RESIDING IN THE BORDER: ONE LATINA’S HOMAGE TO VICTOR TURNER, MICHEL
FOUCAULT, AND HER JOURNEY

By

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To my mom, Mami and my grandmother, Abi.
They gave me life.
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As we have entered the dawn of a new millennium, the academic institution must continually advance the movement to “listen” to voices of those who have been historically colonized and silenced. This work makes use of the media of the written word and the live performance of one individual who identifies as a person of mixed culture, specifically Cuban and Puerto Rican, living in a United States that continues to consider itself a predominantly Anglo-American nation. This work hopes to push (with muscle) the boundaries of that space by using the work of various Latina/o and non-Latina/o theorists to illuminate, theoretically and experientially, how such a space might look.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This project looks at, examines, and ponders how a performance can achieve a much-needed reconciliation that occurs in the Self/ Subject/ Person. Performance, or ritual, can be used as a tool for exploring the self or assists by empowering a person to conquer a fear they might face within themselves. Performance as a force can act as means by which the Self demonstrates the Self to It-Self. It is this very reflexivity that is described as what can be experienced in the “liminal” or “in-between” space of the theatrical stage. It is here, on that stage, where the potential to develop or experience a transformation is offered through ritual—a movement through time and space.

Performance can serve an overt religious function in certain established traditions (Narayanan 2003:503; 506). Specifically, Dr. Narayanan points to the tradition of Hinduism’s use of dance, while simultaneously pointing to the need for the field of Religious Studies as an academic discipline to acknowledge the way in which non-traditional texts (that is, non-traditional to the West) uses performance as well as other arts serve a religious function (499). In that same vein, Victor Turner, a renowned Ritual and Performance Studies theorist, has illustrated how “liminality” is a quality that an initiate possesses or resides within as she transitions from one role to another. He states, “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (95).

I posit that a performance that I gave on February 28, 2003 embodied this very “liminal” space. As it was autobiographical, it also enacted a powerful transformation. As I read to my audience:

You and I, we, will journey through the undulations that are my internal landscape. Some of it will be a reconciliation with parts of myself that are clear, or at least tangible. But
more often, it will be a reconciliation of, a reunion with, and a revitalization of the unclear, the mixed, the impure, if you will.

Victor Turner’s theory of liminality in his earlier work was located in the study of the Ndembu of northwestern Zambia and preoccupies itself with “liminality” as a phase the attendant subject or person passes through within the group’s cultural context. My performance, however, acts as both a vehicle to the purported other side and as a place or destination with which one is to reach and reconcile. In other words, liminality is the destination as opposed to the state one passes through.

Many of the epistemologies that have arisen within postmodern and poststructuralist theories suggest that “borders” and concretized constructs are illusory and upon further examination reveal a more fluid or “fuzzy” nature. This performance stands as a desire to become firmly entrenched in that amorphousness and ephemerality. This ritual, then, acts as a rite of passage into a state of passage.

Subjectivity, or the creation of a subject, entertains the minds of many who theorize the Self. Foucault states, “One has to dispense with the constituent subject to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework.” (1984, 175). While this idea has been critiqued as obfuscating or dissolving the formation of the subject, hence rendering power relations as a web in which we are all equally caught, it does serve to destabilize the rigid demarcation that has traditionally existed for the subject. We can visualize the subject, here, as she who possesses the power to act, think, and speak on her own behalf and the object, as one who is acted upon. While a wholesale denial of the existence of a “subject” via an examination of its constitution can have dangerous implications in a political arena, for the purpose of this project I invite the fluidity of the “Self” that Foucault invokes in his theory of the subject.
Judith Butler shares some territory with Foucault. Specifically, I would like to foreground her discussion of “sex” as a means of entering into the deeper issue of what gets inscribed on the body. She states:

I want to ask how and why ‘materiality’ has become a sign of irreducibility, that is, how is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be a construction?...Is materiality a site of surface that is excluded from the process of construction, as that through which and on which construction works?(1993, 28).

In this packed quote, Butler asks questions about the “Body” that are similar to Foucault’s assertion about the “Subject”. Just as Foucault interrogates (and criticizes) the irreducibility of the “Subject”, so too does Butler begin to do this about the seemingly irreducible “Body”.

Talking about “sex: as the traditionally static construct (fluidity being reserved for “gender”), Butler wonders how this is possible if sex, or the way in which certain messages are inscribed on the Body, is in fact a construction.

I would like to extend this idea to include other aspects of what might be considered “irreducible”. This would include one’s “sex” but also, for the purposes of this project, one’s Race or Ethnicity and even the construct of a Singular Self. By Self, I suggest that a Self as a singular unit is also a construction. Turning to the program that I provided for the evening’s performance for my audience, it says:

Forces that pass through us do not dilute but form us. We are the mere changlings that the world would have us be. The more I know ‘who I am’ the more unstable I become. Yet it [this idea] puts me closer to some truth or anchor I desperately need to walk around on this planet and feel o.k.

The greatest anticipation for this written project is to illuminate, achieve, and replicate on a theoretical level what the performance component achieved in praxis. Chapter 2 will delve into the theoretical work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Ilan Stavans, and Gloria Anzaldúa as well
as other Latina/o theorists. While many others have left their mark on my mind and heart, the
ones I probe are the most pertinent to my personal process.

The chapter that follows will take an unusual, almost literary, approach by investigating
Victor Turner’s unfolding theoretical process around “liminality”. Simultaneously, I propose to
consider Victor Turner as one who personified his intellectual process to inaugurate the
conclusion of my project in which I embody my own theoretical process on a stage in the form of
a ritual that moves me as a subject into a state of immoveable ephemerality.

I hope this work will challenge, trouble, inspire, and question you.
CHAPTER 2  
THE BODY

How is identity formed? What is this thing called the self really about? A lofty question to be sure, one can find much of the discussion regarding the construction of a “self” in its respective literature discusses the body, also. The two constructs do not get conflated but suggest that the literature that speaks of bodies and identities can be found to wander in the same domain. While I will be looking at what some persons have suggested as a viable way of understanding how these bodies are identities get “formed”, I would like the reader to think primarily of this as an exercise in their own ability to stretch or pin down how they might see the formation of their selves, bodies, and/or identities.

This is precisely what led me to write a performance that monitors this question. I found myself motivated emotionally and intellectually to delve deeply into narratives that floated in my mind. Though I can hardly enter into a parley about the artistic process and its role in understanding oneself, I can speak to the intriguing effect of one being led to express, discursively and theatrically, one’s gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.

Michel Foucault

In thinking about what constitutes “the self”, I would like to consider a couple of approaches that are taken. Firstly, there is the contention that discourse does the job of constituting or identifying what the self is. Since, I am specifically interested in the way(s) in which Latina (primarily mine) identity in the United States is constructed, I will be navigating different Latina/o authors’ expositions on such matters. However, most or all of this shall be framed by Michel Foucault’s particular thoughts on the body—its formation and creation, as it were.
Foucault wrote on a series of different subjects but of particular import to this current effort is what he espoused in the area of the “subjectivisation of the self”—both as a discursive product and a product of the institutions that circulate certain knowledges or discourses. One of his works that deals specifically with the latter notion can be found in Discipline and Punish in which he surmised that it was the soul which was responsible for imprisoning the body as opposed to the opposite philosophical problem that has remained one of the great conundrums of western philosophy—that of the body imprisoning the soul (176-177). He extends his findings and conclusions to include all institutions that were in the business of ‘molding’ or ‘categorizing’ humans. He identifies ‘Power’ as the over-riding factor constituting these bodies. Power relations were generative and creative as opposed to limiting. Foucault further developed this idea of generativity and subjectivisation to extend to the realm of “knowledge” and what we define as knowledge. He posits that it is power relations that create the “what” we classify as knowledge. The logical extension of this would be the ‘knowledge’ of what characterizes a particular self (173).

While discussing the formation of the soldier in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Foucault discloses what he sees, “as their principal aim” which was, “an increase of the mastery of each individual over his own body.” He goes on further to say:

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed…at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful. (181-82)

Though in this particular instance, he is illustrating the way in which creating a soldier marks a certain beginning for identity formation. He is also exposing the larger point of how disciplines which are built upon a heap of “discursive formations” create an individual. It is not only discourse that is forming the self but also (or perhaps more accurately) the processes that arise from these discourses that create the individual. It is very seductive when seeking a
conceptual model or framework to encapsulate “identity formation” or questions of the Self (self constitution) to believe one monolithic ‘thing’ is responsible or can ‘explain’ it. In other words, while I find the suggestion that discourse plays a huge part in the matrix that is the Self, it would be foolish to negate the role of other factors in its constitution. What makes Foucault striking within this question of discourse is that he explicates the ways in which ‘discourse’ constitutes by creating the institutions, disciplines, technologies, and the physical circumstances that, perhaps more viscerally, form the subject. To look at one example, Foucault makes mention of the entanglement one can find oneself in when looking toward the jargon-creating institutions:

So that the problem arises of knowing whether the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which objects emerge and are continuously transformed. (1974, 32)

Of late it has been accepted that the Self, then, is constituted by/ of / from various knowledges and processes that emerge from discursive practices existing outside of the self or through the self. How then do these knowledges become the processes that create and generate? Foucault offers a three-tiered system that begins with “hierarchical observation”, becomes entrenched with “normalizing judgement”, and is properly ossified and reinstated with “the examination”. Pointing to the architecture of the prison and the “Ecole Militaire”, he explicates how:

The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly...The disciplinary institutions secreted a machinery of control that functioned like a microscope of conduct; the fine, analytical divisions that they created formed around an apparatus of observation, recording, and training. (1977, 191)

While it might appear a bit extreme to turn toward the way in which prisons and other formative institutions create a self via the aforementioned means, it is significant to consider that the ways in which these institutions operated are virtually identical to the ways in which schools were formatted. Anecdotally, during a brief stint as a public school elementary school teacher,
the model of observation, judging, hierarchizing, and the positive/ negative reinforcement of the “preferred” behavior is very much alive in the schooling of today’s young children. That is to say, the engagement of a person’s “soul”, their insides, and then further their will, is given over as a subject to the normalizing force that is discipline.

Hierarchical observation is located in an architectural structure that lends itself to having those who are being observed become visible to those who are observing who are invisible. Foucault’s famous example of this sort of structure was Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon that made it entirely possible for the prison wardens to watch the inmates and enforce the following two tenets that “generate” the prisoner, the student, or the mental patient. As a minor non sequitur, Foucault mentions, “At the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism.”

Normalizing judgement is the moment at which the agent vested with the authority to decide what is best for the subject. This takes myriad shapes. There are the obvious examples that include the prison warden, the teacher, the medical expert [psychologist, physician, etc.] but there is also the possibility of seeing the less seen forces and examples of this process. A larger culture makes subtle impositions in the formation of its subjects. It acts on its individuals by relying on the already internalized ‘eye’ of the panopticon that can only result from years of observation. Normalizing judgement acts in a gradually building capacity by providing a constant reiteration for the subject of its direction. Foucault speaks of the role of punishment in this process:

The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes. (1977, 195)

He is pointing to the constant negative and “positive” reinforcement that creates the subject.

Unlike a more negative understanding of what the penal system achieves, he uncovered the “generative” process that ensues as opposed to a confining process. I would like to extend that
this illustration is one we can apply to the whole of a child, human, and adult life. If we can safely presume that every person in this current culture has passed through an institution of some sort for a significant period of time, be it a school, a penitentiary, or a mental institution, then all persons have been subjected to instances of subjectivisation of which Foucault speaks. Further, one can easily identify the larger culture of which one is a part as a large meta- or macro-institution that serves to create and generate subjects while in perhaps more subtle and imperceptible, yet still pervasive ways that ‘create’ or ‘generate’ as effectively.

I learned very early in my life indiscernibly that I was Cuban. This was a direct outgrowth of my mother being Cuban. I knew this because the language I spoke at home was different from the one strangers spoke outside as was our food and our story. In the subtlest of ways my life while beginning (at least consciously) in Miami, Florida of the United States was always framed by a notion of Cubanness. In the performance piece that acts as the primary text of this work, I hung a Cuban flag on the wall behind me to deliver this message throughout the entirety of the performance. I, also, opened the narrative of the show with a soliloquy about some mythical and transcendant place that was very much a part of my internal landscape: Me being a “Cuban Cowboy” who sang Guantanamera. I lacked an awareness of the following fact when I wrote or performed this piece, but the story of my family as it has been oft-retold to me really begins with the existence of my great-grandfather who arrived (in Cuba) from Spain at the age of 14 with virtually no education to build his empire that began in the hills of Cuba. “Era guajiro”, we say. He was the equivalent of a Cuban redneck, countryperson and that is precisely where I wanted my story to begin: The beginning of my story’s story. It resembles an odd hologram in which one can locate no beginning or end to the story only the phenom of a story within a story.
This narrativizing of one’s life falls directly into the reservoir of how Foucault characterizes part of the normalizing project. As he describes a function of the architecture of the prison (“to render visible those who are inside it” [1977, 190]), one is motivated to apply this image metaphorically to the process of evaluating, and ultimately, creating the individual or subject. Telling, revealing, and confessing turns the outside Eye of God into an inside arbiter of what is. Put plainly, to correct and to mold one must know what they are dealing with: what needs ‘correction’ needs to be revealed in the first place. Then, the way in which a person or subject describes their story, their reality, their history reveals who they are to themselves. As the subject shares the text of their lives so, too, do we begin to comprehend the unavoidable role that discourse plays in the understanding of a subject’s constitution.

Foucault, then, speaks of the “Examination”. He states:

It (the examination) establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and then judges them. That is why in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. (1977, 197)

While he articulates the larger thematic that an examination must include, he accurately cites the school as the site of the earliest indoctrination and creation of the subject when he says the following:

The examination in the school was a constant exchanger of knowledge; it guaranteed the movement of knowledge from the teacher to the pupil, but it extracted from the pupil knowledge destined and reserved for the teacher. (1977, 198)

The examination becomes a sort of feedback loop by which a subject comes to know itself as itself through the examination. Foucault observes that this process of examining establishes individuality as a documented materialization or reality. He discovers among the documents that he finds archived a certain movement or progression that leads to this conclusion:

The other innovations of disciplinary writing concerned the correlation of these elements, the accumulation of documents, their seriation, the organization of comparative fields,
making it possible to classify, to form categories, to determine averages, to fix norms. (1977, 201)

I would like to draw particular notice to this mention of “form(ing) categories”. While this would hardly be a novel thought, it would bear important mention that much of the way in which understandings of the self and identity occur as a *discursive* practice comes directly to us from the legacy these tracts from the eighteenth century represent. Hence, I would like to accelerate the notion that much of this entire project is founded within and upon the theoretical framework Foucault provides in his unearthing of archived data and subsequent evaluative process. That is, much of the theoretical literature found in queer theory, studies of ethnicity, and gender, the way in which we ask questions and posit answers in a formulaic fashion around identity stems from, perhaps even *sprung* from, a paper trail that began in the eighteenth century and has roots in the pathologizing in which its authors engaged. Foucault can satisfactorily be located within this canon as well as be identified as one formative voice in this stretch.

**Latina/O Voices**

That we coexist and exist as relational beings is not lost when the topic relates to any consideration we might have on this topic. The agents of these processes, the means by which we are able to performatively perform our life, are sometimes the other persons in our lives who are able to inculcate such processes. Again, this is not to nullify the role of discursive processes, but rather to offer a more nuanced characterization of how discursive processes become vehicles of identity formation. In other words, our families, our culture (the family of the family) also act as strong agents of sedimentation when we can hardly see over the rim of that proverbial glass by which we are contained.

Judith Butler has written extensively on the subject of discourse and the body. While not a Latina voice, she certainly articulates the question of sedimentation that speaks so intimately to
how ethnicity is born, at least in this Latina. As Butler begins to discuss in her latest book, *Undoing Gender*, “We come into the world unknowing and dependent and to a certain degree, we remain that way.” (2004, 23) She reiterates the point a bit later, “…the fact remains that infancy constitutes a necessary dependency, one that we never fully leave behind.” (2004, 24)

The introduction of the overt role of the “human” in the constitution of the Self is a very poignant one in that it departs slightly from the larger preoccupation with “processes” and “discourse” as these rather monolithic and dry forces that have this generative power. It foregrounds the role of relationships to people as well as to things: the animate over the inanimate. However, before I launch into a discussion that may deviate *slightly* from the topic of discursive processes and their role in the constitution of the body and identity, let us witness an apt crystallization of Butler’s own interpretation of this constant thorny theoretical thicket:

> Every time I write about the body, the writing ends up being about language. This is not because I think that the body is reducible to language; it is not. Language emerges from the body, constituting an emission of sorts. The body is that upon which language falters, and the body carries its own signs, its own signifiers, in ways that remain largely unconscious. (2004, 198)

I can appreciate the way in which Butler’s own views have developed, not changed or been incredibly altered, as much as have grown. Compare the former statement to Butler’s depiction of the relationship of discourse to the “I” or self, as it were:

> Where there is an “I” who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that “I”…Thus 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”… (1993, 225)

It is useful, then, to observe the manner in which she takes (as others have done) the expression of the “I” and allows for it to stand concurrently with “body”. She allows herself to be contradictory; she allows for the both to exist at the same time. She has made room for the
messiness that is the question of what constitutes identity, the self, and the body. It is difficult not to admire how this messiness is reflected, perhaps, in the uncleanliness and impurity of the lack of surety of one’s position. This is a very Latina position to take; it represents a certain mestizaje and mixture of positions that noted Latina Lesbian theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa, reflects a familiarity with in her seminal work, Borderlands. In it she elucidates the presence of the mythological figure of the Coalticue (a goddess figure considered to be the Aztec precursor to the more tame and Christian La Virgen de Guadalupe) as one who, “depicts the contradictory” (47). She can also embody, “…duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective—something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality.” (?) Hence, thematically, Coalticue and Butler’s fluid theoretical stance (precisely about fluidity) bring out the larger theme of this project which includes my performance and this paper as a theoretically elucidating companion. The theme of duality, the co-existence of two seemingly divergent strands of identity, co-existing in one body—mine—is the earnest ambition of this project. Foucault demonstrates how identity gets born in and creates the individual. It is time to discover the way in which Latinidad is bred in this milieu.

When I think of my own Latinidad and what that continues to mean as I grow older, I am faced with this relational understanding of the world in which I live. I recognize quite easily just in my day-to-day life the Latina cushion on one side of me and the larger American culture around me. While this varies context-to-context, when I have lived in a predominantly anglo-american environment, I have felt the relationality of my Latina constitution as something emanating from my interior much in the way Foucault would refer to the power-knowledge dyad as it ‘creates’ certain bodies, “…the subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the
modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations.” (1984, 175)

This theme is taken up in my performance when I am introducing my “name” (Deborah Alvarez Caron) to the audience. I narrate how my appearance belonged to “another geographical landscape” that my Americanized nickname (my name sans the Cuban middle name) hid. That it, along with my untainted or unaccented English, did so effectively enough to garner ‘compliments’ from peers throughout my childhood—that is all of my ‘American’ peers. Then with the exposition of my Father—one Puerto Rican, whom I had never met yet whose DNA I carry and another American, whom I consider “Daddy”—as two ephemeral figures who acted each in formative ways. One father I never knew but somehow was always “with” me; and the other father I felt inextricably linked to but now only occurred in my memory. It was my American father, as evidenced by my subsequent portrayal of a white American male figure who could easily have been the stand-in for the Daddy I had just described, who I felt more attachment to (to his americanness, even), but yet who was held in a certain tension with my Cubanness in ways I chose to explore on the stage.

In sum, I had the peer group of my youth complimenting how well I hid my “otherness”, my other ethnicity (or really my total ethnicity) through the purity of my accent. Meanwhile, what festered was a resentment toward them for perceived lack of acceptance and myself for how well I gained acceptance at their price. This in conjunction with my resentment toward a family who engrained an ‘othering’ of the “Americans”; they were my friends and my father, but they were not Cuban and that was not good enough.

It is simply a matter of carrying a certain history (both personal and collective/ cultural and familial) that created the Latina that resides within and is revealed when I speak my native
Spanish. Paradoxically, as English has now become my stronger language, when I find myself in a predominantly Latin or Hispanic context, I feel my ‘estranjera-ness’ as unavoidable.

Negron-Muntaner in her multi-faceted work, Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture speaks of how shame then produces certain behaviors or practices that become signifiers of identity. She states:

Puerto Ricanness here does not only (or always) imply an identity or a sign, but technology to ‘see’ for the eccentric ‘self’ in others and find not necessarily what one is looking for but something that could simultaneously be more thrilling, reassuring, or terrifying: a piece of yourself everywhere (32).

Her characterization of a self leaves us with both the contrast of a fluidity and expansiveness of a self that cannot possibly be contained and yet the persistence of an identity or its “pieces” found “everywhere” such that it cannot be ignored. It is a certitude that to address the brownness of one’s skin becomes a slippery slope. Can we make such assumptions, draw such conclusions about what literally constitutes one’s purported inside by what is happening on her outside? Foucault’s contention is that what we ‘are’ or ‘become’ is a process that begins on the outside and then infects our inside.

To return to an earlier discussion revolving around the inescapable intangibility of processes and discourse, we are left only with the ability to cite examples of their existence. Consider when Negron-Muntaner elaborates on this point in a discussion of Jennifer Lopez’s butt:

... Puerto-Rican big butt also suggests that bodies are made of something else besides language even when we can only speak about them discursively, and the gap between the materiality of speech and flesh can never be totally bridged. (237)

At the risk of sounding like an echo, “…the gap between the materiality of speech and flesh can never be totally bridged” is a bold assertion that appears to render any further discussion on how bodies’ constitutions might be informed discursively as useless or lacking value. However,
Butler in *Bodies That Matter* responds to this possibly facile disavowal by stating:

To claim that discourse is formative is not a claim that originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. (10)

This effectively simplifies the issue by allowing discourse to remain a prominent figure in the conversation but it also acknowledges a tension that exists.

The phenomenon of the ‘hyphen’ or the ‘border’—one of the interstices that becomes our lives—and how we are able to manage the twoness that dominates one’s landscape is a reality that comprises many Latinas’ selves. ‘Mestizaje’ has been the most apt term to fully encapsulate or capture this actuality. As Stavans makes mention of in his illuminating yet sometimes problematic work, *The Hispanic Condition*:

Hispanics in the United States have decided to consciously embrace an ambiguous, labyrinthine identity as a cultural signature, and what is ironic is that, in the need to reinvent our self-image, we seem to be thoroughly enjoying our cultural transactions with the Anglo environment, ethnically heterogeneous as they are. (9)

How aptly a ‘labyrinthine’ captures this experience—that is a place, a location—a non-location—a place we never reach—a home we never really own or know. This is the border; this is the hyphen the never-never place where we seek to reside—but where residence feels impermeable. Having to make solid what is fleeting; having to make a home where there exists perpetual homelessness, this is the theme taken up by Stavans second chapter “Blood and Exile” in which he states, “To be sure, the crossroads where blood and exile meet are not the exclusive property of the Carribean. Ours is a wounded continent”(39). But is it not those wounds that shape us precisely? Is it not where our hearts are marked with pain that a person is created?

Inevitably, this leads us into the world of Negron-Muntaner whereby shame creates a certain subjectivity that could only be known as, “minority status” or latinization. It is a clear subjectivisation in the manner of Foucault. Negron-Mutaner explores the many ways in which
shame as a constituting force has shaped latina/o identity specifically Puerto Rican identity. She mentions, regarding specific narratives (of the resistance sort) that, “…a story that is able to represent the liminal moment when ‘nation’ and ‘foreigner’ confront each other and where the invader is repelled, thus founding a heroic national subjectivity”(36) are reconciling in a performative manner such that seemingly disparate parts of one’s identity become less so. Offering an interesting counterpoint, she posits that, “In claiming a traumatized identity, these sectors have also cultivated the feeling that they have been set apart and made ‘special’.”(35) This echoes Foucault’s assertion in how seemingly oppressive processes and forces act as generative ones. To clarify, the process and/or discourse that would oppress the subject serves also to create it.

One is led to ask then, “What if that which forms us conforms not to a form—but is itself a ‘liminal’ or in-between space? Is a perpetual state of liminality such a deplorable state? What if one finds that it is just where one should like to stay?”

Identity is not a stopping point. That is, identity is not a concrete structure. Identity is not even a structure that moves, changes, and grows from one phase to the next having several or a plural number of ‘stopping’ points. Identity is rather the process itself. It is not an arrival point, but the constant pursuit of arrival.

Identity is a process-- whether it is shame, discourse, or other subjectivising forces--informed by various discourses; it is simply an ongoing evolution or unfolding process. While Butler and Foucault make a case for this “sedimentation” and “generative” process, Rodriguez, Stavans, Negron-Mutaner, and Anzaldua suggest that it is far messier than a theoretical explanation might illustrate. While each author brings their own nuanced understanding and portrayal of how this looks, at the risk of some reductiveness let us probe further. They suggest
entirely new hybrid identities that would be fashioned as a result. The hyphen and the border serve to mix up the palette—as does la raza cósmica which Anzaldua explains as the ideological creation of Josè Vasocelos, a Mexican philosopher, who, “…called it a cosmic race, la raza cósmica, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world.”(78) His vision was meant to be “one of inclusivity”.(78) Though it is possible to understand these constructs to be just that—“new” constructs. More intriguing, perhaps, is the denotation of the processes involved: that there is no ‘stopping point’ or fixity.

In Richard Rodriguez’s latest work, Brown: The Last Discovery of America, he prefers to “speak” with the exquisiteness of a metaphorician within the confines of the essay—a creative man, indeed. He speaks to the sensibility of a person’s slow but eventual ‘discovery’ that identity never had the lines we so willingly (or desperately) need to erect to feel the inevitability of identity. Divulging his own identity and motivation for the writing of his book, he says:

The most important theme of my writing now is impurity. My Mestizo boast: As a queer Catholic Indian Spaniard at home in a temperate Chinese city in a fading blond state in a post-Protestant nation, I live up to my sixteenth-century birth. The future is brown, is my thesis; is as brown as the tarnished past. (35)

Rodriguez refers here to himself as a gay Mexican man living in San Francisco, California, USA. A man who received an advanced degree in English Renaissance literature and points out that his first name as a namesake of England all act to define him in traditionally inconsistent ways.

Alas, there is the beauty of it. He represents the brownness that is us all. There also exists the way in which Anzaldua refers to this mixture:

…la mestiza is a product of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking in patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the mestiza faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to? (78)
The resounding answer to her question appears to be all of them or none of them. The mestiza answers to a new arbiter of what is and is not that states the ambiguity itself is where identity can be found. Anzaldua strengthens the mestiza thesis by addressing this ambiguity as a “juggl(ing) [of] cultures” which is what we do to cope but also foster a new something that can effectively be a new identity with no “borders”, no “walls” (78).

How, then, might Foucault address the transitory quality of identity? Foucault speaks more directly to issues surrounding the ‘body’ specifically. While the terms ‘body’ and ‘identity’ are used interchangeably throughout, identity acts as a series of discursive moments that intersect and become confused with the body. Foucault elaborates his take on this elusive but ever-present entanglement:

…the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. (1984, 173)

What of these signs ‘emit’ ‘ambiguity’ or ‘impurity’ (as Rodriguez would be fond of suggesting)? What can we glean from discursive confusion such as can be found with identities that are slippery? They slip through the cracks of bedrock that we have come to hold up with such adulation. We thrive on the certainty of certain constructs that we call categories of identity. The power relations could conceivably be identifying structures that create, form, or generate a subject. Or they could also foreclose an identity or leave a subject out in the proverbial cold. Anzaldua tells us:

As a mestiza, I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious beliefs Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; Yet I am cultural because I am participating in the creation of yet Another culture. (80)

Clearly a reconciliation of a generally perceived split, Anzaldua exalts the role of mestiza as belonging to all.
To reconcile a historically complicated sense of homelessness by wedging a proper “Home” in the world that feels right and makes room for all of the complexities births something new. Something that feels intuitively authentic comes to fruition.

One might be left wondering, “How then might such a reconciliation be made possible?” We will now turn to a figure by the name of Victor Turner whose work in the field of Ritual and Performance Studies offers an amelioration to the “border” or those who might inhabit two disparate worlds or identities. He both embodies the theory he espouses as well as offers a possible resting place within the journey of border-crossing that has been explicated here.
Ritual Studies and Performance Studies have developed into bedfellows in the past two to three decades of scholarship. While the two strands continue to interweave very much with one another, we have witnessed that they also have become their own disciplines with entire journals devoted to each course of study (TDR: The Drama Review, Journal of Ritual Studies).

Victor Turner is a figure that moved from one end of this spectrum, firmly entrenched in the Ritual Studies field to boldly claiming equal, if not complete, footing in the Performance Studies area. While his official title is that of anthropologist, he found himself wandering into various areas throughout his career. His early work focused on the particular rituals of the Ndembu tribe in northwestern Zambia which included performances that typified their worldview. Then he moved deeply into the study of ritual and how it intersects, informs, and bleeds into performance. It is because of this shift (and then focus) that he made in his work that I choose to focus on him as well as invoke him as a figure that embodies one of the phenomena that he developed.

Turner is noted for developing the construct of the liminal, liminality, and the liminoid. These all are permutations of a common theme but are, nonetheless, attributed with their own nuanced understanding. I want to suggest in this paper that Turner’s liminality, which in his explication and development of the term is a “phase” through which one passes to reach the other side of an initiation or transformation process, can also be fruitful as a “stopping point” by itself. Ironically, I want to invoke the stopping point as being located in an ever-shifting sea of movement and “in-between”-ness. I see a marked connection between the betwixt-and-between of identity as suggested in my performance art piece and how Victor Turner “performs” as a scholar of ritual studies. What follows, then, is a historiography of the figure and the liminality
of Victor Turner as his conception of the liminal developed. First, though, I will turn to how he characterizes liminality and the liminal.

**Beginnings**

Turner recites:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. (1969, 95)

Through his fieldwork, Turner had discovered the curious appearance of the liminal among his subjects. He theorized that liminality and the liminal entity was very much a necessary part of the productiveness of a culture. He had located the liminal within the context of something known as, “communitas” which is an inextricable part of the fruitfulness of a culture. It provides a counterpoint to the “structure” of everyday life. As understood by Turner, this communitas which uses liminality as an irrevocable part of its make-up actually allows for the structure that creates a society. Communitas also allows subjects to pass through the various phases of a life in that culture through initiatory rites which are set apart from everyday life precisely to ensure their effectiveness as a rite. This “anti-structure” (used interchangeably with ‘communitas’) gives members of its society a sense of movement and station as a result of having been stripped of any earlier station or identity before they went through the process. The society, in Turner’s estimation, is somehow made solid by the seeming inversion of the normal structure of the everyday that is fortified by the balance provided by the anti-structure. It is as though the tension of these two opposing spheres creates the balance.

Acting as a part of the communitas process, Turner sought to illustrate the way in which in every culture he studied possesses the need for communitas to ensure its survival. Turner’s
words explain succinctly from his book, *The Ritual Process* how we can understand what, exactly, communitas is:

It is as though there are here two major “models” for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” or “less”. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.(96)

It is useful to mention that not only was *The Ritual Process* published in 1969 at which point it was still common to see gender-specific language but also Turner used “communitas”, “comitatus”, and “community/ communion”, quite interchangeably. Returning to the discussion, the culture requires these two interrelated spheres to coexist complimentarily, “…Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high could not be high unless the low existed and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low.”(97) However, Turner further develops, “…The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness.”(97)

Turner determined that much of what enabled an initiate or a subject to achieve further and further levels of statuses was contingent upon the above-mentioned ‘phases’ and ‘practices’. It was in this earlier part of his exploration that he saw liminality as a very specific theoretical construct that served a larger purpose of greater import than its existence by itself. Though this shifts (which will be more clearly outlined as this paper progresses), it is significant to draw attention to this fact. These are the ideas that specifically fall into and inhabit the realm of what we would call “Ritual Studies” understood as the study of ritual processes as they are located within their specific contexts (cultural or otherwise).

The view that the antithesis, or anti-structure as he often referred to it, of a culture’s existing structure literally finds itself enabling the prolongation of its success was key to
Turner’s larger point and discovery. He elaborates his thesis as pertains to passages of status when he states:

To put it briefly, at certain life crises, such as adolescence, the attainment of elderhood, and death, varying in significance from culture to culture, the passage from one structural status to another maybe accompanied by a strong sentiment of “humankindness,” a sense of the generic social bond between all members of society—even in some cases transcending tribal or national boundaries—regardless if their subgroup affiliation or incumbency of structural positions. (1969, 116)

Liminality becomes the almost imperative sticking glue that allows for the continuation and subsistence of the society. Its vigorous survival stands in place due to the temperance of these two energies (structure/ anti-structure) keeping a tenuous balance. Further, it becomes more than just the vigor that is assured but an actual cohesive quality is attained through their co-existence. As these two spheres emerge, so is the balance reached. Let us probe liminality even further.

Turner thinks of those who would inhabit the realm of the “liminal” as, “…persons or principles that (1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins, or (3) occupy its lowest rungs.”(1969, 125)These are the persons who would be thought of as inhabiting the fringe or the outside. As mentioned with reference to ritual or rites of passage, liminality stands for a finite “time and space” that is located within a ritual. However, in Turner’s earlier book Ritual Process, we see him invoking the liminal figure as one who may possess a bit more permanence in their role in society. One can easily pass through one of these roles and still manage to remain there through their life. Turner makes mention of his desire to see that communitas not be limited to a “specific territorial locus” so that we can accurately view the way in which one seeks a space where the structure ceases to be. He, further, develops the nuances of what communitas is by stating that it specifically can be found “where social structure is not” (127).
Liminality, as does communitas:

Breaks in through the interstices of structure…at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or ‘holy,’ possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships. (1969, 128)

It is precisely these interstices that Victor Turner sought to inhabit and make use of with his way of being. He wraps the entirety of his project in the value that these constructs bring to a society. He goes so far as to state that, “Maximization of communitas provokes maximization of structure, which in its turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed communitas.”(1969, 129) It is this tension that allows for such a hearty product to emerge.

I am reminded of the opening of my show here where I describe myself as, “…a person of mixed culture and mixed proclivities…” I proceed by describing this “impurity” and “ambiguity” as being precisely where I “reside”. I inhabit this liminality as a position of strength and fortitude. Turner in this earlier phase of his work described liminality in terms of its temporariness as a finite period in which one could pass through to get to the other side. I make a strong claim in this performance piece that I am in no way misled into thinking that I am passing through this phase but rather am steadfastly remaining in this space. Interestingly, Turner refers to this sort of “permanent liminality” when referring to persons who choose professions in an established religion:

Transition has here become a permanent condition. Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions.(1969, 107)

He, additionally, demonstrates that one is to find that same hyper-liminality or seeming permanence in the ‘contemporary’ phenomenon. While not considered a “national” rite of passage per se, at the time Ritual Process was published, one could find hippies inhabiting this interstitial role in the culture at large. He theorizes this materialization by stating, “In practice,
of course, the impetus soon becomes exhausted, and the ‘movement’ becomes itself an institution among other institutions…” (1969, 112) Though he continues to view liminality as something firmly located as part or a stage of a multi-step process, he begins to see a noteworthy transpiration of liminality by itself. It comes forth as something that can stand on its own for further curious examination.

**Journeying**

In the article, “Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas” which appears in , Turner continues his journey of teasing out and developing what this state of the liminal is. For example, in addition to referring to persons who inhabit this “betwixt-and-between” realm as a part of a rite of passage, he exposes a different category of person that would be called the, “marginal”. As he sees it, marginals are:

…simultaneously members (by ascription, optation, self-definition, or achievement) of two or more groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another. These would include migrant foreigners, second-generations Americans, persons of mixed ethnic origin…(1974, 233)

They stand as close to an example of an embodied or permanent liminal as they come. In this later work, he continues to subscribe to the perception that the liminal phase is exactly that: a phase. However, in beginning to describe prototypes that resemble a figure that embodies the essence of what this phase characterizes he is peeking into the later stages of his work. These include an overt focus on the liminal as a figure that might stand on its own. Yet returning to the process that led Victor to his final stages of thought, consider when he describes:

Marginals like liminars are also betwixt and between, but unlike ritual liminars they have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity. Ritual liminars are often moving symbolically to a higherstatus, and their being stripped of status temporarily is a ‘ritual,’ an ‘as-if,’ or ‘make-believe’ stripping dictated by cultural requirements.(233)

This establishes the plausibility of entering into the discussion of contemplating the “performance” that such a liminar might be subjected to.
As Turner continues to work out his conceptual framework revealing the differences between ‘liminals’, ‘marginals’, and ‘communitas’ he in turn is able to more productively fortify his original construct of the liminal. As Turner states:

…liminality represents the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between time, outsiderhood refers to actions and relationships which do not flow from a recognized social status but originate outside it, while lowermost status refers to the lowest rung in a system of social stratification. (237)

This explanation of liminality now appears within the context of a socially stratified culture as opposed to a standard of ritual that all persons pass through. It is not only a part of a three-tiered progression that marks one’s role in this rite as s/he moves to another phase of existence, but it is also now a ‘phase’ that can stand on its own and be observed in relation to other occurrences of this nature. In an interesting turn toward the suggestion of performance in ritual, he elaborates upon the ‘individual’ by stating she or he, “… is segmentalized into roles which he plays. Here the unit is what Radcliffe-Brown has called the persona, the role-mask, not the unique individual.” There arises the framework of beginning to think about the ways in which a performance of the subject is the ritual that is transporting a subject from one ‘location’ in the structure to the next. In addition to what this movement may invoke in the initiand’s experience, Turner also exposes the issue of temporality and the role it might be found to play within ritual. Specifically, he expresses with regard to communitas, or the anti-structure, that it:

…is almost always thought of or portrayed by actors as a timeless condition, an eternal now, as ‘a moment in and out of time,’ or as a state to which the structural view of time is not applicable.”(238).

As this sense of ‘no-time’ is paradoxically a hallmark of all ritual (a paradox because ritual marks time while also embodying a moment that presumeably “stands above” time so that the ritual can do its work), it also serves the purposes of the anti-structure and liminal quite well.
Just as liminality and communitas stand outside of the structure, i.e. the normative or a culture’s reality, so too does it stand outside of time.

Liminality as a betwixt-and-between phenomenon begins to get pulled and stretched into other realms of understanding. In fact, its persistent ephemerality seems to facilitate its usefulness as a tool to understand other phenomena. Consider when Turner states while discussing ‘social structure’:

Major liminal situations are occasions on which a society takes cognizance of itself, or rather where, in an interval between their incumbency of fixed positions, members of that society may obtain an approximation, however limited, to a global view of man’s place in the cosmos and his relations with other classes of visible and invisible entities (239-240).

I would like to posit here that this macro-understanding of liminality is not only a prudent example of its multiplicitous nature but also can serve as a reminder of the jewel of wisdom that the liminoid or liminal figure possesses. Hearkening back to the previous chapter, the mestiza, the border crosser, and, inevitably, the border resident typify this gift of seeing the outside and the inside simultaneously—both within and outside of it.

Turner asserts, “Life as a series and structure of status in incumbencies inhibits the full utilization of human capacities…” (241-242). If a person is always called upon to do what is obligatory or required of them, as experienced in the normativity of one’s roles, a subject cannot allow the full range of possibilities available to them. In fact, it is precisely where we can pinpoint or locate communitas that expansiveness and the domain of the possibility can be found. This is true even though one might be tempted to fall into the dualistic trap of identifying the anti-structure as “opposing” the structure. Victor states his intentions clearly:

My focus here is rather on cultural—and hence institutionalized—expressions of communitas as seen from the perspective of structure, or as incorporated into it as a potentially dangerous but nevertheless vitalizing moment, domain, or enclave. (243)
Among the many and varied examples that Turner chooses to expose in his discourse regarding "institutionalized" communitas, one discovers that most of them are religious examples. That is various sects of larger organized religions make an appearance as his examples. Some are the Franciscans, the Virasaiva saints of medieval South India, and the Tukuka cult from the Ndembu tribe. These are religious groups emerging from a larger normative group that can be considered the communitas element woven into its larger fabric. In thinking about ways that these liminal groups’ “prophets” might have come upon these spontaneous communitas’ by way of an action or deed, Turner indicates how the action or “historical deeds” get codified only to become part of a “sacred history”. This, inevitably, lends itself to becoming simply a part of the structure even though it might have a risen as anti-structure. (248-249) It is in the following assessment, however, that Turner establishes his discovery or idea:

Religion and ritual, it is well known, often sustain the legitimacy of social and political systems or provide the symbols on which that legitimacy is most vitally expressed, so that when the legitimacy of cardinal social relations is impugned, the ritual symbolic system to which has come to reinforce such relations ceases to convince. It is in this limbo of structure that religious movements, led by charismatic prophets, powerfully reassert the values of commnitas, often in extreme and antinominian forms. (248)

This lengthy statement is a powerful example of how the realm of the liminal in ritual intersects with (and can be indistinguishable from) the liminal in religion. Particularly striking should be the element of “charisma” as it plays a significant role in the composition of liminality in the religious context. In other words, the materialization of liminality [the ephemeral, betwixt-and-between, not founded within the ‘structure’] is located in the performance of charisma by a ‘prophet’ or religious leader. This leader goes against the grain of the authorities who maintain and define the structure by expressing sentiments that run counter to “the grain”. Turner then describes how this former deviation becomes the structure. Hearkening back to the larger point of this exposition (that of observing how the phenomenon of the liminal once seen as
only a temporal phase inevitably becomes useful as a ‘structure’ or ‘stopping point’), Turner observes that often “…spontaneous forms of communitas are converted into institutionalized structure…” (248) In essence, while the need for these categories (structure/ anti-structure) remains legitimate, Turner allows himself and the reader to journey with him into a liminal place where the categories, or rather the variables located within said categories, shift and change into their opposite. He fully encapsulates his point when he states:

In this no-place and no-time that resists classification, the major classifications and categories of the culture emerge within the integuments of myth, symbol, and ritual.

**Play, Drama, Symbol**

In the essay, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology” from From Ritual to Theatre, Victor Turner is making an overt move into the realm of performance, theater, and play. It is in his stepping back and observing a series of signifiers as comprising a larger panorama with players, movements, and scenes that witnesses him expanding himself over and into the Performance Theory realm. While Turner remains vested in his role as a Ritual Studies anthropologist who preoccupies himself with the nuances and meanings to be found with rites of passage, his language suggests a closer look and preoccupation with the action of the performance/ritual itself. For example, he writes:

The passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another. This may take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject’s pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or post liminal status. (1982, 25)

He continues by offering other possibilities in which this action can take place, but what is now taking ‘center-stage’ is the action. How is the phenomena formerly described in a more abstract or theoretical manner coming to fruition? In what manner is the “geographical movement” being
executed in such a way for the ‘passage’ to occur? Turner has shifted his tone and focus to the
realm of the spatial such that he can begin to resemble a theater director.

Turner introduces the notion of ‘play’ as a force that opposes ‘work’ in this exposition of
liminality. As he discusses (or re-explains) how liminality makes itself apparent in initiatory
rituals, he states:

Liminality may involve a complex sequence of episodes in sacred space-time, and may
also include subversive and ludic (or playful) events…in liminality people ‘play’ with the
elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented
combinations of familiar elements. (27)

There is a marked departure from a more binary way of seeing structure/ anti-structure and
liminality’s role in destabilizing (and reaffirming) that relationship. To his credit, he points out
that play, “leisure is sharply demarcated from work,”(29) in the more industrialized nations after
the Industrial Revolution. It is to his credit because he is a subject, or speaker, very clearly
placed within this context. He explains:

Liminality, the seclusion period, is a phase peculiarly conducive to such ‘ludic’ invention.
Perhaps it would be better to regard the distinction between ‘work’ and ‘play,’ or better
between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ as itself an artifact of the Industrial Revolution. (31-32)

This distinction as he illustrates is juxtaposed by the lack of this bifurcated understanding of
‘work’ by ‘traditional’ societies (non-industiralized). Whatever business or activity that takes
place in the tribe exists as part of the larger whole. That is, what might look like play or ritual
play stands as a mere part of that larger whole. The distinction is located, rather, in its sacrality
or profanity.

As Turner’s thinking progresses and develops, he begins to step into the realm of seeing
how his thinking has a distinctly larger capacity or scope in its application. While on the one
hand moving definitively into a preoccupation with the specifics of action and performance, he
also begets an overt resemblance to certain permutations of literary theory, “Binariness and
arbitrariness tend to go together and both are in the atemporal world of ‘signifiers’”(23). With his focus turning to the nuances of the symbolic and how his work fits into it, he locates himself in a liminal position between “semiotics” and “symbolic anthropology” by unearthing “comparative symbology”. He declares:

…comparative symbology…proposes to take into account not only ‘ethnographic’ materials, but also the symbolic genres of the so-called ‘advanced’ civilizations, the complex, large-scale industrial societies.

Turner continues to extend his range easily identifying the interconnections and wide-reaching capabilities as they pertain to (or speak to) seemingly disparate sides of a spectrum. This approach is readily formed in the performance studies genre of scholarship. Victor Turner proposes the following:

The term *limen* itself, the Latin for ‘threshold’ selected by Van Gennep to apply to ‘transition between,’ appears to be negative in the connotation, since it is no longer the positive past condition nor yet the positive articulated future condition. (41)

However, he follows this seeming duality with the corrective that, indeed, liminality does not have only a negative connotation but possesses both negative and positive aspects that “interface”. For example, Turner goes further in his explanation by suggesting that, “‘Meaning’ in culture tends to be generated at the interfaces between established cultural subsystems…”(41) One could then undoubtedly surmise that it is this confluence or blend of the positive and negative that allows liminality to be a meaning-creator.

These are the sorts of conclusions that Turner began to uncover as he continued his inquiry of the larger theoretical implications of liminality. There is an emphasis on abstract symbolization which paradoxically leads into closer examination of the actualization of these abstractions via physical action—a physical manifestation of what is. And it is this very “paradox” that performance and specifically how the liminal acts performatively in which Turner concentrated his later scholarship. He officially shifted into a more liminal space whereby
Anthropology, Performance, and Ritual sort of bleed into each other and yet are not anyone of those particular constructs.

**Drama/ Performance/ Ritual**

Turner’s essay, “Dramatic Ritual/ Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology” from The Anthropology of Performance launches into a specific discussion explaining what performance is. He explains that performance can be understood in terms of, “the processual sense of ‘bringing to completion’ or ‘accomplishing’.” (91) He goes further to say that, “To perform…is to bring the data home to us in their fullness, in the plentitude of their action-meaning.”(91) The embodiedness that could formerly be attributed to ritual and specifically rites of passage is now transferred into the category of performance. Turner finds himself grappling with the strength and significance of thematically what occurs in the same ‘event’ that could have been called ritual. ‘Performance’ as an identifier/ signifier foregrounds the ‘drama’ of the situation. The action, emotional tone, and dramatic power of what takes place in a ritual happening all create the text of a performance such that a ritual can be viewed easily and richly through a Performance Studies lens. This was a discovery within which Victor Turner inevitably gained a foothold.

As Turner focused his attention more overtly on the study of performance it logically led into an engrossment with the world of theater and acting. Made apparent by the article, Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting, Turner viewed himself as very much a part of the Theatre and Performance Studies canon. To encapsulate how he perceives an easy intersection between the world of the theatrical and the (purported) real, he states:

Acting is therefore both work and play, solemn and ludic, pretence or earnest, our mundane trafficking and commerce and what we do or behold in ritual or theatre.(1986, 102)
The notion of the ‘action’ expand into a larger vista as Turner successfully demonstrates that the action of the ritual and of the theatrical performance inhabit a larger meta-genre. This other genre creates something potentially new. Turner explains:

Performance, then, is always doubled…it cannot escape reflection and reflexivity. This proximity of theatre to life, while remaining at a mirror distance from it, makes of it, the form best fitted to comment or ‘meta-comment’ on conflict, for life is conflict, of which contest is only a species.(24)

This statement makes for an interesting intersection or possible reading of liminality whereby the notion of ‘mirroring’ and ‘reflecting’ can easily translate into what happens in performance and ritual. A sense of twoness and meaning-creation arises where before there was none. Turner reiterates this relationship in a synthesizing manner by asserting, “Man grows through anti-structure, and conserves through structure.”(114) The liminal, again, is a place “held-in-between” where the seemingly opposing spheres coming to create something entirely different.

Victor Turner’s final work, The Anthropology of Performance, exposes a very different thinker than the one a curious mind might encounter in a work published over two decades prior where Turner preoccupied himself more overtly with ‘ritual’ as it had been configured by anthropologists before him. Rather than turning away entirely from his field (as made apparent by the title of the aforementioned book), he stayed in it and complicated its structure and ground. In fact, in his essay, “Images and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, Carnival, Film, and Spectacle in Cultural Performance”, he provides a delineation and yet a synthesis of the many phenomena that he chooses to spend a significant portion of his writing to. He states:

Rituals separated specified members of a group from everyday life placed them in a limbo that was not any place they were in before and not yet any place they would be in, then returned them, changed in some way, to yet any place they would be in, then returned them, changed in some way, to mundane life. The second phase, marginality or liminality, is what interests us here, though, in a very cogent sense, the whole ritual process constitutes a threshold between secular and sacred living. The dominant genres of performance in societies at all levels of scale and complexity end to be liminal phenomena.(25)
Turner manages to amalgamate liminality, performance, and ritual in a coherent whole without sanitizing its complications. He succeeds in demonstrating how each ‘strand’ commingles with and interpenetrates the other without sacrificing the individual nuances of each one.

Turner admits to his own ill-definedness and ambiguity elaborating, “…there is detectible an extensive breakdown of boundaries between various conventionally defined sciences and arts, and between these and modes of social reality.”(79) Consistent with this blurring that Turner observes in the constructs of the humanities, or perhaps more accurately in the very ‘bodies of knowledge’, he looks further and toward the essentialized possibilities and the philosophical potential uncovered in the concept of performance. He explains:

…man is a self-making animal…a symbol-using animal,…a performing animal. Homo performans…his performances are, in a way, reflexive, in performing he reveals himself to himself. This can be in two ways: the actor maay come to know himself better through acting or enactment;or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings. (81)

The performance of life, then, whether embodied in a group or by one person alone contains the seeds of self-reflexivity (in the macro- or micro- sense) according to Turner. He has moved the emphasis of his work from a specific ritual studies canon right into a performance studies framework.

Liminality, or more accurately, the state of the liminal, is a good place to be. It is a sound place in which a scholar, an initiand, or a person passing through life can take some solace. What Turner ultimately discovered was that Ritual, Performance, and Liminality were betwixt-and-between states that befell us all. To understand liminality as capturing the fundamental verity that life and the human experience is wrought with ambiguity is to have reached some profound lucidity about existence. That Victor Turner (with the help of wife Edie Turner who was indispensable as a researcher and scholar herself) navigated through fieldwork as an
anthropologist, theatrical performances as a ritual theorist, and then the performance of everyday life as an interdisciplinary scholar (special emphasis on the prefix “inter-“ which denotes goes ‘between’ the disciplines not just ‘multidisciplinary’ as one who covers many) could very well stand as the gift that he represents as a thoroughly liminal figure. It is this perpetual liminality that carries the potential to liberate.

I chose to represent Victor Turner’s intellectual process as one that skates through liminality. My hope is that in the frames of the performance of, “Just Alvarez” that follow one can observe how I, too, as a border-crosser and border resident both personify the very process I choose to illustrate. In other words, the performance itself is one that is located in the liminal and explains the liminal.

Victor Turner was intellectually a liminal figure never quite arriving to a set place while also making his life’s work the exposition of the liminal. It is again, an ‘almost’ concretization of the elusive, a solidification of the ephemeral. My hope and achievement is to stand firmly on what might seem like a passage or transitional state.
CHAPTER 4
PERFORMANCE

After watching this video of my performance, what should be apparent is the element of surprise, the unexplainable, and the ephemeral that is present in performance or ritual. I choose to connect the reconciliation of two disparate ethnic identities with the loss that I experienced at the hands of various “father” figures: my biological father, my present-then-gone father, and my deceased step-grandfather. One was a ghost, one was deeply significant, and another was abhorrently oppressive. My subjectivising process combines the pain of loss and ensuing suffering of those I loved and the loss of a coherent ethnic identity which was bound up in their roles in my life. I hope you experience the power of reconciliation that can follow the tragedy of separateness.

Object 4-1. Just Alvarez. (.wmv file 89 MB)
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

When I developed this performance, it was meant to once-and-for-all disclose the tension, confusion, general malaise that a person of mixed culture generally experiences traveling through a world that may not recognize such a unique position. While I set out to express this truth, what appeared to unfold were the deep injuries I experienced both in the form of persons who personified my each distinct ethnicity and the pain incurred from walking through “outside” world with both identities.

It is Foucault’s notion of the subject being generated or created by these injuries that allowed me to not only seek to stage a public and theatrical reconciliation but also that led me to display proudly the “forces” that created the person, the Body, Deborah Alvarez Caron. This stemmed largely from a desire to demonstrate valiantly the strength of many who have suffered trauma, felt confused by their “mixture”, and generally navigated the world without much recognition of the courage required to do both. Margaret Lock says it best in her article, Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of Bodily Practice and Knowledge, when she summarizes Taussig by stating:

He deplores previous analyses of healing rituals that have focused exclusively on the restoration of order, and talks instead of the mingling of chaos, humor, and danger—a disorder that can also be liberating and healing. (144)

The sexual misuse of children is still a terribly uncomfortable topic for most adults in the United States, especially when truthfully asserted as an experience by an adult standing before them. However, by expressing the profundity of the wound on an adult survivor’s life (both how it impacted her personally and ethnically) and including the audience in a ritual for the healing of that wound, what might have been achieved was both the messiness of their discomfort in
hearing about it and the healing of the person coming out of the shadows by expressing it
publicly.

Lock further expresses, “…the body cease to exist as a stable analytic category over time
and in space” (144). It was precisely this liminal space this I chose to paradoxically solidify:
While I will always reside in the space of being Cuban and Puerto Rican in an anglicized
America, it will remain messy. While I will always carry the wounds of my past, having been
sexually abused by my step-grandfather and abandoned by my biological father and the man I
call, “Daddy”, the healing of those wounds coexist with the wounds themselves. I will remain,
in this lifetime, messy. Academically and personally, I would have it no other way.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

D. Alvarez Caron was born in Santurce, San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1973. When she was one year old, she and her mother relocated to Miami, Florida where she then spent her formative years. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies at the University of Florida in 2000. Upon finishing her Master of Arts coursework in 2003, Alvarez pursued a career as a professional educator. She now zealously researches and incorporates culturally responsive teaching and anti-racist curriculum as a Middle School teacher in Gainesville, Florida.