CUBAN DIASPORIC FORMATIONS: A POETICS OF MOVEMENT, MULTILOCALITY, AND INDETERMINACY

Andrea O'Reilly Herrera

Resumen

Usando varias perspectivas teóricas, este ensayo aborda el fenómeno de la diáspora cubana a través del lente de la cultura visual. De manera más específica, explora asuntos fundamentales sobre la formación de identidades diaspóricas mediante el examen de una exhibición no convencional, en progreso e itinerante de arte cubano diaspórico, llamada "CAFÉ: Los viajes de los artistas cubanos". En su ensayo, la autora postula que Cuba no es un sitio cultural o geográfico fijo, sino una nación viajera y móvil. Al examinar la obra de los artistas de CAFÉ, la autora da cuenta de los aspectos fluidos y relacionales de la identidad y la cultura y perturba los conceptos tradicionales de espacialidad, a la vez que reconoce simultáneamente que están localizados y posicionados tanto histórica como geográficamente.
Palabras clave: diáspora, identidad, cultura visual, Cuba

Abstract

Using a variety of theoretical perspectives, this essay approaches the phenomenon of the Cuban diaspora through the lens of visual culture. More specifically, it explores fundamental issues regarding diasporic identity formation through an examination of a non-conventional, ongoing, and itinerant exhibition of Cuban diasporic art titled "CAFÉ: The Journeys of Cuban Artists." In her essay, the author posits Cuba not as a fixed cultural or geographical site, but rather as a traveling, moveable nation. Through an examination of the CAFÉ artists' work, she takes account of the fluid and relational aspects of identity and culture and troubles traditional concepts of spatiality, while acknowledging, simultaneously, that they are localized and positioned both historically and geographically.
Keywords: diaspora, identity, visual culture, Cuba

Op. Cit., núm. 20, 2011-2012
pp. 271-288, ISSN 1526-5323

CUBAN DIASPORIC FORMATIONS: A POETICS OF MOVEMENT, MULTILOCALITY, AND INDETERMINACY

Andrea O'Reilly Herrera

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 are the dominant figures of contemporary culture."[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 na-

[1] Nicolas Bourriard, *The Radicant*. New York, Lucas and Sternberg, 2009, pp. 55-56.

tivist claims to "authentic" cultural, ethnic, or national identity; and express a utopian sense of *patria* or homeland as a fixed and unchanging physical place 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."[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.[3]

In my previous writings 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.[4] As an island—a geographical space with mutable and porous borders –Cuba has never been a fixed cultural, political, or geographical entity– a notion first explored by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his seminal work *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*.[5] 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.[6] As a result, Cuban culture is stratified and striated by multiple and varied influences; the sea that circumscribes and ultimately

[2] See William Safran's "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", *Diaspora*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1991, pp. 83-99; and James Clifford's "Diasporas," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997, pp. 244-77 (originally published in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1994, pp. 302-338).

[3] *The Location of Culture*. London & New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 140, 200-04.

[4] 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.

[5] Madrid, Cátedra, 1940, 2002.

[6] Pre-colonial 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.

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 temper Cuban history and are the underlying conditions that inform the post-1959 Cuban diasporic experience.[7] Cuba's cultural evolution and continuity, in turn, have always depended on a process of absorption, translation, transformation, and synthesis that has occurred in this context of movement—a phenomenon that Ortiz referred to as transculturation. 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 outside Cuba following the exodus that occurred in the wake of 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 the Cuban diaspora, *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 at the same time that it remains firmly rooted in the local and the historical.[8] Specifically, it rethinks transnational diasporic

[7] 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).

[8] This essay is excerpted from the introduction to *Cuban Artists across the Diaspora: Setting the Tent Against the House*. Austin, University of Texas

formations through the lens of visual cultural expression by interpreting the work of an expanding and alternating group of diasporic artists who participate in a multimedia exhibition called *CAFÉ: The Journeys of Cuban Artists*– first conceived in 2000 by Cuban artists Yovani Bauta, Israel León Viera, and Leandro Soto, and consequently curated primarily by the latter.[9]

The Cafeteros –the participating artists in *CAFÉ*– represent different generations (including artists from the Cuban *avant-garde* and those who either left Cuba as infants or children, or were born outside the island). *CAFÉ* disrupts traditional western modes of curation, which tend to comply with more strictly formulaic codes and regulations regarding the manner in which artwork is installed in the exhibition space; the way in which the audience interacts with the art; and how long the exhibition runs and where it will be exhibited. *CAFÉ*, for example, is curated and installed by an artist. Each manifestation presents a different combination of works (in other words, no two manifestations are the same), yet each exhibition is linked to the other in a nonlinear chain that points to a larger narrative about movement and dislocation, rooting and re-rooting. In addition, the presentation of the artwork is performative in that each exhibition conforms to, or is literally integrated into, the physical space where it is presented, rather than adhering to a set plan or predetermined arrangement. Each showing of *CAFÉ* is designed as "a collaboration" between the artwork and those who come to view it, as visitors are invited to actively participate in the exhibition in a variety of ways. Unlike traditional art exhibitions, *CAFÉ* is also itinerant or ongoing in that it has no set or terminal itinerary but rather continues to manifest itself indefinitely.

The fundamental aesthetic informing *CAFÉ* emulates and models what Cuban theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo envi-

Press, 2011. For more information, see [http://www.texas.edu/utpress/books/hercba.html], accessed December 20, 2011.

[9] *CAFÉ* is an acronym for Cuban American Foremost Exhibitions.

sioned as a particularly Caribbean paradigm that is at once preindustrial, organic, and contrapuntal.[10] The exhibit's central metaphor, *café*, relates to the themes of rupture, dislocation, cultural continuity and transformation. In the same vein, *CAFÉ* is organized according to two basic questions: What constitutes a nation? And what does it mean to be Cuban? The quest to define nation and culture, to define or redefine *Cubanidad* during periods of exile or transition, reaches back to the time of José Martí and continues to resonate in the work of a host of contemporary diasporic writers and critics located across the globe. The same impulse characterizes the work of the various generations of *vanguardia* or modernist artists, who originally sought to forge a set of fundamental elements and motifs that defined a new national identity following the establishment of the Republic.

Due in part to the multivalent social and political positionings and perspectives of the nearly forty Cafeteros I interviewed for my project, the various and oftentimes conflicting manner in which they self-identified or located themselves in relation to the island 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 physical reality of displacement, their positions were not identical as a result of a range of factors. In turn, the variable responses to their work by critics and curators both on and off the island revealed 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 distinct and frequently conflicting positionalities while allowing them to coexist proved to be quite a feat. It required me to rethink diasporic designations in a more relational as opposed to unified manner in order to orchestrate these artists' perspectives within what proved to be a densely woven, kaleidoscopic narrative of displacement and dislocation. In considering the manner in which the Cafeteros self-identify or self-affiliate, I was con-

[10] See *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1992, p. 23.

fronted 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. 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 to the island. In the mix were the experiences and expressions of Cub*ands*,[11] either born or raised outside the island, who claimed to possess a Cuban consciousness shaped by what I refer to as a *second-hand experience* of exile. Though they are clearly aware of their unstable positioning both in relation to other Cubans and to 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.[12] 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 or adopted land searching for a cultural "home." Such a position suggests that having a nomadic, exilic, diasporic, or

[11] 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 such as the Taino or nations that that have contributed to Cuban culture (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…*, pp. xxvii-xxx.

[12] *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, Post-Memory.* Cambridge MA; Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 22.

migratory perspective does not necessarily imply spatial movement. The emphasis then is not so much on locating "home," but on the process of "voyaging" (to borrow Caribbean scholar Evelyn O'Callaghan's term) amid multiple identities and worlds. In other words, the journey itself *is* "home."

An additional, overarching challenge lay in addressing the paradoxical notion that movement, variation, and change coexist with historical and cultural continuity; the idea that *difference always resides alongside continuity*.[13] Globalization, as many contemporary critics have observed, 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."[14]

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. In the process, as many Cuban diaspora theorists have observed, 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

[13] Postcolonial theorist Paul Gilroy uses this phrase throughout *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993. I am adapting Caribbean theorist Stuart Hall's claim that "Difference… persists –in and alongside continuity." See "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, p. 228.

[14] James Clifford's quotation first appeared in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, p. 36.

Boyarin note,[15] and the concept enables diaspora scholars to move away from essentialist claims about culture, race, ethnicity, and nationhood. Nevertheless, the term has been applied both liberally and loosely. Currently, no word adequately takes stock of the divergent experiences and responses to scattering as well as the different circumstances that have prompted individuals or groups to leave their respective homelands.[16] 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. 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.

Rather than attempting to mint or coin a new term or phrase in an effort to clarify my particular positioning regarding Cuban diasporic identity formation, my inclination is to declutter 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 formation without 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.

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 nu-

[15] The quotation by Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin first appeared in *Powers of Diasporas: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p. 10.

[16] See Brent Hayes Edwards regarding the idea that 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 in Bruce Burgett and Glen Handler (eds.), *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York, New York University Press, 2007, pp. 82-83.

anced 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 also 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 term.[17] In their seminal work, they propose alternative, processual, and active analytical idioms, such as *identification, self-understanding*,[18] and *categorization* –terms considerably less encumbered by conflicting meanings, which resist reifying essentialist categories or definitions. Such terminology allows for fluidity, variability, and indeterminacy at the same time that it indicates locality and situated subjectivity. *Cuban Artists across the Diaspora* also intentionally complicates 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.[19]

In emphasizing the potent aspects of movement and translocality, Hugh of St. Victor defies a host of conventional as-

[17] "Beyond 'Identity'," *Theory and Society*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2000, pp. 1-48.

[18] "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", *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[19] Hugh of St. Victor was a medieval philosopher, theologian, and mystical writer born in Saxony, France in 1096. This quotation appears in Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. New York, Knopf, 1993, p. 335.

sumptions regarding territoriality and nationhood. Rather than stressing loss or displacement or casting movement in a negative light, he envisions the individual who belongs at the same time everywhere and nowhere as powerful and free.

Although all of the Cafeteros acknowledge the sorrowful and disorienting realities of dislocation and rupture, for many movement functions as a mode of cultural survival as well as a form of resistance. For others, it serves as a source of creative potential and fecund possibility. In their work, these artists examine the strategic advantages of multi-rootedness and translocality, while at the same time registering what postcolonial theorist Edward Said characterized as the potential "dangers of detachment."[20] Their artwork offers an alternative or altered concept of nomadism that simultaneously suggests a kind of *weightlessness* (to borrow my colleague Søren Frank's term) or detachment from physical spaces at the same time that it promotes the idea of being rooted in multiple places. Though nomadism is generally understood as countering the idea of a fixed "home" or center, the aesthetic formula of nomadism that these Cafeteros propose recasts this definition. It is liberating in its emphasis on movement and detachment much like Hugh of Saint Victor's concept and somewhat akin to the Taoist notion of "impermanence" or "indifference to the world." Embedded in this aesthetic is a particular concept of "doubleness" that involves rooting and re-rooting, continuity, and the simultaneous loss and recuperation of space. It permits, moreover, a form of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (to borrow postcolonial theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept) that allows diasporic subjects to "transport their roots" and thereby remain connected to their homeland.[21]

Art historian and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud perhaps best expresses this seemingly paradoxical possibility in his discussion of *radicant* art. He describes a "zone of turbulence" in which "aesthetic canons upon which contemporary criti-

[20] "Reflections on Exile," *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 173-186.

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

cism 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). Radicants, Bourriaud writes,

> 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.[22]

The art featured in *CAFÉ* articulates a very particular radicant aesthetic. In *Cuban Artists across the Diaspora*, I explore the Cafeteros' relationship to past generations of Cuban artists, and place their artwork in the larger historical context of movement that fundamentally informs the Cuban experience. Yet I also emphasize the Cafeteros' ability to root and reroot in new cultural contexts, and consequently absorb and integrate new or even resonant or familiar cultural elements into their work. In this manner, I resist defining or categorizing their art solely in relation to Cuba or to its art legacy. When read holistically, the Cafeteros' artwork embodies simultaneously the radicant tendency to re-root in the act of translating, negotiating, transforming, and synthesizing new cultural elements; at the same time it visibly retains their primary Cuban roots in its preservation of certain identifiable

[22] Bourriaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

elements that remain anchored or located in specific historical, cultural, and local or geographical contexts.

Throughout his work, 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 often defined as unauthorized "borrowing," 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 Benítez-Rojo and Bourriaud, as opposed to sameness, mimicry, and replication.[23]

Cuban Artists across the Diaspora weighs Cuba's sociopolitical history against what Benítez-Rojo describes as the *poly-rhythmic* cultural *repetitions* or *constants* that have occurred outside the island. In *The Repeating Island*, Benítez-Rojo proposes a concept of *repetition* that is not mimetic in the Borgesian or Proustian sense (i.e., that events, memories, or experiences replicate 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. [24]

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

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.
[24] Benítez Rojo, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

permutations," he tells us, "there are regular dynamics that co-exist."

Seemingly expanding on Benítez-Rojo's concept of *repetition*, Bourriaud meditates on what he terms 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 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.[25]

Throughout my study of Cuban diasporic art, I consciously build upon Benítez-Rojo's and Bourriaud's concepts and terminology; yet in addition to inlaying their definitions of *repetition* and *réplique*, my usage of the terms also draws upon the Romantic concept of spiral return –the notion that during the course of travel or voyaging the artist is permanently altered, thus s/he can never return to the place of origin in the exact same psychological, emotional, or even physical state. The artist necessarily encounters newness as a result of such a trajectory, thus the original can never be fully recaptured or recuperated even in the act of return. The process of absorption, translation, and transformation that occurs, in turn, "inserts" the work of art into a chain, thus "diluting its origin in multiplicity" (without eradicating it entirely) while "asserting the indeterminacy of any code, of

[25] Bourriaud, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

rejecting any source code that would seek to assign a single origin to works and texts."[26] 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, nonlinear continuum, in the same way that the diasporic subject extends her or his cultural and national affiliation.

Ultimately, the idea of being rooted but weightless – coupled with the notion that identity 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 *multi-belonging*.[27] 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 –a concept that is central to the work of many of the Cafeteros. Reflecting this aspect of the Cuban condition, the approach to Cuban diasporic subjectivity and cultural formation presented in *Cuban Artists across the Diaspora* 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."[28] In this way, it strives to move away from the urge to locate one's understanding of culture and nation in only *one spot in the world*.

Finally, general principles expressed in quantum physics have offered a form of intuitionistic logic that gave me

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[27] See Lucy 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.

[28] I am borrowing and inverting Harry 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,' which appears in Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (eds.), *Theorizing Diaspora*. Malden, MA, Blackwell, [2003] 2005, p. 105.

new ways to think about transnational diasporic identifications and cultural expressions, for certain threads of its particular discourse admit the possibility that multiple "realities" or states of being can coexist.[29] 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 put forth in quantum physics, 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 recreate or reimagine space in response to a nonlinear modernity.

Recent trends in quantum thought also posit the notion that "something that happens now is affected by something that happens in the future."[30] This possibility bespeaks the sense of contemporaneity or cross-temporality implicit in the various presentations of *CAFÉ*, for in addition to the manner in which the Cafeteros' art resonates in symbol, theme and form with other cultures, each exhibition heralds the future at the same time that it invokes both the present and

[29] 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.

[30] See Jeff Tollaksen's quotation in Sharon Begley's article "Putting Time in a (Leaky) Bottle," *Newsweek*, 30 July 2007, p. 49.

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 –perhaps more than any other conceptual framework– to problematize and imagine an alternative perspective regarding Cuban transnational diasporic formations as well as posit an alternative approach to what one critic terms Euro-Americans' "imaginary constructions of space, land, time, and history."[31]

Manuscrito recibido: 27 de diciembre de 2011
Manuscrito aceptado: 21 de febrero de 2012

[31] Eric Gary Anderson, *Indian Literature & the Southwest.* Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999, p. 38.