerance of people in liminal spaces in Cuba. People understand why other people are in between jobs, or unemployed. The state does not pay well enough to make working worthwhile. Of course, people in other places have this same sentiment, but it is not as universally understood. Carl Stone has a poignant quote, which encapsulates the feelings of many youth in urban city centers—“work is degrading, hustling is where it’s at, and crime pays.” In most places only people of the same economic class can relate to this sentiment. However in Cuba everyone shares this feeling of work being degrading and therefore most people will not judge a person who has chosen not to be employed in the state system. Lil’ Eva told me about a friend of hers (my tocaya actually) who used to work as a secretary in the ministry of economics. Like every other job, the salary was paltry. And like every other

30 Gomez, Amanda. Conversation. 11 October 2011
31 See image 2.20
state job for women they were required to wear these very institutional looking uniforms. My tocaya told Lil’ Eva “Back when I used to work there I was stuck up about it. I was proud of my uniform and how people would look at me when I wore it. But now when I see those secretaries I just think they’re stupid. They sleep with their bosses, and that makes them feel important, but they make nothing. I do much better as a manicurist.” This illustrates the sort of duality of perspective people can have with regards to the state. There is a certain amount of social capital that comes along with being a state employee. However this status of importance is not reinforced with actual capital. When there are informal jobs that provide people with more money than the state jobs, people begin to lose faith in their government, and feel justified in being unemployed. In the U.S. we do not have this same disdain for our economic system, so begrudging taxpayers see unemployment as the fault of the person who is unemployed. There is a lot more personal guilt. The song Girl Anachronism by the Dresden Dolls demonstrates the guilt and stigmatization that people feel when they do not behave the way they are expected to behave.

You can tell /From the scars on my arms /And the cracks on my hips/ And the dents in my car/ And the blisters on my lips/ That I'm not the carefullest of girls. . . If it were any colder I could disengage/ If I were any older I could act my age/ But I don't think that you'd believe me/ It's/ Not/ The/ Way/ I'm/ Meant/ To/ Be/ It's just the way the operation made me...I am not so serious/ This passion is a plagiarism/ I might join your century/ But only on a rare occasion/ I was taken out/ Before the labor pains set in and now/ Behold the world's worst accident/ I am the girl anachronism.\textsuperscript{33}

She uses time as the medium, rather than social norms, making herself an “anachronism” because of her transgression. We also see that her atypical behavior is specific to being female. She is “not the carefullest of girls.” She feels her behavior is out of line with that of a normal female. Not only does she feel guilty about her atypical behavior, but she

\textsuperscript{33} The Dresden Dolls. "Girl Anachronism." \textit{The Dresden Dolls}. Roadrunner, 2003. CD.
feels guilty about the artistic work she has created out of that guilt. It too is not real, insufficient, “a plagiarism.” Her anachronistic feelings make her the “world’s worst accident.” She does not blame the world, and although she feels that her transgressions are due to “the way the operation made (me)” her, she understands that society will not accept that as a justification. Transgression is not something that needs to be explained in Cuba. If you do something illegal people understand why. In this way Cubans give a justification for people in a subordinated, alternative identity by removing the implication of personal guilt. In this way the ludic, experimental phase of identity building is extended, allowing people to understand the great variety of identities that exist.

I was recently told that I am the ultimate slasher. “What?!” I did not like this title. It sounded like something out of a horror film. The explanation was comforting, and reassuringly disassociated me from the images I was having of myself with a hatchet. “You know, like caretaker slash extra slash linguist slash ethnographer slash librarian slash pianist.” Ohhh! That kind of slash. Elizabeth Salerno: caretaker/linguist/pianist/ethnographer/student/extra... Only now after being away from my family for seven years am I beginning to see all the lifestyle possibilities that exist.
Chapter 3: The Bici-Taxi Incident

It was certainly an amusing poem about the old potato lady, but Lil’ Eva did not find it that helpful. Where did most people wait? ‘Well fate (oh!) has been pretty good to me so far, perhaps I will just happen upon her.’ Eva thought to herself as she jumped down off the malecón. She continued walking along the water and eventually she drew the attention of a bicycle taxi driver. “Muñequita...!” He yelled out to her. ‘He knows!’ thought Lil’ Eva. “Buenas!” She yelled back with a sort of curtsy. He slowed down the bicycle and pulled up next to her. “¿De dónde tú eres?” ‘Oh dear,’ she thought. ‘He doesn’t know after all.’ Eva knew enough about relations between Cuba and the U.S. not to say she was from the U.S. “Brasil” she answered. She was not sure why, but she felt she knew a fair amount about Brazil if asked. She also suspected that she might speak Portuguese. “Do you want a ride?” He asked. Since Eva was not sure where she was going, she was somewhat reluctant. “Well, I thought I’d just take the bus.” She said. It seemed like a logical alternative. “But that’s not as fun as a bici-taxi.” He said. “Well, it is for me.” Eva replied. “I’ve never been on a bus.” “¿Eres del campo?” He asked. “Me too! I just got to Havana a week ago. I came to make some money, but I’ve gotta be careful. They’re always trying to send us back there. Hey, I’ll give you a free ride, just for being from the countryside.”

Eva was not sure how she could say no to that, so she got up on the bench behind him. She really didn’t want him to ask where she was going, so she started jabbering immediately. “How do you drive this thing? Is it more difficult than a regular bicycle?” “It’s not too hard. You have to start breaking early, and turns are more difficult of course.” “But do you have to put in more force? I imagine it feels heavier
than a regular bike.” “No, it doesn’t. It’s all worked out with the chains, so that you are not handling all that weight.” This sort of amazed Eva. She began to wonder if she would be able to handle it. She didn’t know if she could ride a regular bicycle, but as with the Portuguese, she sort of suspected she could. She watched him for about another block and then asked “Would you let me try driving it?” He turned to look at her. “Can you ride a bike?” “Of course!” Eva said, with a tone of indignation she didn’t really feel. “Of course you do, I’m sorry I forgot you’re from the countryside.” It seemed to Lil’ Eva that the tricky part about riding a bike would be that it was on two wheels and could tip over. This thing had many more wheels, so that was not a danger. “I’ll let you drive it when we get to a less busy street.” Lil’ Eva was sort of shocked out how easily he allowed that. They turned onto a quieter street and he pushed down a brake and jumped off. They switched places. “You do sort of have to push hard to get it started.” Lil’ Eva got it going quite quickly, and was pleased with her ability to drive the thing. The steering was more complicated than she would have imagined. It pulled slightly to the right. Perhaps because that was the side he was seated on. He smiled at her. “You’ve got it fine.” He seemed impressed. They were approaching a red light. She began to slow her pace, and use the break a bit. However, she had not realized that as her speed decreased the steering would become more difficult. The thing pulled to the right like mad, and lurched to a stop when it hit a parked car.

“Shit!” yelled the driver. He was out of the thing in a second. “Get in the back.” He yelled to her. There was no dent in the car, but she had taken the side mirror off completely. He repositioned the bike, and looked around. He got back in the pedaling seat and sprinted off. “What about the car?” Eva asked with concern. She felt awful. “It
was a rental. But YOU do NOT know how to ride a bicycle.” He laughed and shook his head. He was turning corner like mad. Trying to make the most indirect route he could between them and the now mirrorless car. “How do you know it was a rental?” She asked. “The license plate. All rentals have yellow license plates.” This relieved Eva enormously. “So everyone is okay. The rental company will pay for it?” He looked at her. “Yeah, they’re okay. I hope no one tries to find me.” Eva thought about this. “But I did it.” “But it’s my vehicle. It’s licensed to me.” “You have a license?” “Well I’m supposed to, but anyways you’re not getting in trouble. You’re a foreigner. And you do NOT know how to ride a bicycle.” He laughed at her again. Eva felt slightly defensive, but she began to laugh in spite of herself.

“Why did you call me muñequita when you first saw me?” She asked. He turned back to look at her. “Look at you, what else could I call you mi ángel?” Eva felt her cheeks getting hot, and reached up to feel them. They were soft and fleshy. “Where am I taking you anyways?” He asked. ‘Parsley snips!’ she thought. She had forgotten that she was supposed to be avoiding this moment. “I’m staying with my aunt.” She said, hoping she could stall. “Is she Cuban?” “No, but she married a Cuban and she never goes back to Brazil.” “It’s probably very expensive.” Eva was amazed at how easily she could just fabricate this story. Eva sensed that if she did not run with this, his next question would be... “Where do they live at?” ‘Bisque!’ She thought. She hadn’t been fast enough. A crazy idea occurred to her and she decided to run with it. “You know, I’m not sure she’ll be home, and I’ve forgotten my key. Perhaps I should try and meet her while she’s out.” This wasn’t any better, what was she doing? A few more questions and he was going to realize she didn’t know anything about anything. “I forget where
she said she was going. She was going on about how long she was going to have to wait, and all the people who were going to be there. She gets tired of standing very quickly. She’s a little fat. She kinda looks like a potato actually.” This was silly. He was laughing at least. “Well, she could be anywhere. Everywhere you go there are lots of people waiting. You know what neighborhood this aunt potato of yours lives in?” Well here she was. “The truth is, I don’t, but if you said it I’m sure I’d recognize it.” He laughed at her again. “Don’t know where you live and you can’t ride a bicycle.” Eva refrained from protest. “Okay, is it Vedado? Plaza? Miramar?” Eva shook her head. “Playa? Centro Habana? Habana Vieja?” She shook her head again. “Diez de Octubre? Luyanó?”...Eva felt she had waited long enough. “That’s it! Luyanó.”34 “Oh good, too bad it’s back in the direction we came from.” At least they were headed somewhere now.

Before long, he announced that they were in Luyanó, and Eva was pretending to recognize places. And then, they were passing a bank and there was an enormous

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34 Luyanó seems to be a queer place. I cannot find a scrap of normal geographic/demographic information on it. All the books that mention it contain writing similar to my own with intimate descriptions of people, and indoor space. I tried to get a helpful description from Lil’ Eva, but the best I could get was that it is in the municipality of Diez de Octubre in Havana. And it is located on the east side of the city just behind the old city, or Habana Vieja, which in colonial times was enclosed by a wall. It has an industrial feel, and is near to the port. The most popular bus stop is the one near the hospital Miguel Enríquez. When I brought Lil’ Eva to my neighborhood, she told me it reminded her of Luyanó. I was sort of surprised. I live in the armpit of Miami, where 836 meets I-95. It is in view of the Marlins stadium, but on the other side of the river, actually on NW North River Dr. NW North River Dr. is exasperating to me. I have this problem in Miami, where things run parallel to the water they are not always consistent with the grid. Usually streets run east west and avenues run north south, however as you continue down NW North River Dr., it is intersected alternately by avenues and streets. This disorients me and I can't be sure whether I'm heading north or west. Lil’ Eva says that Luyanó has that same disorienting feeling as the bay curves around. I think it is the presence if the port that makes them feel similar to her and the industrial feel. The bakery is important too. There is not much on NW North River Dr., but there is a wholesale bakery facility. The back of it has large grated metal gates, so you can hear, see, and most importantly smell what is going on inside. Eva remembers just such a bakery in Luyanó and she had been shocked one day when the boto had just walked up to this back gate and given them a small quantity of coins for what seemed to her the most delicious white fluffy rolls. They had carried the rolls away in their shirts as they had not brought a bag. Lil’ Eva was happy to see this bakery that reminded her of the other, although she sighed and agreed when I ventured to say that that interaction would probably not work here.
line. “Is that your aunt?” He asked, pointing at a lady who was lumpy and brown, very much like a potato. “Yes! Imaginate!” She began to get up from the bench. “Well, thank you ever so much for everything. I’m so sorry about what happened with the car. I really hope you don’t get into any trouble.” She began to turn her back. “Aren’t you going to give me a kiss?” Eva was startled by this boldness, but recovered enough to say “My aunt is right there.” He had a look in her eyes that sort of frightened Eva and intrigued her at the same time. “Just a kiss on the cheek.” Eva did not trust him to just give her a kiss on the cheek. “How about a hug?” She suggested. She reached up to hug him, and he sort of kissed her on her neck. “When will I see you again? I’m sure you don’t know your phone number.” Eva laughed. “Nor do I know where my house is.” “Would you meet me somewhere? Like maybe where I first saw you today? Do you know how to get back there?” Eva thought. “I might kind of.” “Well just in case, it’s by the bus stop right before the tunnel. You want to meet me there Wednesday?” Eva went ahead and agreed. What had happened didn’t seem okay at all, she had broken another thing, but somehow the boy seemed relatively unconcerned about that. He seemed more concerned with whether he’d see her again.
Chapter 4: How Travel Affects Identity, Archetypes, or the Sorting of Identities

Archetypes are “organizing” factors in our unconscious. When we meet and interact with people we unconsciously seek to categorize them in some way. The psyche contains basic structures, or primordial typical forms of feeling and thought that are repeated always and everywhere. To these structures Jung gave the name of ‘archetypes.’ It is the archetype that is the fundamental principle of order in human experience. It determines such basic human relationships as those between father and son, mother and daughter, man and wife, etc. Travel confuses one’s identity, and perceived archetype as you are taken out of your schema of perception, and placed in another. When you return to your world it becomes harder to see yourself in the archetypal role you used to fulfill. I think that Rigoberta Menchú is a very good example of someone who has travelled in this way. She is an indigenous woman from the Quiche Maya group, who won a Nobel Peace Prize, and wrote a book informing people about the atrocities committed against indigenous people during the Guatemalan Civil War. In this book she reflects very eloquently about the way in which her travels and time working in Guatemala City made her less sure about the vehemence with which her community resists the oppression of having their land taken.

I was very ashamed of being so confused, when so many of my village understood so much better than I. But their ideas were very pure, because they had never been outside their community…going to the capital in a lorry brings about a change in an Indian, which he suffers inside himself. That’s why my little brothers and my brothers and sisters understood more clearly than I did.

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After traveling to the capital, she has more difficulty identifying with the challenges of the indigenous people. Her understanding of her own identity is not as pure. Ultimately for Menchú, I think this confusion strengthened her indigenous identity. Being in the capital, her interactions with Ladinos (people of Spanish descent) made her more acutely aware of the differences between her lifestyle and their lifestyle. This may have led her to question things about herself, but it also allowed her to see the ways in which oppression affected poor Ladinos as well. While it may seem like a negative thing to face such conflict in one’s identity, it is important not to be too rooted in one identity. We may not be able to relate as strongly, but we can relate with more people.

Queerness and Wandering

There were many words Lil’ Eva came to love in Spanish. One of them was mariconería, literally translated this means faggotry, or gayness, maybe queerness. I like this word too. I had heard it used by a Cuban boy in the CHC. We had been joking about frolicking, and I asked how to say frolic in Spanish. He shrugged and said “Mariconería.” While it is used to categorize things in a derogatory fashion, much like the English use of gay, its lexical construction, suggests a less permanent state. Gayness, like happiness, sadness, kindness, or sickness is a passing state. However to be gay is black or white, it is an impermeable state. Once people come out, they cannot go back in. Calling something gay is to commit it to a specific sexuality. But things can only be associated with gayness. Hume likens identity to a “sequence of related objects,” which means identity is positional, like gayness (and queerness nearby) it is associative, a
quality that is perceived one moment, but does not dictate an entity’s essence interminably.\textsuperscript{38}

Lil’ Eva understood it to be much like herself. The flesh person she was in Cuba was related, but still distinct, from the figurine on the bowl, which was related, but also distinct from the character I am portraying here. The point is -nesses are states; you can travel through them and are not obliged to reside in them permanently. At first I was annoyed to hear this explanation of gender from Lil’ Eva, because it seemed to contradict what I thought about an array of very specific genders. But not everyone roams around the country that is gender. It is helpful to conceptualize identity (whether that be gender identity or otherwise) as a physical location or position. Some people are immobile, rooted in a particular identity. Others wander a bit more. In general Cubans have more need to do a lot of physical wandering. There is a housing shortage, which means people sometimes live in very close quarters with their parents well into their own adulthood. As one might imagine this can be quite wearing. As a result people frequently spend a lot of time outside their homes. This also leads to a greater acknowledgement of sexual wandering. Because of the proximity within which they live, people know what kind of sex you are having. “People may experiment just as much sexually in the U.S., but since everyone has space for themselves, no one has to talk about it, which means it is less likely to be accepted” Lil’ Eva explained. In addition shortages of food and other things force people out of their homes with greater frequency, and necessitate that they borrow from their neighbors. Relying on your neighbors means maintaining amiable relations with them. One might think that this would mean they are particularly civil with one another, but rather they are simply very forgiving in terms of

social transgressions.

**Unpleasantries**

The old lady potato bickered daily with her youngest son as well. She never requested anything, but instead ordered everything, even if she was in fact doing him the favor. For example, rather than asking if he could bring her his dirty laundry she would say “Tráeme tu ropa sucia para lavar.” It was a bit of a process since the old lady potato would take the laundry to the house she cleaned in another neighborhood where they had ample running water, and a very sunny porch where things could dry quickly. She would load the laundry into a little rolly cart and take it on the bus. It was quite a process and was somewhat unappreciated by the lady’s son. Perhaps that explains some of her gruffness. When dinner was ready, rather than telling everyone in an amiable fashion, she would say “Sirvete, que la comida está preparada.” She even accused Lil’ Eva of having “un retraso mental,” because she did not serve herself all the food that remained. Lil’ Eva had learned that it was not polite to finish off the food. But she quickly realized that the table manners she had observed from her bowl were hardly appropriate here where the old potato lady would eat on her bed in front of the TV. Lil’ Eva appreciated the old lady potato’s gruff ways. It was a welcome change to the supercilious cordiality she witnessed from her soup bowl. The old lady potato complained because her son never did as she asked, and he said maybe he would do it if she weren’t ordering him around all the time. Lil’ Eva thought it a bit absurd because this woman was doing all of the housework for her son. The old lady potato even washed his underwear. Something Lil’ Eva thought no human being should have to do for another human being. Lil’ Eva supposed it was an expression of love, but what a
strange one. Being a figurine from the side of a soup bow she did not have to worry about who washed her underwear. Nor was she even conscious of the phenomenon as it was not a topic of dinner conversation. The lady whose house Eva’s bowl resided in would not have permitted such crass conversation at the table. Probably the old lady potato would have. As mentioned before she did eat in her bed. The table was more used for visitors who came for coffee. Lil’ Eva did find it ever so jolly when visitors came for coffee. They would discuss things like, well washing underwear. The old lady potato had a neighbor of whom she was very fond. Eva seems to think her name was Cilantro, but I’m sure that couldn’t have been it, so we will just call her Jane. Cilantro (never mind about calling her Jane) once told the old lady potato that it was her own fault that she had to wash her son’s underwear. “If you keep doing it for them they never learn.” Did I mention the old lady potato’s son was nearly forty? “He has never needed to know how to do it. It is the fault of all the women around him, because clearly they have been washing his underwear and he has never accustomed himself to having to wash it.” The son agreed. He said that when his mother stopped doing it his wife took over, and then when he and his wife separated, his mother took it up again, apparently with some resentment. Of course he did not refer to his wife as his wife as they were never officially married, but they were together for a long time and had a child together, which he supported financially. He referred to her as mi mujer, which always sounded a bit crass to Lil’ Eva. Your mother could be your woman. A wife seemed tenderer. And yet there was something demanding and authoritarian in it, that Eva sometimes thought she liked, and then she felt she must have gotten confused, because one likes pleasant things, not brash ugly things. Another thing Lil’ Eva loved was to hear loved ones referred to as
cosas, or cositas. Sometimes the boto would call her such, and it made her feel less awkward about having been a decoration on a bowl. She was just a little thing. And to be referred to as such was adequate thanks for washing someone’s underwear, she thought. And so she sometimes took responsibility for washing the boto’s underwear.

While they ate and watched television the old lady potato would listen for the water to come on. In their corner of Luyanó running water was generally available for about two hours a day. When it came on the old lady potato would already have placed a bucket under the faucet in the sink. She would sit and watch it fill up, waiting until it was nearly full to change it out for an empty one. While the second bucket filled the first bucket would be poured out into water bottles of varying sizes. The bottled water was used for drinking and the buckets of water would be used to bathe, and flush the toilet after someone’s bowel movement.39 If the running water did not come for a few days, the allotment of water would have to be discussed. Lil’ Eva would ask permission to bathe, and be asked to use only one bucket of water for this process, because the old lady potato was going to shit later. It amazed Eva that they could talk about their bowel movements, and yet if she farted in front of anyone they were quite shocked. I guess farting has no practical necessity. The old potato lady also filled kitchen pots in order to have water for cooking and washing the dishes. Eva was very sympathetic about the washing of dishes as she remembered how much she enjoyed being hand washed back when she was a dish. The boto would use an entire bucket for shaving his face, which Eva sort of resented. On other occasions he would go to the barber and the barber would shave both his face and head.

39 Urine they would let stand.
The barber had a tenuous relationship with his ex-girlfriend. She was still around sometimes after they had had sex. On these occasions she was always amiable with his friends, and treated him in a cordial fashion as well. But, she was no longer his woman as it were. She did not wash his things or cook for him, nor did they call each other little names. He lamented to Lil’ Eva about this one night. He understood the burden of all the household chores after she left him. He kept his place quite neat. As a barber he was a fairly meticulous person. Other men might have just given up being tidy until they found their next woman, but he didn’t and he admitted “It’s very stressful to have to do everything.” To be fair, even now he did not do “everything.” Sometimes he would make pasta, and he made smoothies for himself, but his mother would also bring plates of food to him. She only lived a few houses away. He may have seemed more independent in that he had his own home, but he was still a part of his mother’s household. Lil’ Eva could never tell if this was a point of shame for him, or whether he found it convenient to still rely on his mother for certain things. Was her love a bother or a blessing? All of these interactions Eva found most intriguing. She had never witnessed relationships like these from her bowl.

Public Unpleasantries

While these examples have been of fairly private discussions, there are places where the discourse on modes of behavior is even more public. Public transportation is one of the best examples. It is an environment where people are forced to interact and thus display their perspectives on different gendered behaviors. First let me say that Eva has informed me that the buses are incredibly crowded, putting people into close contact with one another. This is something for her to say, because she is accustomed to being
crowded. Let us not forget, she used to live in a cupboard. Of course the cupboard was filled with inanimate objects, which tend to move less, thus decreasing that crowded feeling… At any rate, on one bus ride Lil’ Eva observed a very tiny woman of about 30 years. She was so tiny that she could barely reach the hanging support, which people who are forced to stand use to stabilize themselves. Beside this she was very dirty and barefoot. She was also eating Pelly, which are a snack similar to a cheese puff in texture, but sold in a variety of flavors. They come in a bag, but she was not eating them from a bag. Instead she had two fistfuls, which she would bring to her mouth and eat in intervals. It was quite something how she managed to reach for the hanging support and hold it with a fistful of Pelly without dropping any. I speculated on whether this was entirely sanitary. Besides being maybe unhealthy, I had previously been told that it is rude to eat on the bus. Firstly because the other people will be jealous, and secondly because it could get quite messy due to the jerky stop and go motions of the bus. It is always considered rude to be dirty and barefoot. On numerous occasions Eva had incited commentary by not wearing shoes inside. The old lady potato actually gave her a pair of sandals to use, because she was so aghast at the idea of Eva walking around her home with no shoes on. She framed it as a health issue, but the very first time she saw Eva barefoot in her home she asked Eva if she had grown up on a farm, leading Eva to believe that it is not simply a health issue. At any rate you should not be barefoot at home, you should not be barefoot on the street, and you certainly should not be barefoot on the bus. As interesting as this lady was to watch, it was almost just as interesting to see who else was watching her. Again, people did not try to be modest and hide their disgust. Their faces, body language, and exchanged glances clearly indicated that this
tiny lady was crossing the line, several lines in fact. Here we see how the scheme of perception is publicly enacted, and universally confirmed.

On another occasion there were two men standing on the bus holding onto the hanging supports that are located directly in front of the seats which have their back to the wall of the bus. These seats are located in the middle, and face inwards such that the people seated there are facing the people standing, rather than having their shoulder to them. Lil’ Eva tells me that these seats are the ones most frequently given up to the elderly, because you cannot ignore the weary look of the old people who are forced to stand. She tells me that fatigued people target these seats to hover over, because the people sitting there are the easiest prey. One evening Eva was seated in one of these seats next to an elderly lady, and she could not ignore the fatigued look of one of the men standing. However, she tells me she has not really seen a woman give up a seat for a man. Instead she got up for her stop a few stops early, which people do when the bus is crowded and they are concerned about how quickly they will be able to maneuver towards the exit. The fatigued man took her place, and his friend took the hovering position in front of him. The elderly lady looked relieved to no longer have a man hovering over her. From her new position by the exit she was able to see that the hovering man was not just a friend of the seated one, but that their relationship was such that the hovering one felt comfortable sliding his leg between the other man’s thighs and letting it brush against the other guy’s inner thigh. The woman next to them, who had been next to Eva, kept staring at them shocked, and then when they returned her gaze she would turn and put her nose in the air. Sometimes she would look at Eva appealingly, inviting her to make a judgmental face as well. She wanted her to condemn them too, but
Eva’s scheme of perception did not match this elderly lady’s and she kept a face of complete indifference. “From the table I rarely saw physical affection of any sort, so whether it was hetero or homo was merely cheese on the soup.” By cheese on the soup, I think Eva means icing on the cake. The exact same thing occurred when there was a lesbian couple waiting for the bus. There was again an elderly lady who stared at them, but was not content with simply condemning them herself, but looked around to see if she could find someone to share in her outrage at the audacity of this public display of homosexuality.

Lil’ Eva had trouble getting used to tying her shoes. Previously when she had been immobile on the bowl, they would never come untied. Now she would sometimes be walking and men would start to yell at her that her shoes were untied. Eva found this somewhat intimidating. She was embarrassed to have this matter brought to her attention so publicly. Also, she couldn’t tell if they were really concerned for her safety, or if they just wanted her to bend over. She concluded that it must have been the former, because on two occasions she actually had men bend over and tie her shoes for her. One of these times she was on a crowded bus. Eva felt that it would not be very conscientious of her to take up the space necessary to tie her shoe. She told the man she would do it when she got off, and he bent down and did it for her. His girlfriend looked on and rolled her eyes at the nuisance he was creating.

Father’s day was an interesting study in publicly displayed gender roles. What struck Eva the most about Father’s day was that it was not just a celebration for one’s own father, but rather a holiday which recognized the idea of fathers. By this she means that people congratulate and give presents to all the men in their lives who were fathers. She
told me the boto was offended that she did not congratulate him. She however felt that he was not her father, nor the father of her children, nor does she really understand the fatherly relationship, and therefore she did not need to have an interaction that acknowledged his role as a father. For me, the idea of a father is strictly positional. It is not a figure that can be publicly recognized. But clearly, in Cuba it is.

In regards to the bus, it was humorous, Eva tells me, because there are seats that are designated for women carrying babies, and on Father’s day there was a larger number of men with children on the bus and they occupied these seats even though the sign designating the seats is clearly a woman with a child. Like me, the sign only recognized specific persons as caretakers, but for Cubans they have a much more liberal understanding of the issue. A friend of Eva’s got into a cab with three older men, and was offended none of them responded to her “Happy Father’s Day” salutations. “I wanted to be polite,” she said, “one of them must have been a father.” For me it seems rude to make an assumption that because he is a man he must be a father, and if he is a father, it is not anyone but his family’s business. I had never noticed that I consider fatherhood a private matter until everyone was so publicly acknowledging the possibility of a man having fathered children.

This episode introduces another common occurrence, which is a man sitting in a woman’s lap. It did not happen on that occasion, but not because it is taboo. Women are always given the priority in terms of seating and sometimes this leads to a man sitting in his girlfriend’s lap. It looks a bit odd to me, but it is nothing that raises any Cuban eyebrows. I like the way in which it plays with roles. It is a direct reversal of who I would expect to be sitting on whose lap. Of course the opposite can also be seen, and I
like the way in which the role of the person sitting in the lap can be taken by either the
man or the woman. It seems pragmatic. Being on a crowded bus sucks, and it is nice that
people are understanding of that and don’t get all hot and bothered about the way in
which gender roles are being allotted. This tolerance for role reversal is something that
happens in public view, and therefore becomes part of the public consciousness.
Chapter 5: In Which Eva and I Establish that Cuba is More Open than a Cupboard.

You can see that to some extent Lil’ Eva is a woman of few words. I do not think that she is innately a reclusive person, nor is she socially awkward. Her presence at the dining table has given her an excellent understanding for the proper flow of conversation. She is just a bit timid sometimes about voicing her opinions. And when she does speak she sort of pours her words out as if she feels her voice might be taken from her at any moment. After our interaction in the CHC we spent a long time together during which Eva recounted her experiences in Cuba. I felt almost like her therapist. She seemed desperate to tell someone about all that had happened to her since being freed from her bowl. I kind of know this feeling. When you come back from a trip you really want to tell people about it. It is not just about what a good time you had, but how much you feel changed by what you experienced. Travel is more and more being recognized, not simply as a physical transportation of one’s person, but a repositioning of one’s mental psyche. As such an analysis of personal dilemmas is pertinent to a testimony on travel and culture. Yudice defines testimonial literature as “an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation.”40 Lil’ Eva passed her story on to me and I am obligated to tell it to others.

An Open Society

Foucault disapproved of the idea of therapy. Therapy creates a closed space for the discussion of personal problems. Things like sexuality, addiction, and depression become taboo, because they are expected to be discussed in a private setting.41 Lil’ Eva

had never heard these things discussed around the table, and this was her only reference for social interactions. She spent the rest of her life in a cupboard trying to make conversation with a despondent tea kettle.

Eventually she just gave up and tried to enjoy her private space. Upon arriving in Cuba Lil’ Eva discovered that there are very few truly private places in Luyanó. Living spaces are packed together such that what in other places might be considered one house now accommodates four families. Windows and doors are kept open to help with ventilation, creating a communal soundtrack. One evening she was seemingly alone and began to whistle. When she trailed off, she heard a neighboring whistle take up the tune where she had left off. It was a song that could be heard a lot, on the street, in people’s homes, whistled sung, etc. One day it drifted in through the window, inciting commentary from Eva and the old potato lady. She told Eva that it was called *Si no te hubieras ido* and it was sung by Marco Antonio Solís. She also told Eva the name of another person who sings it, but they both agreed they preferred the one they were hearing. The lady then asked her son to download the album for Eva. It is not just music that flows back and forth in the communal soundtrack. On the nights when the Brazilian telenovela airs one can walk down the street without missing a moment of dialogue. Eva liked the way everyone kept up with the soap operas. They were not all new. Some of them had aired in Brazil in the 80’s, and were now rerunning for a second time in Cuba. This made discussions interesting as some people remembered more accurately how the soap opera ended, and they could fill the others in during particularly suspenseful episodes.

As we can see it is not just the flux of words and opinions, but there is an actual exchange of goods that occurs between people who occupy neighboring spaces. Besides
the Marco Antonio Solis album littler things like garlic cloves, coffee, or cigarettes are asked for on a daily basis from neighbors you may not even like that much. The old lady potato Eva stayed with referred to her neighbors as *pingueros inmorales* (immoral penisers) and yet she still lent them: pressure pots, rice, sugar, etc. Cilantro would frequently come by from the market with things she had found and knew were somewhat more difficult to find. On these occasions when she and the old potato lady would reconvene they would have fairly lively discussions about those around them. The friend would complain about her brother, the lady would complain about her son, and they would empathize and support each other’s opinions.

**Arguments**

Many people say Cilantro’s brother is good for nothing. One day he came by and wanted to come in the house. Cilantro was cleaning, however, and she had several friends inside with whom she was socializing. She told her brother he could not come in because she was cleaning the floor. It is hard to know whether this was her real reason, or whether she didn’t want him getting involved in her ladies’ discussion. Anyway he got very upset and started yelling that he should be allowed in his own home. At which point Cilantro started yelling that it shouldn’t even be his home, because he doesn’t do anything to take care of it. Personal arguments or any moderately animated conversations are no longer personal as they can be heard by everyone.

Sometimes Eva would worry about arguments being overheard by this one little girl who frequently wandered about in the passageway. Eva was never sure to whom she belonged. This is how Lil’ Eva felt herself. Now that she was no longer attached to her bowl, or stored in someone’s cupboard, she was uncertain who her owner was. In some
ways Eva thought of herself as her own owner, but she tried not to think about that too much. It gave her a weird schizophrenic feeling that she found creepy. The little girl was also a bit creepy. She was quite young and did not speak much yet. Mainly though, Eva found it creepy how the girl appeared in the doorway while Eva was cooking or washing laundry. She would not interact with Eva, but stare and make slightly menacing faces.

One day Eva and the Boto got into a rather boisterous argument a few blocks from his home. The argument stemmed from the fact that Eva was acting like a girl from a cupboard, and the Boto was not used to the rigidity and primness that cupboard life entails. When they finished the argument he went off in a huff and Eva returned to his home to be greeted by sympathetic neighbors who had already heard about the fight. While they were comforting her ‘Creepy wandered in, looked at Lil’ Eva’s distraught face and giggled. “Vete,” she said with an evil grin. One of the neighbors (not her mother) chastised her for saying something so rude. Everyone seemed to have an opinion about Eva and the Boto’s fight. Rather avoiding what might be considered a private matter, people wanted to talk about it. The fight now entered into public domain, to be speculated on and discussed by whoever felt inclined. This creates an atmosphere in which people are comfortable discussing their opinions, even in regards to traditionally taboo topics. I was not accustomed to expressing derogatory opinions in a public discourse, but it is an acknowledgement of diversity even if it is judgmental.

No Such Thing as TMI

People speak candidly about their problems, and the situations in which they find themselves. There is a saying that Eva had heard once, that you should not wash your dirty linen in public. People may not literally wash their linens in public in Cuba, but
they do dry them in full view of the public. On a figurative level people are more comfortable sharing private issues with people outside their family. For example you may go to visit a friend, only to find that they are otherwise occupied. With the windows and doors closed, and no response to banging or yelling one might presume that their friend is out. However, a helpful neighbor can usually be relied upon to offer an unsolicited explanation. “No, no, he’s home, but his girlfriend came over and I believe they are occupied.” Occupied naturally being a euphemism for certain sexual activities. This reminds me of another euphemistic lexicon wherein semen, or cum is referred to as _intriga_ (intrigue). When people are living in close spaces, and a person’s bed might be in the same room where they entertain the public, it is handy to be able to discuss cum without explicitly discussing cum. At some point that ‘occupied’ friend will no longer be occupied and maybe you arrive shortly thereafter and want to make sure it is okay to enter. “Any sort of intrigue around here?” you might say. While one might think that the existence of such a euphemism means that people do not want to discuss sexually explicit things publicly, the reality is that people do express sexually explicit things publicly to such an extent that there exists a euphemism. It has a “practical necessity” which relates to the “real conditions of its genesis.” If it was the case that people did not want to discuss these things than they would not discuss them, and there would be no euphemism. Their way of sharing intimate details validates these experiences and demarginalizes them in a sense.

Perhaps the euphemisms were meant for the children, who might be happening by at any moment. The way Eva explains it, every place is a _family_ place, and so no place is a _family_ place. Kids are just sort of around, and there is no way to uphold that

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42 Bourdieu 97.
the sterile, innocent environment that people think is *family* appropriate. Eva enjoyed the extent to which children wandered about and interacted. Sometimes she thought if she had been able to wander like that, instead of being adhered to a bowl, she might know more about the world and feel more competent. Maybe know how to ride a bicycle properly or perhaps not. It seemed there were very few women who rode bicycles in Havana. One day Eva spotted one for the first time and commented on it to the boto. He laughed. Later that day, they saw another woman on a bicycle. “It must be day of the lady bicyclist!” He said, and Eva laughed a lot because she understood very well about *days* and their celebratory nature. Cake! Pie! Raucous behavior! Eva actually learned a lot on celebratory days at the table, because there were new people sometimes, and people’s behavior would sometimes differ on cake or pie days from the way they behaved on a regular old cereal and milk sort of day. On one such day Eva had been carried into an entirely new room. She had heard much about the bathroom, but never been there. It was Easter and a child of a cousin of the lady-in-whose-home-Eva’s-bowl resided carried his bowl, which was filled with ice-cream cake, into the bathroom with him. It was a whole new world for Eva, and made a grand impression on her. In this way Eva understood that celebratory days were connected with activities that departed from the ordinary. This mobility of going into a new room, a new world for her, was certainly out of the ordinary. One day in Cuba Eva told me she almost cried, because she and her friend were sitting on the porch and a crowd of young boys went by. The friend looked at the boys and furrowed her brow. She pointed at one of them and said to Eva “I think I know that kid from somewhere.” Eva suggested that maybe the kid was a friend of her son’s. The woman laughed, “That is my son. I was just joking because he spends the
whole day in the street and I hardly see him.” Eva could not imagine being that
disassociated with your owner, that mobile to wander daily to new and exciting
places. She found the idea that she could be so competent as to be out on her own in the
world sort of delightful.

People on Buses
In another instance of kids getting to interact with non-family members, there was this
massively fat woman with a piece of bendy plastic the size of a poster board trying to
enter the bus. It was unwieldy and she was not exactly stable on her feet to begin
with. As soon as she entered she started screaming for someone to give her a seat. Eva
was seated and hesitated hoping someone else (namely a man) would give up his seat so
she would not have to. There was a very nice looking young couple in front of her and
the man gallantly gave up his seat. His girlfriend did not stand up to let the woman in,
but rather turned her knees into the aisle. Eva tells me it is rare for the person to slide
into the window seat, but sometimes they will perform this little courtesy of turning into
the aisle to make it easier for the other person to enter. Other times they will do nothing
and not even flinch when the entering person’s ass is in their face. The fat woman
thanked the man, squeezed past the man’s girlfriend, and as the bus jolted into motion she
fell with a shriek into her seat. After she had the plastic thing settled she offered the seat
back to the boyfriend if he didn’t mind sitting with the plastic thing. Naturally he
refused, saying that they were getting off shortly. When they did get off a little girl took
the seat. Her mother and another woman, possibly an aunt, accompanied her. The little
girl had some trivia cards that she was reading and asking to her mother. One came up
that involved money, and naturally the cards were not from Cuba, so it involved non-
Cuban money. Neither the mother nor aunt knew the answer, but the fat lady did and she not only answered, but explained why she knew the answer. After doing so she seemed emboldened by proving herself and took over answering the little girl’s trivia questions. This demonstrates the impropriety, or familiarity that people feel they are allowed to have with the children of others.

As mentioned the aisle seat has a greater value, because it is easier to get up and maneuver one’s way to the exit from it. The unfortunate thing about the aisle seat is that you have to deal with someone standing right next to you, and generally their crotch is at about your eye level. If the bus is really packed their crotch might even be pushing into your shoulder. It is not exactly an accident either. As noted in the example of the two men standing in the aisle, people are not are not apathetic to this impertinence, and they want to make the sitters feel as uncomfortable as possible. The idea being that they might just give up their seat to be rid of the privilege, and therefore the distress that comes with protecting that privilege. That said the person sitting in the aisle seat will generally angle themselves away from this awkward situation, which makes getting out even more complicated for the person in the window seat. The window seat sitter is trying to get into the aisle, and the person between them and the aisle is pointedly trying to forget that the aisle (and its entire contents of eye-level crotches) exists. This is one sort of propriety which we saw before with the older lady who would not make eye contact with the gay couple. It was this sort of modesty which Eva was trying to summon when the elderly lady gave Eva looks imploring her to condemn them. It is a look which says nothing, thereby saying “I am not even going to acknowledge what you are doing, because it is so inappropriate.” I digress. Eva took particular note of an instance when
she did see the aisle sitter move into the window seat. There was a couple hovering in
the aisle and doing their damnedest to be irritating enough to force the aisle sitter to
relinquish her seat. Only the man was using the hanging support, and his other arm was
wrapped around the woman bracing her. They were kissing, laughing, and feeling on
each other in a way that might make anyone uncomfortable, most of all the person seated
next to their crotches. When the person in the window seat got out, the standing woman
moved forward as if to climb over the aisle sitter. There was a brief look from the
woman in the aisle seat in which she perhaps evaluated the awkwardness of being put in
between this amorous couple. She scooted into the window seat and focused her
attention to the world passing by outside, doing her best to ignore the amorous intrigues
at her side. Everything that happens on a bus is a part of the public domain and is thereby
an available possibility for conduct.

**At the Barber Shop**

In general there is less protection of kids. What interests me most about people
discussing sexual things is that not only are these discussion open and more public, but
kids have access to them. The most common expletive in Cuba is *pinga* (prick), which is
used in many contexts, not just sexual ones. The old potato lady’s section of Luyanó was
frequently referred to as “*el pingado.*” There are several other variations, but all of them
are used in front of children without any pretense or afterthought. Not only are they used
in front of one’s own children, but in front of others’ children as well. The word *maricón*
(faggot) is also tossed around much more loosely than the English word faggot (amongst
English speakers). As mentioned earlier the word *mariconería* (faggotry) covers all sorts
of actions. Sometimes Lil’ Eva would go to the house of a barber who lived nearby. The
house was a sort of hangout for young men. The barber was quite lucky for a 25 year old and lived in a house of his own. He also had a PlayStation and one controller. In order for anyone to play against another person they would have to bring another controller from somewhere else. There were generally at least three guys there. The barber and a few of the others took English lessons, and Eva would practice English with them while they waited for their turn to play. Sometimes these lessons and the games would be interrupted by someone wanting a haircut. While they would pause the game, the banter would still continue regardless of the age of the customer. Fifi was one of the boys who could almost always be found in the barber’s home. He was particularly enthusiastic about practicing English, and also the one who knew where to borrow a second controller. Being only 17, and younger than the other guys, he frequently became the butt of their jokes. One day Lil’ Eva was helping Fifi practice his English. “Cuba is a very safe country. That is something I like about it. Except in December, rapes augment in December.” Lil’ Eva giggled a bit. She suspected Fifi might have gotten something wrong. “Rape? Like estupro?” Fifi nodded credulously. “But why in December? Why should that increase in December?” Fifi sort of shrugged. “Maybe the holidays, more people on the street.” Lil’ Eva exploded with laughter. The boto looked over at her from the video game. He sometimes got jealous when she and Fifi seemed to have too much fun practicing English. Lil’ Eva tried being logical. “Do you think it’s because people come to vacation here for the holidays, and there are more tourists getting raped.” Fifi shook his head. “No, no, Cuban women get raped.” Lil’ Eva decided it was time to let this one go, “I guess it makes sense, maybe people just get overexcited for the holiday.” She didn’t necessarily expect Fifi to understand this statement. It was more
meant as a way of closing the topic. When she was alone with the boto later she asked him about it. “Would you say that rapes go up in December?” “What?!” Lil’ Eva was glad to see that she had been right to be suspicious of this information. “Fifi told me that rapes go up in December.” The boto laughed, and shook his head. “El Fifi, asere.” He did not bring it up immediately with Fifi the next time he saw him, but waited until they had already begun to ridicule Fifi for something else. “And what’s this you’re telling Eva about rapes going up in December?” Again, Fifi got the same look of credulity “It’s true. Everyone knows that rapes go up in December.” The boto feigned sincerity and turned to the barber, “Did you know that rapes go up in December?” The barber replied fairly impartially, or maybe he just had a keen sense of comedic timing, and was letting the situation build. “Rapes no, but crime does increase.” Fifi took this as an affirmation of his statement. “¿Ves?!!” He yelled as if he’d won. The barber began to chuckle, while the boto reasoned with Fifi. “Wait, wait, he said crime increases and crime does increase, but robbery, and violence. People are trying to get money for the holidays. But rape…” “If violence increases so does rape, naturally.” Fifi said with an unnaturally casual tone. Lil’ Eva decided it was time she got in on the fun, “I suppose once you’ve violently robbed someone, you may as well rape them.” Fifi tried to use this logic. “People just go crazy. More people get their organs robbed in December too.” The barber began to laugh openly. “So now, we have to worry about getting our organs stolen too? Eva, don’t come in December. Better to be out of this country in December.” Everyone laughed a bit at this, and as the laughter died down the boto ventured in a new direction. “Where did you hear this anyways?” Fifi replied with absolutely no shame “my mother told me when I was little.” At this everyone
exploded. The barber tried to explain nicely, “she probably just told you that to keep you off the street.” “Yeah, she was worried about you getting raped.” The boto yelled. “Or maybe she was worried you’d be raping people.” The barber added. They were all laughing at him now. Fifi became sullen. “This is serious. If you all can’t take this seriously, forget it.” Once Fifi became ornery most of the mocking ended in the same fashion with the boto making fun of Fifi for acting like a little girl, and then pretending to apologize for hurting his feelings. Another one of the ongoing jokes was about his girlfriend. He maintained that he had one, but she never accompanied him. “How can you have a girlfriend, you are always here. Is that couch your girlfriend?” Eva enjoyed listening to their teasing. One afternoon when three boys of about eight arrived to have their haircut the barber requested that Fifi and the other guys pause the videogame so that the younger boys did not see it and loiter about hoping to play after their haircuts. With the videogame turned off, the guys turned to their second favorite form of entertainment; mocking Fifi. They started as usual by asking about why he never brought his girlfriend around. He defended himself saying they hung out other times. One of the guys turned to the barber, who was putting a smock over one of the young kids “Have you ever seen him with this girlfriend?” The barber replied that since the two had met at a party, he had only seen them together twice. While this made the others howl with laughter, Fifi actually tried to use this as proof of the existence of his relationship. “Ves?!” he yelled. “Well why don’t you go visit her now, or bring her here?” The boto chimed in “Yeah, I’ve got my girlfriend here.” Eva felt oddly pleased to be mentioned and claimed in such a public manner. Fifi responded that she was presently on a camping trip. Upon hearing this comment the room exploded. “She goes camping and she doesn’t invite
“You know what people do when they go camping?” The barber laughed along with them as he worked the electric razor over the kid’s head. When their laughter had died down one of them turned to Fifi as if he was now going to take the topic seriously. “Okay, so what’s she doing on this camping trip?” Fifi shrugged, not wanting to say anything that might set them off. “Well how long is she gone?” “Two weeks” replied Fifi. Again they all erupted into laughter. “Two weeks?!!” “How long have you even known her?” “Fifi, for the love of God, stop calling her your girlfriend.” “Do you know how many black cocks she can suck in two weeks?” Li’ Eva, who had been listening with a grin, heard this comment, and looked apprehensively at the barber. He was still smiling, and did not seem at all concerned about whether this conversation was appropriate for the little kid whose hair he was cutting. She then gestured to the others, just in case they had forgotten about the kids getting their haircuts. They were unaffected by Eva’s gestures. She relaxed. If they didn’t think it was inappropriate, she would just enjoy it as well. Being frequently mistaken for a child of a tender age herself, she could appreciate the way in which these guys were not censoring themselves, neither for her, nor for the boys receiving the haircuts. “Are their guys on the trip?” “Yeah, guys with big cocks?” They continued like this and Eva began to feel bad for poor Fifi. He seemed conflicted as to whether it was more embarrassing not to have a girlfriend, or to be ridiculed for his girlfriend going camping for two weeks without him. Eventually he could not take their mockery any more and he disowned her. This sort of conversation was very different from those conversations Li’ Eva had heard conducted in front of children of a tender age. Sometimes at home when she found herself on the supper table, she felt that her presence
acted as a reminder of the genre of conversation that was appropriate. But here, it was almost as if her embarrassment incited them to say even lewder things. These conversations and experiences were not only available to children, but were enforced by the fact that the children had been sent there by their parents.

**Spiro on Personality and Cultural Construction**

I have already implied that the entire community takes a greater role in the rearing of an individual child. There was one household in the *pasillo* where Eva stayed that was conspicuously better off than the other ones. They received a lot of money from the wife’s mother in the U.S. People would congregate at their house, kids in particular. Communal caretaking relieves parents of having sole responsibility for their children. Ironically this is a tendency in Utopian societies. In a structured communal society like a kibbutz, for example parents are assumed to have the same morals. They are therefore interchangeable. In Cuba kids experience a diverse spectrum of parental and moral values. That does not mean that everyone has unique values. The common culture, dictates much of people’s belief system, that is, “culturally stipulated goals are cathected (becoming needs).” Spiro explains in much the same way as Bourdieu that there is a “logic of practice” created around a practical necessity. This structure is not invented so much for the kids, but rather it has a practical function for the parents. Parents in the kibbutz are meant to be free to pursue personal endeavors, which involve their peers. Cuban parents, because of their economic troubles need to concern themselves with their own personal endeavors as well. In the kibbutz interpersonal

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45 Spiro. 90-109
relationships have been restructured such that equality exists in love, and all allotment of work. The Cuban revolution, while allowing women to become political, did not restructure the politics of the household. Kibbutzim are meant to relieve the anxieties of parents who fear they will not excel at parenting. The same is true of the communal nature of Cuban child rearing. Kids are exposed to parents who feel competent in their roles, and parents who would prefer to relinquish parental responsibilities. Bettelheim sees this diversity of exposure the kid experiences as more typical of a heterogeneous population.

In a pluralistic society such as ours, most of all in our urban centers, even the very young child is exposed to many different ways of solving life’s problems. If nothing else, variations in our standards of living practically force him, from the earliest age, to question his family’s way of life, and to wonder for which way he will opt. In school he is exposed to the intellectually curious and the dropout, to the grind to those who car only about social success and to those other who care only for sports, etc. There are differences of religion, of party allegiance, of ethnic background etc.

I agree with part of this sentiment, but I do not think that a society that is merely diverse assures that kids will get exposure to many different ways of life. Kids’ interactions are in so many ways controlled by their parents, such that they do not socialize with kids outside of their economic class. In order for kids to be exposed to a diverse spectrum of lifestyles, the parents must trust each other. They must be united around a central factor.\textsuperscript{46}

Parents are trying to help their kids fit into a community. They are teaching them how to conform. In the case of the kibbutzim conforming means accepting the group values,\textsuperscript{47} but in the case of Cuba, the group values are cynicism for authority. Prior to the special period of the 1990’s, there were more rigid expectations for what sort of comportment was considered

\textsuperscript{47} Spiro. 90-109
revolutionary. Since people had to become more flexible, flexibility is a core value which allows for the tolerance of many types of behavior. The phrase *no es fácil* is a meme, which conveys a communal understanding that people have different ways of resolving their problems. There is a social unity that comes from people facing the same economic situation, and a cultural unity of knowing that people share the same values, which in the case of Cuba may be a tolerance for an array of values.

People feel that life in the kibbutz is easier, because many of their decisions are made for them. They do not have to contemplate individualism. This may not seem like a positive thing, but the more conflicting ideologies people have to confront, the less they know what to believe. Except for in Cuba, where conflict has become the status-quo, thereby making people accustomed to justifying conflicting information. When people travel they are confronted with ideologies which conflict with their own. But, sometimes traveling does not mean physically traveling. Interacting with people who do not have your same world view can be traveling. Cuban society is so very diverse, so people’s daily interactions sometimes constitute traveling. However, simultaneously they are united by their common economic struggle. Inadvertently communism has created solidarity within the Cuban society by placing everyone in the same economic situation. But there is the stress of finding an individual solution to your situation. People have a healthy disdain for what came before them. This motivates them to not pattern themselves after their parents, which means modeling yourself after a role model of your choosing. For ceramics projects our professor will sometimes frame them as problems we need to resolve. Maybe we need to make a set of something that can be assembled and function as one unit, or maybe we need to make a portrait, or something that creates

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48 The special period referring to the time after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union, when Cuba was in crisis because it had no trading partners, and therefore no one to supply them with many of their staples.
shadow. While we all resolve this differently, we have a common problem that unites us. It is easier and simpler to have only one resolution, however how can you find what best suits you if you follow a set path. Childhood is a time of experimentation. It is a ludic time when you can take on different roles. While Cuban children are given much independence, which makes them seem grown up, they can stay in their ludic period of experimentation longer. There is no set model for how to succeed, so they can continue experimenting. There is less fear of failure. Since the system is seen as against them, most failures are justified.

Lil’ Eva’s submergence into the bowl symbolizes her breaking with her habitus. The peaweed that incites this incident could be any number of factors which allow us to escape our habitus. It could be literal travel, or figurative travel. Up until now her only points of reference have been her bowl, the kitchen table, and the cupboard where she is stored. This is not that different from kids who only have knowledge of their home, their school, and on a broader level, their city.
Chapter 6: In Which Eva and I Explore Alternative Perceptions

Enjoying Unpleasantries

Lil’ Eva and the boto strolled down the street holding hands. A *bachata* drifted out of a restaurant. Eva sung along, “*yo soy el poeta de mil penas, y tú eres mi condena*...” “Do you like this song?” The boto asked, a bit surprised. Eva responded that she loved *bachata*. “But it’s so sad,” he said. Eva laughed a little, “That’s why I like it.” “You’re sick,” he said, but his eyes were laughing too. In relating this story to me Eva said “You know, you think you’re supposed to want all those tender, sweet, happy things, but sometimes you don’t. I kind of enjoy being grouchy and prickly, and sometimes I just want to revel in my sadness.”

When I was little my mother never let me have any Hello Kitty things. She did not approve of any of the Sanrio products. She thought that by purchasing these products she would be paying a lot of money for plastic crap. She has a point, but as a little kid I wanted those things anyways, and not being able to satisfy that desire it persisted into my adolescence and adulthood. When I went to Brazil I became shameless with my love of Hello Kitty. It is not just a juvenile fad there. Grown ups can wear it too, and they do not look crazy. They look chic and affluent. And so my infatuation was rejuvenated, and manifests itself now in my bank checking card. This debit card is the first card I have had that is entirely my own, because it is connected to a bank account filled with money which is entirely my own. I sometimes find it ironic that this card, which symbolically represents my financial independence, should feature a cartoon character generally associated with little girls. The point is there is no reasoning with
desire. Even if we understand that the things we want are strange, or atypical, or just plain stupid, we cannot reason our way out of our desire.

Constituencies for Emotions

Our post-modern state has made us more aware of our surroundings. As mentioned earlier, interior decorating portrays genres, categories not unlike archetypes. Consumer marketing and advertising groups people into categories constantly. Products are aimed at a constituency. People have become more conscious of ways to cater to certain other people. All this awareness of our surroundings makes it seem as if we ought to be able to reason logically with our desires. Unable to make sense of our sense we attribute these senses to something outside our self; to the spiritual world, or in a broader sense, the unknown, in math the variable x, y, como sea. Love is an unknown. What produces love? Allegedly we don’t know. Don Draper of Mad Men says “Love was invented by people like me (advertising men) to sell nylons.”^49 Cynical, but more importantly, critical of the idea that love is magical. Love too is dependent on these “primordial typical forms,” these archetypes.^50 We are drawn to certain people more forcefully, and this has to do with the genre we perceive them as, and the genre we perceive ourselves as. These are not fixed as we would like them to be. Sartre opens “Les Jeux sont Faits” with “Human thought has made considerable progress by reducing what exists to the series of appearances {apparitions} which manifest it.” Hume also describes identity as a series. In this way we change from archetype to archetype. Post modernity, film specifically, has altered our understanding of choice and variance. Film does not portray multiple alternative realities. It gives the impression that life follows a plotted course; that there is only one


^50 Jaffe 12
acceptable way to love and be loved.

In the Boto’s home there were frequently water shortages, and bathing water would have to be fetched from a communal tap in the passage to his apartment. After explaining this to Lil’ Eva, he requested that she not fetch water in just her underwear. Eva found this request condescending. “I may be from a cupboard and have spent most of my life on the edge of a soup bowl, but I am not entirely daft, and I do not need to be told that when in a public a person should be fully clothed.” Eva thought to herself.

**Indecencies**

The old lady Potato she lived with preferred to wear as little clothing as possible. Her garments were generally overly loose, thin, or both. She removed the sleeves from her shirts, creating armholes so large that it was quite common to see one of her breasts protruding from the side of the shirt. Undergarments were optional, but the option had been long forgotten. Her second son referred to her clothes as “*trapos indecentes*” (indecent rags) and banned them from use in his home. Scantily clad in her indecent rags, she would receive visitors, and even venture as far as a neighbor’s window or living room. After living with her for some time Lil’ Eva realized that the boto’s request that Eva not fetch water in her underwear was not condescending because it was actually quite common for women to leave their homes somewhat less than fully clothed. They weren’t getting on buses, or going to the store like this, but their domestic realm seemed to extend beyond their physical abode.

It cannot be easy growing up as an object. Everyone enjoys feeling competent. This means being able to take care of yourself. A large part of Eva’s identity centers around being someone else’s possession. When she spoke with me she used the phrase “the lady whose house the bowl is from,” which indicates that she understands
that the lady possesses the bowl. She may be free from that possessive relationship, but as we saw when the guy from the bici-taxi called her “muñequita,” she is comfortable being objectified. When I used to keep the Lil’ Eva bowls in my mother’s house, my mother kept them well dusted. We all like to maintain a certain appearance with our possessions. Our possessions reflect on us. That is why the boto wanted Lil’ Eva to be decently clothed when she left his house: as his possession, her appearance reflects upon him. His suggestion to her, made it sound like he thought she was incompetent, but incompetence is a luxury. It means that someone else takes care of you, and you don’t have to worry about making a living. I have been taught to avoid men who tell women what to wear. In the U.S. it is considered a sort of abuse; an invasion of a person’s will. This is one “scheme of perception.” However, I should not apply this scheme of perception to a culture I do not know.

The issue of cat calls is another demonstration of objectifying behavior, which is completely tolerated. Lil’ Eva tells me that when a woman is walking down the street she can expect to have all sorts of things yelled at her like: Preciosa (Precious), or Mi ángel (My angel). Sometimes the things are raunchier. In general women will not acknowledge these at all. Lil’ Eva tells me that men consider these calls successful if the woman smiles. There are occasions when the comment will be so clever as to actually elicit a response. One friend of Eva’s has a very small butt, and a man yelled at her “¡Ay mija! ¿Dejaste el culo en casa?!?” (My dear, you left your ass at home?!) to which she replied “Para que tú no lo cojas” (so that you couldn’t grab it). Here you could not say things like that to a woman on the street. This as well would be considered harassment,

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51 Bourdieu 97.
but in Cuba it is accepted, it is almost a sort of game, a sexually explicit public commentary. Eva was shocked to find out that in the U.S. you could be sued for such behavior. In the Cuban “scheme of perception” objectification and possession are not given the negative connotation that they are given in the U.S.

Another foreign friend of mine was asking a Cuban man for advice on how to flirt with this girl he likes. The Cuban man suggested sending a text requesting that she wear a particular shirt that he liked. The other foreigner and I both thought that this was a little creepy by U.S. American standards, but the Cuban man assured us it was quite acceptable. It showed interest and attention to her by mentioning specific clothes. Also it is a request that demands that the woman modify herself specifically for a man. This may seem controlling, but it also indicates need on the man’s part; a need to feel that a woman cares enough to alter her appearance. It is possessive and demanding, like a child who gets jealous when another kid plays with his toys, and begins to make rules for how the toy can be played with. It is a claim on a body, an acknowledgement of insecurity, which is a raw and endearing emotion.

There are also stipulations for men’s dress as well. In the home of close friends men will take off their shirts, because of the oppressive heat. On one occasion Eva went with the boto and a friend of his (who we’ll call Tom, because he looks like a foreigner and in reality has an English name) to visit another foreigner (let’s call her Sarah) and her boyfriend (we’ll refer to as José), who is Cuban. So here we have two foreign travelers, two travelers from Luyanó, and José who traveled from Casa Blanca (a neighborhood of Havana that you actually can take a ferry to) assembled in the efficiency apartment on top of a house not far from the University of Havana in a fairly nice and touristic
neighborhood. Sarah rented the efficiency apartment from a family of four. They lived in the house below, and used the rent towards their impending immigration to Canada. It was tortuously hot, and Tom asked José if it would be okay for him (Tom) to unbutton his own shirt. For me this is very humorous in that I generally assume that a person has complete autonomy and control over their clothes and body, and the way in which they interact with them. If I wanted to put my hair up, it would not be something I asked anyone about. For the boto it was not humorous, but downright inappropriate. His stance was that a man knows when it is appropriate to take his shirt off, and if he has to ask, then it is clearly not a familiar enough environment to make it appropriate. He chastised Tom when they left, and Tom tried to defend himself saying “but he said it was fine, and I didn’t want to just do it without asking, because his girlfriend was there.” To this the boto replied that at that point, after the question had been asked, José had no choice but to allow it. It is humorous because both Eva and Sarah, who are the ones being protected, are not even aware of the “schemes of perception” that make this behavior controversial and inflammatory.

Eva tells me that one day she was at the barber’s house, helping Fifi with his English, and suddenly the boto decided to leave. She went with him, and he reprimanded her for sitting so close to Fifi. “If he is crowding you, you need to say something. You are my girlfriend, and I don’t want him thinking it’s okay to sit so close to you.” Eva was surprised and flattered that this little thing had so upset the boto, that he had to leave the house. “I actually liked it so much, that I tried to provoke him more.” She told him that

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52 Their extended family lived in the house below as well, but they had not built the apartment, did not receive Sarah’s rent, and were not planning on going to Canada.
she and Fifi were just practicing English, and Fifi only sat close so that he could hear her better. “I speak English too. He doesn’t practice English with me. He doesn’t sit too close to me. You are too sweet with him. You are very lovely and polite, but he is kind of dense, and might get the wrong idea.” Eva found the boto’s jealousy so charming. Sometimes she would purposefully sit too close to Fifi, or laugh too loudly at his jokes, and then she would wait for the boto to give Fifi a surly and warning glance.

Eva was not alone in enjoying this jealousy and possession. The boto enjoyed it too. He had a daughter, who he visited weekly. Usually. But, if he forgot and hadn’t visited her for a week, or two, he said he sometimes would go ahead and wait even longer because he liked the way she would treat him. “She’s like a little jealous wife. It’s so cute. ‘Where have you been? What are you so busy with?’” Eva understood this feeling very much, because on days when the boto told her he would not see her because he was visiting his daughter, she would become jealous in just the same way. “How did I know he wasn’t off meeting some other woman?” I found this statement quite odd, and yes, even cute. I would never admit to assuming or even pondering the possibility that a man is cheating on his wife. But Eva told me that from her understanding there is a sort of assumed guilt about people being adulterers. The mysterious-man-of-uncertain-origins (who I insist is a spook, and Eva believes is a writer) has a particularly hard time dealing with this attitude from his girlfriend. He would often complain to Lil’ Eva about how suspicious his girlfriend was. “Forensics could come in here and they wouldn’t find a thing.” That is immaterial. She still treats him like he’s cheating on her. In America to

54 He has lived in Havana on and off for two years, making occasional trips to Cancun and his home in Washington D.C. He is an African-American and so is frequently assumed to be Cuban until he opens his mouth and emits appalling Spanish. He does, however, cook pasta the way Cubans do, which Lil’ Eva considers unfortunate. “I’ve never even eaten pasta in the U.S., but it certainly doesn’t smell like that.”
be jealous or suspicious shows that a woman is insecure, or does not trust her partner, however in Cuba this jealousy does not reflect anything about the character of the jealous person. Instead it is a sign of a relationship where people care very much about one another. For example if a person receives a phone call it is perfectly acceptable for the partner to be asking (while the other one is still on the phone) to whom he/she is speaking. The one on the phone may react negatively to this, but not in such a way as to dissuade the other person from repeating the behavior on the next available occasion. The boto got into the habit of alerting Eva whenever his cell phone would sound. “My mother.” He’d say. He would sometimes even hold the phone up so that she could see the identity of the caller. Even so, Eva eventually became jealous of the attention he gave the cell phone itself. He laughed at her a lot for this, but since he too had once been an object, he understood that Eva was used to feeling jealous of inanimate things. When he had been a weeble, he used to get jealous of all the other toys, because they could do more than just weeble, and they were therefore more interesting to his owner. He sometimes worried that when Eva returned to the U.S. she would forget him, find someone else, and he would be stuck in Cuba just weebling.
Chapter 7: *No es Fácil: Memories of Overdevelopment*

Cubans have a very healthy disregard for formalities. It comes from contempt for their government which is almost ingrained. This contempt for the establishment exists among Anglos in the U.S., as well, but generally it is not something we learn from our parents, but rather something which constitutes a personal discovery. It is not a given. Eva tells me Cubans get on buses without paying. “And it is not as if they sneak on the bus either. They actually get into arguments with the driver as if it were impertinence for the driver to be requesting that they pay. Maybe it’s because I grew up in a bowl, but I don’t have that sense of entitlement about anything.” People will validate and accept many other people’s lifestyles because they are sympathetic to the difficulties of their economic situation.

“I Bought a Brand New Attitude.”

My friend Rachel recently gave a presentation on gender in Cuba after the revolution. She analyzed ads and articles in magazines to see how ideas about femininity were changing. One of the things she noticed was that thriftiness became a positive female attribute. Thriftiness allows women to resolve certain economic problems. Hustling also allows people to resolve certain economic problems. Eva had a friend in Cuba, who was in a rather unhappy relationship. The man she was seeing was married, but she justified the relationship by explaining how she got him to pay for food and other items for her kids. She was proud of this, and considered it an admirable quality in herself. So admirable, in fact, that she could share this fact with other people and expect them to admire it as well. Which, much to Eva’s dismay, they did! She tells

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me that some men are even proud to have wives who are *jineteras* (hustlers/prostitutes) as it means they have an additional income with which to provide for their family. We discussed how the old lady potato referred to her neighbors as *pingueros inmorales*, but did not go into her justification for their behavior. As she tells it the special period “*acabó con todo.*” During that time people had to do things outside of their moral schema to survive and since then they don’t feel shame about things people normally would. The kids who grew up in that time who live near her are all *jineteros mariconeiros sin vergüenza, que gastan todo su dinero en brujería*, or shameless faggot making prostitutes who waste their money on witchcraft. Now this is a very loaded statement, but for now what we need to take away from it is the shameless part. What she means is that they don’t feel embarrassed about doing things that before the special period would be considered illegal/immoral. These things have become acceptable because life *no es fácil*. Eva’s friend who is a *jinetero* asked her if she knew anyone in the Cuban navy. He had a Spaniard coming, who was looking for a gay boy in the navy. She suggested that maybe it would be easier to just have a gay boy pretend to be in the navy, but he told me that had occurred to him too, however the Spaniard had himself been in the navy, so he would probably be able to tell if he was being deceived. My friend sighed and said he would just have to go to the navy base and look for the guy who was the most *flojo*. This word literally means loose, or weak. Here he was using it to refer to the guy’s homosexuality, but it also implies that he might be weak, and susceptible to an advance.

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One of the houses in the boto’s *pasillo* was more affluent than others. Eva and the boto used to go by their frequently hoping that someone would be making coffee at that time. I was shocked at the liberties they took with the kids who congregated there. They would offer them snacks, let them watch violent/sexually explicit movies, and even discipline them. One night they watched *Zombieland* a comedy about the zombie apocalypse, and *American Virgin*. The latter is about a fairly conservative girl who gets very drunk at a frat party and gets filmed flashing everyone. This footage is going to be aired on the show *Chicks Gone Crazy*, a play off the real show, *Girls Gone Wild*. When I say they I mean Eva, the boto, the couple who lives there, and every child under sixteen who lives in the *pasillo*. Most of them being well under sixteen, I was surprised that no one was concerned whether their parents would think this was inappropriate. Both of these were R rated movies, which in the U.S. would mean that a parent or guardian would have to be present for a kid under 17 to see the film in the theater. But in Cuba there is a certain amount of trust between members of the community. Also, they are less possessive of their kids. They recognize that other parents can make informed decision regarding the rearing of their children.

In the U.S. some parents refuse to send snacks to school with her kids because they did not want them sharing their snacks with other kids. This may seem unkind, but the concern is that one of her kids might give a snack to a kid who had an allergy to something in the snack. This is a culture that is extremely sensitive to the formalities of the situation. On the other hand Eva knew a Cuban family here that frequently provided snacks to lots of kids in the neighborhood, and sent extra snacks to school with her kids.
so that they could share with their friends. She would even have some kids coming over for breakfast before school.

The boto once told Eva the story of why he no longer spoke to his mother in law. One day he was picking his daughter up from the mother in law’s house and he had just picked up a bag of milk. It had not been prepared yet and his mother in law offered to trade him a bottle of prepared milk for the bag he had. She happened to have milk because her daughter and her granddaughter lived with her. When she brought the bottle back it was a small baby bottle with milk. He had anticipated a liter bottle, which would be the quantity a prepared bag would fill. She was trying to get milk from him that she could keep for herself. In a way she was charging the milk in return for the effort to prepare the milk. He was very upset that she would not simply prepare the milk out of kindness for her granddaughter. He told her to keep her tiny bottle of milk, that he could get that from any of his neighbors for no cost. This shows that a certain amount of sharing is expected. I like the way in which sympathy is expected. There is public outcry not for what is right, but for what feels right. Last summer I got into an accident on my bicycle that left me with a very permanent physical injury. Not a week after the accident the woman with whom I had collided called me wanting my insurance information, so that she could take care of the damage to her car. Legally of course, this is very prudent, but I found it somewhat insensitive. I think that policy and procedure can frequently isolate us from the human emotions that we all ought to share.

Previously I imagined myself continuing in Academia as my brother and sister have done, but lately I think I will do whatever it is that I NEED to do in order to resolve my identity. I like Academia and I like my work, but I feel that it isolates from the real
world; an ivory tower and that shiznet. A friend texted me the other day asking what I was up to and I responded simply that I was working. I was in fact in the library revising this thesis. My friend did not go to college, and is not part of this world, so he texted me back asking if I was going to get off work soon. It made me feel very sad, and I did not want to text back that it wasn’t that kind of work. I don’t clock in and out. I feel like it’s a luxury to be able to work this way, and for many years I have tried to make people understand that living in luxury causes just as much stress as living in any other world. Miami may be where people vacation and enjoy the sun, but for those of us that live here permanently the sun becomes oppressive in a way that people might have a hard time understanding. In Menchú’s testimonial book she criticized the excessive drinking of the Ladino family she worked for. However, she justifies the excessive drinking of her people as being an escape from their situation of enslavement on the finca. Alcoholism is always an escape from something, but it is hard to be as sympathetic to alcoholics who seem to have everything. One day the old lady potato and Eva were watching a TV special about Whitney Houston, and the old lady went into a rant about how stupid it is that celebrities use drugs. “Si yo tuviera ese dinero, no lo gastaría en esa basura.” Maybe I am too sympathetic, maybe I’ve reached that point where my mind is so open that my brain has fallen out, but I would like to defend people who live in luxury and are still unhappy, but somehow when I do so I just feel like an asshole. Sometimes I wish I didn’t know anything about real problems, because then maybe my first world problems could envelop me fully and then I’d just be an oblivious asshole.

**The House on Idon’tgiveafuck Ave.**

In the U.S. most people have the luxury of having their own internet access. And this luxury too can be a burden. I had a friend who had to block porn sites from their computer,
means that they can access pornography privately without needing to involve anyone else in the process. There are also private businesses that make it easy for someone to obtain porn independently. In Cuba things are not so simple. Most people do not have access to the Internet, and there are no legitimate purveyors of pornography. This means that people have to obtain porn through informal networks. Generally a person will buy a blank disc, and take it to one of their acquaintances who has the Internet and can burn them a disc. Close friends will also exchange discs amongst one another. Just as it is with kitchen appliances, or certain foods, people are dependent on others to provide them with things that they lack. This is a little more complicated, because a close friend may not be the one who can provide them with this. It might be a friend of a friend, or someone who they used to be closer with, etc. Unlike here, where we can procure pornography through the internet, or at an anonymous shop, they have to use personal connections. This means discussing their use of pornography with their friends and possibly mere acquaintances. They may even discuss specific preferences if the person is downloading videos/pictures solely for them. When you enter Cuba as a tourist one of the customs papers you fill out declares that you are not bringing pornographic material into the country. Of course, many people do, and this is another method of obtaining porn; receiving it from a foreigner. The friend looking for the gay sailor had also recently gotten a lighter from a foreigner. The lighter had a little flashlight, which projected an image of two men fucking a girl. They are holding her up and one is fucking her in front and the other from behind. Even his non-smoker friends will borrow it, and everyone gets a good laugh out of it. Adolescent boys would be one thing, but grown men getting a kick out of a light on a lighter that is only a profile view of two men because they were not getting any work done.
and a woman doing it?? In another instance some men crowded around a cell phone to watch a video of a striptease. I feel like I want to say they are sexually repressed, but that is definitely not what I want to say. The way in which sexual matters are so openly discussed seems risky to me. There is the risk of embarrassment at so openly discussing something of such a sexual nature. Giddens states that “risk presumes a society actively trying to break away from its past.” Risk leads to innovation. The old lady potato I lived with told me that before Castro and the revolution women who had children outside of marriage were stigmatized, and I can attest to the fact that today there seem to be a lot of women having children outside of marriage (along with many other unique and curious familial arrangements) and they do not seem stigmatized in the least bit. In Cuba today these arrangements are not perceived as risky, because Cuba is a society which has broken with its past. I, being from a society which still upholds its Victorian sexual modesty, am the one evaluating these behaviors as risky. It is part of my scheme of perception, not part of their scheme of perception. For them it is not a conscious innovation, but a process which has happened gradually and left them with a new habitus.

Although people will discuss sex fairly openly, their treatment of trading pornography is more discreet. Perhaps it is because it is illegal, or perhaps it is because it implies masturbation, which is generally a more taboo topic. Some sort of code word is used to inquire about where someone’s porn is. This works out very well, because it is not in the least suspicious that someone would come by another person’s house to borrow something, say a video game controller, or some bread. So the porn might be referred to

as one of these things, thus saving everyone a bit of embarrassment. Unfortunately the topic of masturbation is more embarrassing for women. In the U.S. women can anonymously access pornography through the internet just as men can. This makes it much more difficult for women to obtain pornography. The boto was once approached by a girl who, knowing that he worked with tourists, asked him directly if he could get her some porn. He did not even know her and felt somewhat affronted. “Only if I can watch it with you” he replied slyly. Lil’ Eva was upset by this anecdote. “That wasn’t very nice of you. How is she going to get some porn? It’s embarrassing enough for her to ask. You don’t need to make her feel bad about it.” The boto was not about to be reprimanded for this. “She could ask her boyfriend.” Lil’ Eva could not believe what she was hearing, she almost laughed at the absurdity of it. “How do you expect her to do that? If she has a boyfriend, she probably wants the porn for when he’s not around. He’s the last person she wants to know about it.” The boto did not except this either. “No, no she should be able to tell him about it. Couples watch porn together.” Lil’ Eva was surprised by this as she and the boto never watched porn together. She knew he had it, but she generally tried not to think about him watching it. “We don’t watch porn together” she said. The boto laughed and sort of winked at her. “Well we could, we could go to my mother’s house on the days she works.” And so it came to pass that Lil’ Eva and the boto would go to his mother’s house every Monday to watch porn.

**Conclusion**

In the first chapter I discussed the song Girl Anachronism as demonstrating the guilt people feel for transgressing social norms. That song plays with an extended metaphor about birth as well. She says that she is “removed as a Caesarian” as a way to illustrate
how she is not a natural product of the system. Lil’ Wayne also has a song that uses birth as a metaphor to express the way the social system in the U.S. nurtures and fosters certain people. The song is titled abortion, and the bridge goes as follows: “I know your name/Your name is unimportant/We in the belly of the beast/And she thinking ‘bout abortion now.” Lil’ Wayne takes a different perspective than the Dresden Dolls. While the Dresden Dolls’ song worries about whether the audience will believe them, Lil’ Wayne thinks the opinion of others’ is “unimportant.” The justification being that the system is about to abort both of them alike, transgressors and supplicants. Lil’ Wayne has that “I just built a house on I don’t give a fuck Ave.” sort of attitude. In fact, he invented it.

I bought a brand new attitude/The haters music to my ears/I got my dancing shoes/Sometimes we question shit that there is no answer to/But I just built a house on I don’t give a fuck Ave./I see you with your palms in your pants/But me me, see me, I got the world in my hands/I make it spin on my finger/I’m a hell of a smoker/And a bit of a drinker.  

In rap music social transgression is a given. It is an acceptable, expected identity. No one needs to encourage Lil’ Wayne to come out and acknowledge his identity. But at the same time, part of what enables him to assert himself the way he does, is the fact that he is wealthy, and has succeeded in the capitalist system. He has got the “world in his hands,” and has enough money to afford “a brand new attitude,” “dancing shoes,” and a newly constructed house.

As Lil’ Eva mentioned earlier, it is easy to be critical of affluence when you are privileged enough to have experienced it. We frequently have this mentality that if we have gone through a transformation and it has benefitted us, others must also go through

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this transformation. People who are wealthy and then come to disdain possessions think everyone must eventually disdain possessions. People who are comforted in fixed gender roles (be they gay or straight) want others to commit to these fixed identities as well.

When I made the bowls I was not really thinking about gender. I was thinking about the narrative of a journey. I was thinking about Faustus. In the final days of finishing this thesis, I was in the library inserting the photos of the bowls. The boy next to me tapped me and said “I think I know you from somewhere.” I had not recognized him, but I knew exactly where I knew him from. He had been in the German/Religion class with me, where we read Faustus. I reminded him of this, and he said “Yeah, that’s right! That story really sticks with you. I still think about it.” It does, and I think about it a lot too. Faust wants to understand the mysteries of the universe, he is studious, but this brings him no closer to enlightenment. And so he makes a deal with the devil in which he sells his soul in order to leave his world of studies and have the devil show him true enlightenment. The Eva bowls were made with the intention of demonstrating this pact with the devil, and the way in which you are transported when you make a pact with the devil. I did not intend the bowls to be moralistic. Eva’s disappearance into the bottom of the bowl was, in my eyes, a good thing. I did not see it as her death, but as her escape into another world, where she could experience other things besides bowl-life. The story of Faust has been re-written many times. Depending on the version, the thing which finally gives Faust satisfaction is different. In Goethe’s version Faust is content when he does public service, and feels that his memory will live on through these works. In the Cuban version, Faust returns home and is happy in his routine of reading, writing, eating, etc. When I made the bowls I thought travel and understanding multiple perspectives
was the ultimate satisfaction. The bowls represented not just a collection of instances, but a progression in which the ultimate stage is enlightenment. My ceramics professor said you can only understand that narrative if you have all twelve bowls together. These days, I rarely do, and the narrative is somewhat lost. But experiencing the bowls separately I can appreciate their unique aspects, see them as a non-linear set, and not give in to the narrative which privileges some bowls more than others in ‘prioritizing and validating the reality of only a select few of the beings exhibited.’ I used to pity the bowl in which Lil’ Eva sits complacently on the side of the bowl. She was just cute. She needed to come out of her world. It is the same with genders. People see some genders merely as phases, stepping stones into more concrete genders. However, there is no end point of ultimate truth.

Post Script

“One ‘exists’ not only by virtue of being recognized, but in a prior sense, by being recognizable.” 60 This thesis is recognizably queer. That is part of the reason why I have not felt the need to cite many queer theorists. In fact they are intentionally lacking. Instead I’ve cited more popular references as a way of queering Academia. I have left authorities out of this. In terms of the subject matter I did not depict the Cuban government’s presence in Cuba. Rather than a study that explains the formal realm of Cuban society, we have a narrative on the informal realm, written not with citations from authorities on queer theory, but mainly with citations from people who do not realize they have anything to do with queer theory: “The possibility of decontextualizing and recontextualizing such terms through radical acts of public misapprobation constitutes the basis of an ironic hopefulness that the conventional relation between word and wound

might become tenuous and even broken over time” (Butler 63). I still feel the stigma of the word queer as much as I throw it around. I do not believe in it, and I feel as if somehow by associating queer theory with writers and artists from other arenas and calling them queer as well I will somehow persuade myself that queer doesn’t really mean what I think it means.
Images

Image 1.0

Image 2.1  Image 2.2
TEMPORARY VALET PASS

YOU MUST LEAVE KEY WITH VALET
MUST DISPLAY ON DASH TO AVOID TOWING
15 MINUTE TIME LIMIT OR VALET WILL PARK AND CHARGE

[Signature]

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[Signature]

[Signature]
Works Cited


Eugenio Florit Papers, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries, Coral Gables, Florida.


Gomez, Amanda. Conversation. 11 October 2011


Lil Eva. Conversation. 27 September 2011


