Queer Transnationality: Narrative, Theatre, and Performance Across Temporal, Spatial, and Social Geographies

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QUEER TRANSNATIONALITY: NARRATIVE, THEATRE, AND PERFORMANCE ACROSS TEMPORAL, SPATIAL, AND SOCIAL GEOGRAPHIES

By
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A DISSERTATION

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QUEER TRANSNATIONALITY: NARRATIVE, THEATRE, AND PERFORMANCE
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This study investigates the ways narrative, theatre, and performance art negotiate identities across Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the United States, and larger global contexts. I research how physical, social, and temporal spaces transform enactments and receptions of text and performance. Particularly, I investigate the effects of transnationality in works that represent queer subjectivities. I intervene in Queer Studies, expanding the notion of queer beyond sexuality to include nationality, race, and class. While identity politics emerges around fixed categories of identity, I argue that representations of subjectivity in transnational networks of production dissociate politicized identification from the rigid geographic and cultural boundaries of the nation-state. I introduce the concept of queer transnationality, which demands access to identification without ascribing the body to binary understandings of identity. I employ this concept to highlight the fluidity of all voluntary and involuntary identifications assumed or imposed by binary and hierarchical naming powers. By investigating the relationship between narrative, theatre, and performance art, I emphasize how each work plays on and against the separation of language and corporeality, and how Caribbean authors and artists redefine cultural and national belonging in multiple geographic spaces.
For Lisa and Bill, forever encouraging.
For Coston, who always reads it first.
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Chapter 1
Where Are We Now? Locating Queerness, Caribeñidad, and Kinship in Transnational Spaces

Martha Divine is afraid to fly. It is not the cascading space entered upon reaching altitude at thirty thousand feet that causes her fear. Rather it is the take off and the landing, the interstice between two geographic spaces, the space between ground and air. This intermediary space between being grounded and in full flight piques Martha’s fear surrounding her identity. Martha’s interstitial fear: “…los aterrizajes y los despegues siempre le revuelcan el ansia. Y no hay ansia en este mundo que no le provocara a Martha pensar en su cuerpo. Oh sí, su cuerpo, el disfraz que era su cuerpo. Temblaba de solo pensar que alguien, en pleno take-off, la señalara con el dedo y gritara: —Miren eso. Eso no es una mujer” (Mayra Santos-Febres, Sirena Selena vestida de pena, 23).

Martha’s anxiety surrounding the intermediary spaces of air travel is grafted on to her pre-operational body, and the fear of discovery, of not passing assimilated, manifest in a physical and psychic space between national and geographic boundaries, and the borders that mark and make bodies intelligible. This space of movement, a queer transnational space of claiming the self, is a perceptible trope in contemporary Hispanic Caribbean literature, theatre, and performance art, among other genres. It is my aim, then, to put Martha at ease; to investigate the ways in which this intermediary, interstitial, and still very real space becomes a location where authors and artists begin to reshape the relationship between temporal, spatial, and social borders and the bodies these borders attempt to define.

In “Queer Transnationality: Narrative, Theatre, and Performance Across Temporal, Spatial, and Social Geographies,” I investigate how narrative, theatre, and
performance art negotiate identities across Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the United States, and larger global contexts. I research how physical, social, and temporal spaces transform enactments and receptions of text and performance. Particularly, I investigate the effects of transnationality in works that represent queer subjectivities. My specific aim is to demonstrate how artists and authors expand the notion of queer beyond sexuality to include race, nationality, and class. I introduce the concept of queer transnationality, which demands access to identification without ascribing the body to binary understandings of identity. I employ this concept to highlight the fluidity of all voluntary and involuntary identifications assumed or imposed by binary and hierarchical naming powers. Within the context of twenty-first century transnationality, identities become rhizomatic assemblages, in which belonging and naming are not couched upon geographic or cultural localizations. By triangulating my investigation of transnationality, I challenge the understanding of diaspora as a “two way street,” to underscore the interconnectedness created by performers and writers on the Caribbean islands, in the continental United States, and on a larger global scale.

This study reconceptualizes diaspora in the twenty-first century. The advancement of new technologies, virtual interconnectivity, and the malleability of national and international borders brought about by these new modes of communication and connection require a reformulation of our understanding of diaspora. I argue that it is possible to understand transnationality as a development and consequence of diaspora. Specifically, the pre-internet conceptualization of movement from one place to another entails a particular loss, both on the physical and affective level. Through diaspora—moving from one national space to another—, bodies leave concrete spaces, and both
those who leave and those who are left feeling the physical absence. The affective loss is manifest in the nostalgia and/or melancholy felt for the space that one leaves. Importantly, however, the affective loss of this space can be manifest in many other ways: an attempted recreation of the physical space in the new nation, a purposeful forgetting of the space, or, among others, the space can exist as an “alternative place,” a space which is visited frequently, but never wholly belongs to a subject. Currently, the speed and ease with which subjects can “return” to the island forces contemporary scholarship to reformulate understandings of diaspora, specifically the notion that it is a complete detachment from the physical and affective space of the island.¹

Furthermore, for works of narrative, theatre, and performance written and enacted in the 21st century, it is indispensable to analyze the role of new technologies in the production, dissemination, and reception of the texts. The transnational character of the works goes beyond what they represent, and includes the means in which they are produced, where they are shown, and how a global audience receives them. Furthermore, transnational aesthetics and the cross fertilization of ideas allows for different ways of thinking about the novel, theatre, and performance as genres in contemporary terms. The transnational character of these works is palpable in how they, beyond a mere observational critique of the division between “here” and “there,” respond to a contemporary transnational aesthetic that questions the dichotomy of island versus diaspora.

¹ This is not to ignore the political situation in Cuba, which complicates physical return to the island. However, to a certain extent, virtual connection is still available and changes the relationship of the exiled subject to the space of the nation.
The enactments of identity formation presented in these works concern questions of localized/national identity formation, but do so on a global stage and with a global audience. As such, diaspora must be analyzed specifically within the framework of transnationality, a virtual transnationality that goes beyond geo-political borders, embodied physicality, and the affective purchase of physical presence in concrete space. Virtual transnationality refers to the ways in which people connect globally, through new technologies, including but not limited to: cell phones, internet/video based communication, social media sites, and Internet more generally (access to news, YouTube, email, etc.). Virtual transnationality allows bodies to move without really moving.

The spatial limitlessness of virtual transnationality requires that analyses of the texts in this study focus on specific elements that relate to and transform/are transformed by virtual transnationality. This analysis focuses on the representation and development of networks of queer kinship in works of narrative, theatre, and performance situated in transnational contexts. My intent is not to allegorize transnationality and queerness, but rather to understand how these two phenomena reconstruct and reconfigure traditional notions of biological, genealogical kinship. I argue that virtual transnationality creates a new space in which family and kinship ties are queered and reconfigured to respond to the exigencies of new spatiality and temporality engendered through alternative understandings of transnationality.

2 This is not to ignore the political and economic limits to virtual transnationality. For an analysis of the economic and political limits to virtual transnationality, see Jorge Duany, Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States, pp. 35-80.
This project is significant because it investigates how virtual transnationality is understood not only in the country of arrival, (within the studies of the Hispanic Antilles this is traditionally the United States) but also how it is understood and received in the country of origin. Furthermore, I highlight the permeability of temporal, spatial and social geographies. Owing to the development of virtual transnationality, the concept of insularity, which defines the island nation by the geographic boundary where land meets sea, no longer rigidly structures creations of national and local identities. The exchange of ideas, practices, and materials allows transnational communities to expand notions of nationhood beyond the insular geographic borders of the island. The reconfiguration of where national borders begin and end extends to the intelligibility of the social construct of the family unit in the 21st century. Nation and family have been intrinsically tied since the concept of the nation was first articulated. Looking at the work of Doris Sommer, one can see how genealogically productive relationships promote the propagation of the nation-state. This essay contemporizes Sommer’s influential work *Foundational Fictions* by reconceptualizing the role of kinship and the nation in the 21st century. I do not argue that we are in a post-national moment in terms of national and cultural politics; it is quite evident that national policy and national understandings of culture play a very important role in the contemporary moment. I do argue, however, that it is necessary to rethink the transformation of nationality and kinship in a time permeated by virtual transnationality. Owing to the role of new technologies and the borders they cross, it is possible to understand nation and its relationship to kinship in a way that can be read as queer. Kinship and family ties are shifting due to alternative understandings of what makes a

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3 Specifically for Latin America, the nation was conceptualized and constructed in relation to Independence from “la madre patria,” Spain, in the beginning of the 19th century.
family, for example, changing gender roles in heteronormative and homonormative couplings, how families connect and interact with one another, and how national policies shape affective relationships amongst family members, among others. Changing ways in which families and affective communities connect and interrelate challenge national and political boundaries.4

Queer(ed) articulations of family/kinship network allow for a nuanced understanding of diaspora/transnationality as “nodes of being” rather than geographically isolated beings. Importantly, queer is understood as not merely non-heteronormative relationships, but rather as the radical questioning of structures of heteronormative and homonormative understandings of kinship and family relationships. Kinship is reinterpreted not as bound by bloodlines, but as a malleable social construct that can be altered and adjusted to fit the needs of people and communities. Transnationality, and especially virtual transnationality, creates networks of relationships that allow for a queer way understanding family and kinship. Reading diaspora through virtual transnationality opens a conceptual metaphorical space but also presents a real space that reconfigures different notions of family and kinship.5

In order to better guide the reader’s trajectory, I will provide a brief outline of each chapter, focusing on the principal aims of each chapter, with specific consideration of my theorization of queer transnationality.

4 It is important to highlight (despite differences in accessibility) the democratic nature of many of these social media outlets as well as virtual means of communication.
5 Differentiations must be made, however, between real space, virtual space, and metaphorical space. Real space refers the geographical and geo-political boundaries that mark not only nations, but communities as well. Virtual space marks the seemingly limitless place of the Internet, which crosses geographical and geo-political boundaries, but is still marked and to a certain extent controlled by them. Metaphorical space refers to conceptualizations such as diaspora and transnationality, which, while being real things, refer to metaphorical concepts and spaces through which texts and lives are read.
Outline of the Project

Chapter 2: Queer Translocations: Narrating Kinship on the Move

This chapter analyzes how Mayra Santos-Febres’ novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000) and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro’s *Caparazones* (2010) question the construction and enactment of subjectivity with relation to categories of identity. Specifically focusing upon the markers of nationality, sexuality, and race, these two authors represent bodies that, while still rendered legible by certain markers of identity, challenge the reduction of the body to a simplified correlative pairing with categories of identity. The authors represent how transnational subjectivity challenges identity as a discrete, closed categorization.

Chapter 3: Conscripts of the Body: Transnationality and Theatre

This chapter focuses on Cuban dramaturgy through the works *Chamaco* (2006) by Abel González Melo and *Vacas* (2008) by Rogelio Orizondo. This chapter highlights the translation of artistic representation from page to stage, analyzing the ways in which the live enactments of theatre create immediacy and intimacy with audiences. Shifting the analysis from page to stage—without prioritizing one over the other—demonstrates more concretely the role of corporeality in articulations of queer transnationality. Through performance the reader/spectator dynamic becomes corporeal, as the reader/spectator must engage his or her body in the act of interpretation. While the conventions of theatre as a physical and psychic space condition how spectators read bodies on stage, considering the transnational element in each play allows the reader/viewer to see how such identifications and readings are culturally conditioned.
Chapter 4: Dialects of the Body: Performing the Transnational “Yo”

This chapter focuses on the works of two Dominican-born performance artists, Dominicanish (2000) by Josefina Báez and the performances Ad Infinitum (2012) and Dominican Shower (2012) by Ismael Ogando. Important for a comparison of these two performance works is the role of language, text, and body in each performance. Dominicanish is a performance that includes a text, which narrates the experience of moving from the Dominican Republic to New York City and how the performer is forced to reformulate her notions of identity and belonging. I analyze how the blending of the Spanish and English languages with cultural referents from the Dominican Republic, United States, and India complicates national identity. Ogando’s performances return to the 1960s and ‘70s aesthetic of conceptual performance art while still concentrating on elements of race, sexuality, and nationality. The works analyzed in this chapter have no text attached to them; they are corporeal articulations of what it means to be a black, gay, Dominican male living and performing outside of the Dominican Republic. Each work is accessible on the Internet, which creates a new node in my analysis and understanding of transnational queer identity. Both texts highlight the visibility of bodies of color, an element not explicit in the four other texts analyzed in this investigation. Consequently, the chapter focuses on the intersections of race, language, and visibility in these two performance pieces.

Methodological Apparatus

The primary methodology informing this work are studies on Queer Theory, Caribbean Diaspora Studies, Transnational Studies, Performance Studies, and Theories of Space. However, my objective is to consider the intersections amongst these fields of
study, rather than applying them as discrete categories to the works analyzed. Much
analysis has been done regarding queer and diaspora studies. My work aims to expand
upon this research and consider how queerness is transformed through a contemporary
transnational lens and to understand how this transformation is manifest in works of
different genres. Specifically, I analyze how diaspora can be reconfigured into
transnationality when considering how reorganized national borders intersect with
notions of queerness. Again, it is not my intention to conflate the transnational experience
with notions of queer, nor to allegorize transnationality as queer, but rather to understand
how the two work together to create contemporary understandings of family and kinship
networks.

Along with Queer and Diaspora Studies, Performance Studies provides a
necessary theoretical category for this analysis owing to the consideration of theatre and
performance art. However, elements of Performance Studies can also be applied to the
novels analyzed in this study, as they include thematic elements of performance in the
plot. Furthermore, the more nuanced categories of performance, including Speech Act
Theory by J.L. Austin and performativity by Judith Butler, can be analyzed across genres,
as these two intellectual constructs consider how words bring bodies and events into
being. As such, the category of Performance Studies will not be relegated solely to issues
of genre, but will be considered across the works, as it is the objective of this work to go
beyond notions of genre as fixed categories.

Lastly, I give a general historical consideration to the three primary nations of
study: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. I also highlight the specificities
of each place in order to solidify the relationship each has to transnationality and the
relationship amongst the islands, as articulated by the concept of the “repeating island,” delineated by Antonio Benítez Rojo. It is my intention in this essay to expand the notion of the “repeating island” beyond the geographical space of the island, its relation to other Caribbean islands, and geographical space in general to understand how virtual transnationality transforms the concrete space of the island into a virtual network of “islands,” each with repeating and competing notions of identity and belonging. The concept of a virtual network of islands is bolstered through a reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, a philosophical model that undoes hierarchies as well as binary understandings of relationships. Understanding concepts of transnationality, queerness, and the specificity of identity formation in the 21st century requires a brief historical outline of the countries of study, their relationship to colonial enterprises, their conceptualization of queer bodies’ relationship to the nation-state, and the specificities of each nation’s diaspora to the United States and other nations.

This project requires consideration for the field of Queer Studies in general and more specifically notions of queer Caribbean and its relationship to transnationality. As such, I shall presently consider the works of Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam. I will then move towards an analysis of Peggy Phelan, who gives an important critical framework for understanding identity and visibility in performance art and other visual arts. I then analyze the works of José Quiroga, Carlos Decena, Larry La Fountain-Stokes, and José Esteban Muñoz, all of whom consider the specific relationships between queer/homosexual identity in the Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora. I will then analyze the work of Antonio Benítez Rojo in order to understand the concept of how islands “repeat” and develop this concept beyond the island into the sphere of transnationality.
Finally, I consider Jorge Duany and Christian Krohn-Hansen’s sociological perspective of transnationality.

The introduction to Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (2005) retains similarities to her arguments placed forward in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993). Butler begins by noting that gender is an act of improvisation within a scene of constraint (1). Right, Butler makes evident her interest in the productive nature of power. She goes on to note that recognition is a site of power by which humans are differentially produced (2). Importantly, she continues by highlighting the advantages to remaining less than intelligible, a notion also articulated by Peggy Phelan, Carlos Decena, Larry La Fountain Stokes, José Quiroga, and others. The “I” is constituted by and dependent upon norms, but also lives in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them (3). An example of this is the pathologization of gender variance, in which subjects depend upon a diagnosis in order to receive “treatment,” in the form of bodily transformation. This is the “double edged sword of pathologization” (5). Autonomy and determination of gender are caught in the relation of existing articulations and social norms surround gender. According to Butler, “one only determines “one’s own” sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself” (7). Essentially, our conception and actuation of gender is always conditioned by what already exists as articulated by through history, social norms, politics, and other over arching structures of power (a la Foucault). Again however, we are not merely conditioned by said structures, enactments of gender also remold--but never break-- existing structures that code articulations of subjectivity. In this vein, Butler argues that “the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our
own,” (21) owing to the dependence on situated and existing articulations of legible/recognizable subjectivity and to the importance placed upon recognition. The body is never one’s own precisely because legitimation is dependent upon the gaze/recognition given by an ‘other.’

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler goes on to analyze the position of gender, and questions whether gender is a preexisting regulation or if the gendered subject emerges from regulation. She argues that gender is an instance of a larger operation of power (41) and that even if one is outside the norm, they are still defined in relation to it. The subject, in Butler’s conceptualization, can never be fully outside, as it is continually inscribed within a matrix of power. Butler notes that the term ‘gender’ is employed in certain instances to question the norms of masculinity and femininity, yet is continually conflated the dichotomies of masculine/feminine, man/woman, male/female, and “thus performs the very naturalization that the notion of gender is meant to forestall” (43). She continues, noting “a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (43). She argues, therefore, that gender operates to secure certain forms of reproductive sexual ties and prohibit other forms (47).

In Chapter 5, Is Kinship Always Heterosexual? Butler states that kinship can be understood as an allegory for the nation, and normative kinship exploits worries regarding the disruptive effects of kinship variability for national projects. This argument is similar to Doris Sommer’s work *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, which reads heteronormative romance fiction of the mid to late 19th
century in Latin America as an allegory for nation building. Butler analyzes how the state is desired for the recognition it may confer on same sex couples and countered for the regulatory control exercised upon normative kinship. Butler promotes non-state centered forms of support and alliance, and insists that marriage should not be the only option of legitimacy under the law. She highlights the disconnect between actual practices and the desire of the law in the United States, stating, “in the United States, the norms of recognition supplied by the state not only often fail to describe or regulate existing practices but become the site of articulation for a fantasy of normativity that projects and delineates an ideological account of kinship, at the moment when it is undergoing social challenge and dissemination” (116).

For Butler, the object of feminism is gender (in that gender is a social construct, and women/men are not intrinsically a certain way, but socialized to be that way) while the object of queer studies is sex/sexuality (in that the category of oppression is sexual practice). Butler states that the view of homosexuality as proliferating a variety of genders seems to be based on notions that homosexuals have departed from their sex and cease to be men/women. Most important to Butler is to challenge a simplified understanding of gender, “more important than coming up with a strict and applicable definition is the ability to track the travels of this term through public culture” (184). As for sexuality, Butler notes that it is never fully given (biology) nor fully constructed (social) but partially both. In the radical separation of gender and sexuality, according to Butler, we miss the opportunity to analyze particular operations of homophobic power (186).
Most useful for this project is the understanding that no subject is truly outside power, and that subjects are constituted by structures of power. However, this does not mean that there is no transformative power in existing within structures of power. Queer studies prioritizes sexuality because this is the category of their oppression (in terms of sexual desire) where as feminism prioritizes gender because it is understood as being socially constructed, and not a purely biological (and therefore unalterable) element of a person’s being. Butler, however, looks at the two together in order to understand the ways in which both are operation of larger structures of power and to understand how both affect subjects in various ways.

Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) analyzes how queer uses of time and space develop in opposition to family, heterosexual, and reproductive notions of time and space. Key to this analysis is the idea that time and space are gendered, and through this gendering are normativized and regulated by certain majority groups. Queer becomes a way of life, which is counter to “straight time/place” and through which distinct conceptualizations of alliance (kinship) and transgender embodiment can be actualized. This understanding “opens way for new life narrative and alternative relations to time and space” (2). In regards to the progression of time towards old age, Halberstam signals that the AIDs epidemic causes a diminishing future and forges a focus on the here and now. Queer subjectivity also creates “potentiality of life unscripted by conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing” (2). This “way of being” hinges upon an understanding of queerness that diverges from notions of homonormativity, which, in many ways, is aligned with

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6 As an expansion relevant to my research, it can also be noted that space and time are also racialized, nationalized, and regulated according to socioeconomic class.
“straight time/place”. Importantly, however, as noted by social geographers (Gil Valentine, for example) homonormativity is usually only “afforded” to middle/upper class white males. Halberstam quotes Lisa Dougan as stating, “new neo-liberal sexual politics…might be termed the new homonormativity…” (19). As such, queer understandings of time and place give certain legitimacy to those who are marginalized not only because of their gender and/or sexuality, but also owing to reasons of class, race, socioeconomic standing, and profession, among others. Halberstam tries “to use the concept of queer time to make clear how respectability, and notions of the normal on which it depends, may be upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality” (4). Halberstam also questions the centrality of the body in identification, noting, “in queer rendering of postmodern geography, the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice” (5). This understanding positions the body as produced by embodiment, place, and practice, and as productive of embodiment, place, and practice. Halberstam challenges both gender variance and gender identification by negotiating between gender as a binary and as a space of variance, and sexuality as understood through desire and also sexuality as a practice of desire.

Halberstam defines queer time and queer space as the following: “‘Queer time’ is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (6). My challenge to this particular formulation lies in the

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7 This argument relates to Doris Sommer’s as well, regarding the importance of heterosexual reproductivity and the continuation of nation-states.
word “leave.” For one, leaving temporal frames of bourgeois time implies that everyone is born into this temporal frame, which as Halberstam notes is not the case. Secondly, the idea of leaving implies a total removal, which, as Judith Butler notes, is never truly possible. Butler states “For there is an “outside” to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute “outside,” an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive “outside,” it is that which can only be though—when it can—in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders” (Bodies that Matter, 8). One is always on the edge of intelligibility, and can never truly leave or exist outside of productive powers.

Queer space designates the place-making practices in post modernity in which queer people engage and queer counterpublics enable a new understanding of space (6). To understand this concept more fully in the scope of my research, I consider what counts as “important” space. For example, the prioritization of the island in identity formation of diaspora/exile subjects situates the geographic boundaries of the island as key for marking national identity. However, transnational communities outside of the geographical boundaries of the island queer notions of nationality by staking claim to a national identity outside of the prioritized space of the island.\footnote{Dara Goldman analyzes this in her work Out of Bounds: Islands and the Demarcation of Identity in the Hispanic Caribbean, 2008.} This identification is furthered when subjects question the dominant representation of nationality as it relates to articulations of gender and sexuality. Understood broadly, transnational space (but also in certain instances the space of the island) allows for articulations of identity that
question norms imposed by the nation-state as related to how subjects embody gender and/or sexuality.

Beyond the nation-state, it is important to note the influence of neo-liberal, post-modern capitalism, and its influence on how we are to understand flexible articulations of embodiment. The transgender body has been seen as “futurity,” as a bodily space that is flexible, moldable, and transformable to the desires of the subject. However, Halberstam notes that bodily flexibility as a commodity (surgery) and commodification cannot be celebrated as progress and liberation (18). The trans and queer body, in its supposed liberation, has been subsumed as another commodity under the banner of neo-liberal capitalist free expression. The body as commodity/commodification is particularly important when taken out of a symbolic understanding and place in the real world context of prostitution and sex tourism.

Both Butler and Halberstam address the significance of the visibility of non-normative bodies and the role of said visibility in claims for political and social recognition. Peggy Phelan’s *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) also investigates issues of visibility primarily in visual art and performance. According to Phelan, her work “examines the implicit assumptions about the connections between representational visibility and political power” and “among the challenges this poses is how to retain the power of the unmarked by surveying it within a theoretical frame” (1). Phelan questions the power of visibility, especially in regards to identity categories and their political mobilization.⁹ A strong concern for Phelan is that “contemporary culture finds a way to name and thus arrest and fix, the image of that other” (2). Employing

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⁹ Identity categories are groupings formed around visible bodily difference, with are “othered” in relation to hegemonic or majority understandings of subjectivity.
visible identity categories or making identity categories visible forestalls agency in the presentation of the other. By fixing the other within a particular identity category, it removes the possibility of multiple and resistant meanings. Phelan argues “in conflating identity politics with visibility, cultural activists and some theorists have also assumed that “selves” can be adequately represented within the visual or linguistic field” (10).

This notion is problematic because it leads us to question who is representing whom? Self-representation is difficult enough, but the question of representing an other becomes particularly tricky. According to Phelan, “visibility politics are additive rather than transformational,” and are “compatible with capitalism’s relentless appetite for new markets and with the most self-satisfying ideologies of the United States: you are welcome here as long as you are productive” (11). There is, for Phelan, little power in visibility because visibility has been co-opted by capitalist structures, normativized, and re-sold to the masses. This argument is similar to Halberstam’s understanding of queer time/place, which has not appropriated by neo-liberal capitalist enterprises for the purposes of normativity. Similar to Butler’s understanding of recognition, Phelan notes that “identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other—which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other” (13). Phelan argues for “an active vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility” (19). This is a key moment in Phelan’s analysis, because it demonstrates the productive agency in consciously and, paradoxically, remaining visibly invisible.10

10 Examples of this visible invisibility include the Guerrilla Girls, and more contemporarily the Internet activist group Anonymous; both of whom work very publicly but never reveal their identities.
For my analysis of *Chamaco* and *Vacas*, the chapter Theatre and its Mother: Tom Stoppard’s *Hapgood*, provides a useful analysis of the space of the theatre and how it is involved in questions of invisibility. Phelan notes, “the “secret” of theatre’s power is dependent upon the “truth of its illusion. Enfolded within fiction, theatre seeks to display the line between visible and invisible power” (112). Phelan also tracks the space of immateriality, noting that in the Renaissance it was located in the figure of a ghost, “whose voice could not be located in a corporeal body,” where as “in a post-psychoanalytic world, such ghosts are described as the symptoms of the unconscious” (114). She demonstrates how the theatre of Beckett “makes clear that presence is doubt,” (115) by erasing the distinction between the actors and the audiences, since, in works like *Waiting for Godot*, everyone is, in essence, waiting for the same thing.

Pertinent to my analysis of *Dominicanish* and the performances of Ogando is Chapter 7, The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction, which analyzes the fleeting nature of performance, and contends that by attempting to “participate in the circulation of representations of representations…it becomes something other than performance” (146). The repetition of performance always is marked as “different” from the previous performance, and documentation is “only to spur a memory, an encouragement of memory to become present” (147). I find this assertion problematic because it does not engage with performance that integrates documentation as part of the performance (Josefina Báez, for example). The documentary vestiges do not solely spur memory; they exist as an integral part of the performance. Furthermore, while it is true that documents enter into circulation for reproduction, and certainly market sales, they also democratize performance, reaching audiences across distant
geographies and temporal planes. Furthermore, the Internet provides highly
democratized access to works, including the performances of Ogando. The works are
available for viewing at anytime and from anywhere. The Internet is a new form of genre
that increases accessibility to works. However, according to Phelan, “the disappearance
of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of
the subject who longs always to be remembered” (147). The problem of this statement is
evident in the physicality of Phelan’s book. If disappearance is so fundamental, why
include photos of performances in the book? This further serves to signal the importance
of documentation to performance, and the intrinsic historical link between the two. This
is not to say, however, that I fully disagree with Phelan, rather, I find the distinct
separation between performance and document to be problematic, given their
longstanding relationship. Furthermore, Phelan’s notion must be reconsidered in the
digital age, which was not as highly accessible at the time her analysis was written. As
such this project will investigate how visibility and documentation function in the frame
of virtual transnationality.

Phelan states that “performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive,”
and that “it implicates the real through the presence of living bodies” (148). For Phelan,
performance is a metonymic activity, in which “the performer actually disappears and
represents something else- dance, movement, sound, character, “art” (150). It is here we
can see the importance of invisibility in the highly visible. While the performer is
physically there, their visibility is subverted into the action of performance,
foregrounding the action over the physical presence of the body. As such, “in employing
the body metonymically, performance is capable of resisting the reproduction of
metaphor…of gender, a metaphor which upholds the vertical hierarchy of value through systematic marking of the positive and the negative” (151). To synthesize, Phelan notes “performance approaches the Real through resisting the metaphorical reduction of the two into the one” (152). Phelan again lauds radical negativity because “it resists reproduction” (165). I understand “resisting reproduction” to claim a certain autonomy and agency in creation, and that said agency is diminished through reproduction and resignification of a particular image. This is justified by Phelan’s statement that reproductions of images (or even photographs, paintings and sculptures, which are representations) end up in institutions (museums, universities, banks, etc.), which “are intimately involved in the reproduction of the sterilizing binaries of self/other, possession/dispossession, men/women which are increasingly inadequate forms of representation” (165). I have already articulated my disagreements with Phelan’s arguments regarding performance art, however, I find her understanding of the agency within active invisibility important to my research. It highlights how reductive (not on the part of the artist per say, but on the stultifying reaction/interpretation of the audience) the use of visible identity categories can be, and how actively resisting visibility is a tactic towards a deeper recognition of the multitude of marginalizing elements that affect many people.

Moving into more specific analyses of queer Caribbean bodies and diaspora, Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America by José Quiroga (2000) proposes that notions of homosexual identity should be replaced by the concept of homosexual praxis (“praxis” indicating practices, or the application of use, practice, or skill), which denotes the productive nature of identity. That is, identity is not fixed but in
constant negotiation with social, political, and personal factors. Quiroga opens his analysis describing the 1993 Marcha de orgullo gay in Buenos Aires, stating that masks were handed out to those who wanted to march without being recognized. This allowed participants to be “openly masked” participants supporting a community. The mask becomes a trope in Quiroga’s introduction, which designates “broader circuits that did not necessarily end with an “outing, or an identity as conclusion” (1). Quiroga notes that the mask is “part of a complex dynamic of subject and identity, and the closet was one element among many” (1). Like Butler and Phelan, Quiroga notes the productive power within the mask, a space of curiously visible non-visibility: “the option of the mask ruptured the borders of the stage…The act of not wearing the mask turned you into a homosexual, while wearing it absolved you of responsibility…From the moment the mask was deployed, those on the sidelines became the ones whose sense of same did not allow them to join” (2). Quiroga demonstrates how the mask inverts the concept of shame, allowing those hidden by the mask to more effectively pronounce their identities as homosexuals. This conceptualization is problematic however, because it begs the question what becomes of the gay participants who march openly without a mask? Furthermore, does the duality of masked/unmasked only apply to the binary of participant (masked)/spectator (unmasked)? And does not this argument presuppose that the spectators are straight? My analysis expands the trope of the mask beyond the binary of straight/gay and to understand how the mere existence of the mask queers relations between and participant specifically in this march, but also in certain elements of the texts studied in the present essay. Quiroga explicitly states that his project examines how
visibilities within forms of social praxis in Latino America function “as modes of intervention that that allow different publics to participate in the social sphere” (3).

An element of analysis central to Quiroga’s project is the concept of outing. Quiroga’s work “seeks to question ‘outing’ from within a context where state mechanisms erase individual agency” (3). He is also wary of classifying certain writers as gay, since it can “flatten” their work and “collaborate against their work’s broader social aims” (3) which echoes Phelan’s concerns regarding the visibility of identity categories. Here one can see the importance of conceptualizing homosexual praxis as opposed to identity, since identity in Quiroga’s understanding serves to “corner” or forestall the productive agency of multiple identititary praxis at play. The use of masked figure is a tactical maneuver, in that the masked memorializes its own absence and insists on presence as erasure. Again, one can see the agency garnered through a subversion of identity politics. Rather than using a specifically visible identity to protest for change, the visible identity is cloaked in anonymity, which brings the issue to the forefront, rather than the identity behind (or rather in the foreground of) said issue. However, consideration must be given to the visibility of the homosexual body as compared to other, more visibly discrete identity categories. Processes of assimilation and radicalization of the homosexual body complicate visibility in comparison to the visibility of the female body or the body of color, for example.

Quiroga also touches on important issues such as desire surrounding the homosexual body within the context of transnational configurations of self. Specifically, he notes that in post-revolutionary Cuba, the homosexual body was always outside of the national body, as it is considered a non-normative body that does not fall in line with
heteroreproductive conceptions of the national. As such, the homosexual body rejected by the state becomes the homosexual body desired by capitalism (11). This can be seen in neoliberal appropriations of the homosexual body as a commodity fetish, or more concretely in both gay and straight sex tourism to the Caribbean. Following Guy Hocquenghem, Quiroga argues “national bodies are reconfigured into transnational bodies, which collaborate more effectively with capitalist ventures” (11). Quiroga astutely notes that Hocquenghem’s project is thwarted, in that “the translocalized body of the homosexual does not stand at this point so much for personal liberation as for the liberation of global capital to pursue its aims” (11). Once again, it is possible to see here the power in the mask, which problematizes capitalist appropriation of identity for marketing purposes.

Regarding this issue, Quiroga insists that gays and lesbians are cultural constructs of capitalism and represent modes of defiance that use tools of capitalism to undermine its repressive paradigms (12). His example of this duality can be seen in his analysis of “Latin Dolls,” market sensations such as Ricky Martin. Quiroga historically situates homosexuality as it relates to nation building in Latin America by taking a Foucauldian (of The History of Sexuality) approach. He states “visible homosexuality was meant to be expelled from a national fabric that could only see itself as tenuously constructed, in view of its immense social, racial, and ethnic inequalities. Power operated in this specific regard in a dual fashion: it articulated the visibility and named it as something that it believed to be other” (13). This in turn creates highly codified visibilities, which,

11 Amalia L. Cabezas analyzes the gay and straight sex tourism in the Caribbean in her work Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, (2009).
12 This is an idea also developed by John D’Emilio in “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” 1983.
notably, are culturally marked, so that “the homosexual citizen may be marked in one state but relatively unmarked in another—and thus the very notion of an essential homosexual is subject to dispute” (13). Recognizing the non-essential character of homosexuality is central to Quiroga’s project, because it allows for multiple understandings of how homosexuality is negotiated, depending on interlocutors, social situations, etc., and a multiperspectival reading of subjectivity, in which other identifications may or may not mark the body of the “other.” In this case “other” denotes the subject in a transnational context, who is read in accordance within particular cultural/social frameworks of a nation-state. Quiroga explicitly notes that gay identity is not a given, it is a praxis “that needs to be created and constructed, sustained by a “transformative ideology” (17). Furthermore, identity should not be essentialized, “rather, we should privilege the networks of relationships that will allow subjects to construct an identity” (17). Once again, he highlights the productive power of identity formation, as opposed to the forestalling of transformation as implicated in fixed, stated identities. Quiroga demonstrates that outness “is not a constant, universal, normative way of being” (15). Rather it is contextual to the needs and desires of a subject, as well as being conditioned/tempered by geography and class.

Quiroga couples shame and exile when analyzing authors and texts, stating that “culture bears the mark of the social shame produced by homosexualities, and this shame places gays and lesbians always in the realm of exile” (20). In this instance, Quiroga relates exile to a quality of foreignness in a text, which he regards as “a metaphor for the relationship that dares not speak its name” (20). However, it is productive to consider the relationship between shame and exile more literally, in which shame produces an exiled
subject, even within the boundaries of the subject’s nation-state. One could argue that this is characteristic of some of Carlos Decena’s informants in *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire Among Dominican Immigrant Men* (2011), who, even within the boundaries of the nation-state and within the boundaries of acceptance of the family, feel a sense of exile owing to the tacit nature of their identities.

*Tacit Subjects* explores how male homosexuality is performed, received, and transmitted in the context of a transnational Dominican society. Rather than analyzing works of literary production, Decena takes an autoethnographic approach, interviewing several self-identified gay Dominican men, as well as giving accounts of his own life. According to Decena, he chose to take this particular approach in order “to demonstrate that what people say merits as much careful attention as any other form of literary and artistic expression, performance, or piece gathered in the historical archive; to mode a critique that listens to how people view the world and that never assumes language to be transparent” (5). Language is clearly an important element in the study, especially considering how Decena organizes the informants’ discourse in order to structure the narrative of his book. Furthermore, language, in the vein of Judith Butler, is a productive entity, and to that end, Decena’s study is not only “about what words say, but also about the way words produce circuitries of sociality” (2).

Decena centers his investigation around the concept of a “sujeto tácito,” a grammatical structure characteristic of Spanish in which the subject of a phrase is not directly stated because it is understood in the morphological construction of a verb. As such, he focuses his analysis on the tension between normative articulations of *dominicanidad* and how these clash or go against normative articulations of male
homosexuality. For example, he analyzes the tropes of el macho, el tiguere, and la loca and how these articulations of Dominican identity undermine or challenge certain articulations of normative homosexuality.\textsuperscript{13} The work contributes to scholarship on U.S. Latino Studies “by addressing and analyzing at length the conflicted ways in which immigrant men who self-identify as gay or bisexual deal with their fellow Dominicans and official notions of national identity and society” (11). Furthermore, and importantly, Decena works vigorously to disentangle identity from the nation state. He focuses on the effect of transnationalization of Dominican society, which “pluralized, exploded and continued to put pressure on the national polity through the disarticulation of dominicanidad (Dominican identity) from the geopolitical space of one nation and one state” (10). The work also takes an intersectional approach, analyzing the ways in which “difference in class, race, and education shape their [the informants] relations with their compatriots…” (11). Decena is very careful to note the productive power of language and identity, signaling that the book “focuses on the ways these men contest, reproduce and reformulate [dominicanidad] in New York” (11).

Through his interviews, Decena challenges the notion that gay men have to “choose between biological kin and other kinship formations...” positing that “biological families, as well as gay and other non-kin Dominican social networks, made possible the migration and survival of the informants in New York City” (14). The work challenges Judith Halberstam’s formulation of queer time/place, as well as Butler’s argument in

\textsuperscript{13} According to Decena, the Dominican macho represents the ambivalently and erotically binding ghost of a nationalist subject form (178), while “la loquita [the effeminate gay male] signals immaturity, a disinvestment in the practices and self-fashionings that produce upward mobility in the worlds the informants inhabited,” and the tiguere is “an archetype of Street-savvy masculinity, tigueres are men who tread on the edges of the licit” (130-1).
*Undoing Gender*, which argues for expanded notions/legitimation of alternative, queer forms of kinship, because the majority of Decena’s informants maintain ties with family and live tacitly as gay men. Most family members are aware of the identification, and welcome partners to family functions, as long as the issue is never *directly* brought up. This integration into the family is notable, since, although being a tacit acceptance of homosexuality, it essentially queers the family space further, specifically through its status as tacit. The acceptance of the partner, typically labeled as a “friend” (that is, never named in such a way as to reveal the romantic relationship between the two men) introduces a non-traditional actor into the familial kinship network. Including and accepting the “friend” into the family network changes the way in which family is understood, specifically because the friend has a dual subject position, which is defined distinctly by family members (partner versus friend). Furthermore, the tacit understanding of the men’s relationship includes the dually named partner into the family structure, integrating and assimilating him while at the same time restricting the form and function of family relations.

Decena also expands Butler’s conceptualization of queer kinship by noting “these narratives offer portraits of the relations of individuals and collectivities in order to demonstrate that self-realization as a man who loves men does not require moving away from the biological family” (14). While this is indeed the case of many of his informants, he also demonstrates that maintaining ties requires a careful navigation of homosexual identity, which, in many cases, requires the subject to “remain closeted.”

However, Decena demonstrates a particular autonomy in remaining tacit, noting that “in some situations, the absence of a family dialogue about an openly lived
homosexuality reveals the legitimacy that informants enjoyed, a legitimacy that allowed them to refuse to make their homosexuality a point of discussion” (22). Here, similar to Peggy Phelan’s arguments regarding the power of subsuming visibility of identity markers in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, and Judith Butler’s contention that one can savor the status of unthinkability as a site of pure resistance (*Undoing Gender*, 106), Decena notes the productive power of not making explicitly visible one’s homosexuality, within the specific context of transnational Dominican male subjects. He signals that negotiating the visibility or legibility of one’s homosexuality allows one to access support from the biological family. He also notes that “other informants took as a given that their homosexuality was sufficiently understood or assumed by those around them so as to render its revelation redundant, and being considered a family’s provider helped these men command respect in their families to a degree that made intrusions into their “private lives” problematic for the intruders rather than the informants” (26).

Interestingly, in these cases, adoption of a heteronormative/patriarchal position (the breadwinner) allows men to live (tacitly) as homosexuals because, as providers, they command respect, which in turn gives the men a private space in which to enact their desires. Furthermore, harkening back to Butler and *Undoing Gender*, closeting homosexuality is, in the instances of the immigrant Dominican informants, a strategy to ensure legitimacy within the United States, particularly considering that “the possibility of being outed as a homosexual in immigration court demonstrates the importance of attempting to control how and where information about one’s sexuality circulates” (36).

Decena signals that coming out is never a fully actualized process, and we must be aware
that “coming out is always partial, that the closet is a collaborative social formation, and that people negotiate it according to their social circumstances” (38).

Decena’s work is a thorough investigation into how Dominican men in transnational Dominican contexts navigate their particular identification as gay men. He analyzes how this identification shifts in relation to others, and how this identification is navigated when it intersects with other identity categories such as gender, race, class, education, and nationality, among others. He is also quite explicit regarding some informants’ appropriation of male privilege for the purpose of social advancement. He is in no way blind to the particular position (even homosexual) men occupy in regards to social hierarchies of power/influence. My critique then, is that Decena’s argument seems to be conveniently proved by the informants, and that, although outside of the scope of this particular project, his non-engagement with lesbian, transgender and transsexual subjects weakens his argument because he does not investigate the ways in which these other elements of marginalization discursively navigate the problems set out in regards to gay men in a transnational Dominican environment.14 Furthermore, comparing the experiences of these other subjects could very much enrich his analysis of gay Dominican male subjects. For example, comparing how a lesbian subject navigates a tacit homosexuality in regards to her family would shed interesting light on how male privilege allows for a tacitly accepted homosexuality, rather than, as Decena does, assuming this privilege without any comparative analysis to other gay experience.

14 Notably, Decena does have one transgender MtoF informant, Karla Bassant a subject whose family, upon displaying certain femininity as a child, “became invested in making her a girl” (132). What makes this particular informant acceptable to the family is “matching” her biological sex to her gender. Decena notes “Bassant’s father became increasingly comfortable with her as she began to transition” (135).
Larry La Fountain-Stokes’ *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (2009) confronts the traditionally unacknowledged relationship between sexuality and migration. The purpose of La Fountain-Stokes’ work is to “transform Puerto Rican migration studies paradigms by showing how the attitudes toward stigmatized forms of same-sex sexuality and gender variance provoke and affect migration, and how artists, writers, filmmakers, dancers, choreographers, and performers have documented and discussed this fact” (ix). Along with understanding migration as a contestatory gesture to normalizing power structures of the state, La Fountain Stokes also acknowledges, “not migrating” as an act of resistance.

Like Decena, La Fountain Stokes is interested in analyzing “the intersections of migration, culture, and sexuality” (xiii). Owing to several “dualities” that develop regarding the unique relationship of Puerto Rico to the United States--simultaneity of development/underdevelopment, nationalism, nation-building, and statelessness, etc. (xiv)--the author hones his analysis in upon the powers of resistance developed and nurtured by the particular cultural productions he considers in the work. Regarding the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, La Fountain-Stokes also challenges the idea that Puerto Rico and Latin America more generally are significantly more homophobic than the United States. Here he brings up the important notion of the “tacit,” as articulated by Decena, to demonstrate the acceptance of homosexuality in Puerto Rico, “as long as they are not disclosed or are negotiated strictly as an “open secret” or “secreto a voces/secreto abierto” (xvii). This way of being challenges the assumed agency that comes with being openly homosexual, which is prioritized and legitimized within the LGBT community in the United States. La Fountain-Stokes
continues by noting that “openly gay, militant homosexuals and other LGBT individuals (in Puerto Rico) are seen as emulating foreign attitudes, posing a menace from the outside and not necessarily behaving as Puerto Ricans are expected to” (xviii). It is here that the reader can see the conflicts that arise regarding sexuality and nationality. Certain ways of being homosexual for the Puerto Rican individual conflict either with hegemonic articulations of homosexuality as it is broadcast from the United States and/or with hegemonic articulations of nationality and what it means to be Puerto Rican.

The chapter of this book central to my research is Chapter 1, The Persecution of Difference. Here La Fountain-Stokes specifically analyzes the short story “¡Jum!” by Rafael Luis Sánchez, yet the analysis of the intersections of race, sexuality, and migration are useful to a more general analysis of Hispanic Caribbean cultural production. The chapter begins by countering the rigid structure of gender politics in Puerto Rico highlighting the highly coded rituals of carnival, which allow for the breaking of social conventions. However, La Fountain-Stokes also notes the ubiquity of MTF transvestites, masculine women, and effeminate men in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora. He notes that “prescriptions against male effeminacy and female masculinity do not work to simply eliminate gender-variance or trans practices and identities, but rather stigmatize this behavior and give it a specific meaning” (1). The transgression of established gender norms does not work, in La Fountain-Stokes’ analysis, to undo the gender binary. Rather the visibility of variant genders and sexualities creates another category that is to be regulated through the imposition a specific meaning. La Fountain Stokes does, however, note the productive power of gender variance, stating that it is a relational system, in which “there can be no macho if there is no loca or maricón…” (1).
La Fountain-Stokes analysis of “¡Jum!” demonstrates “archetypal forms of homophobic or antihomosexual collective violence in a very specific, racially marked environment…” (2). Central to this analysis is Rafael Luis Sánchez’s “association of the butt with the effeminateness of a black man” which “reinforces particular tropes of racialized identification more commonly identified with women: the sexualized reduction of the body to the rear end…” (5). This conflation of gender, sexuality, race, and nationality is important to highlight, given that, the marking the protagonist of “¡Jum!” as Other, serves to undermine the discrete separation between binary relationships of being. That is to say, the nameless protagonist is “othered” on many levels: racially, sexually, and in a gendered way, all of which intersect into an “othered” identity which confuses while at the same time reinforces supposed heteronormative gender stability. Furthermore, the male protagonist’s femininity is read as something foreign, which invades their community and therefore needs to be destroyed (15). Here once again one can see the intersections between sexuality and nationality. It is difficult to analyze this story as a form of resistance to norms, given that the protagonist is killed at the end and therefore variance is essentially eliminated from the community. La Fountain-Stokes notes that “the situation of marginality produced by racial difference in “¡Jum!” does not foster understanding or tolerance of other marginal identities or solidarity among the marginalized, but rather makes the community more vigilant against difference” (13). Here La Fountain-Stokes highlights the relationship between this vigilance and the “contradictory ideologies that oppressed people in fact demonstrate in real life” (13).

José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) introduces the concept of “disidentification,” which Muñoz defines as
“...the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (4). However, Muñoz states that disidentification, as a contestatory practice may not work for all minority subjects, noting “on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere” (5). Muñoz also broaches the question of identity politics, which he “imagines a reconstructed narrative of identity formation that locates the enacting of self at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short circuit” (6). The concept of disidentification works well for studies of diaspora and transnationality, specifically because it highlights the importance of working on and against cultural forms. Muñoz signals that Butler and Pêcheaux’s accounts of disidentification demonstrate that understanding identification is never unilateral (12). He states that “as a practice, disidentification does not dispel those ideological contradictory elements; rather, like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, rather, a disidentifying subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life” (12).

This conceptualization works well for an understanding of diaspora, in which subjects must reconcile identities that are lost or left behind, with newly formed—or even imposed—identities in countries of emigration. Furthermore, the concept of disidentification expands understandings of transnationality, as transnational subjects, especially within the realm of a virtual transnationality, can disidentify in very distinct ways, owing to the function of embodiment on a virtual level. When considering the global networks that inform the texts studied in the present essay, one can conceive of
disidentification as a virtual, disembodied negotiation, which requires new understandings of the relationship of the subject (as body) to mass culture. Importantly, Muñoz does not understand the minority subject’s position to dominant culture as a duality to which one must either join or refuse. Rather, he highlights the subtleties of how minority subjects transform elements of the dominant culture for their own purposes or political ends. This understanding is central to the present work, as the texts analyzed here move away from the dualities understood in the relationship of the diaspora subject to the country of emigration and the island, and rather investigate how all of the identities negotiated by the protagonists are nodes of being, which function together to make subjects legible. Lastly, Muñoz underscores the importance of race in disidentification. He notes the white academy’s reticence to analyze the role of race in cultural production, stating “when race is discussed by most white queer theorists, it is usually a contained reading of an artist of color that does not factor questions of race into the entirety of their project” (10). This assertion is key, as this project looks to the intersectional quality of identities represented in cultural production, I will thoroughly analyze the role of race in these texts, especially considering the important role race plays in the performance art works included in this analysis.

In order to fully understand the space of the island as it relates to diasporic and transnational subjectivity, a brief analysis of the concept of the “repeating island” as described by Antonio Benítez Rojo en *La isla que se repite* (1989) highlights the Caribbean as a place marked by fragmentation, instability, uprootedness, cultural complexity, contingency, and provisionality. These characteristics have been an integral part of Caribbean identity since its modern inception, inaugurated by Columbus’ arrival
in 1492. Benítez Rojo approaches an understanding of the fragmented and fragmentary nature of the Caribbean through the application of chaos theory, stating, “En fin, ¿cómo dejar establecido que el Caribe es un mar histórico-económico principal y, además, un meta-archipiélago cultural sin centro y sin límites, un caos dentro del cual hay una isla que se repite incesantemente—cada copia distinta—, fundiendo y refundiendo materiales etnológicos como lo hace una nube con el vapor del agua” (24). His concept of repeating islands is central to the present study, as it understands culture and identity as borderless, things, which go beyond abstract constructions of geography and political boundaries. He states:

Hay una isla que se repite hasta transformarse en meta-archipiélago y alcanzar las fronteras transhistóricas más apartadas del globo. No hay centro ni bordes, pero hay dinámicas comunes que se expresan de modo más o menos regular dentro del caos y luego, gradualmente, van asimilándose a contextos africanos, europeos, indoamericanos, y asiáticos hasta el punto en que se esfuman. (40)

This island is constituted by transnational and transhistorical processes as well as a transnational articulation of identity, in the ways in which it is referenced and assimilated to identities constructed as part of the culture of the island, but enacted in spaces beyond the geographical territory of the island. For Benítez Rojo, the Caribbean should not be conceived in terms of geography, but rather understood as all that comes and goes through the islands. Regarding insularity, Benítez Rojo states, “la insularidad de los antillanos no los impele al aislamiento, sino al contrario, al viaje, a la exploración, a la búsqueda de rutas fluviales y marinas” (41). This conceptualization of the Caribbean and of the space of the island is the present project, as it permits understandings of the Caribbean to move beyond the space of the island, and to analyze how transnationality
shapes contemporary understandings of personal identity and how networks of kinship are reconceptualized beyond political borders and national cultures.

In his seminal work *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States*, Jorge Duany investigates transnational movement from the Hispanic Caribbean to the United States. His anthropological study provides a key historical and social background and context for the present study, particularly his analysis and classification of transnationalism as a disciplinary and interdisciplinary term. I aim to apply Duany’s anthropological and sociological research to my analysis of literary and artistic representations of Hispanic Caribbean transnationalism, while broadening the scope of analysis beyond movement to the United States to include other nations, such as Spain, Germany, Turkey, India, Australia, and Bali. Regarding terminology, Duany makes an important distinction between borders and boundaries, stemming from Michael Kearney’s differentiation between the two. For Kearney, “borders are the often hybrid geographic and cultural zones between nations, while boundaries are the legal spatial delimitations of the states. Thus the borders and boundaries of nation-states often do not correspond neatly to each other” (1). According to Duany, transnational movements work to further complicate the relationship between borders and boundaries. He states, “the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism undermine the notion of the nation-state as the ‘natural’ container of the physical and cultural spaces in which people lead their daily lives. Instead, many people—especially transnational migrants—are part of broader social networks across nations” (3). Duany points out the distinct historical and cultural processes that shape transnational migration from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. He states “many authors have
regarded Cuba and Puerto Rico as anomalies in contemporary population movements, because Cuba is socialist and Puerto Rico remains a colony. Yet I argue throughout this book that the insular Hispanic Caribbean can profitably be visualized through a transnational lens, highlighting common patterns as well as the peculiarities of each case” (4). While considering the specificities of each nation’s history and present condition, the present study aims to analyze the convergence of Hispanic Caribbean cultural and artistic production in transnational spaces. I too am interested in analyzing the common patterns that emerge in transnational artistic production, particularly by artists and authors who are in some way linked to the Hispanic Caribbean.

Duany notes the particular distinction between Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, regarding their historical ties with the United States, as well as their legal statuses within the United States. He notes “…migrants from each country have different legal statuses on arrival in the country of settlement. During the Cold War, the U.S. government defined Cubans as refugees from communism and privileged them over other groups. In contrast, the U.S. government classifies most Dominicans as economic migrants and denies entry to many of them, creating a large pool of undocumented immigrants. As U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans enjoy free access to the United States and can fully exercise their political rights when they migrate” (8). Duany clarifies that “comparing the Cuba, Dominican, and Puerto Rican diasporas requires abandoning what some scholars have called ‘methodological nationalism’—the tendency to equate society with the nation-state” (9).

15 Duany provides a thorough analysis of the historical trajectory of the transnational with regards to Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. See Blurred Borders, 4-7 and 35-61.
Research on transnationalism has typically been the reign of anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers. My aim in this study is to bring the aesthetic into a consideration of transnationalism. As Duany notes, “…Levitt and Glick Schiller have insisted that studies of transnationalism should focus, first, on the connections between those who migrate and those who stay behind. Second, researchers should approach transnational practices as historical processes that vary according to cycles, events, and crises. Finally, scholars should use qualitative techniques such as participant observation and intensive interviewing to document migrants’ cultural repertories, identities, and interactions” (9). While I agree with this process of studying transnationalism, it is also necessary to consider the role of artistic and literary representation in transnational communities. Analyzing the aesthetic representations of transnational experiences offers a new perspective on the transnational experience that goes beyond the everyday life of these populations. Furthermore, it highlights the interaction between artistic practices and political intervention, where literary and artistic works effectively work to change perceptions regarding transnational identity, cultural belonging, and bounds of the nation-state. To that end, it is a major goal of this study to include the voices of authors and artists into the study of transnationalism. According to Duany, “…transnationalism can undermine the state’s legal definition of boundaries by blurring cultural borders” (17). It is precisely artists and authors from the Hispanic Caribbean working in transnational spaces who are beginning to blur these cultural borders. Cultural boundaries are marked by those living within them, as well as by the cultural and artistic practices that mark these borders. As such, an analysis of these transnational cultural products is key to
understanding how transnationality is shifting conceptions of nation and national belonging.

Duany provides an important intellectual genealogy of the term transnational. He states “In 1916, the U.S. journalist Randolph Bourne coined the expression “transnational America” to challenge the myth of the melting pot, which justified the assimilation of immigrants into Anglo-Saxon culture” (18). Significantly, this use of ‘transnational’ again highlights the paradoxical relationship between transnational movement and the significance of the geographic boundaries of the nation-state. Regarding the relationship between transnationalism and globalization, Duany notes “when applied to migrants rather than corporations, transnationalism suggests that people may transgress borders and boundaries, inhabiting the interstitial social spaces between them; hence such migrants have been called ‘borderless people’ (Michael Peter Smith, 1994)” (18).

Jorge Duany defines his use of transnational as the following: “…I use transnational as a middle-ground concept. By transnationalism, I mean the construction of dense social fields through the circulation of people, ideas, practices, money, goods, and information across nations. This circulation includes, but is not limited to, the physical movement of human bodies as well as other types of exchanges which may or not be recurrent, such as travel, communication, and remittances” (21). My research of artistic and literary production in transnational spaces provides an important axis of analysis that has not been considered in depth within the realm of sociological and anthropological perspectives of transnationalism: namely, the analysis of aesthetic cultural production and its relationship to transnational identity and identification. My definition of queer transnationality specifically focuses on the impact of aesthetic
production and it restructures notions of identity in transnational spaces and through transnational movement.

Another important work regarding the transnational movement of the Hispanic Caribbean, specifically from and to the Dominican Republic, is Christian Krohn-Hansen’s ethnography *Making New York Dominican*. In his ethnographic study of Dominicans in New York, Krohn-Hansen signals the importance of transnational migrant circuits which “have created a new sort of social space or community or sociospatial relations that force social theory to question the received ways of understanding international migration—that is, that migrants have not abandoned one nation-state for another but have generated communities stretching across national boundaries; they belong simultaneously to more than one nation-state and, thus, to no one nation-state in particular: they are transnational” (20).

Krohn-Hansen offers an important definition of the term ‘identity,’ which he understands as “a series of domains or fields that are crucial for people’s experience of community and belonging—kinship, family, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, the arts, and cultural production. An identity is best understood as a form of production—as historically specific ideas and practices” (22). This understanding of identity is important for the wide consideration of categories that work to assemble identity, highlighting the relationship between the identity of the individual to a group or collective dynamic. This is key to understanding the development of transnational networks of community, which are not aligned by geo-political borders of the nation-state, but rather bound by cultural borders that mark (and at times exclude) participants. Importantly, exclusion or non-belonging occurs in both understandings of community, the nationally situated and the
transnational. This exclusion is bound, many times, by cultural and social codes established within the geographic and cultural bounds of the nation-state.

The authors outlined in this literature review provide some of the foundational works for the present study. However, it is my aim to expand and challenge some of the ideas proposed by these theorists in order to bring a new perspective to the intersections among artistic production, Queer Studies, Transnational Studies, and Performance studies. One of my original contributions to the field is my analysis of the interrelation between language and corporeality in the context of transnational movement, both virtual and real. Physical and virtual dislocation from the geographic borders of the nation codes bodies in distinct ways. These bodies, however, are never completely outside of the cultural borders of the nation-state. By investigating the relationship between narrative, theatre, and performance art, I emphasize how each work plays on and against the separation of language and corporeality, and how Caribbean authors and artists redefine cultural and national belonging in multiple geographic spaces. Let the reader, then, return to Martha Divine, who finds herself propelled forward at 600 miles per hour, somewhere between Puerto Rico, New York, and the Dominican Republic...
Chapter 2
Queer Translocations: Narrating Kinship on the Move

This chapter analyzes the ways in which Mayra Santos-Febres’ novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000) and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro’s *Caparazones* (2010) question how subjectivity is constructed and enacted with relation to categories of identity. Specifically focusing upon the markers of nationality, sexuality, and race, these two authors represent bodies that, while still identifiable by certain markers of identity, challenge the reduction of the body to a simplified correlative identification with categories of identity. The authors, in distinct ways, represent how transnational subjectivity undoes the concept of identity as a discrete, closed categorization.

It is through the transnational that the body is queered; it finds itself in a space that is not regulated by the heteronormative demands of the nation state, particularly the allegorical relationship between heterosexual coupling and the propagation of the nation. Rather, transnationality challenges subjecthood as a stable and identifiable position, and complicates the relationship between nationality, expression of gender and sexuality, and affective bonds. Key for the present analysis is the notion of affective bonds, and how a queer articulation of said bonds allows for new formulations of kinship. Queer(ed) articulations of family/kinship networks allow for reconceptualized understandings of subjects as members of a transnational rhizomatic affective network, rather than geographically isolated beings. Importantly, queer, as articulated in this essay, represents more than non-heteronormative relationships; it is the radical questioning of structures of heteronormative and homonormative affective bonds and family relationships. Kinship is reinterpreted as a malleable social construct that can be altered and adjusted to fit the needs of people and communities. Transnationality facilitates networks of affect that
allow for a queer reading of family and kinship. While analyzing the forms of queer
kinship that arise in these two contemporary Puerto Rican novels, I engage in a
theoretical analysis of the relationship between heteronormativity, the structuring of time,
and the ways in which people inhabit and use space. This theoretical background is key
to understanding how both Mayra Santos-Febres and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro challenge
traditional structures of family and kinship through narrative. Specifically I underscore
the relationship between shifting paradigms of family structures and the emergence of
queer transnational identifications.

The traditional mask of heteronormativity is the traditional family, as it is
articulated and defined in the United States and the wider Western world. While
typically a marker of social stability, the heteronormative family represents a facile
security blanket that can lovingly smother non-normative departures from this supposed
familial stability. This is not to say that all traditional families are secretly crumbling
from within, but rather, one should not consider the heteronormative family the only
option for cultural and social intelligibility. This is especially important when
considering the history of the typically marginalized or outcast population of the
economically disenfranchised body, the racially subjugated body, and, among many
others, the queer body. Increased scholarly interest in and activist engagement with trans
identities have brought more acceptances of the trans body, and with the acceptance of
the trans body, new formulations of kinship arise. As the trans body exists outside of the
heteronormative framework of the male/female and masculine/feminine binary, kinship
ties are not necessarily dependent on marriage or familial bloodlines. In Undoing Gender,
Judith Butler notes that
Efforts to establish bonds of kinship that are not based on a marriage tie become nearly illegible and unavailable when marriage sets the terms for kinship, and kinship itself is collapsed into “family.” The enduring social ties that constitute viable kinship in communities of sexual minorities are threatened with becoming unrecognizable and unavailable as long as the marriage bond is the exclusive way in which both sexuality and kinship are organized. (2004, 5)

The expansion of the family from bloodlines to social interconnectivity provides queer and trans bodies with a network of support and love at times not available within the heteronormative family. Furthermore, trans kinship engages in restructuring rigid notions of kinship, so that “the rights and obligations of kinship may take any number of other forms [other than the traditional form of marriage]” (Butler 2004, 5). In Puerto Rican writer Mayra Santos-Febres’ novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000), each character represents a new formulation of trans identity. I will analyze the new manifestations of kinship present in Santos-Febres’ work to argue that rather than allegorizing the trans body as something unintelligible, Santos-Febres expands the possibilities of identification of the trans/queer body through the performative, as theorized by Judith Butler.

Furthermore, Judith Halberstam’s formulations of queer time and queer space consider space and time outside of the heteronormative family time and illustrates the ways in which traditional forms of kinship are reconsidered within the newly developed trans kinship. This opening of representation allows for the development of new forms of kinship, which break the hegemonic mold of the heteronormative family.

However, in parting with much scholarship on the novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*, I argue that perhaps the most queer body of all is the one that outwardly presents the most heteronormative presence, that of Hugo Graubel, a sugar magnate and hotelier. While the bodies that are visually counter hegemonic (those of the transvestite, the transsexual, and as some argue, the homosexual) desire a form of heteronormative
familial stability, the hegemonic body of Graubel exists discontentedly within the heteronormative framework of a wealthy, white family, and seeks companionship with the femme fatale/nubile young boy that is Sirena Selena. The purpose of my reading is to dissolve the rigid binaries between male/female, masculine/feminine, and hegemonic/counter-hegemonic. The visual presence of the body is not enough to determine whether one falls into the heteronormative family time or the newly formulated queer time. This is not to ignore, however, the new queer formulations of familial stability desired by the counter hegemonic trans body. Rather, I hope to reveal the queer kinship that develops among the trans-identified characters, such as Selena, Martha Divine, and Leocadio, as well as to demonstrate that even the most stereotypically heteronormative character in Santos-Febres’ novel exists within the framework of new queer kinship. The destabilization of gender binaries and social and economic divisions allows for a formulation of queer kinship that integrates both the typically marginalized body (the visually different body) and the visually hegemonic body. Furthermore, the movement of bodies across geographic spaces furthers the articulations of queer subjectivity, effectively aligning trans movement with the particular enactments of identity forged by each character.

Santos-Febres’ novel focuses on the journey of Martha Divine, a transgendered entrepreneur, performer and owner of the Puerto Rican nightclub El Danubio Azul, and her protégé, Selena, a young transvestite who, after his mother’s abandonment and his grandmother’s death, has taken to the streets as a prostitute and petty thief. Martha

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16 Visually counter hegemonic within the space of the novel refers to bodies that, through their physical description, are clearly divergent from heteronormative/hegemonic notions of masculine or feminine. Their purely visual presence sets up a particular expectation of difference.
discovers Selena’s talent for singing boleros one evening outside of her nightclub, takes her in, and grooms her to become a star of drag performance. The main action of the novel takes place over the weeklong journey to the Dominican Republic, where Martha intends to debut Selena’s talent, since child labor laws in Puerto Rico complicate Selena’s performance. Selena is constantly referred in the text as a ‘quinceañera’ or fifteen year old. It is this transnational movement that facilitates enactments of queer identity. Owing to the fact that labor laws inhibit queer performance in Puerto Rico, it is the geographic and ideological space of the Dominican Republic that affords a place in which Selena’s queer identity is enacted and legitimized through public recognition. In his analysis of Dominican masculinities, Antonio de Moya gives an important key to understanding to the title of Santos-Febres’ novel: “In the last twenty years, transvestites have become an important part of show business, sex work and nightlife in large Dominican cities. In the household culture the word vestida (cross-dresser) is frequently used for men raised as women, who presumably look, think and behave as such, often deceiving ‘real’ men” (93).

It is worth noting the multiplicity of identities that form characters such as Selena and Martha Divine. Following José Quiroga’s ideas (see pp.194-195), I argue that these bodies exist as sites of multiple identifications. They are not only queer bodies, but also Caribbean bodies, as well as bodies of color. The assemblage of these multiple identities allows the characters “not [to] remain in the localized space of an isolated identity world, but [to] mobilize these identities” (Quiroga 2000, 194). In his analysis of the film Brincando el charco, Quiroga notes that

The body has multiple points of contact, but these do not turn it into the site where the American ‘melting pot’ is reproduced. There is constant tension
between the different zones that the body may inhabit, but its possible hybridity is not immediately the cause for celebration, for everything conspires to normatize and tame the disruptions produced by different vectors on one self. (Quiroga 2000, 194)

This quotation is particularly poignant when considering the trans body. Selena and Leocadio do not represent an interstice nor are they a third gender blending of male and female. Consideration of their bodies requires a reconceptualization of the gender binary, as well as a decoupling of the strict ties between male and masculine and female and feminine. The text achieves this decoupling through constant flashbacks that reveal the disintegration of the heteronormative family due to the overly rigid social and economic structures that determine familial and bodily intelligibility. The text describes the pasts of Martha Divine, Sirena Selena, a young Dominican boy Leocadio, Hugo Graubel, Selena’s grandmother, as well as many other characters. For the purpose of this analysis, I will focus mainly on the histories of Martha, Selena, Leocadio, and Hugo, owing to their overarching presence in the novel as the main protagonists.

New forms of queer kinship in the novel exist within what Judith Halberstam describes as a queer space and time. According to Halberstam, there exists a family time as well as a queer time. Family time essentially revolves around the needs of children and exists within a heteronormative framework. Furthermore, family time “connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability” (5). Family time is regimented by the practices of child rearing (or heteronormative conditions) while queer time “produces alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience-namely, birth, marriage, reproduction and death” (5). As such, queer time
and space “requires and produces new conceptions of space…by articulating and elaborating a concept of queer time, I suggest new ways of understanding non-normative behaviors that have clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects” (6). In contrast with family time’s preoccupation with past and future, with queer time “speed itself (the drug as well as the motion) becomes the motor of an alternative history…” (5). While existing within a queer time, which is inherently counter-hegemonic, all of the characters with a queer subjectivity in Sirena Selena vestida de pena, except that of Graubel, depend on the performative heteronormative standard. As Judith Butler notes, the performative “must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler 1993, 2). As such, Martha Divine’s performance of femininity is produced by hegemonic discourses. Martha, as well as Selena, represents an exaggerated manifestation of traditional femininity. However, this is not to criticize any particular manifestation of femininity. I also do not argue that by exaggerating femininity any queer agency is subsumed within the hegemonic representation, negating any possibility of self-formation. Interestingly though, each queer body, except that of Graubel, yearns for a modified version of the supposed stability of the heteronormative family. This search for stability and the subsequent modification of the heteronormative family through its particularly queer formation effectively subverts the normative family model, creating a space of queer kinship.

From here, I would like to analyze a few instances in the text in which the visually counter-hegemonic characters depend on the heteronormative performative in order to enact a personal agency and formation of queer kinship. However, I would like
first to clarify my use of the phrase visually counter-hegemonic. It is clear in the text that visually, the bodies of Selena, Martha Divine and Leocadio do not fit within the rigid binary categories of either male or female. However, one of the few bodies in the text that can be visually marked as male is that of Hugo Graubel, who I will argue, despite the mask afforded by his heteronormative family, represents perhaps the clearest example of a counter-heteronormative formation of queer subjectivity in the text.

On the flight to the Dominican Republic from Puerto Rico, Martha Divine is described as

…Alta y rubia oxigenada, ya con sus arrugas, con su par portentoso de pechos de silicona, con piel increíblemente tersa por las hendiduras del escote…No exhibia ni un solo pelo que la delatara. Solo su altura y su voz, y sus ademanes tan femeninos, demasiado femeninos, estudiadamente femeninos. (13)

While Martha is thorough in her performative appropriation of feminine attributes, she repeatedly speaks of her fear of discovery. Martha identifies as a female and has almost completed her final sexual reassignment surgery. Her hopes are to garner enough money from Serena’s shows to complete her surgery. While on the plane, Martha overlaps the fear of discovery with the interstices of air travel. The liminal space of take off and landing between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic becomes an allegory for her pre-operational body. She states her fears: “Oh sí, su cuerpo, el disfraz que era su cuerpo. Temblaba de tan solo pensar que alguien, en pleno take-off, le señalara con el dedo y gritara: Miren eso. Eso no es una mujer” (23). Her ultimate desire is “quitarse la ropa y verse, al fin, de la cintura para abajo, igual que de la cintura para arriba, con tetitas y totita. Total. Al fin, poder descansar en un solo cuerpo” (24).17 While projecting a very feminine performance there is a constant fear of discovery. The representation of travel

17 It is important to keep in mind that all gender representations are performances; I do not wish to insinuate that any character’s gender as performative is in any way disingenuous.
also highlights the relationship between queer subjectivity and transnational movement. The space of flight, and in-between place that is neither Puerto Rico nor the Dominican Republic, becomes a place in which queer subjectivity is articulated, enacted, but at the same time hidden for fear of discovery. The narrative makes the space of travel an opportune moment to highlight the obliteration of physical and geographic boundaries, as well as the boundaries between masculine/feminine, male/female, and masculinity/femininity. While the undoing of these binaries becomes evident to the reader, it is important to highlight that it is not Martha’s objective to embody this queer space, but rather to privatize and hide it from regulatory powers that read the body through binaries.

Antonio de Moya underscores the political, social, and economic reality of transgendered people, specifically within the Dominican Republic. He notes “most of Dominican transgenders only go as far as putting on make-up, waxing or depilating, receiving hormone treatment, and implanting silicone and similar substances into their bodies to resemble females. Only a few transgendered migrants to the United States or Europe have become transsexuals, undergoing genital surgery, probably because of high economic costs, and primarily because of the social value of being a ‘phalic woman’ in a phallicist-homophobic society” (94). The concept of political and social capital gained through status as a ‘phallic woman’ is, while potentially problematic, noteworthy.

As represented in Santos-Febres’ novel, Martha Divine does not benefit from this capital and works throughout the narrative to achieve her sexual reassignment surgery. Selena, however, does benefit from this capital, but in a manner very distinct from that which de Moya describes. De Moya articulates that retaining the phallus extends a
fractional amount of social and political power to a subject who, otherwise, is completely
devoid of masculinity owing to their physically and social resemblance to females.
However, while this can be read as a particularly queer way to access political
agency/visibility, it is still couched upon the political power of masculinity embodied
through the phallus. Rather, as represented in the novel, it is important to consider the
variety of gender expressions at play, and to understand how cultural notions of
Dominican masculinity complicate or reinforce these representations. There are no male-
identified characters in the novel that fit within de Moya’s category of “hegemonic
masculinities.” Importantly, this emphasizes the notion of gender identity as
performative, as a reiterative process that is only legible through constant repetition.

Martha Divine’s almost post-operational body represents the interstices between
space and time. As such, it is important to signal the spatial and temporal division
between the action of the story (the Caribbean, more specifically Puerto Rico and the
Dominican Republic) and the aspired for metropolis, New York City. New York City is
represented as a utopia of self-expression and queer embodiment. Martha Divine
highlights the notion of space, temporality, and freedom as represented in the space of
New York City as opposed to the rural area where she grew up:

Allá, en sus países, se reproducían, heredaban, enterraban padres y abuelos,
corrian caballos por las haciendas y se comportaban como los futuros próceres de
la patria. Pero acá, en Nueva York, se aflojaban las corbatas de sus trajes grises,
soltaban los maletines con permisos para exportar fanegas de flores, minerales o
café, y entre botellas, pastillas polvos alucinógenos, volaban las boas de plumas,
llose rubores para labios y efebios con faldas que rescataban de la calle para
terminar de enseñarles lo que era en verdad el gozo y la perdición. (126-7)

18 Perhaps with the exception of Graubel’s father, who forces a sexual encounter upon his young son in
order to confirm is masculinity, both that of his son and of himself, as his son functions as an extension of
his own masculinity.
Underscoring Halberstam’s conceptualization of queer time and space, the space of Martha’s past (and it is important here to note the temporal aspect of space as it relates to memory) represents heteronormative conceptualizations of space and time and the link to projects of representing nationhood.

According to Martha, in rural space (and notably, again, this space is located temporally in the past), heteronormative actions are tied to those respectable people who develop national projects. Furthermore, the space of the rural past is described linearly, marked by those key moments of heteronormative time, such as reproduction, inheritance, and death. Halberstam “tr[ies] to use the concept of queer time to make clear how respectability, and notions of the normal on which it depends, may be upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality” (Halberstam 2005, 4). The space of Martha’s past, which represents projects of heteronormative nation building, is necessarily tied to a teleological impulse towards the future. The productive relationships described in Martha’s past (which, importantly is linked to rural space) have as their objective procreation, and the propagation of a national identity. Queer time, in contrast, represents specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernity once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety and inheritance (See Halberstam 2005, 6). My challenge to this particular formulation lies in the word leave. For one, leaving temporal frames of bourgeois time implies that everyone is born into this temporal frame, which, as Halberstam notes, is not the case. In the novel, Sirena is not born into a heteronormative temporal/spatial frame. Secondly, the act of leaving implies a choice, which is not often the case. In the novel, for example, Leocadio is forced out of heteronormative time/space for reasons beyond his control.
Furthermore, social discrimination of queer bodies can also force them out of heteronormative time/space. Lastly, the idea of leaving implies a total removal, which Judith Butler notes, is never truly possible. One is always on the edge of intelligibility, and can never truly leave or exist outside of productive powers. Butler states

For there is an ‘outside’ to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute ‘outside,’ an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constitutive ‘outside,’ it is that which can only be though-when it can-in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders. (Butler 1993, 8)

Transnational Caribbean space further problematizes the notion of leaving a particular space, specifically because, even if the physical space of the island is not present, it is discursively present in conceptualizations of the transnational community as an imagined community, as described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983, 6). Furthermore, the space of the island is always present in the construction of transnational subjectivity, whether one defines oneself against or with the space of the island. Queer Caribbean space and time, as well as transnational articulations of queer Caribbean space and time must be theorized in a slightly different manner than proposed by Halberstam, specifically because of the paradoxical distance/proximity of the geographical and psychological space of the island within transnational communities.

The space of New York City, in contrast to the rural space of the island, is described as a non-linear mélange of alternative sights, sounds, and experiences. New York City exists within the novel as a utopic vision on the part of the characters, but more importantly, in its depiction within the novel, the city defies heteronormative conceptualizations of spatiality and temporality. Notably, in her description of the rural
space of her past and the metropolitan space of her past and future, Martha’s terminology again undoes binary divisions of here versus there and past versus future. The use of the terms *allá*, which indicates a far-away indeterminate space, the English equivalent of ‘over or back there’ and *acá*, which indicates the exact space from which one is speaking or the English equivalent of ‘right here’ complicates Martha’s narration of time and space. This is because Martha is speaking of the past when describing both her rural upbringing and her three years spent in New York City, yet when describing the temporal events of the past, she uses terminology to spatially mark herself in a hyper-present moment represented by the use of *acá*. As such, this passage describes the queer space of New York City, while actualizing a queer space through enunciation and through the complicating of time and spaces as wholly separate or divided categories.

It is specifically this projected desire towards the North American metropolis of New York City that allows one to theorize differently queer Caribbean space and time in this novel. The utopic projection of the expanded Caribbean enables the characters to reconceptualize space and time not as a rigid division of here/there or past/future, among other binaries, but to mark the fluidity of the space and time of the island. New York City represents a space of unbridled queerness, in which each character can enact personal and professional desires; it also represents a space of Caribbeanness that extends beyond the geographic and nation-state boundaries of the islands of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. This is a notable link between works that are specifically Caribbean and those classified as U.S. Latino, specifically referring to U.S. Latino writers with Hispano-Caribbean origins. Both groups, although clearly not all writers, engage with a notion of an expanded Caribbean, which goes beyond the spatial borders of the
island as it is conceived geographically, politically, and temporally, in the ways in which official, familial, and personal histories conspire to influence and complicate one’s understanding of Caribbeanness.

Returning to the protagonists of the novel, Selena, perhaps because of pre-pubescence age, travels more comfortably amongst borders dividing male and female than her mentor, Martha Divine. For this reason, the text switches freely between masculine and feminine pronouns and markers while describing Selena. Upon arrival at the Hotel Conquistador, Martha scolds Serena for jumping on the bed:

*Nena*, no brinques así en las camas, que no quiero problemas con la administración—gritó Martha, severa, pero aguantando la risa por dentro al ver a su *hijita* tan feliz, tan risueña, tan despreocupada de la vida. Pocas veces la había visto así…dejándose ser *el niño* que era. (29, my emphasis)

However visually (and aurally, considering her singing voice further denotes her femininity) variable Serena’s gender may be, ironically her most contestatory asset, or that which destabilizes gender binaries, is in fact the gender definer *par excellence*, her penis. While Martha helps her apply her make up and prepare her body for the show, the reader voyeuristically observes the description of Selena’s genitals:

Martha disipaba la gula y la sorpresa ante el tamaño genital de su ahijadita. Asombrada, no se podía explicar cómo, de un cuerpito tan frágil y delgado, colgaba semejante guindalejo. La verga de Sirena era inmensa, un poquito grotesca por la falta de proporción que guardaba con el resto del cuerpo. (55)

Relating to these androgynous characteristics, de Moya signals that “paradoxically, feminine behavior in boys with androgynous characteristics may be tolerated and even reinforced in this [Dominican] culture. This can occur under special borderline circumstances, such as being the only boy in a family of five or more sisters, or being the last boy in a long family (more than five to seven children) and, perhaps, being
exceptionally endowed in his genitalia, that is, having a ‘sacred phallus’” (92, my emphasis).

The necessity of appropriating heteronormative femininity depends on what Judith Butler describes as ‘becoming undone.’ According to Butler, “…the ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical distance and transformative relation to them” (Butler 1993, 3). The question of intelligibility depends on the performed and consistently reinforced gender norms of prescribed femininity. In pushing the limits of intelligibility, one risks becoming “unreal”:

…Those who live outside the conjugal frame or maintain modes of social organization for sexuality that are neither monogamous nor quasi-marital are more and more considered unreal, and their loves and losses less than “true” loves and “true” losses. The derealization of this domain of human intimacy and sociality works by denying reality and truth to the relations at issue. (Butler 1993, 26-7)

However, within the narrative frame of the novel, I argue that owing to the overarching presence of queer subjectivities, the pain and loss of these unreal subjects becomes painfully real. One only need look at the rape of Selena and also the death of her friend Valentina. While these are subjects who typically exist on the periphery of society for reasons of bodily intelligibility and economic and social standing, within the narrative framework, they are the center. They are the focus of the work and thereby become hyper-real in their narrative presence.

Leocadio, a young Dominican boy who has also been abandoned by his mother, represents another visually non-hegemonic body. While not a transvestite, nor transgender, Leocadio’s male identified body is marked by an excess of femininity that is noticed by his mother, by himself, and by various lecherous men around him. This
excessive femininity creates a need to protect and shelter Leocadio, specifically because his femininity provokes the unwanted advances of older men. Upon encountering a lecherous man on the beach, Leocadio thinks to himself “había que regresar a donde estaba Mamá. Ella era el salvo conducto, la piedra de toque. Si lo veían con ella, lo dejarían tranquilo” (62). The need to protect Leocadio extends to his new family; one could say a new queer family, established with doña Adelina. Doña Adelina inherits a house from her aunts and with her life savings dedicates herself to informally adopting boys from the streets and taking care of them. The boys in the family help support doña Adelina financially through petty robbery, legitimate jobs in hotels, and prostitution. This example of new kinship demonstrates what Elena Grau-Llevería describes as:

…Comunidades alternativas que estos grupos marginados crean y cómo a través de ellas se instaura un sistema educativo y se genera un apoyo emocional que prepara a sus miembros para desarrollar proyectos económicos cuya última finalidad es conseguir una mayor autoestima de sí mismo y una posición de más poder frente a una sociedad que los niega tanto por tendencia social como por estrato económico. (239)

While it can be problematic to talk about increased self esteem through prostitution, it must be noted that both Leocadio and his best friend and mentor Migueles also have ‘legitimate’ jobs. However, the legitimacy and/or illegitimacy of their jobs, in terms of legality, respectability, or intelligibility, do not regulate nor impede upon queer practices. It is obliquely stated that Migueles, while working as a waiter at the Hotel Colón, has more intimate interactions with the male guests. When Migueles insists that he does not want two of the same watch as a gift from a client, he reveals his encounters with North

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19 Prostitution, while a line of work that is historically read through heteronormative interpretations of exploitation, disenfranchisement, indecency, and/or illegitimacy, can, in certain cases, be read as a form of agency, enfranchisement, and power. It is important to consider the ways in which prostitution, as represented in this text, becomes a queer form of capitalist entrepreneurship, in which subjects can garner access to power.
American and European men while at the same time denying homosexuality. Speaking of the differences amongst clients he notes “Los europeos son mejores que los gringos. Saben respetar a los hombres y no se ponen con eso de querer besar a uno, ni cogerle la mano en público. Hacen lo suyo, si acaso, y ya. Pero al fin y a la postre, todos ellos se parecen. Les encantan los dominicanos. Vienen para acá solo a eso. Hasta regalan las mismas boberías” (218).

This discourse on sexual tourism mixes Migueles’ sexual relations with men with a need to maintain or affirm his masculinity. The dialogue becomes queer in itself. He vacillates from speaking of how well men respect him, to noting that they do not try to kiss him in public. The privacy of affection, for Migueles, becomes a form of respect, because he does not want his masculinity publicly questioned. However, it is important to consider the culturally variant notion of homosexuality in certain Latin American contexts. In *Mexican Masculinities*, Robert McKee Irwin notes that in Mexico, and I would argue in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico “acts of affection between men, which might be read as homoerotic today, passed unnoticed as long as those men involved appeared to be masculine” (2003, xxii). As such, the interactions between Migueles and the tourists would not be necessarily read as homosexual if Migueles maintained the binary division between male versus female and masculinity versus femininity. However, this rigid division is blurred in the text through the relationship developed between Migueles and Leocadio. The desire for intimacy (although not necessarily sexual) and interpersonal contact trumps the need to maintain a macho façade:

Pero él [Migueles] era un hombre ya, y un hombre guarda sus secretos. No anda por ahí diciéndole a todo el mundo lo que piensa ni lo que hace. Los hombres son
reservados y no les gusta el chisme. Y Migueles insistía en que él era un hombre hecho y derecho. Pero le gustaba conversar con Leocadio. (214)

Importantly, the narrative also highlights the implications of North American and European sexual tourism in the Caribbean, a tourism that directly affects Migueles, Leocadio, and even Selena.

Chapter 15, written entirely in English, demonstrates the perspective of a Canadian sex tourist towards the Caribbean other. When speaking about gay rights in the Caribbean he states, “It is understandable that they are not as evolved as us in these matters. I mean, we had Stonewall, we had Act-up, we have a history of political presence in our countries” (207). While noting the dangers of being openly gay in the Caribbean (as if there were no difference between Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Cuban homosexuals who are out of the closet) he clearly states that “no, honey, I did not come here to play the spy nor to give free psychiatric counseling to my Caribbean sisters in distress. Done that, been there, without having to pay airfare. That is not way to spend a vacation” (208). Rather his intentions are “to be half naked, running around the beach, filled to the brim with pretty boys. And where else can you get that at a fair price? The Caribbean!” (208). These statements clearly demarcate the rigidly established division between developed and developing world economies, as well as between races. The speaker objectifies the boys’ “pretty chocolate skin” (209) and finds it “cute” when, after having sex, “they [the boys] revert back to that Latin Lover Macho role they grew up with” (209).

Migueles must work against these stereotypes and imposed identities. Migueles and Leocadio, like Selena and Martha, inhabit sites of multiple identifications. According to José Esteban Muñoz “…identity is enacted by minority subjects who must
work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant cultures generate” (6). I argue here that Migueles, like Serena, enacts a form of disidentification, which according to Muñoz

…Is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this ‘working on and against’ is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within… (11)

Migueles disidentifies with the perceived role of a young boy who works in a gay tourist hotel. He utilizes and works against this prescribed role for the purpose of economic survival. Furthermore, he enacts an agency: while he depends on the dominant discourse (the sex tourist) for economic gain he will eventually subvert it, being that his ultimate goal is to escape the life of the Hotel Colón in order to open a business in Puerto Rico. One can assume that Migueles interacts with men like the Canadian sex tourist at his work, considering the Canadian tourist is staying at the Hotel Colón.

However, it must be noted the power of Migueles’ new found economic standing garnered through his encounters with clients. He gains respect from the other boys in his extended family, as well as inspiring and eventually helping Leocadio to get a job at the hotel as a dishwasher. Leocadio is also seduced by the power of this economy, and always hopes to steal a glance of the forbidden bar. The bar at the Hotel Colón is where the men and the boys rendezvous and it is also where Leocadio and Migueles reveal the deeper relationship that exists between them. Migueles shows Leocadio how the men dance together and explains to him that it is not always the larger man that leads, but rather “el hombre es él que dirige, él que decide. El otro es la mujer” (273). In this way, the heteronormative gender roles are established, even between non-heteronormative
couples. However, this statement also skillfully decouples masculinity/femininity from maleness/femaleness. The roles of masculinity and femininity are adopted and performed by either sex, depending on which how each partner negotiates these roles. While this establishes a queer relationship, Leocadio’s ultimate desire is to move to Puerto Rico with his mother and Migueles, and to open a business. The queer kinship between Leocadio and Migueles rests in what Halberstam would describe as family time, rather than queer time.

Importantly, masculinity is discursively constructed and patrolled through performative repetition. While homosocial relations between men regulate the policing of gender roles, de Moya signals the importance of women in policing gender expression in the Dominican Republic, stating “…women have been seen as playing a pivotal role in the cultural transmission of gender anxiety and homophobia to the younger generations. Parents strongly fear that their children could eventually “become” homosexual and, because of this, the mother tends to behave as the guardian of child sexuality…” (72). De Moya highlights the relationship between class and gender expression:

Mostly in the upper-middle and middle classes in the Dominican Republic, who are mainly concerned with social power, there is a relatively basic clear-cut, stereotyped and paranoid (totalitarian) etiquette for gendering both the verbal and non-verbal behavior of young boys away from “femininity.” (72)

This is visible in the way Hugo Graubel’s father handles his son’s masculinity at a young age, but is also demonstrably inverted in Martha Divine’s cultivation of Sirena. Significantly, however, she does act as a guardian to Sirena’s sexuality as mentioned above.

De Moya demonstrates the intersections between race and class in perceptions and articulations of masculinity. Drawing from Kaufman, he highlights how “instead of
thinking about a single masculinity, ‘hegemonic’ and ‘subordinate’ forms should be recognized and studied, thus positing masculinity as a hierarchical construct” (74). This perspective elucidates the paradoxically rigid while simultaneously fluid articulations of masculinity that occur in the Dominican Republic. Importantly, masculinity is not categorically definable as a binary position in opposition to femaleness, rather the categorizations delimited by de Moya (hegemonic, subordinate, marginal, and residual masculinities) demonstrate the relative fluidity of gender identity in the Dominican Republic. Significantly, however, this seeming fluidity is not necessarily an object of choice, but rather of categorical imposition from naming powers. Despite the oppositional rigidity versus fluidity, like categorizations of race in the Dominican Republic, there seems to be a wider variation of possibilities, especially when compared to North American, particularly from the United States, conceptualizations of gender, race, and class identity. For gender identity in the Dominican Republic, specifically for masculinity/masculine identification, de Moya argues that “homosocial relations among me are experienced as competitive gendered relations in terms of domination-subordination, at least in the ‘definitory state’ of new dyadic relationships, where they establish, probably on an unconscious basis, who is the ‘male’ (leader, initiator) and who is ‘the female’ (follower) among them” (78). De Moya’s analysis of Dominican masculinity asserts that what exemplifies masculinity is its oppositional relationship to femininity, and that being a man is exemplified by its status as not-female. Importantly, this dynamic sets up a relationship in which masculinity is not necessarily defined by sexual desire, while it is, however, affirmed or denied because of this desire. That is, what makes links the biological male to masculinity is a diametrically opposed
identification to femaleness. This relationship is couched upon the division between active (masculine) and passive (feminine) roles. According to de Moya, homosexual desire is not necessarily emasculating, at least for the active participant, and “the stigma against male homosexuality partially results in the perception of this role as feminine, weak and lacking power” (90). Masculinity is couched upon power relations, rather than sexual desire.

The newly formulated queer kinship bonds between Martha, Selena, Leocadio, and Migueles demonstrate the relatively heteronormative framework of their relational bonds. Each has an ultimate desire that fits within family time as formulated by Halberstam. Martha hopes to be comfortable in her post-operative body, Selena hopes to be economically self-sufficient, Leocadio wants a home for his family, and Migueles, like Selena, hopes to make money and establish himself. While these new queer kinships break heteronormativity in their outward presence, being that they do not fit the circumscribed definition of kinship through familial relations or blood ties and owing to the fact that the trans or queer identifications demolish the heteronormative classification of family heads as one male and one female, their ultimate life goals fit within Halberstam’s heteronormative family time. Or to quote Irune del Río Gabiola, “both Sirena and Martha are depicted as complex individuals driven by heteronormative desires enacted through non-normative social practices” (86). There is one character who, perhaps owing to his seemingly heteronormative and patriarchic position, has been somewhat overlooked in the analysis of new forms of kinship in Sirena Selena vestida de pena: Hugo Graubel.
Hugo Graubel represents the colonial legacy of the Dominican Republic, as well as its neoliberal future. He is the son of a wealthy sugar cane magnate, and has become a hotel and resort investor. He lives in a mansion in the wealthy beach resort town of Juan Dolio, outside of the capital Santo Domingo. Despite his privileged position and his seemingly perfect bourgeois family (a young wife, two lovely children, a mansion on the beach) Hugo too can be described as a queer subject. His childhood, like Leocadio’s, was spent under the constant protection of a parental figure. However, while Leocadio’s mother protects her son’s emerging sexuality, Hugo’s father exposes and regulates it. Upon determining that his son may not be sufficiently masculine, Hugo’s father pays a woman named Eulalia to have sex with Hugo, which is described as a traumatic experience. After reaching orgasm:

Cerró los ojos, se vio enterito por dentro, tan lejano de todos, de sí, y el terror fue tan grande que, de espanto, se ahogó en un mar. Entonces, soltó un bramido desesperado. El padre, que lo esperaba afuera, creyó que aquel bramido era señal de que el pupilo había aprendido el oficio de macho. Pero el pupilo bramaba de miedo, el sentimiento más fuerte que había sentido en toda su vida… (144)

Hugo’s initiation into manhood—or as I see it, his rape—becomes an irreconcilable moment around which his life spins. He describes his desire: “quería volver a sentir aquella sensación de cuerpo distendido, doble” which seemingly will never return, “ni borracho, ni acostándose con siete mil mulatas, ni dejándose clavar por wachimanes, ni en los baños turcos, puentes y callejones del extranjero” (145). Not even his marriage to the young Solange pacifies his trauma. A year after their union, Solange complains that the marriage has yet to be consummated. The moment of penetration dissolves his temporarily found peace, which “lo distrajo de las tardes de la playa, de los bugarrones por contrato, del deseo por los hijos preadolescentes de sus compañeros de la industria”
The moment of consummation completely destroys this temporary satisfaction and the search for his body at peace continues. It is interesting to consider that from an outward perspective, Hugo Graubel is the epitome of the heteronormative family man. However, while characters such as Martha, Selena, Leocadio, and Migueles search for a seemingly homonormative future, Hugo Graubel’s desire seems counter-normative, in that, instead of conforming to the family time norms of familial sharing, he desires self-satisfaction and self- appeasement at all costs. He finds that his ultimate desire rests in Selena, being that she can potentially embody all that he desires: masculine, feminine, youth, experience, et cetera. Selena becomes emblematic of Hugo’s desire for queer time because a relationship with her will not carry the markers of heteronormative family time.

With Selena, Graubel can exist within a quasi-liminal space that is not regulated by birth, child rearing, and death. Rather, a relationship with Selena begets a return to a pre-violated state, the state that Hugo so desperately searches for in his wife’s body and in his encounters with various young men. The queering, as it is represented through Graubel, is the questioning of being unmarked by family time. This allows for a relationship that deviates from one standard marker of heteronormative development: initiation into manhood. The text reveals the trauma of this event. However, in his relationship with Selena, Hugo finds a type of catharsis, which helps to heal the trauma of his forced sexual encounter. The love making between Serena and Graubel contrasts sharply to his first sexual encounter:

Hugo nota cuando le cae un poco de saliva tibia entre las nalgas, y luego, sonríe al sentirse arropado por la presión de un cuerpo menudito que se le trepa encima y le coloca la punta de su misterio en la boca de atrás. Hugo se retuerce, el calor del roce lo adormila y ya no sabe nada más que aguantarse a las sábanas de aquella cama, mientras su sireneto lo cabalga despacio; después, más rápido y más. Hugo
This moment demonstrates a cathartic release on the part of Hugo Graubel, while narrating the revelation of Serena’s masculinity. This moment of calling Serena ‘sirenito,’ the masculine form of ‘sirena,’ allows Selena to exist outside of the highly constructed and performed act of femininity. While Selena enjoys performing, her desire to be recognized as ‘sirenito’ is evidenced in the text when Serena implores “decirme sirenito a mí, decirme sirenito” (277). At the same time, this moment further reveals Hugo’s queer subjectivity, because, rather than upholding the masculine/feminine binary that is inherent in an encounter between he and a transvestite, recognizing Selena’s masculine sex allows him to truly recognize his desire. Furthermore, this moment decouples maleness from masculinity as well as femaleness from femininity. The fluidity of identifications opens a space of self-identification and self-actualization that does not depend on rigid social and sexual binaries.

It is possible to argue that, because Hugo’s desire rests in the other (Selena), and this particular other is one that embodies many possible identifications of trans subjectivity, that Hugo, despite his outward heteronormativity, is in fact also identifiable within a queer subjectivity. I would argue that his desired outcome is the only one that fits within Halberstam’s description of queer time. His desire is to remove himself from the family time of his current situation and to inhabit a queer time that is not demarcated by the traditional events of marriage, birth, death, et cetera. However, Selena’s drive toward self-sufficiency problematizes Hugo’s desired entry into queer time. Selena recognizes the lack of agency that comes from dependency on another person. She has already, although not maliciously, left Martha Divine in order to pursue her private
contract with Hugo Graubel. Furthermore, she recognizes in Solange, Hugo’s wife, the entrapment that comes with being financially supported by another. Grau Llevería notes that Solange

…Crea escenarios perfectos para que otros crean lo que ella quiere ser. Sin embargo, las escenificaciones de Solange no le dan un espacio a ella; ella se diluye como una pieza más del montaje general que ha diseñado. Su nueva identidad no depende de lazos personales sino de la imagen que recibe como la señora de Graubel. (244)

Solange, like Selena and Martha Divine, depends on a performance of overt femininity for her economic and social survival. Societal conventions of femininity force Solange into a role that confines her to her mansion and forces her to play the good wife. Even when she knows her husband is trolling for young men on the street, Solange seeks respite in her status: “…lo único que lo necesita ahora es para ser una señora, saber de tenedores, tener su puesto asegurado por toda la eternidad” (179). Just like the non-biological females that depend on constructed femininity for survival (through prostitution or performance), so too does Solange depend on her constructed femininity for survival. Furthermore, Solange, like Selena and Martha Divine, aspires to a higher social position (garnered through prostitution and performance). While Solange does not work the streets, her father essentially prostitutes to a wealthy associate (Graubel) to ensure the family’s dwindling fortune. Interestingly, Solange then also works as a foil to Graubel, who was also sold to a prostitute to ensure his masculinity and his father’s image.

As such, Graubel’s ultimate desire is problematized because it depends on the other. The new formulations of queer kinship represented in Sirena Selena vestida de pena depend on interconnectivity but ultimately rely on a type of personal venture
capitalism, in which each member of the neo-family must depend on themselves, rather than on others. However, the circularity of the novel demonstrates the reintegration of new family members into the lines of queer kinship. Just as Selena was Martha’s protégé in the beginning of the novel, there exists the possibility of finding a new protégé. Upon seeing Leocadio and Migueles dancing in the bar, Martha notes, “tiene algo ese nenito, tiene algo, igualito a lo que tenía la Sirena. Quién sabe. La vida da muchas vueltas. Aún le quedan bríos en los implantes. Quizás pueda volver a empezar” (282). *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* effectively demonstrates new formulations of queer kinship, while highlighting the possibility that visually hegemonic bodies can dismantle the heteronormative drive that forcefully identifies masculinity with male and femininity with female. The characters create new bonds of kinship that depend on experience rather than blood ties and marriage. As such, these new forms of kinship would seemingly fit within Halberstam’s formulation of queer time, rather than family time. However ironically, the character that best represents an inhabitant of queer time is neither a trans body nor a poor working boy; it is the wealthy sugar magnate Hugo Graubel. Graubel’s desire for Selena as a sirenito further unravels the seemingly compulsory identification between male and masculine, since for Graubel, Selena consistently performs the role of the femme fatale. However, at the moment of Graubel’s consummation of sexual desire, Selena drops the act and becomes the young boy she was before the emergence of Selena. In this moment it is Selena who penetrates Graubel, yet this is not to argue that one plays the masculine role and the other the feminine. Furthermore, the scene of penetration is described almost as a non-penetrative act. Rather, this moment at the end of the text demonstrates the malleability of identity that
works upon and against dominant identification practices, affording each character a space of self-identification that begets personal agency.

While *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* explores the ways in which visually counter-hegemonic bodies do not necessarily seek existence within a queer space/time, it demonstrates the ways in which bodies move on and against heteronormative understandings of intelligibility. It seeks to represent bodies in movement, whose subjectivities are understood beyond binary frameworks of identity. In a similar fashion, Puerto Rican author Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro’s novel *Caparazones* (2010) also questions how subjectivity is constructed beyond categorizations of identity. Arroyo Pizarro, like Santos-Febres, positions her characters in trans spaces; spaces—be they geographic, gendered, racialized, or sexualized—that are not necessarily rigidly categorized. In fact, some contemporary literary representations of transnational subjecthood move away from reconciling questions of identity and instead queer national, sexual, and racial identities, among others. These identifications are de-essentialized to resist normative impulses towards discrete categorization, and exemplify the nomadic, incoherent, and chaotic articulation of identity in the twenty-first century. *Caparazones* demonstrates this move away from grappling with discrete markers of identity, and rather focuses upon the ways in which subjectivities, nation, sexuality, race, and gender play on and against the bodies of her protagonists. Notably, however, Arroyo Pizarro does not refuse naming particular identities, and in fact, the interplay of identities is key in her work. Alternatively, it is the superposition of fields of identitary influence that construct or assemble the protagonists of her novel.
The move away from naming discrete categories of identity allows the protagonist and narrator Nessa to create an affective, interpersonal relationship that challenges heteronormative conceptualizations of kinship. To cite Jasbir Puar’s “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” “an unsettling of the site of origin, that is, nation as one of the two binding terms of diaspora, de facto punctures the homeland-to-diaspora telos and wrenches ancestral progression out of the automatic purview of diaspora, allowing for queer narratives of kinship, belonging, and home” (135). I argue that beyond the homeland-to-diaspora telos, transnationality, as represented in Caparazones, moves beyond the binary relationship between homeland and diaspora. The novel, through its decentralization of discrete categories of identity as manifested in a transnational context, reformulates the literary and historical impulse present in many works by authors who represent, write, or form part of the literary diaspora of the Caribbean. The novel questions the teleological impulse of its predecessors, namely reconciliation of a divided national identity as a project or goal of diasporic writers. Rather than foregrounding the search for a coherent identity which has been split by the move from one national geographic space to another, Arroyo Pizarro utilizes the space of transnationality to question the monolithic and hegemonic understandings of national identity, and furthermore to decouple sexual identity from national identity.

In Arroyo Pizarro’s novel, the transnational position of the protagonists queers understandings of belonging and affective ties between characters. Following Puar’s conceptualization of “queer assemblage,” it is possible to see how Arroyo Pizarro’s novel demystifies the diasporic urge/push towards the homeland. The position of the transnational subject moves away from the melancholic and nostalgic impulse towards
the land left behind, and rather works to assemble a subjectivity that is based upon a multiplicity of referents. By foregrounding subjectivity as an assemblage, Arroyo Pizarro moves beyond the notion of identity categories as discrete units, and rather positions these determinate categories as fields of influence that converge upon, but never discreetly define a subject. Puar differentiates assemblage from intersectionality, stating that intersectionality “presumes components such as race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion, are separable analytics and thus can be disassembled” (127), and demonstrates how, through intersectionality, categories of identity maintain separation and unity, and therefore can be considered the last bastions of the “grand narratives” of identity, which post-modern thought and criticism have worked so hard to question, dismantle, or destroy.

Incorporating Puar’s notion of queer assemblage, I adopt Judith Halberstam’s understanding of queer, which eschews intelligibility for a radicalized position that challenges normativity. For Halberstam, embracing the status of unintelligibility afforded by queer subjectivity moves away from categorization of identities, and from heteronormative understandings of self. Following Halberstam, Patricia Elliott argues that a particular criticism of intelligibility concerns how “the dominant process by which intelligible gendered subjects are distinguished from unintelligible subjects is based on securing the stable, bounded, typically white, masculine, coherent self by projecting what is unstable, ambiguously gendered, or incoherent onto non-normative ‘others’” (64). For Halberstam, becoming an intelligible subject requires certain fixity of identity categories, be they normative or not. This stabilization annuls the radical questioning and/or opposition of the normative. While the notion of kinship is traditionally tied to
heteronormative understandings of family, procreation, and biological ties, Halberstam questions this position through the notions of queer time and place, as articulated in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*; and it is particularly this form of kinship at stake in *Caparazones*.

I argue that Arroyo Pizarro’s novel queers traditional notions of family and kinship by positioning the protagonists as transnational subjects. Transnationality challenges subjecthood as a stable and identifiable position, and rather complicates the relationship between nationality, expression of gender and sexuality, and affective bonds. The linkage between transnationality, queerness, and kinship is a necessary point of analysis for literary works that question the fixity of identity and the imposed identification between the geographic and political boundaries of the nation-state and one’s national identity. As stated, this identification is not an innocent conflation of geography and national belonging, but also an imposition of categories of gender, sexuality, and race, which are intrinsically tied to national identity. In the introduction to *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics*, Brown, Browne, and Lim consider the interconnections between gendered and sexualized practices of space, stating, “the spaces that we can understand as structured by sexuality, however, are not just these kinds of everyday spaces. Rather, these everyday spaces intersect with various other scales of spatiality, including national, international, and transnational spaces” (3). Transnationality decouples subjectivity from geographic and political boundaries while still depending on them for certain modes of articulating selfhood. This follows Judith Butler’s consideration that, even for identification, there is no true outside, and that in order to effect change it is necessary to work from within certain boundaries (*Bodies that
However, national identification in the space of transnationality is not couched upon the space of the homeland, but what it means for the protagonists of *Caparazones* to be Puerto Rican outside of the geographic border space of the island.

*Caparazones* blends personal histories, temporalities, and narrative to create a non-linear retelling of the experience of transnationality as well as the formation of alternative familial bonds. The story recounts the lives of Nessa and Alexia, Puerto Rican photojournalists and animal rights activists who have started a family together. From the beginning of the narrative, the reader learns that Alexia has been missing for some time, and although not an unusual occurrence, Nessa nervously awaits word of where she may be. While waiting and repeatedly marking the narrative with Alexia’s absence, Nessa describes aspects of her past, her life with Alexia, Alexia’s marriage to David, and includes various moments of stream-of-consciousness in which she ponders nature, the universe, and her identity. The narrative shifts between Nessa’s childhood in Puerto Rico, which, importantly, is never directly named as a geographic space, her present in an unspecified location, and the experiences shared between Nessa and Alexia as activists working around the world.

The movement between past and present occurs without warning to the reader, creating a temporal pastiche that blurs the borders of linear progression, as well as geographic, spatial, and political borders. As such, the present analysis considers how subjects are represented in transnational space and how they queer affective bonds. Considering how author deliberately employs a non-linear, inchoate, and at times vague style reinforces the non-centeredness of transnational experiences. Here, one can see the intrinsic link between the queerness and transnationality. Both experiences valorize that
which is situated outside of normative frameworks of intelligibility, order, and recognition. While queer defies normative articulations of gender belonging and identification, transnationality questions the frameworks that define and regulate bodies, while challenging identification with and through the geographic space of the nation state. The present analysis underscores the relationship between transnationality and queerness, articulating both as experiences that subjects traverse and that traverse subjects, rather than imposed categories of identity. By considering queerness and transnationality as experiences, it is possible to reconceptualize the act of identification as a process and practice of fields, described by Pierre Bourdieu as a network of relations among agents, which intersect vertically and horizontally. However, instead of seeing fields as discrete entities, the present analysis understands fields as transversal influences that, while individually identifiable, overlap and blur borders. This conceptualization de-centers identity itself as a grand narrative, and describes the way in which power is experienced as an assemblage of forces, rather than as an imposition of discrete categories. I aim to reconceptualize the notion of power as a top down process, and express the ways in which the influence and confluence of parallel fields of power shape the subject as he/she moves through them. They are differential, never equally exerted, and malleable not only to specific situations, but also to who is passing through, and when.

In *Caparazones*, the titular referent, the sea turtle, is symbolic of the blurring of geographic borders.\(^{20}\) The narrative emphasizes the migrations of the turtle, and the differing national policies toward protecting this endangered species. This symbol works

\(^{20}\) “Caparazón” translates into English as “shell,” referring to the shell of the sea turtle.
well for a consideration of transnationality, in that it can be interpreted as an allegory for
the borderless existence of beings. Regarding the couples’ involvement with UNESCO and Greenpeace, Nessa states, “Dado que las tortugas son especies migratorias y no
portan ningún estandarte nacional, las medidas conservacionistas de un país son de poca
utilidad si otro que se halla en la ruta migratoria las caza sin pensar en la población futuro
de la especie” (24-5). Throughout the novel, Nessa recounts how she and Alexia met
while covering protests to protect this endangered species. The sea turtle function as a
symbol of transnational movement, and it is also a central figure in the development of
Alexia and Nessa’s relationship. The first time they meet is while witnessing a sea turtle
migration in Australia, where “Alexia cubría las fotografías. Por esta razón, y no otra,
coincidimos en aquella playa esperando ambas la puesta de huevos” (19). The sea turtle
continues to be a symbolic and actual presence in their lives, and is frequently tied to
moments of intimacy. Nessa recalls: “Alexia siempre me hizo comentarios seductores
cuando atestiguábamos un desove…Decía: Ven a poner mis huevos, bonita. ¿Por qué no
me dejas fecundarte? Y yo reía…” (33). Within the structure of the novel itself, the sea
turtle plays a significant role, as it is divided into “Caparazones,” equivalent to sections,
which are then divided into chapters.

The symbolic protection afforded by the narrative shells demonstrates Nessa’s
vulnerable position within the text. She finds herself dependent upon Alexia, and
fashions her partner as a form of addiction, stating: “Esa noche es cuando me da la
tercera crisis….Pero, ¿y con Alexia, mi adicción mayor, qué hago?” (166). Nessa’s
vulnerability and dependence upon Alexia, however, is counteracted through
remembering their past and present, and through the process of narration. In Discourses
of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions, Linda Kauffman analyzes epistolary fiction, specifically focusing on the question of presence in the act of writing. For female authors of epistolary exchanges with their lovers, presence is a problematic notion, as Kauffman questions, “[w]hat, after all, does it mean to be “present” to one’s beloved? If he truly loved when he was present, how could he bear to be absent now?” (17). For women writers, specifically of the epistolary genre, there is a productive power in the act of writing, as writing functions to textually engender the absent recipient/addressee of the epistolary exchange. Kauffman states of the female writer: “…her strategy is simultaneously subversive, for she contests the fate to which her lover has abandoned her. Her epistle is simultaneously a love letter and a legal challenge, a revolt staged in writing” (18). While Caparazones is not an epistolary fiction, it is productive to consider Kauffman’s project when analyzing Nessa’s position as narrator of this story. Nessa frequently invokes Alexia’s absence, converting Alexia into a ghostly figure in the text. Alexia hardly exists within the temporal present of the narration, and haunts the text as a specter of past experiences. The narrative is marked by Alexia’s absence and abandonment of Nessa and their newborn child: “Hoy Alexia no está. No ha llegado todavía. La pieza verde menta que es nuestro cuarto de pareja carece de su fisonomía. El espacio que se ocupa por mi cuerpo abrazado al suyo, está incompleto” (12). Nessa repeatedly invokes Alexia’s void, and the first invocation highlights Alexia's missing body. It is corporeality that makes the space of their home complete, and without Alexia, this space is incomplete. However, the narrative repetition of physical absence de-essentializes the physicality of the body, turning the body into an assemblage of
concomitant experiences of physicality, presence, absence, time, and space. The absent body becomes what Bryan Reynolds designates a “transversal agent,” through which

...Radical changes that disrupt maintenance of a subjective territory forge paradoxically a transversal subject, an unsustainable condition incorporating two mutually exclusive phenomena: transversality and subjectivation. Whether consciously or not, when a subject becomes a transversal agent, she actively permeates and makes permeable the parameters of her subjective territory and generates a continuously shifting series of conditions that challenge the underlying structures of her individuality and social identity. (286)

Rather than situating Alexia within the binary of presence versus absence, it is possible to read Nessa’s textual invocations of her partner as a strategic and productive move, which de-centralizes corporality in the process of forming subjectivity. The affective link between Nessa and Alexia can be understood through Jason Lim’s clear definition of the effects of affect. For Lim, “affect can be thought of, very simply, as the capacity or power of bodies to affect other bodies and be affected by other bodies. ‘Bodies’, here, are not to be understood only as human bodies. Rather, ‘bodies’ can be defined as a site where forces are ‘actualised’” (54). In regards to queer affect, Lim expands his definition, stating, “[b]y focusing on the way that bodies’ capacities to enter into differing relationships is, as we shall see, constantly shifting and amenable to augmentation, an attentiveness to affect can be enormously empowering. It can foster a sense of exploration by gesturing towards how bodies are able to forge new connections and new alliances, to forge new pleasures and new ways of being productive” (55). By challenging ontological presence, Caparazones queers subjectivity and creates a space in which physicality is not a precondition for subjectivity.
Alexia’s absence is marked in the text through her physical absence, but also through Nessa’s recollections of Alexia’s abandonment of her families. A telling quote demonstrates Alexia’s abandonment of her second family (more on this shortly) and the physical connection between herself and her child. Nessa states, “Hoy Alexia no está. Sigue sin llegar y yo miro el reloj y al bebé con sus ojos, los ojos de Alexia. Nuestro hijo es una copia casi exacta de ella” (33-4). It is important to signal that procreation is the marker \textit{par excellence} of heteronormativity, and is implicated in the propagation of what Judith Halberstam describes as “family time.” As previously analyzed, Halberstam investigates how queer uses of time and space develop in opposition to familial, heterosexual, and reproductive notions of time and space. Key to this analysis is the idea that time and space are gendered, and through this gendering are normativized and regulated by certain majority groups. For Halberstam, “family time refers to the normative scheduling of daily life…that accompanies the practice of child rearing. This timetable is governed by an imagined set of children’s needs, and it relates to beliefs about children’s health and healthful environments for child rearing” (5). However, even with the birth of their child, Nessa and Alexia still exist outside of a heteronormative or family-centered conceptualization of time and space. As Lim states, queer theory and queer affect “explore the possibilities for desiring in ways that move beyond the politicised regulation and representation of bodies and desire. Queer theory seeks to facilitate new practices and new ways of relating that are beyond normative understandings of what bodies should and should not be able to do” (53). Nessa and Alexia’s relationship, although identifiable with certain elements of heteronormative

\footnote{21 It is important to signal the repeated relationship to the sea turtle in this instance of abandonment. Upon laying and hiding their eggs, sea turtles, like Alexia, abandon their young.}
conventions, demonstrates these new practices and ways of relating that characterize queer affect. Their experiences converge in non-linear, non-centered ways, marking queer affective relationships.

While a heteronormative drive generally marks the act of procreation, Nessa and Alexia’s pregnancy, as it is represented in the text, demonstrates a radical reorganization of heteronormative conceptualizations of family, femininity, masculinity, and reproduction. Regarding the conception, Nessa describes the process of procreation, aided through in-vitro fertilization as: “Su óvulo colocado en mi vientre por la maestría de la ciencia, por la sapiencia de la genética” (34). It is not the interjection of science that queers conception and reproduction in Alexia and Nessa’s pregnancy; it is how Alexia positions herself in the reproductive relationship. Nessa recounts:

Me arrinconaba en una esquina para recordarme, Quiero tener un hijo contigo, Nessa, quiero que pongas mis huevos, que desoves mis crías. Tiempo, y buscamos un especialista renombrado en inseminación artificial. Tiempo, y escogimos un donante de sobre una treintena de perfiles. Seleccionamos los espermatozoides que poblarian su óvulo y que yo cargaría dentro mío. Tiempo y la mano cálida de Alexia sobre mi frente, luego sobre mi vientre, después en la esterilizada probeta que el médico puso entre sus dedos para que fuera ella, y precisamente ella, quien depositara en mi matriz las semillas. (43-4)

The description of the child’s conception is not queer in the mere fact that it is an in-vitro fertilization, but specifically because Alexia is duly positioned in both traditionally masculine and feminine roles. It is Alexia’s fertilized egg that is injected, by Alexia, into Nessa. The duality of Alexia’s positioning as masculine and feminine queers the women’s relationship and the conception of their child. As such, despite the fact that childbirth and rearing are hallmarks of heteronormative time as delineated by

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22 I am specifically referring to how in-vitro fertilization is represented in this particular novel; I am not claiming that all in-vitro fertilization is radically queer.
Halberstam, the family dynamic is still non-heteronormative because Alexia does not merely occupy a masculine role in the relationship, but rather positions herself as both and neither at the same time. Her femininity and masculinity are fields of influence that inform who she is as a subject, but do not necessarily identify her as either/or. Furthermore, the dynamic of presence/absence articulated in her radically queer positioning is highlighted by her relative physical absence throughout the text. My use of presence/absence with a slash is not to indicate a binary, but rather to demonstrate that they two are not mutually exclusive, and within this novel exist at the same time. They work together with notions of corporeality, space, and time to undo the traditional binary of presence versus absence, proposing instead an understanding of affective relationship not predicated on the presence of the physical body. It is worth restating that Nessa’s narration is essentially an invocation of Alexia’s disappearance, and a way to fill the empty space and time that surrounds her absence and desired return. Alexia’s presence/absence is in relation both to Nessa and their child, and to her other family, comprised of her husband David and her daughter Christine. Nessa recounts:

Alexia viajó a documentar el asunto, pero yo, a ese viaje, no pude acompañarla. Fue la primera vez que estuvimos tanto tiempo separadas, porque en vez de regresar a nuestra casa, a nuestros libros…regresó a su primer y originario hogar, donde tenía otra vida que yo sabía bien que tenía, y en el que compartiría con su esposo David y una hija de ambos, Christine. (55)

The existence of two families, both to which Alexia—and to an extent Nessa—form part, underscores the queer reworking of family dynamics. Both Nessa and David are aware of each other’s existence, but do not confront one another about Alexia’s other families.

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During one of Alexia’s disappearances, Nessa is resigned to her absence, since she is aware that she has gone to see David. Nessa states: “A veces pasa demasiadas semanas lejos de mí y no puedo evitar extrañarla. Tampoco puedo exigirle nada, porque cuando accedí a esto sabía todo lo que implicaba” (35). Nessa knows about David and Christine and understands Alexia’s desire to maintain a relationship with them; despite the fact they live far away. In fact, Nessa also articulates a non-heteronormative acceptation of their relationship, stating “Yo voy y vengo por el mío. No tenemos ninguna obligación con la otra que no sea esta constante sed de presenciarnos. Y ahora el bebé, que tampoco nos amarra” (96). It is indicative that not even the heteronormative anchors par excellence, progeny, can render their relationship normative. Nevertheless, Nessa and Alexia work to actively make their child’s position in society intelligible through documentation and legal actions in the court. Nessa states, despite the fact she and Alexia are not legally tied to one another,

> Hemos realizado las debidas disposiciones legales para que al bebé no le falte nada en caso que una de nosotras quiera romper la relación. Todo se ha hecho de manera legal y ordenada, como lo exigen las mínimas normas de civilidad en esta sociedad. Así que en caso de la separación, ruptura o abandono de Alexia, yo fungiré como la típica madre soltera que debe dedicarse a criar sola a su criatura mientras recibe una pensión alimenticia consecuente. (96)

While their child may fall within legal recognition of heteronormative parameters of intelligibility, their relationship, however, cannot be hinged upon heteronormative values of family time and space. Nessa goes on to highlight her understanding of relationships, and how they are not lifelong ties, but rather that “La gente no le pertenece a nadie, la gente se enamora de otra gente, el catálogo de vivencias a nuestro alrededor se enriquece con la sola presencia de otros seres, otros cuerpos, otras siluetas, otros roces. Así es la vida” (111).
Despite her position regarding their relationship, Nessa still discursively confronts Alexia about her dual lives, asking:

…Alexia, me enamoraste y ya tenías otra vida, y un esposo y una hija en otro lado. ¿Qué quieres de mí? ¿Qué morboso sentimiento intentas satisfacer con esto? Y ella usualmente alza la voz, se exaspega, me explica con toda la pasión de sus sienes que yo soy otra cosa, que conmigo aspiro a todo, a tenerlo todo, que vivir allá es una obra de teatro en la que se requiere hacer un papel, y que vivir acá es tener al toro agarrado por los cuernos y disfrutarse cada cabrona respiración como si fuera la última. (62)

Alexia’s dualistic conceptualization of her affective relations establishes a binary relationship between heteronormative and queer affect. Her relationship with David is scripted to the emotions tied to heteronormative experiences of family, while her relationship with Nessa is described by Alexia as liberating and genuine, and marked with urgency and desire. Despite setting up this opposition, however, it must be underscored that Alexia continually moves back and forth between these family units, without prioritizing one over the other. As such, one can see the importance of physical space and how it relates to affective relationships in the text. Alexia’s constant movement demonstrates how her actions queer space and place, as understood by Larry Knopp’s reading of queer movement. Knopp underscores how “[a] queer perspective, informed by embodied and lived queer experiences, can similarly help us to rethink some additional spatial ontologies, including place, placelessness and movement. Many queers’ lived experiences, for example, entail a radically different relationship to these notions than that of more sedentary non-queers” (23).

The physical distance between the two families allows Alexia to participate in each, without the two overlapping. However, despite the physical distance and lack of interaction between the two are still affectively tied to one another. Nessa frequently
laments that Alexia has another family, to the point that she considers writing David a letter regarding her and Alexia’s child: “He querido escribir una carta, un mensaje de texto, un correo electrónico alertando a su esposo que esta mujer me ha embarazado” (46). David’s presence/absence also haunts Nessa through the frequent reminders of his existence that litter her apartment: “Dos de los libros que poseo están escritos bajo el asesoramiento del propio David. Se siente extraño tener su nombre y foto de solapa en una publicación que me pertenece” (115). The physical separation of Alexia’s two families does not signify a rupture in affective ties between the two. From Nessa’s perspective, her relationship is marked not only by Alexia’s presence/absence, but David’s as well.

Significantly, there is a moment in the text where David and Nessa meet, after working to find Alexia after she disappears one of many times. Upon finding that Alexia is alive and has been incarcerated for her actions with eco-terrorist groups, Nessa describes their reaction: “David y yo nos abrazamos aliviados al encontrarla. Y nos separamos casi de inmediato, sobresaltados, como si algún afilado cuchillo hubiera cercenado de manera radical el nexo. Fue la única vez que entre nosotros hubo contacto físico más allá de un apretón de manos” (67). For Nessa, intimate contact with David marks a collision of worlds previously separated by physical distance, yet still affectively tied to one another. It is notable that the feeling described by Nessa incorporates the concept of a nexus which as been severed. The paradox of physical connection causing a desire for separation is key to understanding how the novel plays on and against the presence/absence of the body.
The decentralization of corporeality and physical presence once again highlights the ways in which Nessa and Alexia’s relationship and individual identities are marked by Puar’s notion of queer assemblage, which is “attun[ed] to intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities…assemblage underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information” (128). The notion of presence/absence moves beyond the physicality of being, and brings into question the influence of affective ties that are not hinged upon corporeal presence. This questioning of presence/absence can be extended beyond interpersonal ties—as demonstrated by the triangulated relationship between Nessa, Alexia, and David—to Nessa’s ties to her place of birth, Puerto Rico. Key to an analysis of this text is a consideration of both Nessa and Alexia’s position as transnational subjects.

The space of the island of Puerto Rico plays an important role in the text, as it is a space of memory and genesis for the two protagonists, and also the space in which both recognize their sexualities. Significantly, the space of the island is never directly named. It is first hinted at in the text through a reference to sea turtles, as Nessa describes Alexia’s photographs and what initially attracted her Alexia: “…lo que más me había llamado la atención había sido su tenacidad con los tinglares, sumado al hecho de que era mi compatriota” (22). The “tinglar,” or leatherback sea turtle, is a species of sea turtle indigenous to Puerto Rico, which, while traveling as far north as Maine, returns yearly to lay its eggs on the beaches of Puerto Rico.²⁴ Later, Nessa again refers to the island of

²⁴ For an analysis of the tinglar leatherback sea turtle’s migration and habitat, see Ian Malinow’s article in the NY Daily News: http://www.nydailynews.com/latino/puerto-rican-groups-work-save-tinglar-leatherback-sea-turtle-article-1.127856
Puerto Rico without explicitly naming it. After the Office of Domestic Terrorism of the United States threatens Alexia, she and Nessa decide to flee. Nessa recalls how “[Alexia] me tomó de la mano, hizo maletas para las dos, y se fue a refugiar conmigo a esa patria borincana que tanto extrañamos” (51). By identifying her homeland (*patria*) through references such as the *tinglar*, or by only including the adjective *borincana*, Nessa decentralizes the primacy of the geographic borders of the nation state and their supposed influence upon her national identity. While Nessa identifies with Puerto Rico and as Puerto Rican, she does so in a way that does not prioritize the nation state as an arbiter of national identity. By identifying her *puertorriqueñidad*, or “Puerto Ricanness,” through the sea turtle and through the Boricua, she eschews hegemonic identification with the nation-state, and rather identifies through cultural and natural elements of the island. 25

As such, Nessa effectively fulfills Butler’s understanding of the situated nature of power. One is always on the edge of intelligibility, and can never truly leave or exist outside of productive powers. Nessa decouples identity from geographic and political boundaries while still depending on them for her particular articulation of subjectivity. By referring to the island in ways only an informed reader would grasp, the text decentralizes the notion of the *patria* from the identification of the self as a queer transnational subject.

Similar to the notion of transversality articulated by Brian Reynolds, and more specifically applicable to the notion of queer transnationality, is Hanna Hacker’s concept *queerscapes*. For Hacker, “*queerscapes* would be a similar concept [to zones]—the perspective of queer transversal movement. Those queerscapes might be thought of as

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25 *Borinquén* is the original name of the island of Puerto Rico, given by the indigenous inhabitants. Boricua designates the original inhabitants of the island, and is used contemporarily to disidentify with colonization that has impacted the island since the fifteenth century. The use of the adjective *borincana* by Nessa indicates her relationship to her Puerto Rican identity as a disidentification with colonial practices.
transnational ‘enabling networks’ for elaborating queer understandings of space, gender, and sexuality. Representational strategies for transcultural encounters should focus on grasping the meetings between ‘localised’ and ‘globalised’ subjects in all their complexity” (79). The conceptualization of queerscapes is important for the present study, because it specifically addresses the question of sexuality, gender, space, and nation as fields of influences that work to identify and disidentify Nessa as a subject. Again, however, Nessa’s subjectivity should not be thought of as totalized or totalizing, but rather a process enacted by particular fields of identitary influence.

Nessa’s identification with Puerto Rico is also expressed through a pastiche of childhood memories that form part of the novel’s non-linear narrative. The descriptions of her childhood reveal both a previous connection to Alexia and Nessa’s transient upbringing in a far from ideal home. Nessa and Alexia grew up in the same neighborhood, and attended the same school. Despite not remembering Alexia growing up, Nessa repeatedly informs Alexia that she does remember her, and remembers being physically attracted to her. On one occasion Nessa states, “Yo no recuerdo haberla visto en el vecindario mientras crecíamos, pero de vez en cuando le digo que sí” (73). In a similar fashion, she later states “Le digo que en más de una ocasión le guiñé un ojo, seductora, porque desde pequeña me llamaron la atención las niñas machos. Esas que parecían hombrecitos concentrados. Esas que simulaban caminar como hombres, gesticular como machos, vestirse incluso como ellos” (145-6). The use of repetition is a recurrent theme in the novel, and highlights how memory and identity are both narrative constructions dependent upon repetition, affirmation, and recognition. The changes in
each repetition demonstrate the constructed nature of memory, while still maintaining a similar narrative trajectory.

When remembering her past in Puerto Rico, Nessa recounts her experiences with her family. Raised by a single mother, Nessa was consistently at the mercy of the younger men with whom her mother engaged in sexual liaisons. As a child, she becomes aware that her family is not typical. She states:

Crecí en una familia como cualquiera otra, hasta que fue necesario cruzar el borde, esa línea divisoria de los noble y lo macabro. Descubrí entonces que mi familia rozaba los límites. La repentina e inesperada ausencia de la autoridad, del punto de referencia siempre es un padre-esposo, hizo de mi madre una cazadora de hombres más jóvenes, todas crias volátiles, efebos dispuestos, hasta que dio con un lo suficientemente astuto como para quedarse más tiempo en el hogar. Y esperar. Esperar por mí. (127-8)

Nessa describes the abuse she experiences at the hands of her mother and her mother’s lovers from an emotionally distant perspective. Furthermore, she complicates the cycle of abuse through the presentation of memory as a narrative that is often disorganized, blurry, and reconfigured through time. Nessa, recounting one instance of abuse, notes:

A veces creo que es él quien saca el hacha y la lanza, y ésta va y se entierra a la cabecera de mi cama, donde estoy colocada en posición fetal y tiritando...Otras veces, es mi madre quien clava el hacha en el pedazo de madera y yo tengo colocadas las manos sobre los pechos desnudos, escondiéndolos. Así que nunca, en mis recuerdos, estoy segura de quién me abusa y quién me defiende. Y realmente no hace y ninguna diferencia. (91)

Nessa’s abuse describes a childhood marked by trauma, and a family space defined by fear. The marginalization experienced by Nessa through her mother’s actions explains why, later in the novel, she feels little emotion when her mother dies from cancer. When describing her passing she states, “dejó de ser” (136). The emotional detachment from her mother’s death is a result of her abusive childhood, and a manifestation of Nessa’s understanding of existence.
Nessa’s conceptualization of time, space, memory, and affect is marked by what Reynolds describes as transversal power, in which “reconfigurations of thought, emotion, and experiences occur when subjectivity transgresses the parameters maintaining subjective territory” (287). Nessa transgresses these parameters of subjectivity by simultaneously remembering her past while de-centralizing the importance of linear, historical time. Furthermore, her subjectivity as a categorically marked subject—be it female, Puerto Rican, a person of color, or lesbian—is curtailed specifically by positioning herself as a transversal agent. She questions ontological manifestations of subjectivity through a discourse that de-prioritizes linearity, identification, intelligibility, and stability. Similar to the notion of the transversal subject is Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the nomad. Deterritorialization is marked by nomadic waves or flows, which “go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new center to the periphery, falling back to the old center and launching forth to the new. The organization of the epistrata moves in the direction of increasing deterritorialization” (53). The nomad, for Deleuze and Guattari, is a subject that exists outside of (or perhaps better articulated as “through”) the organized, political State. The nomad moves in ways with defy the structures and organizations of the state. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points…the nomad is not at all the same as the migrant, for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle points for him are relays along a trajectory. (380)

Interestingly, this form of nomadism applies to Nessa’s position as a transnational subject and to the movement of her thoughts and the narrative progression of the novel.
Nessa’s identity does not hinge upon one particular marker of identity, nor does her self-identification as Puerto Rican depend upon the geographical space of the nation-state. Rather, she moves across fields of identification, each exerting particular influences in specific times, but in ways that are neither stable nor predictable. Nessa’s recollection of her life through memory as a nomadic process, the non-linearity of time expressed through the novel, as well as the de-essentialization of space (both geographic and abstract) present a narrative marked by queered expressions of time, space, and discourse. Nessa describes her particular understanding of time, noting, “El tiempo no es una línea recta, ni tampoco se traslada en paralelos. Es una extensa curva que va zigzagueando a comodidad” (18). This understanding of time has a concrete referent in the narrative structure of the novel, which moves back and forth between time, across geographic spaces, and through identities, rarely making explicit the who, what, when, and where of the text. Regarding the de-essentialized nature of identity markers in the text, it is only through vague references that the reader is informed of Nessa’s position as a woman of color. Furthermore, this position is only recognized through the gaze of an Other, in this case, her partner Alexia. Each reference to Nessa’s skin color is couched in an affective relation to Alexia. The revelation of skin color is not a marker of difference but of desire. However, the desire for the Other as expressed in this text demonstrates the impulse to de-essentialize difference. Nessa states, “A Alexia le gusta el negro. El color. Por eso le gusto yo. Le agrada colocar nuestros brazos en paralelo, uno junto al otro y

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26 As a political entity, Puerto Rico presents an interesting situation in the context of transnationality and movement, given its designation as a Free Associated State. Those born in Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens and may travel freely between the mainland and the island. Partly because of this freedom of movement, there are established Puerto Rican communities in the territorial United States, which complicates the definition of nationality as bound by geographic and political borders.
mirarlos a plena luz de sol, de frente los rayos para establecer los contrastes de ambas pieles” (37). While the text highlights the contrast between the skin colors, the revelation of Nessa’s skin color does not serve as a discrete category of identification, rather, it is presented as part of a spectrum of identities, again, each of which pass through Nessa as a subject, but do not concretize her identification as one over the other.

The nomadic impulse of the novel moves beyond geography, identity, and corporeality into the space of semiotics. For the protagonist, a linear, historical narrative of events does not suffice to express the multiplicity of identities and experiences that converge to form her position as a subject. Nessa eschews a cohesive, logocentric expression, and employs a form of language that defies fixity, intelligibility, and futurity. Furthermore, her use of language de-emphasizes a unitary self, while focusing upon the multiplicity of experiences that form the self of her narrative. For example, there are moments that move away from any description of events regarding Alexia’s disappearance, and rather focus on Nessa’s internal thoughts. Early in the narrative, she describes a dream:

Soy una rompecabezas incluso que la sueña. Hay nubes. Hay supernovas. Recibo una carta suya escrita con coraje…En la carta (que es un libro de fotos) redacta en letras grandes, redondas, algunas elípticas, que está comprometida para casarse con un nuevo amor conocido en una pasada protesta…me da ira, porque en el sueño puedo sentir como real que Alexia aún me pertenece. (20-21)

The description of this dream state reveals the blurring of interior psychology and exterior reality. Nessa’s emotions are so strong that sleeping and waking life do not separate them. Beyond the oneiric world of dreams, Alexis and Nessa possess a form of communication that is not dependent upon logocentric forms of language. When they first meet, the enactment of a queer gaze establishes their desire before words are even
exchanged between the two. According to Nessa, “Cuando nos conocimos me miró directamente a la boca, luego a mis senos, Así, de una manera tan descarada que entendí su preferencia enseguida” (16). This queer gaze eschews language regulated and structured by hegemonic practices, and engenders an alternative form of communication that is not couched upon verbalized expression. Nessa and Alexia also communicate through a form of telepathy, described by Nessa as “[s]us charlas telepáticas, porque entre nosotras se da el fenómeno ése de que no tenemos que hablar para saber qué piensa la otra, y con tan solo una Mirada basta para la provocación a la carcajada” (104). This form of telepathy highlights the significance of the body in acts of communication. Just as performative speech acts generate forms of being, corporeal expressions can engender forms of language and communication.27 This is a communication that crosses the boundaries of traditional language and integrates a bodily element. By integrating the body into language, the barriers between the physical (body) and the representational (language) are not broken, but rather made permeable by subjects who de-essentialize the binary division between either/or.

The final lines of the novel resonate with the conceptualization of the interdependence of time, space, identity, and self as expressed in this novel. The revelation of Alexia’s death at the end of the narrative demonstrates once again the function of absence/presence in the novel. The entire narrative swirls around Alexia’s physical absence and the construction of her narrative presence through Nessa’s memories; memories regarding the specificities of their relationship, but also the tangential recollections that form links to their story. Nessa describes finding out about

27 J.L. Austin notes that for performative speech acts, “The uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as ‘just,’ saying something” (5).
Alexia’s death: “Escuchando al médico cuando nos asegura que las pruebas de ADN han dado positivo. Es su cuerpo que finalmente ha aparecido. Sus restos. Alexia ya no está ausente” (168). Through her death, it may seem that Alexia’s presence/absence becomes fixed, as she is, according to the narrative, no longer absent. However, Nessa’s final statement does away with teleological impulse toward the future, nostalgic visions of the past, and more generally the idea of presence and absence, as she notes:

Y tiempo fue lo que necesité para convencerme que los cuerpos celestes rotan, mutan, pero no se crean ni se destruyen, como la masa. Decidí, por fin, el lugar de eterno habitación en ese otro universo. No es menta. No carece ya de su fisonomía. El tiempo no es una línea recta, ni tampoco se traslada en paralelos. Es una extensa curva que va zigzagueando a comodidad, en espirales torcidos. (172)

Through a conceptualization of time and space as non-linear, Nessa is able to come to terms with Alexia’s death. More than a form of catharsis, positing space, time, and subjectivity as non-essentialized categories queers and decentralizes notions of recognition, intelligibility, and identification. Understanding subjectivity as an outcome of transversal effects of power demonstrates how queerness and transnationality work together, undoing identification as a discrete and closed practice of naming. The move away from identifying these discrete categories, and focusing on forms of identity as rhizomatic connections that are non-essential and de-prioritized, begets the creation of affective, interpersonal bonds which challenge understandings of kinship that are hinged upon the teleological impulse of futurity, stability, and presence. It is through a consideration of queer transnationality that Caparzones effectively reconfigures kinship to describe affective ties that move beyond heteronormative conceptualizations of time, space, subjectivity, and identity.
Chapter 3
Conscripts of the Body: Transnationality and Theatre

Moving from an analysis of the novels of Santos-Febres and Arroyo Pizarro to works of theatre requires the critical reader to expand their intellectual and perceptual role to include both the act of reading and viewing. Theatre as a genre moves beyond the written page to a live enactment on stage, for a present audience. This analysis focuses on the works of Abel González Melo and Rogelio Orizondo, Cuban dramaturges who question the relationship between familial belonging, nationality, and non-traditional articulations of sexuality and gender. I will highlight the transformation of artistic representation from page to stage, analyzing the ways in which the live enactments of the works of theatre create immediacy and intimacy with their audiences. Shifting the analysis from page to stage—without prioritizing one over the other—will demonstrate more concretely the role of corporeality in the articulation of a queer transnationality. Through the performance, representation becomes a physical act and the reader/spectator dynamic becomes corporeal, as the reader/spectator must employ their own body in the act of interpretation of these works of theatre. Furthermore, the spectator of a work of a theatre piece is not a passive receptor of the actions on stage; he/she is positioned to read bodies as they perform on stage. The conventions of theatre as a physical and psychic space condition how spectators read bodies on stage, and different types of bodies are read in different ways. Furthermore, the space of the theatre conditions the bodies of the spectators: how their bodies sit, attend, keep quiet, etc. However, considering the transnational element in each play allows the reader/viewer to see how such identifications and readings are culturally conditioned and how a transnational approach challenges the fixity of cultural coding in these works of theatre.
I propose two interdependent approaches to these two plays. The analysis of *Vacas* will focus on textual representation, including an analysis of text, stage directions, and photos. I have chosen this approach for two reasons. First, it is key to demonstrate how the play functions as a text and as a live act, as such; it is necessary to include a textual analysis of the work. Secondly, I have not had the opportunity to see this play live, nor are there any extant recordings. As such it would be academically/theoretically irresponsible to analyze this work as a live act, as I have no access to such documentation. I will however, make reference to the stage directions and photographs of live stagings to give a more detailed analysis of the links between the written piece and the live act.

My analysis of *Chamaco: Informe en diez capítulos (para representar)*, (here to fore *Chamaco*), while covering key elements of the text, specifically those elements of the text that disappear in live stagings of the work, will mainly focus on the movement from page to stage. More concretely, I will analyze the staging of this work in Havana, as well as the international stagings of this work, specifically a recent staging in Madrid, 2013. Concentrating on the international stagings of this work will demonstrate the malleability of works of theatre. I will also focus on the ways bodies on stage transform written works of text, and how culturally conditioned codes of intelligibility are variant and variable to the geographic spaces in which they are acted. Staging the work *Chamaco* in various countries requires a translation of dialogue, cultural codes, spaces, and identities so that the audience may understand the play. These translations and adaptations reveal the de-centering of grand-narratives and demonstrate, paradoxically,

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28 The elements of the play text that disappear in the staging of *Chamaco* include the narrative parts, structure of the text, the asides to the reader, and the blending of literary genres.
the imposition and elimination of cultural codes that inform a specifically transnational intelligibility. Codes in the text and performance become malleable. The international viewer can understand the context of the work in distinct ways. Furthermore, Gonzalez Melo’s personal experience living in Spain shapes the rewriting of the play from a Cuban to a Spanish context. He highlights the borders and boundaries of national belonging by exploring Spain's contemporary situation regarding migration reforms. Once again, the reader/viewer finds themselves in a Butlerian realm of “never outsidedness,” however the paradoxical push and pull of codes allows the reader/viewer to construct intimate forms of meaning and understanding these texts/live acts. Analyzing the international stagings of this work demonstrates how Chamaco, both as a text and a live act, engages with a theoretical understanding of queer transnationality. Not only do the characters represent queer subjects who question identification and categorization; the text as a live act demonstrates how, moving beyond the geographic and psychic space of the nation, identification is a malleable and ever changing social and cultural construct.

Furthermore, the international acclaim of the text/live act demonstrates how González Melo, as a Cuban identified playwright living in Madrid, is able to create an expression of Cuban identity that extends beyond the geographic space of the nation state. Here, like my analysis of the Puerto Rican novelists, national identity is not couched in hegemonic understandings of national belonging. Moving beyond the nation-state while still focusing upon local issues and problems allows the text to become a transnational expression of belonging, both locally and globally.

More generally, I will also analyze the specificities of the Cuban condition of interior/exterior exile, the reconceptualized affective links between characters, the
demands of theatre as a text and a performance piece, how the performance changes a reader/viewer’s understanding of the representations of queer identity, the restrictive spatial availability caused by the stage and the paradox of utilizing this space to represent timeless/spaceless places, the duality of text/performance as compared to reader/viewer, and the works as a response to the variety of Cuban experiences in the 21st century. Regarding this Cuban experience as expressed through theatre, both plays move away from critique of the Cuban government to a critique of social conditions, including lack of opportunities, social mobility, etc. It is also important to note for my analysis that I have seen a live staging of Chamaco, in Miami, 2010, but for the play Vacas I have, to date, only been able to read the text.

In order to better the role of theatre in queer transnationality, I engage in an analysis of the theory of assemblage. Assemblage seeks to fill in the gaps left by intersectional analyses, moving away from understanding identity categories as discrete and looking to the ways in which experience and potentiality can serve as alternatives to concretized identity. While I still use the term identity within this analysis, I approach identity as encounter and process, rather than focusing on the consolidation of identity as discrete, individual, definable parts. Jasbir K. Puar highlights the potentially narrow scope of intersectionality, noting “…transnational and postcolonial scholars point out that the categories privileged by intersectional analysis do not necessarily traverse national and regional boundaries nor genealogical exigencies, presuming and producing static epistemological renderings of the categories themselves across historical and geopolitical locations” (54). This is an important point of departure for a study—like this one—that posits the necessary analysis of the nation-state and its borders as ideological and
discursive constructs. In this chapter, I analyze theatre as a process while making parallel relationships between assemblage and notions of identity formation in transnational contexts. Following Puar, I agree that “…identification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact. Identities are multicausal, multidirectional, liminal; traces are always self-evident” (59). Both Vacas and Chamaco challenge the notion that identities are discrete categories of identity. A variety of theatre critics and academic highlight how these two plays challenge the notion of set identities, as well as their assumed importance in the texts/performances. For example, regarding representations of lesbianism in Vacas, Giovanni Fernández Valdés states, “El triángulo amoroso lésbico no transcurre por los caminos trillados de la sexualidad superflua, sino que los conflictos y los puntos de giro de la drama viajan a través de reflexiones y dudas que trascienden el mero hecho de lo carnal, para introducirse en los fenómenos y problemáticas universales” (cubaliteraria.cu). Alberto Sarraín gives a similar perspective:

Las tres mujeres protagonistas se mueven en un triángulo de desesperación, oscilando entre la vida y la muerte como se moverían los personajes de cualquiera otra situación dramática. No exhortan, no proclaman, no son mártires de una sociedad machista, ni de ningún macho en particular, al menos ese no es su discurso, transita simplemente la angustia de su existencia y nos dejan decidir. (lajiribilla.cu)

Regarding the representation of race in the Vacas, Sarraín continues, “lo mismo sucede con el tema racial. Los conflictos de Betina, la protagonista negra de la obra, contienen los condicionamientos sociales que los generan, los que vive el personaje, sin que el autor pretenda teorizar sobre dichas circunstancias” (lajiribilla.cu). A similar discourse emerges around the representation of gay and transgender themes in Chamaco. While recognizing their importance, the critical discourse focuses on the universality of the
play’s tragedy. For example, Gaetano Ievolella states, “En Chamaco no hay buenos y
malos, solo hombres y mujeres, seres humanos ante la vida. Al igual que en las obras de
Esquilo y Sófocles no esperamos saber lo que ha ocurrido, sino entender la tragedia
humana que intuimos detrás de los casos de cada personaje” (Chamaco, 135). Similarly,
Habey Hechavarría Prado states:

La virtud del texto dramático radica en su multilateralidad, un sabor de tragedia
shakesperiana que soporto los rigores del referente clásico a pesar de que
pertece ne en cuer y al ma a la escritura dramática posmoderna y auténticamente
nacional. Incluso en Chamaco impersiona su compromiso con los oscuros
paisajes urbanos y las criaturas nocturnas de la noche habanera. La delincuencia
y la gama de ilegalidades, la sordidez, la marginalidad, los vericuetos de la
sensibilidad gay, recorren de lado a la textura y el amor: el cotidiano, rapaz e
inmenso amor que de manera ambigua mueve a los personajes y al entorno. Todo
es hiperreal y nada es real. (Chamaco, 137-8, my emphasis)

Rather than reading these critiques as part of a historical tradition of eliding non-
normative sexualities and the erasure of racial difference in Cuban discourses of identity
(which could be argued) it is productive—within an analysis of queer transnationality—
to engage in a reading of these critics through an approach to assemblage that prioritizes
“matter as not a thing but a doing” (Puar, 57). Perhaps we can see through theatre and
more specifically these two plays, how theatre can be “… not a theory of spectatorship
identification, but of affective intensification: the meeting of technology…bodies, matter,
molecular movements, and energetic transfers” (Puar, 61).

Before turning to the texts themselves, it is important to outline a theoretical
consideration of space, particularly the use of space in theatre, as well as the ways in
which space is marked/coded for particular uses. In works of theatre, the coding of space
is important both to the space of the stage and to the lived reality of the audience. That is
to say, works of theatre undergo certain changes in relationship to the space of theatre as
well as to the space (geographically) in which the work is performed. As such, a consideration of theories of space will enrich an analysis of the writing and staging of *Chamaco* and *Vacas*.

Foucault describes the development of conceptualizations of time as having a history in Western experience, and notes that the historical development of time is marked by three key spaces, each of which is conditioned historically: localization, extension, and position. Briefly, localization describes the space of the Middle Ages, in which there was a hierarchy of places. According to Foucault, “it was this complete hierarchy, this opposition, this intersection of places that could very roughly be called the medieval space” (22). It is Galileo who challenges the space of emplacement (localization) through “his constitution of an infinite, and intimately open space,” noting that “a thing’s place was no longer anything but a point in its movement” (23). Foucault classifies this space as extension. In the present day (or at least the present day at the time of writing *Of Other Spaces*), “space takes for us the form or relations among sites” (23). This space Foucault names “position.” Importantly, while time has been desanctified, there are still spaces that have not, and these spaces are typically described in a binary fashion to highlight the need for their division. Such spaces include: “private space and public space, family space and social space, cultural space and useful space, the space of leisure and that of work” (23). I will venture to add a new classification of space, which I will term expansion, which desanctifies both space and time. Through processes of globalization and the increase of virtual technology, both space and time become relational, especially considering how they are managed and used in global networks of transfer and through virtuality. This notion of expansion is key to a study of
queer transnationality, as it highlights the changing relationship between time, space, and embodiment.

For Foucault, there are two spaces that essentially undo certain binaries. The two spaces of utopias and heterotopias “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (3). Heterotopias, however, designate real spaces, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (2). When applying certain principles of heterotopias to the function and evolution of space in theatre, it is important first to consider how space is defined in theatre, through the terminology of Anne Ubersfeld, as well as how Gay McAuley reconceptualizes these terms. Ubersfeld focuses on the centrality of space to performance as well as the way the space of performance mediates the playtext and the sociopolitical, sociocultural context of both text and performance (18). Ubersfeld divides the space of theatre in five categories, each of which responds to certain exigencies regarding the relationship of space in theatre to sociopolitical/cultural elements. The categories described by Ubersfeld are the stage space, the scenic place, the theatrical space, the theatre space, and the dramatic space. The categories of scenic place and theatrical space are key to Foucault’s description of heterotopias as they relate to theatre. Scenic place embodies “the fictional place where the action is occurring and ‘the topological…transposition of the major features of the social space experienced by a particular group within society’” (Ubersfeld, cited in McAuley, 154). According to McAuley, Ubersfeld’s major contribution through the delineation of this category of
theatrical space is the way in which the theatrical representation incorporates sociopolitical commentary. Furthermore, McAuley signals, “spatial organization of a fictional world is always perceived in terms of ideology” (18). Theatrical space is defined rather generically as a “general notion that refers to the whole complex function of space in the theatre, brings together all the categories and distinctions Ubersfeld has made” (18). However, theatrical space can be compared to Foucault’s idea that heterotopias can juxtapose several incompatible spaces in a single real space. Theatrical space brings, as Foucault argues, “onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (25). Furthermore, theatrical space also makes possible the representation of varying temporalities, which can be easily changed, distorted, or juxtaposed on the space of the stage. As I will demonstrate, this is a key element of analysis for Chamaco and Vacas, as both create a non-linear mode of showing and telling not dependent upon a traditional teleology of theatre or narrative.

Before further analyzing how Ubersfeld’s particular categories of space in theatre, I will signal an element of analysis that is lacking in Foucault’s articulation of heterotopias, but which is analyzed in Bloomer and Moore’s Body, Memory, Architecture. Specifically, the missing link in Foucault’s analysis is the relation of the body to space. For Bloomer and Moore, architecture (and, I argue, constructions of space) is intrinsically imbued with meaning, which is given by humans. They note that from the most basic constructions, “architecture, then, developed simply from columns, walls, and roofs which were regarded as talismans. Qualities invested by humankind into those columns, walls and roofs gave meaning to the built world” (5). Furthermore, they signal the body as an organizing principle in the construction of space and the importance
of space to the formation of our body image: “the most fundamental organizing principle in the formation of our body image is that “we unconsciously locate our bodies inside a three-dimensional boundary” (37, emphasis in original). There is, therefore, a reciprocal relationship between the body and space. In emphasizing the ways in which space conditions the body, the authors note, “although we are capable of an infinite range of movements, most of us move within a fairly narrow range of our possible spectrum. One of the critical determinants of this range is the built environment: the space and stuff that we construct and inhabit (59). On a more detailed level, the authors note how the specificities of a particular space can condition actions, movements, and emotions: “Richard Upjohn’s Connecticut State Capitol [has] corridors, halls, and stairways [that] are faceted with body-sized articulation that welcome our presence…smooth surfaces invite close contact…changes in texture often signal special events and can trigger a slowing or quickening of ones pace” (70-1). All of these examples demonstrate the important link between bodies, how they move in space, and how said movement is conditioned by space.

Ubersfeld’s description of theatre space (as opposed to theatrical space) is important to consider in regards to how the body moves in space. Her description of theatre space can be understood in terms of Foucault’s articulation of a heterotopia. For Ubersfeld, theatre space is more specific that theatrical space, because it designates the place of the performance, both the theater building, as well as the divided spaces within the theatre. Theatre space is that which “brings together actors and spectators in a

29 Virtuality and digital technologies will challenge the location of the body in a three-dimensional boundary, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter.
relationship which depends essentially on both the physical form of the auditorium and the form of social organization” (Ubersfeld, cited in McAuley, 142). This articulation of theatre relates to Bloomer and Moore’s analysis of the relationship between body and space. Ubersfeld’s conceptualization goes further, however, to consider functions of social organization, which serve to codify and regulate the space of the theatre.

McAuley’s expansion of Ubersfeld’s categories of theatre space demonstrates a more detailed description of the “regulated” space of theatre and how it conditions the spatial organization of bodies. More generally, McAuley focuses her analysis on performance and the interrelations between space (physical space of theatre, of the scenography, of performance itself, among others) and of performance. Rather than analyzing theatre from the text (as a literary analysis, and as is historically the case in studies on theatre) she is interested in conducting a semi-ethnographic study of the performances themselves, stemming from a 10 year period of observation of a theatre group in Sydney. There is, for McAuley, a vital connection between physical space and the artistic communication in question that critics and theorists have only recently begun to explore (1). She is interested in the immediacy of the act of theatre and of its physiological reality, which is situated in the actor’s body (2). That theatre must “take place” somewhere implies its deep connection to space. The empty space of the theatrical stage (and of the theatre space) is “the condition that alone makes possible the simultaneous presence of performer and watcher” (3). The essence of theatre is in the relationship between performer and spectator. The two essential elements of theatre as performance, as derived from various definitions, are that theatre takes place live and that it requires the simultaneous presence of performer and spectator. McAuley’s expanded
focus on the body is analogous to Bloomer and Moore’s focus on the body in space, however, McAuley clearly focuses her analysis particularly on the relationship of bodies to one another in the space of theatre.

In regards to the expansion of Ubersfeld’s categories, McAuley articulates a spatial category that relates specifically to the conditioning of the body in the physical space of the theatre. Her description of performance space highlights the ways in which the presence of actors and audience work together to create the performance. For McAuley, performance space is the coming together of audience space and practitioner space. It is the space where “the two constitutive groups (performers and spectators) meet and work together to create the performance experience…” (26). In conceptualizing the space of theatre as a heterotopia, McAuley’s intervention gives recognition to the audience in the creation of the performance experience, which is highly important, since it functions to include all elements of a society, particularly the living beings of a society.

The audience/performer dichotomy can be undone through a parallel reading of Foucault’s articulation of the utopia of the mirror. For Foucault, the mirror is a utopia and a heterotopia:

It is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there…The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

Similarly, the experience between audience and spectator can be paralleled to the experience of the mirror. Both audience and performer see themselves reflected in one
another, especially in the moments in which the audience is invited into the fictional space of the place (specifically when actors break the fourth wall), however the division between the audience space and the practitioner space, the physicality of the mirror (understood here as the space which divides stage and seating) continually forces both actors and performers to recognize the division between them.

In a further expansion of concepts of space in theatre, as well as analyses of performance over the text, *Potentials of Space* by Allison Oddey and Christine White analyzes the potential intersections between scenography and performance. Specifically, the work investigates how space changes and develops the project of scenography and performance. Their analysis “attempts to show the interdependence and relationship between experiments, which see the potentials of scenography and performance and demonstrates the multiple narratives of Scenography and Performance as experimental communication” (12). Highlighting the interaction between space and performance, the introduction notes, “Scenography explores time and space performatively. Space has become practice, a practice of space rather than a presentation of space. The scenography becomes the performance, and the experience of the space for the spectator is integral to the performance of the experience” (12). This conceptualization is important because it breaks the barriers between performance, scenography (staging), time, and space. It considers how these elements work together (along, of course, with the text) in the formation of an experience. This notion is directly related to the concept of assemblage and my reading of theatre in the spaces of queer transnationality.

To the present moment, this essay has described the importance of divisions of space, and particularly how the body interacts in space and is conditioned by space.
However, an element not yet discussed is how space conditions physical and ideological aspects of the body. The works of social geographers such as David Bell and Gill Valentine highlight the ways in which space is produced in a way to reinforce heteronormative articulations of bodies. For their particular understandings of space, they apply Judith Butler’s notion of performativity, which argues that sex is a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs. This production occurs through highly regulated practices. For social geographers, this notion is extended to space, to underscore how “space is a performative act naturalised through repetition --and destabilized by the mere presence of invisiblised sexualities” (Bell and Valentine, 18).

Returning to Bloomer and Moore, it is possible to see the intellectual development of queer space from some of Bloomer and Moore’s arguments. For example, the idea that the body is conditioned by space is a precursor to the idea that space is conditioned by ideologies and that ideologies are conditioned by space. This can be extended further to Bell and Valentine’s contention that the gendering/sexing of space conditions the body’s comportment in space, as well as how the body is identified by others. Problematically, however, Bell and Valentine’s argument “builds upon a commonsense notion that space is unencumbered—naked if you like—and can thus be dressed in any way: any sexual identity can assume space, and space can assume sexual identity” (18). This statement is problematic not because it makes possible the understanding of space as a mutable entity, which I believe it is. It is possible to queer space, as shown in the examples of mock gay marriages, kiss-ins, and through other performative acts of resistance that occupy public spaces. What is problematic, however, which McAuley, Ubersfeld, Oddey and White, and Bloomer and Moore, among others note is that space is conditioned historically, and
because always located in history, will carry that charge with it. Oddey and White note in their analysis of uses of found space in both theatre and performance that “the use of found space did show that buildings and spaces had existing character, ambience and dramatic potential” (14). Furthermore, Bloomer and Moore repeatedly highlight how physical structures (specifically in their physicality) influence a body’s reception of space. While I agree with Bell and Valentine’s assertion that space can be gendered in any specific way, and further that it can be radically de-heteronormativized, I do think it is important to not strip all conditions of space away with the assertion that space is essentially naked, specifically because it is always situated in relation to the body, history, and other spaces. For both Chamaco and Vacas, it is necessary to recognize how space renders the body in particular ways, both physically and psychically. That is to say, the space of the theatre—be it nationally or on the micro-scale—conditions the ways bodies move and how they are read. Similarly, on a psychic level, the relationship between actors and audience is conditioned corporeally and historically, and creates bodies that read in distinct and changing ways. This is particularly evidenced in Chamaco, owing to the transnational movement of the text and performance across cultural and national borders.

Beyond the space of the theatre, it is important to consider how issues of transnationality and sexual identity relate to Foucault’s categories of spaces. Furthermore, it is possible to relate the issues of transnationality to the concept of heterotopia, both in physical space and in theatrical space. Because Foucault’s categories of spaces describe the historical conceptualization of space as it has developed from the Middle Ages to the present day, it is less productive to understand issues of
transnationality and sexual identity in regards to this categorization, however, it is quite productive to consider how transnationality, sexual identity, and queer spaces (as described by social geographers) relate to the concept of heterotopia.

Transnationality describes the process of moving beyond the physical, geographical borders of a nation-state, while still recognizing the effects said boundary has in situating one’s identity. The space of the Caribbean is particularly implicated in ideas of transnational subjectivity for a number of reasons. Geographically, the proximity of the islands to one another as well as to the United States, the large number of people who immigrate from the Hispanic Caribbean demonstrate the physical transnational flows between nations. The ties between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States include the status of Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth, which allows open travel back and forth from the US to Puerto Rico, U.S. presence in Cuba during the first half of the 20th century and the mass exodus of Cubans in the 1960s after the revolution, as well as in the early 1980s with the Mariel boat lift, and in the case of the Dominican Republic the U.S. occupations of 1916-1924 and 1965-1966 created a physical link between the United States and the Caribbean. In her analysis of transnationality in works of literature, Dara Goldman notes that the “process of Caribbean self-fashioning, the literary and cultural discourses through which Caribbean identities are performed and negotiated, are thus realized by means of the relationship between the island and the nation” (28). This analysis specifically relates to the link between the geographical spaces of the island to the place of the nation. However, considering the transnational communities of the islands undoes the understanding that the geographical borders of the island guard the nation-state. By displacing the geographical specificity of the island for an articulation of
national identity outside its borders, the space of the island becomes heterotopic for many living in diaspora communities. However, the conceptualization of the island as a heterotopia is in no way homogeneous. For example, Goldman argues that the novel *Dreaming in Cuban* conceives the island as a heterotopia of crisis, where the island “is imbued with sacred qualities and becomes tied to a rite of passage through which members of a society, who are compelled to travel through this space, are transformed and become able to assume a more privileged position once the reenter the quotidian social space” (175). The idea of the island as a heterotopia of crisis is also visible in works such as *Memory Mambo*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, the performances of Ana Mendieta, the performance of Carmelita Tropicana, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, among many other U.S. Latino novels and performances.

Turning more specifically to analyses of Latin America, theatre, and the concept of the nation, Gail A. Bulman presents a fascinating study of the use and transformation of intertextuality in contemporary Latin American theatre. Her work questions the notion of nationality and belonging, and particularly how contemporary playwrights use intertextuality to create new discourses surrounding the nation. This understanding of belonging is central to the present study, however it will be approached through an analysis of transnational movement. She analyzes the history of the Latin American nation, noting, “though unstable, nation is, more than anything, a linguistic concept, for it is language that defines both the territory and those who belong to it” (15). The concept of nation is produced discursively, and this linguistic shaping of the nation works effectively to include certain citizens and to exclude others. This is an interesting
concept when considering the geographic space of the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{30} The geographic spaces that make up these islands are physically limited/restricted due to the fact that physical expansion is nearly impossible, as the sea surrounds islands.

However, the geographic limitation does not exclude the psychic or cultural expansion of the island beyond its geographic borders. This is a central issue for my understanding of queer transnationality. The space of physical and psychic movement between geographic places makes possible the reconfiguration of national identities and national belonging. While the geographically delimited space of the island still necessarily codes and influences identity and identification, physical presence is this space is not a condition for belonging. In fact, in the case of marginalized populations including members of LGBTQ communities and those who settle from other nations, physical presence on the island may be a very real danger.\textsuperscript{31} Importantly, national policies shape national belonging, defining who fits within a particular national project and who does not. As Bulman notes “…while the national may be a tangible geographic space, delineated by set boundaries and imagined by a certain ‘national’ community, the nation also ‘lives’ inside each national citizen, whether or not that national being resides within the nation’s borders” (31). As such, the experience of transnationalism, whether by those who live outside of the geographic borders of the island or by those who remain there, is reshaping how individuals define nationality and national belonging.

Furthermore, as Bulman signals, “transnationalism, in its many manifestations, is

\textsuperscript{30} As part of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic is a distinct case, as it shares a geographic island with Haiti. As such, the Dominican Republic as a nation has the physical possibility of expanding its geographic territory.

\textsuperscript{31} See the current situation for LGBTQ identified Jamaicans, the constitutional changes regarding citizenship in the Dominican Republic, or the persecution of homosexuals in Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s.
reconfiguring national discourses” (32). Regarding the works Chamaco and Vacas, the issue of national belonging is presented in a way that challenges the traditional binary of here versus there, or belonging versus exile. Specifically, these works fall in a more contemporary trend in which these issues are not defined along a binary. In agreement with Bulman, “tensions are not between a right and leftist perspective, between bad government and good citizens, or between immigrants and nationals; rather, tensions are simultaneously within, in favor of and against self, and within, in favor of and against nation. Ironically, it is within this ambiguous space called nation, that the space of struggle, where both nation and nationality attempt to be defined” (33).

Since Aristotle's Poetics, there has been a debate surrounding theatre as a genre, specifically regarding the role of the theatrical text versus the performance of said text. This duality, rather than being read as a binary, can and does exemplify the beautifully queer nature of theatre. Theatre is in fact, both text and performance at the same time. Reading queer transnationality through theatre undoes binaries between genres, and creates a space between text and performance in which this literary/performative aesthetic can be read both ways. My particular reading of these texts and performances calls for the need to look a theatre as a space in which text and performance work together to create a deeper understanding of the genre.

Bert O. States takes a phenomenological approach to theatre, investigating the ways in which experience shapes the theatre text. This analysis is key to understand the role of assemblage in queer transnational theatre. His approach is in relation and opposition to a semiotic approach to theatre, which considers that all elements on the stage function as a sign, as a representation or stand in for the “real” world. According to
States, the theatre “becomes an event in a self-contained illusion outside the world of praxis but conceptually referring to that world in some way, if only in the fact that the illusion is about hypothetical human beings” (441, emphasis in original). There is a historical precedent to an analysis of theatre through semiotics, owing to the fact that theatre is traditionally seen as representational; of the “real” world and the play text that precedes its enactment on the stage. However, a consideration of the phenomenological aspects of theatre allows one to approach theatre as an experience in itself. For States, “…there is a sense in which signs…achieve their vitality—and in turn the vitality of theater—not simply by signifying the world but by being of it” (441-2). In order to relate the phenomenological edge of theatre, States highlights the role of art and artistic projects by quoting Shklovsky, who states, “the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known” (Shklovsky, quoted in States, 442). As such, a consideration of the unfamiliar is key to experiencing theatre as praxis. This unfamiliarity in theatre is achieved through the play text, particularly through the use of sound, staging, and performance. The physicality of theatre as it is enacted upon the stage can allow for new readings of the body, achieved through the specific ways actors use the body. The corporeality of theatre, as opposed—but not in opposition—to theatre’s textuality, creates an experiential axis for the spectator. For States, reading, unlike viewing “presents no phenomenal distraction” (444). While reading does allow for envisionment, or playing the play in the mind’s eye to the reader’s specifications, in the theatrical presentation, the play is already set up and enacted to the specifications of various players: the actors, director, producer, etc. However, as States notes, “What the text loses in significative power in the theater it gains in corporeal presence, in which
there is extraordinary perceptual satisfaction. Hence the need for rounding out a semiotics of theater with a phenomenology of its imagery—or, if you will, a phenomenology of its semiology” (445). This quotation is particularly significant, as it highlights the interrelation between phenomenology and semiology, rather than considering them as oppositional categories.

The relationship between phenomenology and semiology is key to my approach to theatre, in which I consider the totality of the theatre-text, both on the level of narrative and performance. This chapter serves as a lynchpin for my analyses of narrative and performance, as theatre encompasses both. It is my attempt, then, to consider both drama and performance, and to underscore, through these plays, the continuum of representative power that flows from narrative representation (on the page) to performance based representation (on the stage/body). This analysis of textuality and corporeality is key to my understanding of queer transnationality, as it is an experience that is simultaneously represented and lived by the artists and authors who exist in this realm of queer transnationality. Particularly for theatre, which travels and whose representation is malleable depending upon director, actors, and location, underscoring the relationship between text and body is key for a consideration of queer transnationality. The text itself is challenged in the movement of these works, while the primacy/stability of identity and identification is challenged through textual and on-stage representation of Cuban identity. Particularly important for an analysis of Chamaco is a consideration of the various versions in different countries, which change the subject-positions of the characters to more closely fit the realities of the nations in which they are presented.
My approach to transnationality engages Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizomatic for my specific articulation of queer transnationality. Specifically, I argue that queer transnationality highlights the fluidity of all voluntary and involuntary identifications assumed or imposed by binary and hierarchical naming powers. Within the context of twenty-first century transnationality, identities become rhizomatic assemblages, in which belonging and naming are not couched upon geographic or cultural localizations. As such, an analysis of the relationship between Deleuze and performance is key to understanding the overarching concept of queer transnationality, as well as to create a link between artistic representation and lived experiences in transnational contexts. As Laura Cull demonstrates, a primary link between Deleuze and Performance Studies is “a shared concern to shift the focus from thinking in terms of discrete objects and subjects, towards a concern with processes, relations and happenings (Schechner 2006: 1-2, cited in Cull, 3). This focus on processes, relations and happenings within the realm of theatre requires an analysis of these terms for both drama and performance. In one of Deleuze’s few writings on theatre, “One Less Manifesto,” he highlights “the need to perform a critical operation: the removal from theatre of what he calls ‘the elements of Power” (Cull, 5). Specifically, this Power is situated in representation, where “representation means the assumption and imposition of stasis upon that which perpetually differs from itself” (Cull, 5). Theatre as a genre challenges the stasis of representation, both through its fluidity as a genre, as well as through its transnational movement and translation.

It is necessary to briefly consider the historical role theatre has in Latin America. In Historia multicultural del teatro y las teatralidades en América Latina, Juan Villegas
analyzes the intersections between theatre and other cultural practices in Latin America. Particularly, he analyzes how “cultura como discurso pragmático que llevara cabo una síntesis de las interrelaciones entre cultura como discurso y planteó la posibilidad de que la columna vertebral de una historia de la cultura y del teatro fuesen los desplazamientos de poder de los sectores productores de cultura y asumir sus consecuencias y efectos en el supuesto básico: América Latina como pluralidad cultural” (12). He reads theatre as a discourse, as “un acto de comunicación entre un emisor y un destinatario (receptor) en una situación específica, en el cual el emisor utiliza una pluralidad de signos…para construir un imaginario social y comunicar un mensaje a sus receptores (15). Here, I interject to clarify my interpretation of Villegas’ use of the word mensaje. I read the use of this term within a vocabulary of semiotics, in which something is transmitted to the audience and read or signified by the spectator. I do not read the use of this term with any moralistic underpinnings, in which the message is pedagogical or to affect some sort of change. Important to Villegas’ analysis is the concept of a cultural system, which stems from his analysis of culture as a “sistema semiótico plurisignico por medio del cual los participantes de un sistema social establecen comunicación, construyen un sistema de valores y establecen una tradición de valores sociales y culturales” (16). While Villegas argues “la cultura como discurso cultural se configura en una continua relación de conflictividad de poderes en busca de hegemonía o como consecuencia de las reacciones frente a las tendencias hegemonizantes de grupos dentro de la sociedad” (16), he goes on to state “…en un determinado momento histórico coexisten varios sistemas cultuales, de los cuales algunos tiene la capacidad de imponerse como dominantes y otros quedan como marginales o subyugados” (16). While Villegas recognizes a historically situated
binary between hegemony and marginalized peoples, he also sets the stage for an important reconceptualization regarding the nature of cultural distribution and reception. Importantly, if we take Villegas contention that “[la] concepción de la cultura como sistema semiótico obliga a entender a América Latina como una pluralidad de macro sistemas y minisistemas culturales, relacionados entre sí, en continua transformación de hegemonía y marginalidad fundada en la conflictividad de poderes políticos, culturales, y económicos” (16), we can see the networked relationship between cultural production and reception. While not Villegas’ mission to undo these binaries, I find it particularly productive to read this analysis of macro and mini systems of culture as a challenge to the binary between hegemony and margin. Particularly in relation to Deleuze, this analysis recognizes the power of a ‘plurisigned semiotic system’ to eschew hegemonic validation while still recognizing the very real existence of differential power relations.

If we consider how various cultural systems exist at the same time, it is possible to render the relationships between speaker and receptor of the varying cultural systems in a way that challenges the binary division of power established in the concept of hegemony. That is to say, a multiplicity of cultural systems becomes rhizomatic (à la Deleuze) and challenges a two-party system of power. Taking the varying stagings of Chamaco into consideration, it is possible to see how the text is a malleable cultural product that changes to speak exactly to the multiple cultural systems (here understood as groups of people) that may see the play. Or looking to Vacas as a work of drama, the blending of traditional stage directions with a more narrative form challenges a traditional (hegemonic) reading of theatre as text, while creating a drama open for interpretation upon its staging. As Villegas states, “…tanto un discurso teatral como otras practicas
escénicas y culturales corresponden a procesos de comunicación instrumentalizados por los productores, en los cuales los códigos utilizados varían de acuerdo con la cultura legitimada en los sectores correspondientes” (17).

However, rather than emphasizing the power the ‘legitimated culture’ has in regards to the creation of theatrical discourse and the staging, it is perhaps more productive to analyze the ways in which the multiplicity of cultural codes/signs and cultural systems works to undo the supposed legitimating power of hegemonic culture. For example, each cultural system can create artistic/representative practices that go hand-in-hand with the reality of the creators (be they socially/culturally intelligible or not). They become micro-systems with a rhizomatic function that respond to individual or specific realities that do not require legitimation from hegemonic culture, particularly because they are created and received by specific, non-central groups. By considering these cultural systems as systems we can understand these plays as nodes in a network of cultural production, that are no longer (fully) dependent upon the legitimating forces of “high culture.”

This is a particularly pertinent argument when considering the role of transnationality and virtuality in the conceptualization and representation of the works analyzed in this study.

Considering Rogelio Orizondo’s Vacas (2008) it is possible to see the ways in which identities as discrete categories are challenged through a notion of assemblage. Furthermore, the play as a text is significant in its relationship to representation, time, and space. The text challenges the fixity of textual narrative, opting for a way of telling that

32 There is still a very real distance between centralized and marginalized populations and the very real effect power has upon the everyday lives of people. I hope to highlight the ways in which certain forms of artistic/aesthetic representation begin to challenge this binary, without denying its still very real impact on everyday life in Latin America and worldwide.
eschews linearity and cohesion. *Vacas* represents the lives of Eva, Liuba, and Betina, three lesbian women who live an atemporal existence marked by radically queer and feminist actions. There is not necessarily a plot of events that the play follows; Eva recollects her work in a slaughterhouse and the loss of her younger sister. Liuba works as a cleaning lady in an oncology suite, and through the text attempts to reconcile that her mother abandoned her by dreaming of returning to Russia. Betina aspires to perform in a cabaret, while musing upon her past life in public relations.


Although the geographic location of the play is never explicitly stated, certain key facts signal that the events most likely take place in Cuba, including facts revealed about Eva’s job, the revelations that Betina gives regarding her African ancestors, and Liuba’s Russian heritage. Importantly, these three spaces are triangulated in a way that creates a temporally conditioned form of transnationality.
Transnational movement marks the characters. However, this transnational interaction is historically situated in the African slave trade to Cuba, as well as the Cold War movement of Cubans and Russians. As such, the notion of queer transnationality in this text is considered with relation to time, history, and representation. The movement in this text is not physical; rather it is representational movement through time and history that marks the aspect of queer transnationality in this play. The temporality of the work is a very important element, and the protagonists in *Vacas* live atemporally. While there is a narration of past memories, the majority of the dialogue occurs in a hyperreal present, demonstrated by the drastic movement from one scene to the next. For example, in scene VIII, the final stage directions state “Eva somete a Betina. Se besan y se muerden. La sangre del cuello de las dos, cae al suelo y corre” while the first stage directions in scene IX locate the reader/spectator in front of a dental clinic: “Afuera de la clínica dental, Eva y Liuba esperan a Betina” (43). This drastic movement between spaces destabilizes the traditional linearity of plot progression while at the same time questions notions of time. It is notable that the only explicit enunciation of a temporal marker occurs before the final scene, when Betina signals the passing of “Un año entero. Parece increíble” (54). Regarding the relationship between space and the characters of this play, Alberto Sarraín signals the important intersection between discourse and encounter: “Orizonto opta por dotar a sus personajes de espacios de conflicto individuales, que se interceptan en algún punto del universo circunstancial, construyendo la relación entre ellas como tres monólogos que se cruzan en el único lugar posible, el del encuentro” (*Vacas*, 11). This quote marks the importance of the relationship between
discourse and encounter, and the concept of assemblage helps us to read these transnational works of theatre in new ways.

For Puar, in assemblage (as opposed to intersectionality), “…bodies are unstable entities that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into identity formations” (56). Assemblage hinges upon the role of experience and potentiality, rather than identity as a discrete formation. This understanding of potentiality is key for analyzing theatre in new ways. Following Bryan Massumi’s analysis of mass media: “what the mass media transmit is not fundamentally image-content but event-potential” (cited in Puar, 61). It is quite possible and productive to expand this understanding of the function of media to other artistic outlets, especially that of theatre.

When one considers critical analyses of *Vacas*, as previously noted, there is an impulse to disengage with an analysis of discrete categories of identity as politically contestatory forms of being, and rather to focus on the event-potential, following Massumi. The move away from understanding or foregrounding categories of identity in *Vacas* allows for an analysis of this play and the genre of theatre in which “categories—race, gender, sexuality—are considered event, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects” (Puar, 58). This is particularly salient when one considers how the characters interact. Their interactions are marked by physical contact and exchange. For example, regarding a violent encounter between Betina and Eva, which starts violent and then turns sexual, Betina describes how female lions kill prey. The stage directions state “Betina le destapa la boca a Eva y le pone el cuello. Eva la muerde. Betina le vuelve a tapar la boca.” Betina then states: “Usan sus dientes a pesar de que les falte uno. Nunca sus garras. Es el contacto con la presa, de
boca a cuello, lo que les produce el éxtasis…” (41). This moment demonstrates the
significance of experience and contact, of the encounters between bodies marked by
power relations. This is a particularly physical encounter, however, Puar’s understanding
of assemblage also allows for less physical events, actions, or encounters, particularly
through a relationship with space and time.

The representation of time and space is key to understanding the role of
assemblage in theatre. Rather than a blending of past, present, and future, the concept of
cyclical time is central to *Vacas*. For example, in the fourth scene Liuba recounts the
events of the first scene exactly as they are physically represented in the first scene. In
fact, there is no clear indication of the beginning or the end of the plot. It begins in
*medias res*, with an altercation between Betina and a doorman.

This first scene lays bare the processes of theatre as a genre, as it is Betina who
introduces herself through a third person narrative. However, a stage direction precedes
the first line of text, which states, “Betina se cura una herida en la boca” (*Vacas*, 19).
Significantly, before even introducing herself to the audience through a third person
narrative, the stage directions demonstrate a self-reflexive action in which Betina takes
care of herself by curing a wound. The narrative begins as follows: Betina: “Betina llega
da la puerta del cabaret y se para frente al portero. Un cigarrito, dice, uno solo. Betina es
una negra hermosa y el portero no la mira. Será por mi vestida viejo, piensa” (*Vacas*, 19).
This introductory scene places Betina, one of the main characters, in the role of a
narrator, who narrates what she is doing as she simultaneously completes these actions on
stage. This significant moment in the text that highlights the relationship between
discourse and physical action will be revisited throughout the plot. Betina, in her
narration, takes on the role of both narrator and stage directions, as she explicitly
enunciates the actions that she takes on stage. She then enunciates the dialogue she is
speaking in the moment, as seen in the second sentence and the interruption of the word
dice in the line of dialogue. Betina verbalizes her physicality in the third sentence,
highlighting the blurred distinctions between protagonist, narrator, and stage directions.
In the last sentence quoted above, Betina narrates and verbalizes what is, in the text, an
interior thought. Betina, through this type of interaction between dialogue and action,
simultaneously emphasizes her role as a protagonist, while complicating this role through
the relationship between her dialogue as action and her dialogue as description of action.
Furthermore, her first action in the text and performance, enunciated through the first
stage directions—the first lines of the text—is also self-reflexive. She highlights, both
through dialogue and action, the relationship between the play text and the performance,
as well as between textual, oral, and corporeal discourses.

Erika Fischer-Lichte investigates the tension between drama (written text) and
orality (the performance), and opts for an analysis that places the two in dialogue, rather
than in opposition. However, Fischer-Lichte states that there are “fundamental
differences between the performance of a drama and its literary text in terms of both the
media and the semiotics. Drama, with its fixed, written text, belongs to the class of
monomedia texts. The performance, on the other hand, which at very least is
communicated by two media—the stage and the actor—belongs to the class of
multimedia texts” (510). The distinction between monomedia and multimedia texts,
however, does not make them mutually exclusive. Rather, it is important to consider the
ways in which the two work together both on the level of text and on the level of performance.

Scene II provides a glimpse at the relationship between time and discourse, specifically regarding the notion of time as a discursive construct. Liuba states:

Hoy, casi nunca digo hoy, no sé por qué utilizo mañana, mañana acabaré más rápido de limpiar, mañana sabré en qué parará la telenovelas, mañana me compraré un vestido nuevo, mañana llamaré a mi madre, mañana me iré, por fin mañana me iré, y todos los días así, como si la palabra mañana y el día de mañana fueran la misma jodida cosa. (21-2)

This quote demonstrates the deconstruction of time and futurity as essential components of a teleological narrative progression. It also disconnects the potentiality of the future as a means of change. Rather, the play focuses the categories of time—past, present, and future—as concepts (discursively constructed) that relate to one another in a way that challenge time as a construct. Following Puar, “in *agencement*, as John Phillips explains, specific *connections with* other concepts is precisely what gives them their meaning. Concepts do not prescribe relations, nor do they exist prior to them; rather, relations of force, connection, resonance, and patterning give rise to concepts” (57, emphasis in original). As such, it is the experiential relationship between past, present, and future that drives these characters, rather than either a linear progression through time or a discrete relationship to time as a stabilizing concept. There is also a social reading for Liuba, as ‘tomorrow’ for her is an empty concept because every day is the same and there is no significant change.

Regarding the linearity of time and its relationship to specified outcomes, the play focuses not on conflicts and resolutions, but rather on the ways in which the three women relate to one another. One of the most significant events in the play involves an attack
against the slaughterhouse where Eva works as an administrator. In Scene III Eva describes the attack, stating “veinte mujeres encapuchadas irrumpieron en el pacífico local con enormes machetes en las manos. Vinieron en motos. Todos creían que era una caravana de las organizaciones feministas. Y gritaban los estúpidos lemas de los derechos de mujer. Pero no, eran mujeres hambrientas” (24). After any important revelation is made in this play, especially revelations that could move the plot forward, the characters leave discussion of said event aside and continue on to another discussion. While it is true that the event is discussed and resolved, the discussion does not occur in a linear way, but rather it is presented as a consequence of a tangential development in the plot. The quotation regarding the women attacking the slaughterhouse signals the connection between categories of identity—in this case feminist—and the preconceived idea of how a woman should behave. However, instead of being a demonstration, the attack against the slaughterhouse responds to exigent realities. The female attackers are starving, and their attack is not political, but rather of necessity. Furthermore, the attack does not provoke reproach from Eva, but rather she uses the attack as a means of changing the system of product distribution from the slaughterhouse in order to feed and subsequently empower the women. Eva indicates that “si cada semana logro aumentar las cifras de las carnicerías, las mujeres no tendrán miedo de tener hijos, ni expulsar calorías, ni extensas lubricaciones en los orgasmos y crecerá el número poblacional femenino, saludable y feliz” (40). Later she resolves the women’s problems, stating “…autoricé un envío completo a las mujeres embarazadas del país. Mil ochocientas treinta y dos vacas para las mujeres embarazadas” (48). Rather than emphasizing the representation of lesbian identity of the three protagonists and the subsequent political
use of this identity, the work underscores this identity category as a part of the characters’ totality.

It is also noteworthy that lesbianism is not represented to the reader/spectator as a radical identity, but rather emerges as an integrated element of the plot, yet not the central axis of the narrative. As such, the work demonstrates how the protagonists’ homosexuality is, paradoxically, tacit and explicit at the same time. While the representation of the characters clearly foregrounds them as lesbians, the social and political maneuvering of this identitary axis is less explicit. Following the notion of assemblage, the experience of lesbianism and its emergence in the text is part of the event-experience of the action of the play, rather than a politicized category of identity. Following the concept of assemblage: “…bodies are unstable entities that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into identity formations” (Puar, 56).

Although the presentation explicitly marks the women as lesbian characters, this information is never directly revealed for the reader and/or spectator. That is to say, there is no moment of coming out of the closet in this work, similarly to Chamaco. In the works of Orizondo and González Melo, queer subjects are explicitly represented, but queer identity is not the organizational axis around which the works spin. Rather, it is the manner in which queer subjects live in worlds where visibility and “outness” are not foregrounded as explicitly necessary to queer identity. Queerness is managed strategically in these works, in order to situate the self as an active agent within the regulations of a heteronormative system.

Abel González Melo’s Chamaco (2006) takes up similar themes to Vacas, including the representation of identity, the role of experience in theatre, as well as
creating a specifically transnationally queer form of theatre. My analysis of _Chamaco_ will begin with an analysis of the original Cuban version of the text, and then proceeds to a comparative analysis of the Cuban version with a version culturally translated for a Spanish audience in 2013. My aim in engaging with a comparative reading of these two texts is to demonstrate the malleability of theatre as a genre, specifically with regards to cultural translations in both the text and the staging of this play.

_Chamaco_ recounts, in reverse chronology, the murder of Miguel by a young man, Kárel. The text interweaves the lives and families of Miguel and Kárel, while recounting the sexual relationships that develop between Kárel and Silvia (Miguel’s sister), Kárel and Alejandro (Miguel’s father), and the sexual tension between Kárel and Miguel, highlighted at the beginning of the play. On the stage, the work blends temporalities that complicate linear narrative plot. Notably, the play begins at the end of the action, and from there presents the main events of the play through the use of analepsis. The action occurs “entre el lunes 23 y el jueves 26 de diciembre,” and in the play, there are strong and noticeable shifts between temporalities, which many times occur in the same scene.

The work makes use of a blending of literary genres. The stage directions read in a narrative fashion, and give the reader more information than what is represented on a live stage. The naming of scenes as ‘chapter’ demonstrates how the play blends literary genres, considering that traditionally plays are divided into scenes. The subtitle of the play, “para representar,” in English “to perform,” indicates the objective of the work, which is the performance of the play on stage. Regarding the relationship between these blended genres and the role of the spectator, Habey Hechavarria Prado states, “Las zonas de indeterminación o de duda son tan amplias que el texto acoge la participación directa
del autor a través de la función—a veces narrativa o de comentario—de las acotaciones, para crear más ambigüedad y exigir aún más la participación del lector, potencial espectador” (Chamaco, 138). This relationship between reader, spectator, play, and participation is highlighted in “Deleuze’s concept of theatrical presence, as a non-representational relation between audience and event, suggests one context in which we might apprehend ontological presence as becoming—the perpetual variation or difference-in-itself that, for Deleuze, constitutes the real” (Cull, 5). That is to say, theatrical presence is implicit both in the text and the performative manifestation of the play. By comparing these two manifestations, the reader can perceive the potentiality of the text towards a physical manifestation, and the physical manifestation of the play requires a form of negotiation with the audience that is based upon not necessarily faithful representation, but rather the transmission of an experience. This relationship is couched in a phenomenological understanding, following States’ analysis previously discussed in this chapter.

The stage directions in Chamaco also blend temporalities and genres. For example, the first stage direction in Chapter 1 notes that Roberta López, the guardian of the park “[q]uiso confiar en alguien, optar por algo. Ningún auto se detenía al doblar del parque. Y el cuerpo permanecía allí. Todo eso ella lo dictaría luego para la redacción última del informe, de una manera exhaustiva y organizada” (21). This quote demonstrates the way in which linguistic temporalities complicate a linear reading of the text. Furthermore, it introduces both the genre of narrative as well as the informe or police testimony. The play represents characters who live on the margin of society, and who live in a temporality that is distinct from hegemonic conceptualizations of linear
time. As can be seen in the work, the majority of the action occurs during the night, which is interpreted as an alternative temporality for the characters, as most consider nighttime to be a time designated for rest and in-home activities. The stage directions also demonstrate how *Chamaco* represents and performs the literary genre of the detective novel, which generally reads in a linear progression. In this work the stage directions include personal reflections, suspicions, and truncated possibilities of a future that will never occur. For example, one particular stage direction includes the conditional tense, to indicate future possibilities outside of the text that do not occur:

> Alejandro podría tomar un baño. Va y en ese lapso regresa Miguel. Va y no regresa. Silvia puede aconsejarle que tome un baño y así daría tiempo, pero se halla demasiado ocupada en la cocina: abre la olla de presión, revuelve el arroz, mezcla con un tenedor la raspa y los granos blancos porque le gusta el sabor amargo que deja el metal. Nada de esto será visible, tal vez. Vuelve a la mesa y coloca la olla sobre una servilleta, levisimo ruido que hace al padre observarla. (32)

This direction includes the practical elements as to what characters should be doing on stage, but also includes a narrative line not often included in stage directions. It muses upon possibilities that may or may not occur, and even directly states the possibility that everything being narrated in the stage direction may not be visible to the viewer or to the characters themselves in the end. As such, through the stage directions and the formal structure of the text, genre and discourse complicate linear reading and viewing. By including this voice in the play-text, González Melo demonstrates the intersection of genres at play in this text, as well as challenging traditional theatre narrative. It creates an important distinction between the play-text and the performance, as this is a voice that can only be heard (or read) in the drama. Again, this highlights theatre as a queer art, both in the relationship between text and performance, and between adaptations and
stagings. By approaching the play-text and the performance as a rhizomatic experience, rather than as a defined outcome of either reading or spectating, it is possible to see how “Deleuze allows us to rethink notions of theatrical presence as differentiated not by representation, but by variation or movement” (Cull, 6).

In the play, each character can be read as queer, which extends even to the characters who, because of their work and/or social position, exercise a type of institutionalized power. The first scene presents an interaction between La Paco, a transvestite florist, and Saúl Alter, a policeman. In this scene, Saúl and La Paco have a rather unexpected conversation and interaction considering their different social positions. Upon seeing a dead body (as of yet unidentified, but the plot will reveal it is a central character of the play) Saúl asks La Paco: “¿Lo tocaste? La Paco: “Me acerqué” Saúl: “¿Por qué lo tocaste?” (24). This entire exchange follows conventional expectations regarding an interaction between a policeman and a witness to a crime. However, the following description revealed in the stage directions, but not in the dialogue, highlights the true intimacy of their relationship. The division between text and performance parallels an important relationship between spoken dialogue and public space versus stage direction and intimate, private space. This relationship mimics the reader’s relationship to public spectating and private reading. The stage direction notes: “Saúl se quita el abrigo y se lo pone a ella. La abraza. La Paco solloza. Saúl le acaricia el pelo, largo y rojo” (24). In this moment the reader as well as the spectator are confronted with a rather unexpected event: a tender moment shared between La Paco and Saúl.
However, while this moment occurs between two non-heteronormative subjects, it still falls within the parameters of a heteronormative relationship. La Paco, while marked by certain masculinity in terms of physical appearance, falls into the role of the fragile female who needs affection after witnessing the aftermath of a violent crime. Saúl embodies the role of the macho but not misogynist, who supports the female character. Despite the heteronormative drive of their relationship, it is still a relationship that exists at the margins of intelligibility. The relationship between Saúl and La Paco, while heteronormative, demonstrates the importance of conceptualizing homosexuality and queerness as a practice, as described by Quiroga, and also recognizing how queer bodies are read and understood outside of North American conceptualizations of queerness. The two characters are not radically queer subjects who enact alternative sexualities for the purpose of denouncing hegemonic understandings of sexuality. Rather, they are non-heteronormative subjects, who, in their blending of non-heteronormative identity with a heteronormative affective relationship, create queer notions of romantic coupling.

Another important exchange that demonstrates the intersections of space, language, and queer drive in the play occurs between Kárel and Miguel when they are playing chess. The relationship revealed as they are playing is of great importance, especially regarding the differences in representation between the written text and the scene played out on the stage for spectators. Upon reading the text, the reader comes across only one vague reference to the characters’ sexuality. The text states: “Kárel: Tu jeba debe ser mulatica. Miguel: Cuando la veas me cuentas. Kárel: Porque te cuadran las jebas, ¿no? Miguel: ¿Y a ti te cuadra perder tantos peones?” (27). Reading this exchange provides little evidence to the sexual tension that exists between the two characters.
Furthermore, reading the text does not reveal the velocity of the game, which is evident in the live staging of the work.

The chess game functions as a code between the two men, and allows them to clandestinely reveal their sexual desires for one other. This scene demonstrates how the bodies of the two men are visibly unmarked as homosexual, and how a game can function as an alternative form of communication. However, the characters’ revelation of sexual desire is not a public, individual declaration, but rather that each character essentially outs the other to themselves. The revelation of sexual identity does not have a political function, but rather a personal agenda that never comes full circle, owing to the fact that, at the beginning of the play and at the end of the scene, Kárel kills Miguel. Importantly, the murder has nothing to do with sexual desire and its revelation, but rather Miguel is murdered because he refuses to pay Kárel after losing a bet involving the chess game.33

Another important scene relates an encounter between Miguel’s father Alejandro and Miguel’s killer Kárel. Their relationship also demonstrates the negotiation of a certain queer praxis through the use of particular codes of communication. Furthermore, the appearance of La Paco in this scene signals the interstitial character of La Paco, as well as the variety of alternative sexualities represented in this work. Similarly to the scene between La Paco and Saúl, there is a power relation between a hegemonic subject, Alejandro, who works as a lawyer and has connections with the government, and Kárel, a young man who earns money however he can. In this exchange, Kárel reveals his desire for La Paco, which subsequently is converted into a secret code that opens the possibility

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33 This is an important move away from the trope of murder or violence being used to suppress revelation of homosexual or transgender identity, as seen in the novels *El lugar sin límites*, by José Donoso (1966) and the films *XXY* by Lucía Puenzo, (2007) and *Boys Don’t Cry*, by Kimberly Peirce (1999), among many others.
for a sexual relationship between Kárel and Alejandro. The text states: “Pasa La Paco frente a ellos, fugazmente. Kárel: “Me gusta esa niña.” Alejandro “Es un niño.” Kárel “Pero hace la mismas cosas que una niña.” Alejandro: “Y de pensarlo nada más se te para el tubo.” Kárel ¿Quieres tocarlo? (42-3). This scene reveals how codes understood amongst peripheral subjects destabilize the ingrained/conditioned heteronormativity of public space. Furthermore, the use of these codes allows these subjects to take advantage of their status as tacit subjects, as described by Carlos Decena. By not ‘coming out of the closet,’ subjects who embody alternative sexualities can take advantage of the productive power that comes from enacting sexuality in ways that are distinct from the U.S.-based, homonormative push to come out of the closet.

It is notable that the revelation of sexual or affective desire between characters occurs in public spaces. Many times in the play there is a destabilization of public and private spaces, which I analyze as a queering of space. Specifically, the queering of space is the destabilization of the gendered functions of space particularly the division between private (feminized) space and public (masculinized) space, a notion Halberstam articulates. In this play, public space has a specific function for private relationships, but the enactment of private relationships in public spaces does not necessarily convert public space into private. Furthermore, the private space of the family home is represented as suffocating and claustrophobic. Both Kárel, who lives with his uncle, an older man the play insinuates is a rich lover who takes care of him, and Silvia, Miguel’s sister and Kárel’s girlfriend feel the oppressive weight of private spaces. Silvia feels the repression of the private space of her home, which is not her private space, but rather the private space in which she is in charge of taking care of her father and brother. Silvia, despite
her relationship with Kárel, also falls outside of heteronormative conceptualizations of femininity owing to her relationship with Kárel. The ways in which each character interacts with and inhabits particular spaces has an important connection to understanding how space can be read as queer. In agreement with Manzor, “Con las acciones cotidianas o de cada noche este espacio público queda resemantizado de una manera queer, envuelto dentro de los hábitos y deseos íntimos, las rutinas y las historias personales. Lo ordinario queda develado como apariencia y las fuerzas sociales hegemónicas se entretejen con otras voces” (67).

It is also important to highlight the relationship between the concept of heterotopia and queer space, which is also tied to understandings of transnationality. According to Dara Goldman, for scholars such as David Eng and Alberto Sandoval Sánchez, “queer sexuality is fundamentally tied to the extra- or transnational. The space of queer subjectivity not only relies on the uncoupling of family and capitalist production—as John D’Emilio has averred—but is always already situated in a perpetual “elsewhere” that lies outside the dominant space of national subject formation” (103). Within this conceptualization, the space of the island is understood as restrictive to alternative sexualities, and it is through movement out of the island and into the diaspora community in which one can enact or develop queer subjectivity. It is important to signal that this argument is made in relation to a set of texts that Goldman is studying, and is not an overarching denial of the possibility of formulating queer subjectivities on the island.

Queer space more broadly can be understood as a heterotopia, especially if we look to the works of social geographers. However, it is important to underscore that the work of these scholars is not to locate queer spaces, but rather to investigate “the ways in
which the spatial and the sexual constitute one another” (2). Queer space, importantly, is not an isolated area where queer subjects live. As Bell and Valentine note, “the reality is that most gay men and lesbians live and work not in the ‘straight’ world where they face prejudice, discrimination, and queerbashing” (7). While queer communities exist, subjects cannot live isolated within these communities. Social geography of queer spaces undoes the binary of heterosexual and homosexual spaces to underscore the relation between them, but also how each is produced performatively, through reiteration and repetition of practices. The idea of space as fluid rather than a rigidly separated binary relates to Foucault’s notion that heterotopias “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (26). He goes on to note “the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place…” (26). As such, queer spaces, such as queer neighborhoods with in large cities, are to an extent isolated and disciplined, one could argue. Gill Valentine notes that “the spatial concentration of lesbian and gay men in particular districts of cities makes it easier for heterosexuals to both control and target them” (3). However, this space, while being isolated, is accessible because there is not a rigid division between queer and heteronormative space.

Beyond the lived space of the city (or rural areas), it is possible to look to a more micro level in order to read how queer space functions in the space of the theatre. Theatre itself being a heterotopia—seen as a microcosm of space and time—it is possible to enact this place as a queer space. I argue that the space of theatre in itself can be read as queer, specifically because, by isolating representation spatially form the larger world (in classical representations of theatre which occur in a theatre building, this argument is
challenged in works that occur in found space, or in the open air of the city, unmarked by a stage space) it undoes the link between normatively produced space, as well as ideas of linear time. Even if the work represents a highly linear story, it is always contending with the space of time as it is lived by the audience and the performer. There is, then, in theatre, always a tension between real spaces, represented spaces, real time, represented time, and the ways in which these spaces and times are manipulated, experienced, and understood by the actors and spectators.

As theatre takes places in a variety of spaces, including the space of the theater and the nation in which the work is performed, it is important to consider the physical transnational movement of these works of theatre. I move to an analysis of the setting of Chamaco within the play text, as well as the physical space of the play, as it is represented both in Havana, Cuba and Madrid, Spain. The geographic localization of both Vacas and Chamaco is significant. According to the stage directions, Chamaco is set in La Habana (19). Regarding the relationship between Cuba as a nation and a culture, Bulman notes, “reading ‘Cuba’ through Cuban theatre has, perhaps, posed more difficulties than defining any other nation through its theatre at the end of the twentieth, beginning of the twenty-first century, largely because of the great number of playwrights writing outside of their national borders and, at the same time, because of the lack of freedom experienced by Cuban playwrights living on the island” (194). Carlos Celadrán, the director of the Havana staging of Chamaco notes that “mientras leía Chamaco lo que me atrajo de golpe fue el no sentir ninguna diferencia entre la obra y el resto del mejor teatro que se escribe hoy en cualquier parte del mundo. Chamaco es un texto no sólo cubano sino contemporáneo, escrito con una sensibilidad, una velocidad y una síntesis
completamente contemporánea” (“Por qué Chamaco,” v). Similar to this comment, in the introduction to Vacas, Alberto Sarrain signals that in the work “temas que saltan de la cubanidad de sus personajes hacia el arquetipo universal” (Vacas, 9).

Regarding the representation of lesbian characters in Vacas, and applicable to the representation of homosexual desire in Chamaco, Alberto Sarrain notes that the play “…asume una visión posmoderna de la homosexualidad que deja de ser categoría para convertirse en circunstancia” (11). This quote is strongly suggestive of the concept of homosexual praxis, as described by José Quiroga. According to Quiroga, homosexuality should not be conceived as a fixed identity, but rather as the practices that constitute a homosexual person, which are distinct and vary depending on the place of enunciation and enactment. The concept of homosexual praxis is strongly related to the notion of assemblage, as both prioritize practices and experiences of subjectivity, rather than reductionist separation of categories of identity. Through his quote regarding Vacas, Sarrain also signals, although not explicitly, the problem of using identity categories as political tools, owing to the fact that, as Phelan points out, identity as a political weapon forces the public to focus not on the problem at hand, but rather at the identity category, blinding themselves to the political aims a particular group advocates. Lastly, both quotes highlight the universal or global aesthetic of the works. This concept is important when considering the transnational character of the production and representation of the works.

Both of these plays represent a paradoxical relationship between geographic specificity and non-specificity. Chamaco is explicitly stated to take place in La Habana, however in Vacas the location is not explicitly stated. Although both plays debut in
Cuba, *Chamaco* in particular has been staged in other countries. As such, the influence of transnationality in these texts can be seen in the representation, production, and staging of the plays. Each author is part of a transnational community of authors, actors, and directors, all of whom work together to create these works. Following Manzor, “cada una de las puestas, a través de su interacción con el público, de la inclusión de diferentes corrientes artísticas y de diferentes técnicas brechtianas de extrañamiento, interviene en el discurso heteronormativo de la nación creando un espacio alternativo de comunidad local and global” (59). Furthermore, the adaptability of theatre as a genre to different locations (I am specifically thinking of the Spanish staging/adaptation of *Chamaco*, as well as the version staged in Miami, Florida) has an important impact on notions of transnationality and genre.

*Chamaco* exemplifies the interesting tension between the national and the global articulated in understandings of transnationality. While transnational experience goes beyond the geographic and cultural borders of the nation state, the nation-state itself still plays a strong role in process of identification, disidentification, and reconfiguring national belonging. *Chamaco*, it its various manifestations, plays on and against the *cubanidad* that marks this text. The setting of the play is expressly Cuban, yet the experiences of the protagonists are translatable to other cultural and geographic contexts. I analyze the textual process *Chamaco* undergoes in the cultural translation between the original written version, staged in Havana, and a version of the text translated for the stage in Spain. Importantly, this ‘translation’ is cultural, not necessarily linguistic.

There are, however, a number of translations of *Chamaco*. In order to understand the global impact of this text, I will give a brief outline of its creation and global
dissemination, which is paraphrased from “Recorrido de Chamaco (2004-2013)” in Chamaco, Ediciones Alarcos, 2013. The drama is written in Havana between the 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 26\textsuperscript{th} of December, 2004. It had its first staged reading directed by Alberto Sarraín with Perez Estanquero (Manzor, 60). The world premier occurs in 2006 in Havana, directed by Carlos Celdrán with Argos Theater. In the same year, it is translated to Turkish by Sakip Murat Yalçin and debuts under the direction of Orestes Pérez Estanquero in Semaver Kumpanya, Istabul. In 2007, the text is translated to British English by William Gregory, as well as to Catalán by Josep Rodriguez Atienza. In 2008 the play is adapted to a radiodrama directed by William Quintana and distributed by Radio 26 in Matanzas, Cuba. In Havana, director Juan Carlos Cremata begins filming a cinematic version of Chamaco, with González Melo and Cremata writing the script. In 2009, Chamaco is staged by La Má Teodora at the Trail Theater in Miami, directed by Alberto Sarraín. On this occasion, Yael Prizant translates Chamaco to English. A bilingual English-Spanish version is published under the title Chamaco: Boy at the Vanishing Point. In 2010, Gaetano Ievolella and René Foures translate Chamaco to Italian and in 2012 Christilla Vasserot translates Chamaco to French.\footnote{Cited in “Recorrido de Chamaco (2003-2014)” in Chamaco, La Habana: Ediciones Alarcos, 2013.}

The global success of Chamaco, across genres (theatre, radio, film) and nations, demonstrates the universally approachable narrative of human relations cited by many critics and academics. Carlos Espinosa Domínguez states “González Melo no se acerca a la realidad con el ánimo de juzgarla: su acercamiento destila ternura y comprensión por estos personajes, tan similares a otros que se pueden encontrar en Madrid, New York, Buenos Aires o Londres” (Domínguez, cited in Chamaco, 131). Ernesto Fundora notes:
“es Chamaco una obra muy habanera y a la vez operable en más de un contexto específico” (Fundora, cited in Chamaco, 141). Regarding the Spanish version of the play, Amado del Pino notes, “Chamaco ha triunfado en Madrid sin dejar de ser cubana. Argos Teatro deja su sello de rigor en la cartelera española y tengo la certeza de que esta experiencia enriquecerá su fecundo diálogo con el espectador habanero” (de Pino, cited in Chamaco, 2013). These statements highlight the paradoxical pull between marking Chamaco as a Cuban play and touting the universality of the drama. It is interesting that rhetoric such as “sin dejar de ser cubana” marks the movement and translation of Chamaco. However, this is analogous to the processes of transnationality, and is necessary to understanding the function of the nation-state transnational representation. Furthermore, accepting the cubanidad of this work in its various geographic expressions marks an important shift in rhetoric regarding Cuba and its transnational community and artistic production.35

In order to analyze this relationship more closely, I will engage in a close reading of two versions of Chamaco: a publication written by González Melo for the Cuban (more specifically Havana) stage, as well as the adaptation written specifically for Ediciones Alarcos in 2013 for the Spanish (specifically Madrilenian) stage. This Spanish production was presented in the Teatro Fernando de Rojas del Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid, in May of 2013, directed by Carlos Celrán. My aim in this close analysis of these two versions is to demonstrate how the specific cultural and linguistic changes undergone by the play-text create and maintain a queer articulation of transnational artistic production. As I will demonstrate, both versions of the text engage in a dialogue

35 See Duany and relationship between Cuba and U.S.-Cuba rhetoric, highlighted in the introduction.
of nationality and national belonging, although in distinct ways. This discourse of belonging is placed upon characters who exist at the margins of society and who participate in a star-crossed network of interpersonal contact. The changes between the Cuban and Spanish versions of the text are significant specifically in their relation to nationality, belonging, and practices of queer identification. These changes structure the language and presentation of the play-text (specifically in the play’s relationship to genre), as well as the ideology surrounding who belongs where in discourses of nationality and citizenship.

In order to better understand the cultural translation of *Chamaco* from Cuba to Spain, it is important to consider Villegas’ notion of cultural competency, which he describes as “la familiaridad del utilizador y descifrador de signos de un sistema cultural con los signos del mismo y su habilidad para descifrarlos adecuadamente dentro del contexto de la emisión” (17). In an expansion of this idea, he states “para el caso de la historia del teatro las competencias culturales y teatrales varían de acuerdo con las relaciones de producción y consumo de los discursos teatrales” (17). The notion of cultural competency is important, as relations of power, particularly in regards to access, shape said competency. However, again, if we consider the role of cultural competency as a range of understanding, rather than an binary construct of understanding versus not understanding, we can begin to analyze this concept as a category that challenges a binary framework of knowledge. That is to say, particularly with theatre, both the text and performance are situated in ways that understanding or comprehension of the text is never fully actualized. There is always some element of the text/performance that one will not understand, and other parts one will. This comprehension is structured by
cultural and social systems. Furthermore, the emotive response to a text/performance will vary depending on the manifestation (if the text is read or if it is viewed as a performance) and the cultural codes embodied by the viewer.

To give an anecdotal example, I saw a staging of *Chamaco* in 2009 at the Trail Theater in Miami, specifically in Little Havana. I distinctly remember a moment in the play that I found particularly tragic, only to have the same scene met by uproarious laughter from the principally older Cuban and Cuban-American audience. I wondered if my response/reception of the moment was in some way inappropriate or decontextualized, but rather, I find that the variety of emotive responses is conditioned by distinct cultural, social, political, and generational experiences and understandings. This is, in essence, a particularly queer feature of theatre. Not only does it undo the division between script and body in the performative manifestation of the drama-text; it creates a distinct experience for each viewer. Theatre is a distinctly queer experience. It changes for the viewer in terms of reception and depending on the desired effect for the viewers (cultural intelligibility, alienation, shock, comfort, etc.). As Villegas notes, representation should not be understood as a recreation of reality: “Estas representaciones, sin embargo, no deben ser vistas como reproducciones de la ‘realidad’ sino como construcciones intencionadas por parte del productor, portadoras de mensajes, que usan las imágenes sociales, legitimadas, social y culturalmente, para su empleo por las practicas ‘artisticas’ en cada momento histórico” (19). He goes on to consider the role of legitimized culture in the reception of theatre, stating “la teatralidad legitimada implica, con frecuencia, una competencia cultural específica del destinatario o espectador” (19). Considering theatre through the lens of transnationality challenges the
notion of legitimated *teatralidad*. Specifically considering the works *Chamaco* and *Vacas*, the concept of ‘the legitimate’ is challenged through the play-text and through modes of representation, as well as the various changes undergone in the multiple stagings of *Chamaco*.

Villegas draws a distinction between the ‘texto teatral’ (analogous to the performance) and the ‘texto dramático’ (analogous to the play-text, or drama) (20). He states, “el texto teatral y el texto dramático son entidades ontológicamente diferentes, a pesar de sus semejanzas e interrelaciones en determinados momentos, y por lo tanto es legítimo su estudio como dos productos culturales diferenciados” (21). While I agree that it is acceptable to study the play-text and the performance as distinct cultural products, it is also necessary to highlight that, while distinct, they are not isolated from one another, nor are they autonomous. That is to say, while one can either read a play or spectate the same play, they cannot necessarily be understood as distinct (versus differentiated) texts. They are interdependent in a unique way, as each presents specific manifestations that are not visible/readable to the other. For example, in *Chamaco*, one can consider the use of stage directions in the text that are, at the most extreme, untranslatable to a stage production, and at the very least must be adapted to fit within the staging of the play.

Furthermore, they blend a variety of genres. As Manzor notes, “Desde el teatro, incorpora mecanismos de la poesía y de la narrativa con un lenguaje lírico y coloquial, y una estructura no lineal que se acerca al lenguaje cinematográfico; todos estos elementos

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36 *Teatralidad* is Villegas’ term used in place of performance. He supports this use of this term, stating “optamos por no utilizar [performance] de modo sistemático porque, pese a su semejanza con ‘teatralidad’ y ‘teatralidad social’, en algunos casos, y ‘discursos teatrales’ en otros, el énfasis in ‘performance’ pudiera entenderse en el ‘actuar para’ y no la diversidad de matices que involucran los términos que hemos caracterizado en el apartado anterior” (22).
van a ser potenciados por la puesta en escena” (Chamaco, 136). While stage directions can give certain specificities regarding the performative manifestation of specific parts of the text, it cannot create from the text alone the corporeal manifestation of said dialogue. However, the performance of text/dialogue is necessarily dependent upon the written-text, just as the text depends upon, or precedes/anticipates a corporeal and verbalized performance.

Villegas presents a stunning and thorough analysis spanning from Amerindian *teatralidades* to postmodern manifestations of *teatralidades*. Of significance for the present study is his consideration of *teatralidades* of postmodernity and globalization. In this section of his wide-reaching investigation, he underscores the ways in which contemporary works of theatre are moving away from a social or political function, and rather are interested in experimenting with new forms, including technology. He states “la búsqueda de nuevos lenguajes, a la vez, estimula la utilización de elementos electrónicos y tecnológicos como componentes importantes de la producción teatral. Esta orientación contribuye a disminuir la importancia de la función del arte estéticamente legitimado como instrumento de cambio social” (215). He notes, however, despite the depoliticization of Latin American theatre, it has not necessarily disappeared. Rather, “[el teatro político] ha cambiado el mensaje y el modo de comunicación del mismo” (216). This statement is particularly important when considering contemporary Cuban theatre. While the discourses surrounding freedom of speech and governmental repression of marginalized citizens has fallen to the wayside, there is still a perceptible disenchantment regarding the quality of life represented in both Chamaco and Vacas. However, I do not necessarily agree that technology necessarily displaces the aesthetic function of works of
theatre. Rather, I see the use of technology and virtuality as a means of augmenting and developing both the aesthetic function well as the role of theatre as an instrument of social change. Villegas notes “el teatro político en tiempos de la posmodernidad, con frecuencia, incluye el desencanto” (217), and that “la diferencia clave con el período anterior [de la guerra fría a la posmodernidad], sin embargo, radica en que el mensaje no suele ser tan directo y los códigos teatrales empleados enfatizan una mayor complejidad estructural y participación del espectador en la descodificación del mensaje” (216). As I will demonstrate, this ambiguity is exaggerated in the multiple stagings of the play Chamaco. In agreement with Villegas, both Chamaco and Vacas demonstrate “…espacios y personajes victimas del nuevo sistema político y económico” (217). He continues, “Son numerosos los textos y espectáculos que tienen como núcleo el exilio en los cuales el énfasis esta en la condición humana del exilio y no en la proclamación de una ideología de revolución social” (217).

The structure of the text undergoes a rather radical change in the Spanish adaptation. To begin, the title itself is changed from Chamaco: Informe en diez capítulos (para representar) to simply Chamaco (Version española). The structure of the informe detailing the chapters and their titles is removed from the Spanish version, and the list of characters is altered in a significant way. In the Cuban version of the play, the characters appear as “personas implicadas,” highlighting the intertext of the police report. These characters are listed in the following order: Kárel Darín, un muchacho; Alejandro Depás, abogado; Miguel Depás; su hijo; Silvia Depás, su hermana; testigos y fisgones; Roberta López, guardaparques; Felipe Alejo, tío de Kárel; La Paco, florista; Saúl Alter, policía. The description of each character follows their relationship to the previously listed
character, highlighting the network of relationships that develops through the narrative of the play. In the Spanish version, the characters are listed as follows: Alejandro Depás, juez; Kárel Darín, Chamaco, Silvia Depás, hija de Alejandro; Miguel Depás, hijo de Alejandro; Felipe, tío de Kárel; La Paco; Mariana, mendiga; Saúl, policía. In the seemingly innocuous listing of characters, the Spanish version of the text downplays the network established between the characters, and highlights each characters relation to Alejandro. While the Cuban version follows a more rhizomatic relationship between characters, in the Spanish version, Alejandro serves as an axis around which the other characters relate. Returning to the title, it is interesting that the subtitle of Chamaco is removed in the Spanish version, as said version appears to be more streamlined, specifically for the ease of representation or staging. However, at the same time, including the subtitle in the original version also underscores the fluid structure as well as the blending of genres that is emphasized in the Cuban version.

As previously analyzed, Chamaco demonstrates a blending of genres, including drama, novelistic forms, poetic forms, and even the informe or police report. The text includes stage directions that, rather than direct, give an omniscient narrative perspective regarding the characters’ psyches or particular details of the scenography. In the Spanish version of the text, these narrative directions are removed, and more standard stage directions are used in their place. For example, after the fight between Kárel and Miguel en Chapter 1, the omniscient voice included in the stage directions states:

Roberta no barre: contempla. Se fajan. Miguel golpea con furia. Durante unos segundos no se separan. Algunas piezas caen al suelo. Kárel va perdiendo fuerzas, se toca las nalgas. Creo que esta mañana dejó la cuchilla sobre la mesita del cuarto, por suerte no la traes, una cuchilla con hoja de ocho centímetros de largo que le sirve para pelar las naranjas. Creo pero me equivoco. La trae, la saca.
Se la clava en el vientre a Miguel. Una, dos veces. Parecen abrazados. Miguel va cayendo despacio, no puedo precisar el sonido que emite. Kárel se mira las manos e inmediatamente las restriega contra su pulóver. Ahora se ve que el tablero es de cartón porque nuestro héroe la dobla y se lo cuadra en un bolsillo del jean, junto a la cuchilla, así también las piezas en un saquito de lana. Observa otra vez el cuerpo de Miguel y huye. (29-30)

In contrast, the Spanish version of the text narrates the same directions as such:

Miguel golpea con furia. Kárel saca una navaja y se la clava en el vientre a Miguel. Se mira las manos, dobla el tablero de cartón y se lo cuadra en un bolsillo junto a la navaja y las piezas de ajedrez. Observa el cuerpo de Miguel tendido en el suelo y huye. Mariana se acerca a Miguel, registra sus bolsillos. (80-81)

The Spanish version of the play removes the first person narrator from the narrative of the stage directions. This ‘character’ presents an interesting dynamic between drama and performance, as the omniscient narrator included in these stage directions is not represented in any version of the performance. This voice expresses a first person narration, while including moments of uncertainty or impossibility in the stage directions. This type of narrative style is not characteristic in drama, as this level of uncertainty or impossibility within the narrative stage directions is nearly impossible to stage, unless voiced over by an offstage voice (which has not occurred in a staging of Chamaco).

Beyond the structural changes to the text, there are significant changes to the characters that must be considered through the lens of queer transnationality. A major change occurs regarding Kárel’s national belonging, as well as that of his uncle, Felipe. In the Cuban version of the text, it is signaled that Kárel is from the countryside, an outsider to the centralized Havana, a place so integral to the drama that, as Yael Prizant signals, “la ciudad [La Habana] se convierte en un personaje central, con sus muchas locaciones dibujando su intrincada personalidad” (Prizant, cited in Chamaco, 139). As such, Kárel becomes a decentralized figure even within the space of the nation-state
owing to his queer identification, but more concretely because he is from a peripheral part of the country. Within the power relations established in this text, the notion of national belonging extends to a more micro level, in which nationality and belonging are couched upon the space of the nation-state, and more specifically on the division between center and periphery. The relationship between La Habana and el campo serves as system of power relations that mimics the relationship between the Cuba de adentro (specifically, on and within the bounds of the island) and the Cuba de afuera, marked by diasporic and transnational communities. It is not until Chapter 4 that the text reveals Kárel’s place of origin, when his uncle decries his behavior. Felipe states, “Cuando llegaste a esta casa tenías las uñas negras y yo te las corté para que no parecieras un pordiosero” (39). While this quote indicates Kárel’s socioeconomic standing, Felipe quickly reveals his geographic marginalization in the face of the centrality (hegemonic and geographic) of La Habana: Felipe: “Nunca vas a saber lo que te quiero. Acepté que vinieras a esta casa, que durmieras en ese cuarto, esperando que pudieras olvidarte para siempre de ese campo de basura en que vivías, donde se te llagaban las manos con la guataca y la tierra…” (39). This moment in the text demonstrates Kárel’s position as an outsider to the city of La Habana, but also marks Kárel’s disenfranchised situation, in which he is dependent upon his uncle, who takes advantage of Kárel’s social and geographic displacement.

Queer transnationality, in this particular instance, can in fact inform situations of cultural and social displacement that occur within the space of the nation-state. However, it is particularly the changes that occur in the Spanish adaptation that highlight how the movement of this play, both physically through staging in Madrid as well as
representationally though changes in the characters, relates to my contention that transnational space provides a place in which national belonging is reconfigured outside of the geographic space of the island. In the Spanish version of *Chamaco* the drama is translated from La Habana to Madrid. The Depás family and the policeman Saúl are Spanish nationals, while Kárel and Felipe are Cuban, and it is indicated indirectly that La Paco is also from Cuba. The issue of Kárel’s belonging is translated from a binary between city and country to one of immigration. In both versions of *Chamaco*, Kárel migrates from a peripheral space to a more centralized space that simultaneously provides certain opportunities while enacting modes of alienation.

The Spanish version of the text brings up this question of belonging much earlier than the Cuban version. In Chapter 2, Mariana, the Spanish version’s Roberta (la guardaparques) addresses Kárel: Mariana: “Oye, chaval…¿tú de donde eres? La otra noche te escuché hablando con una negra…¿Eres canario?...No tienes pinta de canario…¿serás marroquí?” (77). In the Cuban version of the play the issue of Kárel’s outsider status—of being from the countryside—never arises in Roberta’s address to Kárel. In the Spanish version, the issue of transnationality and belonging comes to the forefront within the geographic boundaries of Spain. Mariana’s question regarding Kárel’s place of origin is poignant, specifically because her first guesses—Canary Islander and Moroccan—reflect important national policies within Spain. The Canary Islands occupies a curious place in Spain, as they make up one of the seventeen autonomous regions of Spain, yet are geographically displaced from the Iberian Peninsula and Spain’s mainland. Owing to their geographic specificity and their physical disconnect from Spain, the Islands are seen as an outside place, particularly to the
centrality—geographically, culturally, and symbolically—of Madrid. This relationship parallels that of La Habana and the campo, demonstrated in the Cuban version of the text. There is also a connection with the accent, as Cuban Spanish and Spanish from the Canary Islands sound very similar. However, the guess that Kárel is Moroccan demonstrates another specific cultural tension regarding immigration and historical ties between Spain and Morocco. However, in Chapter 2, in the scene between Kárel and Miguel, Kárel reveals that he is, in fact, from Cuba. Kárel’s country of origin is revealed as follows: Kárel: “¿Veinte pagos? No te dan para nada. ¿Eres de Madrid?” Miguel: “Sí, soy de aquí. Pero tú no, ¿verdad?” Kárel: “Soy de Cuba” Miguel: “¿Y en Cuba se juega tanto al ajedrez?” Kárel: “No tanto.” Miguel: “Hay cada historia de cubanos…” (79).

Within the Spanish version of the text, Kárel’s position with in Spain is marked by questions of legality, as he is an undocumented person living in Spain. Significantly the question of legality and belonging is present in Cuban version as well. Decree 217 is a law in Cuba enacted in 1997, which states that those who move from the provinces of Cuba to Havana must also be registered to live and work legally in the capital. Both instances of legal limbo provide a space of analysis in which questions of transnationality, belonging, and displacement come into play.

The moments of queer desire enacted in both versions of the play take on a distinct meaning within the context of transnational subjects, exemplified in the characters that are marked as outsiders in terms of nationality, specifically Kárel, Felipe, and La Paco. As analyzed previously, all of the characters in this play challenge binary sets of identification through queer practices, desires, and identifications, yet the Spanish version of the text brings into play a more concrete element of transnationality and
national belonging. In this case, the three characters marked by “otherness” through their country of origin, are simultaneously identified and identifiable through the notion of queer transnationality. Their position in a transnational space forges new sets of relationships and new approaches to belonging and community that, again, are not foregrounded upon the space of the nation-state. This is significant with regards to the character’s representation in the play. It is also a key point of analysis for the play itself as a transnational object. The play as a physical object exemplifies queer transnationality through its movement from country to country, but also in its malleability and adaptation to address the cultural and geographic specificities of the nations in which it is set. Like transnationality itself, the play-text as an object is never fully disconnected from the nation-state in two important ways. It is always marked by a certain cubanidad, by certain practices of the cultural realm of the nation-state that are not removed by its transnational positioning. Secondly, the cultural practices of the nation-state in which the play is adapted shape and inform the newly coded cultural project placed upon the stage.

While transnational movement and representation create a space in which new forms of identification and belonging may be enacted, it is important to repeat that the nation-state as a source of cultural intelligibility will continue to inform these works of literary and artistic production. Kárel’s tenuous legality in Spain is marked in an interaction with Saúl, the policeman, as well as with Saúl’s interaction with Felipe, Kárel’s uncle. In Chapter 5, Saúl offers to leave Kárel alone if Kárel agrees to helps Saúl to track where Alejandro Depás gets money to solicit prostitutes (like Kárel) in the street. The dialogue states: Saúl: (Al oído.) “Te dejo tranquilo hasta enero, ¿vale? Libre hasta enero…Ni te pido los papeles que no tienes…” (90). In the Cuban version of this
encounter the issue of identification and legality is brought up, yet it resonates in a
distinct way in the Spanish version, specifically because of Kárel’s tenuous position as an
undocumented person. When Saúl visits Felipe, Saúl antagonizes Felipe for being an
immigrant from Cuba. Saul interrogates Felipe about Kárel and their relationship: Saúl:
“¿Duerme aquí todas las noches?” Felipe: “Cuando no se queda por los bancos de la
plaza.” Saúl “¿Qué plaza?” Felipe: “La única que les interesa a los chiquillos de este
barrio, a esa panda de inmigrantes asquerosos que han acabado en Madrid…” Saúl:
“Usted también es inmigrante…” Felipe: “¡Pero yo soy de antes! Y ademá, tengo
pasaporte español.” (95). Felipe’s reaction brings up an important point regarding the
legal status of Kárel, as he reveals that he, Felipe, is documented, indicating that Kárel is
not. The question of immigration and legal status is not part of the Cuban version of the
text, and brings in important questions regarding transnationality and the place of
undocumented participants in this seemingly open, yet still rigidly controlled
transnational network.

La Paco is also a character that, in the Spanish version of this play, comes from
Cuba. In Chapter 9, La Paco reveals her past in Cuba: La Paco: “…He vendido tres
flores en la Plaza de Santa Ana y estoy desde las dos de la tarde en la calle. En La
Habana a esta hora ya no me quedaría ni una pero en este país y en pleno invierno…”
(103). This moment in the text is particularly interesting when compared to the Cuban
version, specifically because La Paco’s statement that she would have sold a number of
flowers in La Habana is proven otherwise. In the Cuban version, La Paco states, “Vendi
tres flores en la Magdalena y estoy desde las dos de la tarde en la calle. Si no subes hasta
el Parque Central no te empatas con nada…” (65). In this case, the texts become differing accounts that the reader can use to compare statements made in both. However, beyond a mere one-to-one translation of the Spanish and Cuban versions of this play, there are significant changes that are made in direct response to issues of cultural competency. The translation of these plays simultaneously maintains the Cuban identity of these works while engaging the play into a network of transnational cultural production. With Chamaco, the transnational axis of the play is negotiated directly with another culture, and is culturally translated in a way that, while changing the cultural specificities of the text to respond to potential audiences, still highlights issues of cultural negotiation, national identity, and the reconfiguration of belonging in various geographic spaces.

Analyzing both the text and representation of Chamaco demonstrates the queer nature of theatre as a genre, specifically enacted through a blending of narrative genres, questioning the limits of possible representation, and a restructuring of the cultural codes surrounding the text in its various cultural translations. While my analysis of Vacas specifically focuses on the play-text, I demonstrate the potentiality theatre has for an analysis based on the Deleuzian concept of assemblage. Both plays demonstrate the deterritorialization of identity as discrete categories of representation, focusing rather on the potential of experience, movement, and exchange. Situating an analysis of queer transnationality through the lens of assemblage allows for an understanding of the genre of theatre as well as monolithic concepts of identity as categorizations that cannot account for a full understanding of genre and identity as they are enacted in these two plays. Understanding the relationship between assemblage and queer transnationality
will be further investigated in Chapter 4, which presents an analysis of the performances of Josefina Báez and Ismael Ogando. This next chapter will continue a discussion on the relationship between text and performance, however I will specifically underscore the function of the body as a creator of discourse, while analyzing transnational identity as experience, rather than concrete representation.
Chapter 4
Dialects of the Body: Performing the Transnational Yo

The centrality of the body in performance art forces actions to be read through it. The body becomes an arbiter of discourse, and issues surrounding history, identity, and location are communicated to an audience or spectator through its material presence. As studied in previous chapters, transnationality and the queering of identity through transnational movement has been a narrative and representation strategy for authors in the Caribbean. The novelization of queer transnational subjectivity in Sirena Selena vestida de pena and Caparazones demonstrates the narrative construction of identity that is placeless, both in terms of geographical situatedness as well as gender expression. While these texts use the movement of the body across geographic and identitary planes to demonstrate the formation of queer networks of kinship, they will always be textual representations. Through performance art, we are able to see how the creation of a narrative of queer transnationality takes place on the body. The body of the performer not only represents the challenges of articulation belonging outside of the geographic and cultural borders of the nation-state, it is the object of representation that physically and ideologically moves across and through these borders. It is through this physical and ideological movement that queer transnationality is articulated as a theoretical concept.

Queer transnationality utilizes an understanding of queer theory as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 8), while expanding these possibilities, lapses, and excesses to other categories of identity, specifically but not limited to race and nationality. My project takes up these previously
articulated ideas and transforms this expansion of queerness by analyzing how these identities are produced, iterated, or reproduced in geographic and geo-political contexts that are beyond the physical and cultural boundaries of the nation-state. These national boundaries are constitutive in the process of rendering a subject intelligible. My concern, then, is to analyze the ways in which the subject finds slippages in this process outside the bounds of the nation-state.

The notion of embodiment and corporeality in transnational movement is problematized in the works that form this chapter. *Dominicanish*, by Josefina Báez is a performance text that challenges the centrality of corporeal presence in performance art. Her work consists of text and a performance piece, both of which can be read individually, but when studied together form the totality of the work. The performances of Ismael Ogando analyzed in this chapter are not text based, and rely on the body in order to express a queer transnational experience. However, the centrality of the body and the physicality of corporeality in these works is challenged through Ogando’s use of digital media, both as a part of the performances, but also as a means of archiving and publicizing his works, as well as networking with other performers, scholars, and artists who form part of this transnational community. In this chapter I demonstrate the ways in which nationality and national belonging, specifically with regards to the Dominican Republic, Dominican York, and the wider global Dominican diaspora, are challenged through the transnational movement of the queer body in performance art. I analyze the ways in which identity is situated upon the body, and how these two performers challenge the hegemonic imposition of identity as a top down process, mediated by socially constructed ideas such as nationality, race, sexuality, gender, class, and others.
Furthermore, I aim to demonstrate the ways in which textuality and virtuality reconfigure the centrality of corporeality in performance art, analyzing how the body creates discourse while simultaneously eschewing centrality. The decentralization of the body through text and virtual technology in these performances allows for an understanding of identities as assemblages, in which identification occurs as a rhizomatic process, rather than a mosaic of discrete categories. Following a Butlerian trajectory, Jasbir Puar argues for a methodology of queer analysis that “encourag[es] subjects of study to appear in all their queerness, rather than primarily to queer the subjects of study, provid[ing] a subject-driven temporality in tandem with a method-driven temporality…As there is no entity, no identity to queer, rather queerness coming forth at us from all directions, screaming its defiance, suggests to me a move from intersectionality to assemblage” (127). The notion of assemblage is important to the present study’s consideration of transnational queer identity.

As such, queerness includes issues of sexuality, as well as of race, class, and nationality. Again, the extension of queerness into these other realms of identity is not to de-centralize the issue of sexuality/gender as it pertains to queer, but rather to understand how queerness can intersect with other categories of identity. Owing to the historical background of the Dominican Republic as well as the thematic axis of Báez and Ogando’s work, I will pay special attention to issues of nationality, race, and gender, and the historical problematic these categories inscribe upon these performers.

Important for a comparison of these two performance works is the role of language, text, and body in each performance. *Dominicanish* is a performance that includes a text, a genre defined by Báez as a performance text. It narrates the experience
of moving from the Dominican Republic to New York City, specifically Washington Heights, and how the performer is forced to reformulate her notions of identity and belonging. Specifically she must confront the use of Spanish and English, as well as the reading of her body as a body of color, as it is received and projected upon her in the United States. For this performance text, the interaction of language and the body are key to forming an identity that challenges hegemonic understandings of national belonging as a geographically marked space. I am interested in understanding how the blending of the Spanish and English languages, along with the incorporation of cultural elements from the Dominican Republic, the United States, and India complicate national identity.

The works of Ogando move away from textual representation, and demonstrate a quasi return to the 1960s and 70s aesthetic of conceptual performance art. They have no text attached to them, they are purely bodily articulations of what it means to be a queer, black, Dominican male living and performing outside of the Dominican Republic. However, a type of text develops around the performance, in Ogando’s use of digital and virtual technology. Each piece is accessible on the Internet, which differentiates and makes contemporary the return to 60s and 70s aesthetic. As such, the virtual accessibility of the works creates a new node in our analysis and understanding of transnational queer identity. Importantly, both texts highlight the visibility of bodies of color. While this is an element present in the four other texts analyzed in this project, the presence of the body in these performances makes this marker of identity a more pressing node of analysis. As such, the chapter will focus on the assemblages of race, language, and visibility present in these two performance pieces.
More generally, this chapter will include considerations of the specificities of Dominican diaspora experiences, performance as a genre, the assemblage of race, sexuality, and nationality (strong themes in both artists’ work); the use and constraints of physical space in performance (generally and specifically to each piece); and the demands of archival footage/documentation for ephemeral genre. In order to do so, this chapter begins with a brief analysis of two key theoretical concepts that structure my reading of Báez and Ogando’s performance: the concept of performativity, as delineated by Judith Butler, and the notion of marked and unmarked identity in performance art, as described by Peggy Phelan. While analyzing the works of Báez and Ogando, I engage in a brief historical analysis of race in the Dominican Republic, as well as the influence of other nation-states, specifically Haiti and the United States, upon a Dominican understanding of racial categorization. This historical background is key to understanding the challenges set forth by Báez and Ogando in regards to identity in transnational spaces. Lastly, I set forth a theoretical paradigm for understanding the shifting notions of corporeality, identity, and performance in a digital age. Specifically, I underscore the urgent need to reconsider categorized notions of identity in a digital age, highlighting the network of connectivity that the Internet provides for the creation of transnational and virtual networks of queer connectivity.

While sexuality studies has extended beyond categories of identity to issues of space as I have demonstrated in my analyses of both novels and works of theatre, this chapter brings forth a new analysis of the relationship between queer identity, nationality, and transnational space, both real and virtual. It is important to underscore this new field of study, as it has methodological and real implications for literary and performance
analysis. Understanding the role of transnational space, conceived geographically and virtually, furthers analytical approaches that move beyond an investigation of the role of identity in representation, and begin to understand/underscore the relationship between space, identity, and representation. Particularly within the genre of performance art space, representation, and identity are situated around the body. Representation through logocentric discourse is no longer the only manifestation of enactments of identity. Rather, as stated previously, corporeality becomes a creator of discourse. This enactment of bodily discourse is directly dependent upon space, as it is movement, interaction, set-up, that conditions the creation of the pieces and the viewer/spectator’s reception.

Understanding how space can be queer or queered lends to my analysis of the implications of performing sexual, racial, etc. identity in transnational spaces. There has been much research in the past 20 years regarding the sexualization and conditioning of space by social geographers, principally from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. While in the previous chapter I highlight the use of physical and psychic spaces in theatre, my analysis here takes these proposals as a foundation, but looks at how the interconnections between spaces, particularly facilitated by virtual technologies and globalization, create a queer transnational network of representation, in which contesting categories of identity are assembled and deprioritized. This is not to say that categories of identity are unimportant, as this is not the case. Rather, the prioritization of one category of identity over another is no longer a politically viable strategy for both Ogando and Báez, as the historical impulse of Dominican identity has left aside a viable consideration for alternative expressions of identity, be they sexual, racial, political, national, etc. By engaging the performative—both in the Butlerian sense as well as the
act of performance—self-representation and self-fashioning in transnational spaces becomes a rhizomatic assemblage of selves, each of which finds a form of self expression but none of which is necessarily prioritized as a politicized nucleus of identity.

Performativity is a key concept for understanding the relationship between identity, nationality, and transnational experience. Judith Butler argues that there is no subject that exists outside of discourse and power; and that each subject is constituted by discourse and through the reiteration of social norms. For Butler, “…there is no ‘I’ who stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse. On the contrary, the ‘I’ only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated (to use the Althusserian term), and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the ‘I’; it is the transitive invocation of the ‘I’ (“Critically Queer,”19). The subject does not constitute itself through discourse; rather the effects of discourse constitute and render the subject intelligible. However, subject-formation is never a complete process, and the incomplete nature of this process marks its instability. Regarding identity categories, Butler underscores the problematic surrounding the supposed power in self-naming. She states, “the expectation of self-determination that self-naming arouses is paradoxically contested by the historicity of the name itself: by the history of the usages that one never controlled, but that constrain the very usage that now emblematizes autonomy…” (20). As we will see, however, both Báez and Ogando challenge the process of categorization of identities through a strategic use of linguistic and visual doubling.

Performativity, perhaps because of its linguistic proximity to ‘performance’ and ‘perform’ tends be analyzed in terms of choice: of deciding how one wants to ‘perform’ gender in a certain time or place. This, however, is not an accurate understanding of the
relationship between gender, discourse, subjectivity, and power. As Butler notes, “the misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a ‘one’ who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today” (22).

The subject is constituted by gender, and, as highlighted in the performances of Báez and Ogando, the subject is also constituted by other categories of identity. However, as the assemblages of these varying identities constituted on the body of the performer are never fully actualized nor fixed, slippages in meaning open spaces for resistance. It is through these slippages that the performers signal the socially constructed nature of these identity categories, as well as challenging their totalizing nature. For Butler, “there is no subject who precedes or enacts this repetition of norms [surrounding gender]…for the subject only comes into intelligibility through the matrix of gender” (22). Through the use of forms of linguistic and visual doubling, both performers highlight the de-centralized nature of both subjectivity and corporeality. Their queer articulations of identity signify the position of the subject before language and identity, as well as the varying ways the self is constituted through processes of naming. Performing (in terms of performance art) this process in transnational spaces highlights the historical processes of identification and control throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. By performing these histories in transnational spaces, both Ogando and Báez challenge the position of hegemonic understandings of marginalized populations, across varying categories of identity. As Butler states, “there is not subject who is “free” to stand outside these norms or to negotiate them at a distance; on the contrary, the subject is retroactively produced by
these norms in their repetition, precisely as their effect” (22). Both Ogando and Báez highlight the construction of identity through repetition.

Furthermore, by blending varying cultural codes and modes of power that produce identities, they find slippages through which they can articulate these encoded processes of naming. Importantly, that the subject is constituted and produced *a priori* of discourse does not signify that no possibility of resistance to the powers that constitute exists. Butler states:

Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off a twill, but which work, animate and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged. (23)

In performance art, repetition and reiteration of norms in calculated ways highlight the constituted nature of identity, not only gendered identity, but race, nationality, class, etc. The transnational element of these performer’s works further queers identification and belonging, specifically because it emphasizes how national discourses construct and shape identity and belonging. The intermingling of these national discourses (see, for example the divergence of Dominican, United Statesian, and northern European constructs and enactments of race) in these performance pieces simultaneously signals their construct while providing spaces of resistance. Particularly, resistance is enacted through the recognition of the constitutive effects of national discourses on identity and belonging.

Moving to a particular consideration of the role of performativity and subjectivity in performance, Peggy aims to find the political potential in remaining invisible. Her work analyzes the place of visibility for subjectivity, stemming from a Lacanian
psychoanalytic perspective. Specifically, she understands that recognition is imbricated in networks of power, and it is through recognition that power stakes its claim upon marginalized bodies. This is an important notion for queer subjectivity, as gender, sexual difference, and desire are simultaneously invisible and inscribed upon the body. As noted in the Introduction of this study, Phelan’s primary concern revolves around representation. Representation can never fully articulate subjectivity, namely as subjectivity is in a constant state of flux. On an individual level, the self/subject is ever evolving and changing through time, while on a collective level the self/subject represents itself differently depending on interlocutor, situation, or place. For Phelan, “the ‘excess’ meaning conveyed by representation creates a supplement that makes multiple and resistant readings possible” (2). It is necessary, in Phelan’s approach, not to conflate representation with real. Specifically, the relationship between representation and real is mirrored in the relationship between self and other, in which the reciprocal gaze confers upon a subject the status of real or intelligible. Again, it is through this conference or recognition that power relations are maintained and reproduced. The gaze, in all of its manifestations, is a central concern to performance, as the performer is an ‘object’ of the gaze who can look back.

While Phelan’s argument and challenge to visibility and recognition is situated around a Lacanian framework of marked and unmarked binaries, it is important to consider how these binaries are challenged in works where multiple identities are at play, as Phelan’s primary concern in *Unmarked* is the visibility and invisibility of gender. Phelan states “as Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction have demonstrated, the epistemological, psychic, and political binaries of Western metaphysics
create distinctions and evaluations across two terms. One term of the binary is marked with value, and the other is unmarked” (5). While I do not disagree with the historical situatedness of this analysis of binaries, it is important to consider how these binaries shift when one considers the multiplicity of identities at play in works by Báez and Ogando. The interplay of various identities, including national, ethnoracial, gendered, sexual, and performative (in the sense that the performed self is distinct from the ‘real,’ as described by Phelan) challenges the power structure of the binary set between marked and unmarked. Specifically, the interplay of power relations is situated along lines that stretch way beyond the identifications of male versus female, and includes socioeconomic relations, power differentials between ethnoracial identities, and conferred national belonging, dependent upon geographic situatedness. Significantly, however, by analyzing the assemblage of multiple identities present in Báez and Ogando’s performances, we can read the unmarked character of these performances, which intentionally complicate recognition and intelligibility through queer transnational identification.

This critical framework provides the necessary tools for analyzing the role of transnationality and identity in performances. Before analyzing Dominicanish, I will briefly consider Báez’s artistic philosophy, as it demonstrates the queer impulse in her artistic process. Josefina Báez’s works are based upon the concept of Performance Autology, a term coined by the artist. Performance Autology integrates specific practices, rituals, and ideologies into the creation of her texts and performances. These devices of artistic creation become a type of Bourdieuan practice of everyday life, in which Báez utilizes specific elements of different cultures in the process of artistic
creation. For Báez, the texts and performances that she publishes or enacts are not final products, but rather a “stop along the way” in the process of creation. This is an important move away from conventional representations of artistic practice, which are typically seen as a final outcome of a forward progression. Báez’s artistic process reformulates the teleological impulse of this process. She accomplishes this through the enactment of Performance Autology, and through the way in which she publishes her performance texts.

In *Dominicanish*, for example, the text is reordered for new performances, imposing a non-linear structure upon the reader and viewer. The text itself presents a rhizomatic enactment of the reading process, through both form and content. The form of the text demonstrates the mobility of the reading process, through the use of fragmentary language, cultural referents, and language play. The fragmentation and play of the text highlights Báez’s exploration of identity and belonging. Silvio Torres-Saillant states in the text’s “frontispiece,” “Ad infinitum makes a point about the complexity of the Dominican experience in the riskiest way possible, namely be parting with the illusion of transparency. It disdains binary representations of ethnicity which authors often use when speaking about their identity” (13). Beyond expressing the complexity of Dominican experiences through both the form and content of the performance text, Báez underscores the importance of the self in the experience/experiment of identity. Performance Autology is a system of creation, care, and return to what belongs to an individual. The importance of the self and the articulation of an identity which forms its basis through the self, while drawing from the collective, enables Báez to challenge the

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37 Conversation with the artist, July 13, 2013.
impulse to tie identification with culturally and socially constructed categories of identity. Furthermore, the performance text, through its non-linear progression, constant re-ordering, and inclusion of highly codified cultural referents and movements, gives the reader a text that will always be partially understood and conditioned by the act of reading, as well as by the background of the reader/spectator. Regarding the performance text Torres-Saillant succinctly states, “Partial apprehension in this case accords perfectly with the elusive matter of cultural identity, which only a fool would try to count or measure with precision” (14). In the context of *Dominicanish*, cultural identity is not in accord with the notion of culture as a monolithic, prescribed, entity. Rather, the performance text, through its creation, presentation, and enactment, questions compulsory identification with one’s place of birth, race, and/or gender, as it is conventionally accepted. As Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes notes, Báez “incorporates various types of additional materials, movements, and sounds that can serve to disorient or rather, to re-Orient spectators or readers with a mixture of South Asian, Caribbean, African American, and U.S. Latina/o elements” (14). The performance side of this performance text further complicates the reader and viewer’s culturally coded expectations of the work. Regarding the reader/viewer’s of the work, director Claudio Mir notes, “*Dominicanish* is a theater text that is written in a non-conventional stage time, with multiple characters, with a non-linear story surrounded by a group of little stories, where your life experience is the element that defines your contact with *Dominicanish*” (12). This performance and text provides a queer way of reading and viewing in which partial comprehension, slippage of meaning, and incompleteness are integral to the process of creation and reception.
Important for an analysis of Báez’s performance texts is Phelan’s argument surrounding the role of writing in and about performance. Phelan states:

…To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself…It does no good, however, to simply refuse to write about performance because of this inescapable transformation. The challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself. The act of writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself. (148)

In Dominicanish, for example, neither text nor performance is autonomous of one another, and the viewer/spectator will not fully engage with the work by experiencing only one part. However, each work is designed in a way that partial understanding will be the only experience available to the reader/viewer, as both text and performance are specifically designed to be incomplete, in the sense of never fully actualized, which follows the nature and experience of identity and subjectivity. Furthermore, as stated, the text is never the same, as it is reordered for each publication. This challenges the fixity of writing. Rather than altering the event it parallels the ever evolving and non-static nature of performance. The text, in fact, becomes a performance in itself.

The performative aspect of Báez’s text is highlighted in her use of code-switching. Phelan questions the linguistic inscription of representation through writing, stating “writing, an activity which relies on the reproduction of the Same (the three letters cat will repeatedly signify the four-legged furry animal with whiskers) for the production of meaning, can broach the frame of performance but cannot mimic an art that is nonreproductive” (149). This assertion, however, can be contested through the use of code-switching in Báez’s text. The use of code-switching challenges the one-to-one correlation between word and meaning, especially considering Báez’s use of phonetic
writing. Furthermore, a central theme in the work considers how language and culture can never be a one-to-one translation. Báez’s text and performance do not fix identity or representation; rather, through the use of a pluralistic language within the text, she demonstrates the variability of the self, as engendered through writing and performance.

The performance of the text analyzed in this study is a staging directed by Claudio Mir, presented at the University of Miami in 2003. In contrast to the variable form of the text, the performance of Dominicanish presents highly codified physical actions that do not change from one performance to another. The movements of the performance are informed by kuchipudi, a classical Indian dance form (Torres-Saillant, 14). Despite the codified nature of the performance, it still contributes to the decodification of cultural identity at play in Dominicanish. In fact, the first moment of cultural disconnect experienced by the spectator is the confrontation with a black, Dominican, female body on stage telling the viewer a story through kuchipudi. The incorporation of Indian cultural elements, as well as references to highly specific Dominican and United Statesian culture challenge the reader/viewers expectations. According to Báez, many audience members react negatively to Dominicanish, complaining that it is not “Dominican” enough, and that it did not meet their expectations upon viewing Báez on stage. This is owing to a fraught history between Dominicans on the island and those who have immigrated to the United States.

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38 This is not to say that performance is the same when it is performed for a second time. Following Phelan’s understanding of the repetition of performance, “performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition marks itself as different” (146). It bears pointing out that his argument can also be made for the reading process in general, in which each approach to the text changes through time, but specifically to Báez’s texts, which are reordered for each publication.

39 Conversation with the artist, July 16, 2013.
According to Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández, the history of Dominicans spending time in New York goes back to the early 19th century: “Dissidents from the Dominican Republic have chosen the United States as a haven since the 1830s when Juan Pablo Duarte, the founding father of Dominican nationhood, spent time in New York before finally arriving in Santo Domingo to activate the cause of national independence” (104). At the turn of the century, “renowned philologist Pedro Henríquez Ureña…arrived in the city [New York City] on January 30, 1901, at the age of sixteen” (105). These examples of emigrants or visitors to the United States from the Dominican Republic predate the U.S. occupation, which began on November 29, 1916.40 Later, in the mid-20th century, “massive emigration from the Dominican Republic began in 1962 after the death of dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo” (33). The presence of Dominicans in the United States highlights the transnational character of their movements and political, social, and cultural engagement. Torres-Saillant and Hernández cite Jorge Duany: “Transnational migration transforms social relation and generates a new identity that transcends traditional notions of physical and cultural space. Among other changes, the diaspora calls into question the immigrant’s conception of ethnic, racial, and national identities as defined in their home countries” (Duany, cited in Torres-Saillant and Hernández, 147). Significantly, following Jorge Duany, Torres-Saillant opts for diaspora as the framework for understanding Dominican movement between the island and the United States. According to Duany, “Instead of transnationalism, Torres-Saillant

40 According to Torres-Saillant and Hernández, “…President Wilson ‘reluctantly’ authorized Secretary of State Robert Lansing to proceed with a formal military invasion. Thus, on November 29, 1916, captain Harry S. Knapp proclaimed the military occupation from his flagship U.S.S. Olympia in the port of Santo Domingo. The captain dissolved the Dominican government and began an American military rule of the country that would last until 1924” (27).
interprets the contemporary experiences of Dominicans in the United States as diasporic. He feels that this term—with its dual implication of uprooting and taking root in a new land—better describes transplanted Dominicans in New York City and elsewhere” (Duany, 171). However, if we take experience away from territoriality and analyze the symbolic movement of ideas and cultural practices, as well as virtual/technological participation, this adds a transnational element to Dominican experiences. The movement of Dominicans from one geographic space to another does not signal a disconnect between the two. Torres-Saillant and Hernández note:

Consistent with the advent of the global economy, many Dominicans have settled into a mode that permits them to remain actively linked to life in the native land while also becoming acclimated to the values and norms of the receiving society. However, one wonders whether a community can efficaciously sustain the level of concentration necessary for defending its interests as well as uphold its economic and political rights simultaneously in two societies. (156)

This concern demands us to shift our focus in a 21st century analysis of the connections between two or more societies, especially considering the advent and use of virtual technologies. Furthermore, when considering works by artists such as Báez and Ogando, one can see how artistic and identitary concerns go beyond “here versus there” understandings of a split culture.

In the case of the representations enacted by Báez and Ogando, the concern shifts from consolidating cultures situated in two geographically specific locations, and rather questions the notion of a “here versus there” binary in terms of cultural and national identity. They look to the transnational as a rhizomatic network of identification, replacing the “‘radical’ art of modernity with the ‘radicant’ art of the ‘altermodern’, whose raison d’être is the destabilization of cultural norms and which, characterized by the journey structure and continual translation, is continually moving us along, refusing
to put down deep roots in anything as stable as site, city, nation or community” (Hodge and Turner, 91). This is not to say, however, that the geographically specific locus of the Dominican Republic—or New York City, specifically for Báez—is not central to both performers. While the centrality of Dominican identity pervades both artists’ works, the notion of a unified, centralized, radical (following Deleuze) is eschewed for an understanding of identity as rhizomatic, shifting, and continually evolving. This identity is not rendered intelligible spatially, geographically, or nationally. Rather, it plays across a multiplicity of spaces and ideas of what constitutes identity in order to demonstrate the queer relationality between identity, place, body, and representation.

In particular, Dominicanish disentangles the complex web of identification that occurs between individuals, nations, and other markers of identity. Specifically, “Dominicanish ofrece un marco ontológico abierto donde todo lo que cabe empíricamente en la vida de los compatriotas en la diáspora necesariamente ha de caber en la formulación de lo que somos como nación” (Dominicanish, 16). It is not only the diaspora experience that forms part of the nation, but also the multivalent cultural dynamics that inform the individual. For example, in Báez’s Dominicanish, questions of identity integrate elements of her cultural experiences as an individual. Her travels across the globe, from Cuba to Chile to Bali to India inform her artistic practice as well as her expression of identity. She embodies a contemporary experience of what it means to be Dominican (or for that matter, female, person of color, artist, or person) in a 21st century transnational context. It is through this embodiment, specifically the corporality of performance that subjectivity moves away from processes of naming and labeling, into a field of being in which self-actualization is not necessarily dependent upon language.
While language may be interpreted as a stand-in for physical absence, in *Dominicanish*, it is the presence of the artist’s body as a speaking subject on stage that brings subjectivity into being.

Báez plays upon Phelan’s theory of unmarked through her performance texts. According to Phelan, “Writing re-marks the hole in the signifier, the inability of words to convey meaning exactly. The intimacy of the language of speech and the language of vision extends to their mutual impossibilities” (6). Báez’s writing for *Dominicanish* plays with the notion of the real, and with the idea that writing and performance can accurately represent the subject. Through shifting visual codes and languages, as well as incorporating a variety of global cultural elements, Báez signals the impossibility of fixed representation, and shows how identity and the self are in constant flux. [let’s talk about Phelan’s quote here and how you read Baez’ playing on that]

*Dominicanish* narrates and performs the experience of migrating to the United States at a young age from the Dominican Republic. The performance text questions notions of acquisition of language and culture, the marking of the body as black, and the negotiations of identity that make a subject. All of these themes are examined through the use of language, as it is performed and written. The performance text begins with the words “every sin’ is vegetable/vegetable vegetable/Refrigirator refrigerator fridge/Comfortable comfortable comfortable/Wednesday sursdei zersdeis” (21). This marks an important dynamic between the text and the performance, in which code-switching becomes a mode at times not visually perceptible but discernible through voice. As Sofie Maríñez notes:

En el performance oral de este texto, las palabras pierden su fíjeza y unicidad significante a través de distintas formas de pronunciación que acarrean distintas

The first words in the text are written in English, but pronounced with Spanish and English phonology. This destabilizing moment demonstrates the importance of oral discourse to the reader/viewer’s comprehension of the text as one that is bilingual. The first actual switch between Spanish and English occurs in the context of learning grammar rules: “Once in a while everi sin’/Son sin’ something sin/ Past perfect perfect past/ Regular irregular/ ING very very very good/Ando cantando/ING singing/Di Ar er ir/A as in Michael/ M as in apple” (21). This section eloquently demonstrates the desire to create a one to one comparison between languages, which, like culture, is no simple act of transfer. As the text demonstrates, one to one transfers are jumbled, as in the last two verses. More importantly, the play between Spanish and English is generative because it creates new words and meanings. For example, the word ‘thing’ becomes ‘sin,’ which translates into Spanish as ‘pecado’ and/or the Spanish word ‘sin,’ meaning ‘without’; something, pronounced ‘son sin’ – can be translated from Spanish into English as ‘are without’; or the musical genre of ‘son’ and ‘sin[g].’

From the first few verses of the performance text, Báez begins to break down monolithic conceptions of language, both on the page and the stage. In narrating her acculturation in the United States, specifically Washington Heights, she begins to realize how U.S. society has positioned her as a black female, an identity not as discretely imposed in the Dominican Republic. As Christian Krohn-Hansen notes:

When Dominicans moved from the island to the United States, they simultaneously moved from one hegemonic symbolic system of racial classifications to another. Both the Dominican Republic and the United States
grew out of a history of colonialism and slavery, but the two countries have had, and still have, clearly dissimilar systems of racial classification. This led to a racial-identity dilemma, even a racial-identity crisis, for migrants. When Dominican immigrants in Washington Heights and elsewhere in the city presented themselves as hispanos or Hispanics, which they often did, they frequently used the term as a racial-identity strategy. (179)

This strategic identification is visible in Dominicanish in a different way, particularly through the use of multicultural and multiethnic identities. The text notes “Aquí los discos traen un cancionero/Discos del alma con afro. Con afro black is/beautiful. Black is a color. Black is my color/ My cat is black” (26). It is in this moment that the reader is first exposed to notion of identity as assemblage. The first matrix introduced was that of language, and now the reader adds on the level of racial positioning. In order to solidify her identification with U.S.-based black culture, Báez describes, in contrast to the implicit teacher teaching her the grammar rules of English versus Spanish verbs, how popular music groups were her real teachers. The text states, “Los hermanos Tonga Isley/Los hermanos Isley/The Isley Brothers/Repeat after them/my teachers the Isley Brothers/Repeated a whisper/whispered a little louder/sing a song sang a song/sang a whisper…” (27). One can observe the quality of identity as assemblage as Báez translates the name of the Isley Brothers from Spanish to English. In agreement with Almarza, Báez utilizes identity as a borderline, which “…offer[s] the possibility of new conceptualizations of official discourses on nationality, ethnicity, and culture” (161).

It is important to recognize the position of corporeality when spectating the body on stage, specifically in regards to identity and expectation. Throughout the performance Báez engages in a highly stylized and ritualized Indian dance, which carries with it expectations regarding how bodies should move or perform and in what ways. These movements force the audience to be aware of what they expect when viewing a body of
color on the stage. Like code-switching in the written text, the integration of the highly culturally coded movements of Indian dance challenges the audience’s perception of how a Dominican woman “should” move and be received on the stage. This presents to the viewer a literal embodiment of code-switching.

The performance of *Dominicanish* demonstrates the reconfiguration of language through the body. In the beginning of the performance Báez separates bodily movement from oral discourse. She begins by remaining very still, body engaged in a kuchipudi pose, while enunciating the oral component of the performance. In a distinct moment, she begins dancing the kuchipudi, to the musical accompaniment of a trumpeter. However, later in the performance the separation between oral discourse and bodily movement fades. Báez enacts the two simultaneously throughout the rest of the performance. The performance manifestation of this work demonstrates further how *Dominicanish* challenges both the presumed stability of text and identity. It is only in the performance that the reader/spectator can hear the text aloud, attuned to the variety of pronunciations, tones, and exaggerations of the words. For example, Báez frequent extends and shortens the length of words through exaggeration of sounds. In one part of the performance, she takes the word ‘amor’ and lengthens the pronunciation to seven seconds in length. This exemplifies how the body can manipulate text to create a form of discourse that in flux, rhizomatic, and destabilized. Furthermore, Báez consistently uses footwork to create sounds that rhythmically accentuate her oral and corporeal discourses. This bodily element is not present in the text, nor could it be. The use of the body, paradoxically, sheds light on the objective of the text—to complicate understandings of identity as a stabilized practice—while simultaneously obfuscating said objective. For
example, the use of kuchipudi through out the performance does not serve to clarify the
text. Rather, it lays another layer of meaning that, to the uninformed viewer, complicates
the viewing process. In kuchipudi, each articulated movement of the body stands in for a
verbal enunciation; each gesture is in itself a statement. Significantly, however, Báez’s
kuchipudi is not fully classical, following the Indian tradition. She integrates her own
movements, informed by a variety of cultures, in text and performance. The story Báez
tells blends kuchipudi, her own movements, oral discourse, and text to complicate the
viewing experience and to confront the viewer’s gaze as one that maintains power. The
story Báez weaves will never be entirely comprehensible to a viewer. However, and
perhaps more significantly, Báez’s body and expressions challenge the viewer more
directly. One element of kuchipudi is the strong and direct gaze of the performer to the
audience. This is a confrontational gaze that simultaneously invites the viewer while
making the viewer aware that they too are being watched. As such, the complication of
layered meanings challenges both the viewer and the performer.

Beyond incorporating kuchipudi into her performances, Báez integrates Indian
culture into her practice of Performance Autology. Almarza notes that in an interview,
Báez

Insists that her art is an excuse for the exercise of her spirituality, which relies on the
 teachings of Advaita Vedanta philosophy, positioning herself explicitly against the
 prevalent Catholicism on the island. Advaita Vedanta’s non-dualistic
 understanding of reality seems to be very much in line with Báez’s experiences as a
 migrant who deals with multiple cultural traditions, and who, as a transcultural
 subject has to reconfigure her sense of personal identity moving beyond the logic of
 binary oppositions… (164-5)

On the textual level, the integration of Indian culture is palpable linguistically. The text
states, “take take take off every safety pin in your way/unleash this starched sari/let its
prints and colors play/wild ragas/foreplaying to the juiciest kalankhan/foreplaying in the juiciest dulce de leche/and yet/Thanks to the Ganga gracias al ganjes los/tígeres de Bengala no enchinchan la sed/el salto del tíger hace rato que no es tántrico/thanks to the ganga bengali tigers don’t/move me long gone tantric attacks” (37-38). Mariñez signals the importance of the word “ganga” as it relates to English, Spanish, and Hindi: “Ganga es el nombre del Ganges en sánscrito, y también la forma en spanglish de la palabra inglesa ‘gang’, nombre con que se identifican las pandillas juveniles en Estados Unidos. Aquí, Báez relaciona tres palabras con sonidos distintos (Ganga, Ganges, ganga) pero que contiene distintos significados ” (156). Furthermore, the allusion to “el salto del tíger,” is situated in a Dominican context; it is an idiomatic expression “utilizado entre dominicanos para referirse a cierta acrobacia sexual” (Mariñez, 156).

While this moment in the text denotes a type of “phonetic bilingualism” along with code-switching, there are also examples of the use of Spanglish. The text demonstrates the blending of Spanish and English into a hybrid code, including references to ethnic and racial identity:

Me chulié en el hall/metí mano en el rufo/Craqueo chicle como Shameka Brown/Hablo como Boricua/y me peino como Morena/La viejita de abajo no e’ viejita ná/El super se está tirando a la culona del 5to piso/Jangueo con el pájaro del barrio/Me junto con la muchacha que salió preñá/Salgo con mi ex/Hablo con el muchacho que estaba preso/Garabatié paredes y trenes/City/I pulled the emergency cord. (43)

This quote demonstrate a unique blending of Spanglish with Spanish, while utilizing phonetic representations of speech (“no e’ viejito ná,” for example). Here, the phonetic representations demonstrate the breach between formal and informal registers. This is a phenomenon that is representable both in the text through spelling and in the performance of the text through pronunciation, and reveals the multiplicity of identities at play in
 Báez’s text/performance.

The last line of the text returns to the essential dichotomy between English and Spanish presented at the beginning of the text. Báez concludes her performance text with the lines “**Here I am chewing English/and spitting Spanish**” (49, emphasis in original). This line highlights the title of the work, *Dominicanish*, which can be read as “kind of Dominican,” indicated by the suffix “ish” in English, meaning “kind of,” or as a blending of the words “Spanish” and “Dominican,” or as a blending of the words “English” and “Dominican,” amongst many other possibilities. What is important about the title, and the performance text as a whole, is the relative difficulty of classification. The genre itself is a “textual and visual ‘pastiche,’” a hybrid that illustrates more accurately the fragmented lives of migrant communities” (Almarza, 164). The inclusion of various forms of genre, blended with intertextual references, creates a space that allows for the assemblage of all facets of identity represented in the text/performance. Almarza, quoting Silvio Torres-Saillant, eloquently notes “performance ‘offers an open ontological frame’ where everything that is present in the life of migrant communities can be constituted to take part in the formation of Dominican nationhood in and outside the island” (169).

I would argue that in the case of *Dominicanish*, the space of textual representation also affords this ontological frame. By intentionally engaging with various languages, registers, alternative spellings, onomatopoeia, coded references, and narrative structure, Báez constructs a non-linear space that fits into Puar’s notion of assemblage. The textual pastiche of *Dominicanish* demonstrates Bakhtin’s concept of the “refracted word,” where “discourse [is] aimed at an object but is everywhere refracted by the intentions, the
‘readings’ of others as well as division …of our own socially constructed selves” (Bakhtin, in Vélez, 68-9). Notably, however, the concept of the refracted word is also applicable to the performance text itself. The work demonstrates a fracturing of language that allows Báez to utilize a multiplicity of identity categories to construct a non-traditional narrative/performance that responds to her personal reality as a black, female, Dominican-American “actress, dancer, writer, educator” (71). Furthermore, by incorporating a series of images within the text that function as a flipbook, Báez is able to include physical movement within the seemingly static pages of the text. This action on paper challenges not only the fracturing of language, but also the ways in which readers construct and understand texts as physical objects.

An analysis of *Dominicanish* demonstrates the ways in which language-breaks in register, as enacted through code-switching, open a space where identities can be considered through the concept of assemblage. Language and register breaking refers to moments in the text when the formal register gives way to the informal register within the narrative structure. In *Dominicanish*, the reader is presented a narrator/performer who embraces identity as a possibility of conceptualizing the self as unbound by the traditional division between identity categories. Báez utilizes linguistic elements to articulate identities that are on the borderlines of representation. It is through code-switching, register shifts, multi-narrative perspectives, pastiche, intertextuality, and culturally coded language that Báez highlights the multivalency of her work. Opening this space of representation allows both performers to question monolithic conceptions of
race, gender, class, and nationality, and to create a space for authors of the island who are, for whatever reason, not on the island.

Josefina Báez confronts the realities of cross-cultural negotiation between the Dominican Republic, New York City, and a wide-range of cultural influences. Her work, through the implementation of Performance Autology, centers on the individual’s experience of transnational identity. In agreement with La Fountain-Stokes, in Báez’s performance texts “language and race are mediated through love, an affect or emotion that can surpass the difficulties and pains of migrant experience” (19). Ismael Ogando’s performance art also speaks to pains and difficulties of Dominican identity in transnational contexts. However, Ogando addresses these realities through an artistic aesthetic that is significantly different from that of Báez. Ogando’s works are not text based, nor do they use verbal enunciation. He frequently employs the participation of other artists or spectators, and unlike Báez, engages with these others in productively confrontational and physical ways.

Ogando’s interactions are indicative of the political realities facing queer Dominicans, both on the island and in transnational communities. Despite the aestheticization of the political, his performances speak to the exigencies of Dominican identity, especially considering how both bodies of color and gender queer bodies are othered in hegemonic discourse. While virtual technologies can create an affective network for Dominicans across the globe, the imposition of naming practices still attempt to define who is recognizable as Dominican within these communities. The use of virtual technologies and new media in these communities paradoxically creates connections and interchanges that were previously not possible, while still imposing forms of recognizable
Dominican identity. That is to say, both on and off the island, the politics of identity and naming are still structured by both the political apparatus of multiple governments and a variety of strongly held social conventions, as well as historical precedents.

One only need consider the move to revoke the Dominican citizenship of Dominicans of Haitian decent. In September of 2013, the Dominican Republic Constitutional Court ruled that to be considered a Dominican citizen, at least one parent must be “of Dominican blood” or be a legal resident. Previous to 2010, any person born in the Dominican Republic automatically received citizenship.\(^1\) This political move speaks to the psychological and historic fears surrounding perceived or real encroachment upon the borders of the nation-state, specifically the movement of Haitians to the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, it demonstrates the perceived notion of homogeneity, and the exhaustive desire to maintain a specific type of *dominicanidad*, of Dominican identity, understood both nationally and transnationally, despite the constant flux and change of how *dominicanidad* is defined. The fear of the other is further rooted in racist discourses of nationality. The real or perceived phenotypic makeup of the Dominican population is a moot point. What is of consequence are the historically entrenched and contemporarily continued discourses of racism in the Dominican Republic.

In order to more fully understand the concept of race and identity in the Dominican Republic and New York, it is important to briefly consider the history of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the imposition of United States culture on both.

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Following Ernest Sagás’ history, slavery in the Dominican Republic was abolished in 1844. According to Sagás, owing to a move from plantation society to a cattle farmer system, “there is no divisive legacy of exploitation or historical resentment between blacks and whites over the issue of slavery. Dominican culture is strongly influenced by African legacies, and Dominicans do not shy away from extolling the syncretic nature of their food, music and speech patterns” (321). Otherness in the Dominican Republic is marked not between white versus black, although there are social political economic inequalities between light and dark skinned Dominicans. “In general, the socio economic gap between whites and blacks still gives light-skinned Dominicans a privileged place in society when it comes to opportunities, recognition and even the application of the law” (Sagás, 322). Otherness is marked by nationality, particularly by neighboring Haitians. Within the Dominican imaginary, Haitians are marked by blackness, creating a visually and aurally distinct other. “Being Haitian in the Dominican Republic means being a foreign pariah, easily identified by your foreign-sounding name, by your accent, and, more often than not, by your black skin” (Sagás, 324). Particularly for dark-skinned Dominicans, there is a fear of being misidentified as Haitian. As such, the psychological fear of identification is double: it manifests as a racialized other, as well as a geographically situated outsider, as a Haitian. This is paradoxical considering the two nations share the geographic space of the island of Hispaniola. However, divergent projects of colonization and nation-building have placed the two at odds for centuries.42

Beyond the tensions between France and Spain in the island of Hispaniola from the 16th to the mid-19th century, the United States also played a forceful role in further

42 For a detailed analysis of French and Spanish Colonialism, see Sagás, 324.
antagonizing the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The United States imposed a powerful role in the region after the Spanish-American war of 1898: “Besides brief skirmishes and saber-rattling [in the region], the U.S. Marines occupied Haiti and the Dominican Republic for longer periods (1915-1934 and 1916-1924, respectively)” (326). Sagás argues that “the U.S. military occupations also brought in foreign notions of white racial superiority…In addition, the U.S. forces implemented segregationist practices and policies, such as favoring light-skinned individuals over blacks, and even revived the old corvée law in Haiti, which allowed the U.S. Marines to use Haitian peasants as forced laborers to build roads” (326).

Owing to the United States’ physical and ideological presence in the island of Hispaniola, “Haitians and Dominicans were (re)defining their socioracial identities, not only vis-à-vis each other, but also in reference to ‘the Americans’” (327). Importantly, this identification occurs at the intersection of identitary politics, where it is through the color of one’s skin that the process of othering takes place. Furthermore, racialized identities are imposed upon conceptualizations of national belonging, in which erroneous equivalencies between race and nation take shape, namely that whiteness is identified with the United States, blackness is identified with Haiti, and racial identification in the Dominican Republic depends upon to whom one is comparing the other, be it the United States or Haiti. There is an important set of power relations taking place in this measure of national belonging, which is couched upon a history of colonization, occupation, and exploitation.

While the construction of national identity is a continuous process, Latin American history marks the mid to late 19th century as the quintessential historical
moment for the formation of the Latin American nation, particularly owing to the multiple wars against Spain and other sovereignties for independence. Sagás highlights the differential relationship between varying national forces and the Dominican Republic’s attempt to counter-identify with these powers:

Dominican elites [in the late nineteenth century] responded [to Haiti’s geographic proximity and influence upon Dominican identity] by concocting a new national identity, not only vis-à-vis Spain but particularly in opposition to Haiti. As was the case in other Latin American nations, Dominican elites looked back to the original inhabitants of the land in order to stake a claim of nativity. Unfortunately for them, the native Taíno Indians had been wiped out and absorbed by the Spanish conquerors centuries earlier. In spite of the time gap and the historical stretch, Dominican elites began ‘imagining’ the nation’s citizens as indios, the racially mixed descendants of valiant Taínos and dashing Spaniards—thus helping to explain the obvious lack of whites… Dominican identity formation (as defined by the nation’s elites) became a convoluted process that got even more complicated when the country went under U.S. military occupation in 1916, and my the mid-20th century, at the height of the Rafael Trujillo dictatorship, blackness as a cultural element was virtually eradicated from Dominican society. (327-8)

This quote signals an important relationship between class interests and race, in which the ruling or politically powerful classes erase any trace of blackness from Dominican identity, substituting it for Taíno origins.

This is not to ignore, however, the powerful political and social implications of returning national identity to a group of people decimated by Spanish colonial conquest. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the intellectual occupation that occurs by assuming that Dominicans “reject” blackness and “whitewash” their national project. It is thoroughly important to analyze the intersecting powers at play that work to shape a Dominican national project that does not foreground blackness as a defining national

43 Venezuela gains independence from Spain in 1812. In 1822, Ecuador gains independence from Gran Colombia. Argentina is liberated from Spain in 1816. One of the last colonies in the Spanish Empire to gain independence is Cuba, in 1898. Puerto Rico also gains independence from Spain in 1898, but remains a protectorate of the United States through today.
characteristic. It can be argued, furthermore, that perspectives coming from a predominately white North American academy impose the construct of blackness upon this society, owing to the fact that they are a majority black nation. However, just because one society sees race relations as an either/or issue, does not mean that this assumption should be imposed on another, like the Dominican Republic, which sees itself as something else. Again, however, this is not to ignore the political and economic histories that have shaped the Dominican imaginary as one that is bereft of blackness. As Sagás notes, Trujillo’s dictatorship between 1930 and 1961 “included a major ‘whitening’ component: not only did his ideologues promote the Dominican *indio* identity and suppress all perceived black cultural elements (which now became associated with Haiti) but government policies also actively promoted white immigration” (328). As seen in this quote, while it can be academically shortsighted to argue that because Dominicans are a majority afro-descendant population they necessarily should identify with this heritage, it is also naïve to assume that this counter-identification with the Taíno inhabitants from Hispaniola occurred as a bottom-up process. It is necessary to recognize the political and economic powers at play in the imagining of a nation and in the processes of defining the characteristics of a nation. In the case of the Dominican Republic, national identification is a process defined and delimit by a number of social and political elites, including scholars, government officials, and religious clergy.

Regarding the process of othering, Sagás notes, “If Dominicans are *indio*, and Haitians are blacks, the most blacks in the Dominican Republic ought to be Haitian, or so the reasoning goes. Thus Haitians, the ‘other’ in Dominican society, the useful scapegoat
during hard times, can be easily spotted by their color. But then what about black Dominicans?” (332). Here we must signal the performative aspect of national identity, which as a marker of identity is not easily made visible through the body. Sagás highlights the performative nature of identification in the Dominican Republic, noting “Afro-Dominicans typically go to great lengths to make other aware of their Dominican nationality so they will not be confused with Haitians. I have personally witnessed Afro-Dominicans deny vehemently that they are black while remarking ‘Only Haitians are black’” (332).

The centrality of national belonging as a marker of identification is particularly important in the Dominican Republic:

…[R]acial self-identification in the Dominican Republic is different from that in other nations in the Caribbean and tends to rest more on the nation than on race or ethnicity. In other words, most Dominicans think of themselves as ‘Dominicans’ for national and racial purposes. Thus, indio has become a new sort of ‘race’ by which Dominicans identify themselves and that describes the veritable racial melting pot that is the Dominican Republic—a place where it is hard to tell one ‘race’ from the other and where almost no one can make a valid claim to belonging to one ‘race’. (335)

Notably, however, while Dominicans may identify as Dominican both in terms of nationality and race, this naming is couched upon racial identification and exclusion, namely that blackness equals Haitian (not-Dominican). As such, it is not possible to cursorily identify Dominican society as post-racial or as a melting pot, since racial identification for the purpose of exclusion/othering still has a strong hold in this nation.

Ismael Ogando’s performances emphasize the experiences of Dominican bodies, both on the island and off. He uses his body as a creator of visual discourse that challenges the assumptions of what it means to be Dominican. In a description of his work, Ogando states, “As performer I focus on subjects of my country's idiosyncrasy and
its culture with a wide comprehensive approach from a very personal perspective. I love to work actions that speak out my own complexes as individual, such as my sexual orientation, skin color plus my political criterion altogether and the self consciousness of media influence as well.” (artisabout.com, 2013). By performing outside of the space of the island, he highlights both the marked characteristics of his body and the political realities faced by performers.

Ogando was born and raised in Santo Domingo. He participated in the Ejército Nacional de la República Dominicana. In 2012, Ogando left the Dominican Republic, citing the oppressive forces of institutions as a reason for leaving. Ogando has performed in Miami, Mexico City, New York City, and Berlin, and is currently residing in Berlin, working as a curator and archive manager at the SAVVY Contemporary Gallery. While movement in and out of the geographic borders of the Dominican Republic and the Greater Caribbean affords certain flexibility in terms of artistic production and representation, this is not to ignore the political and social realities of the space in which he performs. Specifically, it is not to say that performing in other spaces affords the artist unlimited freedom, unrestrained from the problematic of “otherness.” For example, neo-Nazi presence is a contentious issue in Berlin, and although there have been no instances of violence at any performances or gallery openings, Ogando confronts this reality frequently in the form of political protests. The key issue in highlighting these events is to underscore the fact that transnational space is in no way utopian; it has political and social complexities that affect the creation and production of performance works.

Challenging readable articulations of dominicanidad in transnational spaces requires a playing on and against both the specificity and non-specificity of Dominican
identity. Ogando’s performances utilize certain markers of cultural identity that are specific to the space of the Caribbean, and particularly the Dominican Republic. For example, in his performance *Dominican Shower* (2012), there is an altar that resembles the rituals of Santería. The hour-long performance is marked by cultural contrasts, between the viewer and the performer. The title itself highlights the difference in perception between the two; “shower” for many audience members indicates a much different reality than the one presented by Ogando, who bathes himself in a large basin. This contrast is dependent upon perceived notions and stereotypes regarding poverty and class in the Dominican Republic, especially from a “western” gaze. While challenging perceptions of what *dominicanidad* is outside of the space of the island, Ogando utilizes and relies upon tropes of race, class, and gender to articulate his Dominican identity, while challenging how others looking in perceive this identity. Those looking “in” are also looking from a geographic and cultural outside, as these performances take place outside of the Dominican Republic and outside of a particular realm of cultural experience for most spectators. I do not ignore, however, this inside/outside dynamic of spectator and performer as it occurs within the space of the island. My intent is to highlight the spatialized dynamic of spectatorship with regards to cultural belonging and geographic positioning. According to the artist:

> I simply do a repetitive action, which is me showering as if I was showering in the privacy of my house, but instead of doing it once, I start over again until my body starts to feel too present to myself. When it happens, I normally just stop, if I am still covered with soap foam, wash it out and get the towel and go. Normally don’t wait for people’s response (sic), since the interaction is created at the moment people have to decide whether to stay in front of the curtain listening to the water dropping on the floor or behind it facing my naked body repeat systematically a task. (Email exchange with the artist, 21 October 2013)

As such, Ogando plays with the dynamic of *dominicanidad* both on and off the island,
and how this identity is read, based on presuppositions, by others.

*Dominican Shower* also employs visual queues to demonstrate the racialized identity of Dominicans, as well as a historically marked desire for “whiteness.” One only need look back to the Trujillo dictatorship to see the national anxiety toward blackness, and the racist policies to promote whiteness in the Dominican Republic. As Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández note, for example, “The dictatorship of Trujillo spent vast public resources in promoting an image of national identity that stressed the Hispanic European roots of the country’s population and omitted any mention of African heritage” while “A demographic assessment taking account of racial distinctions today [1998] would show that blacks and mulattoes make up nearly 90% of the Dominican Republic’s close to eight million inhabitants” (143).

Ogando’s performances play upon this dichotomy, highlighting the national denial of blackness, and underscoring the erroneous nature of this perception. In the performance, Ogando ritualistically bathes himself, covering himself with thick, white suds that transform his body. He repeatedly washes off this “whiteness,” demonstrating that blackness is intrinsic to his identity as a Dominican, and it is something that should not be removed. The futility of “washing away” blackness is not to be read as debilitating, rather it is a celebratory act of resistance, which encourages recognition and acceptance of this part of the national make up. Staging these performances in transnational spaces brings attention to this national dynamic, but also engenders a place of identification that, while dependent upon national tropes, responds to the realities of identity in the 21st century. Ogando’s work highlights the intersections between race and class, including considerations of gender and sexuality.
In order to understand the position of the unmarked in Ogando’s performance, I turn to Peggy Phelan’s reading of the artist Adrian Piper’s performances. Phelan notes how Piper plays upon the unmarked to underscore the socially and politically constructed nature of race. She notes:

More than indication that racial markings are read differently cross-culturally these variations underline the psychic, political, and philosophical impoverishment of linking the color of the physical body with the ideology of race. Race-identity involves recognizing something other than skin and physical inscription. One cannot simply ‘read’ race as skin-color. The tendency to do so leads to the corollary proposition that people with the same skin color believe the same thing, and that there is, for example, such a thing as a coherent African-American community. (8)

This reading of Piper’s work provides a rich analysis for the performances of Báez and Ogando. Importantly, both performers address race as a social and cultural construct, as well as the Dominican Republic’s fraught history with racial identity and racist attitudes. However, both Báez and Ogando eschew the notion that ethnoracial makeup necessarily constitutes or creates wide reaching identity community.

Regarding the specific history of the Dominican Republic, which crosses geographic boundaries and social categorizations, it is impossible to state that the visibility of blackness creates a unified understanding of national belonging, specifically because of the intersecting histories of who and what constitutes national belonging. As Phelan states, “the ‘visibility’ of black skin is not, and cannot be, an accurate barometer for identifying a community of diverse political, economic, sexual, and artistic interests” (10). This is specifically because, in the works of Báez and Ogando, there are many more interests at play than the notion of black identity. While this is a component of each artist’s work, it is not and cannot be the central axis of representation, as each artist seeks to understand the multiplicity of identities, histories, and geographies at play in their
position as members of a transnational, rhizomatic, geographically un-situated community. Furthermore, following Phelan, visual and linguistic representation can never fully nor adequately represent the totality of the subject.

Regarding the conflation between identity politics and visibility, Phelan states quite rightly, “the danger in staking all on representation is that one gains only re-

presentation” (10). That is, through performance and textual inscription of the self, the artist only presents again an idea of self, rather than an adequate understanding of the artist’s subjectivity. As Phelan states, “in performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of ‘presence.’ But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else—dance, movement, sound, character, ‘art.’” (150). The act of seeing, just like the act of representation, is always partial and can never be fully realized. However, this perceived lack is employed as a challenge to the political viability of the ‘visible,’ as described by Phelan. She notes, “possibly, through the impossibility of saying [or seeing] a wholly material truth, we might see what the possibility of the immaterial is (which is perhaps to see how to say it). Lacan and Freud called this immateriality the unconscious; it speaks through the symptom. I am calling this immateriality the unmarked; it shows itself through the negative and through disappearance” (19, my emphasis). The category of unmarked, as a concept, “concentrates on the broken symmetry between the self and the other, and the possibilities this break affords for rehearsing the political consequences of an acknowledgment of a failed inward gaze” (27). The concept of the unmarked has theoretical relevance to the understanding of queer employed in this project. Particularly,
both theoretical concepts—unmarked and queer—encounter political viability in the excesses of colliding categories of identity.

Returning to Ogando’s *Dominican Shower*, the artist puts the nude male form on display in an intimate setting. This is a trope frequently seen in art history, but is one that is traditionally centered upon a male gaze towards a female subject. Furthermore, looking toward the relationship between spectator and performer, this relationship is traditionally set up as a male gaze towards a subject. Importantly, Ogando inverts this relationship, situating the male body as a subject to be spectated. There is no implicitly gendered gaze in these performances. Power relations are not set upon gendered identification of who is watching and who is being watched. Rather, the bathing male body is only a part of a larger discourse on identity, which is, in this case, comprised of an assemblage of parts, each of which plays a crucial role in articulating this identity.

It is significant that Ogando’s situation of gazes also considers the relationship between black and white bodies, specifically related to the notion of a colonial, white gaze. Particularly within queer representations of black bodies, the ‘other’ to the white gaze is positioned in a way to be consumed or regarded for the pleasure of the white spectator. Ogando address this positioning through both the artistic aesthetic present in *Dominican Shower* as well as the use of artistic collaborators in *Ad Infinitum* and *Untitled no. 3*. He complicates the binary positioning of black and white through a consideration of the historical process of racial identification in the Dominican Republic. Blackness, as it is read in the United States particularly, is considered through an entirely distinct lens in the Dominican Republic, a lens that is shaped by issues of nationality, as well as the color of one’s skin. By considering the position of his body as a body of color both ‘internally’ within the space of the Dominican Republic and ‘externally’ in the space of transnationality, Ogando sheds light on the position of the racialized body in performance, as body that challenges structures of power, yet is simultaneously imbricated in existing networks of gazes, conditioned by said structures of power.

However, performing in transnational spaces creates a dialogue between viewer and performer that challenges concretized conceptualizations of identity and specifically for these performances, what it means to be Dominican. Importantly, the viewing process, as well as interpretation of the works, is dependent upon historical and cultural knowledge. Within the context of Ogando’s performance, the spectator is not within a Barthesian realm of dead authors. The background and history of both Ogando as an

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individual and the Dominican Republic as a nation is key to reading these performances. However, because of the transnational context and because Ogando represents relatively global questions of identity and otherness, viewer will not be “left in the dark” if they are unfamiliar with either backstory. Knowing this information, however, will shed light on the political and cultural situation Ogando is exploring and challenging through his performances. This is a strategy and characteristic of much performance art, particularly the conceptual performance pieces from the 60s’ and 70s’ from which Ogando draws. Ogando simultaneously depends upon politicized identification while unmarking these identities through his performance aesthetic. These performances, however, are marked/coded in distinct ways, depending upon where they are performed. Furthermore, *Dominican Shower* and *Ad Infinitum* are performed as part of international performance festivals, the TRANSMUTED performance festival in Mexico City, and the Miami Performance International Festival, respectively. Each of these festivals invites performers from different nations, and importantly, lists their nationality in the program, next to their performance title. This structuring is important, because it highlights national identification in performance, and sets up a particular expectation while conditioning the reading on the part of the viewers. The expectation is set, that in some way, the performance is representative, linked to, or deals with questions of nationality While this is the case for some performers, including Ogando, it is not an issue broached by all. At the same time, the international character of the festivals, despite the titling/naming processes, demonstrates global networks created amongst performers, critics, academics, and the public.

These interactions at international festivals lead to collaborations, like the one
seen in *Ad Infinitum*. This work, conceptualized and performed by Ogando, includes the participation of Diego Bowie, a performer from Panama. *Ad Infinitum* is a work that challenges assumptions surrounding comportment, uses of space, social interactions, and the roles of spectatorship. This performance begins with Bowie sitting languidly in the performance space. He wears only a speedo and has a series of objects lined up in front of him. A video projection of the performance space is cast onto the wall behind him, creating a visual doubling of the space and of the performers.

![Image](http://www.artisabout.com)


Ogando describes his use of technology: “In this piece I used audiovisual elements. A video-camera with output for video and a projector with video input, both connected recording and projecting in real time at the same direction, which was meant to create the phenomenon called optical feedback, which relates to the title of the piece *Ad Infinitum* (forever more)” (Ogando, e-mail message to author, 21 October 2013). He explains his actions upon entering the performance space: “I started burning Wood essence oil with a spoon and a lighter, actions similar to the ones I witnessed during my
field research with male sexual workers in Santo Domingo” (Ogando, e-mail message to
author, 21 October 2013). He then begins to use the objects on the passive canvass that is
Bowie. The two performers have strikingly similar physicalities, they are both very thin
and of similar stature.

A key difference for this performance, however, is that Bowie has a visibly
lighter skin tone than Ogando. It is a striking difference, owing to the relative similarity
between the two performers. Ogando starts by shaving Bowie’s hair, giving him a
similar cut to Ogando. According to the artist:

Afterwards, the space was impregnated with the pleasant smell and I proceed to
take an electric shaving machine and shaved the lower part of the hairline of
Diego Bowie, from the sides to the back, leaving a semi spherical shape over his
head, as a remembrance of sanctity, a haircut similar to the representation of some
male saints and martyrs from old catholic cards. The action of cutting somebody
hair, is closely attached to several experiences in my life: When I was in jail in
Dominican Republic, also when I underwent military service and the time my
mother and a cousin assaulted me in bed to cut an eccentric hairdo I was using
during my early teens. The haircutting is an act allowed to be executed for a
truthful individual or imposed by power as a metaphor for submission, or through
violence, in my criteria. In Bowie’s case, it was neither, since during this piece,
Bowie was absent and I was not me, but my memories and Bowie was actually
me. After the haircutting ritual, I proceed to put a pink lipstick on Bowie’s lips, I
stopped and play an audio piece to go along with the development of the action.
(Email exchange with artist, 21 October 2013)

He paints bright pink lipstick across Bowie’s lips, who stares passively into the distance.
Importantly, neither performer makes eye contact throughout. When he begins to apply
the lipstick, a recording of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata plays in the gallery space. He
then takes Bowie’s head in his hands and aggressively rubs his face across Bowie’s,
smearing the lipstick across his face. This action continues for some time: “I kept doing
this action until the audio stopped, approximately 10 minutes. That was the end of the
piece; Diego and I got up and greeted the people that reacted with a lot of emotion. I was
dizzy and experienced some sort of de-personalization, took me a while to come back to reality” (Ogando, e-mail message to author, 21 October 2013). Significantly, according to the artist, the performance takes him into a consciously liminal space, in which presence, both artistic and personal, is temporarily unavailable to both performer and audience.


Throughout these actions, the performance is projected behind the two performers, creating a visual and spatial doubling of the actions and the space of performance. The use of projections underscores how technology mediates identity and how spectators view both the performance and the bodies on stage. The projections make the viewer aware of how these bodies are ithered by spectators and through technological mediation. The spectator’s gaze is always conditioned in relation to structures of power. The gaze in performance is a negotiation of power, and the spectator’s gaze assumes
power over the performer. Ogando’s performances challenge a number of gazes at play in the act of performance. He complicates the binary division assumed in relations of power by enacting a male-to-male gaze between himself and Bowie. Meanwhile, the projection creates a doubled and disidentified gaze between performer, participant, and spectator through the use of the projection. Moreover, he challenges racialized hierarchies of power through gaze and recognition by doubling himself as a performer, utilizing both the corporeal presence of Bowie—a visual double—and the projection of the performance action, which is cast simultaneously upon his body and behind the space of the performers. Ogando recognizes the power of the performer to complicate, condition, and frustrate the pleasure of viewing. By making the spectator aware of their position as a viewer through a technological doubling of the scene performed, Ogando lays bare the power relations implicit in viewing or spectating, and demonstrates the control artists have over representation and interpretation of their works. This piece further challenges the notion of the spectator as a passive viewer, as the projected filmic doubling of the performance demonstrates the importance as well as the challenges of documentation in performance.

Performance art, in Phelan’s understanding, most closely depicts the power of the unmarked, as it is a non-object. She states, “performance’s being, like the ontology of a subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance” (146). While performance can be and is documented through photographs, video, and writing, these elements are all vestiges of the performance, and can never be a stand in for the live event. In performance art, “the disappearance of the object is fundamental…it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered” (147).
The function of real bodies in performance implicates the real through their presence and the non-teleological impulse of performance is felt through its particular lack of futurity: “performance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends” (148). The act of performance is situated in a hyper-present, and despite documentation, exists only in this space. This hyper-real presence and focus on the present moment can also be seen in works on queer identity, particularly Jack Halberstam’s notion of queer time. For Halberstam, queer becomes a way of life, which is a counter to “straight time/place” and through which distinct conceptualizations of alliance (kinship) and transgender embodiment can be actualized. This understanding “opens way for new life narrative and alternative relations to time and space” (2). In regards to the progression of time towards old age, Halberstam signals that the AIDS epidemic causes a diminishing future and forges a focus on the here and now. Queer subjectivity also creates “potentiality of life unscripted by conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing” (2). Lee Edelman also analyzes the importance of the present in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. For Edelman, “The queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form” (4). While these performances may make reference to a historical past or a space of the future, the ontological reality of performance can exist only in the space and time of now, which is the time-space of performance art. Regarding performance art’s relationship to the real and representation, Phelan argues:

Performance is an attempt to value that which is nonreproductive, nonmetaphorical. This is enacted through the staging of the drama of misrecognition (twins, actors within characters enacting other characters, doubles, crimes, secrets, etc.) that sometimes produces the recognition of the desire to be
seen by (and within) the other. Thus, for the spectator the performance spectacle is itself a projection of the scenario in which her own desire takes place. (152)

Ogando’s performances engage the theoretical implications of the present and presence. While documentation is an important element in his works, the physical interaction between performers and audience in his works highlight the urgency of queer transnationality. That is to say, the moment of performance, of bodily interaction with self and other—in the relationship between the performer and himself, the performer and collaborator, and the performer and audience—signals the theoretical crux of queer transnationality, which argues for an understanding of identity situated in a present, that understands identity as assemblage, as a process always in motion. The ‘now’ of contemporary queer theory—see Edelman and Halberstam, for example—resonates with the way Ogando articulates a dominicanidad specific to his experience in transnational spaces.

Ogando also addresses more directly notions of queer desire, and the taboo state of queer desire in the Dominican psyche. Antonio de Moya provides an important analysis of the role of masculinity and desire in the Dominican Republic. Regarding the performative impulse of Dominican masculinity, he argues that it is identification, rather than sexual desire that categorizes masculinity in the Dominican Republic. He states, “This irrational fear of becoming a woman, as I have said, of ‘degenerating’, helps to compulsorily construct—and simultaneously deconstruct—exclusive heterosexuality. For de Moya, it is members of the category of hegemonic males who “are the ones who must produce and reproduce as a ritual the patriarchal power game of masculinity, primarily on the basis of sexual orientation” (99). This is the axis of definition that is taken out of the Dominican Republic and inserted into transnational spaces in Ogando’s
performances. Importantly, this highly codified understanding of masculinity and of masculine desire is displaced in transnational settings, and thereby is re-coded according to both the cultural specificities of the location of the performance and to the viewers.

De Moya highlights that the categorizations and nomenclature developed for his projects are translatable to other cultural contexts and “are basically intended as an invitation for linguistic and ethnographic cross-cultural research, mostly in the Caribbean” (99). The Caribbean as it exists in today’s globalized culture is not geographically delimited by the space of the islands. The Caribbean within the scope of this analysis in particular, stretches beyond the Caribbean basin, into the northern reaches of the United States, particularly that most distant island of the Caribbean, Manhattan; to Miami, the “capital of Latin America;” and into lesser known (within Caribbean Studies) but still culturally connected global city of Berlin. It is precisely through the transnational movement of these cultural codes that queer representations of national identity begin to emerge. Experiencing any number of culturally and nationally codified forms of identity, be they racial, gendered, sexual, class-related, etc. in transnational spaces reconfigures the articulation and reception of these identities. Furthermore, as a genre, performance art puts these issues of articulation and reception on display, quite literally. Performance can be directed in a manner that makes the spectator consciously aware of their culturally coded ways of seeing. This reconfigures the traditional relationship between artistic producer and audience, in that the two, especially in the performances of Ogando and Báez, enter into a collaborative dialogue to, if not come to consensus, debate the socially and culturally constructed and performative nature of identity.
Importantly, by using virtual technology and social media platforms, Ogando is creating a digital archive of his performances that is not separate from performance. In *Ad Infinitum*, the act of documentation is a part of the scenography, literally projected into the moment of performance. The creation of a digital archive of performance is elemental in understanding the role of transnationality in these performances. Ogando’s performances move across national boundaries, and are enacted in in a variety of spaces across the globe. They also deal with issues of national identity and the variety of persons that are included or excluded from this national belonging. However, the documentation and dissemination of these works also includes a transnational axis that must be analyzed. The majority of Ogando’s performances are available either on YouTube or on his personal blog. This open-access digital archive of his works forms part of a transnational and global network of artistic and cultural production. While performed in gallery spaces, and, to a certain extent rely on the legitimizing space of the gallery, the documentation of the works demonstrates the democratizing possibilities available through the Internet.

For works of performance, one must consider the role of space, specifically within the realm of the physical action. Both Josefina Báez and Ismael Ogando stage the majority of their works either on stage or within the space of a gallery. This is in comparison to works that are enacted within public spaces not necessarily designated for performance or visual arts, which are, incidentally, sites both artists have used on occasion. The distinction between spaces, particularly that of the gallery, theatre, or museum is important, as these spaces, like all spaces, are codified and situate practices of viewing and spectatorship in important ways. The space of the gallery or stage sets up
particular expectations on the part of the viewer and performer. The artist can, however, challenge the conventions of this space through the body.45

While space may condition the body, the intrinsic relationship between corporeality and space creates an oppositional drive in which the body can and does condition space. Here, I use the term condition both in its more literal sense, in that the physical space can constrain or affect a body’s possibilities within that space, and also in a more figurative sense, designating how uses and codings of space regulate bodily practices within said spaces. While the gallery or museum provides a silenced, public space of critical and personal reflection, the space of virtuality is, paradoxically, entered into in a (usually) private, individual manner, and yet connects people to one another across spatial and temporal boundaries.

The accessibility of Ogando’s performances on YouTube allow for commentary, criticism, and shared reflection through the comments page. The content on YouTube is also linked to other videos of interest, either posted by Ogando or tagged in relation to his work. This creates a network of viewership and participation that does not depend upon the space of the gallery. Any Internet user can access Ogando’s documentation, participate in conversations surrounding the works, and explore the network of relations between performers linked on YouTube. Ogando’s blog is another example of the digitization of his archive, where he posts videos, personal and artistic statements, as well as other forms of documentation, including photography. While the blog is not

45 Hodge and Turner describe the complex relationship between the space and the body, noting “yet though place appears complex and frequently riven by those forces that lay claim to it, the simultaneously metaphorical and material need to insist on location, to ‘stand one’s ground’, to enable actions to ‘take place’ remains, despite reservations, a necessity. Performance implicates our bodies, which make us objects among others in the world” (90).
necessarily as interactive or networked as his YouTube page, it is an important element of contemporary performance. The artist’s blog or webpage functions as an interactive and evolving artists’ statement, which can, should the artist decide, include important background information, entries delineating the genesis and development of a project, or include other events in which the artist participates.

Online artistic production has the dualistic drive of bridging cultures to the potential detriment of erasing specificities. However, virtual technologies become an outlet where historically marginalized individual cultures can enact a space that articulates artistic and cultural specificities. Importantly for Caribbean and Latin American Studies, analyzing how online cultural production expands our understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean as a geographic spaces allows contemporary artists and scholars to consider how cultural production is not bound by geographic space. As Taylor and Pitman underscore, “…Latin American identity often traverses nation-state/regional boundaries, [and] can be composed of multiple and diasporic identities, and indeed, the growing opportunities to express these identities are often facilitated by new media technologies and their ability to cross borders” (2).

Regarding the space of the internet and how it is structured, it is important to highlight, as Taylor and Pitman do, that the Internet is conditioned by previous structures of power, and is centralized in a way that mirrors hegemonic discourses established in a pre-digital era.46 For example, Taylor and Pitman highlight how the term ‘cyberculture’ itself has an “…implicit reliance on utopian, patriarchal conceptualisations [sic] of online activity as encapsulated in cyberpunk visions of the 1980s in which the user is freed from

46 For a detailed analysis of the historical development of the structure of the Internet in relation to existing hierarchies of power, see Taylor and Pitman, pp. 33-34.
the body and from material constraints, to navigate a purely virtual realm” (3-4). A significant issue within Internet studies is the notion of the disembodied, in which all markers of identity cease to influence the production and reception of digital discourse. However, these markers are still important to digital intelligibility, as discourse is still centered on hegemonic, heteronormative practices, organizational structures, and forms of language. However, while it is naïve to think the Internet is a space of unbridled decorporalization, it does provide important and novel forms of articulating identity and belonging, which are not necessarily structured upon traditional categorizations of identity. This is not to say, however, that the disembodied character of the Internet eschews politicized expressions of identity, quite the contrary. As we see in Ogando’s online presence, the body is still a central practice to his online persona, which is indicative of his performance art practice, as the body is central to his offline performance.

The space of the Internet has provided a way of reconfiguring national identity in a seemingly geographically unbound way. Looking at Ogando’s work, we can see how currently, he articulates queer, black, *dominicidad* from Germany through new media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, blogs, and YouTube. However, geographic spaces are, and have always been, artificially constructed by networks of power. According to Crampton, “maps are part of a general discourse of power, which both enables and abridges possibilities for people to act” (Crampton, cited in Taylor and Pitman, 29). Not only are geographic spaces mapped out and regulated in relation to established political powers; nations and geographic spaces are constructed and maintained discursively.
That is to say, following Taylor and Pitman, that Latin America and the Caribbean are, like other geographic regions, constructed as an ideological concept (22). Citing Walter Mignolo, Taylor and Pitman highlight the ways in which the Americas were discursively engendered through processes of mapping:

Before 1492 the Americas were not on anybody’s map, not even on the map of the people inhabiting Anáhuac and Tawantinsuyu […] the mass of land and the people were there, but they named their own places […] ‘America’, then, was never a continent waiting to be discovered. Rather, ‘America as we know it was in invention forged in the process of European colonial history and the consolidation and expansion of the Western world view and institutions. (Mignolo, cited in Taylor and Pitman, 29-30)

Understanding cultural spaces as geographically and cartographically bound is a problematic notion for 21st century cultural production, as well as for a 21st century understanding of Latin America, and for this study specifically, the understanding of the Caribbean as a cultural and political space that is geographically immobile. As Taylor and Pitman note, “the cartographic representation of a bounded entity known as Latin America, whether intended to be abridging or enabling in its function is furthermore highly problematic for Latinas/os who do not fit within or identify with the traditional regional boundaries” (31).

The authors contend that, if Latin America is imagined discursively in “real life,” then this discursive construction translates to online production as well. While this discursive construction may translate to online cultural practices, there are also transformative and resistive possibilities of digital cultural production. It is important, therefore, to highlight the ways in which artists, playwrights and performers are using these digital platforms to challenge traditional and hegemonic discursive constructions of

47 Drawn from Homi Bhabha, Doris Sommer, and Walter Mignolo.
identity practices, be they cultural, political, or surrounding any marked categories of identity. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the interrelation between online and offline spaces.

Taylor and Pitman highlight this relationship through the parallel discourses between online and offline spaces as easily susceptible to hegemonic and imperialist enterprises, especially stemming from North America, and more particularly the United States. For example, they note how recent scholarship on how the actual coded structure of the internet is inherently molded by specific national and economic projects:

…The use of generic top-level domain extensions (gTLD) and country code top level domain extensions (ccTLD) in URLs has been highlighted by scholars as both mapping out an implicit US neo-imperialism online, and at the same time attempting to draw boundaries around internet content in the interest of the nation-state. Steinberg and McDowell note how purportedly ‘generic’ top-level domains are in many cases available solely to refer to the US, with the .edu and .gov domains being particular cases in point. (32)

While the Internet is discussed in terms of openness and cross-boundary potential, it is still evident that different national and economic interests structure it in unequal ways. However, again, I do not argue that the space of the Internet, like space offline, is conditioned in a way that removes all contestatory potential. To underscore Butler again, resistance cannot take place outside of hegemonic practices. Following my analysis of Foucault in Chapter 3, the potential for resistance within dominant practices of power is great, however, one must know how to play on and against said powers in order to challenge them. Referring back to my analysis of heterotopias in Chapter 3, it is fruitful to consider the space of the Internet as a heterotopia, in and through which culturally specific identities, including Caribbean identities broadly understood, can be challenged in a transnational, non-geographically specific platform.
Taylor and Pitman also provide an insightful analysis of how issues of race in Latin American translate to online spaces. The authors signal the misconstrued idea that the Internet provides a disembodied space free of the regulatory nature of power. They state:

While much popular *Wired*-inspired discourse championed the emancipatory potential of new technologies...to free us from the limitations of our bodies altogether in the apparently raceless, genderless expanses of ‘cyberspace’, such utopianist dreams were quickly checked by more critical work that has focused on the rather less liberatory effects of the medical technologies now available and on the persistence of gender, and later race, as signifiers of inequality in virtual environments. (144)

Key to their analysis of the impact of race and ethnicity in Latin American cultural production is the notion of visibility. Siting Jennifer Gonzalez, the authors note “that race is an ‘importantly visual system of power’ and that ‘the visual truth effect of races has very real consequences even if the facts about race as a category or discourse reveal it to be primarily an ideological construction’” (Gonzalez, cited in Taylor and Pitman, 143). The authors go on to signal how the visual character of race and ethnicity problematically ‘naturalizes’ it, stating “as a result of the visual nature of race it tends to be interpreted as less of a matter of performance than as a natural fact revealed by the naked body (rather than through the use of selected props). Representations that seek to reveal race always run into the risk of reifying it in an unhelpful way, whatever the intentions of their creators” (143).

While I do agree that there is a particular and specific difficulty in revealing the performative nature of race— which is a performative construct equal to gender as highlighted by Butler—I disagree that these representations *always* risk reifying race in “an unhelpful way.” Considering the works of Ogando and Báez, the reader/spectator
can see the ways in which these two performers challenge the visibility of a body of color on stage as a natural condition, and through their movements and stagings, clearly articulate the performative and socially constructed nature of race, particularly race as it is understood and performed in the Dominican Republic, and as it may be read in the United States and transnationally. The cultural specificity of their performances as they relate to race further highlights its performative nature. Furthermore, in the case of Báez, by dialoguing with a variety of cultures and by engaging with a multiplicity of cultural practices (from Dominican to Yola to Black America to India and to Bali), she constructs an artistic practice, both textually and on stage, that mimics the performative construction of identity. Rather than being categorized by top-down process of naming and intelligibility, she takes charge of her identification and utilizes cultural referents that speak to her as a person.

Ogando situates his performances in a way that reveal identity as a social and political construct. The mere visual presence of his body, which is almost always naked or near naked, does not ‘naturalize’ his body of color. Rather, by carefully using video projections and partnered works, he demonstrates the constructed nature of race through a performative and technological doubling. While Ogando does consider race through use of binaries, these binaries of black and white paradoxically challenge the notion of race as binary category. By paralleling visually similar bodies in works such as *Ad Infinitum* and *Untitled no. 3*, performed with Chris Thary, Ogando creates a form of doubling that signals the social construction of race on binary oppositions. In the Dominican Republic, this racialized binary is superimposed upon discourses of nationality, particularly in the construction and legitimation of Dominican national belonging in the face of Haitian
immigration. Furthermore, his performances demonstrate how the individual is an assemblage of multiple categories of identity. No one identifier is necessarily privileged, despite the more or less visual character of these identities.

Following Phelan’s notions regarding the unmarked and political viability, visibility or recognition by an Other (particularly an Other situated in a position of power) is not the only means to political agency. It is specifically the binary relationship between marked and unmarked, self and other that has important limitations. She states “I am not suggesting that continued invisibility is the ‘proper’ political agenda for the disenfranchised, but rather that the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal” (6). These limitations reside in desired and necessary recognition by hegemonic powers that confer intelligibility upon an unmarked other. Most importantly, this type of recognition is named and controlled by those in power, such that visibility never ‘truly’ belongs to the other, nor is it in the hands of the other (unmarked). Visibilization works to fix or stagnate the other, denying the varying possibilities of identification that fall on the margin of hegemonic intelligibility.

Considering the digital component of Ogando’s works, the embodied practices of race, gender, and national belonging (among others) are central to both online and offline production. Therefore, arguing that the Internet is an unbridled space of identity-lessness is counterproductive and, as previously analyzed, not an analytically viable understanding of this space. Rather, in agreement with Taylor and Pitman, the discursive constructs surrounding identity offline have been transposed to online space, yet still proved
contestatory and resistant potential. For both Ogando and Báez, embodiment is a central element to their work. As such, while the potential for disembodiment on the Internet exists, it is not a fruitful endeavor for the political and artistic nature of their performances and, in the case of Báez, performance texts. Rather, the space of the Internet provides a platform through which both artists can share their experiences and works, as well as creating a networked platform between artists, spectators, academics, and interested publics.

The use of social media as an outlet and genre in performance art leads to a democratization of the artistic process, in which the artist has more thorough control of the artistic process, as well as the publication of their work. Using these media as channels to access a larger public enables young performers such as Ogando to create global networks of viewership and interest. This simultaneously virtual and real community challenges the way in which performance is conceptualized and enacted. The physical presence and immediacy of action are still central to the genre of performance art, yet the action as a total expands beyond the space of the gallery and the audience. While performance art has always, to different extents, been concerned with documentation, the use of technology and social media pushes documentation into an interactive, collaborative space, of which the artist is not only creator, but participant as well. This moves performance and performance documentation away from a top-down model of production and dissemination, in which the artist performs, and the documentation subsequently becomes a gallery or museum show in itself. Rather, technology allows performance documentation accessibility to greater populations. In a rather interesting turn, social media and performance documentation create a Kaprowian
non-distinction between life and art. Ogando does not necessarily identify his use of social media as an artistic act; rather, his interaction on social media sites including Facebook and Instagram blur the lines between artistic process and everyday life. Like many Facebook and Instagram users, Ogando makes a digital record of everyday occurrences, but also uses these media as a platform for his performance work.

Through Facebook he shares upcoming projects and events/happenings/performances that occur outside of sanctioned gallery space that blur the lines between Performance and Activism. For example, he posted photos of participation in an anti-neo Nazi rally in Berlin and gay pride parades in the Dominican Republic. Again, while not necessarily part of his performance archive, these events concern questions of identity and identification important to Ogando’s artistic work. Including an analysis of social media platforms give the viewer/spectator biographical information occurring in the present that informs the creation and dissemination of his performances. Importantly, this method of analysis does not presume that all information is directly related to artistic creation. However, by making this information public and directly concerning a majority of posts to the creative process, Ogando integrates virtual technologies and social media platforms into, at the very least, the genesis of his creative process.

Returning to issues regarding space and live art, works such as *Ad Infinitum* and *Dominican Shower* are presented with in the space of a gallery. However, his recent performances in 2013, such as *Untitled no. 3* and *Untitled no. 5* question the division between artist and spectator in space. Following in the historical tradition of the

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48 Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life.*
happening, Ogando sets up a performance that finds its genesis in a distinct use of the
gallery space that ruptures the division between spectator and performer. Ogando
describes the work as such:

With a volunteer artist Chris Thary I set up a happening called “untitled no. 3” for
the opening night of my exhibition READYMADE STEREOTYPES. We both
blend with the visitors of the gallery, later asked them all to set their alarm clock
on their cellphones from 8:00pm to 8:30pm then we proceed to undress to
our under wears (sic), we sat on a platform in the center of the room, and kept a
stare into each other eyes for the whole happening, without making a sound. 2
minutes after sitting in silence, I reacted spitting on Chris’s face, Chris then hit a
bell bottom in between us, and after one minute responded with another spit. We
repeated this action of spitting eachother’s (sic) faces for 30 minutes until the
visitors’ alarm clocks activated at 8:30pm. The sequence of the spitting was
arrange (sic) before hands between Chris and I. We agreed to once we sit I would
hit the bell bottom and from there we will mentally count from 1 to 30, the first to
reach 30 would have to spit first.
(http://actionsandreactions.blogspot.com/2013/04/untitled-3-savvy-
contemporary.html)

Figure 4.4. Ismael Ogando and Chris Thary in Untitled no. 3. Photo: Tuleka Prah. 2013,
4, 2014).

Dominic Johnson demonstrates the intrinsic intimacy between performer and audience in
live art. This genre, according to Johnson, “stages the ways intimacy and risk have been
historically tied to social, cultural and legal crises concerning the body, ownership, pleasure and desire” (121). This notion is keenly present in Ogando’s works, which question the boundaries between self and other, both within the performance and with the audience as well. His solo performances, particularly *Dominican Shower*, defy the intimacy of everyday actions by performing them for an audience. His performances with others, such as *Ad Infinitum* and *Untitled no. 3* implicate the audience in an action that breeches traditional boundaries between self and other, namely through lengthy unreciprocated physical contact between performers (*Ad Infinitum*) and repeated bodily exchanges (spitting at one another) traditionally deemed unacceptable or taboo (*Untitled no. 3*). 

Intimacy, between performers and audience, is keenly present in Ogando’s works, which question the boundaries between self and other, both within the performance and with the audience as well. His solo performances, particularly *Dominican Shower*, defy the intimacy of everyday actions by performing them for an audience. His performances with others, such as *Ad Infinitum* and *Untitled no. 3*, implicate the audience in an action that breeches traditional boundaries between self and other, namely through lengthy unreciprocated physical contact between performers present in *Ad Infinitum* and repeated bodily exchanges traditionally deemed unacceptable or taboo, exemplified in *Untitled no. 3*. Dominic Johnson analyzes the intrinsic intimacy between performer and audience in live art. This genre, according to Johnson, “stages the ways intimacy and risk have been historically tied to social, cultural and legal crises concerning the body, ownership, pleasure and desire” (Johnson 2012, 121).
The confrontations in Ogando’s performance follow Johnson’s assertion that “live art often asks what kinds of risks we—as audience members—feel comfortable bearing witness to. In our identifications with the body of the artist, we may call into question the social and cultural conventions that often prevent us from claiming full ownership of our own bodies” (Johnson 2012, 121). This intimacy, which can take on a continuum of meanings ranging from physical proximity and psychological identification to discomfort or even pain, challenges binary practices of identification while blurring the psychologically strongest binary of all: the division between self and other. It is through performance art that the spectator begins to question their role in categorizing or naming the subject seen. Johnson ascertains that “by confirming the viewer as a radically ‘particularized’ subject, body art demands that art history accounts for gender, sexuality and race as constitutive to the production of meaning in the encounter with art” (Johnson 2012, 122). When the spectator and performer confront one another the experiential axis of performance lays bare the political, cultural, and social forces that condition spectatorship.

Ogando’s works question the intelligibility of bodies that fall on the margin of normative frameworks of identification, whether in the realm of gender, sexuality, national belonging, and/or race. His work follows the tradition highlighted by Johnson, who notes “since the 1990s, live art has been an important resource for analyzing and opposing the persistent colonization of the body by the law, and by conventional morality. Artists have continued to claim ownership of the body, by exploring the ways in which body modification or other anomalous body practices might ask questions about the limits of agency, provoking new challenges to the relationship between intimacy and
risk” (Johnson 2012, 144). By implicating the audience in performance, whether through direct contact or moral obligation, Ogando unravels the power relations that separate performer and viewer and challenges the separation of the two.

What is innovative in these processes is the ways in which Báez and Ogando’s performances approach questions of identity and power relations in transnational spaces. Following Butler’s conceptualization of performativity, Bryant Keith Alexander notes, “…the performative nature of culture and the materiality of bodies are most significant in the company of those who value and recognize that repetition, as they both revel in the familiar and critique cultural performance for authenticity and acceptability” (xvi). This assertion is important when considering performance in transnational contexts, as both cultural and corporeal codes become disconnected from the geographically situated nuances of intelligibility. Importantly, Ogando consciously plays with highly specific cultural codes in transnational spaces to question the nature of identity as it is supported or rendered intelligible by the nation-state. This intelligibility is afforded to subjects by being within the geographic space of the nation state (citizenship), as well as through a symbolic and real allegiance to the social and cultural archetypes of acceptable citizenship promoted by the nation-state. Specifically, full acceptance as a citizen is in no way garnered by being born within the geographic space of the nation-state, as clearly seen in the Dominican Republic’s recent change to the constitution. By taking these iterations out of the geographic and cultural space of the Dominican Republic, Ogando is able to unmark these practices of identity and force them to be read in distinct ways through different cultural and political perspectives.
A comparison between his works that are staged with a division between performer and spectator and his works that emerge from the space of the spectator, such as *Untitled no. 3*, reveals how staging conditions both the othering of the performer, as well as the processes of spectatorship. By situating himself as an object of viewing, Ogando highlights the processes of othering that are historically linked to Western gazes towards the other. Particularly as a person of color who frequently performs in various stages of undress, his stagings reveal the exoticization and fetishization of the other. However, Ogando strategically questions the process of the spectators “othering” by utilizing techniques to complicate this process, such as visual feedback, soundtracks, and performing with partners. Furthermore, by creating performances in different spaces, Ogando is never solely on display, rather he varies his performances to include audience participation, to alienate his audience, and to challenge his audience to recognized their roles as spectators, as well as the power relations inherent in the spectating process.

Ogando also challenges processes of othering by frequently collaborating with other artists, many of whom provide a visual contrast to his particular physique. In performances such as *Ad Infinitum* and *Untitled no. 3*, by working with an artist with whom the spectator can visually identify (read, whiteness), Ogando casts the process of othering onto the performance itself, thereby forcing the audience to recognize what they are doing, whether it is done consciously or not. As such, through performance, Ogando is not merely placing himself on a stage to be seen/consumed/othered, rather he engages in a thoughtful process that forces the viewer to consider the power relations at play in the process of spectating, but also as a more general condition.
Despite the conceptual nature of Ogando’s work, as well as the more globalized concerns regarding identity portrayed through this conceptual lens, Ogando still brings the question of *dominicanidad* to the forefront in his works. That is to say, the question of a marked otherness is still present and central to his performance pieces. In works such as *Dominican Shower* and *Ad Infinitum*, there are particular cultural references that speak to a Dominican experience, such as the small objects that resemble Santería rituals and the sequence of hair cutting. However, the specificity in these works does not make the conceptual node of his works unintelligible to a lay spectator. Rather, the interplay between cultural specificity and global concerns regarding otherness compliment one another in a way that makes the performance comprehensible to a wide range of audiences.

An analysis of Ogando’s performances in gallery spaces runs parallel to the space and insularity of the Dominican Republic as an island. While the Dominican Republic experiences increased nationalist leanings regarding who counts as a citizen within the geographic borders of the island, the cultural expressions and definitions of *dominicanidad*, especially and particularly outside of the limits of the nation-state are becoming increasingly globalized. Identity categories mark bodies in a certain way, and while Ogando’s performances signal the implications of these imposed or adopted identifications, as an artist and subject Ogando eschews binary classification. While his work concerns issues of otherness and categorical identification, his personal identity expression moves beyond binaries and embraces a rhizomatic understanding of being in the 21st century. It is, therefore, unnecessary to discuss reconciliation between artistic and personal practice, in which the performance takes on a radical understanding of body
and identity politics, while the personal goes beyond these identity categories. It is more productive to understand the artistic process, especially of performance, as a discourse rather than a mode of being. Because performance requires the artists’ body as a medium, it is easy to assume that the practices of performance intrinsically correlate to the artist’s expression of personal identity. It is necessary therefore to differentiate between performer and person.

Playing with culturally marked identifications in transnational spaces creates for an uncanny experience for both performer and viewer, in which the familiar (for the performer) is presented as unfamiliar—used in the context of uncanny as described by Freud—yet still approachable and readable, although in a distinct way from those who revel the performative repetition of a recognizable and politically/culturally legible body. This uncanny moment is what is queer about transnational performance. While identifiable, the cultural codes that mark Ogando’s body are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, knowable and unknowable. The dual psychological nearness and distance create a space of simultaneous identification and disidentification on the part of the viewer/spectator. This uncanny moment is a central characteristic to performance in transnational spaces, as it serves as a moment that engenders a queer experiential axis of performance and spectatorship. While this uncanny moment can occur for viewership within the geographical confines of the Dominican Republic, I argue that it is particularly

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49 The uncanny is defined by Freud as a type of fear that leads back to the known and familiar. Comes from German heimlich, which means “not strange, familiar, intimate, friendly” and also “concealed, kept from sight, withheld from others” (Freud, 516). For Freud, the uncanny stems from the anxiety that comes from the castration complex of childhood. The uncanny occurs in one of two situations. Either when infantile complexes, which have been repressed, are revived or when primitive beliefs, which have been surmounted, have been confirmed (Freud, 530).
in transnational spaces that the experience of the uncanny queers practices of identification and recognition.

It is specifically the performance in transnational spaces that renders the iterative repetition/performativity of the subject queer. It is still within the boundaries of categorization and identification, yet expressed on the margin of those categories as legible boundaries of recognition, as the political, social, and cultural space (both geographic and psychic) renders identities legible to other participants of said space. Alexander also underscores the process of othering that occurs through racialized bodies. He argues, “…the collision or juxtapositioning of differently racialized bodies in the process of social travel, everyday mobility, and in the referential construction of ‘the other,’ initiates a reassessment of the real on both sides of the border” (xiv).

Queer transnationality substitutes an analysis of a ‘here versus there’ dialectic for a rhizomatic network of multiple spaces that mark ‘here’ and ‘there’ within the realm of performance art. The body and identification are continually reassessed and re-identified through this dynamic in performance, depending upon the nature of the space, audience, and reception. As such, the issue of the real on both sides of the border, as articulated by Alexander, becomes a question regarding the nature of reality, owing to the interconnectedness of people through virtual technologies as well as the role of virtual technologies in artistic practice, especially performance. However, it also becomes a question of where these borders are situated: borders between cultures and identities; national, political, and cultural borders of nation states; and the borders between the self and the other. Transnational performance allows us to resituate these borders in regards
to the formation of identities through artistic practice as well as in regards to the relationship between self and other as embodied by performer and spectator.

Regarding the role of queer studies in projects that analyze the intersections of racialized identities, performance studies, and gender studies, Alexander signals that “the notion of ‘queer’ is engaged…as a destabilizing political force that establishes categories of resistance to social constructions that link race and gender identity” (xvii). This project aims for a similar goal, specifically the engagement of “categories of resistance.”

Transnationality can, in certain instances, bring up images of globalization, assimilation, and loss of culturally specific identification. The goal of this project is not to use transnationality as a means of disengaging with radical identity politics and identity as a site of resistance. Rather, I demonstrate the usefulness of transnationality in building queer networks of identification that eschew top-down naming processes, and rather look to other groups of traditionally marginalized or disenfranchised peoples, accessible through virtual networks of communication, in order to create a transnational community of resistance and engagement.

As a scholar of communication studies, Alexander highlights the practice of reading identities as texts. His analysis:

Explore[s] the ways in which racial, sexual, and gender identities are always and already oriented to as texts, texts that illuminate issues of power and propriety. These are texts that establish specific sites of contestation that are not located in/on the body, but within the psyche of the social communities who assign meaning and value to bodies and lives. These are texts that can be written and rewritten based on desire, but not really made manifest in social beings, on in social actions and in the wake of history. (xvii)

Alexander highlights how it is not the body in itself that contains meaning or value, rather that social processes assign, ascribe, and reiterate particular meanings on to particular
bodies, following a Butler’s notion of performativity. However, in the realm of performance art, I argue that specific sites of contestation are, in fact, located in/on the body, as the body is the discourse that challenges how meaning and value are ascribed to bodies, particularly racialized, gendered, or socioeconomically disenfranchised bodies.

It is significant that Alexander marks the epistemic shift that occurs through performance and performativity, seeing performance “as a way of knowing and showing the nature of human experience” (xvii). Arguably, performance and performativity are emblematic of an epistemic shift in our understanding of the practice of identity and identification. A novel element of artistic production in transnational spaces today is the use of technology and virtuality to connect artists, spectators, and cultures. Furthermore, the democratization of technology allows access to these works to anyone with an Internet connection. This is not to ignore, however, questions of accessibility related to political censoring and socio-economic limitations.

Within Ogando’s works, the body functions as a creator of discourse, but is not in itself the text. There is a particular unfolding of the body and discourse, in which the text created by the body is not an absolute self, but rather one of the selves of the performance expression. Rather than understanding the body as a text, it is more productive to understand the body as a form/creator of language and discourse that expression modes of being, rather than a unified, concretized identification of a singular self. Importantly, none of Ogando’s performances analyzed in this chapter utilize a verbal form of communication; each performative enunciation comes from the movement of the body. The corporeal construction of a performance text, where text refers to the political/identitary narrative performed through the body, eschews a dialogic exchange or
presentation to an audience. This form of language is not logocentric, rather it utilizes an inchoate communication that is open to interpretation. I am not arguing that verbal discourse is fixed and therefore lacks an interpretive edge, nor do I argue that physical language (performed through the body) is wholly open to interpretation. Rather, I signal the importance of the body in communication particularly in relation to the transnational element at play in Ogando’s works. By performing through the body in transnational settings, Ogando—as does Báez—translates verbal discourse into a bodily performance that goes beyond a particularly fixed marker of national identity, that of official languages, particularly in this case, Spanish.

As seen in *Dominicanish*, language is a particularly strong marker of identity. Beyond the question of which language one speaks (Spanish, English, Creole, etc.) and how this marks national belonging, variations within language marks subjects racially, socioeconomically, regionally, and in terms of gender. This is an issue readily seen in Dominican culture and history. The use of Spanish as a requisite for national identity goes beyond linguistic facility. One only need look to the Trujillo regime and his draconian tactics employing the pronunciation of *perejil* as a marker of either national belonging or death.50 This is an issue that resonates more contemporarily as well, owing to the constant movement between the Dominican Republic and other transnational Dominican communities, particularly New York. The hybridization of Spanish and English (while not a recent phenomenon, owing to the history of U.S. invasion

50 During the massacre of Haitians perpetrated by the Trujillo dictatorship in October of 1937, a way of determining if a person was Haitian or Dominican was to have them pronounce the word *perejil* (parsley). Those who could not pronounce the word “correctly” were summarily executed. This is a moment of linguistic terrorism represented in literature, including *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz and *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat.
occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916-1924) creates another instance of the insistence of linguistic purity as a marker of national belonging. Problematically, Dominicans who spend a substantial amount of time between the island and another geographic space are not considered true citizens of the nation for many reasons, but one particularly marked reason is their use of language. Ogando linguistically unmarks his performances by leaving spoken dialogue out. Remaining silent throughout his performances allows a different form of discourse to emerge, one that does not rely on aural difference or linguistically marked categories of identity. Through the body, Ogando translates these marked aural distinctions into a corporeal language that crosses borders and linguistic/cultural ideologies. He is able to transmit these issues through a visual vocabulary that is, through its non-verbal language (that is, not specific to one linguistic community) accessible to a wider audience. It is necessary, however, to highlight the cultural specificities of his visual vocabulary, including highly coded visual references to Dominican/Latin American culture. These culturally coded elements, however, are not anchored by a specific linguistic referent. They are visual referents to a linguistic code, which becomes a catalyst for a replication (like DNA) of meaning. By leaving these visual codes open and without linguistic referent through the genre of performance, Ogando enacts a queering of language, in which verbally codified meanings are set aside for an open interpretation of visual language. By creating this opening, Ogando sets up a transnationally queer form of discourse that, while including specificities of his cultural and national experiences, prioritizes the creation of a transnational network of artistic belonging, both for performer and spectator.
It is not merely the decategorization of identity through transnational (both physical and virtual) that enable one to read Ogando’s work through the lens of queer studies. It is fairly easy, and perhaps dangerous, to categorize anything and everything that falls outside of categorization as queer. Importantly, queer has a historically situated agenda that relates directly to questions of sexuality, gender identity, and desire. Ogando’s works specifically address what it means to be a gendered queer subject in the space of a nation (and paradoxically outside of this space) that continually rejects this identity. What is key to Ogando’s work is the fact that this queer identity is not prioritized in his performance works. Rather, this facet of identity is assembled together with other contestatory categories of identity.

Both Ismael Ogando and Josefina Báez engage in a political reading of the social, cultural and political realities of Dominicans living in transnational contexts. The localization of their performances and of their bodies in transnational spaces lends to a queer understanding of identity in the 21st century. Transnationality, enacted both through physical dislocation from the geographic space of a nation-state, as well as through the use of virtual technologies, affords a space where concretized and marked categories of identity are assembled upon and through the subject in such a way that the primacy of identification and naming is challenged for an understanding of identity as an assemblage, in which no one part of identity, be it visible or not, is prioritized through the subject. By using text, performance, and virtual technologies, both Báez and Ogando challenge the position of corporeality by using their bodies in such ways that force the spectator to question the primacy of the body. Techniques such as textual and visual doubling, the blending of distinct languages, and the use digital technologies create a
dialogue with the spectator regarding what it is they perceive they are viewing. By engaging in these challenges within the space of transnationality, it is possible to underscore the relationship between place (or placelessness), identity, and performance, such that new paradigms of queer transnationality begin to emerge. Through this chapter, I have presented the works of two performance artists who enact a queer transnational reality through performance, text, body, and virtuality.
Chapter 5
Conclusions

Martha makes sure her seat back and tray table are in their full upright position, makes sure her seat belt is correctly fastened. And the plane slowly makes its descent, away from that interstitial place of being and non-being to its geographic destination.

But where is Martha, and where is she going? And for that matter, dear reader, where have we come from, where are we now, and where will we be going? These temporal considerations, of being and becoming, signal the tenuous nature of geographic place in the process of identity formation. Queer transnationality is not a space of concrete being a subject, but rather a place through which challenges to identification can and do take place. The Caribbean, that paradoxical place of movement, hybridity, and transculturation, marked by historical and cultural processes that encourage heterogeneity, still clings to definitions of nationality that categorically mark certain subjects as persons who ‘do not belong.’ Notably, these peoples—gender-queer, racialized, somehow always ‘different’ others—have long been marked as subjects on the margin of intelligibility in many nations.

The space of the Caribbean nation, marked by transit, movement, take off and landing, provides a unique space for considering how these subjects on the fringe reconceptualize national belonging. Being a participant of a nation requires both that a subject identify as part of the nation, but also that the nation-state apparatus recognizes the subject in turn. While processes of hybridity and change shape the Hispanic Caribbean, this does not mean that the concept of nation and belonging are not still strongly held in this region and by these individual sovereignties. And even if the ‘nation-state’ in question is not a sovereign state, such as Puerto Rico, the concept of a
geographically determined sense of cultural belonging still informs who ‘counts’ as Puerto Rican and who does not. Therefore, the boundaries of the nation state, be they geographic, cultural, or discursive demarcate both the physical space of the nation, and the types of citizens who belong, who count as subjects. Moving beyond these spaces and articulating different types of national belonging through artistic practices in transnational movement creates new forms of subjectivity that challenge the defining parameters of national belonging in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico (as well as their respective diasporas/exiles). Reading these practices of transnationally framed formations of identity through queer theory highlights the fact that these practices of identification are specifically practices that are constantly changing and in flux.

Identity in queer transnational practices of subject formation tends toward the rhizomatic, towards assemblage, towards identity-in-becoming. Furthermore, the subject of queer transnationality is not the sole concern of this study. It is important and necessary to analyze how queer transnationality can be a space of community formation, of creating networks of artistic practices that articulate different forms of belonging, both on individual and collective levels. As the nation-state is a collective discursive practice that relies on the continual reiteration of its naming practices through a performative impulse that defines who belongs, so too is queer transnationally a collective endeavor, as it considers both individual and collective practices of alternative forms of national belonging. While the works of study in this analysis tend towards a consideration of the individual, I aim to discover how these individual practices form a type of collective through transnational networks of artistic production and spectatorship. Through the collective it is possible to see how these artistic practices challenge the geographically
situated understanding of national identity in the Hispanic Caribbean. Those who leave are no longer *gusanos, traídores, not-X, vendepatria, pitiyanquis*, or any other of a number of derogatory terms that mark those who leave, but rather they embody alternative practices of being-X. Shaping national identity and belonging in queerly marked transnational movement challenges both the necessary recognition between subject and nation-state, as well as the belief that recognition must occur within the physical, geographic boundaries of the nation.

Addressing works of narrative, theatre, and performance at the intersections of queer theory, social geography, and transnational studies, this project sheds light upon both the changing ways we conceptualize national belonging, as well as the impact cultural products have in the shaping of contestatory forms of identification, relationship building, and belonging. This investigation contributes to a body of scholarship that considers how affective networks are created across geographic and cultural boundaries. However, rather than analyzing the physical movement of bodies and goods across these borders, I emphasize how artistic creation—both textually and through the body—challenges the back-and-forth telos of diaspora studies to engage in an analysis of transnational movement as networked practices.

Transnational movement and exchange is necessarily structured in a manner that defies a here-versus-there understanding of movement in the twenty-first century. The development of virtual technologies facilitates communication between those who are on the islands of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and, to an extent, Cuba. Yet more importantly for my arguments in this study, virtual technologies provide networked ways of interacting, exchanging ideas, and most significantly, of creating alternative forms of
national identity and belonging. I am not arguing that those who leave the islands, be it for social, political, or economic reasons, necessarily disidentify with naming practices of their respective national identities, although this may occur in some instances. Rather, the space of the island is in many ways essential to the practices of naming and belonging created by the authors and performers of this study. However, the art of creating alternative forms of national belonging through queer transnationality depends upon an enactment of this counter-identity in transnational spaces. Significantly, these spaces need not be physical, real spaces. They can occur, as we see in the networked performances of Ismael Ogando, in virtual spaces through uses of technology. Furthermore, they can occur in the representational movement of bodies through narrative. The concrete physicality of this alternative, transnational space is not a necessary condition to create these contestatory forms of identification.

A necessary node of analysis for queer transnationality is the interrelation between language and corporeality in the context of transnational movement, both virtual and real. Physical and virtual dislocation from the geographic borders of the nation codes bodies in distinct ways. These bodies, however, are never completely outside of the cultural borders of the nation-state. By investigating the relationship between narrative, theatre, and performance art, I emphasize how each work plays on and against the separation of language and corporeality, and how Caribbean authors and artists redefine cultural and national belonging in multiple geographic spaces. To that end, the present study questions how the concept of nation is produced discursively and performatively. I signal, through a study of cultural products, a shifting understanding of the nation itself, which is becoming paradoxically decentralized through movement—both virtual and
real—yet simultaneously reaffirmed, perhaps due to this movement, through nationalistic projects of defining citizens, delimiting borders, and exclusionary practices. However, the narratives and performances studied in this analysis highlight how our understanding of the nation as a singular concept is shifting towards an understanding of the multiple forms of being that can shape different ideologies surrounding this assumedly monolithic conceptualization of nation.

Another significant contribution of this study, beyond how these texts challenge established forms of identity and national belonging in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba (and, incidentally, New York City and Miami as major cities of diaspora and exile), is considering the relationship between various genres of texts, starting with narrative, moving through to theatre, and then analyzing performance. It is my intention to conceptualize the relationship between these genres as a network, rather than a pendulum that swings from textual representation in narrative to corporeal representation in performance, with theatre existing between the two. For this very reason, I highlight the performative and performance-inspired qualities of the novels in the first chapter, while considering the variety of texts—broadly understood—that develop around and through the performances of Josefina Báez and Ismael Ogando. The second chapter, with its focus on theatre, considers both defining characteristics of theatre, drama and play text, while expanding this comparison to what I term the ‘cultural translations’ of Abel González Melo’s Chamaco. Understanding the relationship between these works as a network, rather than a pendulum, challenges the division between narrative and performance, as well as between written text and body. Queer transnationality underscores the dismantling of concrete categories, be they of identity,
genre, or otherwise. This is not to say that these categories are rendered futile or useless, quite the contrary, these categories are understood through their relationships, rather than their differences, specifically to understand how these queer transnational networks emerge and sustain themselves through a simultaneous consideration of, and challenge to these concretized formations of understanding. As such, this project considers the relationship between similarities, rather than difference, in formations of identity, artistic production, and belonging.

While the project divides chapters rather neatly between narrative, theatre, and performances, as well as between Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, it is worth noting that the division between nations and genres was not intentional; rather I chose texts representative of this developing concept, of queer transnationality, and then structured the chapters according to a logical progression. The division between geographic places and genres, as clear-cut as it is in this project, may appear problematic. However, I justify the organization of the chapters by carefully considering the relationship between the texts, genres, and creators, as well as highlighting the networked quality between the three islands of study, as well as the three genres, that, while distinct, frequently cross borders of disciplines, genres, and, quite naturally, of geographic spaces. I will briefly summarize the three chapters of this study, highlighting how they cross disciplinary fields of study as well as literary and performative genres.

Chapter One highlights the formation of queer networks of kinship through transnational movement in Mayra Santos-Febres’ *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro’s *Caparazones*. These contemporary novels, both by Puerto Rican authors, signal the shifting paradigms regarding how family and kinship are
signified and formed. In *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*, I focus on the characters that are identified queer, including Martha Divine, a MtoF night club owner and performer who is nearly complete with her transition, Selena, a singer and Martha’s protégé, whose gender within the text constantly shifts somewhere between male and female, and Leocadio, a young male-identified child who exhibits feminine characteristics. However, a main focus of my analysis of this novel is dedicated to Hugo Graubel, who on the surface presents non-queer markers of identity, but in the exploration of his desires and the evolution of his character enacts a strongly queer identity. In the novel queer becomes a mode of being that creates potentiality for the characters. Queer life provides alternative forms of family, different types of prosperity and economic gain, and a network of affective bonds that challenge both heteronormative and homonormative conceptualizations of desire. The transnational movement of the characters drives the text; Martha and Selena move from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic so that Selena, a minor, can perform. In her past, Martha moved between Puerto Rico and New York City, a metropolis that represents anonymity and sexual liberation. Many other characters, including Martha, move from rural parts of Puerto Rico to San Juan, which I analyze as a form of internal movement that removes certain normative social constraints in a similar way to transnational movement. Significantly, this novel highlights the performativity of gender specifically through representations of performance. For example, when Selena sings, her body is read through a different set of parameters that mark and categorize gender. She embodies femininity through her singing voice, as well as through her feminine features. Her singing performance for Hugo Graubel is a seduction that, while masking the signifier par excellence of masculinity, the penis,
simultaneously highlights the phallus, the object of desire for Hugo Graubel. Martha Divine literally performs gender through her act as a drag queen, yet she complicates this performance as she is working to gain enough money to complete her transition. And lastly, both Migueles and Leocadio, two young boys who live with Doña Adelina and work at a tourist hotel, challenge the binary identification between male body and masculinity and female body and femininity through their dancing. The two boys dance together, adopting the necessary role for their partnership, while simultaneously using this role as a means of economic gain and survival. Therefore, performance—understood theoretically and in practice—inhabits the narrative and marks the ways in which the characters challenge monolithic categories of gender and sexuality, as well as they ways in which these characters create affective networks.

Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro’s *Caparazones* also explores the formation of alternative types of family, which are engendered and practiced through transnational movement. *Caparazones* challenges the homeland-to-diaspora telos, moving beyond the binary relationship between the two. By decentralizing discrete categories of identity in a transnational context, the novel reformulates the literary and historical impulse present in many works by authors who represent, write, or form part of the literary diaspora of the Caribbean. Arroyo Pizarro utilizes the space of transnationality to question monolithic and hegemonic understandings of national, sexual, gender, and racial identity. Her two protagonists, Nessa and Alexia, move in a seemingly placeless and timeless existence, although their movement across geographic borders is palpable. Time and space, understood as categories that regulate human existence, are decentralized for a fluid, in flux movement across time and space. Arroyo Pizarro creates a non-linear narrative that
moves back and forth through time and place to highlight the malleability of identity. In my analysis of Caparazones, I consider how subjects are represented in transnational space and how they queer affective bonds, but more specifically I underscore how Arroyo Pizarro deliberately employs a non-linear, inchoate, and at times vague style in order to reinforce the non-centeredness of transnational experiences.

Chapter Two focuses on the relationship between theatre as text and performance. The two works I analyze in this chapter, Vacas by Rogelio Orizondo and Chamaco: informe en diez capítulos (para representar) by Abel González Melo, demonstrate how transnational movement affects understandings of identity, both representationally within the text. Perhaps more significantly, I investigate how the actual transnational movement of the play through productions staged in Madrid and La Habana creates new understandings of national belonging. My analysis of Vacas focuses primarily on a reading of the play-text, highlighting how the text challenges the fixity of a textual narrative and the possibility of representation on stage through a non-linear narrative, the use of vague and/or expansively literary stage directions, and the characters’ experience of an atemporal existence marked by radically queer and feminist actions. Like my analysis of Sirena Selena vestida de pena and Caparazones, I focus on the development of queer forms of kinship and desire among the three female protagonists.

While Vacas is set in a seemingly stagnant place, and the characters do not necessarily move across national borders, the characters are marked by transnationality. The manifestation of queer transnationality in Vacas is experienced through history: through the Atlantic slave trade and through the Cold War movement of Cubans and Russians back and forth. These past transnational movements mark the present of the
characters in this play. Their movement is not physical; rather queer transnationality is manifest through representational movement through time and history. Chamaco, on the other hand, has been adapted and staged around the world, including productions in La Habana, Miami, Madrid, and Istanbul. My analysis of Chamaco approaches the forms of queer kinship that arise in the text, but focuses more specifically on two adaptations of the play, one performed in La Habana, and a recent production in Madrid, Spain. By comparing the two texts and performances, I highlight how the text functions in a network of transnational artistic practices, and how these adaptations create new forms of national belonging.

Chamaco is a text that is praised for its cubanidad, for its characteristic Cuban-ness, yet simultaneously is praised as a text that moves beyond the local to the global. However, the role of Havana in the play is so important that the city itself has been considered a character. What happens to this specificity when the play is ‘culturally translated’ in Madrid, Miami, or Istanbul? Through a comparative analysis of these two stagings, I analyze the specific changes to the Madrid production that create a ‘Cuban other’ in a play that is, paradoxically, consistently read as a prime example of contemporary Cuban theatre. By moving the location of the plot (and the play itself) to Madrid, rather than La Habana, the Madrid staging of the play creates national outsiders, immigrants (documented or not) who raise questions in discourses of nationality and citizenship regarding who belongs and who does not.

Moving toward an analysis of performance does not signal a move away from text. Chapter Three considers the performance art of Josefina Báez and Ismael Ogando, two performers from the Dominican Republic who live and perform across the globe.
While the presence and centrality of the body in performance allows actions to be read through it, shaping the body as both a text and a creator of discourse, I also consider the texts that surround and are engendered by these performances. Josefina Báez’s performance-text *Dominicanish* most clearly demonstrates the relationship between text and performance. While *Dominicanish* is a text and a performance (a genre Báez calls performance-text), both can be approached independently of one another or considered together. Báez questions the nature of identity, and more specifically her experience of identity through text and performance. However, in *Dominicanish*, Báez intentionally creates a complicated reading/spectating process by including a variety of cultural referents, styles, pronunciations, spellings, movements, etc. Therefore, the performance-text will always be incomplete and in process, no matter how well read or informed the viewer. The text challenges the fixity of writing and written discourse, while the performance challenges how certain bodies ‘should’ act and be read on stage.

Both Báez and Ogando address issues of race in their performances, highlighting the Dominican Republic’s fraught history with racialized identification. However, this element is only a small fraction of their larger projects. Ogando’s performances are not text-based, but I argue that a form of text develops around his international performances through the virtual network that he creates to share and develop his works. Ogando’s use of digital and virtual technologies creates a new node in an analysis of queer transnationality. Considering Ogando’s performances and the virtual network that expands around his performances, I argue that in these performances the body becomes decentralized, principally as an embodiment of identification. The decentralization of the body as an arbiter of stabilized identification allows us to read identity as assemblage, as
a process, rather than an outcome of lived experiences. Through performance art, we are able to see how the creation of a narrative of queer transnationality takes place on the body. The body is the object of representation that physically and ideologically moves across and through the borders of national and cultural belonging, and it is through physical and ideological movement of the performers that queer transnationality is articulated as a theoretical concept.

Like identity in queer transnational networks of artistic production, this project is in process, continually evolving, and a being-in-becoming. Understanding the queerness of transnationality, of queer spaces and places and how they impact the formation of identity—be it sexual, national, or any other—provides an important mode of analysis for cultural texts, political situations, or even national policy. The impact of queer transnationality, while applied primarily to artistic production, can spread beyond the artistic to include the political. This is merely one direction this study can take, however, it seems to be an appropriate extension of queer transnationality. I am interested to see how queer formations of transnational identity, artistic or otherwise, are shaping political and social actions. It is important to recognize and develop the political capital that art and literature can and do possess, their capacity for change, for creating the seemingly ‘impossible’ modes of being that they represent. Particularly of interest for the study queer transnationality is elaborating the role of technology, virtuality, and digital media in the creation of transnational networks of artistic and cultural production. To that end, I am interested in expanding this mode of analysis beyond the Hispanic Caribbean to other areas of Latin America, and Latino/a America as well. I hope to broaden the theories developed in this project to an investigation of the intersections of politics, performance,
and virtuality in Latina/o and Latin American cultural production. This analysis could include, for example, a study of the performances of Ana Mendieta and Tania Bruguera, focusing on the connection between the two as Cuban-Latinas and the intrinsic relationship between their performances, particularly Bruguera’s re-creation of Mendieta’s performances. My investigation into performance would expand beyond performance art to include the demonstrations of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S. Similarly to Mendieta and Bruguera, I am interested in how H.I.J.O.S. take on the demonstrations of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and transforms them in the 21st century, utilizing all manner of digital and technological devices to reveal the atrocities of the guerra sucia en Argentina. Along with demonstrations, it is revealing to consider the political happenings of former Bogotá mayor Antanas Mockus, whose creative and artistic policies helped make Bogotá a more progressive city in the late 20th century. Lastly, a study of technological interventions of Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s www.pochanostra.com and Ricardo Dominguez’s Electronic Disturbance Theater will provide insight into the relationship between technology, identity, politics, and the constant policing of borders, particularly between the United States and Mexico. The beauty of queer transnationality is its malleability, its ability to shed light on questions of identity, belonging, and movement across a number of academic disciplines and genres.

And so we conclude, not with a finished product, but with the opening of numerous possibilities for queer transnationality. Naturally, a project such as this should end in a way that creates new forms of being; an analytic exercise that models its own arguments. We, you the reader and I the writer, are like Martha Divine; we are bodies in transit, texts in becoming, never fully realized yet not necessarily lacking. The
intellectual project proposed here does not presume to be exhaustive, if such a category even exists. Queer transnationality is a starting point, a runway from which future analyses may take off. It is in that liminal space between departure and arrival, between destinations that queer transnationality finds its analytic, theoretical, and practical potential.
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