CRUISING HAVANA:
AFFECTIVE SPACES, PUBLIC GESTURES, AND THE WORLDS THEY MAKE IN A
CONTEMPORARY CUBA

By

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To the Cubans that invited me into their lives and who gesture to new worlds of belonging
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Cuba is at an historic juncture. The Special Period, the economic depression caused by the fall of the USSR that afflicted Cuba throughout the 1990s appears to be coming to an end. Mixed markets have become a feature in Cubans’ everyday lives. The United States has begun to make moves toward reconciliation. In this precarious context—one of shifting worlds, discourses, and ideologies—I explore the ways in which gesture (both physical and political) generate alternative social and sexual worlds, making individual feelings public.

This thesis is an attunement to the ways in which Cubans experience the spaces that they frequent, generating emerging worlds of belonging, desire, danger, and longing. I contend with the historic criminalization of homosexuality in Cuba as well as the current turn, referred to as the “Sexual Revolution,” by exploring these policy’s legacies through ordinary, quotidian world making practices. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork from May to June 2016 and a participatory mapping activity—that generated 17 affective and utopic maps—I consider the social inscription of affect onto the contested terrains of spaces and bodies, arguing that the sexual world making projects of Havana evidence an embodied politic, or mariconería, that longs for something more. In Cruising Havana, I suggest that these world making projects are
future oriented, sustained by utopic imaginings and the critical practices of hope. Taking cruising
for sex as an analytical methodology, I cruise between a diverse and, seemingly, disperse range
of experiences in order to gesture toward the connections.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.
—José Esteban Muñoz

_Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity_

**A Gesture of Entry, a Wave toward Belonging**

It started with a wave. The corporeal movements of Odalys’s hand, decorated with rainbow rubber bracelet of the IX Jornada contra la homofobia y la transfobia [9th Conference Against Homophobia and Transphobia], beckoned us forward, inviting us to close the distance.

I had been marching in Havana’s Conga por la diversidad [March for Diversity] with my lover Mateo (an ethnomusicologist at Harvard University). The Conga made its way along the Malecón, the seawall and boulevard that stretches the length of Havana, and turned up La Rampa (literally the Ramp, La Rampa is the stretch of Calle 23 that ascends from the Malecón to Copellia, the hotel Habana Libre, and Cine Yara). The gentle sound of the sea waves hitting the Malecón, ushering in the slightest breeze, was lost beneath horns and drums of the full marching band that formed the second line.

We gradually caught up with the front of the march where two large, street-wide flags led the way to the final destination, Pabelón Cuba, a large exhibition space built just after the Revolution. Each flag—one rainbow, one Cuban—was supported three or so feet above the street. They swayed slightly up and down causing waves of motions in the taught fabric as the self-proclaimed _militantes_ [militants] holding the flags marched up the street. Many held the flag with one hand and, with the other, a sign with bold letters on a rainbow background that read “_Yo me incluyo; no al Bloqueo_” [I include myself; no to the blockade].
Passing the rainbow flag, we approached the very front of the march. It was here that Odalys saw us. Holding the front corner of the Cuban flag, he called to us and waved us over toward the two empty spaces next to him. Moving beyond simple acknowledgement, Odalys’ gesture not only asked us to close the physical space between us but it invited us to close the distance between observation and participation.

My own body tightened with a tension that echoed the stretching of the flags across the street as I hesitated, unsure about my place along the flag. But Odalys’s fingers kept beckoning and my feet followed. Mateo and I found our spots alongside Odalys and joined in the chants: “Revolución de todos los colores” [Revolution of all the colors] and “Homofobia no, socialismo sí” [Homophobia no, Socialism yes].

At Pabelón Cuba, we turned down a narrower street that required the flags to now go up the street with the smaller side in the front. Suddenly, Mateo, Odalys and I had gone from holding the flag near the front of the parade to literally leading the parade as it entered its final destination. Only a transformista [drag queen] in a splendid long flowing dress that kept getting caught under her stilettos and the lead car were in front of us. I looked around to see if anyone was upset that I was now leading the Conga but noticed no unhappy faces, only the waves of solidarity and belonging.

Up the side street we paused to wait for the next flag to make the same maneuver and just long enough for the lead car to stall on the hill. The driver attempted to restart the car. Crank. The parade had caught up to us. Crank. The parade was beginning to push into us. Crank. There was only one thing left to do. And now, leading the parade, with one hand holding the Cuban flag behind us so that it maintained its consistent distance from the ground, and one hand on the back of the car, we pushed.
Background

Cuba stands at a historical juncture. The Special Period, the economic depression caused by the fall of the Soviet Union that afflicted Cuba throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, appears to be coming to an end. Mixed markets have become an omnipresent feature in Cubans’ everyday lives. Cuba and the United States have begun to make moves toward reconciliation. In this context—one of shifting worlds, discourses and ideologies—new potentials and challenges have opened up for Cubans on the island. How have Cubans perceived and negotiated the potential to build new social worlds?

Intertwined with these shifts, Cuba has undergone, over the last 10 years, what some Cuban officials have called a “sexual revolution.” This “sexual revolution” has been led by the Centro nacional de educación sexual (CENESEX), housed under the Cuban Ministry of Health and headed by Mariela Castro Espín, the daughter of President Raúl Castro and Cuban revolutionary and feminist Vilma Espín. Under Mariela’s direction, CENESEX has instituted policies to advocate for transsexual, gay, and lesbian Cubans. At the head of the Conga por la diversidad [the March for Diversity] in 2009, Mariela commented that “ahora la diversidad sexual forma parte de la revolución y ya en una manera es revolucionaria” [Now sexual diversity forms part of the Revolution, and already in one way is revolutionary] (“La Conga de Mariela” 2009).

Several recent studies have critically explored the narrative of the sexual revolution in Cuba. As Lilian Guerra points out in Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971, “1959 gave birth to many revolutions among the vast majority of citizens” (2012, 8). Carrie Hamilton makes a similar argument in Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory (2012), stating that there were many different and distinct “sexual revolutions” rather than one common experience. Hamilton seeks to explore “the ways political change creates emotional response, and feelings become part of the political process” (2012, 4).
However, *Sexual Revolutions* does little to illuminate the affective qualities of the Sexual Revolution.

Four recent studies have demonstrated a fuller understanding of the social, political, and affective qualities of the sexual revolution. In *¿Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (2011), Jafari Allen considered closely the politics and desires of self-making, arguing that “gendered, raced, and sexed self-making in Cuba is impelled not only by interaction with foreigners and global discourses but most pointedly by individual and group desire for a larger freedom” (2011, 2). Noel Stout’s ethnographic work in *After Love: Queer Intimacy and Erotic Economies in Post-Soviet Cuba* (2014) demonstrated the effects of mixed-market reforms and new tourist economies on conceptions of love and intimacy. Aisha Beliso-De Jesús’s book *Electric Santería: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (2015) considered the “affectivities and intensities” that play out through race, gender, sexuality, and nationalism in the context of transnational Santería practices (2015, 13). And, finally Tanya Saunders’ book *Cuban Underground Hip Hop: Black Thoughts, Black Revolution, Black Modernity* (2015) explored the racial, gendered, and sexual politics of Cuba’s Hip Hop movement which served as a space for political actors to challenge not only the current government but also the legacies of colonialism throughout the Americas.

This thesis, *Cruising Havana*, is an exploratory project that engages with these recent works to contribute to a nuanced study of contemporary Cuban politics that spans across notions of sexuality, gender, and race. Beyond these recent projects within cuban studies, in this thesis I am engaging broadly with the theoretical contributions of queer theory, feminist theory, and affect studies. In particular, I am most animated by the work of, to use Rodrick Ferguson’s term, queer of color critique (2004). Specifically, the collective work of José Esteban Muñoz and
Juana María Rodriguez have greatly influenced the chapters to come. In Cruising Havana, I have engaged with these texts, many of which live securely in the humanities, as part of a mixed-methods critical ethnography.

The ethnographic encounters and fleeting moments of connections documented in the following chapters are an investment in the particular. It has been my goal to place the quotidian theorizing of the individuals who invited me into their lives into conversation with these bodies of literature rather than to analyze their lives and politics through them. This thesis, therefore, explores the quotidian and ordinary embodied politics of world making that suffuse the urban city of Havana, Cuba together with the various ways in which Cubans experience and interpret them. Throughout, I have examined ways in which gestures, both physical and metaphorical, are generative of alternative worlds of belonging, desire, intimacy, and liberation. More reflexively, in this thesis I have contended with how to write about these worlds and I have attempted to capture the ephemeral trace of affect and gesture.

This thesis works to continue and further nuance a trend in Cuban sexuality studies to consider affect (Hamilton 2012; Stout 2014; Beliso-De Jesús 2015). In this thesis, I dialogue both with Cuban sexuality studies and the larger theoretical literature within queer theory and affect theory. I, thus, seek to address the challenge of Sonia Alvarez, Arturo Arias, and Charles Hale in “Re-Visioning Latin American Studies” (2011) that Latin Americanists must engage in “inter- and postdisciplinary inquiry, including transdisciplinary fields such as feminist, queer, and postcolonial studies” (Alvarez, Arias, and Hale 2011, 229). My research furthers this academic project of connecting the field of Latin American Studies with other transdisciplinary projects such as queer, feminist, and affect studies.
Returning to the Jornada

There we were—Odalys, Mateo, and myself—pushing an aging vehicle up the street with one hand, while we attempted to maintain the Cuban flag’s distance from the ground with our other. That was how we arrived at Pabellón Cuba, our final destination, with the march closing in around us. I could not have made up a better metaphor for the precarity of contemporary Cuba complete with the unstoppable movement of young bodies, the desire to maintain a clean nationalism, and a car that could have used a checkup.

For me a readjustment had taken place along the circuitous march that challenged me to not only rethink my preconceived judgements about the Jornada but to embody that change, to be thrust into a position to not only observe but to participate, to lead the parade and ensure its closure. Indeed, despite myself, I had become sutured to the very assemblage of ideologies and discourses that I had arrived at the Jornada to unravel. Not only did it become impossible to disentangle the discourses that converged upon this march but it became altogether unimportant. The intensity of emotion, of excitement and nervousness, of joy and friendship swelled out of the embodied experience of these discourses, of the living-out of them through the motion of carrying these flags, one rainbow, one Cuban, to their final destination. It was the affective gesture that called us over to the flag, the corporeal wave and a political gesture toward solidarity, intimacy, and belonging that welcomed us in.

Perhaps the Conga remains a coopted space, it is certainly a space charged with the merging of disparate and conflicting ideologies (as I explore in more depth in Chapter 2), but it also became a space of fostered belonging and desire. A gesture toward something else. Finally, having arrived at Pabellón Cuba, there was only one thing left to do: dance.
What Matters? (Re)Thinking Sex, Space, and the Body

_Cruising Havana_ is a thesis that is animated by stories of movement and belonging that saturate the bodies and spaces that constitute Cuba’s urban capital, _La Ciudad de la Habana_. It is about the utopic imaginings, hopes, and dreams that sustain world making projects in the face of an uncertain future brought about by rapid political and economic change. It is also about the embodiment of politics—the living-out and making-public of politics—through the gestures, movements, and feelings of the corporeal body.

Intervening in the sex and pornography debates of 1980s feminism, anthropologist Gayle Rubin’s 1984 article “Thinking Sex” argued for a distinct theory of sexuality that drew attention to the ways in which sexual acts are constructed as morally “good” or “bad.” Her article opened the door to what today is considered queer theory and—as will be discussed more later—the role of affect studies within queer theory. Departing from the materialist (in the Marxian sense) analysis of her earlier work, she contends with questions about how sexual acts are understood and constructed in the realm of culture and politics but she also asks that we consider closely the sexual act. Similarly, in _Cruising Havana_, I argue for an attention to the materiality of bodies and their movements within space.

Rubin begins “Thinking Sex” by suggesting that “to some, sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality” ([1984] 2011). Likewise, I suggest that now, in a precarious Cuba, is precisely the time and place to think sex, to think about the political worlds of _potajeras_ [sites of cruising and public sex], the contact zones of bodies encountering bodies, and the publics that imagine alternative worlds free from the heteronormative logics of the present.
Of course, thinking sex in relation to the Caribbean body is not exactly novel. The exotification and sexualization of racialized bodies in Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean have been a mainstay in their construction since colonialism. As Rosamond S. King has pointed out, “the Caribbean body has consistently been exploited for its labor, in previous centuries through slavery and indentureship…. [It] has also consistently been used for sexual labor, through sexual access to slaves and indentured persons, and now through sexual tourism” (2014, 1). Bodies, thus, carry with them histories of subjugation and particularities that mean that “sex is often more than ‘just’ sex: it has a variety of functions and effects on the political, social, and economic realities of both island bodies—individual Caribbean bodies and Caribbean nations and cultures” (King 2014, 2).\(^1\) It is precisely because of these complexities and particularities that I locate my argument primarily at the realm of the body and space, exploring the generative and liberatory potential of bodies in contact and movement.

This project is akin to Sofian Merabet’s *Queer Beirut* (2014) which explores “the human geography of queer identity formation” locating this process as dynamic “interpretations and challenges [to normativity] that are enacted spatially and through intricate bodily performances” (2014, 3). Furthermore, it follows J. Jack Halberstam’s (2005) theorization of queer space. Halberstam points out that “in queer renderings of postmodern geography, the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities with and between embodiment, place, and practice” (2005, 5). There is a certain affinity between spaces and bodies, both being contested terrains upon which forces act through and upon. That is, in this thesis, I attempt to explore the intertwined relationships between what are sometimes separately conceived as the discursive (read: constructed or imagined—in the Andersonian sense) and the material (read: corporeal and spatial). As E. Patrick Johnson points out, “many queer theorists, in
their quest to move beyond the body, ground their critique in the discursive rather than the corporeal. [Johnson] suggest[s] that the two terrains are not mutually exclusive, but rather stand in a dialogical/dialectical relationship to one another” (2005, 132).

Thus, distinctions between the constructed and the material, such as with sex and gender become troubled binaries. To this end, Judith Butler persuasively demonstrates that to talk about a body’s sex is to already be actively constructing it (1993). Likewise, the distinction between material space and socially-constructed place collapses. As Edward Soja argues in *Postmodern Geographies*, “the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translations, transformations, and experience” (1989, 80). To think about the materiality of space is to contend with the ways in which space is always already a “socially produced and mediated form” (Reddy 2011, 82). Not only does the matter of space pick up meaning in the realm of the social, but the material is always in a process of being affected by the social—such as in urban planning—and simultaneously affecting it—such that the objects and configuration of a space allow for the generation of certain types of sociality (for example: the secluded, obscured from view, and yet centrally located attributes of potajeras in Havana *produce* a sociality or public).

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms place-making and world making in order to reference this dialogical process.

I seek, throughout this thesis, to intervene into Cuban studies literature on sexuality by paying special attention to bodies, spaces, and the world making projects they constitute. The spaces in which people meet, hang-out, and *singar* (fuck), while having been extensively mentioned, have not been sufficiently theorized. These spaces—variously termed “Havana’s gay district” (Haynes 2012), its “*ambiente homoerotico*” [homoerotic scene] (Sierra Madero 2006), or, even, its queer enclaves (Stout 2014)—have played a subsidiary role in these works but have,
with the exception of Abel Sierra Madero’s work, received less individual attention. Indeed, the myriad of terminology used to describe them seems to point to toward a conceptual dissonance in the literature. Rather than suggesting a definitive typology of these spaces, I attune my work to look at the ways in which these spaces are socially experienced and generative of social worldings. I consider the ways in which bodies and spaces mutually affect each other; I look at the ways in which affects of danger and desire, precarity and intimacy, among a multitude of others, become inscribed into street corners, cafeterias, beaches, and discotecas. I also contemplate the relationship between the gesturing body and the spaces they move within, through, and among. As Jane Bennet points out, “all bodies [human or otherwise] are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations” (2010, 13).

Throughout Cruising Havana, I attempt to contribute to a shift away from representationalism, “which assumes separation as foundational” (Beliso-De Jesús 2015, 12). Rather than theorizing space as a site for communities to engage in the production of place (which suggests a directional, or even unidirectional, relationship), I consider the ways in which spaces and bodies become assembled together in complex relationships of mutual generation.2

Models for understanding space, such as the “scape” model—suggested by Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) work—suggest that the coming together of processes like globalization, heritage, and diaspora produced imagined worlds. The scape model builds on Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities (see Anderson 1992). While this metaphor has been useful, it has also fixed notions of identity “that produce cohesive representational models” (Beliso-De Jesús 2015, 11–12). My own emphasis is instead on movement: actions of bodies within spaces and the potentialities that they open up. Thus, following Beliso-De Jesús (2015, 13), I shift from “scapes” (which suggest only a representation of imagined communities) to
affectivities and intensities that do not remain fixed. Indeed, this thesis considers the “vitality of
matter,” or the ways in which spaces, objects, and things refuse to remain passive and dull, but
instead form an assemblage of “vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which
(human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics” (Bennett 2010, 5).

Following the anti-representational thesis, I suggest that bodies in movement and spaces
of world making are immanent forces that cannot be contained within the field of representation.
As bodies gesture they exceed coded discourse and as worlds are made, spaces become suffused
with affective bonds refusing to be contained within static notions of symbolic signification. This
thesis, therefore, invests in an attunement to what matters: vital spatiality, lively bodies, and the
flows and intensities that resonate among them. It is about taking seriously sex and other
corporeal articulations as quotidian and ordinary moments that give depth and vibrancy to the
clichés of representation.³

**Public Feelings, Queer Gestures, and Utopic Longings**

**Affect**

*Cruising Havana* is an attunement to the realm of the affective. It considers the social
inscription of desire, intimacy, danger, precarity, belonging, and an innumerable list of others,
onto the contested terrains of spaces and bodies. Affect in this thesis, is about how feelings and
emotions operate in the realm of the social, what potentials they open up and imaginings they
inspire. The focus on affect—as opposed to the widely studied phenomena like neoliberalism,
capitalism, communism, and globalization—asks one to consider the ways in which these
phenomena take on meaning, density, color, and texture in the ordinary lives of Cubans. These
macro-structural concepts, while at times useful, recreate the representational clichés that skim
over the moving bodies of difference and worlds-in-the-making that I write this thesis toward. A
study of affect, then, seeks to go beyond the labeling of characteristics that define these concepts
and suggests them as a “scene of immanent force” and as an “emergent form” (Stewart 2007; Stewart 2015).

In this thesis, I theorize “affect as potential: a body’s capacity to affect and be affected” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2). I also register that affect extends beyond the human body, flowing between spaces, objects and other non-human things (Bennett 2010; Chen 2012). Affects are both material—that is, chemical and physical changes within bodies—and ephemeral. They function as a flow of energy or intensity, attaching themselves, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick states, “to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects” (2003, 19). Affect is about motion, the kinetic and energetic connections that form in the gaps between bodies, spaces, and things.

If my conceptualization of affect seems unstable, it is perhaps indicative of the texture of what has been termed the affective turn. Indeed, there is no capital-T theory of affect. Its current popularity in the academy has disparate and convoluted genealogies and applications (see: Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 6–8). In general, affect has its roots in Freud and psychoanalysis (Thien 2005, 451), however, its more recent popularity, the affective turn, can be traced back to the late 1990s and early 2000s after it was popularized by Sedgwick and Brian Massumi. In the Affect Theory Reader, Melissa Gregg and Greggory Seigworth contend that these authors developed the two main strands of affect theory, one that follow’s Sedgwick’s interest in Silvan Tomkins’s psychobiology and the other that follows Massumi’s Spinoza-Deleuze grounded theory (2010, 5). Despite the usefulness of this geneology, the two bodies of literature are far from linear and the boundaries between them are porous. To divide the current literature into these two main branches contradicts affect theory’s promise to move away from “linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking” (Sedgwick 2003, 8).
As such, the affect that I theorize in *Cruising Havana* is animated by both of these currents. While I draw energy from the spatiality of Deluezian affect theory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Stewart 2007; Puar 2007; Bennett 2010; Beliso-De Jesús 2015), I find myself most touched by the work of feminist, queer, and (particularly) queer of color writing that “attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera” of the quotidian (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 7). Indeed, sexuality studies and affect “have always been closely intertwined” (Cvetkovich 2007, 462) and, as I have already drawn reference to, early queer theory such as the work of Rubin and Butler appealed to a study of affect. It is important to also note that positing these two linear paths of affect theory, like many academic genealogies, obscures the contributions of women of color feminism and queer of color critique. An academic lineage could just as easily be started with the work of Audre Lorde (1984) or Gloria Anzaldúa (1987).\(^4\) The writers whom most animate my understandings of affect—including, Anzaldúa, Sedgwick, Muñoz, Rodriguez, Lauren Berlant, and Ann Cvetkovich—emphasize the ways in which “political identities are implicit within structures of feeling, sensibilities, and everyday forms of cultural expression and affiliation that may not take the form of recognizable organizations or institutions” (Cvetkovich 2007, 461), a project very much in line with Allen’s self-making in *¡Venceremos?* (2011) and the artivism in Saunders’ *Cuban Underground Hip Hop* (2015).

Following these writers, I resist the brand of affect theory that posits affect, feeling, and emotion as pre-social phenomenon. Following Muñoz’s article “Feeling Down, Feeling Brown” that outlined a gendered and raced notion of depression which he calls “feeling brown,” I suggest that all affects function within the realm of the social (2006). In Ulla Berg and Ana Ramos-Zayas’ article “Racializing Affect,” they provocatively argue that affect is “not an expressed or
observed emotional response… [they, instead] focus on the radically distinct, racializing, often public, and unequal ways in which affective practices, emotive manifestations, and evaluations of personhood are experienced and lived” (2015, 654). They provocatively show that affects function in a “structure of feeling” (Williams 1989) and, just as they can be liberatory and radical, they are also intertwined with structures of subjugation and normalization such as race, gender, and sexuality. In this thesis, affect should thus be read as implicitly public and never solely individual. I, thus, follow Cvetkovich’s call for a study of “public feelings” (2007). Like Rodriguez’s theorization of affect, my own use of

*affect, feeling, and emotion* becomes entangled in imprecise ways. Rather than elaborate a genealogy of these terms… I am invested in deploying affect as a crucial methodology that provides access to what Foucault terms ‘subjugated knowledges….’ Affect in this text is not about individual self-contained emotions, but rather how feeling function in the realm of the social. (2014, 17)

Rodriguez’s reference to Michel Foucault’s notion of subjugated knowledges, I believe, points to the liberatory and radical potential of affect that this thesis attempts to locate within an embodied politic. Foucault states in *Power/Knowledge* that “by subjugated knowledges one should understand something else, something which in a sense is altogether different, namely a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientficity” (Foucault 1980, 82). To take seriously categories like feeling, emotion, and affect is to challenge the ways in which these categories have been relegated as outside of traditional forms of knowledge and rationality and it also recognizes that “minoritarian affect is always, no matter what its register, partially illegible in relation to the normative affect performed by normative citizen subjects” (Muñoz 2006, 679). Thus, the study of affect in this thesis pursues “an epistemology rooted in the body” (Johnson 2005, 135).
Throughout this thesis, I explore affect as it sustains the nation while simultaneously offering another way (Chapter 2), as it suffuses spaces and creates worlds (Chapter 3), as it flows between moving bodies (Chapter 4), and as it sustains liberatory, radical, and utopic imaginings (Chapter 5). Following Cvetkovich’s call for an “archive of feelings,” I look to document through various registers the diffuse ephemera that gives evidence to public feelings, thus offering “alternative modes of knowledge” (2003, 8). Indeed, this thesis seeks to form an archive of affects as they existed in a particular time and place while simultaneously resisting the urge to taxonomize. I attempt the, perhaps impossible, task of neither reducing affect to a singular circulating feeling (whether negative or positive) nor loftily referring to affect as a category of innumerable and nameless intensities, drives, or feelings. As such, this thesis narrows in on the public feelings of desire, longing, precarity, hope, and belonging; just as it, at times, takes energy from shame, intimacy, solidarity, and danger. These are provided not as exhaustive lists that define the forces of affect, but rather they are meant to ground affect in the realm of the specific and the particular, locating them within the urban spaces of Havana and the bodies that move among/through/within them as they generate alternative worlds.

Queer(ness) and Mariconería

Following José Esteban Muñoz, I theorize, in Cruising Havana, queerness as a “longing that propels us onward” beyond the heteronormative logics that shape the present (2009, 1). Queer is an embodied politic as well as a theoretical lens that points to the potentiality of alternative world making.

Rather than imposing “a universal queer subject on the Cuban [or any non-U.S.] context” (Stout 2014, 25), I offer queer and queerness as an analytic. Thus, I follow Allen’s recent point that
the people [whom ethnographers write about] do not... have to be or to identify as queer for queerness to be a useful, disruptive, and prospectively capacious hermeneutic. Continuing to vociferously argue that (some) so-called natives do not use the word *queer* to describe themselves, while overlooking the ways that other words we use to describe folks—like *individual*, *women*, *men*, and *children*, for example—are also socially, culturally, and historically contextual, seems less significant than the volume and persistence of this charge.” (2016, 619).

Furthermore, while queer is not a particularly common term that Cubans use and it is not directly translatable into Spanish, neither is it completely unknown. For example, Mariela Castro Espín uses it as a loanword in an interview with the Puerto Rican newspaper *Claridad: En Rojo* (Baerga 2015) and many of my friends and participants would refer to the term occasionally.

In “«Mariconerías» de Estado”, Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2008) applies the term “mariconerías,” which more traditionally references the gesticulations that are associated with gays, or more specifically with *maricones* (faggots), in a similar re-appropriative usage to queer in English. In fact, I am struck by this translation due to its reference to gesture. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz theorizes queerness as futurity and, more specifically, of queer futurity as “not an end but an opening or horizon. Queer utopia is a modality of critique that speaks to quotidian gestures as laden with potentiality” (2009, 91).

I take up this emphasis on gesture in my conceptualization of queer and consider its performative potential to create worlds. Queer, therefore, becomes more than just the constitutive opposite to heteronormativity. It is a gesture toward futurity. That is, world making like Muñoz’s queerness is an “idea of hope, which is both a critical affect and a methodology” (Muñoz 2009, 4). Thus, I theorize queer and queerness to be an embodied politic that is affective and gestural.

The project of thinking queerness as mariconería is akin to Johnson’s foundational Black Queer Studies text, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from my Grandmother” ([2001] 2005). In this text, Johnson uses the “thick, black, southern dialect” of his grandmother in pronouncing the word queer/quare in order to “devise a
strategy for theorizing racialized sexuality” (2005, 126). Mariconería offers a strategy for thinking queerness through the historical and political contexts of Cuba; through the processes of racialization, sexualization, and gendering of bodies; and through the movement and embodiment of politics. I suggest mariconerías as an “embodied politic of resistance” (Johnson 2005, 127), such that to refer to the queer body (as I do, at times, throughout this thesis) is to refer to this embodiment.

This interest in gesture resonates as well with Allen’s introduction to GLQ’s 2012 special issue Black/Queer/Diaspora. In “Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjuncture,” he explores the strokes (/) that separate black, queer, and diaspora noting how they separate and bring together, connecting “the cumulative, synthetic force of each” along with the work of area studies, performance studies, and affect studies (J. S. Allen 2012, 217). He continues,

For black queers, survival has always been about finding ways to connect some of what is disconnected, to embody and re-member. This is the social erotics of love at work…. Thus, our work here is both a labor of love and evidence of it, perforce. Note once again the strokes shared between black/queer/diaspora: they are in fact also caresses… (Allen 2012, 217).

Mariconería likewise is about connecting the affective experience with the corporeal politics of survival and resistance. Mariconería is about caressing gestures that are deemed unnatural and carnal movements of desire. They are about racialized movements of excess. Mariconería is cruising the potajera for sex and it is dancing the night away.

Mariconerías or queer gestures are both the physical articulations of bodies and the social expressions of the body politic. As Rodríguez so eloquently puts it, “gestures are where the literal and the figurative copulate. The reach of the hand forward to touch the face of the Other is also a process of extending the limits of one’s spirit to diminish the space between bodies. Likewise, the political gestures we undertake… enact the process of forging collectives” (2014, 4). Like the strokes of Allen’s black/queer/diaspora, the mariconería of this chapter is about the
connections between bodies and the social contact that happens when bodies move in space and time together.

Gestures are one way in which the body works within and toward the circulation of public feelings. An attunement to gesture seeks to explore movement between and through the material and the social. As opposed to performance, gestures explore the quotidian and ordinary affects that are, as Kathleen Stewart puts it, “the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They’re things that happen.” (2007, 2). That is, gesture specifically looks to the politics of the everyday that is commensurate with my theorization of affect.

The gestures and affects that animate this thesis are ordinary and quotidian; they register a politics of the everyday. Their ephemerality, the lingering presence that is felt after the body gestures, encourages a look beyond the semantic or symbolic meaning and considers the ways in which bodies and social worlds pick up texture. Gesture and affect encourage a look at the poesis, to use Michael Warner’s (2002) phrase, of discourse and the intensities that inundate ideologies. A study of affect asks not what these intensities do, but rather what potentials do they open up. As Stewart puts it, affects “catch people up in something that feels like something” (2007, 2). Gestures and affects register the potentiality of that something, the quality of tasting something and reaching out for more.

**Soñando: Hope and Longing**

Dreaming has a way of dislodging time, derailing it from its linear course. Dreaming also radiates out our feelings—manifestations of our affective bonds.

The morning after Mateo had left Cuba I woke up to the sounds of construction on the apartment above me and to a deep sadness that had clearly became apparent to Olga, the *abuela*—
figure that looked after me throughout my time in Havana. We sat at breakfast, she had prepared eggs, toast, coffee and *jugo de mamey* [mamey juice]. Above us the sound of construction continued. “¿Olga, cuándo van a terminar?” I asked, trying to ascertain how long I would hear the workers fixing up the apartment above us.

“They’re working on it to get it ready to be sold,” she explained. Then, perhaps attuning to the sorrow that had saturated my body since Matthew’s departure, Olga asked, “Do you think Mateo might be able to purchase the apartment with his brother’s help?” And with that caring gesture, we began to dream, to imagine having an apartment just above Olga. A cascade of ideas flowed between us.

O: And Cristián (the neighbor who would bring me mangos) could look after the place while you were gone

K: And then Mateo and I could visit for dinner every once in a while

O: This is a very good area of Vedado, it almost never loses power.

*Seguimos soñando y soñando.* We continued to dream and, momentarily, I lost myself within them, within the act of dreaming itself. Until, all of a sudden, the weight of Mateo’s absence hit me again. “Bueno, es un sueño” [Well, it is a dream], I declared. It was *just* a dream, out of reach and unattainable. A crushing sense of *reality* had come down upon me, constraining all sense of potentiality.

And Olga could sense something more behind those words, registering my fall. “Kerry, we all must live in dreams, we can’t possibly live in reality all of the time. We need dreams to get us through reality.”

This statement, so simple in its formation and so meaningful to me, resonated as a temporality, one focused on a “not yet here,” a longing for something else. It was attuned to a past as well, resounding of the stories that Olga had told me about surviving the Special Period.
It was a gesture of care, a statement that brought us closer together, attempting to remedy my sorrow and set me back on the task of my research. It was also a worlding, a refrain that reverberates throughout this thesis, a glimpse into quotidian survival.

We never did buy the apartment, but the sueño—the potential it offered, the act of longing for something more, hope—carried me through many hard times both in Cuba and here in the United States.

If mariconería is a gesture to something more and queerness is a “longing that propels us onward” (Muñoz 2009, 1), then where is it that we are going? Putting Olga’s wisdom in conversation with Muñoz’s point that “we may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (2009, 1), Cruising Havana looks to the hopes and dreams—the utopic longings—of the individuals that invited me into their lives. Hope and longing are anticipatory affective structures that are both critical hermeneutics, critiquing a here and now, and methodologies of survival.

Like all affects, longing functions in a social field and so, picks up an historic specificity in the Cuban context. For example, longing operates within a revolutionary and historical context of longing for and toward socialism—which was encouraged by the state—and, concurrently, it registers the longing for a world free from the precarity and scarcity that was endemic during the Special Period and continues today under the creation of mixed-markets and state lay-offs.

Throughout this thesis, utopic imaginings reference what Muñoz calls “concrete utopias,” which “are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential” (2009, 3). They differ from “banal optimism” and are instead invested in the already-there potential of the collectivity. Potential is not possibility, “a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not
actually existing in the present tense” (Muñoz 2009, 9). Utopic imaginings are thus embodied longings that are are oriented toward the future. They are the dreams that we reach out for collectively, hoping for something more.

Like the ordinary and daily movements of mariconería, utopic imaginings can be found in the quotidian. They are small “worlding refrains” (Stewart 2010) and they are “impulses that we see in everyday life” (Muñoz 2009, 22). The various longings that animate the chapters that follow, from the imaginings of a world free from precarious infrastructure, to the longings for connection that bring bodies into contact at the potajera, to the hope that sustains Grupo OREMI as they forge their own coalitional politics, are played out daily in their ordinary movements through the urban landscape of Havana, Cuba.

A Methodology of Mariconería

Cruising as a Methodology

Archiving the ephemeral—the social gestures and public feelings that become assembled with spaces, bodies, and temporalities—is a difficult task that asks us to rethink our notions of evidence and empiricism. Cvetkovich registers a similar problem in her work toward the creation of an archive of trauma claiming, “because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all. Trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation and commemoration, giving rise to new genres of expression” (2003, 7). Indeed, the friends and participants that animate Cruising Havana engage in the creation of worlds of quotidian resistance, and place-making practices that trouble traditional forms of representation.

As Muñoz argues, “queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence. Historically, evidence of queerness has been used to penalize and discipline queer desires, connections, and acts. When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past,
there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present, who will labor to invalidate the historical fact of queer lives” (Muñoz 2009, 65). Furthermore, desires and intimacies, feelings of precarity and danger, connections through hope and belonging, are not easily representable, nor are the bodily gestures of connection that transmit them.

The type of cruising that is referenced by the title of this thesis is not solely about cruising for sex. This thesis explores a large cross-section of spaces, connections, and affects from potajeras [sites of public sex] to the spaces of belonging generated by Grupo OREMI. Cruising, thus, becomes a methodology. Just as Muñoz "asks one to cruise the fields of the visual and not so visual" this thesis cruises Havana between different sites of connection and desire (2009, 18). In the potajera, one walks among the tall grasses and cruises along the well-worn and yet mysterious narrow pathways in search of desire and connection. Just as in the potajera, this thesis walks along metaphorical pathways and, at times, it comes across an act of connection: a corporeal gesture of desire. In the potajera, this may be a couple fucking or just a lone person pleasuring themselves, and, just as in the potajera, the reader of this thesis may choose to play or just to watch (though voyeurism, too, is participation).

The potajera becomes not only a literal space in this text but also a theoretical one, cruising becomes a methodology of mariconería that allows me to explore a diverse and seemingly disperse range of experiences and ways of knowing and being in the world. It draws theoretical energy from cruising for sex to be sure—and, in Chapter 3 and 4, I explore the potajera in more detail—but cruising for sex is only one mode of movement, one affective world. Thus, throughout this thesis I also explore Grupo OREMI and the sites of connection that they foster (Chapter 5), I consider dance between friends (Chapter 4) and the march of activists at the Conga por la diversidad (Chapter 2). I explore the contact of bodies as they move in space
through participatory maps of affect and utopia (Chapter 3). While these sites of connection may initially seem disconnected, cruising as a methodology allows us to make the mysterious walk between them in order to find that the affects and the gestures toward connection remain much the same.

**Ethnography and Radical Empiricism**

The field research for *Cruising Havana* took place between May 6th and July 3rd of 2016 in Havana, Cuba and from May 15th to 18th in Matanzas, Cuba. The primary research activity was *observant participation*. I reverse here the common “participant observation” in order to stress my role within these worlds as a participant. My fieldwork started at the IX Jornada contra la homofobia y la transfobia and I met my initial network of contacts during the conference. I made contact through what is commonly referred to as snowball sampling. While I do not doubt the usefulness of the term, my own experience of meeting new people seemed more organic. People that I met, from my partner and lover (Mateo), to the friends that I made and the participants of this ethnography, invited me places and introduced me to new people. While all of my friends and participants were well aware of my role as a graduate student doing research, my participation (as opposed to observation)—much to my own surprise—became primary. I attended social gatherings, group meetings, conferences, and shows; I ate dinner in participants’ homes and I went out to clubs with them at night. Throughout, I took special consideration of the sensorium of these spaces and tried to attune my senses to the structures of feelings that imbedded themselves there. I watched bodies gesture and crowds react. I marched the streets with my lover and fellow *militantes* and danced the night away among friends. I not only observed the gestures of connection and belonging that I was so interested in, but I experienced them and participated by gesturing back. I took field notes daily to record my impressions and experiences in the field.
Toward the end of my 2 months in the field, I completed six in-depth, semi-structured, and recorded interviews—four individually and two with pairs of participants. All of the participants that I interviewed had become close friends and confidants of mine by the end of the two months that I had spent in Havana. Throughout this thesis, I have chosen to only write quotes from participants in Spanish if I know the precise words used—such as if I have written down a direct quote or have the moment recorded. When I paraphrase based on imprecise notes and/or memory, I use English. Through the thesis I have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants.

At the end of each interview, I asked each participant to take part in two mapping activities. In the first activity, I asked participants to draw maps of the spaces that we had discussed during the interview and, after the map was drawn, asked them to use various colors to add affects—intimacy, belonging, danger, desire, etc.—onto the maps. Then after finishing these maps and discussing them, I asked participants to choose one space in particular and draw it as if it were an ideal or utopic space. This workshop activity, adapted from one described by Christina Hanhardt that was performed by an activist group in New York called FIERCE, asks participants to envision an ideal future for a space that was important to them (Hanhardt 2013, 214). By prompting participants to act as urban planners and design the spaces that they engage with, depictions of potentiality, desire, and need became physical aesthetic works.

In total my research generated 17 different maps that represent space and affect at a specific spatiotemporal moment. These maps form the basis of a visual archive that this thesis creates. However, one of the limitations of these maps is their static nature. Affects and bodies move and change. The maps, thus, form only part of the archive with the rest of the thesis, in particular the focus on gesture, complementing them.
Applying a critical hermeneutics to the maps, one that considers both the content and the form, I explore what these maps tell us about the quotidian experiences of Cubans that are living through a time of change and “sexual revolution.” They become a snapshot glimpse into the lived emotions and the spaces that public feelings occupy, telling us not just about how public space becomes raced, gendered, and sexualized but also how those spaces are experienced.

An interest in embodied politics has encouraged me to employ a reflexive ethnography that considers the way in which my tall, light-skinned body (which, I was often told, did not look Cuban) that gestured with its own particular mariconería, was an instrument in field research. As Beliso-de Jesús states, “the positions of researcher and interlocutor both infect and affect—haunting, negotiating, and penetrating in ways that are never fixed or without power” (2015, 27).

The beginning of my field research also marked the beginning of my relationship to Mateo, a fellow ethnographer from Harvard University, whose presence and, later, absence had profound effects on not only my own affective state but also on my relationships with those around me. Not only did Mateo introduce me to several of the participants of this ethnography, but many of the insights that occupy the following pages came about due to the care and solidarity that people like the women from Grupo OREMI showed me after he left. I have, thus, done my best to insert my own participating body into the story “while not appearing to compete with our subjects for the limelight” (Behar 2007, 150), I can only hope that I was successful.

Throughout the following chapters, I have attempted to write toward a “radical empiricism... the act of description [as] a peering, accidental glimpse of what matters—what comes into matter in the cocomposition of objects in contact, what shifts its matter in a moment of recognizable, though unnamed and partial, significance” (Stewart 2016, 31). For Stewart description emphasizes her theoretical lens of analysis. She further points out that “if description
is an approach to an ungraspable thing, it might begin by deliteralizing the properties and appearances of that thing, and then, in its very faithfulness to its object’s energetic, multiplicituos possibilities, it might find itself overwhelmed by an excess of surfaces, aspects, and remainders” (Stewart 2016, 33). Following this hyper-realism, or as Michael Taussig puts it, “surrealism” (2011, 7), I contend that the analysis of my field research takes place partially in the form of writing. Throughout I treat writing as “an attunement, a response, a vigilant protection of a worlding” as I try to capture some piece of the affective gestural world making projects that I experienced (Stewart 2015, 221). Just as my field research became a certain type of cruising between disparate groups, my analysis follows suit, cruising between bodies and spaces and describing events, happenings and movements in an effort to, at least momentarily, put off evaluative critique and allow the immanence of the moment to linger.

**Gesturing Onwards**

Each of the chapters in this thesis piece together the dynamic confluence of bodies and spaces: The affects, gestures, and utopic longings that this introduction has laid out. At its heart, *Cruising Havana* seeks to understand the quotidian experiences of spaces and it searches the rich textures and incongruities of social feelings. Throughout the ethnography, I ground the prior discussion in the everyday moments and movements of the Cubans that participated in this study and I attempt to show the ways in which the politics of alternative world making becomes an embodied politic as bodies contact, connect, and gesture among other bodies.

Chapter 2, “The Queen of Cuba Goes to Havana City: Notes on Sex and Citizenship from the New Man to the Sexual Revolution” establishes a foundation for the rest of the thesis. This chapter explores what it means to belong to the nation. Starting from the Revolution, this chapter provides a brief genealogy of the construction of sexuality in relation to citizenship. It then considers contemporary Cuban politics around sexuality. It argues that there may indeed be less
of an evolution from the days of UMAP to the current day than would initially be assumed. “The Queen of Cuba Goes to Havana City” explores the ways in which the state has used events such as the Jornada contra la homofobia y la transfobia to normalize bodies into the body of the nation while simultaneously appealing to transnational modernity discourses. However, most importantly, this chapter demonstrates that despite these regulatory structures, Cubans are able to find gaps to form their own world making projects.

Chapter 3, “Affective Cartographies: Belonging in Space, Utopic Longings, and Urban Contact” explores these world making projects through the maps that were produced by the mapping activities discussed earlier. This chapter examines the ways in which spaces become suffused with public feelings. It deals intimately with space, place, and the world making practices of Cubans. As opposed to the forms of belonging that are explored in Chapter 2 (citizenship), “Affective Cartographies” explores belongings that are spatially and corporally experienced. Through various ethnographic encounters and a close examination of the maps, this chapter reveals the quotidian resistance and survival of queer bodies in Havana, Cuba as they experience space and as they dream, long, and hope for something more.

Chapter 4, “Gesturing Toward Connection: Cruising, Dancing, and Other Mariconería of Belonging” is this thesis’s meditation on gesture. This chapter is an experimental ethnographic cruising of various scenes throughout Havana that explores movements and gestures of and toward belonging. Divided into “movements,” this chapter explores closely the politics and poetics of public sex and dance. It expands this analysis to explore the many other ordinary and quotidian gestures of belonging that sustain alternative worldings in a precarious Cuba.

Finally, Chapter 5, “On the Pulse of Precarity: Grupo OREMI, Lesbian Publics, and the Hope that Sustains Them” explores the politics of lesbian publics in a country where public
space is gendered masculine. It looks at the ways in which Grupo OREMI, a group of self-proclaimed bisexual and lesbian women many of whom are mulata or black, is gesturing toward a new potential world through their sustained efforts to form a public space of belonging. The chapter looks at the way in which the Pulse Massacre, a shooting at a bar of predominantly queer individuals of color in Orlando, Florida affected the group and fundamentally changed my relationship to the many women there that I had become friends with. I examine the ways in which this incident illuminated the coalitional and embodied politics of the mostly black and mulata women of Grupo OREMI. Through this examination, I present several more utopic maps, and contend with the longings that suffuse this worlding. Throughout the chapter, I contend with the notion of precarity, the affect of a precarious world on the vulnerable body. Grupo OREMI and its many members demonstrate that their future oriented politics are sustained by a critical hope that will hold out in the end. The chapter takes the “pulse” of Grupo OREMI in a world of instability.

Notes

1 It is important to note that while Cuba and the Caribbean are often perceived as hyper-sexual places, due to the construction of racialized bodies as hyper-sexual, “local conceptions tend to be rather different” (King 2014, 7). That is to say that Caribbean bodies are faced with a contradictory set of discourses, national ones that are often more conservative and transnational ones that rely on this hyper-sexualization. In the case of Cuba, this has a long history and in Chapter 2, I explore in more depth the ways in which norms around sexuality collide on the queer body.

2 Across this thesis, I have refrained from using the term community to refer to the worlds the I describe. As Sierra Madero has pointed out, the idea of a “gay community” has a specific capitalist context that makes it unsuitable to the case of Cuba. He states, “muchos estudiosos de la sexualidad en Cuba han insistido reiteradamente en la existencia de una comunidad homosexual en Cuba durante los años 90. Considero que esa visión tiene que ver con la importación de términos y categorías que se adecuan a otros contextos sociales y a otros sistemas jurídicos, pero no al nuestro” [many people studying sexuality in Cuba have insisted on the emergence of a Cuban homosexual community during the 1990s. I think this idea is derived from the assimilation of imported terms and categories that apply to other social contexts and juridical systems but not to ours] (Sierra Madero 2006, 225).

3 Key to my understanding of antirepresentational theory is the work of Gills Deleuze, in particular, his analysis of Francis Bacon in the chapter “Painting before the Painting…” (2003, 86–98). In this piece, Deleuze considers the cliché as “ready-made perceptions, memories, phantasms” which can be equated to his notions of representation (Deleuze 2003, 91).
Too often the contributions of women of color feminism and queer of color critique have been simply eclipsed or if mentioned buried in the endnotes. Indeed, Gregg and Seigworth’s Affect Theory Reader which offers perhaps the most comprehensive literature review of the “affective turn” never mention these contributions and instead subsumes them to queer and feminist theory more broadly. As Rodriguez points out, “it is also important to note that women of color in the 1980s were also insisting on the theoretical relevance of engaging feeling and emotion” (2014, 191 n. 17)

In this thesis, I use the term subjugation rather than oppression as it highlights the ways in which power does not operate solely in top/down, oppressor/oppressed ways. Subjugation “indicates that power relations impact how we know ourselves as subjects through these systems of meaning” (Spade 2015, 6). Normalization refers to the process by which subjectivities are incorporated into the category of normal or natural. In particular, this thesis is concerned with the notion of heteronormativity, “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (Berlant and Warner 1998, 259).

As Sedgwick points out (in her particularly humorous fashion), “there is the additional opportunity of experimenting with a vocabulary that will do justice to a wide affective range. Again, not only with the negative affects: it can also be reifying and, indeed, coercive to have only one, totalizing model of positive affect always in the same featured position. A disturbingly large amount of theory seems explicitly to undertake the proliferation of only one affect, or maybe two, of whatever kind—whether ecstasy, sublimity, self-shattering, jouissance, suspicion, abjection, knowingness, horror, grim satisfaction, or righteous indignation. It’s like the old joke: ‘Comes the revolution, Comrade, everyone gets to eat roast beef every day.’ ‘But Comrade, I don’t like roast beef.’ ‘Comes the revolution, Comrade, you’ll like roast beef.’ ‘Comes the revolution, Comrade, you’ll be tickled pink by those deconstructive jokes; you’ll faint from ennui every minute you’re not smashing the state apparatus; you’ll definitely want hot sex twenty to thirty times a day. You’ll be mournful and militant. You’ll never want to tell Deleuze and Guattari, ‘Not tonight, dears, I have a headache.’” (Sedgwick 2003, 145–46).

While Chapter 2 goes into more depth about recent historical constructions of sexuality in relation to the nation (post-1959), it is important to note here that there has historically been an importance of gesture in notions of sexuality within Cuba. Ian Lumsden, in his book Machos, Maricones, and Gays mentions that historically in Latin America, gender and sexuality norms have “been more socially punitive toward deviations from traditional male appearance and manners than toward homosexual behavior in itself. In Cuba, it was assumed that males whose comportment appeared effeminate and deviated from stereotypical masculinity would be homosexual. They were called maricones” (1996, 27). Furthermore, he points out that “by making certain mannerisms unacceptable, machismo ensured that homosexuals who could neither fit traditional male roles nor conceal their erotic attraction to other men would act in a way that confirmed the ‘machista’ assumption that no homosexual could possibly be ‘un hombre de verdad’ [a real man]” (Lumsden 1996, 30 emphasis mine). Indeed, the historical importance of mannerisms, comportment, and gesture is further grounded in the historical work of Emilio Bejel in Gay Cuban Nation (2001). In as early as 1880, maricon had been defined as “an effeminate and cowardly man; He who does woman’s work; Men who imitate women in their mannerisms, insinuations, and at times even in their dress, taking their place in the most shameless of acts” (Bejel 2001, 7 emphasis mine).

Grupo OREMI is a one of the redes sociales [social networks] that are organized by CENESEX. They are a group of that self-identifies as a group for lesbian and bisexual women. The name OREMI comes from the yoruba word for friend and is often used as a term for lesbian. The choice to use the word Oremi for their name demonstrates their intersectional politics which is actively engaged with race, gender, and sexuality. For more on the structure of CENESEX see Kirk (2015). For more on Grupo OREMI see Chapter 5 and Saunders (2009).

While some may criticize the fact that I have at times written quotes and dialogue based on memory and my notes (in English), I am comfortable with this decision. First, it allows for the stories to flow in ways that would have been impossible otherwise and as one of my goals in this thesis is to create an affective experience to the reader, this was particularly important. Furthermore, while undoubtedly these words are now filtered through my memory and my own frames of reference, this is just one more way in which all aspects of this thesis, or any academic work, are determined by the author. Indeed, even direct quotes from recordings are selected, transcribed, translated, ordered, and edited.

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A full collection of the original 17 maps can be found archived online at the University of Florida’s Institutional Repository:
http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/contains/?t="Cruising+Havana%3a+Affective+Spaces,+Public+Gestures,+and+the+Worlds+They+Make+in+a+Contemporary+Cuba"&f=TI.

It is also important to note that the relationship between Mateo and I during the first few weeks of field work allowed me to establish relationships with many of my participants free from the amorous and sexual tensions that could have otherwise arisen and it often gave me cover to avoid the attention of male sex workers (pingueros).

Throughout this thesis I use the term mulata/o, spelled in Spanish, as it is a cognizant racial identity in Cuba. When possible, I use the racial identities that participants self-identified with.
CHAPTER 2
THE QUEEN OF CUBA GOES TO HAVANA CITY:
NOTES ON SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP FROM THE NEW MAN TO THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

What would it mean to write a genealogy of sex… in which unjust sexual power was attributed not to an individual, nor to patriarchy, but to the nation itself?

—Lauren Berlant

*The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*

For biopolitical governance to remain effective, there must be porous or even co-constituting bonds between human individual bodies and the body of a nation…

—Mel Y. Chen

*Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*

**Introduction: Sexual Citizenship**

Citizenship is a type of belonging, an intimate public relationship to the nation. Belonging within the Cuban nation, within *cubanidad* (Cuban national identity), links one to ideologies, discourses, and histories that give meaning to the “imagined community” of the nation. Citizenship is affective: One feels a belonging to and within citizenship. While citizenship across the Americas have interwoven roots it is not a universal concept, rather it is deeply historical. Indeed, in Revolutionary Cuba, citizenship became redefined and picked up new textures. Under these changes, one did not simply belong to the nation but had to prove through action and behavior an alignment with national norms.

If the main goal of this thesis is to explore the ways in which Cubans who grate against the heteronormative logics of the present create alternative worlds of belonging, desire and intimacy—worlds that long for a something else—then this chapter is about setting up the foundations of and context in which those generative worlds survive. This chapter explores historic constructions of gender and citizenship, transnationally circulating discourses on modernity and gay rights, and revolutionary nationalist ideologies. Tracking this assemblage—a constantly changing, inherently contradictory, and immensely complex multiplicity of ideas,
knowledges, and techniques of regulation—this chapter locates it as it affects the body. Just as affect may generate sites of resistance, survival, and alternative world making, so too may it produce the intimacy of citizenship, the desire to be included, and the belonging of cubanidad. Furthermore, in the assemblage of historic constructions, national discourses, and transnational ideologies, gaps are opened up in regulatory and normalizing systems, openings that become the sites from which utopic imaginings, public gestures, and world making projects of belonging can take form.

The Jornada Begins: Pabellón Cuba and Candis Cayne

Situated on Calle 23 or what is commonly referred to as La Rampa, as the street forms a ramp of sorts that starts from the sea-wall of the Malecón [the boardwalk] and extends as a vein of life into the neighborhood of El Vedado, Pabellón Cuba takes up an entire city block. It is only a few streets up from the massive Hotel Nacional which was built on the top of Taganana Hill on the former site of the Santa Clara Battery in 1930 by a U.S. company. The Hotel Nacional still defines the skyline of the Malecón and overlooks La Rampa. Pabellón Cuba is also only a few blocks down from the famous Heladería Coppelia and the infamous Cine Yara (which has a history of being a place of encounter for mostly gay male Cubans).

Prior to the start of the IX Jornada contra la homofobia y la transfobia, this building remained a mystery to me like so much of Cuba. Stationed slightly above the street and surrounded by dense foliage, the pabellón [pavilion] at first seemed an impenetrable space. However, as this was the site of the first event of the Jornada, I determined to find the room that I needed. At the corner of the block I found a set of stairs being used by Cubans as a place to sit in order to access the NAUTA Wi-Fi, a service that the Cuban government just recently started: For 3 CUC per hour Cubans are able to search the internet, call family abroad, and update their Facebook profiles. I weaved around the Cubans to talk to a security guard and find the entrance.
It appeared that he had not been informed that the event was happening but allowed me to enter and find the room. The entire pabellón had been filled with an exhibit that paid homage to the Cuban flag. Representations of nationalism filled the space from giant flag cubs that hung from the outdoor awning to reproductions of famous *Bohemia* covers that featured not only the Cuban flag but the female embodiment of Cuban liberty, the female body to be protected from the tiger of imperialism per José Martí’s *Nuestra América* (2002). Navigating this gallery and event space I found my way upstairs to where a group of activists from the Centro nacional de educación sexual (CENESEX) were standing around. After asking to make sure that I was in the right space, and receiving a few strange looks, I stood around waiting like everyone else for the room to be unlocked.

Finally, after I imagine a key had been located, we entered a rather tight room filled with chairs facing a front table. Slowing people began to trickle in and take their seats or congregate in the back and begin talking with one another. They were almost all familiar with one another, chatting in animated and undoubtedly friendly ways. One volunteer, wearing his white Jornada tee-shirt with the slogan, Me Inclu(Yo) [I Include Myself], took the lead in decorating the room already filled with various representations of Cuban flags for this event, affixing first to the front of the table and then, later to the back of the wall behind the front table a large rainbow flag.

A strange affixing in my visual field began to happen between the Cuban flag (so prominently displayed throughout the pabellón) and the rainbow flag that drew my attention. Indeed, the rainbow flag, an example of diversity politics at its finest, recently used to demarcate some gay neighborhoods in the United States on street signs or perhaps to fly outside a gay bar to attract the right clientele, becomes linked to a symbol of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism.
Sitting in the center column of chairs and toward the back, I moved in toward the center and sat alongside two middle-aged women that were chatting with each other. It was here that I first met Mateo, my lover and partner, who sat next to me right before the panels started. Perhaps the fact that I was able to meet Mateo that day, points to one of the ways in which the Jornada operates as a place for Cubans (and foreigners) to engage in the forging of connections and relations that are both intimate and sexual as well as friendly and long-lasting. However, it soon became clear to me that it was also a space where various discourses collided, a space where the very notion of belonging to the nation, a sexual citizenship, was being created.

After the first panel, Mateo and I walked around the room and he introduced me to Adairis, a member of Grupo OREMI, which identifies itself as a group for lesbian and bisexual women (many of whom are black or mulata) and is one of the redes sociales [social networks] organized by CENESEX. When we returned to our seats, we sat behind two younger Cubans talking animatedly to each other. Over the next few days, I would end up meeting them and one of them, Odayls, a mulato gay man, would become one of my closest friends in Cuba and, perhaps, the most present of the multitude of voices that this thesis tries to generatively write toward.

The second panel that day followed the brief intermission. I had heard that there would be an estadounidense [a person from the United States] trans actress and “activist” on this next panel and it seemed to have drawn a significant crowd. However, by the time the panel started—already considerably behind the stated time—she hadn’t yet arrived. The moderator began despite being clearly distracting by Candis Cayne’s absence. Midway through an introduction to the panel of activists, the room grew suddenly distracted. Due to the magnitude of the shift in energy I had initially imagined CENESEX’s director and the daughter of President Raul Castro and
revolutionary Vilma Espín, Mariela Castro Espín had entered the room only to find when I
turned, a tall white woman surrounded by a group of handlers and an entourage of film staff.
Candis Cayne walked into the room and took up her position at the front table.

![Candis Cayne and Mariela Castro Espín holding a rainbow flag at a Conga por la Diversidad event in El Vedado, Havana. Photo taken by the author.](image)

Figure 2-1. Candis Cayne (left) and Mariela Castro Espín (right) holding the rainbow flag at the Conga por la Diversidad in El Vedado, Havana. Photo taken by author.

Candis Cayne is a transwoman and a U.S.-based actress and performer, known for her role as a transwoman in *Dirty Sexy Money* and more recently appearing alongside Caitlyn Jenner in her reality show *I Am Cait*. When she sat in front of the microphone to begin her section of the panel, she read in English from a script that had also been provided to a translator. She began:

I’m excited and inspired to be here in beautiful Cuba. I admire your culture and your love of art and music and your perseverance in maintaining that. I am honored
to be representing the LGBTI [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex] community of the United States. And it is heartwarming that Cuba along with the U.S. along with so many other countries around the world are recognizing, celebrating, and starting to protect the LGBT people. Our history as LGBT people in Cuba and the United States as well as the world have had important difficult moments. Injustices, misunderstandings, and wrong policies that must be recognized and repaired. I know we have a lot of work to do but we are making strides as a global community. But today is about the future and celebrating the growing acceptance of diversity in our two societies.

Her speech, which paused every half-line to allow the translator to keep up, made explicit the complex intermingling of U.S.-based diversity discourses around gay rights and the nationalist and Revolutionary discourses that circulated in Cuba. The Cuban flag and the rainbow flags formed a visual mixing that portended Candis’s arrival and, indeed, her presence suggested a complex transnational assemblage of ideologies and discourses. The inordinate amount of attention that followed Candis outshined Iris, a black transwoman from Matanzas [a neighboring city to the east of Havana], that was also on the panel. Whether this was solely due to her fame as an actress or her foreignness, the presence of Candice and the erasure of Iris made clear a power gap between the women. Again, the coloniality of the U.S.-Cuban relationship played out.

Once the question and answer section began, most of the questions were directed to Candis. One questioner began by thanking Candis for coming to the Jornada, commented on her striking beauty, and then asked her to comment on her activism. She responded,

We have similar organizations in our country [referring to CENESEX]. Since I work in the entertainment industry I work closely with GLAAD [Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation] and the HRC, the Human Rights Campaign, I am also on a television show there called I Am Cait, which celebrates a group of transwomen led by Caitlyn Jenner, and for me, part of my activism is being on television, showing the United States how I am, who I am, so my philosophy is, at least for me, is that everyone in America, or the world, if they see a transperson they get to know them, they see them on television, they get to know them, the next time they see that person walking down the street they won’t be so apt to be aggressive, and that’s my little way to try to help....
Immediately after she finished, a woman stood up in the crowd, and the room fell silent again. She started pointing out, to applause in the room, that activism is not about how beautiful someone is, “here everyone is beautiful.” Feminist goose-bumps covered my arm. “I mean no disrespect to Candis, but the United States and Cuba are not the same. Transwomen have a different story here and we must remember that.” She sat down and the room applauded again. The tensions were palpable.

The story of Candis Cayne’s appearance at the Jornada’s first event, an activist panel, highlights the various tensions and collapsings that are constitutive of the sexual citizenship that CENESEX and the Jornada seek to produce. Indeed, while I am sure that Candis Cayne is a more complicated human that I am suggesting by this recording of events (and I am hesitant to make a straw-woman out of her), I was still uneased by the types of rights-based activism, associated with the HRC and other neoliberal gay political organizations, for which she advocated and that is so distinct from the coalitional politics of woman of color feminism and queer of color critique (see Cohen [1997] 2005), of radical trans politics (see Spade 2015), or of Grupo OREMI (see Chapter 5 in this thesis).

Despite Candis Cayne’s comparison, CENESEX is certainly a different type of organization than the HRC—just as the Conga por la diversidad is a very different type of march than a gay pride parade—and yet they also became messily connected in their contact with one another. In particular, Candis Cayne’s appeal to a pedagogical approach, using her body as a teaching instrument, appealed to many of the ideas that Mariela pursues and that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Perhaps it is Candis Cayne’s invitation itself to the Jornada that most animates the inquires that this chapter explores. Despite asking around, I was never able to figure out who had
initially invited her and for what reasons. Thus, her attendance and the manner in which it happened remains an open question that haunts this chapter. What does her attendance mean for the Jornada? Was it evidence of an appeal to transnationally circulating modernity discourses of gay rights, what Jasbir Puar has called, “homonationalism” (2007), or was it evidence of a neoliberal change in national discourses of citizenship? That is, was Candice’s presence meant to be a model of appropriate trans feminine subjectivity in Cuba? And most importantly, how does this matter; how does it shape the contexts and experiences in which Cubans live? That is, how does the Jornada matter? How does it make material, constitute bodies, and redefine spaces?

The Construction and Regulation of Sexual Citizenship

The title of this chapter is a play on Lauren Berlant’s book *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997) and, like Berlant, I attempt here to “take the temperature” (20) of the political hegemony of one form of belonging: Citizenship—at the point in which it comes into contact with sex. Beyond this connection, the title is also a reference to a conversation that I had the day after first hearing Mariela speak at the Jornada. Olga, the woman that I was living with in El Vedado, told me, “Ella es la reina de Cuba” and thus, in this chapter, I explore the role of Cuba’s “Queen” as she leads the Cuban nation along what has been termed by CENESEX as the “Sexual Revolution.” Indeed, the question becomes, is she performing acts of “diva citizenship... a moment of emergence that marks unrealized potentials for subaltern political activity” (Berlant 1997, 223) or does the sexual citizenship that marks CENESEX’s activity represent a new form of regulation?

In answering this question and those that arose from the story that started this chapter, “The Queen of Cuba Goes to Havana City” explores the porous connections between the national body and the breathing, kissing, and fucking corporeal body. It is about exploring what happens when “abstract and corporeal citizenship come into... contradictory contact [with] the exploited
and minoritized body [and] the body of the nation” (Berlant 1997, 226). These porous connections animate my larger theoretical claim that calls for an embodied politics of queer gesture or mariconería. Just as mariconería makes feelings public and builds worlds of belonging, the nation becomes reconfigured through the affective gestures of belonging to a nation. Citizenship has its own sensations and affects which act, within the realm of the social, to racialize, sexualize, and gender citizens (Berlant 1997).³ What then, does it mean when belonging to the body of the nation is reconfigured by the image of Mariela, nuestra reina, walking down the streets of Vedado (as I described in Chapter 1) or, even more so, the narrow streets of Matanzas, leading the marching bodies of the Conga por la diversidad, while holding a rainbow flag that takes up the entire street, and leading the chant of “Revolución de todos los colores” [Revolution of all of the colors]? The Conga por la diversidad is one of a multitude of government sponsored movements that have been headed by CENESEX and that collectively have heralded what some have called the “Sexual Revolution.” If the original revolution freed Cuba from the grips of imperialism and crony capitalism, then the sexual revolution was said to have liberated Cubans from gender and sexuality based discrimination.

The Sexual Revolution, and the many policies and governmental actions that it represents, has been characterized as a major reversal for Cuban politics which during the early years of the Revolution enforced a strict gender/sexuality system. From a past of forced labor camps (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción or UMAP) to the history of the the “New Man,” Cuba’s past has been marred by human rights abuses toward anyone that could be deemed anti-social due to their non-conforming gender or sexual expressions.
In this chapter, I first read the theoretical work of Michel Foucault along with the ways in which his notions of biopolitics have been developed through recent queer theorists. This section attempts to provide a theoretical outline that informs the rest of this chapter. In the following section, I argue that during the 1960s and 1970s, revolutionary Cuba deployed strict norms of gender and sexuality that became inextricably linked to belonging to the new revolutionary nation. Characterized best by Che’s “New Man,” this new nationalized heteropatriarchy served the purpose of creating a productive population for the state. In doing so, it also figured queer bodies outside of the nation, figuring them as expendable in the pursuit of revolutionary cohesion and economic stability. I, then, turn toward the Sexual Revolution and the role of CENESEX in contemporary discourses of belonging within citizenship. Here I argue that despite the teleological narrative of progression that has characterized the moment, there is considerable continuity between the policies of the 1960s and 1970s and today, not least of which is the continuation of a sexual citizenship which links together the construction of national belonging to sexuality and gender. The turn has instead been one of normalization, bringing the queer body into the body politic through discourses of diversity and multiculturalism. Rather than fundamentally eschewing the nationalized heteropatriarchy of early revolutionary Cuba, these policies potentially further entrench strict gender and sexuality norms. This chapter elucidates CENESEX as a state apparatus that sits at the fulcrum between an international mandate for multicultural homonationalist modernity and a domestic necessity to further nationalist and socialist ideologies. Throughout the chapter I hope to demonstrate the ways in which discourses and ideologies of belonging to the nation are mapped onto the contested terrains of the body and space and, in particular, ways in which they move from imagined concepts to materiality, affecting and being affected by the corporeal form. Finally, I seek to show the ways in which this
convergence of conflicting discourses and ideologies opens up spaces for the world making projects that animate the rest of this thesis.

**Biopolitics and Homonationalism**

I explore the power of the state in this chapter through Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics and as furthered by the work of Jasbir Puar and Mel Y. Chen. As Foucault suggests, “one would have to speak of *bio-power* to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (Foucault 1978, 143). By this Foucault, points to a shift of power from one of death to one of regulating life. He states that this shift of power meant that the State “could no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself” (Foucault 1978, 142). Thus, the project of the nation state is a regulation of life by a “biopolitical governmentality [that] has submitted the political sphere and the domain of citizenship to an even stronger determination by instrumental rationalities, in which institutionally formed social practices become the violent omission of heterogeneous historical and social means” (Reddy 2011, 33). As a technology of power, biopolitics points us to more nuanced understandings of the role of the Cuban State, and later more specifically, CENESEX in regulating life.

I use normalization to refer to the strategy of biopolitics to incorporate subjectivities into the “normal” or, in the case of this thesis, into the heteronormative. Throughout both the period of the State-sponsored and orchestrated subjection of queer bodies under regimes like UMAP and the more recent discursive changes toward multicultural diversity under CENESEX, Cuba has deployed a biopolitical governmentality that has been assembled to heteronormativity. In “Sex in Public,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner describe heteronormativity as “the institutions,
structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (Berlant and Warner 1998, 259). Thus, bio-power becomes invested in maintaining the naturalization and normalization of—to use Rodrick Ferguson’s phrase—heteropatriarchy (2004).

Furthermore, transnational discourses of gay rights, multiculturalism, and diversity have become connected to notions of progress, modernity, and even to the nation (Alexander 2005; Puar 2007; Chen 2012). Puar’s term homonationalism describes the way in which nationalism and homosexuality have become linked together in a way that “operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects” (Puar 2007, 2). Homonationalism is about a process of normalizing subjects within the heteropatriarchal system. Thus, just as with Puar’s analysis of U.S. homonationalism, Cuba must “temporarily suspend its heteronormative imagined community to consolidate national sentiment and consensus through the recognition and incorporation of some, though not all or most, homosexual subjects” (Puar 2007, 4).

Exploring these lines of thought, we can see the various ways in which biopolitical technologies regulate both bodies and space. The analysis presented in the rest of this chapter describes a state apparatus that, in its pursuit to regulate life, consolidate the Revolution, and increase the productivity of a faltering labor force deployed a new patriarchy based off of the ideology of the “New Man.” While indeed repressive, UMAP camps were one of many examples of the Revolution deploying gender norms for productive means. The “sexual revolution” becomes a shift in the ways in which sex and nationhood become assembled together, thus, making queer bodies assimilatable into the nation. Having ended overt-government-encouraged homophobia, the state continues to work to normalize queer sexual desires and gender
subjectivities into the very structures that had previously rejected the homosexual and transsexual subject as the “antisocial.”

Thus, I show how CENESEX continues to normalize queer subjectivities in Cuba. CENESEX regulates the bodies and spaces of queer subjectivities through medical and pedagogical diversity discourses. In turn, sexuality, intimacy, and desire is intentionally limited in favor of assimilation and normalization into the nation, and a history of human rights abuses and state-led homophobia is erased. However, I also show that this system of regulation is not complete. Despite a historic and contemporary biopolitical state that has connected citizenship and sexuality, this connection is forever incomplete, providing gaps for alternative imaginings to take root and for world making projects to generate.

While the analysis developed in this paper is critical of CENESEX, it should not be read as a negation of the many policies that CENESEX has spearheaded that have made real change in peoples’ lives. Rather, this paper seeks to acknowledge that the complexities of politics, especially the politics of gender and sexuality, often create ambivalences. Nor is it my intent to suggest that the identitarian gay rights movement model of the United States and Europe is superior to the model underway in Cuba. Indeed, I am similarly ambivalent about the identity politics of the United States. By exploring an analysis of biopolitics, this paper suggests thinking about power in ways that belie simplistic notions of top/down or oppressor/oppressed. As Foucault eloquently states, “power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared… power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (Foucault 1978, 94). As Dean Spade argues, a biopolitical analysis “captures how systems of meaning and control that concern us permeate our lives, our ways of knowing about the world, and our ways of imagining transformation” (2015, 6). I thus, offer this chapter not as a critical or
paranoid hermeneutic\textsuperscript{5} but rather as a foundational and contextual referent for the following chapters that archive the ordinary and quotidian utopic imaginings, public gestures, and affective spaces that transform, resist, survive, and generate alternative politics and worlds.

**The New Man, UMAP, and the Heteronormative State**

In her article, “Gender policing, homosexuality, and the new patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965-70,” Lillian Guerra demonstrates the extent to which the Cuban state authorized/encouraged homophobia and developed a “new patriarchy” as a strategy “devised to solve the economic conditions of the moment and further consolidate [the Revolution’s] power” (Guerra 2010, 271). This article along with Guerra’s later book *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption and Resistance, 1959-1971* (2012) challenges earlier works, particularly that of Ian Lumsden (1996), and Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich (1984; 1985), that portrayed “Cuba’s persecution of homosexuality as an outgrowth of historic machismo or a mistaken anomaly of an otherwise ‘idealistic’ era; they did not, [she notes,] see it as part of a larger pattern of human rights abuse” (Guerra 2012, 227). Guerra’s works suggest that new gender and sexuality norms were deployed as a form of regulation of life under the Revolution. Indeed, despite the turn by Cuban state officials toward a policy of tolerance and diversity, elements of the more draconian regulations of an UMAP-era gender matrix continue to inform the biopolitics of CENESEX. Thus, pedagogical and sanitation discourses can be seen as informing current gender norms in a constant process of refiguring the nation, its spaces and its bodies.

Guerra’s findings contrast with the work of Carrie Hamilton in her book *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory* (2012). Hamilton argues that “the changes that took place in the realm of sexuality after 1959 were less a result of deliberate policies on sexuality than of wider social, political, and economic transformations” (Hamilton 2012, 2). Furthermore, she argues that “variations and consistencies in sexuality were intimately tied to
social power relations of gender, race, and social class” (Hamilton 2012, 2). I argue that through a biopolitical lens we can see the ways in which deliberate state policies become co-constitutive with relations of gender, race, and social class. Furthermore, biopolitics allows us to see the ways in which the state regulates the social through political economy (Foucault 2009, 450). Thus, as Guerra argues, “individual attitudes, aesthetics, and creativity became a primary domain of interest for the state as officials struggled to re-engineer the economic behavior of citizens in the mid- to late 1960s” (Guerra 2012, 228).

Foucault states that “bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (Foucault 1978, 140–41). While Cuba clearly rejected liberal capitalism as a system, not only did it (does it) still exist in a global capitalist system that continued to mandate surpluses for the use in global trade (even trade at highly preferential terms as was the case with the USSR) but it continued to have needs to regulate the population in order to achieve production goals. As Guerra argues, “the success of the state’s economic policies depended on achieving a self-disciplined volunteer labor force, young Cubans’ willingness to carry out their assigned roles in production was fundamental to society’s future development” (2010, 271). Thus, we can see that in Cuba there was a similar need and desire to optimize the labor force by both encouraging a higher rate of productivity and an availability of labor. Due to the failure of several mismanaged nationalized businesses by the late 1960s, the socialist economy of Cuba was approaching disaster (Dumont 1974, 28–30).

Looking for solutions, the revolutionary government of Cuba deployed highly regulated gender norms through the image of the “New Man.” Cuba turned toward the deployment of
gender norms as a way in which to encourage the “moral incentive” of men and women to carry out state orders (Guerra 2012, 228). Commitment to the state was, thus, demonstrated by participation in the volunteer labor brigades that had been adopted in 1962 to compensate for mass labor shortages in the rural areas of Cuba (Guerra 2010, 273). Due to being perceived as the “most ‘biologically’ capable sector,” the economic strategy relied on the (re)production of a “proper gender identity” of both men and women (Guerra 2010, 273). This highly structured masculinity, as an imperative for economic saliency, became a litmus test for political commitment.

Beyond ensuring the availability of (free) labor and the productive capacities of that labor, the Revolution also had to ensure labor’s docility. That is, as Foucault states, the state “had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern” (Foucault 1978, 141). Here again gender operated as the regulatory power of the state. Not only did the specific constructions of masculinity ensure a labor force for the economy, and specifically for the sugar cane industry, but it also became a way of naturalizing compliance. As part of this naturalization, Ernesto “Che” Guevara published his famous article “Socialism and the New Man.” The figure or ideal of the New Man becomes a gendered political ideology. Furthermore, Abel Sierra Madero states that “the New Man was not conceived as a citizen but as an indistinct member of a disciplined and docile human mass that would follow the political vanguard” (Negrón-Muntaner 2011, 12, emphasis mine).

The construction of the New Man, as an instrument of the state, had important implications beyond defining heterosexual manhood in Cuba. First, the New Man designated the next generation as one that would “be free of original sin” and, therefore, not tainted by
capitalism (Guerra 2010, 274). There was, thus, a large emphasis placed on youth and in particular, young boys. For example, the state established “the Centre for Special Education for effeminate boys raised by single mothers, fearing that the boys might ‘infect others’” (Guerra 2012, 239). Furthermore, the New Man was also invested in femininity and the construction of womanhood. According to Guerra, “women’s role was to create New Men not only as mothers but, more importantly, as admonishers of doubt and examples of volunteer labour whose work quotas men should surpass – if they were ‘true’ men” (Guerra 2010, 277). Thus, the regulation of the New Man depended on the construction of femininity as much as it did on masculinity.

Foucault states in *The History of Sexuality* that sex was deployed as “a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species” (Foucault 1978, 146). Similarly, under the New Man, the deployment of a new patriarchy served to connect both a regulation of reproduction and the regulation of properly gendered bodies to the productive capacities of a workforce that sustained the state. In fact, beyond raising properly masculine boys and serving as a benchmark to judge masculine work efforts, a woman was supposed to inspire greater productivity and revolutionary commitment through the “cultivation of her sex appeal through hairstyling and the like” (Guerra 2010, 278). Indeed, the state regulated the appearance of women to such a degree that afternoon lessons at a school that taught women to direct traffic focused on how to apply cosmetics (Guerra 2010, 278). While women were expected to cultivate sex appeal and men were expected to be appealed, the New Man also encouraged abstinence in the name of production. Revolutionary masculinity was, thus, paradoxically constructed by both virility and by “denying one’s deepest instinctual urge to seek sexual release, both men and women surrendered their individual bodies to the collective task of building Communism and galvanized their wills for the sacrifices the revolution required” (Guerra 2010, 278).
Not surprisingly, the investment in what Guerra calls a “New Patriarchy” had a particularly strong impact on homosexuals who were constructed as both outside of the revolutionary “New Man” and as a production of bourgeois capitalism. As Ian Lumsden, Emilio Bejel, and Jafari Allen all point out, in Cuba, homosexuality is seen as more dangerous for its refusal to perform patriarchal masculinity properly than in the sexual act itself (Lumsden 1996, 30; Bejel 2001, xiv, 7; Allen 2011, 127). For example, Emilio Bejel points out that queer bodies are not those that engage in sexual acts with other queer bodies, but rather, “women perceived as too passionate and/or as having masculine characteristics; men thought to be weak or ‘effeminate’” (Bejel 2001, 10). Furthermore, Allen points out that “the male body is allowed a fair amount of mixing and ambiguity, as long as the body performs the masculine gender script competently. For example homosex experienced in youthful relationships that bond young boys then passes is exempted from mariconísmo” (2011, 127).

Homosexuality, then, constructed as excess to masculinity (for example, in mannerism and expression) was, thus, seen as also an excess to the reproductive necessities of the nation and incompatible with the production necessitated by the voluntary labor movement. As Rodrick Ferguson points out in Aberrations in Black,

Naturalizing heteropatriarchy by posing capital as the social threat to heteropatriarchal relations meant that both liberal reform and proletarian revolution sought to recover heteropatriarchal integrity from the ravages of industrialization. Basing the fundamental conditions of history upon heterosexual reproduction and designating capital as the disruption of heterosexual normativity did more than designate the subject of modern society as heteronormative. It made the heteronormative subject the goal of liberal and radical practices (2004, 10).

Heteronormativity, therefore, became an integral part in the revolutionary process.

Homosexuality was, in contrast, taken by the Revolution to be an excess to production and a form of colonial and imperial penetration.
Thus, not only was homosexuality seen as a product of bourgeois excess, an argument that was not exclusive to Cuba, but the supposed “effeminate traits [of homosexuals] were the result of the defeat of the national virility by American penetration/colonization” (Negrón-Muntaner 2011, 12). Indeed, as Ferguson points out in his analysis of African American and Chicano nationalist movements in the U.S. “revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism have… with few exceptions… idealized heteropatriarchy as the essence of social relations and have presumed that heterosexual subjects and relations exist as absolute givens. Idealizing heteropatriarchy as the rational organization of society also meant defining antiracist [and anticapitalist] agency through the recuperation of phallocentric loss” (Ferguson 2004, 140).

Similarly, Cuban anti-imperialism and, later its particular brand of communism, took heteropatriarchy as a given and re-invested in highly regulated gender norms as a way in which to recuperate or rectify a perceived loss of virile power.

As Foucault points out, the institutions of power related to bio-politics become “techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions” (Foucault 1978, 141). For example, Samuel Feijóo, a professor of Anthropology, published an editorial in El Mundo that due to its elucidation of the discourse surrounding homosexuality is worth citing in full:

On a certain occasion, Fidel let us know that the countryside does not produce homosexuals, that this abominable vice does not grow there. True. The conditions of virility found among the Cuban peasantry do not permit it. But in some of our cities it proliferates. […] Against it, we are struggling and we will struggle until we eradicate it from a virile country, wrapped up in a life and death battle against Yankee imperialism. And in this super-virile [virilísimo] country, with its army of men, homosexuality should not be and cannot be expressed by homosexual or pseudo-homosexual writers and ‘artists.’ Because no homosexual represents the Revolution, that is a matter for males [asunto de varones], of fists and not of feathers, of fury and not of trembling, of sincerity and not of intrigues, of creative valor and not of candy-coated surprises…. We are not talking about persecuting
homosexuals but of destroying their positions in society, their methods, their influence. Revolutionary social hygiene is what this is called” (Feijóo 1965).

This passage demonstrates several important discursive trends, many that I have already outlined; including the connection of the homosexual to imperialism, and the constructed virility of the New Man. Beyond these, Feijóo also connects homosexuality to a discourse of hygiene and public health. Although the call for the eradication of the “positions” of homosexuals in society has ceased to be salient (and is actively rejected by the state), the categorization of sexuality and, in particular, of homosexuality as a public health issue has continued.

The biopolitical deployment of gender as a regulating norm during the early years of the revolution served to eradicate ideological competition and to consolidate the Communist Party’s power (Guerra 2010, 289). However, it also provided justification for the creation of the UMAP camps. These forced labor camps detained thousands of homosexuals, up to 60 thousand according to Virigilio Piñera (Lumsden 1996, 66). While this may seem at first to be a blatant repression of sexuality, we can see through the development of this section that the “New Man” was equally a productive force. As their name implies, Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (Military Units for the Support of Production), the purpose of the group was to fulfil the national needs for production and to normalize antisocial citizens into the ideological mandates of the “New Man” (Sierra Madero 2006b, 197). As Lumsden points out, the camps “provided cheap regimented labor for the province of Camagüey, within which they were all located. At the time there was an acute shortage of labor in the province, which was converting large tracts of ranch land into cane fields” (Lumsden 1996, 66). Thus, bio-power operated to sustain the political and economic needs of the state. My focus on the regulatory aspects of the UMAP camps is not to discount the death toll that these policies and camps created. Indeed, the barbarity of the camps are evident: “conditions were so severe that some people committed
suicide. Some camps were apparently so notorious that their military commanders were actually changed and convicted of brutalizing inmates” (Lumsden 1996, 70). Here we see, perhaps most prominently, the way in which biopolitical technologies of power seek to hide away death. The homosexual, constructed (at this time) as the abjected body from the Nation was an expendable one.

Furthermore, medical and sanitation discourses were utilized as a way in which to “purge” elements of the society that were seen as “antisocial.” As Lumsden points out, “‘sanitizing’ the environment politically and socially was part of the ‘revolutionary offensive’ that led to political purges” (Lumsden 1996, 68). UMAP camps were, thus, treated as sites to transform these “antisocial” elements of society into productive ones. As Frances Negrón-Muntaner states, “El propósito principal era transformar a los integrantes de estos grupos en miembros productivos de la sociedad, en línea con la ideología revolucionaria y con las necesidades laborales del Estado” [The UMAP’s avowed objective was to transform them into productive members of society in line with revolutionary ideology and the state’s labor needs] (Negrón-Muntaner 2008, 165). The UMAP camps aligned with Fidel and other official’s conception of the countryside and agricultural work as incompatible with maricones (Lumsden 1996, 67). Thus, it is important to recognize that the camps were seen as corrective.

Indeed, as recent evidence in an interview with one of the psychologists involved in the UMAP camps Dra. María Elena Solé Arrondo demonstrates, sexuality was connected to one’s ability to show political devotion to the revolution. In the interview she states that there were 4 different categorizations of gays used by the UMAP system: A1, A2, A3, and A4; which were based on both effeminacy and the political inclination.

El A4 era el ‘afocante,’ el que soltaba las plumas y que además no tenía ninguna integración revolucionaria… El A1 era, Bueno todos eran homosexuales. El A1 no
hacía ostencación de su problema, no manifestaba hostilidad hacia la Revolución. [The A4 was the “afocante” (individual that was resistant to the Revolution and was perceived to be contaminating others), that put up his feathers (suggesting that the A4 exhibited the gestures and mannerisms (mariconería) of pájaros or faggots) and that in addition had no potential of being integrated into the Revolution. The A1 was, well they were all homosexuals. The A1 though was not as ostentatious and did not demonstrate a hostititity to the Revolution] (Guerra and Sierra Madero 2016, 359).

This system illuminates the ways in which one’s ability to be a revolutionary was connected to one’s embodied gendered performance. Furthermore, it continues to demonstrate how the camps were meant to rehabilitate homosexuals and reintegrate them into the heteropatriciacl norms of the proper revolutionary citizen. This was done through the separation of homosexuals into various categories and often included the forced separation of couples (Guerra and Sierra Madero 2016).

This section demonstrated the historical contexts that preceded the emergence of CENESEX. It traced the various discourses that were deployed in order to define a new patriarchy and set the figure of the “homosexual” as constitutively outside of the revolutionary New Man. Through the lens of a biopolitical analysis, we can see that the New Man (and even the UMAP camps that it engendered) was not merely a repressive power but, instead, a productive one. Furthermore, this section traced these tactics in order to highlight various discursive trends that will be explored in the following section.

**Sexual Citizenship in Contemporary Cuba**

As transnational discourses of diversity and modernity flow between the U.S. and Cuba, and as Cuba sits on a precarious edge, implementing reforms to both its economic system and its forms of regulation, CENESEX sits at the fulcrum between international and domestic imperatives. The following section explores transitions that have been led by CENESEX in Cuban society. It argues that following Foucault’s biopolitics we can see how CENESEX retains the role of
regulating citizenship while suggesting a new assemblage of sex and nation. If the last section was about providing a brief sketch of the various ways in which heteronormativity, sexuality, and nationhood were constructed during the early years of the Revolution, providing a foundation on which the rest of this thesis works, this section is about establishing a(n) (albeit incomplete) outline of the contemporary political context in which the activists and militantes [militants, but used like activists in Cuba] that animate the rest of this thesis gesture toward alternative worlds of belonging, desire, and intimacy, daring to hope in a precarious Cuba. Indeed, while this chapter attempts to explore the regulating and normalizing role of the state, it is also invested in demonstrating the small gaps and fluxes that make alternative world-making projects possible.

In this section, I ask what happens when the Queen of Cuba, Mariela, leads the Conga por la Diversidad, through the streets of Havana’s Vedado neighborhood, and what happens when the Conga moves to the streets of nearby Matanzas? I start this section with my own ethnographic encounter from afar with la reina who gives this chapter its name. Then, I explore in more detail some of the points that the encounter brings to light, exploring the implications of a diversity discourse, a pedagogical approach, and the ways in which these approaches flow transnationally.

The Queen of Cuba

The Conga started in Matanzas in the eastern-most park in the city, Plaza Vigia. Odalys and a few others started to unfold the gigantic Cuban flag, taking extra precautions to keep the flag from touching the street below them. When the flag was stretched out it took up the entire street and Odalys again invited Mateo and I to join him and hold the Cuban flag as we marched. We had to stand up on the sidewalk with our backs against the walls of the buildings in order to keep the flag taught. Again, the Cuban flag took the lead. Odalys, Mateo and I stood on one of
the sides of the Cuban flag near the back. In Havana, Mariela had marched with the Rainbow flag, taking the center place in the back of the flag. For this second Conga, nuestra reina moved to the Cuban flag (again at the center and along the back of the flag), just 4 or so people between us. Perhaps it was all of the time spent with Odalys and our other friends over the busy days of the Jornada or perhaps it was the narrowness of the street, but this second Conga was a more intimate affair. The streets were filled with onlookers, doors were all open with people standing inside, and those that lived in the tall buildings that closed in on the street stood out on the balconies watching the conga progress.

Figure 2-2. La Conga por la diversidad in Matanzas, Cuba. Photo taken by author.

This was the first time the Conga had marched in Matanzas. Each year the Jornada takes place in Havana and then moves for a second week in one of the provinces. This year was
Matanzas and it seemed like the entire city had come out to see the spectacle. As we marched, Mariela led the chants from her prominent position: “Socialismo si, homofobia no” [Socialism yes, homophobia no]; “Diverso, unido; abajo al bloqueo” [Diverse, united, down with the blockade/embargo]. The interested onlookers politely moved out of the way as the flags made their way through toward la Plaza Central.

While often described in the U.S. media as Cuba’s gay pride parade, the comparison elides not only the differences in the stated politics of the march but also the affective experience of marching. After returning to the United States a little over a week after the Conga in Matanzas, Mateo attended the Boston Gay Pride Parade and described the difference: “the larger event was hard to get in to. Many of the floats belonged to dubious corporations. At one point, we were handed little rainbow flags with TD Bank insignia on them” (Leslie Santana 2016b). Gone was the presence of a broader political stance against poverty and colonialism, gone was the gestures of belonging and solidarity that animated our interactions with Odalys and so many others at the Jornada, and in its place was a proliferation of corporate interest.

I was reminded of the words of Mariela just a few days prior as she ended the academic event of the Jornada.

Y otro elemento que quería transmitir, que salió incluso del panel anterior, y es: no copiar acríticamente? los modelos que vienen de las sociedades dominadoras?, no lo copiemos, es una tendencia que se da en todas partes…. Cuando yo empecé a participar en estos espacios de lucha por los derechos LGBT, me habían invitado [a eventos en los EE.UU. y Candada]…. Vi las posiciones de los grupos que representaban las comunidades más desfavorecidos económicamente de las sociedades, sobre todo latinoamericanas, que estaban allí y vi el comportamiento totalmente diferente, ostentoso, lleno de recursos de los que venían de grupos de mayor poder económico y allí también vi como desde ese lugar se les cuestionaba a “los que tenían y a los que no tenían”, “porque nosotros hacemos y ustedes no hacen” y como los cuestionaban a los cubanos porque era la moda, la moda era cuestionar, patear, bloquear, lastimar a Cuba, ahora la moda es Cuba… Cuba! todo el mundo viene a Cuba! (aplausos)

[And another element I wanted to convey, which came even from the previous
panel, and it is: to not copy uncritically the models that come from the dominating societies, we should not copy it, it is a tendency that is everywhere.... When I started to participate in these spaces of struggle for LGBT rights, I had been invited (to events in the U.S. and Canada).... I saw the positions of the groups that represented the most economically disadvantaged communities, many from Latin Americans, and I saw the totally different, ostentatious, resourceful behavior of those who came from groups of greater economic power and there I also saw as from that place they were questioned "those who had and those who did not have," "because we do and you do not" and how they questioned Cubans because it was in fashion, it was in fashion to question, kick, block, hurt Cuba, now the fashion is Cuba...Cuba! Everyone comes to Cuba!! (applause)

This quote illuminates the many ambivalences and tensions that exist within the Jornada and the politics of CENESEX more generally. Just moments before this statement, she provocatively invoked Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970): CENESEX could not adopt the methods of the United States or Europe in the struggle for LGBTI rights, despite the tendency to do so. She critiqued the neoliberal gay rights approach in North America that has worked for the few, those that are white and already have access to wealth, while leaving behind those from Latin America, people of color, and the poor. Her critique resonated with my own sense of disillusionment with the neoliberal model underway in the United States, and yet, I also cannot help but to place this in tension with the arrival of Candis Cane, who only days after her presence on the activist panel on the first day of the Jornada, had marched on the right hand side of Mariela up the streets of El Vedado (see Figure 2-1).

Furthermore, Mariela ends this section by referencing Cuba’s own transnational position. Her point that Cuba was now in fashion pointed to the ways in which CENESEX also functions as a projection of the progressive narrative to the outside world. Gone are the repressions of the UMAP camps and in its place is an amalgamation of neoliberal rights based ideologies and revolutionary-nationalist discourses. Of course, this change has also been marked as a time of increased insecurity and dramatic economic change, which has left those most vulnerable in increasing precarity.
Diversity, Pedagogy, and the Trans/Queer Body

Further exploring the facets of sexual citizenship that I tried to highlight in the discussion of the Conga in Matanzas, this section explores the approaches and discourses of Mariela and the rest of CENESEX. In order to do this, I start by considering the role of CENESEX as a producer and regulator of legible discourses surrounding sexuality. While, following Sierra Madero, this section expands on a theory of biopolitics to analyze these approaches, I also, through ethnographic insight attempt to nuance this discussion. While I consider the way in which medical and pedagogical discourses led to an adoption of tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism as a tactic of normalization, I have also tried to flesh out the ways in which this normalization and regulation falls short, allowing gaps for the utopic imaginings and embodied mariconería that animate the rest of this thesis.

In 1989, the National Working Group on Sexual Education was reorganized into CENESEX and, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, it became the leading voice promoting a tolerance discourse and sexual diversity (see Stout 2014, 49; Kirk 2015). Furthermore, Castro Espín stated that “Cuban society needed to develop a ‘healthier culture of sexuality’” (Stout 2014, 49). The mere fact that the sole legitimate arbiter of acceptable ways of knowing and talking about sex and sexuality is housed in the Ministry of Health suggests a particular de-politicization of queer subjectivities through health and pedagogy frames. However, while I argue adamantly that sexuality is inherently political, as is gender, I do not mean to suggest here that identitarian politics, such as the those seen in the U.S. is preferable model.

Indeed, the politics of CENESEX and the ambivalences that it operates in are well described through the case of the Conga. In Allen’s ethnographic work, he points out that the Conga remains a space where more radical voices are not included. In particular, he states that Las Krudas “may not be able to join the conga line” any time soon (Allen 2011, 192).
Furthermore, Sierra Madero states that the Conga is a place of state co-optation, working through an “assimilationist logic” which in his analysis serves to restore legitimacy to the hegemony of the state by portraying it as a “well-intended and ‘good’ revolution” that has evolved since the period of UMAP (see Sierra Madero 2014). While this analysis describes an important larger-scale dynamic, in my own experience of marching, I found it to be a space that defied the homogenizing tendencies of this analysis.

Figure 2-3. “No Violencia policial contra nosotr@s” at the Conga por la diversidad in El Vedado, Havana. Photo taken by author.

Indeed, several of the participants that animate later parts of this study, including Odalys and Yamaris were not only integral participators in the march, they were also openly critical about aspects of CENESEX. Furthermore, while marching with the Conga in El Vedado, I noticed
that the leader of the group Projecto Arcoiris, an organization that is not affiliated with the government marched with a large sign made out of card board stating: “no violencia policial contra nosotr@s” (Figure 2-3). Later during my fieldwork, Projecto Arcoiris organized a “besada” [Kiss-in] on La Rampa in support of the victims in Orlando, Florida from the Pulse Massacre (which was the largest mass-shooting to ever take place in the United States and which is discussed further in Chapter 5) which several of my friends from the CENESEX-organized Grupo OREMI joined. All of this is to say that despite CENESEX’s role as an arbiter of discourses around sexuality and sexual politics in Cuba, the spaces of the Jornada exist within a complex system that is at once co-optive of more radical politics and a space where alternative imaginings continue to circulate.

To further illustrate the ambivalences inherent to the tolerance/public health discourse that is so prevalent in Cuba, I offer the example of the 2007 CENESEX-led campaign to update the Family Code. As Tanya Saunders has pointed out, the Family Code, which was passed in 1975, “promoted monogamous heterosexual marriage as an ideal” (Saunders 2015, 56). Indeed, the Family Code can be seen as an extension of the ideology of the New Man which linked together morality, sexuality, and gender—thus, creating an ideal heteronormative citizen. The proposed legislation, an amendment to the Family Code, would have “outlaw[ed] discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, extend[ed] social programs for travestis, and allow[ed] transgender Cubans to change their identity cards without undergoing sexual reassignment surgery” (Stout 2014, 50). Without a doubt these are admirable aims, in fact, I wish to point out the administrative change proposed. This chapter has developed a theory of biopolitical regulation, that sees power as commonly acted out through the administration of bureaucratic structures rather than through law (Spade 2015). In the proposed plan, CENESEX
advocated for an institutional and administrative change that would have directly impacted, positively, the lives of transgender Cubans by allowing them to get new identification cards. However, equally important, was the tactic that was used. By seeking to reform the Family Code, it “naturalized the heteronormative, nuclear family” (Stout 2014, 50). Indeed, the naturalization of the heteronormative family can be seen as part of a tolerance strategy. As Wendy Brown points out in her book *Regulating Aversion*, tolerance fixes heteronormativity and precludes a more radical project of dismantling it (Brown 2006). This example illustrates the utility of a biopolitical analysis, as it encourages a critical assessment of policies that allows for inherent ambivalences and the dangers of tolerance tactics.

Ultimately the CENESEX-proposed changes to the Family Code were not passed and, in 2007, Castro Espín retired her proposal “until her pedagogic strategy could fully penetrate the minds of Cuban politicians” (Sierra Madero 2014). We can, thus, see an evolving rhetoric that now takes a pedagogical approach toward diversity. Like CENESEX’s work with the Family Code, Mariela’s pedagogical approach carries with it significant ambivalences.

While attending an event at the Universidad de Ciencias Medicas [University of Medical Sciences] in Matanzas I witnessed a particularly eye-opening exchange between Mariela and a student at the University. After presentations, the auditorium that was filled well past occupancy (I couldn’t help but wonder if the students had been required to attend), was opened up for *debate* [discussion/question and answer]. After a few innocuous comments, a younger student walked up to the microphone and began to ask his question. This student was clearly opposed to the work that CENESEX was doing and to sexuality politics more generally. His comment, trafficking in the all-too-often used (and racialized) comparison of homosexuality to necrophilia and bestiality, was received by a silent audience. I could see the tension rising for many of the
LGBTI activists that had attended. When the student ended, Mariela was the first to respond and she started by praising the students’ courage to say this. The Queen of Cuba demurred his comments politely and after discussing a few of her points in distinction, said that they would have to agree to disagree. A few activists (mostly those that had traveled with the Jornada from Havana) stood to say a few comments in response, all starting with a line praising the student’s courage taken directly from Mariela. Notably absent from these responses was a defense of the “bad, abnormal, or unnatural—” to use Gayle Rubin’s ([1984] 1993) descriptors—sex that the student was comparing to the normalized homosexual and transgender subjects that had become a stand-in for the body of the (homo)nation.

Furthermore, Mariela’s praise seems to reinforce the pedagogical approach that she takes, suggesting that change is slow and happens in the minds of Cubans rather than in the laws. Indeed, I could not help but find the contrast with this approach and a 1960s Cuba that had declared, “Contra la Revolución, nada [Against the Revolution, nothing] (Castro Ruz 1961).” Nor could I help but wonder what it would look like for Cuba to employ the same drive that it had used during the UMAP-era toward the policies of CENSEX; of course, this change highlights the transformation of regulatory techniques in Cuba.

The pedagogical approach that Mariela and CENESEX takes has, as Sierra Madero argues, “the dual effect of shifting both the burden and blame for historically deepened homophobia from the state’s five-decade policy of open persecution, prosecution and marginalization onto citizens” (2014). And while CENESEX’s approach does (correctly, in my opinion) recognize the equally co-optive potential of law- and rights-based reform strategies—such as those pursued by mainstream gay rights organizations in the United States, such as the HRC—it also fails to see the ways in which homophobia and transphobia are structured. Indeed, this pedagogical approach
continues a narrative that sexism and homophobia are individualized problems rather than systemic ones and, especially, not state-orchestrated ones (Stout 2014, 51).

We, thus, see the emergence of not just a tolerance discourse but one of diversity that marginally allows gay identities but relies on a strategy of “domestinormativity” that makes it clear “that turning tricks, sex for material gain, sex parties…, and other queer acts exceed the protective bounds” of diversity (Puar 2007a, 123). Indeed, at no time during the Jornada was there a mention of the public sex cultures that thrive in Havana’s potajeras [cruising locations] (see chapter 3 and 4). Furthermore, despite the growth of sex work in Havana due to mixed market reforms and the growth of tourism (see Stout 2014), the Jornada maintained a distance from the topic, only broaching it to critique the transwomen and travestis that have utilized it in order to pay for black-market surgeries rather than pursuing these operations through official channels.

The regulation of trans bodies is an important terrain in which discourses become forces on embodied subjectivity. Transsexual subjectivities are disciplined by and incorporated into the heteronormative gender dynamics that were established by the new heteropatriarchy after the Revolution. As one self-identified travesti notes, “the program forms part of a process of extreme feminization to which transsexuals are subject, culminating with genital reassignment. CENESEX offers travesti little or no opportunity for a conversation on the diverse spectrum of gender expression” (Sierra Madero 2014). The policy of free gender-reassignment surgery for trans people and travestis in Cuba is therefore also marked with an important ambivalence. While it has created a space for Cubans that identify as trans (almost exclusively transwomen) to get access to both hormones and operations, it has also been a space where the state has been able to normalize queer bodies. In this way, these policies seek to invalidate alternative modes of
embodiment while they are simultaneously productive of the types of sexualized bodies that can be brought into the folds of the sexual citizen. However, to further nuance this, the rejection of queer bodies that are between normalized categories, that of hombre o mujer [man or woman], are also encroaching into the national imagination. Thus, for example, during the Jornada, one art show portrayed a series of photographs of nude trans women that had not undergone bottom surgery. This small moment points out the presence of competing discourses and embodiments and perhaps demonstrates the emergence of new spaces for sexual citizenship opening up.

**Multicultural Modernity and a Homonationalist Cuba**

Diversity discourses do not only operate internally on the island rather they also flow transnationally. Diversity and multiculturalism (especially in regards to sexuality politics) has become a marker of modernity internationally. As McGee and Kampwirth point out in their study of Mexico and Nicaragua, “in the wake of the United Nations Women’s Decade (1975-85), a key indicator of modernity was the extent to which a state’s policies incorporated gender issues… [and how] in the early twenty-first century, a new indicator of modernity is the extent to which a state incorporates its LGBT sector” (McGee and Kampwirth 2015, 55–56). Furthermore, as Puar points out in *Terrorist Assemblages* multiculturalism becomes parallel to biopolitical projects that have normalized homosexuality into ideas of the nation (Puar 2007, 22). In this way, “the nation-state maintains its homophobic… stances while capitalizing on its untarnished image of inclusion, diversity, and tolerance” (Puar 2007, 26). It is about slow, pragmatic changes which, as we saw in the last section, have also been linked to pedagogical discourses encouraging the slow rectification of gender and sexuality based discrimination, rather than radical coalition based resistance.

Diversity discourses have provided Cuba with legitimacy, not only through normalization internally, but by appealing to this international norm of modernity. Thus, diversity and tolerance
aimed “to achieve a national stage of controlled and controllable diversity” that could be utilized (Sierra Madero 2014). With this international context in mind, the Jornada contra la homofobia y la transfobia can be considered as partially “oriented toward an outside audience in which the Otherness of participants… serves a utilitarian end, that of restoring the hegemony of a well-intended and ‘good’ revolution whose exceptionality is as unquestionable as its evolution” (Sierra Madero 2014).

This narrative of evolution is an important element to this discursive turn. Indeed, one of the reasons that the discourse of a “new sexual revolution” of diversity is so important for Cuba is because of its history of human rights abuses, most specifically with the UMAP camps. During the Jornada in 2016, the history of UMAP camps was completely absent. During Mariela’s closing comments at the academic conference, her only reference to the past was to point out the evolution of the communist party, stating:

No queremos que se agote en estas secciones el debate. El dialogo se mantendrá a lo largo de todo el ano como parte de la campaña educativa y comunicacional permanente que desarrolla el CENESEX con la participación de las instituciones del estado, de la sociedad civil y el apoyo político del Partido Comunista de Cuba que en estos momentos, en estos temas si está a la vanguardia, en otros momentos no lo fue.

[In these sections, we do not want to exhaust this debate. The dialogue will be maintained throughout the year as part of a permanent education and communication campaign developed by CENESEX with the participation of state institutions, civil society and the support of the Communist party of Cuba, which in these moments, in these themes, is in the vanguard, if at other moments it was not.]

Here we see not only the appeal to pedagogy but also the construction of the Communist Party as having evolved from its past of human rights abuses to being now in the vanguard. Thus, with the single brush of diversity, CENESEX is able to both appeal to international mandates for modernity and perform an erasure of the UMAP-era past. In fact, CENESEX seems invested in maintaining a silence in regards to UMAP—despite agreeing to oversee an investigation into UMAP camps, four years later CENESEX has yet to produce anything and “has gone as far as to say
that talking about what happened would be a healthy exercise for the nation; however, asking for forgiveness… would be an act of great hypocrisy” (Sierra Madero 2014).

This section aimed to demonstrate the ways in which CENESEX operates as an arbiter of intelligible discourse in regards to sexuality and gender, even while that position is constantly being challenged by other imaginings and affective belongings. Ultimately, building on discourses of pedagogy and health CENESEX has developed a narrative of tolerance that attempts to coopt and normalized queer bodies into the state’s ideal sexual citizen while simultaneously appealing to international standards of modernity. Despite being based on a narrative of evolution; this discourse actively erases historical efforts that used a strict gender binary as a disciplinary force.

**Conclusion**

Belonging to the nation, to cubanidad, is an affective flow between the body and the body politic. I suggested that discourses surrounding sexuality, gender, and nationhood could be explored as multiplicities and assemblages. That is, rather than looking at various discourses as discrete vectors that can be disassembled from one another I consider them as a multiplicity. An assemblage of discourses and ideologies, which conflict and work in concert in a multitude of ways, becomes affixed onto bodies and embodied politics. Throughout this chapter, I have offered both a historical overview of the investment in a heteropatriarchal system through ideologies such as the New Man after the Revolution and I have attempted to provide a nuanced sketch of contemporary sexual politics of Cuba.

Through the historical analysis of this chapter, I also demonstrated the ways in which gender was deployed as a productive force, one that was used to encourage the body politic at large and the individual body to produce for the nation. Furthermore, this section demonstrated
that many of the discourses that still circulate in the contemporary political context have basis in the era of UMAP camps and Che’s New Man.

By exploring Mariela Castro Espín and CENESEX, I developed an analysis that furthered the biopolitical lens and considered the notion of homonationalism. This section demonstrated the ways in which CENESEX and Mariela have pursued at times a pragmatic and pedagogical approach to sexual politics while firmly operating in the realm of public health. I proposed that discourses within Cuba and those that operate transnationally are simultaneously oppositional and complicit with each other. Thus, they both seek to regulate the queer body within the nation and appeal to international norms of multicultural modernity. Furthermore, these discourses around gender and sexuality becomes assembled to affectivities, intensities linking bodies, spaces and ideologies.

Whose Mariconería?

In Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s article “Mariconerías de estado: Mariela Castro, los homosexuales, y la política cubana,” she points to the shift in policies that have been highlighted in this paper. She suggests that the state is undertaking a certain “transformismo” to its body politic in much the same way as the transition made possible by the state for the transsexual body (Negrón-Muntaner 2008, 164). The new tolerance of homonationalism and the multiculturalism of the nation, she continues, serves as “una estrategia para darle una nueva cara al cuerpo político nacional” [a strategy to give a new face to the national body politic] (Negrón-Muntaner 2008, 164).

Furthermore, as the title of the article implies there has been a precarious linkage between the body politic and the queer body, a sexual citizenship. She uses the term mariconerías in the paper to suggest not only this corporeal connection between the state and individual body, but to also suggest the uncertainty about Mariela, nuestra reina de Cuba, and her role in the future of
Cuba. Defining mariconería she states, “de una u otra forma, habría que tener en cuenta que en el Caribe una mariconería es tanto una característica propia de los homosexuales como una necedad que fastidia, o un gesto inesperado que desequilibra” [one way or another, we have to keep in mind that in the Caribbean, a “mariconería” can refer to a presumed characteristic of homosexuals, just as it can mean some bothersome nonsense or an unexpected gesture that throws one off balance] (Negrón-Muntaner 2008, 179). Which, she suggests, will Mariela be?

There is, however, more than one gesture that threatens to throw everything off balance. This chapter has shown that despite a deeply rooted heteropatriarchal system, one that was entrenched throughout the early years of the Revolution, and despite the nation’s recent attempt so encapsulate alternative desires and embodiments into a normalized sexual citizen, there remains small gaps, spaces open for imagining, and bodies that refuse the logics of heteronormativity and homonationalism. The following chapters explore the ways in which these bodies risk to gesture through these cracks, generating affective spaces, bodies of desire, movements toward belonging, and hopes and dreams for something more.

Notes

1 Prior to Candis Cayne’s appearance on television, she performed as a drag queen in New York. Muñoz describes her drag as “relatively ‘real,’ [and as] rat[ing] high on the glamour meter” (Muñoz 1999, 100).

2 While it could be argued that this chapter reproduces this violent relationship by reproducing Candis’s words—an argument I am deeply sympathetic to—however my goal in this chapter is to explore the historical and political contexts in which Cuban LGBTI militantes [activists] are working within, later chapters privilege the voices of living, breathing, and fucking bodies that generate the sexual and public alternative worlds of Havana’s ambiente [scene].

3 See, for example, Berg and Ramos-Zayas (2015)

4 Future research should be done that further outlines the genealogy of sexuality in the Cuban context in relation to race and racialization.

5 Sedgwick (2003) calls for scholars to move beyond a paranoid hermeneutics that has become more repetitious than truly critical and toward a hermeneutics of the reparative. Sedgwick suggests that strong (generalizable) theories of the social might not be as useful in this moment as what she calls weak theory; ”what we can best learn from such practices [reparative reading/weak theory] are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (2003, 150–51).
This analysis is also informed by Sierra Madero’s work in *Del otro lado del espejo* (2006).
CHAPTER 3
AFFECTIVE CARTOGRAPHIES:
BELONGING IN SPACE, UTOpic LONGINGS, AND URBAN CONTACT

A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth glancing at.
—Oscar Wilde
The Soul of Man under Socialism

Introduction

At the heart of this thesis, I am interested in the political world making practices of my friends and participants in Havana. The worldings that I explore rewrite temporality, are produced through sociality, and are inherently spatial. This chapter attempts to contribute to the body of literature on sexuality in Cuba by pausing to explore this spatiality. This is a particularly urban project and, thus, I feel compelled to repeat the phrase, one that I heard repeatedly throughout my time in Havana, La Habana no es Cuba y Cuba no es la Habana [Havana is not Cuba and Cuba is not Havana]. As such, I withhold making generalizing claims about all Cubans or even all Habaneros [people that are from Havana]. Rather, this chapter searches out a different type of generality which, in the words of Roland Barthes “neither reduces nor crushes” (1981, 18). This chapter is, therefore, about delving into the particular and exploring the nuance and lived experiences of the urban spaces that serve as zones of contact, landscapes of circulating bodies and public feelings, and spatial anchors to alternative worlds.

This chapter has two beginnings. The first marks my experience in 2012 as a queer undergraduate student studying abroad in Havana and trying to find these spaces for the first time. The second is an enlightening conversation with my friend Odalys in 2016 during a nighttime stroll through the streets of Havana. Each story explores the interwoven spatialities of the urban world making projects of Cubans as they generate belonging and intimacy that challenge heteronormative logics. The first is an experience that presages my interest and research into these spaces and the second a direct culmination of it.
Indeed, in preparation for my fieldwork in the summer of 2016 as I scoured the various works on sexuality in Cuba and frantically searched for a “problem” that I could address, the issue of these spaces became immediately apparent. Initially, the literature presented to me what I understood to be a conceptual gap around space. I discovered a plethora of terminology that had been deployed to describe this collection of spaces in Havana and it seemed to me to demonstrate the need for more clear theorization around space and place-making.

To provide just a few examples: Lonely Planet’s guide book has a textbox titled “Gay Havana” which states that “the focus of gay life is on the cusp of Centro Havana and Vedado in the ‘triangle’ that stretches between Calzada de la Infanta, Calle L, y Calle 23 (La Rampa)” (Sainsbury and Waterson 2015, 114, emphasis mine). Wanderlust magazine, a UK-based travel magazine published a “quick guide to gay Havana” online which termed these spaces Havana’s gay district (Haynes 2012). Ian Lumsden’s Machos, Maricones, y Gays (1996) has a chapter called, “Gay Life in Havana Today” where he considers gay life to be a “street scene in Old Havana and Vedado” (130). The groundbreaking work, Del otro lado del espejo (2006), by Abel Sierra Madero theorizes these spaces as a “ambiente homoerotico” [homoerotic scene or environment]. The ethnography After Love (2014) by Noelle Stout refers to these spaces as “Havana’s queer enclaves” (30). Aisha Beliso-De Jesús’s book Electric Santería (2015) considers “queer Havana” to be comprised of “underground but nevertheless public sites” (166, 164). Jafari Allen’s ¿Venceremos? (2011) looks to “the sweeping panoramas of time and place [that] are often collapsed into snapshots or single moments. As such, [he] attempt[s] to historicize and theorize the constitution—racialization, gendering, and sexualizing—of space in Cuba” (15, emphasis mine).
What on initial reading seemed to be a lack of clear conceptualization, on further consideration appears to be an abundance of discourse around the importance of space and place-making within the sexual subcultures in Cuba. Still, while many scholars and other observers have noted the importance of space, few have explored the quotidian practices that construct it. Rather than suggest a definitive typology of these spaces—a project that is both beyond the scope of this chapter and antithetical to its purpose—I explore the vital corporeal experiences of urban living and belonging within and among these spaces and the political projects of co-producing place. Indeed, perhaps the multiplicity of discourses around space and place point to a complexity of the lived surfaces of difference among these spaces and the experiences of people within them.

**Beginning One: From Mi Cayito to Bim Bom**

We were those foreigners that arrive in Cuba during the winter months and, despite the incredulity of our Cuban hosts, want to go to the beach. My first time in Cuba was in 2012 as an undergraduate doing a study abroad at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) [University of the Arts] along with a group of 13 other students from Lewis & Clark College. When we arrived in January we all wanted to go to the beach as soon as we could. Rain delayed us for the first few weeks but by late January the majority of us found our way to Las Playas del Este, the beaches just to the east of Havana. We took an old 1950s van. We sat in the back where the original seats had been replaced by two long wooden benches that stretched from the front seats to the back on either side of the vehicle. Our chofer (driver), took us to the popular Santa María beach just shy of an hour drive from la Habana Vieja.

After we had found a place to stretch out our towels and enjoy the turquoise water and fine white sand, I decided to walk up the shoreline a bit to check out our new “local” beach. For the most part it was sparsely populated, however, the day had turned out nicer than expected and
some Cubans had also found their way to the beach. After a 15 or 20 min walk east along the beach, feeling the warm sand move under my feet, I saw a larger group of people assembled ahead. At first I thought nothing of it, however, as I started getting closer to the cluster of people relaxing under umbrellas and on white plastic lounge chairs (*camas*), I began to notice that there was something different about this group of people. For one, almost all the people that were there were men and almost all of them were wearing their tightest and most revealing swimsuits. Then as I walked along the water, I noticed that many were sitting particularly close together and even a few were making out. I had stumbled upon my first queer space in Havana, a beach which I would later learn was called Mi Cayito.

I sat down in the sand with my feet sitting just close enough to the sea so that the cool salt water would reach them at the peak of the tide. I was soon joined by two very attractive young mulato men. Looking back, it seems clear to me that these two were Pingueros (male sex workers) that were marking me as a possible patron but at the time I was simply interested in knowing more about the beach and learning about where else I could find a place of belonging in Cuba. After stumbling through a conversation (my Spanish wasn’t very good at the time and both spoke with a strong guajiro accent), I explained to them that I had to return to my friends or they would begin to worry about me. They suggested that we meet up later that evening at a place in Vedado. They explained where to go: “Just walk down calle 23 until you are almost at the Malecón.” That night I made my way for the first time to Bim Bom.

**Beginning Two: A Nocturnal Stroll Through the Tropical City**

“The trans in Cuba son los más marginados” [Trans People in Cuba are the most Marginalized] Odalys told me as we walked on Calle Línea which makes its way through the El Vedado neighborhood at a diagonal, splitting with Calle 9 at Calle D and making its way through the neighborhood to end at the Malecón. To the west of La Habana Vieja, Vedado is a
neighborhood of streets laid out in a perfectly symmetrical grid-like pattern with Parisian-style boulevards (particularly the Avenida de los Presidentes and Avenida Paseo) that run in a northwest to southeast direction in order to channel the ocean breezes through the neighborhood—elevating the smell of urban living and the heat of island life.

The streets are named in an orderly fashion: streets that run parallel to the aforementioned boulevards are named with letters on one side of Paseo and with even numbers on the other, the perpendicular streets with odd numbers.

Vedado stands as a testament to a change in urban planning that took place during the Republic years of Cuba. As Marial Iglesias Utset describes it, “El Vedado, a residential zone founded in the latter years of the nineteenth century that had tripled in size by 1903” was “the model par excellence of urban chic… the grounds surrounding El Vedado’s new houses were laid out symmetrically; with neat flowerbeds and well-trimmed grass. They bore witness to a change in the organization of space, according to which ‘order’ and ‘rationality’ became the primary virtues” (2011, 22). Vedado is a material manifestation of the discourses of scientific positivism that swept Cuba in the late 1800s which proscribed to a utopic vision of modernity that sought order, rationality, and social hygiene. This utopia was also built on scientific racism and heteronormativity. The ordered streets bring to mind the quasi-scientific classifications that works like Benjamín de Céspedes’ 1888 work *La prostitución en la Ciudad de La Habana* tried to create in order to naturalize the division of gender roles (Bejel 2001, 30–31).

Odalys and I had met up that evening to attend a play at a small theater on Calle 11 between D and E. It had been a while since I had seen Odalys and he explained that he had been in the hospital with dengue fever for the last few days. After the play we decided to walk to the Malecón and Odalys suggested that we could make our way to Bim Bom. Bim Bom takes its
name from the brand of chocolate truffle, Bom Bom, that in the 1950s became a common term used to describe someone that was sexually attractive.\textsuperscript{1} It seemed fitting then that the street corner that, despite being renamed, was called Bim Bom would be such a popular scene.

It was the first cloudy day that I had experienced that summer in Havana and the clouds had not dissipated that evening, instead they trapped in the humidity as the sun set. I was grateful for the light tropical breeze channeled by the large avenues into the neighborhood as we walked but couldn’t help but think about the social hygiene campaigns that had classified the homosexual, racialized, and effeminate body as counter to the “modern” project of El Vedado.

El Vedado is no longer the uniformly manicured project that I imagine it must have been before. The various embassies, government offices, and recently renovated \textit{casas particulares} (houses for rent to tourists) give one a hint of what it must have been like before the Revolution. However, El Vedado, like Cuba in general, is not lost to time.

We walked down Calle Línea under the sporadic illumination of street lights. Then we turned up the Malecón toward Bim Bom:

Bueno los lugares que yo más paso tiempo son los centros nocturnos del Vedado como es esa zona la Rampa [calle 23], después de [Calle] O hacia abajo. Esa esquina famosa que tiene La Habana que es Bim Bom, Las Vegas que esta todo los lugares que frecuento. Están en el mismo círculo. Están en la misma área, que es esa zona, ese “esquinazo” que hay de 23 e Infanta que hace como una cuchilla, hasta la zona de Malecón donde siempre me siento por costumbre, es ahí.

[Well, the places that I spend most of my time are the nighttime centers of Vedado such as the zone of La Rampa (Calle 23) from (Calle) O down (to the Malecón). This famous corner that Havana has which is Bim Bom and Las Vegas has all of the places that I go to. They are in the same circle. They are in the same area. This zone, this grandiose street corner that is the corner of (Calle) 23 and Infanta that forms a knife shaped space pointed toward the zone of the Malecón, where I always, by custom, sit. (The ambiente) is here.]

As we made our way along the Malecón toward the \textit{esquina famosa} of Bim Bom, I told Odalys about a rather difficult experience I had had earlier that day. I had walked to a large tourist market that had been built on the port-side of Old Havana. It was a converted dock and
the cavernous space was now teaming with Cubanos *resolviendo* by selling their artwork or souvenirs.

After having walked through the majority of the art stands which encircled the smaller souvenir ones, I braved my way through the middle. I walked through paying attention to the items offered but careful to avoid the attention of those that were selling. Almost all the items were the same few things offered over and over again in the shops that cater to tourists: statues of the erotized black Cuban body, sets of dominos, leather bags, pictures of the Old Havana “Bodeguita” sign, and a Che Guevara hat. All generally sold by someone playing the clave rhythm with the two wooden sticks (often engraved with the Cuban flag or the like) that make up the foundational instrument of Cuban music.

As I walked up the main aisle of artisanal goods, a man yelled something at me from in front of his stand. Since it was hardly the first time that someone had yelled out to me (as a pretty obvious yuma, this would happen with some frequency) I just ignored him and kept walking.

However, soon after the man ran past me and I saw him waiting for me ahead, now standing with a group of other men. As I approached him, he began repeating “*similar, similar*” and pointing between me and his friend. I really didn’t see any resemblance and I didn’t want to engage with them so I offered (mostly just to show that I did, in fact, speak Spanish): “¿piensas que sí?” [you think so?]. As I turned away, ready to remove myself from the situation, the man reached out and put his hand in front of me and said again, “*ustedes se parecen*” [you both look alike]. Then his friend responded, clearly frustrated and unhappy by the comparison, “¡pero él es un pájaro!” [but he is a faggot (pájaro literally meaning bird, has a second meaning: a derogatory term for overtly effeminate men and, therefore, men that are presumed to be gay)]. The fact that I don’t identify as gay or male and yet feel some affinity to terms like faggot in English or *maricon*
and pájaro in Spanish point to the complexities that animate much of this thesis and this exchange illuminated the positionality of bodies in space. My own tall, skinny, and pasty white body was read as occupying a specific position that had little to do with my own identification. I was just another Yuma pájaro there to buy a piece of commercialized Cuba to take with me when my vacation was over. The history of state sanctioned homophobia (as described in Chapter 2) became a place from which the man could draw his critique of my presence.

I attempted to walk away growing more flustered but was again stopped by the man who had initially yelled at me: “no tú eres el hombre y él es el pájaro” (no you are the man and he is the faggot). He then completed the sentence with the flapping of his hands in a gesture that referenced both the flapping of the wings of a bird and the mariconería of a hand held limp.

The only answer I could think of was: “¿piensas que yo soy el hombre?” [You think that I am the man?]. I mocked an incredulous laugh and forced my way past and walked away from the encounter.

Odalys laughed at this answer when I recounted the story to him later that night. “¿Pero porque no me invitas a la feria contigo?” [But why didn’t you invite me to the fair/market with you?], Odalys asked me, “I would have gone off on them!” We then spent the rest of the walk to Bim Bom elaborating on all the things I should have said or what Odalys would have said to them had he been there.

Once at the esquinazo Bim Bom, Odalys and I stood talking on the street corner while leaning up against the fence of the cafetería. We were promptly approached by a fair-skinned woman wearing a short dress that sparkled in the light from the street lamps. It was cut in a deep V to show off her cleavage. She briefly said hello to me before Odalys and her shared a kiss and a few sweet words before she moved on. “Ella está trabajando” [she is working], then seeing my
blank look, “ella es una mujer trans” [she is a trans woman], “she is looking for sex work” he continued.

K: Is she part of trans Cuba? (the network of trans women associated with the Centro nacional de educación sexual or CENESEX)

O: [laughing] Of course not! She isn’t the type to be part of CENESEX. That’s a problem with CENESEX and with the jornada, it’s still so against sex work.

K: But then how did she get top surgery if she isn’t part of CENESEX?

O: [Again laughing at my naiveté] She paid for it on the black market of course. It is very hard to get the silicone implants here in Cuba. They cost a lot of money and the surgeries are not done in the hospitals but that’s how most people do it still. They have to buy silicon that is smuggled into the country. They do it for breast and ass implants. CENESEX only does maybe one sex operation per year and the list is very long. You see, Cuba has great healthcare but we don’t have much plastic surgery. It is great for the necessary things, if you have a tumor from cancer it is great, but if you want a lip enlargement, [he puffed out his lips] forget about it. Same thing for trans people. CENESEX has to bring in German doctors to do the surgery, although they say that Cuban ones are learning from them now.

K: But why haven’t Cuban doctors learned how to do it yet, then CENESEX could offer more surgeries faster right?

O: Because no one cares and because there is no funding for it.

K: But what about Mariela?

O: Sure, Mariela cares. And maybe she could ask her father to sign something and boom done but we can’t force things that quickly. You see there are two faces to Cuba, one interior and one exterior. The interior face is about teaching people. It is a different sort of politics from the laws of gender identity and gay marriage that Uruguay has been so advanced on. See, everyone says that Cuba is so backwards, but it isn’t. Even though Cuba doesn’t have all of the laws there is hardly any hate crimes! There is much less discrimination here. Sure you got stopped earlier today but that’s because you are a Yuma. If I had been there they wouldn’t have said anything. And look here no one stops anyone here. You can walk freely down the street without a problem.

Affective Maps and Utopic Worlds

What was it that changed as I walked up the beach and found myself surrounded by bodies that followed new aesthetic codes and public gestures? What was the difference between my ability to walk unmarked at Bim Bom but not at the Feria? How is it that El Vedado became
a neighborhood where so many publics and queer bodies circulated? These are some of the many questions that these stories bring to light and that animate the rest of this chapter. I attempt to explore them through various ethnographic encounters and through a mapping project that I completed with friends and participants in the summer of 2016. This project generated 17 different maps of Havana many of which are reproduced here.3

This activity asked participants to draw two distinct maps at the end of interviews. The first, was a map that explored their affective experience of space. On blank pieces of paper, my friends drew maps of the various spaces in which they felt were important to them. They then added various feelings—desire, intimacy, danger, belonging, etc.—onto the maps using different colors. The instructions were as follows:

1. Can you please mark with a blue pencil the boundaries of the spaces that we have talked about?
2. On that map, would you circle in red the spaces that you feel the most desire in?
3. On that map, would you place a yellow star in spaces that you feel intimacy in?
4. On the map would you shade in green spaces where you feel a sense of belonging in?
5. On the map, would you circle in pink where you feel the most satisfied?
6. On the map, would you outline in black the spaces where you feel the most danger in?
7. On the map, would you outline in orange the spaces where you feel the most independent/liberated in?

The second map, what I have termed a utopic map, asked participants to focus on one space and draw what it would ideally look like. This activity was adapted from one described by Christina Hanhardt in her book Safe Spaces (2013) that took place in New York City. Organized by an activist group called FIERCE, the activity was used as a form of resistance to the transformation project of the piers in Greenwich Village, which were being developed in ways
that not only excluded the queer and trans youth (many, of color) that frequented this space from the planning, but also, were being developed to push the youth out of the space. FIERCE asked the young trans and queer individuals that had previously enjoyed these spaces to envision their ideal future for the piers (Hanhardt 2013, 214). By asking my friends and participants in Havana to act as urban planners, I hoped to capture a critical utopianism, one that both shows the dreams and desires of a group and suggests a critique of the not-yet-here.\(^4\)

Maps are inherently political artifacts. They are used as a form of state authority evidencing infrastructure, naming places, and authorizing a specific epistemology of space. Elizabeth Woods’ *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (2003) demonstrates this important aspect of mapping. She points out in relation to the mapping project that she describes where *campesinos* from the Usultán region of El Salvador drew collective maps of properties before and after the civil war:

> These maps are therefore quite different in origin and purpose from most maps, which are usually the product of efforts on the part of expanding empires or consolidating states to centralize power, define frontiers, and regulate property rights…. The development of modern cartography contributed to the concept of the modern state as a *territory* over which the state held a monopoly of violence: the development of maps reshaped state lands into territory, a homogenous and uniform space with boundaries…. In short, maps are not just strategic but also cultural constructions. Maps not only reflect cultural practices of their producers, revealed by analyzing what is included and excluded (for example, whether or not places important to subordinate but no dominant social groups are named, how images are presented in relation to one another, and so forth); they may also have enduring cultural consequences. [However,] maps are not always produced in the service of the powerful (Wood 2003, 46).

The maps of this chapter similarly evidence a particular relationship with space and evidence lives that have not always been afforded the power of the state or of other cartographers. Furthermore, maps in Cuba hold a particular political resonance. They are often treasured items. It has not historically been easy for Cubans to find current maps of Cuba and drawing maps as means of giving directions is, therefore, quite common. Indeed, even tourist maps are
often hard to come by and those that do circulate actively write out sections of the city that the tourism officials don’t want foreigners going to. In fact while doing research for this chapter, I found that while the Cuba’s travel website had maps of several smaller cities, such as Las Tunas, it did not have any maps of Havana.

When I asked my friends and participants to draw maps for me I only provided to them blank pieces of paper so as not to sway them in any way to a hegemonic notion of what a map is and what a map shows. Perhaps because of this, the maps that form the archive all take a different approach. Some are aligned around the distinctive coast of Havana (usually starting with Havana’s bay), others along the streets and avenues. Still others are more abstract. These maps evidence a spatial way that queer lives are lived in contemporary Havana. Furthermore, through the process of mapping various affectiveregistrars onto space, they become an implicit political project that marks public feelings as relevant factors in cartography. The maps employ their own naming practices, systems of orientation, and temporal legacies. All of which are political and suggest a mode of belonging within space that gesture in excess.

In the rest of this chapter, I attempt to put the theorization of space that is immanently present in these maps in dialogue with scholars that have theorized about world making, placemaking, and spatiality. In each section, I take a map as a point of departure. I start this chapter where this project began, the first map that was drawn by Odalys. Building on the affective maps in the section, I theorize about space and belonging in Havana’s ambiente. I examine the affects shown in the maps as social phenomena and explore the racial and gendered worlds they evidence. I, then, explore the utopic visions than animate these world making projects in Havana. This second section takes as its inspiration Mi Cayito Beach and expands the spatial belongings of the first section by exploring hope and longing in a precarious Cuba. The third section tells the
story of the Instituto Superior de Arte. In this section, I explore the racialized, gendered, and sexualized dynamics that infuse space and infrastructure while also expanding notions of what constitutes “queer space.” Finally, I conclude with a consideration of the corporeal experience of urban space. This section examines sex and other corporeal contact in the Potajera and beyond.

**Bim Bom, El Ambiente, and Other Belongings in Space**

![Figure 3-1. Odalys’s Affective Map of Havana.](http://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00009256/00001)

Color Key: Blue-boundaries of spaces discussed in interview, Red-spaces of desire, Yellow-spaces of intimacy, Green-spaces of belonging, Pink-spaces where one feels satisfied, Black-spaces where one feels danger, Orange-spaces where one feels liberated or free. Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00009256/00001
Theorizing World Making through Bim Bom

By the time that I interviewed Odalys, he had become one of my closest friends in Havana and when I asked him if he would mind sitting down with me for a formal interview during the last week or so that I was in Cuba he agreed without much hesitation. I invited him over to my place and we sat in my living room and drank cafecitos that Norma had offered us. Over the smell of rich coffee and with the sounds of the nearby high school ending for the day drifting in through the double doors that opened onto the balcony and that stood ajar, we discussed the many places that Odalys had taken me to over the last couple months.

When I arrived to do fieldwork, I had initially been fascinated about thinking of gesture as a type of code of entry into these spaces. I had been thinking back to my own discovery of Mi Cayito and the queer public gestures that had made me aware of the worlding that I had inadvertently walked into. Odalys laughed at the proposition when I discussed it with him and my consideration of public gestures (as explored in the following chapter) became altogether more nuanced. Odalys instead told me about how he first found Bim Bom:

Bueno, eso lugar [Bim Bom] está allí, frecuentado por las personas gay, lesbiana, bisexual, LGBT, desde yo creo que antes del triunfo de la Revolución, desde el tiempo de capitalismo. Y entonces, los niños, como Cuba es tan conservadora, siempre a los niños o las niñas les dicen, “oye, no pasas por el Bim Bom” siempre. Ahora yo no le dicen, pero antes le decían “no pasas por el Bim Bom,” "no pasa por la Cascada de Malecón," "no pasas por Malecón y Infanta," "no pasas por Malecón y 23." Siempre a los niños se lo dicen. Y entonces, ya unos crean un hábito, y hábito, y hábito, cuando no se descubre y sabe lo que está allí. Al primer lugar que quiere ir es adonde? El capital gay, el núcleo gay de la Habana, el Bim Bom, que es la cascada de Malecón, que es el Malecón y la esquina con 23 y el Malecón. Todo el mundo va allí y un día me levanté y me pensé que yo tengo que saber que lo que es, ¡yo tengo que saber! Y arranqué viendo con dos amigos míos, que tampoco han ido…. Y entonces, ya a un día fui y después de esa día no he dejado de ir más nunca.

[Well, that place (Bim Bom) has been frequented by gay people, lesbians, bisexuals, (and) LGBT people since, I believe, the triumph of the Revolution, since the time of capitalism. And well, children, since Cuba is so conservative, children are always told, “listen, don’t walk by Bim Bom.” Now they don’t say this but before they would say “don’t walk by Bim Bom,” “don’t walk by the Waterfall of]
the Malecón,” “don’t walk by the [the corner of] Malecón and Infanta,” “don’t walk by Malecón and 23rd Street.” They would always say this to children. And then, one creates a habit where one does not discover and know what is there. Of course the first place that one wants to go is where? The gay capital, the gay nucleus of Havana, Bim Bom, which is the Waterfall of the Malecón, which is the Malecón and the corner of the Malecón with 23rd. The whole world goes here and one day I got up and thought thought to myself that I have to know what it is; I have to know! And so, I started meeting up with two good friends that also had not gone…. And well, one day I went and after that day I never stopped going.]

As suggested by Odalys, Bim Bom was far less a clandestine space than I had initially perceived it. It seems as though the “ambiente” was more of an open secret than an actual one and, indeed, this was further brought to light when another friend of mine, Esteban, told me at a party that the Ministerio de salud (Health Department) had a comprehensive map of all of the potajeras (cruising locations) in the city. These were spaces that above-all-else I had assumed would be kept secret—what I found was that, perhaps, they were less of a secret and rather made invisible.

Bim Bom, an assemblage of sidewalks, cafeterías, avenidas, half-walls that people lean up against, the exterior of the former G2 building which provides shelter from rain, the illuminating street lights, and, most importantly, people that frequent the space is, as Odalys tells us, a nucleolus of the ambiente of Havana. In Sierra Madero’s Del otro lado del espejo, he describes what he terms the “ambiente homoerótico” [homoerotic scene] as a spatiotemporal dimension where individuals get together and socialize (Sierra Madero 2006, 225). He states that they are spaces of cultural diversity,

no excluyentes por razones de orientaciones o identidades sexuales — aunque esas exclusiones también existen—, donde tienen lugar procesos culturales y se comparten códigos lingüísticos, estéticos y se establecen redes de amigos. (Sierra Madero 2006, 225)

[where people are not excluded on account of their sexual orientation or identity—although these exclusions also exist—, where certain cultural processes play out, and where people share linguistic and aesthetic codes and develop networks of friends.]
The homoerotic ambiente, furthermore, is “un ambiente sobre todo nocturno, informal, inestable, itinerante, que se reconfigura y se desplaza constantemente por el mapa de la ciudad, debido a las redadas policiales” [a nighttime, informal, unstable and changeable setting that is constantly shifting sites throughout the city mostly due to police raids] (Sierra Madero 2006, 227).

Odalys offers a complementary and, yet, distinct consideration of these spaces. Indeed, in his approximation, Bim Bom seems to be far more stable than Sierra Madero’s definition would suggest. While there is historiographical evidence that at certain times the ambiente was forced to move locations or periodically stop meeting at this corner, it also seems clear that that “knife” shaped wedge of Bim Bom, whose point sits at the Malecón, is also a queer blade that has engraved itself upon the urban landscape. I was once told that most people used to meet at the Cascada de Malecón rather than in front of the Cafeteria Infanta but that years ago people had moved across the street, yet in Odalys’s words we can see that the whole area remains stained with mariconería [a queer sociality].

As the first beginning to this chapter made clear, the various spaces of the ambiente are also networked together such that each lead into an other. Bodies move among connected worldings. Public feelings generate and flow. Gills Deleuze and Felix Guattari state in A Thousand Plateaus that an assemblage is a kind of multiplicity, one that cannot be disassembled, “a multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 8). Similarly, the ambiente exists as a multiplicity of spaces and the bodies that flow among them; movements of intensity that pick up meanings that are never separate from space. This is not to say that there is not some form of constant change or fluidity within these worlds, but rather to suggest the “rhizomatic” connections between these spaces.
In Figure 3-1, Odalys’s Affective Map of Havana, he provided without any prompting an initial typology of different spaces. This is clearly not meant to be exhaustive since not all of the spaces he provided are labeled with one of these names, yet it suggests that the ambiente constituted by a multitude of settings. Odalys points us to “parques de encuentro o lugares de encuentro” [parks of encounter or places of encounter] (like Bim Bom and Parque de Fraternidad), “Potajeras” [cruising locations] and “Discotecas y Bares” [Clubs and Bars].

It is important to return to and complicate Sierra Madero’s reference to aesthetic and linguistic codes in the ambiente. I had been especially interested in finding specific gestural codes that provided access to these spaces, however, what I found was that they were far less discriminating. The ambiente instead works in a similar way to Michael Warner’s conceptualization of a counterpublic (although more spatially grounded than Warner perhaps intended). For Warner, a public—or counterpublic—is a self-organized relation among strangers, a social space that is created by the circulation of discourse and constituted by those attentive to it (2002, 65–124). Certainly, aesthetics, slang, and particular gestures circulate within the spatiotemporal worlds of the ambiente, however, they act less as codes or barriers of entry and more as affective markers. Furthermore, a counterpublic differs from a public in that they are “publics [that] are defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general” (Warner 2002, 56). In this case, the counterpublic of the ambiente stands in tension with the heteronormative and domestinormative logics that define citizenship (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Another important dimensions of Warner’s conceptualization of publics is what he calls “poetic world making” (2002, 114). For Warner, it is not merely the content of a discourse that builds worlds but also the “pragmatics of its speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers, address,
temporality, mise-en-scène, citational field, interlocutory protocols, lexicon, and so on” (2002, 114). Reading diffractively among Sierra Madro’s linguistic codes and aesthetics, Warner’s poesis, and the maps and experiences of Cubans that produce these spaces, I argue that these social worlds cannot simply be understood as the circulation of various codes and aesthetics of entry (and exclusion) but rather that various aesthetics and (importantly) corporeal gestures are performative of worlds of belonging. This poetic function is often looked over in studies that privilege the content of discourse rather than its form and, due to this, “the poetic or textual qualities… are disregarded in favor of sense…. Other aspects of discourse, including affect and expressivity, are not thought to be fungible in the same way” (Warner 2002, 115). What Odalys’s map (Figure 3-1) shows us is that these spaces become shared worlds of public feelings, spaces of belonging and intimacy. Bim Bom becomes larger than just the assemblage discussed before. It becomes inseparable from the social bodies that express and make public the often conflicting feelings that bring meaning to these spaces.

**Public Feelings and Lesbian Belongings**

Returning to Odalys’s map, Bim Bom carries with it a sense of belonging, satisfaction, liberation, and desire. Other participant maps highlight similar feelings connected to space. Figure 3-2 (below), a map drawn by Fabián, a gay male mulato, shows us similar feelings attached to this space (as well as a rather phallic drawing of calle G). Fabián, like Odalys, experiences Bim Bom as a place of desire, liberation, and, importantly, belonging within Havana. Indeed, what these maps show us is that affects are not individual psychological phenomenon but rather socially circulated, generative, and co-constitutive. Feeling as though one belongs in space and time relies upon the circulation of that feeling among the bodies that assemble there, upon the active project of world making.
Furthermore, affects do not exist a priori to socialization and are, thus, just as inflected with power and oppression as any other social phenomenon. In “Racializing Affect,” Ulla Berg and Ana Ramos-Zayas compelling argue that “racialization processes have been integral to, and at times constitutive of, the very conceptions of ‘emotion,’ ‘feeling,’ or ‘sentiment’ (2015, 654). Emotions are not only racialized but also racializing. Furthermore, they are highly gendered.

Figure 3-2. Fabián’s Affective Map of Vedado.

Color Key: Blue-spaces discussed in interview, Red-spaces of desire, Yellow-spaces of intimacy, Green-spaces of belonging, Pink-spaces where one feels satisfied, Black-spaces where one feels danger, Orange-spaces where one feels liberated or free.

Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00009258/00001

Odalys, who identifies as a mulato gay male, drew a map that is referential to this specific subject position. Despite being one of the most detailed maps in the archive, Odalys only
included two streets, 23 and Paseo (two of the largest avenues in Vedado). Instead, it is generally oriented toward places and toward the coast. The inclusion of the two green circles of belonging at Bim Bom (which is largely a male dominated space) and the long lines of calle 23—again creating, perhaps subconsciously, a phallus—is a particularly gendered experience of public feelings in space.

Figure 3-3. Ada’s Affective Map of Havana.

Color Key: Blue-spaces discussed in interview, Red-spaces of desire, Yellow-spaces of intimacy, Green-spaces of belonging, Pink-spaces where one feels satisfied, Black-spaces where one feels danger, Orange-spaces where one feels liberated or free.

Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00009267/00001

In contrast to the emphasis on roads that is apparent in Fabián’s affective map or the marking of places like potajeras and Bim Bom (more commonly male-centered places), two
members of Grupo OREMI, a group of self-identified lesbian and bisexual women associated with CENESEX, drew maps that highlight very different relationships with space. Ada, a fairer-skinned mulata women in her late 20s provides us with a map (Figure 3-3) that is oriented around the distinctive coast line of Havana and has no roads. It includes various spaces throughout the city including: CENESEX; the cinema Acapulco (where OREMI’s monthly peña or get-together is held); as well as, tragically, her family house and place of work which are both marked with black (danger) in reference to her turbulent relationship with family and coworkers due to her relationship with Yamaris.

Her partner Yamaris, a dark skinned mulata women that speaks with a heavy accent, goes even further in deconstructing traditional forms of orientation in space. In her affective map (Figure 3-4, below), she has removed any system of orientation that is not her own particular experience of these spaces. Her world becomes a circle of important places in her life that she travels to and from, only blank space exists in between, suggesting the long distances that she must travel between these worlds of belonging and import.

Furthermore, both maps prominently show Yamaris’s home (in Ada’s it is labeled “casa de pasión” or house of passion) and other locations that are more commonly considered to be private. Of course the gendered distinctions between private and public spaces is well documented but it is worth noting here as well. While I explore in more depth the ideas of public and private space in regards to lesbian publics in Havana in Chapter 5, it is important to take notice here that the home of Yamaris is given particular affective resonance in both maps. It is a space of belonging, desire, intimacy. For Yamaris it is one of the only places where she feels truly liberated and, when Ada labels it the “Casa de la Pasión” she is actively creating visible queer feminine sexuality, which is otherwise erased.
Figure 3-4. Yamaris’s Affective Map of Havana.

Color Key: Blue-spaces discussed in interview, Red-spaces of desire, Yellow-spaces of intimacy, Green-spaces of belonging, Pink-spaces where one feels satisfied, Black-spaces where one feels danger, Orange-spaces where one feels liberated or free.

Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009265/00001

The Acapulco Theater also becomes an important space within both maps. This is the theater that Grupo OREMI uses for its monthly peñas (festivals). As Mariposa, another OREMI member, explained to me the peña is an active project to create non-exclusionary public space for women, particularly lesbian and bisexual women—which didn’t exist prior. While I did see groups of lesbians at Bim Bom and at Mi Cayito, these spaces are generally male-dominated public spaces. The peña in contrast is a purposeful attempt to create a place for not only Grupo OREMI but for women in general while also maintaining a non-exclusionary stance. Each month
for example, OREMI invites *transformistas* [drag queens] to perform at the event as a show of solidarity. Furthermore, as I mentioned in the introduction—and as Tanya Saunders has pointed out (2009, 182)—Grupo OREMI is a group which explicitly celebrates black lesbian sexuality. The group, therefore, provides a public space to black and mulata lesbians that encourages them to explore both their race and sexuality.

**The Politics of Belonging in Space**

I contend that world making is both an inherently political project and an active project: worlds-in-the-making. In particular, I take interest in the quotidian and ordinary gestures that build these worlds and that assemble together feelings of desire, danger, intimacy, precarity, and belonging along with the physical materiality of space. These practices are political.

Edward Soja argues in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, that while “space in itself may be a primordially given… the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translations, transformations, and experience” (1989, 80). While I contend that all world making projects are political (whether to conservative or emancipatory ends), within the historical context of Cuba, the politics of space takes on a particular resonance. Lillian Guerra (2012) and Michelle Chase (2015) demonstrate that, by the early 1960s, the Cuban state politicized space through discourse, re-education programs, and mass organization in order to bring private, autonomous space into the purview of the Revolution. Thus, the politicization of both private and public space in Cuba was intimately tied to the construction of the nation and the ideal citizen as discussed in Chapter 2. This confluence brings into focus different potential modes of analysis and resistance.

As J. Halberstam points out, hegemonic modes of belonging operate as “social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity” (2005, 181). Thus, to look toward alternative worlds and other forms of
belonging is to resituate and trouble the role of citizenship through these world making projects. The world making practices described here can be seen as movements toward the formation of counterpublics. That is they are formed upon a rejection of heteronormativity which is the basis of the national public of citizenship.

Esther Newton’s ground-breaking *Mother Camp* (1972)—an ethnography about female impersonators (drag queens) in Chicago and Kansas—demonstrated the importance of the spatial field in her participants’ notions of gender and sexuality. For example, in her chapter “Two Shows” Newton provides maps of the bars in which the performances are happening (1972, 59–96). Newton’s emphasis in the spatial contexts of performances, importantly, complicates her later claim that

drag questions the “naturalness” of the sex-role system *in toto*; if sex-role behavior can be achieved by the “wrong” sex it logically follows that it is in reality also achieved, not inherited, by the “right” sex. Anthropologists say that sex-role behavior is learned. The gay world, via drag, says that sex-role behavior is an appearance; it is “outside.” It can be manipulated at will (1972, 103).

In this passage, one can see the immediate influences of Newton’s work on Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) where Butler theorizes about the performativity of gender. However, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out, “when Butler draws on Newton’s work at the end of *Gender Trouble*… the ecological attention to space collapses in favor of a temporal emphasis on gender as ‘stylized repetition’ and ‘social temporality’” (2003, 9). Ethnography is, perhaps, especially suited to provide the spatial context that resists the urge to reify this simplification and to explore modes of belonging that are spatially and corporeally bound.

Furthermore, Bim Bom and the other worldings of this chapter are active projects which gesture toward the horizon of belonging. To consider them closely, to put it in the words of Kathleen Stewart, is
a sharpening of attention to the expressivity of *something coming into existence*. Here, affect is a gathering place of accumulative dispositions. What matters is not meaning gathered into codes but the gathering of experience *beyond subjectivity*, a transduction of forces, a social aesthetics attuned to the way a tendency takes on consistency, or a new regime of sensation becomes a threshold to the real. (2010, 340, emphasis mine)

These stories and maps explore the accruing of affect onto space. They evidence a *something* happening, a becoming. They indicate not only the corporeal experiences of space but the ways in which bodies long and hope for a something else in a world of insecurity and precarity.

These maps therefore form the basis of an archive of feelings that document not only the affective experiences of space within these emerging world making projects, but they also, as the next section shows, evidence the utopic longings that sustain these political practices. In José Esteban Muñoz’s theorizing of utopia as a critique of the pragmatic politics of the gay rights movement, he suggests that it is important to turn to a “no-longer-conscious… [a] temporal calculus [that] performed and utilized the past and the future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now, a notion of nothing existing outside the sphere of the current moment, a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity” (Muñoz 2009, 12).

Of course Muñoz’s critique, which is focused on the United States, should be reworked within the distinct political ecology of the Cuban Revolution. Indeed, the naturalization of the cultural logic of capitalism has a very different history in Cuba (as does heteronomativity, see Chapter 2), although perhaps some common ground can be found when considering the introduction of state endorsed capitalism, starting in 1992 and continuing today, which has produced a growth in inequality precipitated by state lay-offs, the decrease of services provided by the government (such as the food rationing system), and implementation of mixed-market reforms. Furthermore, the maps document the structures of feelings that exist in the world
making publics that exist in this moment, on the edge of a precarious Cuba. Thus, they offer the potential of being a “then and there” for future queer _militantes_ in Havana.

This is particularly relevant in the context of discourses that rely on nostalgia in either constructing Cuba as a nation frozen in time (“going to Cuba is like stepping back into the ‘50s”) or as a nation that has only changed for the worse (a willful forgetting). One particularly prescient example of the later is the Miami-based organization Coming Out Cuba (otherwise named, the National Cuban-American LGBTQ Foundation), which claims as its mission: “to reveal the gay Cuban culture pre-Revolution while building a new future for the LGBTQ and Cuban communities” (“About Coming Out Cuba” 2016). While I accept the value in projects that seek to uncover lost queer histories, the implicit politics of this organization (“To reveal the gay Cuban culture. To build a new one.”) is to discount the living, breathing, touching, and gesturing bodies that occupy space and are actively building political and alternative worlds in Cuba today (and ever since the Revolution). I surmise that this discounting of living queer bodies is perhaps due to the complex and nuanced relationship that many non-heteronormative Cubans have with the Cuban State. Instead of dealing with this complexity, it is easier to harken back to a pre-revolutionary Cuba that was dominated by an exploitative racialized hetero-patriarchal capitalism. Indeed, Coming Out Cuba’s connection to the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) is a continuation of the ways in which queer bodies have been utilized by Miami’s right-wing against the Revolution in Cuba since the days of UMAP without regard to actual queer lives or an explicitly anti-heteronormative politic.

The world making projects like Bim Bom reject the rigidity of these transnational debates and, as I explore in the next section, imagine different forms of politics and distinct modes of belonging within space. They are projects that are intimately tied to space and the circulation of
bodies. They provide a place of belonging for people to live and survive in the here and now and they look out into the horizon for something more.

**Havana’s Utopias and My Own Little Cayo**

![Figure 3-5. Odalys’s Utopic Map: Mi Cayito](http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009257/00001)

Mi Cayito sits close to Guanabacoa, just under a mile east along the coast from the most popular areas of Santa María Beach. Like the rest of the Playas del Este, Mi Cayito is a fine white sand beach that stretches out into the turquoise Caribbean water. One can walk out for a 100 feet or so and still only be waist deep in the water. Just to the east of the beach, a small river which empties into the ocean, a river that one must wade across in order to reach the busses of Guanaboco that most Cubans use to get to and from Havana.
Mi Cayito means my little cay or key in Spanish. The name is a telling marker for the way in which the beach operates within the ambiente. A beach, just like any other along the stretch of beaches near Havana, becomes a little island harboring its own little world, a world that people belong in. In Odalys’s Affective Map (Figure 3-1), Mi Cayito became marked with consecutive circles, first green (belonging), then red (desire), then pink (satisfaction), and finally with the largest circle on the map orange (liberation). Clearly Mi Cayito held a special place in the heart of Odalys and, indeed, in many of my friends’ and participants’ understandings of the ambiente. It seemed to be not only an important place for the circulation of people that were attentive to the public of the ambiente, but it was also a space that broke the rules that the rest followed. Namely, it existed in its own temporality:

K: Siempre [los lugares del ambiente] están nocturno?
[Are (the places of the ambiente) always nocturnal?]

O: De día no… no hay mucho. Siempre La Habana es después de la 8 de la noche hasta la 6 de la mañana, es la vida! [Odalys claps his hands representing the finality of this statement.] De día no es muy visible un lugar así. No hay nada abierto así en el día que tú puedas ir.
[During the day no… no there isn’t much. In Havana it is always after 8 at night until 6 in the morning. (Odalys claps his hands representing the finality of this statement.) That is the life! During the day there isn’t a place like this. Nothing is open during the day that you can go to, there is not one place.]

K: Puede ser Mi Cayito, nada más?
[Maybe Mi Cayito and nothing else?]

O: Mi Cayito, La Playa. Siempre todo el mundo del día va al playa, sobre todo los domingos es el día que va todo el mundo porque el sábado uno nunca va a la playa porque el sábado supuestamente es la superdía de la semana, el día que tú vas a salir por la noche. Entonces, casi nadie va a la playa sábado. Se sale a diferentes lugares, como Bim Bom, el Malecón, las discotecas y el domingo se va a la playa. Siempre domingo si vas a la playa va a estar repleta de gente.
[Mi Cayito, the beach. Always the whole world during the day goes to the beach. Above all, Sunday is the day that the whole world goes because Saturday one never goes to the beach, Saturday is supposedly the “superday” of the week, the day that you go out for the night. Therefore, almost no one goes to the beach on Saturday. They go out to different places like Bim Bom, the Malecón, the clubs]
and Sunday they go to the beach. Always. Sunday if you go to the beach it will be full of people.]

Just as worlds are imbued with public feelings that change one’s experience of space they are also projects with their own temporality. In the case of Mi Cayito, it is not only an experience of time within the space but a rewriting of week models. That is, one’s experience of the week becomes a political project outside of the heteronormative logics of citizenship, belonging within Mi Cayito is about belonging within a world of distinct spatiality and temporality (Halberstam 2005).

Odalys would often talk about the beach as one of his favorite places in all of Havana. I remember when I asked him to mark the spots on the map that he felt belonging in, he held the colored pencil in his hand surveying his map, his wrist bent in an unmistakable mariconería [gesture of faggotry]. He then carefully circled the two sides of Calle 23 where Bim Bom sits and then, with a smile on his face, placed a small circle around Mi Cayito. “Siempre pertenezco al Mi Cayito” [I always belong at Mi Cayito] he concluded.

Then, when we started the second mapping activity, the utopic map, and I asked Odalys to draw one specific space he immediately wrote “Mi Cayito” in the top right corner and started to work making improvements to the beach. The utopic maps suggest a potentiality that is already immanent within these social worlds. For Muñoz, utopia is about a queerness that is performative, one that “is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (2009, 1). It is both a longing and a hope for something more. Hope for Muñoz is “a critical affect and a methodology” which is a necessary critical hermeneutic (2009, 4). The utopic maps of this project align with Muñoz’s project and encourage
a critical optic at the worldings of Havana’s ambiente which stresses that they are projects always in the making.

In Odalys’s utopic map: Mi Cayito (Figure 3-5), one sees a Mi Cayito that is drastically changed from the beach that existed during the fieldwork for this thesis. Gone is the small stand that provides food and beverage and a “gran tienda de comida y bebidas” [a grand store with food and beverages] replaces it. A hotel stands next to that. I asked Odalys about these additions, wouldn’t they bring more tourists and others to the beach I suggested, he considered me for a moment before waving me off, “todo el que quiere ir puede ir y esto se hace más fácil” [everyone that wants to go should be able to go and this would make it easier]. Just beside these two large additions he then added a “centro de la diversidad” [Center of Diversity], a community center of sorts, which includes a gym, a discoteca, and taquillas [locker rooms].

The emphasis on inclusion resonated with several of the other utopic maps which depict spaces that include both LGBTI Cubans and heterosexual Cubans. These utopic ideas seem to stem from one of CENESEX’s and Mariela Castro’s main points of focus which argue for a politic that is not invested in the formation of distinct groups (that is, people are still socialist workers first and foremost) but that instead fights for the eradication of homophobia.

In one map (Figure 3-6), another participant, Esteban, drew a map of the entire island of Cuba, he claims the island for “personas aceptivas” [accepting people] and, in a move which harkened back to the troubled history of the UMAP camps, expelled all that were “toxicas y negativas” [toxic and negative] to the Isla de Juventud. This map demonstrates the complexity of the ways in which multicultural and diversity discourses were assembled to bodies and experiences of space for my friends in Cuba. The utopic map is made with a certain tongue-and-cheek but it also marks the change that Odalys mentioned when he was discussing the las dos
caras de Cuba [two faces of Cuba]. Indeed, Mariela Castro’s approach (which was discussed in the prior chapter) of pedagogy throughout the island on issues of gender and sexuality is a far cry from the “dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la revolución, nada” Cuba from the early 1960s (Castro Ruz 1961).

Figure 3-6. Esteban’s Utopic Map of Cuba.
Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009270/00001

Returning to Odalys’s Utopic Map of Mi Cayito (Figure 3-5), what struck me the most was Odalys’s emphasis on the infrastructure that moved bodies from Havana to the beach. He first drew a road that extended out to the beach and a parking lot. Then, he drew a bridge over the small river. He explained to me: “you see, there used to be a bridge to get across the river but it collapsed years ago and now we have to wade across the river in order to get to the busses in
Guanabacoa, I would put a bridge there again so that we could cross.” The ability to get to and from places in Havana, was a constant theme throughout this research and resonates with Yamaris’s affective map’s (Figure 3-4) blank spaces.⁵ Even the queer worlds of Havana’s ambiente required the roads and other infrastructure that moved bodies from space to space, and they too felt the precarity of a Cuba that was growing faster than its infrastructure was prepared to handle.

**A Queer City of the Arts: The Story of the Instituto Superior de Arte**

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Figure 3-7. Carlos’s Affective Map of the Playa Neighborhood of Havana including the ISA. Color Key: Blue-spaces discussed in interview, Red-spaces of desire, Yellow-spaces of intimacy, Green-spaces of belonging, Pink-spaces where one feels satisfied, Black-spaces where one feels danger, Orange-spaces where one feels liberated or free. Original available at: [http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009262/00001](http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009262/00001)
Domes emerge from between the trees and above the fence that surrounds the Instituto Superior de Arte, el ISA. Made from red crumbling brick, the vaulted cupulas are topped with glass pyramids that sit like erect nipples. I followed Laura Encarnita through the gates of the school and into the Facultad de artes plasticas [The Visual Arts Building].

It was the first and only time that I returned to the ISA since I had been back and returning to the school that I had attended years before while I was studying abroad in Cuba brought back many memories. However, despite the sense of familiarity that I had with the grounds (very little had changed—besides some plumbing that had been fixed that had broken the year after I was there and had flooded the field outside of the Facultad de Artes Plasticas with human waste). Regardless of the time that I had been away, I was swept up with an awe for the architecture of the school that I have felt every time that I have seen it.

The ISA’s grounds and deteriorating buildings are imbedded with the history of the Cuban Revolution. As I followed Laura Encarnita through the lawn of the ISA toward the Facultad, grounds that were originally an exclusive country club, I couldn’t help but imagine Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara playing golf here following the triumph of the Revolution and dreaming up the idea of the Ciudad de artes [City of the Arts]. They decided that day to build an art school that would serve all the students of the global south. It was itself a utopic vision of what could be achieved, caught up in the fantasy and imagination of the early days of the Revolution.

Construction started so quickly on the Ciudad de artes complex that planning, construction, and classes started simultaneously (indeed students themselves helped construct parts of the buildings). By 1961 ground had been broken but materials were in a short supply due to the U.S. embargo: Red clay brick—which could be locally made—would be the primary
building material for all of the buildings and the Catalan vault (which didn’t need concrete beams) was utilized across all of the designs (Garatti et al. 2011). A different architect planned each building. The long wave like Facultad de Musica, the dance school that looked like a fractured piece of glass, the “Circo” or Ballet school with its massive vaulting roofs, the theatre school built like a compact thespian city, and the Facultad de artes plasicas, composed of copulas and winding covered pathway, each were distinct and yet connected together by both a utopic vision and a materiality.

The Facultad de artes plasicas, which I knew best, was designed to speak to an African heritage. Architect Ricardo Porro designed it inspired by Wilfredo Lamb’s art (Garatti et al. 2011). The building took the form of Ochún, the female orisha (saint/divinity) that was associated with the patron saint of Cuba, la Caridad del Cobre, and that is the goddess of fertility. Ochún’s breasts are brought to materiality at the scale of cupulas that serve as art studios and classrooms—nourishing students. Winding semi-indoor, semi-outdoor pathways form lines that mimic the curves of the body. At the spot were two pathways divide—as if they are legs opening—a small plaza sits complete with a fountain in the shape of papaya.⁹

On this trip, I went to the ISA with and at the invitation of a former teacher, Laura Encarnita, to attend an art exposition, the dissertation of one of her students. It was here that I met Carlos, a theatre student at the ISA and one of my good friends in Cuba. Figure 3-7 is the map of the ISA and surrounding areas that he drew for this project.

Earlier that day, I had met Laura at her house in Vedado and, after a cafecito, we caught a collective taxi, often referred to as a máquina or as Laura Encarnita preferred to call them boteros. Laura Encarnita flagged down a 1950s Chevy that bore all the signs of an aging Cuba that refused to be stuck in the past. At first, the driver wanted twice the normal fair, Julia
countered that she was a teacher, “Mi vida, how do you think I can pay to go to the ISA everyday on a state salary if the fair was vente moneda nacional [20 Cuban pesos].” The driver reluctantly let us in for the normal 10 CUP and we began our 30 min commute to the ISA.

In the car, Laura Encarnita continued to explain to me her situation in Cuba. The fact that she couldn’t pay 20 CUP to ride to the ISA (less than one US Dollar) seemed to have inspire her to reflect with me. She explained: “I am a successful art historian, I am a professor and a director at the ISA. I am globally recognized and yet, I don’t have enough money to buy a car to go to work. I do my work por el amor de arte [for the love of art].” She continued that she was grateful for what Cuba had made possible for her. “That is the problem with the critics [of the Cuban Revolution] they only ever see the bad.”

After commissioning and constructing the various buildings of the Ciudad de arte, the Cuban government never fully realized the dream. With two of the facultades completed (Porro’s Artes Plasticas and Danza Moderna), with the Facultad de ballet only missing floors and windows (materials that had already been delivered), and with the remaining two more than halfway completed, the Cuban government stopped construction on all “non-productive” buildings, including the Ciudad de arte project on July 26, 1965 (Garatti et al. 2011).

The vision of an art school with distinct styles influenced from a past, referencing an African heritage, and daring to dream as “solitary oddballs” for a collective (Muñoz 2009, 3), became incommensurate with a government that was becoming more and more influenced by what has come to be known as Soviet Brutalism. New politics in the Ministry of Construction favored buildings that were prefabricated and concern for beauty was seen as counter to productivity. The Ciudad de arte was a space of excess, a queer style that could never be reconciled with these politics.
When Laura Encarnita and I arrived at the gallery space in the Facultad de artes plasticas the heat was suffocating. Laura Encarnita and I took out our abanicos [hand-fans] and tried to survive as we walked the space before it opened. Laura Encarnita mentioned that they had installed air conditioning in the gallery for these occasions but whenever it was turned on it drew so much power that it would cause a black-out across the ISA. She shook her head and told me again, “por el amor de arte.”

After construction had stopped, classes continued in many of the buildings in varying forms. Despite its continued use, it fell into disrepair until the early 2000s when international interest brought it back to the foreground and Fidel promised to rehabilitate the buildings.

Fidel’s statement, that he didn’t know about the state of the Ciudad de arte, mimicked his claim that he was unaware of the persecution of homosexuality, furthering the inextricable connection. In the documentary Unfinished Spaces (Garatti et al. 2011) the actress, and former student at the Ciudad de artes, Mirta Ibarra—famous in Cuba due to her appearance in many of her husband Tomás (Titón) Gutierrez Alea’s films (including Fresa y chocolate)—points out that the exuberant free love art school found itself militarized after Che’s Socialismo y el nuevo hombre was published and influenced Cuban gender and sexual politics. Indeed, during this time, Ibarra explains that there were purges of students that were perceived to be homosexuals from the schools (Garatti et al. 2011).

After the exhibition, Laura Encarnita introduced me to one of her students, Carlos, and his partner, Raúl. “Donde paso más tiempo es el ISA, obviamente” [Where I spend the most time is the ISA, obviously], Carlos told me a few weeks later when we got together to do an interview. Indeed, out of all of my friends to draw maps for me, Carlos was the only person to draw a map that didn’t include the most well-known locations such as Mi Cayito and Bim Bom.
Instead, Carlos drew me a map of the neighborhood of Playa including the campus of the ISA (Figure 3-7).

In the map we can see that the ISA is shown to be an important space of belonging to Carlos. The dormitory in particular receives a deep shade of green (belonging) and a red circle (desire) to indicate the room that Carlos and Raúl share. The ruins of the Ballet school are given another red circle of desire, Carlos explained that this is now a common place to go at night to share a bottle of rum or to find privacy for a sexual experience.

The story of the ISA nuances how one understands what some have called the queer enclaves or homoerotic ambiente of Havana. First, the ISA demonstrates that the world making practices that assemble together bodies, affects, and spaces are not exclusive to more well known places like Bim Bom. Nor does one need to go to Mi Cayito to be engaged in the circulation of these publics. Furthermore, the ISA is an illustrative example of the ways in which space and the infrastructure that sits on it, such as an art school, picks up racialized, sexualized, and gendered histories and social meanings which complicate the worlds of belonging, desire, and intimacy that occupy it in their own queer ways. Finally, the story of the ISA highlights my argument that affects are never pre-social. Longing for utopia does not exist within a depolitized space. Indeed, the ISA itself is a material manifestation of the early utopic longings of Revolutionary Cuba and the deteriorating ruins of some of the buildings is a testament to the histories of the deployment of a new Revolutionary heteropatriarchy (see Chapter 2). The history of purges at the school, as well as the history of it as a queer space, can be read through a history of revolutionary longing, a state-sponsored longing to perfect socialism, and a mandated longing to demonstrate one’s revolutionary values. Despite, or perhaps because of, this complex history, the ISA remains a space of belonging and intimacy; por el amor de arte and for the hope of something more.
Sex, Space, and La Potajera

Figure 3-8. Esteban’s Affective Map of Havana.

Color Key: Blue-spaces discussed in interview, Red-spaces of desire, Yellow-spaces of intimacy, Green-spaces of belonging, Pink-spaces where one feels satisfied, Black-spaces where one feels danger, Orange-spaces where one feels liberated or free.

Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009269/00001

(Sexual) Contact

In Gayle Rubin’s canonical “Thinking Sex,” she theorizes a radical theory of sex and sexuality which encourages an emphasis on the act, on the importance of sex itself ([1984] 1993). Sex is an important corporeal experience to space and place in Havana’s ambiente. In Yamaris and Ada’s affective maps (Figures 3-4 and 3-3), we saw the importance of Yamaris’s home which was the prime location of sexual passion between the couple. In Yamaris’s map we
see a red circle of desire around CENESEX, the place where Yamaris and Ada first met. This is particularly interesting due to CENESEX’s efforts in the past to “police public morality” and keep Grupo OREMI from becoming a sexualized space (Saunders 2009, 184).

Returning to Odalys’s typology of the spaces, many of the places that have been discussed are lugares de encuentro or places of encounter. They operate as places where people are able to meet for the purposes of friendship or for sexual interaction with other people that are attentive to the public and interested in a possible relationship. This is, of course, connected to urbanization where the concentration of bodies in space means that there are simply more chances for spaces of encounter to form and for publics to circulate.10 In Samuel R. Delany’s Time Square Red, Time Square Blue (1999), he theorizes about contact in relation to the public sex venues of pornography theatres. For Delany, contact is “a fundamentally urban phenomenon” that is about interclass interaction (1999, 126). Contact is the conversation that happens between two people as they wait in line at the panadería [bakery] or perhaps what happens between “two men watching each other masturbating together in adjacent urinals of a public john—an encounter that, later may or may not become a conversation” (Delany 1999, 123). It is a type of intercourse among bodies “from which nonsexual friendships and/or acquaintances lasting for decades or a lifetime may spring” (Delany 1999, 123). They are most often ordinary and quotidian; and they are most importantly an interaction of crossings, crossings between communities. They promote interclass, interracial, and intercommunal encounters.

In many ways, all of the spaces of the ambiente that have been discussed in this chapter are zones of contact. Cine Acapulco and CENESEX became sites of encounter and free spaces to feel belonging and meet others. As Saunders points out, private house parties that are common within lesbian communities in Cuba tend to be racially divided (Saunders 2009, 179). Perhaps
one of the reasons that the Peñas and Grupo OREMI in general is a more diverse space is due to
the fostering of space for contact to happen. Delany points out that “if every sexual encounter
involves bringing someone back to your house, the general sexual activity in a city becomes
anxiety-filled, class-bound, and choosy” (1999, 127). Similarly, if every social gathering takes
place in private homes, the public is likely to be racially-bound. OREMI’s focus on creating
public space allows for not only interracial encounters but also an exploration of the
interconnections between race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Bim Bom and Mi Cayito also operate as places of encounter. They facilitate a place for
contact between people from all over Havana. In my own experience, which aligns with
Saunder’s description, these male-centered spaces tend to be frequented by people with a variety
of races and social classes (Saunders 2009, 177).

To further Delany, in this chapter I consider contact to be a corporeal practice. It is about
the contact of one’s body with another body or bodies and the ways in which that contact affects
our corporeal ways of being in the world. Like affect, contact does not exist outside of relations
of power. As Muñoz points out, “a contact zone is both a location and a different path to thinking
about asymmetries of power” (1999, 91). Thinking contact pushes us to think less in terms of
separation and instead in terms of copresence; interlocking bodies affecting and being affected.

Furthermore, copresences, as instances of contact, bring to the forefront Black Cuban
religious ontologies. As Beliso-De Jesús points out, copresence “references the complex
multiplicity of racial spiritual embodied affectivity that the term las presencias indicates.
Copresences are sensed through chills, shivers, tinges, preominitions, and possessions in and
through different… bodies and spaces” (2015, 7). Following this, contact is about the constant
interconnection between bodies. Contact is a gesture in space—a kind of touching—which, whether metaphorical or physical, reaches out to experience the other and forge new worlds.

**La Potajera: Cruising for Sex, Cruising for Contact**

Las potajeras are, as Esteban told me, “sitios de encuentro” [site of encounter] where people can look for “sexo exprés” [express/fast sex]. He continues, they are

lugares que tú vas y sabes que hay. No son lugares que son para ir a socializar, son lugares para tener sexo. Como yo te explicaba a que ya ve son lugares temáticos pero hay ambiente de playa o ambiente de ciudad, como tu prefieras.

[places where you go, and you know what is there. They are not places where one goes to socialize, they are places where one goes to have sex. As I explained to you, they have different “themes,” there is a beach scene and a city scene.]

Like Mi Cayito, its name belies one of its key social functions. In Cuba, *potaje* is a type of stew or soup made from a variety of vegetables and legumes. The term is common in Cuban cooking such that one may see a *potaje de frijoles negros* [of black beans], *chicharos* [peas], garbanzos [chickpeas/garbanzo beans], or *lentejas* [lentils]. The potaje may have a mixture of vegetables and root vegetables, like *malanga* (taro) or *papas* [potatoes], and is often served with *arroz* [rice] added at the table. A potajera then would be a place where one could go to eat potaje. A potaje is a mixing of distinct flavors just as the potajera is a mixing of whoever decides to visit. The use of this name brings to light the kind of contact that potajeras make possible in Havana. As Esteban told me,

Son lugares, que te voy a decir, no puede …determinar el tipo de persona porque tú puedes encontrar todo los estratos sociales, de todos los niveles de instrucción. Hay encuentra personas que son profesores universitario, ingeniero, médico, las personas que son simplemente estudiantes… de todas razas, de toda.

[They are places, how do I say this, you can’t determine the type of person (that you will meet there) because you can encounter anyone from any social stratum, with any level of education. There one can encounter people that are university professors, engineers, doctors, people that are simply students… of all races, of everything.]
The potajera is a zone of multiple bodily contact. They are attuned to what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “nepantla” which is composed of “passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio” (Anzaldúa 1987, 135). The potajera is a space where people (although almost exclusively men) are able to cross borders and make a connection with an other, a person that one may not have brought home or even had the chance to meet except for while looking for sex in the obscured world of the potajera.

Furthermore, potajeras like other lugares de encuentro are a certain type of counterpublic that circulate among a group of strangers that are attentive to the world-in-the-making. In the only ethnographic study about cruising culture in Cuba (that I am aware of), Sierra Madero (2012) describes a world of sexual graffiti and public sex in restrooms around Havana. Reading diffractively through his work we can explore these sites as places for the formation and circulation of publics and as an active project of world making. They are places of connection and contact that resonate with potentiality.

Similar to Mi Cayito and other sitios de encuentro, the potajera has its own temporality. That is, these spaces operate on daily and weekly schedules and they work to restructure ones understanding of time. Esteban explained that there are different types of potajeras which operate at different times. The potajera near Mi Cayito beach for example or Playa del Chivo (which one can see in Figure 3-1) operate mainly during the day. Potajeras that are in urban centers tend to operate mostly at night when the extra cover of darkness can turn a park into a potential space. Other potajeras, such as the one described in the following chapter, due to their isolation, operate throughout the day despite being in the urban center. Yet even these become more popular at
night. The hours when the potajera becomes popular effect people’s lives and life modes. This is a key aspect of alternative world making projects, they change one’s experience of time, not only within the space (which might produce a time that “flies by” or “stretches out”) but also as one organizes their lives, making time to go to the potajera, planning meetings via sexual graffiti, or always ending one’s night there.

Furthermore, the sexual graffiti that Sierra Madero documents can be seen as performative world making. According to one interviewee in the study, “there are people who experience pleasure painting sexual scenes or writing insults or memories of an important encounter, a story that marked their personal life. Others leave messages. One does not see poetry in these places, or literature or a dialogue out of chapter VIII of Lezama’s novel Paradiso” (Sierra Madero 2012, 18). Despite the claim that the graffiti is not poetry, I would argue that it is poetic in the sense that Warner suggests. Warner points out that the discourse of a counterpublic is a form of poetic world making. As he demonstrates, the poetic functions of publics create worlds by suggesting other aspects of discourse such as its affective qualities or its various ways of being read (Warner 2002, 116). Furthermore, as the quote makes clear, people write the sexual graffiti for an affective reason, it gives them pleasure.

Finally, the passage notes that the graffiti can act as an archive of sorts describing memories of important sexual encounters. As Muñoz states, “memory is most certainly constructed and, more important, always political… queer memories of utopia and the longing that structures them… help us carve out a space for actual, living sexual citizenship” (Muñoz 2009, 35). That is, world making is political in not just its rejection of the here and now but also in its gesture toward new futures of belonging and being.
Similar to Muñoz, Allen in his ethnographic work ¡Venceremos? points to the political potential of gendered, sexualized and raced self-making in Cuba (2011, 80). For Allen, transgression of the hegemonic rules of the public (implicit in the formation of a counterpublic) offer a link between “infrapolitical gestures and the intention to build community” (Allen 2011, 3). Thus, the counterpublic is not political just in its transgression per say but rather in the political potential of its discourse. Some of the sexual graffiti are, thus, performative of an alternative utopic future. One example of bathroom graffiti addresses the counterpublic to inform them that “La felicidad de un hombre es la pinga de otro hombre” [The happiness of one man is the cock of another man] (Sierra Madero 2012, 26). This statement, distinct in its form from many other examples (as not being a request to meet), is especially interesting. It is at its core speaking to an affect: Desire.

In the potajera, which is generally outside and in a park of some kind, there is less material evidence for the circulation of the public, since graffiti is not as possible. However, just as in the public bathrooms, the potajera is a place where performative gestures build affective worlds. Esteban’s Affective Map (Figure 3-8) makes clear this relationship with the potajera that he most commonly frequents. In his map, he has drawn two red boxes to represent desire in these spaces as well as a larger green box which represents belonging. He explained to me after the interview that he felt like he belonged in the potajera at this point despite the fact that he was also nervous while there. The danger adds to the sexual excitement of the potajera. That is, the desire becomes subtended to danger in these spaces and, for Esteban, these relational feelings become tied to a sense of belonging within these networks of circulating bodies and discourses.

The potajera is, across all of the affective maps, seen as a dangerous location. Odalys in his map (Figure 3-1) described every potajera that he included as a dangerous place. To visit the
potajera is to make oneself vulnerable to both the police that can arrest you or fine you for, as Esteban put it, “conducta impropia” [improper conduct] and it makes one vulnerable to the possibility of assault or robbery. Both possibilities are intrinsically connected. In ¿Venceremos? Allen points out,

in Cuba el ambiente (the scene) is at once used to denote gay and lesbian space, and spaces of extralegality and potential danger…. these nonmutually exclusive spaces often overlap. In the United States, Cuba, Suriname, and any other place or borderland where histories collide, this life in between is constrained by racialized, classed, and sexualized violence of the state, of global capital, and of the anxieties of desperate in-group elites (2011, 134).

Throughout my research, I was constantly warned to never bring anything to the potajera and without fail whenever I would talk about the potajera I would be told a story about the potential violence of it. Of course this violence is predicated on criminalization and an active project of making it invisible by the state. Indeed, “owing to criminalization (of cross-dressing and homo sex, for example) threats of attack, and crime emerg[e] precisely to take advantage of vulnerability and invisibility” (Allen 2011, 134). The state despite being aware of the potajera—as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I was told by Esteban that the Ministero de Salud had a map of all of the Potajeras in Havana—continues to criminalize the public sex that occurs there and makes it invisible rather than legitimizing it and offering it services. Sierra Madero points out this contradiction when he asks a doctor associated with the Centro Nacional de Prevención de ITS y VIH [The National Center for the Prevention of STDs and HIV] why they don’t put up condom dispensers in the public washrooms that are part of the ambiente:

one of the excuses he used was the high cost of condom dispensers; adding that: “Those dispensers are very costly and you know how it is, you put them in a public washroom, say the one in Quixote Park and before the week’s over it will be kicked down or what- ever.” I could not suppress a hint of irony and sarcasm when I asked him: “Isn’t the human, symbolic or economic cost in terms of medical care and purchase of retroviral medications significantly higher than getting condom dispensers? (Sierra Madero 2012, 33)
Despite the violence, many people do go and do experience belonging in the world making practices of the potajera. What is perhaps most fascinating about this space is the ways in which gesture becomes a primary, if not the sole, mode of communication. Corporeal movements, reaching out, touching, contact with another, these are the queer gestures or mariconería which create worlds of belonging. It is a space where bodies can reach out across societal divisions and build a world of sexual excitement and fulfillment.

**Conclusion: Ending the Night (and This Chapter) at the Malecón**

The Malecón is a universally important space for habaneros. In every affective map that has been shown in this chapter, the Malecón is included. It is often a place of liberation, desire, and belonging. It too carries with it a racialized, gendered, and sexualized past. The creation of the Malecón was a project that attempted to transform Havana into a “modern” city. As Iglesias Utset tells us, “in keeping with the ‘hygienic’ and ‘democratic’ theme and message of the day—both ladies promenading ‘on foot along the wide sidewalk’ and groups of workers or lower-class citizens seeking ‘to relieve their spirits worn down by poverty and work’ turned up on the Malecón. In terms of urban living, the seafront boulevard embodied the ideal of modernity” (2011, 19). As discussed at the beginning of this chapter in the case of the Vedado neighborhood, the urban planning of a “modern” Havana carried with it racialized and sexualized discourses of sanitation. It is particularly striking now that in the maps presented in this chapter, this space of social hygiene has become a prominent space where the mariconería of one’s body creates a place for encounter, a zone of corporeal contact, and a world of queer belonging.

The maps that form the archive of this chapter are my attempt to address the need for maps, which most commonly represent hegemonic and state determined considerations of geography, to better account for people’s experience of space. The impulse to map emotions on space has led to various attempts across the social sciences. Amy Griffin and Julia McQuid’s
article “At the Intersection of Maps and Emotion” (2012) details the challenge of spatially representing emotions and experience as well as various types of projects that have attempted it. Works such as Christian Nold’s anthology *Emotional Cartography* (2009) has attempted to, for example, describe emerging affects within space using GPS and other technologies. My own (maybe less “high-tech”) attempt takes a slightly more humanistic approach which while making analysis more difficult allowed for a more nuanced (and even artistic) description of the assemblage between space and affect in contemporary Havana. In distinction with some of the literature on affect, what these maps have shown is that while they represent personal understandings of space they are also deeply relational and social. Rather than affect being cognitive and a priori to the realm of the social, these maps support my consideration of affect as public structures of feeling. Furthermore, mapping took on a particular resonance in Cuba due to the lack of maps that are available and the common practice of drawing maps for people to find their way around a city whose infrastructure is becoming more and more precarious as tourism and commercial growth outstrips the state’s ability to maintain and fix pot-holed roads, deteriorating schools, limited power systems, and crumbling public spaces.

Yet what these maps reveal is resistance and survival in the face of all the odds against them. The plethora of spaces that form what could be loosely called an ambiente in Havana have become sites of copresence and contact which continue to create alternative worlds. These active projects of world making are future oriented; dreaming, hoping and longing for the horizon of a queer utopia. They are spatiotemporal. They are publics that are intimately tied to the material, to the circulation of bodies within urban landscapes. And, most importantly, they are spaces of belonging.
The publics that animate this chapter are tied to a particular assemblage of things and affects in space and time. Whether it be Mi Cayito beach, with its palm trees, popularity on Sunday, turquoise ocean, intimate belonging, white plastic camas, and tight swimsuits; or the potajera, with tall grasses, obstructed views, carnal desire, potential dangers, and exposed bodies; or Bim Bom, nightly filling with people, its infamy, the Malecón, the raised sidewalk that offers protection from the rain, the intimacy of prolonged conversation over a bottle of rum, la cafetería, the crossings of streets and bodies, and the nearby Cabaret and discotecas; the vitality of these spaces evidence alternative sexual lives in Cuba.

Notes

1 The use of Bim Bom to refer to an attractive person, generally a woman, arrised due to a boarding house of younger women that operated near the University of Havana and who were known as bom bom-eros. (Discussion with Lillian Guerra)

2 Yuma is a term used in Cuba for a foreigner. As Beliso-De Jesús points out: “the original term yuma comes from the 1957 Western movie 3:10 to Yuma, starring Glenn Ford, which aired repeatedly during the early years of the Revolution. “Yuma” was similar to “Yankee” and referred primarily to the United States, which harbored a bunch of wild, imperialist cowboys on a mission to take over the island. However, after the Special Period, yuma was no longer tied exclusively to the United States and instead referred to anything not Cuban. There are [now] two primary uses of the term yuma: la yuma refers to an imagined place outside Cuba, while el yuma is a person” (2015, 152).

3 All of the maps generated by this project have been archived at the University of Florida and are available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/contains/?t="Cruising+Havana%3a+Affective+Spaces,+Public+Gestures,+and+the+Worlds+They+Make+in+a+Contemporary+Cuba"&f=TI

4 This project is informed largely by José Esteban Muñoz’s work on utopia in Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (2009).

5 The G2 is a common name for state security, a secret police force that was organized as early as March 1959. (Guerra 2012, 79)

6 Suggested by feminist physicist Karen Barad (2007) a diffraction model (as opposed to a reflection model) refers to the ways that light and sound waves bend, interfere, and relate to one another. As Beliso-De Jesús points out “diffraction allows us to see how phenomena move through each other…. Diffraction is also a way to read academic scholarship. Instead of the need to always critique, we might read scholars through each other” (2015, 12–13).

7 Cayo in Spanish is a low island or key. The north side of Cuba is filled with keys that are known for being particularly stunning.

8 The theme of mobility is also central to both Yamaris’s and Ada’s utopic maps which I explore in more depth in Chapter 5.
In Cuba, papaya takes on the double-meaning as both the fruit and the female genitalia. Indeed, due to this sexual illusion, papaya is instead most commonly called *fruta bomba* (referencing instead its bomb like quality to one’s digestive system).

The work of John D’Emilio (1983) points to this connection as well.

Muñoz, drawing on Mary Louise Pratt, discusses the entire Caribbean as a contact zone, “a space where the echoes of colonial encounters still reverberate in the contemporary sound produced by the historically and culturally disjunctive situation of temporal and spatial copresence that is understood as the postcolonial moment” (1999, 91).

Griffin and McQuid’s article like much of the recent influx of work on emotion, feeling, and affect in the social sciences takes a psychological approach that contrasts to the social one that I advocate in this thesis.

This analysis follows the critique of some brands of affect theory. See for examples: Emily Martin’s “The Potential of Ethnography and the Limits of Affect Theory” (2013) and Ulla Berg and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas’s “Racializing Affect” (2015).
CHAPTER 4
GESTURING TOWARD CONNECTION:
CRUISING, DANCING, AND OTHER MARICONERÍA OF BELONGING

This gesture is a kind of touching, a way of sensing what might flow between us. It is sexual in the queerest of ways, meant to inspire intense feeling rather than reproduction; it is multisensory, asynchronic, polysemous, perverse, and full of promise.

—Juana María Rodríguez
Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings

Ephemera are the remains that are often embedded in queer acts, in both stories we tell one another and communicative physical gestures such as the cool look of a street cruise, a lingering handshake between recent acquaintances, or the mannish strut of a particularly confident woman…. So much can be located in the gesture. Gesture… signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude.

—José Esteban Muñoz
Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity

The gestures this chapter explores are immanent longings. They are about reaching out and touching. Gesturing toward connections with an other is about forging on—survival through a precarious world, desire saturated with danger. It is about a not-yet-here, the longing and movement toward a horizon. When one gestures, one recognizes the limits and strives to exceed them. The mariconería [faggotry] of this chapter is its movements of excess, its longing to overreach the limits of genre, to create scenes of intimacy and to cruise between persisting desires. Reader beware—whether you gesture back or not—even voyeurism is participation in the potajera [cruising site].

First Movement: Andando por la potajera/Walking Through la Potajera

Seclusion in the middle of the city. A tall hill with sheer sides sits between two bustling Havana streets. Trees and tall grasses dominate the hill, overgrowing the remnants of a concrete Havana that failed to claim this precarious height.

A narrow dirt path begins behind the utilitarian Soviet-era bus stop and makes its way up the side of the hill so steep that in order to scale it one might need to reach out and grab the
rough rocks or the long blades of grass for support. At the top of the hill, the tall grasses and trees make it impossible to see far, especially at night when the potajera is busiest.

The path, made by the soles of feet that have made the climb, splits off, again and again, a labyrinth of trails. It is too narrow to walk without brushing against the grass with one’s arms and legs, feeling its soft and prickly embraces. Paths of precarity, it seems, as though if the flow of feet were to stop for a day the paths would disappear, swallowed whole by the world. They are themselves ephemera, traces of connection among moving bodies.

A fallen tree across the path. The interruption in the path becomes a potential place to sit or to lie against. Trash surrounds it on the ground: empty bottles of rum, condom wrappers, and used condoms; traces of a connection. The remnants of a metal chair. Refuse from a gathering, perhaps. Looking at the assemblage of glass, latex, wood, and rusting metal, provokes the feeling that one can reach out and feel the warmth of human bodies still emanating.

The path splits and one mysterious, wandering direction leads to the ruins of a wall. Plants surround the spot and one can look down onto the street: a surreal experience of looking out into a different world.

The potajera smells of piss and sperm and sweat. Pungent odors that overwhelm the senses the moment one ascends.

Around one corner two men sit in an alcove just off the path, barely visible through the tall grasses, their bodies in exploration of the other, a hand tracing the line from the top of pulled down clothing, groping nalgas, and ending at the small of the back. Gestures of desire. Blades of grass become assembled to the bodies in movement, half-concealing and half-inviting your gaze as you walk down the path.
Around another corner, a solitary man, with his pants pulled down, strokes his engorged pinga, inviting you to join. His eyes search out yours through the darkness. You pass by and he may follow for a bit, your heart rate rises momentarily, and you glance back to see if you are safely away.

Another turn in the path: two friends, just arrived, one tells the other he will wait here for him, “Yell for me if you need help.” He then sits down and waits; a journey in carnal solidarity.

Coming now, unexpectedly, to a place you had already been, you see a group of men at play in the small clearing. Clothing pulled up or pushed down, reaching out in sensuous refrains of a world-in-the-making. One stands to the side, watching. Even the solitary man is stained with sociality.

The friend I accompanied asks me why my shoes are tan sucio [so dirty]; I explain that I wore them because I was concerned about getting my other shoes dirty here. He shakes his head. Why were my canvas shoes, dirtied by the daily walking of la Habana, so out of place? What shoes are supposed to tread these paths, packing down the dirt and keeping the grass at bay, in search of a new opening, connection, or contact?

_Interludio/Interlude_

This chapter is about moving bodies, human and otherwise, in their vital materiality; about moments, in their singularity, when—through coincidence or, perhaps, divine intervention from the Orishas¹—things are thrown together into the same space and something happens. Bodies copulate and dance, things take on their own vitality, senses become inundated, memory becomes embodied, and gestures of excess reach out to close the distance. But it is also about the connections among these disparate scenes, distinct events, and incommensurate moments of worlds-in-the-making.
Gestures are not just coded movements or corporeal discourse. Rather, they provide access to what Roland Barthes calls the “third meaning” (1977, 52–69). For Barthes, the third meaning exists outside of the “language-system (even that of symbols)” such that, if the third meaning is removed, “communication and signification, still circulate, still come through” (1977, 60). Reading for the third meaning suggests looking beyond the semantic message, toward the way gestures affect others.

Gestures are movements, corporeal and metaphorical, that extend one’s self, attempting to bridge the difference. Movements that, in a blink of an eye or after gestating for years, happen and then cease to exist. Their ephemeral trace, however, lingers, abiding within the bodies of those that registered them and assembling to spaces and things. If affect is about how feelings function in the realm of the social, then gestures are one way in which bodies affect and become affected by an other. Gestures make feelings public.

In this chapter, I attempt to register this third meaning of gestures, “the way they pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds” (Stewart 2007, 3). Gestures are the corporeal articulations of affect, movements that impart or register such public feelings of desire and danger, intimacy and precarity, among an unnamable and uncountable list of others.

Imagining a different ontology of queerness, I risk in this chapter to theorize a queerness that is about affect and movement. In Ordinary Affects, Stewart claims that affects are “literally moving things—things that are in motion and that are defined by their capacity to affect and to be affected—they have to be mapped through different, coexisting forms of composition, habituation, and event” (2007, 4). This emphasis in motion resonates with the work of José Esteban Muñoz (2009) and Juana María Rodríguez (2014) who theorize gesture within queer
theory. This connection is further highlighted by Frances Negrón-Muntaneer’s (2008) translation of queer to *mariconerías*, which literally translates to the characteristics, mannerisms, or gestures that are associated with *maricones* [faggots].

Indeed, mariconerías suggest a distinct mode of belonging: movements of connection, the quotidian gestures that are performative of worlds that endure. As Muñoz points out the queer gestures function as both “a beacon for queer possibility and survival” (2009, 74) and they “transmit ephemeral knowledge of lost queer histories” (2009, 67). Mariconerías are about queer survival in the face of impending odds against them, about risking to reach out in a precarious world to form and touch new textures of belonging. Mariconerías are the corporeal manifestations of a utopic longing that propel us forward.

Utopic longings register an immanent potentiality. The various gestures that this chapter explores—whether it be walking in the potajera, dancing at a house party, the small moments of solidarity between sex workers, or even just reaching a hand out to lead and care for another—register these potentialities as a concrete utopia. For Muñoz, “concrete utopias are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential.... Concrete utopias can also be daydream like, but they are the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many” (2009, 9). Concrete utopias rely on an anticipatory longing (coupled with its pair, fear) and a methodology of memory, the act of looking backwards at the not-yet-here. The vignettes that make up this chapter are not presented in chronological order; instead, like memories, they slide between events, registering their intensity and transferring to another singularity. In this chapter, I lay out these moments as movements to generate an energy of looking back and longing for more.
Longing takes on particular resonance in Cuba, where longing as a political manifestation of communism—the longing to perfect socialism ([*perfeccionar socialismo*])—carries with it both affinities and distrust. The utopic longings that saturate the scenes that this chapter explores also become a necessity in the face of a precarious Cuba. Longing and precarity become assembled together, just as danger and desire, intimacy and shame, and fantasy and fear.

The cruising of the potajera is both a moving scene and a methodology of analysis that links together incommensurate events. Just as in the potajera, where one walks along furtive paths searching for connection with another, in this chapter I ask that the reader do the same. The winding and oblique paths between divergent scenes encourage one to consider both the singularity of each event and to ponder the connections among them. The rest of this chapter is a gesture in itself to these connections among disparate scenes. While I take particular interest throughout the chapter in the role of gesture, there may not always be neat or conclusive answers and lines of direct association. Instead, just as in the potajera, one must accept a fragmentary view, partially obstructed, forever slanted and imperfect.

**First Movement Continued, Saliendo la Potajera/Leaving la Potajera**

There is no linear narrative progression of the potajera. There may be one climax or many or none at all. The story winds and twists in mysterious ways. While the ultimate destination—an encounter with an other—is imagined, a journey along the labyrinthine paths presents endless potential for corporeal connection with a foreign body or bodies.

The potajera is about texture, a world of bodies picking up potential from the chance occurrence that they find themselves here, together. It is a place where, through darkness and the obstruction of grass and trees and half-broken-walls, one only sees partitioned bodies, fragmented copulations, and then, perhaps, keeps walking. The remnants of a chair, the tall
blades of grass, the stroking of a penis, the fallen tree, the expectant half-naked body all become connected together, suffused with mystery and desire, assembled with moments of non-canonical intimacy and a friend’s solidarity, and fixed with a pulsing heart that registers danger and excitement simultaneously.

The potajera becomes a kind of enchantment, a type of worlding that takes you into a completely different time and place. The moving back into the bustle (or deadness, depending on the time of day) of the Havana street is a fall from that enchantment. Familiar feelings of shame ingrain themselves into a body, that moments prior, was filled with the high of endorphins and adrenaline (desire and danger?).

I make my way down the treacherous pathway back into the heart of Vedado following in the footsteps of my friend. Loose dirt moves unexpectedly beneath my already sucio canvas shoes. A clump of grass, which I had used to help myself up this path, now lays strewn across the trail, pulled up perhaps by another anxious visitor. I find myself again in the Havana that I know; a line of people waits at the bus stop. It feels as though, during my descent, I had passed through a barrier, the pungent smell of bodies dispersed and, yet, I felt nauseous, shocked, as if time had straightened itself around me.

I am struck now by the austerity of the concrete bus stop that sits at the foot of the potajera; partially concealing the path from the street and providing shelter to the would-be bus riders. It is a remnant of Soviet-era utilitarian utopianism, the architecture that reigned during the heaviest persecution of homosexuality: when effeminate men were sent to the forced labor camps of UMAP.2 The clean lines of the bus stop seem to scream out in protest to the excess of the potajera; or is it the potajera that is screaming in resistance?

I wonder, do the people waiting have any idea of what exists just behind them?
I walk along the street and glance up the steep, eroding wall of the potajera. Grass and trees obscure any movement as if they are the crenulations of a fortified barrier against the outside. I wonder, as I walk, if copulating bodies are looking down at me, reveling in the refuge of their own world making, pleasuring each other, and imparting the tree they lean up against with another memory of connection, as they look down onto a world to which they must return?

With nothing left to do, I turn up a side street and return home. That night I cleaned my shoes.

**Second Movement: Bailando en solidaridad/Dancing in Solidarity**

Dancing is a multisensory and sexual gesture that attempts to register the intensities of others. The gesture of dancing has texture. Like the carnal acts in the potajera that pick up texture through their assemblage with landscapes, things, and refuse (traces of connections?), the gesture of dance exceeds symbolic or semiotic meaning. Dance is about complex social and material connections. As Rodríguez points out,

> While we understand that feet, faces, nipples, and assholes are material substances that can bleed, age, and burn, they are also cultural surfaces that carry the burden of entrenched social and sexual significations.... It is an embodied, queer methodological practice that questions the normative assumptions of the everyday and invites us to resignifying our fleshy encasements on our own terms. Likewise, licking, spitting, slapping, penetrating, and swallowing are corporeal gestures that can be experienced and recoded outside hegemonic cultural logics, even as they gain meaning in relation to these same social and sexual imaginaries (Rodríguez 2014, 122).

Bodies and their (dancing) movements reformulate longing and solidarity. The mariconería of a salsa redeployes official heteronormative histories and risks to make visible forgotten and unspeakable movements of excess.

Dance can be deeply erotic. Like Barthes’s consideration of the erotic in Mapplethorpe’s photos in *Camera Lucida*, dance exceeds an unary domain; instead it is about an excess of texture (Barthes 1981, 41–42). In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick explores the ways in which
texture changes across different scales. In her example, polka-dots from afar may seem to be a “flat sheet of gray; at a few feet, the dots make a visible texture; through a magnifying glass you’ll see an underlying texture of paper or fabric unrelated to the two or three rounded shapes that make a big design” (2003, 16). Gestures and affects also pick up texture as they move through our bodies, as they build the intensities of our social worlds. They are always already immanent, “the question they beg is not what they might mean in an order of representations…but where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance” (Stewart 2007, 3).

Attuning to the texture of the everyday, a something that becomes affixed to incommensurate events, asks the observer to put off evaluative judgement long enough to consider the ways in which “heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities” make up the many dots that, from afar, can appear to be big structures (Stewart 2007, 4). An attunement to texture, reading for gestures toward belonging, compels a model of thinking that refuses to ignore the live, moving (dancing?) surface of difference.

Many of my friends in Cuba had an auspicious way of reacting to one another while dancing. The movement of bodies would often begin in free form, each moving in equally gorgeous yet uncoordinated ways. Then, in ways unperceived by myself (and perhaps even the dancers themselves), they would begin to fall into motion together. Out at night clubs or at small house parties, this was bound to happen at least once, a moment I always registered acutely as I never knew how to follow along, feeling with intensity my outside-ness.

My partner Mateo and I attended an event at the Ciudad deportivo, a large sporting complex that one passes between Aeropuerto José Martí and Vedado. It was the last day of the Jornada contra la homofobia y la transfobia. Most of the foreigners had since left, or decided not
to make the trip. The day consisted of teams competing in events spanning from dominoes to volleyball. The last event was kickball. Mateo and I watched them playing from the stands and cheered on our friends with handmade pom-poms made out of cut strips of colorful plastic bags attached to a plastic tube with a single nail.

It was a lively crowd in the stands: heckles and dance parties between kicks. Eventually a winner was decided. Spectators stormed the field. Music was blared so loudly from the small speakers that they shook and vibrated in ways that distorted the music. Mateo and I began to walk out onto the field to join our friends when we noticed the dance start to change.

Suddenly they started following each other’s steps, each with their own gestural excess, but each performing in unison a movement that took over. Soon everyone was turning at the same moment, stepping with the right foot, then the left, turning again. They became tied together corporally by the gestural movements of a coordinated dance that was never rehearsed. Mateo and I immediately turned around, not wanting to find ourselves out on the field in the midst of a group dance, a corporeal solidarity, that we had no way of joining.

When the song ended everyone laughed (a recognition perhaps of a coming together, a something happening?) and began again to dance freely to the next beat to come out of the reverberating speaker.

**Third Movement: La mariconería de bailar salsa/The Mariconería of Salsa**

The dance floor took up the entire main room of the apartment. The chairs had been cleared away from the meeting of Red HxD³ that had assembled this group of self-proclaimed gay and lesbian militantes. Along one wall, the owner of the house and matriarch of the group, had pushed the table now filled with party snacks, popcorn, croquetas, small sandwiches of jamón y queso, and rum, against the wall.
It was a small, one-bedroom apartment on the top floor of a building in Vedado. Jorge, a friend of mine whom I had been chatting with at length that evening approached another member of the group and asked him to dance.

Jorge was a larger man, wearing a tank-top and jean shorts, both drenched in sweat. Jorge took his hand and invited him to dance. He was petite, emphasized in the contrast with Jorge’s frame. He wore a black tee shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, making the shirt hug his armpits. His tight black jean shorts, that came to sit just above his mid-thigh, were pulled up to sit high on his waist with his shirt tucked into them. With an effeminate crook in the wrist and with a well-practiced just-enough resistance, he allowed himself to be pulled to the dancefloor and they began to start moving alongside the other couples.

Their bodies, *en clave*, found each other and pushed each other away just to find themselves embracing again. They twisted and turned effortlessly. Each playing a part, moving through a racialized and sexualized (hi)story as old as the dance itself. Hips moving in entrancing circles, fingers entangling fingers, separating again to linger for a moment on a thigh or back. Bodies performing coded movements: masculinity and femininity, dominance and submission. Each gesture cited the straight couples that have been seen doing this dance for centuries and reenacted the lost corporeal knowledges of queer dances performed in the dark. Gender and sex deployed, literally, with a twist.

They spun each other around and moved as elegantly with their feet as with their hands, each effortlessly finding the other as if it were a well-choreographed dance. Rather than moving as one, they moved in sync, each responding gracefully to the other, moving in sexualized and gendered steps of cultural memory. It appeared as if they had danced together hundreds of times and yet their faces thrilled with novelty made me feel that I was witnessing a new connection.
While Jorge led, maintaining rhythm and space, his partner moved with endless potentiality, each new gesture calling for a different corporeal response. As the intensity of their dance filled the room the other couples began to watch.

This queer salsa affixed intensities of its own to the apartment and to the partygoers. With eyes only for each other and hips in rhythmic motion, Jorge and his dance partner embodied desire and intimacy and the room stopped around them to take part, to explore their own desires and intimacies through the thrilling performance. As the dancefloor cleared, the two dancers began to take up more space and their flourishes became even more pronounced, energetic. The room became an intimate space, now connected by the magnetism of the performers; all other activity stopped, as if time itself had come to a standstill to marvel. The ephemeral trace of their movements etched themselves into the faces of the audience and longing saturated the sounds of the clave, the bongos, the güiro, and the two pairs of feet in kinesis. Watching the display, I felt myself at a precipice, knowing that the moment cannot possibly last. The precarity of that moment, mimicking a sense of immanent change in Cuba itself, inundated the room.

And just as soon as the music had started, it stopped again. The two bodies moved apart, each with a blushing smile. A U.S. pop song came on and I reached for a croqueta.

**Fourth Movement: Trabajando Bim Bom/Working Bim Bom**

Mariconerías—faggotry, the articulations of a human body or a body politic that move in excess, the gestures that exceed limits and that strive for a *something* else—point us to a queerness that is not about identity per se; rather, mariconería is about the making-public of feelings of desire, care, solidarity, and belonging. In positing a distinct ontology of queerness, mariconerías shifts our analysis away from anti-normative models and toward an epistemology rooted in the body. Mariconería is not the antithesis of identity; rather, it is a call to consider the texture of a glossed over surface—bodies in movement and difference.
These excessive gestures and copulations register what Michael Warner calls the “poiesis” of publics, or their affective qualities (2002, 115). Warner suggests that language, gestures, and aesthetics become more than just codes: “the development of such language ideology helped to enable the confidence in the stranger sociability of public circulation. Strangers are less strange if you can trust them to read as you read or if the sense of what they say can be fully abstracted from the way they say it” (2002, 115–16). Indeed, this registers with Giorgio Agamben’s point that poetic verse is essentially gesture: ‘language is both conceptual and mimetic. The first element dominates in prose, the second in verse. Prose is above all the understanding of a concept; beyond prose and more decisively than prose, verse is expressive gesture.’ If this is true, if speech is originary gesture, then what is at issue in gesture is not so much a prelinguistic content as, so to speak, the other side of language (Agamben 1999, 78).

What Agamben makes clear is that gesture, like affect, does not exist in a pre-social field, rather it references a different type of meaning. The attentiveness to the bodily practices of mariconería registers more than just the ability to read coded discourse, rather, mariconería is about a different form of corporeal belonging.

As dusk fell, I sat at a table outside of Cafetería Infanta, which is nestled into the acute angle formed by Calle Infanta and Hospital where they end at Calle 23. The Cafetería Infanta was more commonly referred to as Bim Bom, which as far as I could surmise was its previous name. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bim Bom—the sidewalks and streets around the cafetería, the raised sidewalk across Infanta, the cascada del Malecón (a stone cliff below the Hotel Nacional that used to be a water feature but that no longer functions) across Calle 23, the Malecón itself as it stretches out for a block or so in each direction—makes up a popular meeting and socializing space for many of my friends and participants. Mostly a space occupied by self-identified gay men, it is also a popular spot for travestis and pingüeros [male sex workers]. On several
occasions I saw a group of lesbians here, although that was less common. This evening, during my first visit to Cuba in 2012, I sat surrounded by newly made acquaintances, thanks to a bottle of Habana Club rum that I had provided. Bim Bom was busy that evening, all the tables were filled and the street corner was flooded with people chatting.

The smell of salt from the spray of the sea hitting the Malecón across the street filled the air. Looking up Calle 23, one can see La Rampa, a bustling section of 23 filled with bars and cafes that stretches from the Malecón to Calle L. Only a block away, the (at the time) newly inaugurated, state-run, Cabaret Las Vegas was preparing to open for the evening, with its (now long-running) drag show, Divino.

In order to fit more people around the table at Bim Bom, I shared a seat with Víctor. As we were talking, suddenly, the two across from me became rather tense and tapped their shoulders with their hands. A split-second later a police officer approached us and asked us something in rapid Cuban-Spanish that I didn’t immediately understand. My friends jumped up, Víctor took a step back, and the officer walked away. I was stunned.

The two across from me sat down again and Víctor remained standing for a while until it seemed that enough time had passed and sat down again. They explained to me that the police officer wanted us to stop sharing our seat. Two of the men that I was sitting with had become known to the police in the area as pingüeros and this was one of the many small and aggressive, yet ultimately futile, movements of a police force that was attempting to stop sex work.

At the time, my shock was mostly about the preposterousness of being asked by a police officer to not share a seat. However, now it is the moments before that I can’t stop thinking about. As I learned later, the quick tap to the shoulder, referencing the badge that sat precariously on a pressed uniform between the chest and the shoulder, provided a gestural code to Víctor to
let him know that a police officer was coming. But it was more than just a code: the gesture was made out of caring, warning, and solidarity, its legibility a sign of collective belonging and relationality. And its transfer carried with it a tension that cut the laughter of a moment before.

The tap to the shoulder could not be replaced by the verbal warning, “Police.” Instead, the gesture registers a relational and affective bodily register (a third meaning), that conveyed solidarity, care for another’s well-being, and a sense of belonging. Likewise, it carried with it the recognition of being surveyed, being at risk, or even being in danger.

**Fifth Movement: El Presidente/The President**

One balmy Havana-summer evening in June 2016, Mateo and I walked to Bim Bom to meet up with Odalys. The humidity was thick in the air. We arrived at the corner of Calle Infanta y 23 but didn’t see Odalys anywhere. We were on time, which meant too early.

We decided to cross the Malecón and sit on the seawall while we waited. Taxi drivers, stopped around the gas station between the cafetería and the Malecón, hassled us as we walked by: “Taxi, Taxi! Dónde van?” We sat on the Malecón for a few minutes chatting before Odalys arrived. Odalys walked up to us with his normal bigger-than-life attitude. After greeting each other, we decided to walk to get a few beers.

Crossing back through Bim Bom, Odalys couldn’t walk but a few steps without having to greet another friend with a quick kiss to the cheek and a few words before moving on. About a month later when Odalys agreed to do an interview with me (a gesture of friendship in and of itself), I asked him if he knew everyone that generally went to Bim Bom. He told me,

“Yo conozco la mayoría de la gente, tú sabes! Yo conozco la mayoría de la gente, porque yo desde el niño prácticamente cuando tenía como 14 años siempre he bajado allí. Siempre he ido a sentarme, antes con amistades, muchas veces iba solo. Y había una etapa de mi vida cuando yo estaba estudiando, cuando estaba estudiante, que yo iba casi todos los días, me sentaba con mis amistades allí y nos sentamos a tomar, a hacer cuentos, a reír por afuera hasta las 10:00 de la noche o las 12:00 de la noche, de 8:00 o 10:00 así.”
[I know the majority of the people (at Bim Bom), you know! I know most of the people because since I was a young boy, when I was like 14 years old, I always came down here. I would always come and sit here with friends, or many times I would come alone. And in one period of my life when I was a studying, when I was a student, I would come here every day and sit with friends and we would drink and tell stories and laugh outside until 10:00 or 12:00 at night from 8:00 or 10:00 or so.]

His distinct emphasis on tú sabes [you know] referred to these moments of Odalys greeting the world. Odalys moved through Bim Bom with a smirk of knowing-memory and with arms open, greeting old friends and making new ones—his own gestures of belonging within space and bodies. In many ways, these gestures extended to us: Odalys held our hands (physically and metaphorically), inviting us to parties, introducing us to his friends and showing us new places. A gesture that exceeded the mandates of our chance encounter at the Jornada.

Cafetería Bim Bom had closed so we had to walk a few more blocks up La Rampa in order to find our beers. Mateo and I went inside a bustling, brightly lit store to buy a few. At the counter we asked for three Cristales, one of the two national beers. No hay. –Bucanero? – Tampoco. The refrigerator behind the bored waitress was, instead, filled with Presidente, a Dominican Beer. We got three bottles and headed back to the Malecón.

Costing at a minimum of one CUC\(^4\) each, beer in Cuba has maintained an allure of expense and modernity. As Beliso-De Jesús points out, dating back to 1928 the increasing beer consumption in Cuba was considered to be a mark of its progress, “whereas rum and other spirits reflected a darker and poorer drink… one indicating a racial ‘backwardness’” (2015, 170). Now in a precarious time of growing tourism and with the instable dual-currency system, the frothy, cold Cerveza Cristal and the stronger (and, in my opinion, slightly metallic-tasting) Bucanero became the alcoholic beverages attached to the privilege of access to foreign capital. National production could hardly keep up with the growth in tourism—hotels and private restaurants buying up the supply. Back in 2012, during my first trip to Cuba, I was craving anything besides
Cristal and Bucanero. At that time, they were not only the two national beers: in true communist form, they were the only options. Now, I found myself longing for Cristal, as if a sip of the light refreshing drink could quench the anxiety of the precarious economic transitions of the island just as it satisfied one’s thirst on a hot humid day walking the streets of Havana.

Mateo, Odalys, and I walked back to the Malecón with our Dominican beers in hand. Conversation turned, as it often did, to President Obama’s recent visit to La Habana (the first visit of a U.S. President to Cuba since 1928). The day after Obama’s main speech, Fidel Castro published a response (which turned out to be the last article that he published prior to his death in November 2016) in the party newspaper El Granma:

Hay una cuestión importante: Obama pronunció un discurso en el que utiliza las palabras más almibaradas para expresar: “Es hora ya de olvidarnos del pasado, dejemos el pasado, miremos el futuro, mirémoslo juntos, un futuro de esperanza. Y no va a ser fácil, va a haber retos, y a esos vamos a darle tiempo; pero mi estadía aquí me da más esperanzas de lo que podemos hacer juntos como amigos, como familia, como vecinos, juntos”. Se supone que cada uno de nosotros corría el riesgo de un infarto al escuchar estas palabras del Presidente de Estados Unidos. Tras un bloqueo despiadado que ha durado ya casi 60 años, ¿y los que han muerto en los ataques mercenarios a barcos y puertos cubanos, un avión de línea repleto de pasajeros hecho estallar en pleno vuelo, inversiones mercenarias, múltiples actos de violencia y de coerción? (Castro Ruz 2016)

[There is an important issue: Obama made a speech in which he uses the most sweetened words to express: “It is time, now, to forget the past, leave the past behind, let us look to the future together, a future of hope. And it won’t be easy, there will be challenges and we must give it time; but my stay here gives me more hope in what we can do together as friends, as family, as neighbors, together.” I suppose all of us were at risk of a heart attack upon hearing these words from the President of the United States. After a ruthless blockade that has lasted almost 60 years, and what about those who have died in the mercenary attacks on Cuban ships and ports, an airliner full of passengers blown up in midair, mercenary invasions, multiple acts of violence and coercion?]

Fidel’s critique that Obama was asking for Cubans to “forget history” was, to my own surprise, taken up by many Cubans and I had heard this idea quoted to me in many of my conversations about Obama’s visit. Odalys mentioned it again on our walk. Then, he looked at us...
with a meaningful glance, eyebrows slightly raised and, with disbelief in his voice, asked: what is Mariela\(^5\) doing when she refuses to talk about the UMAP camps of the 1960s?

As an activist highly engaged in Mariela Castro Espín’s Centro nacional de educación sexual (CENESEX), this was a surprising critique from Odalys and it registered a politics of memory. Odalys’s raised eyebrow seemed to ask us to consider all the forgotten histories, his glance back to us an acknowledgment of the complex contradiction of presidential pronouncements and conflicting discourses. He then took a sip of Dominican beer and we crossed the busy Malecón.

*Presidentes.* With El Presidente beers in our hands and the presidents that played at international politics, change was happening in Cuba. It was felt everywhere, in the foods and drinks imbibed, in the longings for a refreshing sip of the past, and in the embodied responses to presidential politics.

Odalys kept moving forward, holding our hands, and teaching us along the way.

**Final Movement: La primera peña/The First Festival**

I had been invited to a *Peña* [festival] that Grupo OREMI\(^6\) held once a month in the Acapulco Cinema in Nuevo Vedado. The peña started around 7pm, and earlier that day I had traveled to the airport to see Mateo off as he flew back to the United States. I considered not attending the peña because I was so saddened about Mateo’s departure, but I had agreed to take a few videos of the performances for him, so I dug in and dragged myself into a *máquina* [collective taxi] and, then, walked up Calle 26 until I found the cinema. I arrived just before 7 and found myself unconscionably early. The peña finally stated around 8:30.

What surprised me most about my first peña wasn’t so much the performances, which I did enjoy, but the ways in which OREMI reached out to care for me on a difficult day. Either the news that Mateo had left had traveled between them or just by the mere fact that they saw me
without him, every OREMI member that I knew came up to me to talk. Some asked about Mateo, others just came over and tried to engage me in a conversation as a form of distraction. The seat I had chosen when I sat there by myself had soon become surrounded by friends, perhaps a gesture of bodily connection.

When the Peña started, Yamaris, a performer, took a special moment to thank me for being present and regretted publically that Mateo was not able to be there.

After the performance, as I stood talking, Adelia and her partner came over to me and invited me out to a comic show at the Teatro Karl Marx the following evening. Then, Amarilys and Maita, another couple, came over and invited me to go to Parque Lenin with them. Mariposa came over and invited me to her apartment in Vedado for lunch. It soon became clear that Grupo OREMI wasn’t going to allow me to be alone.

The mariconería of these stories is about a movement toward belonging. It suggests a different type of public sociality, one that exceeds citizenship and refuses identitarian categories. Mariconerías reach out and risk touching in a precarious world, sensing the potential of connections between us and performing new worlds.

The gesture of solidarity by sex workers in the face of an active police presence trying to stop them or the carnal gesture of bodies copulating in the potajera or the meeting of two bodies dancing en clave and loosing themselves in their moment of intimacy, these are the incommensurate gestures of world making. They exist beyond any simple reading of coded gestural discourse and suggest an affective quality, they long “for something beyond the knowable and the rational” (Rodríguez 2014, 28). The mariconerías of this chapter struggle, they move out and risk connecting with another to create a different world. They pick up textures along the way. The contested terrain of bodies become assembled to coded racialized and
gendered dances, to a metal chair emanating warmth from potential and past copulations, to foreign beers and national discourses, to shoes that should have been cleaned before venturing forward toward another connection. Far from static, these bodies redeploy these cultural meanings, the excess of their gestures suggest the longing for something more.

Gesture suggests a distinct social worlding, an embodied form of belonging to a public. Mariconería questions notions of representation and is also, importantly, material. In Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings, Rodríguez quotes Muñoz’s work on dance and replaces the word dance with sex. Here I replace it again with mariconería in order to suggest the ways in which these queer gestures exceed the bounds of sex and dance to be found in movements of care and belonging that suffuse the sexual world making publics of Havana.

Mariconería [Dance, Sex], like energy, never disappears; it is simply transformed. Mariconería [queer dance, queer sex] after the live act, does not expire. The ephemeral does not equal unmateriality. It is more nearly about another understanding of what matters. It matters to get lost in mariconería [dance, sex] or to use mariconería [dance, sex] to get lost. Lost from the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality (Muñoz 2009, 81; Rodríguez 2014, 118)

The cruising, dancing, and other mariconerías of belonging that give this chapter its name matter because they give evidence to lives and politics that exist outside the established aesthetics of Cuban national politics. They suggest a world making that is about endurance and survival.

Mariconería is about sustained hope, a critical affect that points us toward a different ontology of belonging. Hope and longing become the methodologies of survival and endurance. Cruising between the scenes, from the fragmentary worlds of public sex to finding a way forward through dance, we see that the connections remain much the same. Gestures forward, toward the ungraspable; the perverse touch that struggles to feel the intensity between two or three or more bodies (social or corporeal), knowing that the movement will always fall short. Mariconería is
the excess, the remainder, the *something* else which is full of promise and which is, simply, necessary.

**Notes**

1 Orishas (also called orichas, ocha, or santos) are the saints or divinities that are associated with the Afro-Cuban religion, Santería/Regla de Ocha.

2 UMAP camps or *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción* were forced labor camps that detained thousands of homosexuals in the early years of the revolution. See Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion.

3 Red HxD is one of the redes sociales associated with *CENESEX*. Originally, Red HxD was the group specifically for men and stood for *Hombres por la Diversidad* [Men for Diversity]. Later, to be more inclusive they changed their name to *Humanidad por la Diversidad* [Humanity for Diversity]. This change has been more substantial than just a name change as the group is lead by both gay men and lesbian women. See Kirk (2015) for more information.

4 In Cuba, there are two currency systems. One, the *Moneda Nacional* or *Peso Cubano* (*CUP*), which is the local currency and the one that most state employees are paid in. The second, the *Peso Cubano Convertible* (*CUC*), which is tied at close to a 1-to-1 ratio with the U.S. Dollar, is the currency for tourists and, unlike the *Peso Cubano*, can be converted into foreign currency. One *CUC* equals approximately 25 *CUP*.

5 Mariela Castro Espín is the director of the government-run Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (*CENESEX*) and an outspoken advocate for the LGBT community in Cuba. She is also the daughter of current president Raúl Castro and the late feminist revolutionary Vilma Espín. See Chapter 2 for more on Mariela Castro and *CENESEX*.

6 Grupo OREMI is one of the networks associated with *CENESEX*. It is a network that defines itself as a space for Lesbian and Bisexual women, many of whom are women of color. Chapter 5 continues a longer discussion of the politics of Grupo OREMI.
CHAPTER 5
ON THE PULSE OF PRECARITY:
GRUPO OREMI, LESBIAN PUBLICS, AND THE HOPE THAT SUSTAINS THEM

Here, on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister’s eyes,
Into your Brother’s face, your country
And say simply
Very Simply
With Hope
Good Morning
—Maya Angelou

On the Pulse of Morning

The Morning of Pulse

I woke up in the morning of Grupo OREMI’s *Caldosa*¹ still weak from the Dengue that had left me bed-ridden for 10 days. I left the stifling heat of my bedroom determined to be well enough to attend the Caldosa. Ignoring the sounds of the manual labor renovating the apartment upstairs, I sat down to a breakfast of *huevos, pan tostado, y café* [eggs, toast, and coffee]. However, my breakfast was soon interrupted by a call from the United States. The unexpected call was from my lover Mateo who informed me of the Pulse Massacre² which had happened the night before only hours away from my university home in Gainesville, Florida. At the time all we knew was that many were dead, most were queer people of color. Later we would find out that the Pulse Massacre was the deadliest mass shooting by a single shooter in the history of the United States. My body, already bearing the toll of the tropical virus, collapsed even further under the weight of the news.

Norma turned the television on and we soon saw footage from the scene in Orlando. That morning’s *Granma*—the official newspaper of the Communist Party in Cuba, named after the yacht that eighty-two men including Fidel, Raúl, and Che used to travel from Mexico to Cuba in 1956 to start the Revolution (Guerra 2012, 15–16)—included the story, “¿Qué se sabe sobre el
mortal tiroteo en Orlando?” [What is known about the deadly shooting in Orlando?]. Both news stories told of a massive massacre of LGBT people in the Pulse nightclub. Each contextualized it within a history of massive shooting in the United States: “En cualquier caso, la matanza de este domingo sigue una preocupante estela de asesinatos masivos en Estados Unidos…. Según el proyecto Mass Shooting Tracker, solo el año pasado en el país se registraron 372 tiroteos masivos…” [In any case, the massacre this Sunday follows in the worrisome wake of massive murder in the United States…. According to the Mass Shooting Tracker Project, in the United States 372 mass shootings… were recorded only this last year] (Granma 2017). The official coverage in the Cuban media offered this analysis, reminiscent to its coverage of Civil Rights struggles in the 1960s, perhaps as a way of offering the implicit comparison to a contemporary Cuba free from such atrocities.³ The cheap black newspaper-ink of the Granma rubbed off onto my fingers as I read the story.

I went to the bathroom and cleaned up to prepare myself for what increasingly seemed to be the arduous task of getting from El Vedado to La Habana Vieja where the Caldosa was being held. Despite the fatigue, I had determined to be around people, especially queer people, during these dark times. That afternoon, I walked the block or so to Calle 23 where I would catch a máquina (collective taxi) to take me to El Capitolio, the capital building, on the edge of Habana Vieja—only across the street from Cine Payret, where I had planned to meet up with two friends, Maita and Amarilys, who were also headed to the Caldosa.

The street was bustling. I stood on the side of the avenue, the sun sapping what little energy I still had, and I looked up the street with my eyes peeled for one of Havana’s old 1950s cars that served as a major form of transportation. The ample space inside these older vehicles allowed a driver to fit three in the back and two in the front. “La Habana” I asked, as the driver
slowed to a stop in front of me, “Capitolio,” he nodded and I slipped into the back of the car alongside two older women. There seemed to be fewer máquinas driving the streets of Vedado than there had been in 2012 but, when I brought this up to Olga once, she scoffed, “there are just more people taking them.” Indeed, I always felt lucky when a car that I attempted to flag down stopped for me; increasingly they passed by, filled with people. The increased demand was perhaps a sign of the emergence of new wealth in Cuba as the mixed-market system produced more inequality.

With warnings against holding onto CUC in my mind, I paid the driver one CUC for the trip and received my change back in moneda nacional. The driver left me near Parque Fraternidad across the street from the capital building. As I got out of the car, I looked up at the building which had been under renovation since before even my first trip to Cuba in 2012. Going on four or more years of construction, the building was beginning to look splendid. I remembered my first trip to the Capitolio with my professor Laura Encarnita as she told me, “our Capitol is modeled after the one in the United States, but ours is taller.” So often the relationship between Cuba and the United States holds traces of hyper-masculinity, comparing phallic sizes. This phallic economy plays out a century of gendered, sexualized, and racialized histories that have constructed the nation as a body. As Abel Sierra Madero points out, “if before the Revolution the Cuban nation had been represented as a feminine body [vulnerable to penetration/exploitation from the north], after 1959 the warrior becomes its guardian, and Fidel Castro’s body becomes the ultimate national symbol” (Negrón-Muntaner 2011, 12). What did this phallic economy mean to Maita and Amarilys, to Yamarís and Ada, or to Adairis and the other Grupo OREMI members, the lesbian and bisexual women of color that were meeting that day? What would happen now that the United States had reopened diplomatic relations with
Cuba while maintaining the economic embargo that continues to cause scarcities of all types? What did it all mean in a world where queer black and brown bodies could be in the United States, Cuba, and Cuba’s diaspora one day and gone the next? Uncertainty permeated the air as Cubans held their breath and waited to see. I turned toward Cine Payret and saw a young boy wearing a t-shirt with the face of U.S. President Barack Obama over the word: Hope.

**On Hope and Precarity**

In this chapter, I risk to hope, to hope in the same generative ways as the women who shared with me their Caldosa. Hope is an anticipatory affective structure. It is utopian and it is human. The type of hope that animates this chapter resonates with José Esteban Muñoz’s theorization of concrete utopias, which “are the hopes of a collective” (2009, 3). Hope is at once an affect and a critical methodology that directs our gaze beyond the here and now. Finally, hope is a gesture of longing, it is about daring to long for something. Hope’s gestures are often ordinary and quotidian movements toward belonging.

This chapter is also one about dichotomies, or perhaps more specifically, a hope to overcome them. The United States, Cuba. Public, private. There, here. Visible, invisible. Masculine, feminine. Hope is a methodology that allows us to move beyond the stifling logics of the present. Like Gloria Anzaldúa’s “nepantla,” Grupo OREMI became a generative point of contact and potentiality, “transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always in transition space lacking clear boundaries. *Nepantla es tierra desconocida*” (Anzaldúa 1987, 237). Grupo OREMI troubled binaries. They brought the there of the United States to the here of Cuba. They challenged the invisibility/erasure of lesbian sexuality in a culture that was determined to segregate it to the private sphere. They *made* public space. There parties became liminal semi-public, semi-private worlds. They challenged
femininity and masculinity. They forged relationships and friendships of and for a future of their own making.

The mariconería of hope gesture in excess and surplus. Racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies that dare to move toward the creation of worlds of belonging, desire, and intimacy in the face of a precarious Cuba. As the United States and Cuba reestablish relations and Cuba advances a policy of mixed-market reforms precarity has inundated La Habana. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, these reforms have produced an increase in inequality at precisely the same time as massive lay-offs from state-run jobs have become increasingly common and long-running state supported services, such as the ration system, are systematically cut. As Kathleen Stewart states, precarity is “one register of the singularity of emergent phenomena—their plurality, movement, imperfections, immanence, incommensurateness, the way they accrete, accrue, and wear out” (2015, 221). Like hope, desire, and belonging; precarity is an affect, one that flows among bodies and through spaces, circulating in the realm of the social. Precarity is more than just precariousness, which marks the corporeal vulnerability of all bodies, it instead points to the ways in which some bodies are more vulnerable than others (Butler 2009). Precarity can take form as “a composition, a recognition, a sensibility, some collection of materialities or laws or movements” (Stewart 2015, 221). Precarity can be the sensation of not knowing what’s about to happen or the gossip from a neighbor that tells you that the government will be devaluing the CUC, “you should go change all your money to moneda nacional today!” Precarity is the instability of crumbling infrastructure and the impossibility of getting to places that one must go from a home on the outskirts of Havana. The precarious movements of a fragile body due to disease or the precarious actions of national body-politics that attempt to find a way through over a half-century of distrust and posturing. Precarity is the recognition, through a
massacre like Pulse, that one’s life may be disregarded with ease. These are the multiple, fragmented, and flowing forms of precarity that dig themselves in, suffusing the ambiente, and embedding themselves in the contested terrains of bodies, landscapes, buildings, and roads.

Precarity and hope exist within and among bodies. They are specifically corporeal. Like in the rest of this thesis, in this chapter I am invested in locating my arguments in the materiality of space and the body. Following Teresa Brennan and Juana María Rodríguez, I contend that “‘the transmission of affect means… that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies.’ How we feel and act exceeds us. We are social—inextricably, undeniably, normatively and queerly, painfully and delightfully social” (Brennan cited in: Rodríguez 2014, 17–18, Rodríguez 2014, 18). To this end, I am interested in the ways in which emotions resonate at the level of “public feelings” to borrow the phrase of Ann Cvetkovich (2007) and to explore the ways in which “public feelings world up as lived circuits of action and reaction” (Stewart 2010, 339). If the movement between precarity and hope is confusing, then I offer only that the two are inextricably connected—“the point would be to offer a vision of hope and possibility that doesn’t foreclose despair and exhaustion. It’s a profoundly queer sensibility and one that I hope can enable us to tackle the work that needs to be done and to create the pleasures that will sustain us” (Cvetkovich 2007, 467). The repetitious pulse of precarity that has suffused our times can only be held at bay through the critical practices of hope: a different type of pulse, a heartbeat of belonging that refuses to relent; a black and brown and queer type of social worlding which is altogether necessary.

The rest of this chapter follows the story of the Caldosa and traces the quotidian and ordinary moments of precarity and hope that pulse through Grupo OREMI’s continued efforts to generate and sustain public lesbian worldings in Havana. Writing the immanent worlding of
Grupo OREMI’s Caldosa and later the final peña (get-together) is an arduous task of reaching for details, of attempting to capture what is un-graspable, of moving from world to word. Despite the difficulty, it is the attempt that matters. Throughout the story I explore the ways in which Grupo OREMI troubles our notions of public and private, belonging and citizenship, here and there, and masculinity and femininity.

*Semi-publico, semi-privado: Arriving at the Caldosa*

I stood under the awning of Cine Payret waiting for Maita and Amarilys. It was 30 or so minutes after we had planned to meet when I finally saw them walking down Paseo toward me. After quick greetings and after they apologized for being late due to their bus not arriving, I followed the two into the twisting and disorienting streets of La Habana Vieja, so different from the orderly avenues of El Vedado.

We finally arrived at what appeared to be a large hole in an old wall, rather than an intentional door or opening. We passed through and although half the ceiling was open to the sky, my eyes still had to adjust to the dimness of the light. As my eyes began to widen in the light, I became aware that we had walked into a parking-lot for many *bicitaxis* [bicycle taxis]. Bicitaxis operate throughout La Habana Vieja, taking tourists between plazas and increasingly taking Cubans who can afford to pay. There were maybe 50 of them parked in the space, perhaps even more. I again looked around trying to orient myself. It was a cavernous space that appeared to be, due to the markings on the surrounding walls, where an older building had collapsed. An aging roof stood over one side and a newer makeshift metal one had been put up to cover the area of the entrance. The *bicitaxis* were parked under the roofs. The back wall went up 3 floors and a small walkway, fenced in completely with chain link, traveled along the second floor providing access to several doors set into the wall. On first floor, a large opening had been made and I could see more bicitaxis parked there. One side wall showed the trace of what used to be a
staircase leading up to a second floor which no longer existed. The entire space was shaped like a
reversed L and in the corner was a small group of women assembled together around a selection
of chairs, tables, and benches. Croquetas [croquets] and mariquitas [fried plantain chips] were
being passed around.

As I approached, I noticed that the party was assembled outside of two doors which made
up the house of the host, Perla and her partner Oelia. The house consisted of two rectangular
rooms, one was the kitchen with a bathroom in the back, the other was the bedroom and living
space. The house had no windows, just two doors (one in each room) that opened onto the
bicitaxi parking. Many of my friends from Grupo OREMI were already there including Oelia,
Ada and Yamaris, and an older dark-skinned black woman, Adairis, whom I had first befriended
at the Jornada contra la homofobia y la transfobia due to an introduction from Mateo. After
greeting me, Oelia walked toward the entrance to talk business with a bicitaxi driver that had just
entered to park his bicycle. It soon became clear to me that Perla and Oelia not only lived here
but ran the parking lot as well.

I sat down on a low wooden bench alongside Yamaris and Ada, “have you heard the
news?” I asked Yamaris. As I told her about the tiroteo (shooting) in Orlando, she shook her
head in disbelief. Soon much of the party had joined in on the conversation. Everyone was as
horrified as I was by the news. Indeed, I was surprised by how much they seemed to care. At
times the United States and, even Florida, felt a world away (rather than just 90 miles). Yet that
day, with the solidarity of Grupo OREMI supporting me, the national boundaries, the open
stretch of Caribbean water, and the entrenched trade embargo felt just a bit less obstinate. Then,
Oelia looked up and walked away to help another man park his bicitaxi.
When Oelia returned, she explained to me that this was how she and Perla made their living. It was a semi-private affair. She had to pay the government for a permit but other than that, the money sustained them. I was struck by the fact that two self-identified lesbians ran the business and had transformed the space, resolviendo [finding a way] to get by.

Throughout the caldosa and after, I was struck by how the space operated within a liminal domain between public and private. In Jafari Allen’s musings about masculine and feminine spaces he points out that,

Men predominate on the streets of Cuban cities and towns. They joke, talk, and play games in plazas, on street corners, and in parks, while women are mostly seen in route to some appointment indoors. Women and girls have less access to life en la calle (in the street)…. For women, the street is fraught with contradiction. The double and often triple duty of women who are caring for households, working at state-sponsored jobs or enrolled in classes, and perhaps engaged in other (possibly “unofficial”) money-making or money-extending opportunities seem to conspire with historical cultural values to keep all but teenagers… indoors, if not purposely moving between one point and another, in contrast to the andandería (strolling) of men. While it has been widely held in Latin American and Caribbean literature that masculinity is made en el calle, the street is more productively thought of as the public sphere… this is distinct but not opposite to la casa (literally house, but more to the point, the private sphere), which has been said to constitute the realm of feminine interest (2011, 22).

Allen’s point about the masculinization of the public sphere follows the argument advanced in Chapter 2, in that the public sphere much like the ideal citizen, exists as an unmarked masculine domain. However it is important to nuance this within the history of the Revolution that as Lillian Guerra argued (and as I furthered in Chapter 2), deployed a “new patriarchy” after 1959 (2010).

While the early years of the Revolution saw a greater inclusion of women in the labor force and in public institutions such as in the Comités de defensa de la Revolución (CDR) [Committees for the Defense of the Revolution], this did not necessarily equate to a re-coding of the public sphere or the ideal citizen (as a public subjectivity). As Rachel Hynson argues in her forthcoming
book *The State of Sex: Regulating Family and Selves in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1971*, while “women experienced, [after the Revolution,] increased opportunities to labor outside of the home, including volunteering to harvest coffee with the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) or standing guard for their local [CDR]…. The new government [also] advanced a specific type of family as the ideal to which true revolutionaries should aspire” (forthcoming, 10). Hynson contends that this “New Family” (as part of the process of the “New Man”), “reinforced the moral legitimacy of revolutionary Cuba” and “aimed to remake sexual/gender norms and produce healthy families” (forthcoming, 4). The demands on women in revolutionary Cuba, thus, didn’t change the public sphere as much as it added more responsibilities to women while still expecting them to take care of parenting and other house related work (Guerra 2010, 278–81; Saunders 2015, 198–201). In *Cuban Underground Hip Hop*, Saunders makes these connections by pointing to the Family Code which promoted heterosexual marriage as the norm (2015, 200). For Saunders, “women are defined out of ‘citizen,’ and defined as feminine subjects… the state and the public sphere, on the other hand, continues to be implicitly understood as male/masculine space” (2015, 201).

This notion of public masculinized space being associated with the street as opposed to the feminine public sphere of the house aligned closely to my experiences in Havana’s ambiente. As Chapter 3 explored, public spaces on the street were predominantly male-centered. Furthermore, the affective maps of Ada and Yamaris (Figures 3-3 and 3-4) highlighted this notion. Neither oriented their maps toward streets and instead represented the places that they attended. They did not stroll between these places, filling in a map of experiences and feelings between them, rather the spaces in between places of import remained blank. In a utopic map drawn by another member of Grupo OREMI, Mariposa, the drawing refigures not a public space
but reimagines the private space of a bedroom, complete with harmony, sensitivity, rapport, cordiality, friendship, love, communication, desire, sincerity (Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1. Mariposa’s Utopic Map. Caption: Esta Habitación con: armonía, sensibilidad, compenetración, apoyo, cordialidad, amistad, amor, comunicación, deseo, sinceridad. [This room with: harmony, sensitivity, rapport, cordiality, friendship, love, communication, desire, sincerity]
Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009261/00001

If la casa is representative of the feminine domain and el calle, the masculine, then the location of Grupo OREMI’s Caldosa lived in an ambiguous space in between. It was at once, definitively, a house party (just like the many house parties that make up the ambiente lesbiana), and, at the same time, it was a party that was taking place in a work space. A group of
lesbians that in general discussed a feeling of invisibility in Cuba, met in a space where men were in a constant state of coming and going, parking and picking up their bicitaxis as their workdays ended or began. Of course, this doubling, or even tripling, of uses in a single space is common in Havana, and especially in places like La Habana Vieja—where space is at such a premium and the concentration of people is higher. Cubans often have no choice but to use the spaces that they have available to them for socializing and to find a way to get by, resolviendo as they so often say. Likewise, my attention to the dynamics of this space is not to say that Oelia had any other option of where to host the Caldosa, although her access to a larger space, may very well have been why she offered to host. Regardless, my consideration here is not to suggest her own choice in the matter but to, instead, attune our attention to the what potentials this dynamic opens up.

I was reminded of my art history teacher while I was studying at the Instituto Superior de Arte (el ISA) [University of the Arts] who spent an inordinate amount of our class discussing the various architectural styles of Havana. Her oft-cited phrase to discuss the typical post-colonial style buildings that lined the plazas which had been built with large covered walkways still rings in my head and picked up new meaning as I began to think about the publicity of the Caldosa. “Son semi-publicos, semi-privados!” I can still hear her voice in my head reciting the phrase as she discussed the role of these spaces along the plaza where one could escape the sun, have a private conversation, and negotiate some business.

The Caldosa was one of these spaces as well. It existed like Gloria Anzaldúa’s nepantla in a liminal space between two worlds (1987). Unlike the Peña, which took place at Cine Acapulco (and will be explored at the end of this chapter), the Caldosa followed the model common to much of the lesbian ambiente, that is it was held at a member’s home (Saunders
2009, 178). However, the space was also the place of business for the couple. It existed in a liminal, or even queer, space between the private sphere of their home and the public sphere of their business. Furthermore, it was a private party between Grupo OREMI members, but Grupo OREMI is a public group open to all. As Tanya Saunders points out (and as referenced in Chapter 3), the “miki” private parties that dominated the lesbian ambiente during her fieldwork tended to produce a class and race segregated social scene, such that miki parties tended to be primarily white (2009, 178–79). Group OREMI, by comparison, was an active project that worked toward the creation of public space for women who identified as lesbian and/or bisexual, and more specifically for black lesbian women. As Saunders’s research has pointed out and my own experiences validated, Grupo OREMI was not only engaged in the creation of public space but was also invested in exploring the African heritage of Cuba and of the majority of the members (Saunders 2009, 178). Indeed, even the name of the group itself references their politics, taking the Yoruba word for friend and used to describe lesbians, Oremi, as the title of their red social [social network] (Saunders 2009, 180).

The Caldosa brought a group of self-identified black and mulata lesbians together in a space that defied clear categorization. They assembled together in a gesture of solidarity that marked their visibility. Rather than rejecting the feminized private space of the home, their transformational politics projected their world making project into the in-between realm of the semi-publico, semi-privado. The Caldosa troubled the lines between public and private space just as Grupo OREMI troubled the boundaries of masculinity and femininity, group belonging and Cubanidad, and the national borders of here and there.

Playing Dominoes and Eating Caldosa: Belonging, Sexual Citizenship, and Cubanidad

In many ways, dominoes is the national game of Cuba. One of my earliest memories of Cuba is from my first night in Havana when I was an undergraduate studying at the Instituto
Superior de Arte (ISA). I was walking the streets of El Vedado late at night and I remember seeing older men playing dominos animatedly on a card table pulled out to sit precariously – half on the street, half on the sidewalk – under a street light. Later I would see this quite often and it soon became clear to me that it was always exclusively men that played dominoes outside. Just as strolling the public street was a male-centered activity, so to was playing dominoes outside of the house.

Yet throughout my time in Cuba, I have only ever played dominoes with women, lesbian women to be specific. And at the caldosa, the women were playing round after round of dominoes, with new teams forming to try to beat the former winners. The caldosa, was my initiation into the rules of Cuban dominoes, both the rules of the game and the rules of behavior while playing. Adairis asked me to be her partner and I sat down across the small table from her, Ada and Yamaris sitting to my left and right. It was here sitting at the table with three self-identified lesbian women of color that I was brought into the national game of Cuba, as men continued to come in and out, parking their bicitaxis.

Soon after the game, the caldosa was finally ready and they served it to everyone in plastic containers. The caldosa is a type of stew that contains a variety of root vegetables, including yucca, potatoes, and malanga [taro]. The caldosa that I ate that day had such a variety of items in it that I often wasn’t sure exactly what I was eating. In many ways, the caldosa is reminiscent of the discussion in Chapter 3 of the potaje which gives its name to the cruising locations—potajeras—that many men frequent in Havana. Similarly, the caldosa represents a certain mixing, a dish for contact between various foods just as the caldosa represented Grupo OREMI as a space for the contact between bodies across racial and class lines.
The caldosa, as both a gathering and a stew, also carries with it an important political and economic history. According to *Juventud Rebelde*—the newspaper for the Unión de Jovenes Comunistas [Union of Young Communists]—the caldosa was created in July of 1979 in order to celebrate the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks on the 26\textsuperscript{th} of July and it was connected to a political move to replace private social gatherings with *fiestas cederistas*, or parties organized by the CDR [Committee for the Defense of the Revolution] (Morales Agüero 2012). The CDRs were a neighborhood system of governance and surveillance and the fiestas cederistas were an extension of this role.\textsuperscript{6} The caldosa cederista was also important in that the caldosa was a replacement for the *Ajiaco cubano*. As I will be discussing in more detail below, the typical ajiaco cubano had become a symbol of national identity and was a common and important meal for holidays.\textsuperscript{7} The ajiaco also had a more specific recipe than the caldosa, which included food items that were increasingly becoming more scarce, such as garlic.\textsuperscript{8} The caldosa can, therefore, be seen as a symbol for the state-propelled movement toward neighborhood gatherings (as opposed to private ones) and for the scarcity of traditional food items in Revolutionary Cuba.

As already stated, the ajiaco cubano has long represented the process of cubanidad and Cuban national identity. The famous Cuban anthropologist from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} to the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Fernando Ortiz, popularized this metaphor writing that “*la imagen del ajiaco criollo nos simboliza bien la formación del pueblo cubano*” [The image of the creole ajiaco symbolizes well the formation of the Cuban people]. He continues by summarizing the various parts that were influenced by various groups of people that came into contact in Cuba due to colonialism:

La indiada nos dio el maíz, la papa, la malanga, el boniato, la yuca, el ají que lo condimenta y el blanco xaoxao del casabe con que los buenos criollos de Camagüey y Oriente adornan el ajiaco al servir. Así era el primer ajiaco, el ajiaco precolombino, con carnes de jutías, de iguanas, de cocodrilos, de majás, [y] de
tortugas…. Los castellanos desecharon esas carnes indias y pusieron las suyas. Ellos trajeron con sus calabazas y nabos, las carnes frescas de res, los tasajos, las cecinas y el lacón. Y todo ello fue a dar sustancias al nuevo ajiaco de Cuba. Con los blancos de Europa, llegaron los negros de África y estos nos aportaron guineas, plátanos, ñames y su técnica cocinera. Y luego los asiáticos con sus misteriosas especies de Oriente.

[The Indian gave us corn, potato, malanga/taro, sweet potato, yucca, chili pepper and white cassava with which the good creole people of Camaguey and the East adorn the ajiaco with when serving. Thus, there was the first ajiaco, the pre-Columbian ajiaco, with meats of jutías (a large rat), iguanas, crocodiles, snakes, (and) turtles. The Spanish discarded these Indian meats and replaced them with theirs. They brought, along with their pumpkins and turnips, fresh beef, dried beef, smoked/cured meat and pork shoulder. And all of this was to give the new ajiaco of Cuba substance. With the whites of Europe, black africans arrived and they brought us guineafowl, plantains, yams, and their cooking technique. And then Asians with their mysterious Eastern spices….] (Ortiz 1940)

In Ortiz’s vision of the constitution of cubanidad, the ajiaco serves as an analogy (which operates in much the same way as the melting pot-myth of the United States) where the various influences from Europe, Africa, and Asia mix together to produce the soup which is, of course, cubanidad. What this ignores is the ways in which power is inflected within these “ingredients.” As Ortiz himself mentions, the Spanish came and replaced the meats used by the indigenous which are considered inferior to those traditional in Spain.

The ajiaco, caldosa, and potaje can be seen as powerful analogies for social contact. Cubanidad is created within the “contact zone,” of the ajiaco, “a space where the echoes of colonial encounters still reverberate” (Muñoz 1999, 91). The analogy furthers our understanding of contact by emphasizing that bodies are given meaning by and through relations with others. As Mary Louise Pratt states, “a ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and ‘travelees,’ not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (1992, 7). Indeed, what the ajiaco occludes is the power relations of colonial
contact between Columbus and the Taínos, of the forced displacement and enslavement of
African people, of the continued patriarchal structure of society that feminized the private
sphere, and of heteronormativity, that punished and made invisible queer bodies. The Caldosa
continues these erasures while also making invisible new relationships of uneven contact brought
about by the Revolution, the scarcity of food, the creation of neighborhood surveillance regimes,
and the elimination of holidays.

Despite many critics of the Cuban government that happily wield queer bodies when they
become useful, persecution of homosexuality was not started by the Revolution. As Frances
Negrón-Muntaner states,

un análisis histórico más amplio revela que, lejos de comenzar en 1959, los
discursos antihomosexuales tienen raíces más profundas en Cuba. Si bien las
primeras décadas de la Revolución fueron la época en que se cocinó el incomible
ajiaco de la homofobia como política oficial, el pensamiento antihomosexual se
remonta en la isla al surgimiento de la idea de lo nacional. Desde al menos finales
del siglo XVIII, un buen número de intelectuales influyentes han concebido a la
nación cubana en términos masculinos y guerreros
[A broader analysis suggests that far from beginning in 1959, antihomosexual
discourses in Cuba have deep roots. Although it was during those first decades of
the Revolution when the unpleasant ajiaco of homophobia as state policy was
cooked up, heterosexist thinking goes back on the island to the emergence of the
idea of the nation. Since at least the end of the 18th century, influential intellectuals
have conceived the Cuban nation in masculine and military terms] (2008, 168).

When considered in relation to Grupo OREMI and its members often ambivalent relationship
with the Centro nacional de educación sexual (CENESEX) and the state, the choice to serve the
Caldosa seems to create a certain appeal to the notions of Cubanidad, to belonging within the
Sexual Citizenship designated by the state, despite the frequent erasure of lesbian bodies and
discourses, and the significant precarity that dominates their lives.

Muñoz’s notion of disidentification as “a survival strategy that works within and outside
the dominant public sphere simultaneously” provides a framework for understanding the
complexities and politics of belonging that saturate the space of the Caldosa. For Muñoz,
“disidentifications is meant to offer a lens to elucidate minoritarian politics that is not monicausal or monothematic, one that is calibrated to discern a multiplicity of interlocking identity components and the ways in which they affect the social” (1999, 8). Disidentifications are antiassimilationist, to disidentify is a strategy for queers of color that see themselves in neither the color-blind work in queer theory nor the heteronormative work of black and anti-colonial theory.¹⁰ For the members of Grupo OREMI, disidentification becomes a primary strategy through which they create spaces of belonging that sustain their publics. In this way, the black and mulata lesbian members of OREMI can still identify with cubanidad’s domino set or Ortiz’s ajiaco or, even, the caldosa cederista, despite the underlining racial and heterosexual power structures which are implicit within them, and which they will critique openly.

Likewise, Yamaris, Ada, Oelis and other members of the group find ways of both identifying with and separating themselves from the sexual citizenship that is sponsored by CENESEX. The Grupo OREMI caldosa can, thus, be seen as a survival strategy that challenges the invisibility of lesbians and, in particular, black lesbians through “disidentificatory identity performances” which make apparent their publicity despite the erasure that is infused within the very notion of the caldosa (Muñoz 1999, 7). Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 2, the particular assemblage of (at times) conflicting discourses and ideologies, produces gaps for such strategies to take hold. That is, Grupo OREMI’s caldosa is not an apolitical middle ground, or a simple reaffirmation of the hegemony of the state, rather it is a strategic and methodological reversal.¹¹ As Muñoz tells us, “disidentification negotiate strategies of resistance within the flux of discourse and power” (1999, 19).

The Grupo OREMI Caldosa stands as a world making practice that continues in the face of precarity. As Tanya Saunders points out Grupo OREMI has already been shut down by
before, which is partly due to the “intertwined… racialized sex/gender system that continues to impede Black lesbians’ ability to participate fully in Cuban society as autonomous subjects” (2015, 57). Indeed, Yamaris once told Mateo and I a story about her not being able to get into a hotel in Habana Vieja. While the worker at the hotel had claimed that it was because of their dress, Yamaris pointed out that other lighter skinned people were allowed in. As Mateo has observed, Yamaris “offered multiple explanations that spoke to the enduring intimacies of race, gender, and sexuality in Cuba: She would surely have been let in if she were lighter skinned, perhaps even if she were just a little less butch” (Leslie Santana 2016a). Despite the uncertainty of continuing as a group and the continual erasure of Black lesbians in Cuba, Grupo OREMI continues to struggle forward, identifying with what they can and rejecting the rest, hoping for and toward alternative worlds of belonging.

Utopic Imaginings in a Disidentificatory Present

If disidentifactory practices are one mode of survival and endurance in the present, so too are the utopic imaginings that keep Grupo OREMI and its members looking toward the horizon. As Muñoz points out in Cruising Utopia (2009), disidentification can be “in the service of a project that is critically utopian” (145). It is this ability to disidentify that allows members of Grupo OREMI, like Yamaris and Ada, to transform their relationships to the critical affect of longing. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the Cuban Revolution has long deployed a longing that has asked for Cubans to sacrifice in the name of the Revolution in the face of hardships caused by the Bloqueo [the embargo] and the mismanagement of resources by the state (Guerra 2012). This longing is also predicated on a utopic moment that characterizes the Revolution’s beginnings (the ISA being a prime example, see Chapter 3). Yamaris, Ada, and other Grupo OREMI members deploy their own longings which take up resonance with hegemonic forms offered by the state while simultaneously rejecting it in a disidentificatory process, looking back
to the utopic imaginings of the early Revolution, and looking forward, gesturing toward a collective future. In this way, we can see that longing, like all affects, are social phenomena that are imbued power. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, affects can provide access to “subjugated knowledges”\(^\text{12}\) of the subaltern subject just as they can also evidence hegemonic structural processes such as racialization (Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015). Disidentification provides us an analytical term for the processes and survival strategies of the members of Grupo OREMI, and helps one understand the complexities that give life to their utopic imaginings.

Figure 5-2. Yamaris’s Utopic Map. Caption: (From left to right) Acapulco, personas –inclusivas –no discriminatoria –con pertenencia. CENESEX. Mi Casa, Cerca de estos lugares importantes para mí. Mar. Calle X – Barrio X – Ciudad X. [Acapulco Theater, People that are: -inclusive –not discriminatory – with belonging. CENESEX. My House, close to places that are important to me. Sea. Street X – Neighborhood X – City X.] Original available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00009266/00001
Perhaps the most obvious example of the disidentifying longings of Grupo OREMI is in Figure 5-2 where Yamaris has included in her utopic imaginings the offices of CENESEX. Just as the members of Grupo OREMI identify with Cubanidad while simultaneously critiquing it, Yamaris is able to identify with CENESEX as not only a place of belonging and desire (as represented in her affective map in Figure 3-4) but as an integral part of her imagined ideal future despite also having reservations about the role of the government office in her world and the precarity that it has generated. To provide just one example, Yamaris is one of the integral performers for Grupo OREMI’s Peña and, yet, during the Jornada Contra la Homofobia y la Transfobia, Yamaris was denied her request to perform in transformismo masculino [as a drag king] at the Gala event (or any other event, for that matter) by the event’s coordinators at CENESEX. Yamaris took this to be another example of the invisibility of lesbians during the Jornada and more broadly in Cuban Society. Yamaris’s Utopic Map, with CENESEX prominently in the center between her house and the Acapulco Cinema, demonstrates her ability to hold together a critique of the cooptive impulses of CENESEX, their complicity in the invisibility of black and mulata lesbians in Havana, and, at the same time, its integral role in her survival as a place where she is able to forge worlds of belonging and desire and imagine liberation. Indeed, I am also struck by the fact that Yamaris choose to add consignas [slogans] to the Acapulco Theater where she is involved in actively creating public space. She labels the venue where she performs her transformismo as a space that is occupied by people that are inclusivas [inclusive], no discriminatorias [not discriminatory], and filled con pertenencia [with belonging], meanwhile she leaves CENESEX, the kind of location where one would more generally expect to be associated with consignas completely blank, perhaps implicitly refrencing her own disidentification with the state.
Yamaris, like many members of Grupo OREMI, lives on the outskirts of Havana. Yamaris, Ada, and Adairis all lived in the Párraga neighborhood to the far south of Havana. To get to Vedado, where Grupo OREMI held its meetings in the CENESEX building or to Nuevo Vedado to get to the Acapulco Theater, they would take a series of buses, a commute that could take an hour or more since the buses are less than predictable. Indeed, commuting through la Ciudad de La Habana [the City of Havana], took a toll on Yamaris and caused her significant stress. It is, therefore, not surprising that an integral part of the utopic map that she drew for the archive has to do with the difficulty of mobility.

In her map (Figure 5-2), Yamaris draws the important places of belonging in her life next to each other. Arrows in between the buildings represent the proximity that she wishes these places had. As opposed to her Affective Map (Figure 3-4), where each of these spaces are separated by white empty space, the utopic map reimagines these worlds as not only connected by a circulating public but also dares to dream of a world where they are spatially connected. Just as Grupo OREMI was able to breakdown the dichotomies of public and private, Yamaris continues to challenge notions of public and private space within her utopic map. Rather than imagining access to the masculinized public space of the calle—by connecting these places of import with a street network, for example—she imagines them as existing within a semi-privado, semi-publico status, both on the street and in the private indoor domains associated with femininity.

The Acapulco Cinema, where the Peña is held and one of the few places of public lesbian space; CENSEX, the government office where OREMI is able to meet; the sea, where Yamaris desires to go to more often; and her home, the private place for her and her partner, are imagined to be together. She labels this utopic spatiality: “Calle X – Barrio X – Ciudad X” [Street X –
Neighborhood X – City X]. For her, it doesn’t matter what city, what neighborhood, what street, just as long as these spaces are together and take away the precarity of mobility that dominates her life.

Of course, this is also not solely an individualist utopia. It is one of and for a collective. Her imaginings are personal and social. She labels Cine Acapulco as a space filled with people that are inclusive and nondiscriminatory and as a space inundated with belonging. Similarly Figure 5-3, which shows Ada’s utopic map, a depiction of a house for her and Yamaris, away from the danger of her current family house (see Figure 3-4), complete with a garden and a
“puerta a [la] calle” [door to the street] and close to the sea. Since public space exists in a masculine domain and private space a feminine one, it is important to resist the impulse to assume that her depiction of a home only references her own individualistic jouissance. Rather, the picture is inflected with relationality. Ada’s longing for a house with a “puerta a calle” [door to the street] (as opposed to both her current home and Yamaris’s home that are built on lots that extend back from the street, making them difficult to find) represents her dreams to have a home that is also a social space.

Furthermore, it is a space of desire or, in her words, “de la pasión” [of passion] for her and Yamaris. The map is infused with female sexuality, which is otherwise made invisible. As I have pointed out earlier, outside of the Peña and Grupo OREMI, almost all lesbian publics circulate in private homes and, as Saunders has pointed out, those that have private homes to host are most often white (2009, 180). Thus, for Ada, a mulata woman, having her own house with Yamaris, also represents her ability to create inclusive spaces of belonging for black and mulata lesbians.

Ada’s map also shows water tanks and a satellite (complete with wiring going in through the window) in her utopic home, both are practices that are technically illegal and yet widely practiced in Havana. The fact that she has included these in her utopic map further demonstrates the ways that she is able to simultaneously see the state as both absent and central within her world making practices.

Finally, I think it is worth noting that both Yamaris and Ada have included the sea within their affective and utopic maps. For Yamaris, the Malecón [the seawall in Havana] was a space of desire and, for both of them, the sea is represented in their utopic maps as a space of liberation from the difficulty of their lives. Of course, importantly, it also represents a particularly
Caribbean experience, that is, Cuba is an island nation, one where the sea is almost always a present feature and which structures world making projects and utopic imaginings.

The utopic maps of Yamaris and Ada demonstrate the critical affects of hope and longing which not only demonstrate the importance of future oriented imaginings within the lesbian publics, but it also gives access to a critique of the moment. They reference the subjugated knowledges and corporeal practices of black and mulata lesbians who are more often than not made completely invisible and they also evidence their survival practices in a disidentificatory present. They are about dreaming, hoping, and longing in the face of an increasingly precarious and insecure world. Yamaris, Ada, and other members of Grupo OREMI imagine an inclusive and coalitional political world, as queer women of color, they do not have the luxury of turning their backs on the revolutionary process, on CENESEX, or on gay men (they always invited at least one drag queen to perform at the Peña along with the drag performances of Yamaris, Ada, and Maita). Instead, they gesture toward new worlds of belonging, identifying with what has sustained them and resisting invisibility by imagining new forms of publicity.

**The Mourning of Pulse**

Twelve days after the Caldosa, just shy of two weeks after the news of the Pulse Massacre had shocked me and many of my friends in Cuba, I made my way back to Cine Acapulco for what would be the last Peña that I could attend before returning to the United States. I arrived early and sat in the front row waiting for people to start arriving. Soon Adairis, who was emceeing the event, joined me and offered me a small cup of aguardiente, a strong alcohol that was fermented from sugar cane and was likely made by one of Adairis’s neighbors. She told me that she planned to start the event by asking for a moment of silence for the Pulse victims. Since we were still waiting for the rest of the performers to arrive, Adairis and I sat back and drank the aguardiente talking about the tragedy of Pulse. It seemed impossible that almost
two weeks had passed since the day of the massacre, the day that Adairis taught me to play
dominoes and we ate Caldosa. Soon the event started, and true to her word Adairis started by
describing the massacre:

En estos momentos no pasamos por alto un hecho, una masacre, que ocurrió en
Orlando, la Florida. Tenemos un compañero nuestro aquí americano, que lo ha
seguido mucho y sabe todo que lo que se sufrió allí en un club gay donde fueron
asesinados, por un sujeto X, 49 personas muertas, entre esos había dos cubanos en
ese club gay esa noche, y 53 heridos, de esto 50 heridos, 14 están salvos el resto no
se sabe si estaban o no.

[In these times, we can’t overlook an incident, a massacre, that occurred in
Orlando, Florida. We have a friend of ours here [referring to me in the crowd] who
has followed what has happened there and knows everything that was suffered
there in the gay club where they were killed, by a person X, 49 people are dead,
among them were two Cubans in that gay club that night, and 50 were wounded, of
this 50, 14 were saved and the rest we still don’t know whether they will be or not.]

This was the first thing that Adairis said, starting the Peña with a call to not overlook the
massacre. This regional, even Caribbean, perspective was highlighted by Adairis’s reference to
the two Cubans who were killed in the Pulse Massacre, two Cubans that lived in Cuba’s
diaspora.

She continued her regional focus by foregrounding race within the massacre, a framing that
was all too often left unsaid within U.S. circulating discourses around Pulse. She points out that
it was

una masacre que la mayoría fueron de Puerto Rico… Hay personas que no se
imaginan por que fue el crimen?... Un señor que odiaba tanto y que era homofóbico
lo que pasa es que odiaba…los latinos… los puertorriqueños de la raza mulata y
ese día aprovechó.

[a massacre of mostly people from Puerto Rico…. And there are people that cannot
imagine why the crime happened? A man that hated so much and that was
homophobic. What happened is that he hated the Latinos and Puerto Ricans that
were mulato and that day he took advantage of them being there.]

Her analysis connected the Cuban diaspora and the Puerto Rican diaspora within Florida, and it
sought to point out regional circulation and contact of racialized queer bodies linking them to
their own political world making project in Havana. These connections could be seen as a
regional perspective that is akin to Rosamond S. King’s “caribglobal” analysis, which she points out “includes the areas, experiences, and individuals within both the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora” (2014, 3).

Finally, Adairis ended her discussion of the Pulse Massacre by connecting it with Grupo OREMI’s politics around gender. She points out that the Peña would go on to demonstrate “que es la verdadera masculinidad, como se vive dentro de nuestra pueblo, y la parte que nos corresponde” [what true masculinity is, as it is lived by our people and the part that corresponds to us]. Suggesting that their own female masculinity, the masculinity portrayed by the transformismo masculino that would be performed, was a more “true” form of masculinity than that of the violence of Pulse. Furthermore, she sutures the violence of Pulse to the everyday and structural violence that effects women throughout the region:

Entonces, mañana es el día de la gala, el día de la violencia contra los negros esta vez como las mujeres sufren. Como mujeres, tenemos problemas por casos y casos de violencia domestica… violencia de todo tipo. Entonces, no dejar tampoco por alto que mañana es un “día naranja” donde la mayoría de las personas que conocen que los 25 de cada mes es el “Día de la violencia contra la mujer” se viste de naranja; un pañuelo naranja, algo naranja. [So tomorrow is the day of the gala, the day of violence against black people, this time as women suffer. As women, we have problems due to cases and cases of domestic violence… violence of all types. So, to not overlook that as well, tomorrow is an “orange day” where most people, who know that the 25th of each month is the “Day of Violence Against Women,” will dress in orange: an orange handkerchief, something orange.]

Throughout the introduction, Adairis made explicit the interconnected violence associated with race, gender, and sexuality. She troubled these boundaries, refusing to separate womanhood from race or race from sexuality and, even more so, troubled the boundaries between the United States, Cuba, and Puerto Rico; advancing a solidarity between Grupo OREMI and the two dead Cubans, the Puerto Ricans that were there, and the community around Pulse more broadly. The Peña became a place for her to gesture toward the connection between the Pulse massacre and
the actions that they were taking to wear orange against the violence against racialized and
gendered bodies.

Grupo OREMI advanced a coalitional politics that refused to be limited by the static
notions of national borders. Their politics attuned to their own racialized, gendered, and
sexualized positions which disidentified with the sexual citizenship projected by CENESEX. They
adopted a regional perspective that understood the flows and movements of racialized and queer
bodies throughout the Caribbean, which included the victims of the Pulse massacre. Adairis’
words of caring and collectivity toward myself and to the entire community of Orlando were
gestures toward a collective politics of belonging. They were gestures that were infused with a
critical hope for the future.

Thus, the Peña started in defiance of the precarity that saturates the lives of queer people
of color in “Nuestra América” an America that spans the western hemisphere.13 Neither the
homophobia nor the racism that underscored the massacre were lost on Adairis as she opened the
event. She asked for a moment of silence so that we could collectively mourn. Then, the Peña began. Yamaris and Ada performed various songs and soon we were all dancing together,
movements of belonging and hope in the face of precarity.

Notes

1 *Caldosa* refers in this context to both the name of the event and to a stew or soup which was prepared for the event.

2 The Pulse Massacre happened on June 12, 2016 in Orlando, Florida. Forty-nine predominantly queer of color individuals (2 of whom were Cuban) were killed in the Pulse Nightclub and fifty-three others were wounded.

3 As Devyn Spence Benson has demonstrated, throughout the period of what is called Civil Rights in the United States, Cuba supported an actively antiracist platform which positioned itself against the U.S. and that propped up its own myths of racial democracy. Indeed, he points out that critiques of the U.S. around race were picked up across the population and especially by young Cubans and student leaders. He states: “the [protesting of the U.S.-owned] Woolworth [store] demonstrates the wide-ranging support for the U.S. civil rights movement among student leaders in Cuba. It also reveals both the pride some Cuban youth felt in being part of the revolutionary movement sweeping their country and their enthusiasm for international social justice causes…. These opinions recalled the claims made by Cuban leaders when they invited African Americans to vacation on the island and worked to reinforce public discourses that imagined Cuba as a racial paradise” (Benson 2016, 161–62). However it is also important to
recognize that “not all Cubans agreed with this official rhetoric… Afro-Cubans in particular challenged the revolution’s claims of achieved racial equality” (Benson 2016, 162).

4 See also Kristin Hoganson’s (1998) work on the ways in which gendered notions of citizenship and political leadership played into the politics surrounding the Spanish-American War. These constructions furthermore rely on not only gendered ideas but also racial ones

5 See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of this and Tanya Sauner’s article on Grupo OREMI (2009). 

6 In the earlier years of the Revolution, the attendance at CDRs or Comités de defensa de la Revolución meetings was often mandatory. In Visions of Power in Cuba, Lillian Guerra describes them as part of a process of “grassroots dictatorship… the state invited citizens to be its principal intelligence agents through the national organization of CDRs” (Guerra 2012, 200). The attack on the Moncada Barracks happened in 1953 and while regarded as the start of the “Revolution” lead to the death of 49 of the 87 people that attacked the building and the arrest of Fidel Castro, for more information on the Moncada see Ramón Bonachea and Marta San Martín’s The Cuban Insurrection, 1952-1959 (1974).

7 Furthermore, at this time, in an attempt to end private social gatherings, the Cuban government had cancelled all holidays, particularly Noche Buena (Christmas Eve) and Christmas and had replaced it with the anniversary of the Moncada Barracks attack.

8 It should be noted that the role of scarcity in the history of the Caldosa is particularly fascinating because of the timing of its “invention.” As the Juventud Rebelde article outlines the Caldosa was created in July 1979. While there was certainly shortages of staple foods due to the governments focus on exportable crops, it was not the height of scarcity in Cuba. Indeed, soon after in 1980, the government opened up the Agropecuarios [farmer’s markets] that made goods more available than they had previously been (and perhaps made making an ajiaco more feasible). These markets are closed again by Fidel in 1986. See the forthcoming dissertation by Alexis Baldacci.

9 See Chapter 2 for a more detailed analysis of this. As I argued there, following the work of Lillian Guerra, the Revolution did indeed enforce what she has called a “new patriarchy” (Guerra 2010). However, that new patriarchy relied on an already established heteropatriarchal structure of relations that predated the Revolution. See also Sierra Madero (2006) and Emilio Bejel (2001).

10 Muñoz uses the illustrative example of Frantz Fanon’s work. Muñoz points out that while his work is foundational as an anticolonial text it is also one that “dismisses the possibility of a homosexual component” and that dismisses queerness as a “white thing” (1999, 8–9). He then continues: “Think, for a moment, of the queer revolutionary from the Antilles, perhaps a young woman who has already been burned in Fanon’s text by his writing on the colonized woman. What process can keep an identification with Fanon, his politics, his work possible for this woman? In such a case a disidentification with Fanon might be one of the only ways in which she is capable of reformatting the powerful theorist for her own project, one that might be as queer and feminist as it is anticolonial” (Muñoz 1999, 9).

11 Since I explored a biopolitical analysis in Chapter 2 based on Michel Foucault’s work, it seems relevant here to point out that disidentification is a strategy that is partly informed by Foucault’s notions of discourse as well. As Foucault states in The History of Sexuality, Volume 1 “we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies… We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (1978, 100–101).

12 The term “subjugated knowledges” comes from Michel Foucault. I am further indebted to Rodriguez (2014, 17) for originally pointing out the connection between subjugated knowledges and affect.

13 Nuestra América refers to the famous work of Cuban Revolutionary leader and thinker, José Martí (2002). In the essay, titled “Nuestra América” he argues for an essential unity between the Americas and discusses the relationship between the United States and the rest of the Americas.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

As the name of this thesis—Cruising Havana—suggests, I have explored the urban worldings of Havana’s potajeras, and I have also used cruising as an embodied epistemology, a way to move between various emergent scenes, worlds of immanent political force, and to gesture toward the connections between them. Throughout I have tried to put the emerging literature around sexuality and affect studies into conversation with these emergent worlds. This thesis was an attunement to the affective experience of space, which suggested that the materiality of space is sutured to public feelings of belonging, intimacy, and desire as well as precarity, danger, and longing. It has also been a meditation on the ways in which gesture, the physical articulation of bodies and the metaphorical action of a body politic, moves toward the creation of alternative worldings. Cruising Havana has, furthermore, been an explorative project that has reflexively considered how to write about the ephemerality of gesture and the trace of affective connections.

I employed a critical mixed-methods ethnography in order to accomplish these tasks. Throughout the proceeding text, I have drawn on the fleeting ethnographic encounters that precipitated from observant participation in these worlds and I have followed what Kathleen Stewart has called a “radical empiricism” where I have attempted to move from world to word (2016). Part of this process has been to generate an affective reader experience that captures, if always imprecisely, the ephemera of bodies in movement and feeling.

I have also applied a critical hermeneutic to the maps that were a result of the participatory mapping activity. This activity produced 17 maps that have been archived online as a resource for not only scholars but, more importantly, for the habaneros [people from Havana] that are involved in actively forming alternative worlds of belonging. This mapping project,
which documented the spaces that people frequented and the feelings that they experienced within them as well as their utopic imaginings for these spaces, allowed the participants to evidence their own lives and embodied politics. These maps demonstrated not only the suturing of affects, such as belonging, intimacy, and desire but they also the critical hope that sustains these worlds, critiquing the here and now and looking onward to something else.

In Chapter 1, I outlined the theoretical argument of this thesis. Following affect studies and in particular the brand of affect that has been developed by queer of color scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz (2009) and Juana María Rodríguez (2014), I suggest paying close attention to the affects of desire, belonging, intimacy, and longing. Furthermore, within this chapter, I propose mariconería as an embodied queer politic that registers the movements of bodies as they form alternative worlds.

“The Queen of Cuba goes to Havana City” provided the historical and contemporary context in which the sexual politics of Havana circulate. This chapter argued that belonging to the Cuban nation has been historically gendered and sexualized. I focused on the post-Revolution biopolitical regulation of bodies that advanced the ideology of the New Man and gave rise to the Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción [Military Units for the Support of Production] or UMAP camps of the 1960s. Then, I explored the ways that these ideologies have become assembled to contemporary modernity narratives that circulate transnationally. I located the Centro nacional de educación sexual (CENESEX) at the fulcrum between these two, often contradictory, discourses. Ultimately, this chapter highlighted the gaps that form in state policy and that allow for the alternative world making projects that the rest of the thesis examines to form.
Chapter 3, “Affective Cartographies,” examined closely the suturing of affect on to spaces through a combination of ethnographic encounters and a close reading of the Affective and Utopic Maps. This chapter argued that these spaces are socially produced alternative worlds of belonging. This chapter suggested that these spaces also function as places of bodily and social contact; a type of contact that reaches across racial and class-based divisions.

In Chapter 4, I employ an experimental ethnographic cruising of various scenes as a mediation on mariconería. This chapter suggests that gesture cannot be read as simply coded discourse but rather has what Roland Barthes called a “third meaning” (1977). I start this chapter by exploring the fragmented alternative worlding that is constantly being formed at the potajera. I then turn toward dance and other corporeal practices that foster belonging, solidarity, and intimacy within Havana’s ambiente. “Gesturing Toward Connection” followed the movements of bodies and embodied politics that are necessary to survival.

Finally, Chapter 5, “On the Pulse of Precarity” considered the coalitional politics of Grupo OREMI as they fostered public space for lesbians in Havana. This chapter takes as its point of departure, the Pulse massacre in Orlando, Florida in order to highlight the ways in which OREMI’s politics extended beyond national borders and sought connections with other racialized and sexualized bodies across the region. This chapter explored the hope that sustains their emerging public in the face of the precarity that saturates their everyday lives.

_Cruising Havana_ has been my own gesture toward the connections between these worlds. In exploring them, this thesis has formed an archive of public feelings and embodied political movements that existed at a specific spatiotemporal moment. It has been my goal to document these worlds, the queer bodies that move within them, and the utopic longings that keep them looking onward, beyond the precarity of the present. I can only hope that this archive will
continue to grow and provide my friends and the participants of this study a space to look back on and to inspire their continual political imaginings for the future.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kerry White was born in Fort Collins, Colorado in 1990. They graduated from Lewis & Clark College in 2013 with a degree in international affairs and a minor in Latin American studies. While at Lewis & Clark College, Kerry studied abroad in Havana, Cuba at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) during the spring semester of 2012. After graduating, they spent a year in Chile before returning to the United States and attending the University of Florida. Kerry graduated with a Master of Arts in Latin American Studies from the University of Florida in 2017.