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Transnational Diasporic Formations: A Poetics of Movement and Indeterminacy

How many doors do you have to knock on before you find your own?
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

As many theorists have noted, the realities of modern-day globalization, with its technological exchanges and circulation of people and all things popular and cultural, prevents us from maintaining stationary or exclusivist paradigms when analyzing transnational diasporic formations. As a result of this movement and circulation, "the immigrant, the exile, the tourist and the urban wanderer," Nicolas Bourriaud observes, "are the dominant figures of contemporary culture" (55-56).[1]

The Cuban diaspora—the primary focus of my scholarly and creative work—serves as an interesting case in which to explore and rethink the manner in which diasporic subjects self-identify, or are identified by others, in the context of movement and flux. In some sense, all Cuban diasporic discourses and cultural expressions measure, consciously or unconsciously, against a central absence. That absence is the island. Certain strains of this discourse share with other diasporic articulations the tendency to idealize the past; make nativist claims to *authentic* cultural, racial or ethnic, and/or national identity, and express a utopian sense of *patria* or homeland as a fixed and unchanging physical place

[1] See Nicolas Bourriaud's *The Radicant*, in which he discusses at length the manner in which a radicant aesthetic is unlike Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome (first developed in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Noting the rhizome's non-hierarchical and fluid structure, as well as its interconnected significations, Bourriaud nevertheless distinguishes this image from the radicant by pointing out that "unlike the rhizome, which is defined as a multiplicity that brackets out the question of the subject from the beginning, the radicant takes the form of a trajectory or path; the advance of a singular object…The radicant implies a subject, but one that is not reducible to a stable, closed, and self-contained identity. It exists exclusively in the dynamic form of its wandering and the contours of the circuit it describes, which are two modes of visibility. In other words, it is movement that ultimately permits the formulation of an identity…[it] views the self as constructed out of borrowings, citations, and proximities…[and] differs from the rhizome in its emphasis on the itinerary, the path, as a dialogical or inter-subjective narrative that unfolds between the subject and the surfaces it transverses, to which it attaches its roots to produce what might be termed an installation: one "installs oneself" in a place or situation in a makeshift or precarious way, and the subject's identity is nothing but the temporary result of this encampment, during which acts of translation are performed. Translation of a path into a local language, translation of oneself into a milieu—translation in both directions. Thus, the radicant subject appears as a construction or montage, in other words, as a work born of endless negotiation" (55-56). A huge thanks to my dear friend Cafetera Angela Valella for introducing me to Bourriaud's work.

of origin. Adhering to the teleology of origin and return, another common feature they share is the impulse to describe the experience of displacement in terms of constructing a temporary "home away from home" (Safran).[2] Defined as such, the condition of diaspora or exile, as postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha observes, "falls in the shadow" of an "idea" of nationhood that is fundamentally static and territorially or temporally defined (200-204).

In my previous writing on the Cuban scattering, I have argued consistently for a more nuanced, malleable paradigm that moves away from essentialist, and territorially and linguistically-based concepts of racial and/or ethnic, national, or cultural identification, and posits instead a poetics of movement, multilocality, and indeterminacy.[3] As an island—a geographical space with mutable and porous borders—Cuba has never been a fixed cultural, political, or geographical entity. In consequence of its strategic location, the island became a site of convergences, a place of migratory interactions, a circuit and receptacle for all manner of exchanges, some of which predate the first Spanish colonial interventions.[4] As a result, Cuban culture is stratified and striated by multiple and varied influences; the sea that circumscribes and ultimately defines the island suggests perennial fluidity, constant movement, and cross-pollination.

Just as Cuba and its people have absorbed and been transformed by diverse presences and cultural elements, it has also become a moveable nation, a traveling, prismatic site of rupture and continuity resulting from continuous out-migrations and scatterings. Rooted in both the indigenous and colonial pasts, the realities of migration and exile fundamentally inform and temper contemporary Cuban history and are the underlying conditions that inform the Cuban diasporic experience.[5] Cuba's cultural continuity, in turn, has always depended on a process of absorption, translation, transformation, and synthesis that has occurred in this context of movement. Thus, when speaking of present-day Cubans, one is referring simultaneously to those who reside on the island as well as to a multilocal population that has spread across the globe and now includes three generations born

[2] See William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return"; see also James Clifford's "Diasporas" in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. The text was originally published in *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302-338.

[3] See my edited collections *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) and *Cuba:* Idea *of a Nation Displaced* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

[4] Precolonial Cuba was frequently the destination point, for example, for Caribs canoeing to the island from present-day Venezuela and Colombia. Indigenous groups, such as the Arawaks also migrated among the islands in the Caribbean.

[5] Following the conclusion of the Ten Years War (1868-1878), a cohort of separatists, as well as thousands who sought work outside of Cuba because of the economic depression that occurred in the aftermath of the war, left the island. Exiled separatists established themselves in various parts of the United States, Latin America, and Europe. The most prominent figure in this struggle was the renowned poet, journalist, and philosopher José Martí, the leader of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano y Puertorriqueño (Cuban and Puerto Rican Revolutionary Party).

outside Cuba following the 1959 revolution. The way to locate Cuba, therefore, is not simply by fixing one's gaze on the island, but also, as Tagore suggests, by "knocking on others' doors."

My most recent investigation into Cuban diasporic discourse, *Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora: Setting the Tent Against the House*, seeks to build upon and extend my previous work by developing a more creatively unstable theoretical approach to diasporic subjectivity—one that takes account of the fluid and shifting aspects of situated or contextual subjectivity, and troubles traditional concepts of spatiality yet remains rooted in the local and the historical.[6] Specifically, it rethinks transnational diasporic formations through the lens of visual cultural expression by interpreting the work of an expanding and alternating group of diasporic artists who participate in an evolving, itinerant, ongoing, and multi-media exhibition called *CAFÉ: The Journeys of Cuban Artists*.[7] The Cafeteros represent different generations, including several from the Cuban avant-garde, and some were actually born in the diaspora following the 1959 revolution or left the island as infants or young children.

Due in part to the multivalent social and political positionings and perspectives of the nearly forty artists I interviewed for this study, the various and oftentimes conflicting manner in which the Cafeteros self-identified served as an ideal metaphor by which to explore critical questions regarding the many and sometimes paradoxical ways diasporic subjects self-affiliate or situate themselves in the narratives of scattering and displacement. Although they were ostensibly linked by the realities of displacement, their positions were not identical as a result of a range of variable factors. In turn, the distinct responses to their work by critics and curators both on and off the island reveals the vastly different ways they are perceived and identified or categorized as a result of the fact that they are no longer residing on the island.

Taking account of and validating these various and frequently conflicting positionalities while allowing them to co-exist proved to be quite a feat. It required me to rethink transnational diasporic designations in a more relational as opposed to unified manner in order to orchestrate these artists' "contrapuntal" perspectives (to borrow Edward Said's term) within what proved to be a densely woven, kaleidoscopic narrative of displace-

[6] This essay is excerpted from the introduction to this book-length project: *Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora: Setting the Tent Against the House* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011). For more information, see: http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/books/hercba.html

[7] *CAFÉ*—an acronym for Cuban American Foremost Exhibitions—is curated by Cuban artist Leandro Soto and directed by his wife Grisel Pujalá. *CAFÉ* disrupts traditional western modes of curating art exhibits. Rather than having a fixed set of showings in predetermined institutional locations, the exhibit is itinerant and ongoing; its location is unplanned in advance, and exhibits may be presented in a wide range of venues. In other words, Leandro Soto does not know where the next showing will be located, and he does not have fixed ideas about whom he will include in future exhibits.

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ment and dislocation.[8] In considering the manner in which the Cafeteros self-identify or self-affiliate, I was confronted immediately with a myriad of discrepant historical and political accounts, and divergent articulations and renderings of the "real" and the "symbolic" island. These accounts reflected their variegated ideological and social or political positions as well as their diverse experiences and perspectives. More often than not, they pivoted on a range of questions regarding authenticity, such as: Who is a *real* Cuban? Who is more Cuban? Who can create Cuban art? Can Cuban art only be created on the island? If so, does it cease to be Cuban art if it is produced outside of Cuba?

A host of intersecting social determinations complicated individuals' experiences or memories of life on the island, for they were informed by the entangled relationships all diasporic Cubans have with the island. Churning in the mix were the experiences and expressions of Cub*ands*,[9] either born or raised outside the island, who claimed to possess a Cuban consciousness shaped by their *second-hand experience* of exile.[10] Though they are clearly aware of their unstable positioning in relation to other Cubans and their status in the diaspora, several Cafeteros insisted that they experience what Marianne Hirsch refers to as *post-memory*—the historical traumatic effects of dispersion that persist in haunting them through generations—like phantom limbs—at both the unconscious and conscious levels (22).[11] Some observed that they experience by association a profound and perpetual sense of cultural non-belonging, even though they were born or bred outside the island. They perceive themselves to be strangers in their own natal land searching for a cultural "home." Such a position suggests that having a nomadic, exilic, diasporic, or migratory perspective does not necessarily imply spatial movement. The

[8] Edward Said is cited in James Clifford's essay "Diasporas"; as Clifford observes, Said employs the term *contrapuntal* in reference to "an originality" or the "plurality" of the diasporic subject's position and perspective, which "gives rise to [a contrapuntal] awareness of simultaneous dimensions." For more on this subject, see Said's "Reflections on Exile," *Granta* 13 (1984): 171-172.

[9] Cub*ands* is an elastic and all-inclusive term I developed as a way of intervening in Cuban exile discourse. The term simultaneously takes account of the layered presences or nations that constitute Cuban culture (such as the taino, Spain, Africa, Ireland, France, the United States and the former Soviet Union, etc.) as well as allow room for the complex identities that are continuously rooting and re-rooting, translating and transforming in an ever-changing diasporic context, which is at once global and transnational. See my introduction to *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*.

[10] In her essay "Los hijos del exilio Cubano y su literatura" ("The Children of the Cuban Exile and Their Literature"), Carolina Hospital accounts for this Cuban sensibility as an acquired phenomenon – a strict product of socialization and acculturation, which results from the external influence of kinship networks or extended communal associations. As Hospital puts it, "Some people ask how it is possible that... individuals who are either raised or born outside of Cuba can have a consciousness of exile. The answer resides in their participation in an exile community that has strong ties with the Cuban situation.… The works of these writers reflect a search for forms, images and themes that permit them to grow in this new experience of being between two cultures." See *Explicaci de Textos Literarios* 16 (2) (1987): 103-14.

[11] This portion of my introduction was first presented in a sustained piece titled "'Inheriting' Exile: Cuban-American Writers in the Diaspora," *Contemporary U.S. Latino/a Literary Criticism*, ed. Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 283-323.

emphasis then is not so much on locating "home," but on the process of "voyaging" (to borrow Evelyn O'Callaghan's term) amid multiple identities and worlds; in other words, the journey itself *is* "home".[12]

An additional, overarching challenge lay in addressing the paradoxical notion that historical and cultural continuity coexist with movement, variation, and change—the idea that difference always resides alongside continuity (Hall 228).[13] Globalization, Nicolas Bourriaud observes, has shattered our very notion of space. The discourses of diaspora must, therefore, be modified and adapted when speaking about the experiences of the displaced, the "unhomed" or *desterrados*. "What is at stake," diaspora theorist James Clifford points out, "is a comparative cultural studies approach to specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of dwelling and traveling: traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling" (228).

An attendant difficulty lay in the need to smith vocabulary elastic enough to capture all of the possible modalities of placement and displacement, rootedness and movement, without losing meaning altogether. As suggested at the outset of this essay, the Cuban diasporic experience has been structured rhetorically according to highly politicized, bicameral and binary concepts demarcating home and nation.[14] In the process, the misleading dichotomy of island or diaspora, of the here/*aquí* or the there/*allí*, has been established as an oppositional category. The emphasis in much dominant Cuban diasporic discourse both on and off the island, therefore, has been on territorial claims to both nationhood and culture.

Clearly, the term diaspora "offer[s] an alternative 'ground' to that of the territorial state," as Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin note, and the concept enables scholars (such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy)[15] to move away from essentialist claims about culture, race, ethnicity, and nationhood (Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diasporas* 10; Edwards 82). Nevertheless, as Brent Hayes Edwards points out, the term has been applied both liberally and loosely. Currently, he stresses, no word adequately takes stock of the divergent

[12] This passage is partially excerpted from my essay "The Politics of MisRemembering: History, Imagination and the Recovery of the *Lost Generation*," which appears in my edited collection *Cuba:* Idea *of a Nation Displaced*, 177-193.

[13] Gilroy uses this phrase throughout *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. I am adapting Stuart Hall's claim in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" that difference "persists—in and alongside continuity."

[14] Brent Hayes Edwards makes the same point in his entry in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*.

[15] The Birmingham scholars (associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, England), such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, began to define culture within a diasporic framework in order to draw attention to what one scholar terms the "absolutism" that defines culture as a racial, ethnic, or national essence. As my colleague, Carole Woodall observes, Gilroy "put forth the Black Atlantic as a unit of cultural analysis in order to reveal formations of distinctly transnational subjectivities beyond the dictates of distinct national or political cultures." For more information, see Brent Hayes Edwards's "The Uses of Diaspora." *Social Text* 66 (2001): 45-73.

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experiences and responses to scattering as well as the different circumstances that have prompted individuals or groups to leave their respective homelands.[16] Edwards' claim would indeed hold true in respect to the Cuban case. The preeminent diaspora scholars William Safran and James Clifford, for example, fail to consider fully the significance or role of multigenerational transmissions of cultural memory, especially as they pertain to future generations.[17] Neither do they allow for the possibility of sustaining multiple, transnational identifications, or take into account in any profound manner the generations claiming a vicarious cultural consciousness and memory.[18]

Rather than attempting to mint or coin a new term or phrase in an effort to clarify my particular positioning regarding the diasporic condition, my inclination is to de-clutter with the aim of avoiding altogether the limitations that yet a new tag would impose on the experience of displacement. In this manner, I preempt an essentialist approach to identity with-

[16] As Edwards observes, contemporary usages of the term *diaspora* emphasize an idea of movement that is self-contained, and current appropriations tend to conflate related yet distinct terms such as *exile*, *scattering, migration*, *transnationalism*, *immigration*, *expatriation*, *minority* or *refugee* status, and racial or ethnic difference. See his *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*.

[17] William Safran—expanding on Walker Connor's definition that a diaspora consists of "that segment of a people living outside the homeland"—defines a diaspora as follows (though it is well rehearsed, it bears repeating): expatriate minority communities whose members or ancestors: 1) have been dispersed from an original "center" to two or more "peripheral" or foreign regions; 2) retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and, therefore, feel partly alienated and insulated from it; (4) regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; (5) believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) continue to relate, personally or vicariously to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. Safran's definition—like James Clifford's—tends to emphasize what appear to be essentialist territorial claims to culture and nation, and deemphasize the relational aspects of diasporic self-identification or categorization. Safran's definition is noteworthy in its acknowledgment of multigenerational transmissions of diasporic memory; nevertheless, it falls short of developing any deep discussion regarding this sector of the diasporic population. Though Clifford regards Safran's paradigm as exclusivist and calls for a less rigidly defined concept of diaspora—a definition that accounts for transnational identity formations and points up the relationship between mobility and stasis—his work disregards altogether the significance of the generations born in diaspora. See "The Impact of Homelands on Diasporas," in *Modern Diaporas in International Politics,* ed. Gabriel Sheffer (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1986), 16-46 [cited in Safran's essay "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," 83-84].

[18] As I point out in the introduction to my edited collection *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*, a number of Cubans with whom I interacted objected to my use of the term diaspora entirely. The primary reason for their objection is the idea that the term suggests scattering or dispersal and thereby contradicts their perception that this movement of people has a center. Not surprisingly, those who expressed discontent were from Miami, which contains the largest portion of the Cuban diasporic population. Certain sectors of the Cuban population residing outside the island have gained considerable political clout in the United States; as a result, they feel entitled to claim a representative status in the dominant narrative regarding the post-1959 exodus. In my edited collection *Cuba*: Idea *of a Nation Displaced*, I consciously and intentionally de-centered Miami in order to interrupt what has become a monopoly on Cuban diasporic discourse. In this manner, I attempted to dispel the illusion of a coherent national, cultural, and/or political vision. For a discussion of the various ways in which the generations born or raised outside the island claim a vicarious cultural consciousness and memory, see my essay "The Politics of MisRemembering: History, Imagination, and the Recovery of the *Lost Generation*" in *Cuba*: Idea *of a Nation Displaced*, 176-193.

out endorsing a relativist or dogmatic universalist analysis. In addition, I skirt the possibility of obscuring once again the variations that occur within all scatterings, or leveling individual or group experiences. Rather, I apply a relational, multi-axis analysis in order to capture the movement of culture, history, and memory across time and borders. "A relational analysis," Ella Shohat tells us, "address[es] the operative terms and axis of stratification typical of specific contexts, along with the ways these terms and stratifications are translated and reinvoiced as they 'travel' from one context to another" (11).

Though I continue to employ terms such as *diaspora*, *scattering*, *migration*, *exodus*, and *exile* throughout my study, I do so with caution and consciousness regarding their nuanced meanings and histories. I also avoid using the concept of identity as an analytical tool, especially as it relates to the contructivist, postmodern stance that treats identity as being in a constant state of flux, with no stable points of reference or connection. I suppress the impulse to treat identity as a concept that suggests some essence or core of allegedly foundational aspects of selfhood. As Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper point out, identity has also become a "hopelessly ambiguous" and frequently reductive and essentialist term.[19] In their seminal work, they propose alternative, processual and active analytical idioms, such as "identification, self-understanding" (17),[20] and *categorization*—terms considerably less encumbered by conflicting meanings, which resist reifying essentialist categories or definitions.[21] Such terminology allows for fluidity, variability, and indeterminacy, at the same time that it indicates locality and situated subjectivity.

Finally, I consciously steer away from the label postmodern, and tend toward Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of the *altermodern*. "Postmodernism," he writes:

> resembles a mode of thought based on mourning, a long depressive episode of cultural life…. This melancholy posture constitutes the first period of postmodernism: it is characterized by an intensive citing of identifiable forms from the history of art as well as by the theme of the 'simulacrum,' in which image replaces reality in reality it-

[19] Many thanks to my colleague Walter Kusters for bringing attention to Brubaker and Cooper's essay "Beyond 'Identity.'"

[20] "The term 'self-understanding,'" Brubecker and Cooper note, "is not meant to imply a distinctively modern or Western understanding of the 'self' as a homogenous, bounded, unitary entity.... In some settings, people may understand and experience themselves in terms of a grid of intersecting categories; in others, in terms of a web of connections of differential proximity and intensity" (17).

[21] Brubaker and Cooper sketch out five common usages of the term identity that are frequently at odds with one another. "Clearly, the term 'identity' is made to do a lot of work," they observe. "It is used to highlight non-instrumental modes of action; to focus on self-understanding rather than self-interest; to designate sameness across persons or sameness across time; to capture allegedly core, foundational aspects of selfhood; to deny that such core, foundational aspects exist; to highlight the processual, interactive development of solidarity and collective self-understanding; and to stress the fragmented quality of the contemporary experience of 'self,' a self unstably patched together through shards of discourse and contingently 'activated' in differing contexts" (8).

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> self.… The second period of postmodernism, in which melancholy gives way to multiculturalism, is born at the end of the Cold War.… The modernist master narrative now gives way to that of globalization: by opening to cultures and artistic traditions other than those of the Western world, postcolonial postmodernism followed the path opened up by the world economy and ushered in a global reexamination of the conceptions of space and time that will remain its historical legacy. (182)

Heralding a new century, Bourriaud calls for an alternative model that emerges from an era "defined by the prefix 'post,'" which united "the most disparate domains of thought within the experience of a single, undifferentiated "afterward." "It is this prefix, 'post-' that will ultimately turn out to have been the great myth of the end of the twentieth century," he claims. "It points to the nostalgia for a golden age at once admired and hated. It refers to a past event that supposedly cannot be surpassed…a mode of thought that is inherently reliant on, even captive to, the origin" (183).

Nicolas Bourriaud critiques the very notion of multiculturalism in a similar fashion, arguing that the term connotes "a system for distributing meaning that assigns individuals to their social demands, reduces their being to their identity, and repatriates all meaning toward an origin regarded as political revealer." Rather, he opts for the prefix "alter," which points toward the end of the "culture of the 'post-'" and is, on the contrary, associated with the notion of the "alternative" and of "multiplicity." "More precisely," Bourriaud writes, "'alter' designates a different relationship with time no longer the aftermath of a historical moment, but the infinite extension of the kaleidoscopic play of temporal loops in the service of a vision of history as a spiral, which advances while turning back on itself" (186). Altermodernity embodies a "nonlinear modernity" that ultimately releases us from what Bourriaud describes as "the tyranny of an illusion, that of Western progressive modernism" (186).

Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora also intentionally moves away from definitions or theoretical paradigms that regard mobility and stability as mutually exclusive terms, or privilege stasis over mobility. "The person who finds his homeland sweet," Hugh of St. Victor tells us,

> is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his. (qtd. in Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 335)[22]

[22] Hugh of St. Victor was a medieval philosopher, theologian, and mystical writer born in Saxony, France in 1096. My colleague, Jan McVicker, pointed out his quotation after learning about my project.

In emphasizing the positive aspects of movement and translocality, Hugh of St. Victor defies a host of conventional assumptions regarding territoriality and nationhood. Rather than stressing loss or displacement and casting them in a negative light, he envisions the individual who belongs—at once—everywhere and nowhere as powerful and free.

Although some of the Cafeteros interviewed in my study stress the destructive aspects of dislocation and rupture, for many movement functions as a mode of cultural survival as well as a potent form of resistance. It promises, moreover, accumulated knowledge, and oftentimes serves as a source of creative potential and fecund possibility. Consequently, my project examines the strategic advantages of multi-rootedness and translocality. At the same time, it strives to maintain an acute awareness of the potential "dangers of detachment"—what Edward Said characterized as "disorienting loss" and the "crippling sorrow of estrangement"—as well as the reality that many Cuban migrants or émigrés cannot choose to return to the island.[23]

Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora thus offers an alternative or altered concept of nomadism that simultaneously suggests a kind of *weightlessness* or detachment from physical spaces at the same time that it promotes the idea of being rooted in multiple places.[24] Though nomadism is generally understood as "dispens[ing] altogether with the idea of a fixed home or center," it is traditionally defined as a state of being "without the hope or dream of a homeland."[25] The aesthetic formula of nomadism that I propose recasts this definition. It is liberatory, on the one hand, in its emphasis on movement and

[23] A special thanks goes to my colleague Søren Frank for reminding me of Said's now famous expressions. See Said's critical work *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*.

[24] As Søren Frank observes, "migration is the defining characteristic of contemporary life," and "the migrant", he adds (quoting Salman Rushdie), is a person "without frontiers…the archetypal figure of our age." In an unpublished essay titled "Globalization and the Migrant Writer," presented in abbreviated form at the Migration and Intercultural Identities in Relation to Border Regions (19th & 20th Centuries) Conference in Kortrijk, Belgium (May 2010), Frank discusses the mutually dependent phenomenon of globalization and migration and its bearing on world literature. He begins his analysis with a discussion of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's concept of the "elimination of the dimension of space" as a consequence of the electronic age. Frank argues that "migration literature, or *Weltliteratur*, cosmopolitanism, and Europe are all particular instances of the growing independence of particular spaces, but also that they are characterized by reactions of inertia which make them reconnect with dimensions of space." Gumbrecht's characterization of globalization as "a growing spacelessness" underlies Frank's discussion of the migrant's "practice of weightlessness" or "bodilessness" as s/he moves from space to space. Though he cautions against the dangers of detachment from history, language, and territory, Frank emphasizes the potentially libratory aspects of being simultaneously "patriotic and cosmopolitan, rooted and weightless, shaded in local colors and movable in global corridors." For more on this topic, see Gumbrecht's essay "A Negative Anthropology of Globalization" in *The Multiple Faces of Globalization*, ed. Francisco González (Madrid: BBVA, 2009), 230-241.

[25] As John Durham Peters notes, the concept of nomadism was "born metaphorical." Traditionally it has been characterized according to two competing forms: as a threat to the state, a case of "dangerous romantic projection"; or as a "dream of radical liberty," an affront to dogmatism and a "subversion of set conventions". See Peters' discussion of nomadism in "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon," in Hamid Naficy's edited collection *Home, Exile, Homeland*, 18-41.

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detachment much like Hugh of Saint Victor's concept and akin to the Taoist notion of "impermanence" or "indifference to the world." Embedded in this aesthetic is a particular concept of weightlessness posited by my colleague Søren Frank and based on Han's Ulrich Gumbrecht's characterization of "globalization as a growing spacelessness" (i.e., the gradual "elimination of the dimensions of space" as a consequence of the electronic age).[26] In spite of its insistence on itinerancy and transience, my approach to nomadism is also grounded in a concept of "doubleness" that involves rooting and re-rooting, continuity, and as Frank puts it, the simultaneous "elimination and recuperation" of "space." It permits, moreover, a form of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (to borrow Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept) that allows diasporic subjects to "transport their roots" and thereby remain connected to the homeland.[27]

Nicolas Bourriaud perhaps best expresses this seemingly paradoxical possibility in his discussion of *radicant* art. In his critical work *The Radicant*, he describes a "zone of turbulence" in which "aesthetic canons upon which contemporary criticism is based are shattered." According to this vision, instability is valorized above the structure of "circumscribed territories" offered by various media (and other institutional sources one might add) —a notion that ultimately perpetuates what Salman Rushdie refers to as the "conservative myth designed to keep us in our places."[28] "The immigrant, the exile, the tourist, and the urban wanderer," Bourriaud writes:

> [they] resemble those plants that do not depend on a single root for their growth but advance in all directions on whatever surfaces present themselves by attaching multiple hooks to them, as ivy does. Ivy belongs to the botanical family of the radicants, which develop their roots as they advance, unlike the radicals, whose development is determined by their being anchored in a particular soil…. They grow their secondary roots alongside their primary one. The radicant develops in accord with its host soil. It conforms to the latter's twists and turns and adapts to its surfaces and geological features. It translates itself in terms of the space in which it moves. With its at once dynamic and dialogical signification, the adjective 'radicant' captures this contemporary subject, caught between the need for connection with its environment and the forces of uprooting, between globalization and singularity, between identity and opening to the other. It defines the subject as an object of negotiation. (55-56)

[26] Frank affirms a notion first set out by Edward Said that the migrant lives "a contrapuntal life," and that her/his "condition of spacelessness" is simultaneously rooted to and detached from particular spaces.

[27] See Appiah's seminal work "Cosmopolitan Patriots" in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation,* ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 91-114.

[28] Thanks once again goes to Søren Frank for bringing my attention to Rushdie's quote. See Rushdie's *Shame* (London: Vintage, 1995).

The art featured in *CAFÉ* articulates a very particular radicant aesthetic that relates directly to the conditions of dislocation and non-belonging fundamental to the Cafeteros' experiences. Although I explore their connections to past generations of Cuban artists, in stressing movement, displacement, and itinerancy the Cafeteros resist the possibility of being defined or categorized solely in relation to Cuba or to its art legacy, for their work embodies the radicant tendency to re-root in the act of translating, negotiating, transforming, and synthesizing new cultural elements. At the same time, the Cafeteros retain their "primary roots" in the act of preserving certain identifiable elements that remain anchored or located in specific historical, cultural, or local or geographical contexts.

Throughout his work, Nicolas Bourriaud reminds us that translation is fundamentally "a practice of displacement." Giving a new spin on the idea of artistic appropriation and translation, which is oftentimes regarded as negative, he points out that the act of transfer "sets in motion" signs that were "strictly codified" and seemingly "fixed." It "presents the foreign in a familiar form" in what one may characterize as a search for points of connection or similarity, and seeks out patterns of *repetition* as defined by both Cuban theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Bourriaud, as opposed to sameness, mimicry, and replication.[29] Yet it simultaneously connotes newness in the spiral trajectory that it fol-

[29] In terms of specific methodology, *Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora* concentrates on the slippage that occurs between the synchronic and the diachronic by weighing Cuba's sociopolitical history against what Antonio Benítez-Rojo describes as the *poly-rhythmic* cultural *repetitions* or *constants* that have occurred outside the island. In *The Repeating Island* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), Benítez-Rojo proposes a concept of *repetition* that is not mimetic in the Borgesian or Proustian sense (i.e., that events, memories, or experiences can be replicated across time), but, rather, allows for paradox and difference amid regularity. "I have emphasized the word," he writes: "because I want to give the term the almost paradoxical sense with which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness according to the principle of entropy proposed by thermodynamics in the last century); however, in the midst of this irreversible change, Nature can produce a figure as complex, as highly organized, and as intense as the one that the human eye catches when it sees a quivering hummingbird drinking from a flower." In Benítez-Rojo's view, these cultural *constants* somehow constitute a protean ensemble of identifiable elements passed down through generations both on and off the island. "Within this chaos of difference and repetitions, of combinations and permutations," he tells us, "there are regular dynamics that co-exist."
Seemingly expanding on Benítez-Rojo's concept of *repetition*, Nicolas Bourriaud observes in a meditation on contemporary, *postproduction* art (art that has neither an origin nor a metaphysical destination): "Repetition in time is called a rerun or *réplique*—a replica, a reply. And the term *réplique*, 'aftershock,' is also used to refer to the tremor(s) following a major earthquake. These aftershocks, more or less attenuated, distanced, and similar to the first, belong to the original, but they neither repeat it or nor constitute entirely separate events. The art of postproduction is a product of this notion of *réplique* (replication, reply): the work of art is an event that constitutes the replication and reply to another work or a preexisting object; distant in time from the original to which it is linked, this work nonetheless belongs to the same chain of events. It is located on the precise wavelength of the original earthquake, putting us back in touch with the energy from which it sprang while at the same time diluting it in time, that is, ridding it of its character as an historical fetish" (174).
Throughout my study, I consciously borrow Benítez-Rojo's and Bourriaud's concepts and terminology; yet in addition to echoing their concepts of *repetition* and *réplique*, my usage of the terms also draws upon the British Romantic concept of spiral return. In other words, the notion that during the course of travel or

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lows, for one can never fully recapture or recuperate the original. In other words, translation "inserts" the work of art "into a chain," thus "diluting its origin" (without eradicating it entirely) in "multiplicity" and "asserting the indeterminacy of any code, of rejecting any source code that would seek to assign a single origin to works and texts" (Bourriaud 131). Images and signs are thus never truly static or frozen, hermetically sealed, insulated, or circumscribed. In the act of destabilizing signs, the diasporic artist extends their meaning in an endless, non-linear continuum, in the same way that the transnational diasporic subject extends her or his cultural and national affiliation.

Ultimately, the idea of being rooted but weightless—coupled with the notion that identify is contingent and relational at the same time that it is localized and positioned—acts as a kind of anecdote for the sense of non-belonging expressed by so many Cub*ands*, including those born or raised outside the island. This approach allows the psychically or physically displaced person to maintain simultaneously a sense of connection with the homeland and feel "at home" everywhere. In effect, it transforms the feeling of non-belonging into "double belonging" to borrow Frank's term, or in the case of many of the Cafeteros, "multi-belonging", as Lucy R. Lippard would phrase it.[30] Such an approach expands on the idea that Cuban culture and all of its expressions are, and always have been, simultaneously portable and solidly grounded.[31] Reflecting this aspect of the Cuban condition, my approach to Cuban diasporic subjectivity and cultural formation envisions the island and its culture as a moveable tent (as the subtitle of my work suggests), as opposed to the stationary concept of a house or home.[32] In this way, it strives to *extinguish* the urge to locate one's understanding of culture and nation in "one spot in the world" (Kearney).[33]

voyaging we are permanently altered, thus we can never return to a place of origin in the exact same psychological, emotional, or even physical state.

[30] See Lippard's discussion of the multiple sense of place in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

[31] As Eric Gary Anderson points out in a discussion of American Indian space, temporality, and movement, "migrations are, paradoxically, constants" in many cultures, though all native groups are deeply tied to the earth. The idea that movement is a mode of survival—that movement is knowledge and power—is an ancient concept that defies conventional western concepts regarding property or ownership, and is widely embraced by many Native-American or indigenous groups. While discussing this topic, a colleague pointed out that a critical difference between the Native experience and that of diasporic Cubans is the idea that many Cubans cannot return to their native land, whereas nomadic or migratory Native-American groups generally followed seasonal migration patterns in order to locate food sources. As a result, they often returned to the same locations. Nevertheless, when read in the context of relocation, one can imagine the parallels that can be drawn among these groups. See *Indian Literature & the Southwest*, 17.

[32] See Peters' extensive discussion of the etymology of the term "tent" and the manner in which it has endured as a sign in "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora," 24-28. In "Framing Exile," Hamid Naficy points out that any traditional notion of home involves legal categories such as rights, property, and possession as well as their opposite (5-6).

[33] I am consciously appropriating Richard Kearney's term, which appears in the title of his critical work *Postnationalist Ireland, Politics, Culture, Philosophy*. In the same vein, I am borrowing and inverting Harry

Finally, general principles expressed in quantum physics have offered a form of intuitionistic logic that gave me new ways to think about nomadic diasporic identifications and cultural expressions, for certain threads of its particular discourse admit the possibility that multiple "realities" or states of being can co-exist.[34] This particular theory relies on a concept of nonlocality that is less concerned with determining the exact physical location or state of a particle or object at any given moment than with the probability of where it might or can be located in both physical and temporal terms.

As I have suggested at the outset of this piece, the diasporic condition operates on the quantum principles of translocality and positionality. Loosely akin to the concept of nonlocality, the identifications that Cuban diasporic artists assume and the conceptual spaces they inhabit are multiple. At the same time, their understanding of self is always measured inadvertently against the "absent presence" that is the island. In this sense their art, represented in each manifestation of *CAFÉ*, simultaneously signifies and collapses the geographical distances between the *here* and the *there,* and thereby presents an uncanny *repetition* of the island, which defies traditional cartographical conventions regarding spatiality. It articulates, moreover, the manner in which one reconstitutes, translates, and transforms the self in diaspora; and emphasizes the role these artists play in producing alternative cartographies as they re-create or re-imagine space in response to a non-linear modernity.[35]

Recent trends in quantum thought also posit the notion that "something that happens now is affected by something that happens in the future" (qtd. in Begley 49). This possibility bespeaks the sense of contemporaneity or cross-temporality implicit in the various presentations of Cuban diasporic art of which I speak in *Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora*, for each exhibition heralds the future at the same time that it invokes both the

Berger, Jr.'s phrase "set the house against the tent," which is quoted in and drawn from a discussion of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants in Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin's essay "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity."

[34] The quantum version of the double- or two-slit experiment, in which a single photon is seen passing through two slits in a screen simultaneously, provides a good example, as does the paradoxical "thought experiment", Schrödinger's Cat.

[35] The French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre was one of the first theorists to explore what he termed the "production of space" (*The Production of Space*; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991). He questioned the "binary logic" of how we understand spatiality and proposed a concept of "spatial variability" that examines the relationship among historicality, sociality, and spatiality. Among other things, Lefebvre considered the "multiple meanings of space" and the "interplay between the social and the spatial." Lefebvre's concepts have been expanded on by theorists such as Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and Jean Baudrillard, as well as more contemporary scholars such as Dorothy Hayden, Doreen Massey, Monika Kaup, and Mary Pat Brady. Other prominent figures engaged in "re-envisioning" traditional concepts of spatiality include Edward W. Soja, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Trinh T. Minh-ha. I wish to express my gratitude to my dear friend and colleague Ewa Antoszek for introducing me to the work of several of these critics including Hayden, Massey, Kaup, and Soja. See Antoszek's unpublished dissertation *Out of the Margins: Identity Formation in Contemporary Chicana Writings* (2010).

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present and the cultural and historical past. These collective aspects of quantum thought—of an infinitely malleable idea of interstitial spatiality, contemporaneous existence and momentum, and the possibility that the present and the future not only interface but overlap—have allowed me more than any other conceptual framework to problematize and imagine an alternative perspective regarding the transnational diasporic formations as well as what one critic terms Euro-Americans' "imaginary constructions of space, land, time, and history" (Anderson 38).

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