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**Enchufad@s: Representations of the Internet
and New Technologies
in Queer Latin American Literatures**

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**Enchufad@s: Representations of the Internet
and New Technologies
in Queer Latin American Literatures**

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all of my teachers: anyone who has ever taught me anything, ever. More specifically, I dedicate my work with gratitude to my supervisors, Jill Robbins and Jossianna Arroyo-Martínez, who played no small role in the process of writing and editing this dissertation. I am also appreciative to my committee members and my parents, who agreed to let me pursue this crazy adventure and have been supportive in myriad and countless ways. Additionally, I credit my high school English teachers Mr. Tim Hagood and Ms. Tolly Patterson Salz for teaching me how to think and to write, and I applaud my high school teacher Sra. Peggy Patterson for inciting a love of Spanish language and literatures. I also give thanks to Dr. Michael Harney, who believed in me, and Dr. Naomi Lindstrom, who always motivated me to do my best work. *Gracias*, thank you. I hope to teach others as well as you have taught me.

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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This dissertation explores themes of identity, desire, and connection as represented in three literary texts authored in Spanish during the first decade of the 2000s. The literature in question – novels *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2000) by Ángel Lozada and *Keres cojer? = Guan tu fak* (2005) by Alejandro López as well as Cristina Peri Rossi's poetry collection, *Playstation* (2008) – relies on queer aesthetics and themes in order to convey the experience of three unique individuals who, through the utilization of Internet and new technologies, navigate Latin America and the ever-globalizing world beyond. The protagonists and poetic voices in question use the Internet as a means to reject hegemonic norms, to reinvent the Self and/or, quite literally in some cases, to reconstruct the body. Using Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Donna Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs", Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture, and a heavy-handed dash of diva studies, this dissertation explores how Internet spaces as represented in the novels and poems serve to enhance as well as hinder human connection, while also making the readers more aware of their Internet dependence.

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Introduction

“We are living in a Material World
And I am a Material Girl.”

- Madonna, 1984

“I’ve got some news for you:
FemBots have feelings, too.”

- Robyn, 2010

The inimitable diva Madonna may have considered our world to be a material one in the 1980s, but contemporary society has given way to the virtual and technologically enhanced. This shift from material to virtual is due to the nearly-constant state of being interconnected via social media networking sites among Western individuals of a certain higher economic standing and their reliance upon the Internet and the new technologies it has made available – and indispensable – to them. As someone who straps a digital pedometer to her wrist and can hardly wait in line at the grocery store without checking her iPhone for Instagram updates, I admit to being one of these cyborg, hyper-connected people. At present, our lives are both enabled and entangled by the Internet. ^[1] Through convergence culture, the web has trapped us, yet rather than immobilized flies entrapped in a spider’s web we are net-surfers and cyborgs caught in a tangle of

man-made synapses. It is no wonder then, that Spanish language literature of the first decade of the 2000s would reflect the trends and tremendous impact of the Internet in the present-day, ever-globalizing society.

In this dissertation, I analyze three literary texts that present the Internet and new technologies as tools that construct an alternative space or body, which foster a queer aesthetic that transcends heteronormativity, and/or negotiate a site against a state that polices queer sexuality vis-à-vis heteronormative regulations. These texts include two novels from the first decade of the 2000s: Puerto Rican-born Ángel Lozada's *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2000) and Argentinean Alejandro López's *Keres cojer? = Guan tu fak* (2005) as well as poems from Uruguayan native turned peninsular Spanish citizen Cristina Peri Rossi's *Playstation* (2008). Each of these texts relies on queer themes to share a story of the individual's experience in a globalized world, but the linking factor for all of them is the Internet. Each author hails from a different nation and place, but the narrative and poetic subjects represented in their works spend the majority of their time in Internet-based spaces. In this dissertation, I show how these texts use the trope of new technology, particularly that of digital communication via Internet chat rooms or group forums, to represent the queer protagonists' quest for belonging and/or a reconstruction of the Self, as well as a rejection of societal expectations. This trope also figures bodies, affect, and identity in the texts in a way that challenges hegemonic norms and allows for a new understanding of identity, family, nation, or gender. The Internet spaces as represented in the texts serve to aid in connections

that span continents, and because Internet technology facilitates, reconfigures, and also problematizes global connections, the texts I analyze suggest that these relationships transcend or test normal boundaries of nation, race, class, and gender.

New technology has sanctioned community formation across boundaries and time zones. The Internet has allowed individuals to organize or categorize themselves without the need for formal configurations. It makes sharing content or advice – with others in similar situations, for example, those who undergo a diasporic exile due to a homophobic homeland, or networking with those who share duplicate hobbies and passions, like a favorite singer or video game – much easier both on and offline (see Shirky 192). As cities expand to the suburbs or individuals flee their Motherland in favor of other welcoming nations, travel-time and technology replace human interaction. As physical distance between individuals may grow, we rely on Internet connections to supplement our interpersonal relationships. We crave connection and yet our connectivity to the virtual world has begun to supplant many real-world intimacies. In her seminal article “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Donna Haraway notes our burgeoning dependence upon technology during the 1990s when media technology began. She comments, “we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (49). To that statement she adds, “[cyborgs are] needy for connection” (50). We may then conclude that we are all cyborgs and we still long for connection. Though it is human to covet a link with humanity, as cyborgs, the connection after which we lust is one with the Internet and technology. It is through this technology

that we are able to join together with others in virtual spaces and realms. Aided by technology, we self-organize into groups of what Rosi Braidotti calls posthuman subjects: “The emphasis on self-organization and metastability frames the project of becoming-machine of the posthuman subject” (*Posthuman* 94). Braidotti’s concept of “The Posthuman as Becoming-machine” (*Posthuman* 89) is similar to Haraway’s idea of the cyborg, which she defines as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (49). In a meditation on Harawayan cyborgs in post-9/11 society, Jasbir K. Puar elaborates on Haraway’s definition saying, “Haraway’s cyborgs are meant to undermine binaries” (*Cyborg* 56) and noting, “a cyborg actually inhabits the intersection of body and technology” (56).^[2] The characters and voices portrayed in the prose and poems I analyze in this dissertation demonstrate Harawayan cyborgs that straddle the real and the virtual,^[3] while also reminding us as readers of our own dependence upon technology. We, as individuals and readers, are inundated by the Internet and linked to it in such a way that we have become posthuman cyborgs, quite similarly to the experiences of the protagonists and voices represented within these literary texts.^[4]

The Internet has helped to establish an intertwined society, which means that our globalized culture has become what Braidotti has called “a moveable assemblage” (*Posthuman* 193) in reference to Deleuze’s theory regarding rhizomatically connected, heterogeneous groups.^[5] She refers to our current state as post-humanity, and acknowledges, “Becoming-posthuman... is a process of redefining one’s sense of attachment and connection to a shared world” (*Posthuman*

193). These attachments and connections create the so-called “moveable assemblages” and are present within the texts I analyze. As these texts prominently figure queer bodies, the assemblies within also may be considered queer assemblages. Puar distinguishes queer assemblages from an act of queering in the following elucidation: “As a queer assemblage – distinct from the ‘queering’ of an entity or identity – race and sexuality are denaturalized through impermanence” (Queer Times 130). She elaborates this statement, saying, “As there is no entity, no identity to queer, rather queerness coming forth at us from all directions, screaming its defiance, [this] suggests to me a move from intersectionality to assemblage. The Deleuzian assemblage, as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated networks, draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect” (Queer Times 127). A queer assemblage is a defiant network, which serves to undermine hegemony and order. Furthermore, Puar demarcates the queer bodies that comprise a queer assemblage as figures that possess a queerness that is “delinked from sexual identity to signal instead temporal, spatial, and corporeal schisms, [as] queerness is installed within as a prerequisite for the body to function symbolically, pedagogically, and performatively as it does” (Queer Times 130-131). Puar links queer assemblages with acts of terrorism:^[6] they confront hegemony and disrupt the norm in such a way that creates what David Bell and Jon Binnie call “the new homonormativity” (1808), which allows for the creation of safe havens for the LGBTQ community.^[7] Internet spaces, like the chat room or gaming forum, can become queer spaces of refuge and community. In this way, technology aids and

problematizes these rhizomatic interpersonal connections, and it is these networks that can disrupt the norm.

My research addresses the following questions: How does Spanish-language literature interpret and reposit Internet and new technology as a trope during the first decade of the 2000s? How do representations of the Internet contribute to the texts' queer aesthetic? How is performativity depicted and filtered through a computer screen and chat room language? How does literature engage the trope of Internet technology to theorize race, gender, desire, nationality, and class in the context of Internet spaces? How does desire function within the context of the Internet and how do new technologies reconfigure region, gender, race, or class? What kinds of ideologies facilitate the need for an alternative family or kinship and how does the Internet aid in or hinder the fomenting of both superficial and emotional connections across borders, real or imagined? And finally, how do the authors compose cyborg bodies and/or queer aesthetics and how do these queer, cyborg characters negotiate agencies on- and offline?

In this dissertation, I perform close readings of fictionalized chat room dialogs, Internet profiles, and email exchanges as well as poetic representations of YouTube and video gaming. I employ queer theories regarding the body and performance as my predominant theoretical basis with an emphasis on Butlerian gender performativity as well as concepts of kinship/alternative family stemming from what Manolo Guzmán has coined *(s)exilio*, the diaspora of queer persons as a result of their non-heteronormative sexuality, often by force or as a result of

ridicule. I also rely heavily on sociological studies about human interactions with technology and cyberspace, which are notably focused on Internet usage in North America, and apply them to the representations of the use of Internet realms in urban spaces in Latin America within the fictional or poetic literary texts.

In addition to being deemed queer, the texts on which I focus my analysis either contain within or allude to multimedia approaches to literature. For this reason, I apply Henry Jenkins' definition of convergence, "the flow of content across multiple media platforms ... [which] represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (*Convergence Culture* 2-3) to the myriad references to (or in the case of López's novel, insertion of) AOL, YouTube, and other technologically-bent popular culture phenomenon of the early 2000s. The Internet has become such a prevalent part of our quotidian lives that it is no wonder that these artists choose to include it in their literary works. We, like the voices represented in the texts, have become inundated by the Internet, and while reading Lozada, López, and Peri Rossi, we as readers become more astutely aware of our reliance upon the Internet's technological advances and our behavior in relation to cyberspace and online communities.

The contemporary literary texts with which I work are largely unstudied texts. The themes of chat rooms and cyborg bodies are transnational and transformative regarding queer themes of gender performance, kinship, and consumerism. Although there is some research regarding Lozada's first novel, *La*

patografía (1998), very little has been said about his second, *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006). My analysis of Lozada's text supplements previous studies by adding the Internet component, which is notably lacking from prior research, and delves into queer aesthetics by taking into account the fluid, performative nature of a bilingual narrative account. This dearth of erudite inquiry is similar with López's debut and sophomore novels, *La asesina de Lady Di* (2001) and *Keres cojer? = Guan tu fak?* (2005), respectively. Perhaps López's text is touted as lowbrow and unworthy of analysis. My research brings to the forefront the author's novel multimedia approach to literature, which makes the readers hyper-aware of their cyborg tendencies – much like the protagonists represented within the novel – and creates a diva not only from one of the main characters but out of the text itself. Though Peri Rossi has written much, her book of poems, *Playstation* was published during the latter years of the first decade of the new millennium, and as such, very few critics have tackled these texts even though it was awarded the 2008 Premio Loewe. My dissertation provides insight to the new, digital epistolary novel as well as to a technology-infused *poemario* as epitomized in the aught years and shows how these literary texts, through a queer aesthetic and an inclusion of Internet as a trope, demonstrate an interconnectivity between individuals of various races, socio-political contexts, nationalities, and social class, which has cemented a new kinship for the queer community or a novel perspective of the gendered body during a decade in which LGTBQ issues came to the forefront of politics in the Americas and in Spain.

This dissertation analyzes representations of the queer community and how, in certain literary texts, it has been figured by the Internet into a sort of Deleuzian network. The use of the Internet in queer encounters and exchanges has not necessarily created a better community, but it has changed the ways in which we think about queer communities. In contrast to the thrust of David Halperin's nostalgic book *How to Be Gay* (2012), which harkens back to a certain kind of gay male community that existed prior to the prevalence of Internet technology, I argue that the Internet has in certain ways aided in the creation of more inclusive queer communities, particularly in regards to marginalized life in Latin America and Spain, in the sense that the Internet allows queer persons to access others in what can be perceived as a safe haven, particularly in areas where Binnie and Bill's concepts of predetermined Queer Villages (like Spain's Chueca or New York's Christopher Street) do not already exist, as Leopoldo Alas and Ricardo Llamas have asserted. Furthermore, my dissertation elucidates the complex relationship between "real world" spaces and virtual space and delves into the types of relationships, communities, and sexual activities that take place online or offline with aid from Internet connections. However, it can also be argued that the Internet is available to many who can afford computer access as a pseudo-anonymous space in which individuals can explore and/or "try on" different personas (using nicks and avatars) without having to come out beyond the cyber realm, making cyberspace seem both a representation of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and an agent which can reinforce closetedness, or in other cases, simply eliminate the need for offline community or

family. My project explores the different ways in which the trope of the Internet within my chosen texts abets in the fomentation of queer communities in some instances and reinforces the closet in others.

In determining how these Internet communities operate within queer society, I find helpful the work of Chisholm's *Queer Constellations* (2005), which brings to light rhizomatic relationality within queer communities. Additionally, Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé's and Martin F. Manalansan's *Queer Globalizations* (2002) posits queer identities, practices, and cultures in a global (post)colonial space, but it fails to analyze how the Internet impacts these movements. My dissertation serves to bridge the gap between different approaches by providing view of queer relationality in globalization and its technological representations in literature that further examines class, race, and nationality beyond hegemonic norms.

Along with an analysis of the creation and transformations of queer communities, my dissertation examines metamorphoses of literature to show how technology-infused queer texts represent relationality as a type of network. These networks offer – and often operate because of – chance encounters, which Patrick Paul Garlingher examines in his study on epistolary texts. The tropes of chance encounters, personal letter writing, and technology are the building blocks from which representations of Internet spaces in queer literature is constructed. These narratives and poems containing chat rooms, online community forums, texts messages, and email exchanges then become a 21st century version of the epistolary

tale, and the cyberspaces represented within the texts become, like the queer space of the bathhouse, contemporary representations of spaces of chance encounter.

Chapter 1, “‘Las Locas were well-connected’: Diaspora, Bilingualism, and Heterotopic Chat Rooms in Ángel Lozada’s *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006)” analyzes the aforementioned novel, in which the Internet chat room becomes a coded, heterotopic space with specific rules and language that lay out a common goal for its queer protagonist, *la loca*: where/when/how are we going to fuck in real life? In addition to themes of queer gender and its relation to Internet spaces in the novel, I explore themes of (post)colonialism, bilingualism, and the search for an alternative family. The bulk of the novel’s plot takes place in New York, though *la loca*’s roots are in Puerto Rico. References to the character’s Caribbean past are made evident through frequent code-switching. This bilingual narration mimics the protagonist’s gender fluidity throughout the novel, and her online habits as represented in the text make her resemble that to which Donna Haraway refers as a cyborg. Though it is tempting to conclude that these chat rooms provide an alternative family for the protagonist, *la loca*, so that s/he feels less *sola y vacía* (a refrain repeated throughout the novel, in addition to being the novel’s title), a sensation which stems from her state of (s)exilio, I find instead that the Internet performs as an additional closet for the protagonist, and her forays into the online world actually perpetuate her isolation and sensations of emptiness.

In Chapter 2, “Amazon [pu(n)to] com: the Diva is online and so is the reader: Diva studies, cyborgs, and multimedia convergence in Alejandro López’s *Keres cojer?*”

= *guan tu fak* (2005)", I transition to a transgendered protagonist in Buenos Aires with dreams of traveling to California. Vanessa can be considered both pre- and post-operative, as her plans for breast augmentation hit a snag during the Argentine economic collapse of 2001, and her body is left lopsided with one, singular breast as she could only afford to pay in installments. The essential plot is one that follows Vanessa's transition from monstrously Amazonian being to double-breasted female in a trajectory that follows the same migratory patterns as the swallows that flock from her home town in the provinces of Argentina to a town outside of Los Angeles, California. Like the text analyzed in Chapter 1, this novel also illustrates a change of scenery from Latin America to the United States, as aided by Internet interlocutors. Vanessa's journey is narrated in a multimedia style that forces the reader to log on to the publisher's website in order to get the full story. The novel commands the readers to recognize their dependence upon the Internet and constant state of connectivity in such a way that the text itself becomes a diva, much like Vanessa, the protagonist within.

Chapter 3, "An Open-and-Shut Case for Linking Diva Fandom and Gaming Culture with Self Love in Cristina Peri Rossi's *Playstation*", provides a female perspective to my analysis of Internet-laden texts, while also serving to synthesize some of the themes seen in prior chapters, namely the Internet and Diva Studies, while adding another component of online studies: gaming. The trajectory represented in these poems can be seen to reflect Peri Rossi's own sexilio from Uruguay to Spain, and the opening and closing poems refer to YouTube and

PlayStation in such a way that I find them to be means for escapism from the stresses of daily life as well as self-pleasure. Her gaming console is consoling and the diva's videos she watches on YouTube create for her an online community even though the poet-author rejects the familial and amorous ties that the real world provides her.

The Internet has altered the way we connect with others, and it has allowed for some marginalized individuals a sense of false freedom that is unavailable in the real world, and for others an opportunity to reinvent themselves. When la loca, Vanessa, and Cristina Peri Rossi log on to the Internet – its chat rooms, its immediate email accessibility, its YouTube forums, and its online gaming community – they are confronted and comforted by something that is not accessible to them on some level in the real world. Their experiences are unique and yet universal, as the in observing their habits and patterns, the reader is often made more cognizant of his or her connectivity issues or Internet reliance. Internet and new technologies challenge the manners in which human beings socialize and interact, and whether this tool is a hindrance or help is oft debated. In the subsequent three chapters, we will follow three protagonists and voices that seek an answer to the question of the Internet's importance as well as how consumer culture, debt, and commodification play a role in our online lives.

[1] “The relationship between the human and the technological other has shifted in the contemporary context, to reach unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion.” (Braidotti *Posthuman* 89)

[2] Haraway’s cyborg myth is one that explores transgressed boundaries. Puar responds to that myth and writes during a time when those who migrate across boundaries are often seen as “the other” or even considered terrorists.

[3] “The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality.” (Haraway 49)

[4] My research analyzes texts written during a time in which personal computers, cell phones, video games, and the Internet are omnipresent, much in the way that Christine Henseler’s *Spanish Fiction in the Digital Age: Generation X Remixed* (2011) examines how Generation X writers’ works shed light on a societal worldview heavily influenced by pop culture, television, and brand name references. Studies like Henseler’s of the Nocilla Generation in Spain and others that focus on the Post-Boom Crack and McOndo movements in Latin America, which discuss the consequences of North American culture on Latin American societies and the elimination of strong cultural and/or national delineations as a result of globalized commerce, particularly the research in *Latin American Literature and Mass Media* (2001), edited by Edmundo Paz Soldán and Debora A. Castillo, also have helped me map the transformation of Latin American literature as the Internet and other communicative technologies came to the forefront.

[5] “An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously... [A]n assemblage establishes connections.” (Leitch 1460)

[6] “Queer times require even greater queer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression in order to elaborate on nationalist, patriotic, and terrorist formations and their intertwined forms of racialized perverse sexualities and gender dysphorias. What about the war on terrorism, and its attendant assemblages of racism, nationalism, patriotism, and terrorism, is already profoundly queer?” (Puar, *Queer Times* 121)

[7] Diane Chisolm calls these spaces “queer constellations,” which she explains as the following: “Queer constellations represent (or, more precisely, re-represent) late-twentieth-century fairylands, notably those of gay mecca, in whose constellation the gay bathhouse stars as an exemplary historical object for dialectical imaging” (36). She calls the inhabitants of queer constellations “queer nomads” (29) and likens them to flâneurs, noting, “Queer constellations personify [Walter] Benjamin’s constellations of awakening in narratives of experience and memory that radically undermine official history” (55). I find it arguable to state that the cyber-cruiser is the new flâneur. Just as “[t]he cruising flâneur of queer constellations strolls city passages with leisurely fascination at a loiterly, anti-industrious, pace. And like the classical flâneur, the cruising flâneur is piqued with desire – desire that the city itself has induced with its intoxicating promenade of commodities.” (46), the cyber-cruiser browses webpages and chat rooms in an

effort to quell his desire. The Internet can also be seen as a replacement of the gay space of the bathhouse: “[In the bathhouse] queers could relax in physical intimacy and explore their sexuality relatively immune from the dangers of city parks, public toilets, back alleys, and other shady fringes of public space. Homoerotic communing in naked anonymity transcended class difference and opened the way for a new social praxis. Moreover, the baths’ artful interior mimicry of city streets and cruising grounds with a choreography of steam and mirrors encouraged a love between citizen and city, as well as between citizen and citizen” (64) as the Internet also allows for a certain level of anonymity and protection.

Chapter 1: “Las Locas were well-connected”:

Diaspora, Bilingualism, and Heterotopic Chat Rooms

in Ángel Lozada’s *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006)

deFINiciones

soledad. (Del lat. *Solitas, -atis.*) *f.* Carencia voluntaria o involuntaria de compañía. /2. Lugar desierto, o tierra no habitada. /3. Pesar y melancolía que se siente por la ausencia, muerte o pérdida de alguna persona o cosa

vacío, a. (Del lat. *vacivus.*) *adj.* Falto de contenido físico o psíquico. /2. Falto de la perfección debida en su línea, o del efecto que se pretende. /3. Hueco, o falta de la solidez correspondiente. /4. Fis. Espacio que no contiene aire ni otra materia perceptible por medios físicos o químicos. [1]

Ángel Lozada’s *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (2006) is a book about fragmentation, queerness, diaspora, and sexile. It is a book about fluidity of gender, of language, and of genre. In its only 143 pages it speaks volumes about instability, consumerism, violence, sex, and the Internet. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on how this novel explores and utilizes space and language to highlight these

fluidities and themes. The central character, La Loca, a Puerto Rican gay male living in New York City, is dichotomous in many regards, and the text sets up a series of dichotomies that it subsequently undermines, revealing instead a spectrum of hybrid identities by code-switching and fluctuating between first-person and third-person narration, while further demonstrating fragmented identities by splintering off to other narrative styles, including but not limited to chat room dialogs, stream of consciousness, and various Internet codes. The title of the book, *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía*, contains a refrain whose variants are repeated and ritualized^[2] throughout the narrative's entirety. Lozada's choice to emphasize these two terms: *soledad* (solitude or loneliness) and *vaciedad* (emptiness), which he defines in the above epigraph, reflects La Loca's motivation and consequences of a desire for societal inclusion and integration, upper mobility, fulfillment, and plenitude, as her involvement in consumerism, online chatting, and sex is intended to eliminate the solitude and emptiness s/he feels but instead magnifies them.

The type of language Lozada employs within the text is creative and shape shifting, belying the structures of language and literary genre. Please note I hesitate to call the narrative a novel as it eschews a traditional storyline in favor of tangential prose, which is all interconnected through the protagonist, La Loca. The text, like La Loca herself,^[3] is hard to categorize. At times Lozada writes with vulgarity and the language produces violence, and at others the author commits violence against language itself by creatively spelling words and forgoing prose norms. Just as La Loca represents malleability in gender, the text itself presents an

elasticity of genre. The Spanish word *género* translates to mean both gender and genre, which further links these two concepts beyond their category-marking intentions. The creative form of writing Lozada uses is made noticeable through the use of parenthetical demarcation in the following words and phrases: “(Loca)lizada” (50, 105), “La Desca(Bella)da” (51), “La Ló(gi)ca” (51), “el (s)exilio” (53), “Psicó(Pata)” (55), “La Lo-que-era” (59) y “latinos semi-(anal)fabetos” (69). The words in paren(theses) are words commonly associated with gay males of Caribbean origin and/or are charged with certain cultural significance, and their poetic spellings stress the labels and stereotypes that are often applied to individuals of gay or queer communities. Additionally, the repetition of this structure begins to become campy or reminiscent of a “repetition and a ritual” per Butler’s definition of gender performativity (*Gender*, xv). The language Lozada uses is distinct^[4] and deliberate, and it draws attention to the instability of gender and genre categories.

The spaces represented in Lozada’s narrative include the islands of Puerto Rico and Manhattan as well as the virtual space of the Internet, namely AOL chat rooms. The relative insularity of these spaces allows for distinct cultures, codes, rituals, and relationships that at times either expel or welcome the protagonist, La Loca. In short, these spaces, both real and imagined, are where La Loca seeks to feel less *sola* (alone) and *vacía* (empty.) S/he navigates them in order to escape ridicule, to present herself as a contributing and successful member of society worthy of inclusion in higher social classes, and to seek permanently or even temporarily

fulfilling relationships. La Loca, as a Puerto Rican gay-identified, biological male residing in New York City, represents an amalgam of identities. As a queer subject, La Loca demonstrates a blend of masculinity and femininity.^[5] La Loca is also equal parts Caribbean and New Yorker and, having lived in the US territory of Puerto Rico, s/he shares the duplicitous nature of colonial subjects (being fragmented into both colonizer and colonized)^[6]. La Loca is a fluid victim of intersectionality.^[7] La Loca's intersectionality is not a choice but rather a condition of her race, sexuality^[8], and position in society^[9], as Jasbir K. Puar elaborates:

Subject positioning on a grid is never self-coinciding; positioning does not precede movement but rather it is induced by it; epistemological correctives cannot apprehend ontological becomings; the complexity of process is continually mistaken for a resultant product. (Becoming Intersectional 50)

La Loca is positioned as a queer immigrant whose accented English belies her white skin. While Arun Saldanha claims, "The theory of intersectionality holds that there is no actual body that is a member of only one set" (289), in the case of La Loca, her intersections are so varied and fluctuating that it would seem her sense of belonging to any specific group is dwindling and tenuous at best. La Loca aims to evade *soledad* (her lack of belonging) and *vaciedad* or incompleteness through shopping, clubbing, and sex, but these attempts are often thwarted and s/he spirals into debt and a potentially harmful dating cycle.

Throughout the narration s/he and the narrative voice vacillate between languages, speaking — or, in the case of the narrator, writing — with ease in both Spanish and in English. However, this code-switching language marks the instability of the novel's protagonist, who is doubly marginalized for being both queer and a Puerto Rican immigrant living in the United States. Shedding a more positive light on La Loca, however, I claim that s/he personifies the unfixed and fluid identity of the queer individual as s/he and the narrative describing her deliberately waver between gender identities and their corresponding pronouns and fluctuate between Spanish and English language use in the text. Additionally, La Loca frequently spends time surfing and cruising the Internet, so that, just as she occupies New York, she also occupies the World Wide Web, making her reminiscent of a Cyborg^[10]-type individual, or Cyber-person, who navigates the real world as easily as s/he does the Internet.^[11] To sum up, La Loca is an amalgamation of dichotomies, namely: masculine/feminine, Puerto Rican/New Yorker, colonized/colonizer, Spanish-speaking/English-speaking, and human/Cyber-person who lives her life both online and off. La Loca's bifurcated nature demonstrates the fluidity of a queer person and the fragmentation of a colonial subject. The spaces s/he occupies and the language s/he and Lozada employ serve to show how La Loca's attempts to seek both consumerist and sexual plenitude as well as emotional fulfillment through her quest to not end up *sola* and/or *vacía* are problematized and frustrated.

I. Reloading... Are You Sure You Want to Go Back? :

La Loca's Puerto Rican Past and Present Sexilio

La Loca equally inhabits New York and Internet spaces throughout the text; however her presence in Puerto Rico, one of the three prominent spaces represented in Lozada's narrative, is limited to the past. La Loca is linked to Puerto Rico through her history, her Boricua accent, and her family members, who still reside on the Caribbean island, but La Loca is not known for frequent visits back to her homeland. S/he instead seeks relationships and fulfillment online and in New York. The narrator insists that La Loca has become disenchanted with her visits to Puerto Rico, the so-called Island of Enchantment, ^[12] "because she was 100 percent certain that always someone, at least once, would call her PATO to humiliate her while on her stay in the Island of Enchantment" (57). ^[13] In this instance, the term "pato" does not innocently refer to a duck but rather serves to pejoratively label someone as effeminate. It noteworthy and perhaps relevant at this moment to mention that Ángel Lozada's debut novel is titled *Patografía* (1996) and narrates the tale of Luisín, a young Puerto Rican *marica* who is teased for his effeminate behavior and so often pejoratively is called a pato that he eventually metamorphoses into the very label he has been given, an actual duck, which is later hunted, cooked, and eaten in a delicious orange sauce. In Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes' 2007 journal article "Queer Ducks, Puerto Rican Patos, and Jewish-American Feygelekh: Birds and the Cultural Representation of Homosexuality" the author states,

In Puerto Rico and at other locations in the Greater Hispanic Caribbean (and in its diaspora), to be called *pato* [male duck] or *pata* [female duck], far from being a sign of affection, is rather a quite disconcerting and at times traumatic event, for it is to be marked as queer, strange, different, sexually or gender non-compliant, or simply marginal. (194)

The ridicule and prejudice that accompany this pejorative Puerto Rican slur strike in La Loca a fear so strong that it provokes her to leave one island for another, trading Puerto Rico for New York.

The ostracism s/he feels causes La Loca to flee her homeland for the Northeastern United States and marks her as a victim of what has come to be known as (s)exilio or sexile.^[14] Manolo Guzmán coined the term (s)exilio in 1997 in order to refer to “the exile of thousands who have had to leave their nations of origin on account of their sexual orientation” (227). This exile has reached epidemic proportions in the case of citizens of Puerto Rico, whose nationalist movement does not provide a safe space for queer people like La Loca. La Loca herself feels conflicted about the nationalist movement because the nationalists tend to be homophobes, but nonetheless, “A la Loca le fastidia el discurso de los independentistas puertorriqueños, porque los encuentro patófobos, pero en lo más profundo de su corazón quiere la independencia para su isla” (23). S/he is clearly irresolute: s/he wants independence for her homeland, but as long as its citizens continue to act with a homophobic agenda, La Loca must remain independent from

them, and she therefore chooses to live in New York, dubbed the “symbolic capital of DiaspoRico” (Aponte-Parés, et al 5), instead. This diaspora of queer persons is, as Guzmán states, a result of their non-heteronormative sexuality, and the migration is often catalyzed by force or comes as a result of ridicule. Queer persons were often pathologized in Puerto Rico in attempts to quash any practices deemed non-heteronormative. “The pathologization of queer Puerto Rican sexual practices [...] aim[ed] to dismiss and stigmatize Puerto Rican queers” (Aponte-Parés, et al 5). Puerto Rican nationalism is anti-gay; there is seemingly no place for La Loca in Puerto Rico except for the closet, so s/he moves to New York for a new opportunity at love, acceptance, and fulfillment in hopes to feel less *sola* and *vacía*. Lozada insinuates that the aforementioned type of stigmatization and homophobia likely is what provoked La Loca to move to New York, the locus of Puerto Rican diaspora. For many Puerto Rican emigrants, similar representations of homophobia were the driving forces for much of the immigration to larger cities like New York City. Jossianna Arroyo defines this type of diasporic immigration as such:

El migrante homosexual... reproduce otras complejidades que problematizan el perfil complejo de la diáspora puertorriqueña... muchas de estas migraciones, especialmente después de la década de los ochenta... tienen que ver con la homofobia en la política y en la sociedad puertorriqueña... (326)

La Loca is decidedly more open about her sexual orientation online and even in her day-to-day life in New York, but it would seem that her sexuality is closeted, or at

the very least not discussed among family, due to prevalent homophobia in Puerto Rico, as noted by Arroyo, and as made evident by the narrator's tendency to use masculine pronouns when discussing La Loca's past and/or family. The following passage demonstrates the narrator's penchant for masculine gender pronouns while discussing La Loca's familial life:

He would get so happy – whatever that meant – when his mother would call him: their only conversation siempre se repetía: hola, te llamaba porque quería oír tu voz quería saber cómo estabas [...] y la Loca colgaba, inidentificable, un sentimiento, no, una intensidad extraña, (Loca)lizada en alguna parte entre el corazón el esófago y el estómago, un movimiento sanguíneo que le teleproyectaba la memoria al futuro: cuando mami se muera sé que ni Elsa ni María ni Orlando ni nadie me llamará... (50)

The narration begins in English, as La Loca is in New York when s/he receives the phone call from *his*^[15] mother, but then the narrator switches languages to encapsulate the sensations of a Spanish mother tongue. The author's choice to switch to masculine gender pronouns throughout this passage reminds the reader of the gender roles constructed within patriarchal or *machista* societies in Puerto Rico, and they exemplify the expectations that a mother would have for her son (e.g. that he "be a man"). La Loca's quite literally visceral reaction to his conversation with his mother demonstrates how s/he senses a feeling of estrangement and alienation that can not only be attributed to physical distance given the delicate

situation that (s)exilio has caused. The Spanish language to which La Loca switches mid-sentence once on the phone with his mother represents the culture, island, and family he left when he packed up for New York City. And it is in this language that La Loca considers her future when, eventually, his mother will die and he will lose all contact with his family, as the rest have continually shunned him because of his sexual orientation. Perhaps it is better to say that the Spanish language s/he uses with his mother represents the island, culture, and family which abandoned him and forced him to leave for another life in a place which would be more accepting of his sexual identity.

As the previous passage briefly demonstrates, both languages are practicable for La Loca, just as both gendered identities – masculine and feminine – seem inhabitable for her. Though s/he identifies most with one gender, the feminine, and though through the narrative voice s/he typically prefers to speak and to write in one language, Spanish, La Loca is wont to use the others when they are convenient or more advantageous to her. Additionally, the narrator vacillates between describing her or himself as a *loca* with feminine-ending adjectives and an *hombre* with masculine-ending adjectives, which signals the fluidity that exists within a person with regards to identities, sexualities, and genders., There are as many genders as there are people, as Martine Rothblatt asserts in *The Apartheid of Sex* (1995): “people are infinitely unique with one of two kinds of genitals (in many variations) and the potential for any sexual identity they choose” (51). Indeed, throughout Lozada’s narrative we readers observe that La Loca manifests the

different types of gender one can express, and furthermore, she many times vacillates between varied gender possibilities, which demonstrates fluidity as well as breadth of gender identifications. La Loca admits that “Quería tener las tetas desarrolladas y la barriga rypiada” (19). S/he wants her body to represent the idealized form of the two genders s/he feels: the desired developed breasts represent womanhood, and the dream of chiseled abdominal muscles demonstrates her hard-bodied male side.^[16] From the very first page of “Chapter Seven, Bombón de Azúcar (vuelta a New York): Charlie Cruz y Ricky Martin,” La Loca uses as much Spanish-English code-switching as she does “code-switching” of genders. Judith Butler states, “Gender is a project which has cultural survival at its end” (*Performativity*, 156.) Just as gender can be performative according to the needs of cultural survival, languages also can be performed or employed according to their cultural benefit, as La Loca demonstrates throughout the novel, and about which I will go into further detail later on in this chapter. In addition to Butler’s assertion, I maintain that just as a person can manage with ease two languages in the case of bilingualism, s/he can also handle with finesse and dexterity the putting on and performance of multiple genders. Through La Loca, the narrative voice demonstrates this code-switching of genders, saying,

But La Loca had to keep her job at Anderson. He had a student loan debt of more than \$85,000. She didn’t know exactly how much she owed, but she had to make almost \$1,000 a month in payments to many banks and financial institutions. She was always behind on

some payment or another, constantly bombarded by emails, letters, phone calls, and faxes reminding her she was late. And to be able to maintain her standard of living in New York City she had to work overtime. (50)

Even though the above passage narrates the life of only one individual, both masculine and feminine pronouns are included. Affirming my prior claim about La Loca's gender pronouns and her previous life and family, it appears that, for the most part, the masculine pronouns refer to the past: "*He* had a student loan debt" because he has already graduated from his university studies, but "*la Loca*," in the present, "had to keep *her* job [and] *she* had to make almost \$1,000 a month in payments." *She* was always behind because *his* student loan debt coupled with *her* spending habits drove her to near financial ruin. *His* past actions and expenses affect *her*, because he and she are both the same persona, despite encompassing different gender identities. Though the above passage highlights the usage of feminine gender pronouns in the present whilst masculine ones stay grounded in the past, I do hope my explication of it can serve to expound the concept of "gender bilingualism." Above all, the use of two binary pronouns él/ella, he/she, and him/her for just one person marks this subject as one who inhabits two different gender roles as naturally and as fluently as a bilingual person who speaks dual languages.

By employing bilingualism and Butlerian gender performance, ^[17] La Loca should have many opportunities to be able to become part of a community of shared, interpersonal feelings of mutual trust and unity, which stems from common

cultural experiences, linguistic traditions, and religious and/or spiritual beliefs (see Hidalgo). However, the methods through which s/he attempts to usurp any diasporic feelings of *soledad* or *vaciedad* – namely consumerism, attempts at social climbing, and cruising the internet for sex partners – end up perpetuating a cycle of debt, loneliness, and emptiness. Many victims of diaspora use computers to connect with their families in the homeland, but, as I have already established, La Loca is estranged from the bulk of her relatives back in Puerto Rico. Michel Laguerre reminds us of the role technology has played in many diasporans' lives, saying,

the use of the computer and the Internet has contributed to the delocation and respatialization of practices... It allows the cyber expansion of social interaction beyond one's neighborhood through participation in virtual communities and online discussions... It allows diasporans to maintain transnational relations with the homeland.

(61)

In the case of La Loca, s/he does not seem to express much fondness for her motherland, as I have already explained, nor does she seem to desire transnational relations with the island that essentially booted her out for her sex practices. However, in some regards s/he does promote a conflicted sense of Boricua pride as her online attempts at self-representation portray an exotimized "Latin Lover" type and the Puerto Rican flag pops up throughout the narrative as La Loca's fetish object, cum rag (18), and AOL profile picture.^[18]

The symbol of the Puerto Rican flag is thus rich for interpretations. Robert Stoller calls a fetish “a story masquerading as an object” (155). What better way to refer to La Loca’s ambivalent relationship to the island than the Puerto Rican flag? There is certainly a story behind her obsession. It is notable that the very flag La Loca uses during masturbation was a gift from an aunt back in Puerto Rico, and that s/he keeps said flag in the closet: “la Loca se lava la boca y luego se masturba viendo películas porno de Chad Douglas, se seca la leche con las franjas blancas de una bandera puertorriqueña que la tía le había regalado y que guarda en el clóset” (Lozada 18). The concealment of the flag, a token reminder of her motherland given by a family member, in the physical space of her bedroom closet represents both her closeted patriotic identity and the symbolic closet in which La Loca places herself when s/he interacts with her family. Though it appears La Loca is “out” in New York City, it would seem s/he is partially closeted with her family and/or that if s/he had already come out to them as gay while on the island, her relatives forced her back into the closet and toward a state of sexile in the United States. La Loca’s conflicted relationship with the flag is demonstrated by her act of hiding it in the closet while also wearing it emblematically on her AOL profile page, as well as her fetishistic use of it in sexual and pre- or post-sexual ritualistic acts (cleaning excrement, etc.). Though many immigrants might adopt their new country’s flag as a gesture of assimilation, La Loca clings to her Puerto Rican roots, as messy as her relationship with the past may be. It is interesting to contrast La Loca’s use of the flag to the pervasiveness of American flags flown by immigrants as observed by Jasbir Puar:

“As with the case of communities of color, these flags and other patriotic symbolism may function as both a defensive and normalizing gestures” (*Terrorist* 43). La Loca is very much an immigrant subject to xenophobia as well as homophobia (though to a lesser extent in New York City than in Puerto Rico), yet s/he chooses to fly the flag of her homeland instead of her adopted country in a way that does not align her with US norms, but rather serves to exoticize her. S/he uses the Puerto Rican flag to self-identify and to declare herself as Caribbean, but s/he also uses it to wipe fecal matter^[19] from her buttocks.^[20] La Loca’s identification with and rejection of the Puerto Rican flag elucidates her ambivalence toward her motherland. La Loca does not, like the other diasporans Laguerre has studied, use the Internet to connect with her home country, but rather s/he logs on in hopes of creating a new – if only temporary – community of semi-anonymous male sex partners. This Puerto Rican subject living in New York, as an immigrant, also searches for a new or alternate family. According to Arroyo, “[los protagonistas puertorriqueños] que se van se sitúan ‘fuera’ de orden familiar para constituirse en un ‘nuevo orden’ familiar” (361). La Loca then appropriates the Internet in order to create a new family, not to reconnect with the ones whom she left.

II. IRL:^[21] Lacanian Desire and La Loca in New York and the Nation's Capitol

Before La Loca sought solace on the Internet, s/he first finds it – if only fleetingly – offline in New York City. New York, home to Saks Fifth Avenue and Christopher Street, allows La Loca easy access to the consumer goods and sexually available gay men, both of which s/he feels will fill her void or *hueco* ^[22] in order to feel less empty and alone. In her psychoanalytic research, Shari L. Thurer notes that some contemporary transgendered persons lobby for the right to marry or adopt, and she insists that these petitions are hardly “a wish to tweak bourgeoisie convention *but rather a wish to join it*” (5, emphasis mine). This situation is one that La Loca, the transgendered protagonist, mimics in Lozada’s narrative: s/he wants to be accepted. S/he wants to join society as a functioning and validated member. S/he searches for love and attention online and IRL while inundating herself with consumer goods in an attempt to fit in: she just wants to be a part of something. La Loca, like transgendered people who seek equality in the eyes of the law, just wants to be treated like everyone else. It is her attempt to fill this lack, however, which perpetuates a longing or the lack itself. In this, La Loca’s desires align with psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s theory of *objet petit a*, the unattainable object of desire. La Loca’s desire is unattainable and thus never satisfied. S/he states in Spanglish, “To stay ahead of the times, not to fall behind, es mi propósito para no sentirme incompleta...” (17). Through this bilingual quote, we as readers see La

Loca as a bilingual subject living through what Jacques Derrida^[23] would call *différance*, La Loca breaks apart the normative logical (*logos*) order of both languages to recreate her own through deconstruction of language and a practice of remaking or reassigning colonial signifiers and cultural agency. S/he encompasses many binaries (masculine/feminine, Caribbean/New Yorker, Spanish/English, etc.) and this further refraction makes it even more difficult for La Loca (to know how) to construct an identity within the competing social and linguistic orders.

The New York in which La Loca lives is not one of moneyed glamour or fame, as s/he would hope, but rather one in which bums, debt, human excrement, and exclusion surround her. Throughout the narrative, expulsion – of both the corporeal and societal varieties – abounds. It is important to remember that La Loca resides in New York because of expulsion: s/he was exiled from Puerto Rico because of her sexuality and again from Washington, D.C. because of a lover who left her feeling, yet again, *sola* and *vacía* and also because of her queer sexuality in a DADT military environment. The world s/he knew has rejected her, so s/he seeks fulfillment (of the societal, monetary, and sexual varieties) and inclusion in New York City, where instead s/he finds diseased rats, malodorous hobos, and yes, again, rejection from society as a sexual deviant or Other. The New York La Loca describes is seedy and serves to reflect Julia Kristeva's theories of the abject: ^[24] s/he picks her boogers (a bodily discharge) in plain sight on the subway and leaves them under her seat, ^[25] s/he lives in a neighborhood where drug addicts are prevalent, ^[26] and her home is “[un] apartamento infectado de ratas” (55). La Loca cannot afford to live in a nicer

area, ^[27] and yet s/he fills her home with fancy furniture s/he frivolously bought on credit: “Vivía prácticamente en un crematorio en Washington Heights, con basura y edificios sucios por todos lados y no quería que los vecinos vieran los muebles caros para que así no sintieran motivados a robarle” (55). S/he douses her home in King Pine disinfectant to remove the stench and bodily odors the homeless persons who live in her neighborhood have left behind as well as the insufferable uncleanliness s/he feels within herself: “El propósito de este perfume [King Pine] es contrarrestar la peste insoportable de los homeless que viven dentro de mí y pernoctan sentados sobre mis bancos. Allí se acuestan en mis esquinas detrás de mis basureros” (26). The narrative voice describes La Loca’s home as constantly being surrounded by garbage and refuse, and s/he is haunted spiritually by abjection as it is also inside of her (“dentro de mí”) and s/he becomes a medium for it. Just as La Loca masks the malodorous neighbors by spraying perfume on them, s/he hides her own true economic status by purchasing knock-off designer sunglasses in Chinatown^[28] or Harlem^[29] and buying fancy home furnishings on credit. La Loca is very concerned with keeping up appearances and staying *au courant* so as to fill the Lacanian lack that commercial marketing says s/he has.^[30] La Loca addresses a homeless man who panhandles near her home: “yo también estoy casi homeless [sic] yo no tengo food to eat because I live pay check to pay check, porque gasté los chavos en Monsters [a gay night club], tratando de levantar un macho...” (26-27). Her shopping habits – which s/he continues in order to appear of a certain socio-economic status – and frequenting of clubs – which s/he does in order to meet

men who might fill the void that causes her to feel *sola* and *vacía* – are what drives La Loca to debt and eventual bankruptcy. At one point La Loca finds herself in so much debt that s/he has to move from her Washington Heights apartment to one in a neighborhood with even less prestige. The narrator states, “Acabar evicted, re(LOCA)lizado en lo profundo del Bronx” (114). Her status as a “loca,” obsessed with dressing in the newest fashions and crazy in her desire to stay *au curreant*, is what causes La Loca to be evicted and to lose what little space s/he could claim as hers in the world. Her endless desire left her mere steps away from homeless.

La Loca, seeking to absolve herself of the sexiled loneliness (*soledad*) and consumerism-fueled emptiness (*vaciedad*) s/he feels, tries to fill herself up in two ways: by having unprotected sexual intercourse with male strangers met either in gay clubs or in Internet chat rooms (two important spaces within the text) or by buying things, which leads to her financial downfall. Both attempts to become less alone and empty serve only to perpetuate the cycles of desire and lack and of debt. Consumerism becomes as expression of the abject, as instead of fulfillment, s/he ends up with debt (a type of death.)^[31] La Loca’s sexual proclivity puts her at risk for disease (and death), but also her bent for anal penetration makes it so that s/he can be filled physically (and thus fulfilled) but only temporarily. Thus the anus becomes a motif linked to abjection (shit) throughout the text: it can be filled and it can be emptied, but it also expels, much in the way that La Loca has been expelled from Puerto Rico and certain (if not most) echelons of US society.

Much in the way that La Loca pursues sex in hope to fill her anus despite the imminent emptying to follow, La Loca inserts herself into high society even though s/he runs the risk of being eventually expelled from it. In other words, society symbolically becomes the anus in the text, and La Loca becomes its abject excrement. La Loca finds (temporary) fulfillment in having apparent economic ability and a certain social status. S/he refers to her ZIP code as her “purchasing power” (21), claiming to live on the Upper West Side when she interacts with the shop-girls as opposed to Washington Heights: “Si se entera que vivo en Washington Heights, no me tratará como me lo merezco: con el respeto que se me deba... Vivo para ese día, en que pueda salir como la [First Lady Jacqueline] Kennedy, en esos shopping sprees, a gastar treinta mil dólares diarios. I can’t wait, I can’t wait” (21). La Loca lives on credit and in this way, s/he tends to be more future-minded, that is, when s/he is not worried about dying early from AIDS. ^[32] Her greatest joy, however, comes from this hope that s/he one day will live like Jackie Kennedy, and others will finally treat her with the respect s/he deserves. La Loca’s desires to be treated like and to live like Jackie Kennedy align perfectly with Lacan’s notion of desire; Lacanian desire is twofold: it seeks recognition as well as what one thinks the other is seeking. According to Lacan, the satisfaction of desire would cause the desire itself to cease to exist, as the desire of the Other “tends to diminish the special significance of any one particular object, but at the same time it brings into view the existence of objects without number” (Lacan *Reflections*). This explains La Loca’s cyclical debt and repeated (and failed) attempts at finding fulfillment through sexual

relationships as well as through credit-based purchases and consumerism. La Loca desires what s/he perceives a woman of certain social status would desire, and s/he wants to be treated like a lady of means; so, until she reaches this goal lifestyle, s/he will continue to take out loans ^[33] and fib to others about her economic status. In short, La Loca fakes it 'til she makes it.

An ally who enabled La Loca to temporarily infiltrate high society is her self-professed sugar-daddy boyfriend, whom s/he met during a truncated stint in Washington, D.C. This boyfriend subtly controlled the protagonist by allowing her entrance to more upper crust echelons of society and providing for her a place in more luxurious or elegant spaces. La Loca is invited as her boyfriend's guest to a soiree hosted by Pepita Rodeaux, the "ex-directora de la Fundación de la Mujer Puertorriqueña" (32) and a fixture in the D.C. social scene. The charity cocktail party Pepita hosts is essentially for an empty cause – echoing the emptiness La Loca tends to feel inside – and allows socialites to hob-knob with one another. Although the relationships formed within the group would seem as hollow as the protagonist feels inside, La Loca is compelled to join the group, however superficial their interpersonal relations may be, and seeks to imitate their perceived successes. La Loca sees Pepita as her idol, ^[34] and s/he decides to learn from her in order to better fit in (and thus feel less *sola*) by observing her: "la Loca nota su forma de caminar y los moños que se hace" (32). S/he admires her style of dress (reminiscent of Audrey Hepburn or Jackie Kennedy, ^[35] one of La Loca's idols, who was mentioned previously in this chapter), her dedication to the arts, and her apartment in

Georgetown (32). S/he decides, “La imitaré” (32) and then in the paragraph which follows, the narrative voice switches to English:

She was best described by John Berger in *G*: Pepita led a full social life in the Nation’s Capital. Scarcely an afternoon passed without her visiting or being visited. Nobody refused an invitation to her dinner parties. Her secret lay in her appearance. She acted delicate, fragile, as though she were made of some material other than flesh: a material which had been wrought and intricately finished so that there seemed to be no danger of it ever changing. (32)

It is noteworthy that the narrative voice switches to English, the more hegemonically dominant language of the United States, while describing a woman of Puerto Rican origins. La Loca sets out to imitate or mock Pepita’s upper class English, but instead s/he ends up quoting John Berger. La Loca, though considered fully bilingual, admits s/he sometimes has trouble with her English, saying, “Tengo problemas defendiéndome en inglés... Pero siempre me vengo, en flashes de defensa...” (19). It is normal for La Loca to (have to) speak English when discussing business or finances and while interacting with individuals on the streets of New York or at Washington, D.C. fundraising galas, as is the case above. Language, being less rigid or fixed than ethnicity, can, like gender, be put on or performed for the right occasion. Mark Warschauer claims, “Language, though deeply rooted in personal and social history, allows a greater flexibility than race and ethnicity, with a person able to consciously or unconsciously express dual identities by the

linguistic choices they make” (155). Being bilingual could allow La Loca the ability to waltz in and out of myriad social circles like Pepita does. In the continental United States, English is the more dominant language, even though there are plenty of Puerto Rican diasporans living there. Where La Loca lives, English is considered the language of money, of power, and of success. S/he is expected to use it if s/he wants to fit in. Regarding La Loca’s Anglicisms and English use, Ana Celia Zentella confirms, “Powerful socioeconomic and cultural forces stimulate borrowing whenever two cultures are in contact; the borrowing by the subordinate group’s language from that of the dominate group is always significantly greater than the other way around” (1100). La Loca then is forced to use English, the language of the dominant group, in order to have a place as part of its society. La Loca’s boyfriend allows her entrance to this world, but it is her domination of the language – prescriptive, descriptive, as well as body language, as her imitations of Pepita’s strut would signify – which could allow her to stay. La Loca desires to have a sense of belonging within this group as a way to quell her feelings of *soledad* and *vaciedad*, even though Pepita’s membership in its inner circle of power implies that the group itself is vacuous and thus empty.

After La Loca loses the love of her cheating sugar daddy, she seeks to fulfill her desire and fill the gap he left with other men named Hugo Boss, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Kenneth Cole and Ethan Allen: “la ropa de GAP, los trajes de Hugo Boss,^[36] las camisas Ralph Lauren, los mahones de Calvin Klein, los zapatos Kenneth Cole” (28). La Loca fills her closet with men’s names and also “visita a Ethan Allen”

to lust over a loveseat (28). The link between La Loca's excessive shopping trips and her visits to gay nightclubs – both acting as a way to heal her heartache by filling the void and ending the solitude s/he feels – is so strong that when the first creditor calls her to collect her past-due payment, s/he initially believes him to be a man s/he met at a gay club:

Teléfono: **This is Derick Talum:** I don't remember his name but he sounds professional maybe I gave him my phone number in a napkin at the Monster ... uhm ... his voice is masculine he sounds handsome he sounds African American: **I am a representative for Citibank. You need to call us at 1-800-455-3333 to DISCUSS you account. Your payment is past due.** (77, emphasis in original)

La Loca's fantasies then switch immediately from having handsome-sounding Derick Talum as a boyfriend to being held in custody for her inability to pay her rather exorbitant credit card charges, which have risen to extreme heights in her attempts to (a) fit in and feel less empty and (b) find a mate who would make her feel less alone. La Loca's intimate exchanges have functioned like her economic transactions, wherein both have left her feeling indebted or depleted. La Loca narrates, "Me arrodillaré frente a las cámaras, declararé que mi motivo era resolver el issue del status... y seré declarada innocent for reasons of insanity" (77). S/he then plays off the meanings of the word "loca": crazy, and declares herself insane as s/he admits that all of her spending has been done with the purpose of resolving her

issue of being forced to be a part of what s/he perceives to be the wrong social status for a (wo)man of her promise.

It is not odd that La Loca initially assumes Citibank's Derick Talum is a man s/he met at a nightclub, because when s/he can afford it, La Loca frequents certain gay clubs to the point where they have become routine, that is, empty experiences which each end in solitude. La Loca says, "Los busco en las barras y los quiero dentro de mi culo" (24). Her search for a male sex partner who prefers a certain position (top) and has skin of a certain color (dark), meeting a designated spot on a grid of intersectionality, has proven difficult in her many visits to New York's gay clubs. These two criteria, preferred sexual position of the potential partner and the potential partner's race, impede La Loca's ability to fulfill her desire for a long-term connection despite the amount of flings s/he has had. Even within certain gay crowds La Loca feels ostracized for being single and/or not belonging to a certain group: "Desprestigiada porque no tenía una relación monógama como las otras locas estables ni iba a grupos de doce pasos, la loca andaba arrastrada por las cunetas y los patos la habían casi excomulgado, declarándola puta" (22). S/he is shunned for not being attached and in a monogamous relationship, and s/he is chastised for not linking up with a 12-step recovery group, which might help her cope with her partying and spending. In short, La Loca cannot find a place in the real world where s/he fits in with the crowd, not even in the gay nightclubs, where s/he would ideally be surrounded by (wo)men like her. S/he has been rejected. S/he combats the emptiness s/he feels with shopping trips and visits to nightclubs, but

once those resources are exhausted (because of bankruptcy or ostracism) s/he turns to Internet chat rooms to fill her void.

III. La Loca.com: online habits of an Internet interlocutor

The chat rooms that La Loca visits are similar to the real-life nightclubs s/he frequents, as they are made available to particular types of persons, even though they are technically public spaces, and they have certain embedded rules of participation. Unlike the nightclubs, however, these chat rooms are neither tangible nor physical spaces, but the virtual realms play a very strong role in the lives of the gay men represented in the novel. Juana María Rodríguez analyzes cyber spaces and a few real-life chat rooms similar to those that Lozada's La Loca would visit in her nonfiction chapter, "Welcome to the Global Stage: Confessions of a Latina Cyber Slut":

Though many rooms exist for the purpose of social chatting, sharing information, hobbies, or interests, a vast number are designed, explicitly or implicitly, to create the possibility of online sexual encounters. And 'sex on the Net' is one of the most noted and notorious uses of cybernetic connectivity. (129)

The character of La Loca confirms the ideas proposed by Rodríguez and takes it even further because La Loca looks for sex on the Internet but s/he wants to have intercourse not virtually, that is, alone and in a void, but IRL. The narrator states: "Los recoge en el Internet. Ahora los busca en los chat rooms. La Loca entra a aol y

se ubica en DomBlkSub4Whtm y Saluda ‘Sub Puerto Rican btm here in Washington Heights. Any Black Maculine (sic) TOP Men here in NYC?’” (Lozada 121). Other chat rooms that La Loca frequents are called “Latino M4M, blkm4blkm, NYC m4m now, Blum 4 latinom, y TRUCKDRIVERSM4M” (60). Those chat rooms make gay sexual partners more accessible for La Loca and other people who share her quest for a one-night-stand or a temporary relationship. However, before a person can enter a chat room, he or she must create an online user identity. ^[37] Lisa Nakamura (2002) confirms this, noting “users are known to others by self-authored names they give their ‘characters’” (35). La Loca chooses the names “WasHts,” and “SubLocaNYC,” which refer to her geographic location and/or to the sexual position and gender s/he prefers as well as her Puerto Rican heritage since s/he elected to incorporate Spanish-language slang. These self-selected nicknames will serve both to allow her entrance into the cyber realm and for others to better decipher what kind of Cyber-person s/he is.

Choosing an online moniker is the first step in creating a cybernetic *performance*. The Cyber-person constructs his or her identity through the words he or she has chosen to post online. According to Sonia Livingston, “creating and networking online content is becoming an integral means of managing one’s identity, lifestyle and social relations” (469). Because of this, the selection of a user name or nick is as important as the construction of an online profile. Juana María Rodríguez observes, “Selecting a nick, naming yourself, becomes the first conscious act of constructing an online identity” (128). The individual can become whomever

he or she wants to become online through self-authorship, and the selection of a user name is the first step. User names are not to be confused with avatars, which typically involve a pictorial representation as well as a written reimagining of the online Self. Jennifer Gonzalez defines an avatar as “a textual description of the user [...] superseded or supplemented by a visual icon” (28). Avatars rely heavily on the more visual component. User names or nicks, like the ones La Loca uses, are purely a linguistic construct. González speaks more of self-creation through virtual avatars as opposed to Rodríguez’s commentary on seemingly more one-dimensional login names; however, the focus here is still on self-creation, a re-creation of self, or perhaps a re-imagining of the self. By opting for chat rooms and selected user names as opposed to adopting an avatar, La Loca uses and manipulates language in order to recreate herself and seduce others via written communication.

The names used online are quite important as online profiles are believed to be representative of the Internet individuals’ lives offline. However, La Loca self identifies as an Internet Abuser, to the point where her offline life is less prevalent than her online one. S/he spends much of her time plugged in and online:

An Internet Abuser, la Loca se las pasaba conectada en el Internet chateando to el día, escribiendo emails, contestando personals y mandando fotos. Browseando las horas muertas sin decir esta boca es mía, hasta que le dolieran los huesos y esperando que uno des sus dates potenciales se metiera en el internet y apareciera blinkeando en el buddy list para empezar a IM con ellos. Chequeaba sus mailboxes a

cada rato y tenía cuentas en starmedia America on Line yahoo excite
planetout hotmail y periscopio (17)

La Loca has multiple accounts and email addresses in order to better her chances for meeting “Mr. Right Now” online. ^[38] S/he talks about the Internet as if it were a place in which one could actually live. “Vive en los chat rooms,” the narrator says as if it were a real space (60). In *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (2002), Nakamura asserts, “Time spent on the Internet is a hiatus from real life” (41), however, La Loca’s online presence overcomes her life. Her obsession with the Internet as a tool to fill her figurative void as well as the literal hole that is her rectum usurps real life, and s/he dreams of becoming a Cyborg: “tendré mi mente permanente conectada al Internet. Seré un ciborg y tendré implantes tecnológicos en todo mi cuerpo” (74). S/he may claim to want to be a cyborg with a utopian cyborg body^[39] (and the tenth chapter, titled “www.loca.com” could attest to her success, as it is written entirely in Internet html code), but La Loca desires the physical sensations of sexual intercourse that only real-life encounters can provide. S/he is not satisfied with virtual sex but instead wants both the physical pleasure and pain of being penetrated and the sensations of her *hueco* feeling filled. The Internet and its myriad chat rooms facilitate the possibility for these desires to be fulfilled, one one-night stand at a time.

The Internet, specifically chat rooms and other online forums, facilitate clandestine encounters for gay men. Through chat rooms, gay males who search for anonymous or semi-anonymous sex do not even have to leave the comfort of their

own bed, whether they are alone and would prefer a virtual romp or, if like La Loca, they would prefer to invite someone to their house to experience the physical act of sex. Chat rooms make these online searches even easier because they are named and categorized to represent the tastes and preferences of visitors like La Loca, including their fetishes. These chat rooms also reflect the names of codified spaces as outlined in Rodríguez's chronicles:

Although in some circles S/M has become a kind of shorthand for all kinds of interactive sexual play and performance, on the Internet, as in these communities themselves, these spaces are highly codified and specific, with channel names such as #bondage, #gshowers, #leatherdykes, #gayCBT, #boy_daddy. It seems that every conceivable fetish and fantasy has established an online presence. (135-36)^[40]

However, chat rooms like these, which are presented throughout the entirety of novel, do not allow La Loca to feel the physical pain of anal sex that s/he so desires. La Loca hopes to present herself in an independent light through her AOL profile in order to attract a large number of sex partners:

Location:	Im around in the Upper WS
Marital Status:	Im taking care of myself
Hobbies:	I can take care of anyone else. I like to have a good time chillin, taking life easy and relaxed watching movies, clubbing and talking long walks with my dog

Computers: I cant believe they asked this

Occupation: Equinox Fitness Clubs---I dont want 2b just another name in your little Black Book

Personal Quote: I got to mean a little more to you then just a space in your list of things to do, just another dime piece you can show all of your friends, you can call me crazy say im insecure but I dont want just another guy.

Webpage: A photo of me with the Puerto Rican flag as a bandana. (106-107)

Through these standardized, hegemonic categories of Marital Status and Occupation as well as Location, Technology, Hobbies, and a “Personal Quote,” La Loca affirms the qualities s/he hopes will lure a potential mate. S/he announces her Boricua pride by carrying a Puerto Rican flag in her profile picture and refers to her self-perceived beauty by assuring the online reader that s/he considers herself more than “just another dime piece you can show all of your friends.” S/he claims s/he is independent by stating, “Im taking care of myself” and purportedly responsible for being able to take care of her pet dog. However, s/he also reveals her codependency at the same time, by writing, “I can take care of anyone else,” and even more co-dependently s/he insists, “I got to mean a little more to you then just a space in your list of things to do... you can call me crazy say im insecure but I dont want just another guy.” La Loca is constructing her online self according to her own

perception of Self and the appearances that s/he would like to maintain. La Loca creates her own cybernetic identity so that s/he exists not only in the New York but also in these virtual spaces.

The insertion of an existing virtual realm — in the case of Lozada’s narrative, America Online, more commonly referred to as AOL — into a fictional text coincides somewhat with Henry Jenkins’ definition of convergence, “the flow of content across multiple media platforms ... [which] represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (*Convergence Culture* 2-3). La Loca’s life then exists across multiple platforms: on the most basic level s/he flits between the virtual and real-world realms, but even within those spaces, s/he flirts with different societies: high class cocktail parties in D.C. or various subcategorized fetishist chat rooms online. It is her online presence that I would like to further analyze. Livingstone states, “to exist online one must write oneself, and one’s friendships and community, into being” (480). La Loca’s language is the only tool she has with regard to online exchanges. As Rodríguez sees it, “It is not that a truer, more genuine or essential self emerges [online]; instead the mere act of continually communicating the self generates a textuality of the self, a written record of interior ruminations, a constant coding and decoding of the self and the other” (128). However, La Loca’s self-representation online is just as truthful as her self-representations in the real world. Just as La Loca lies in order to present a more palatable self-image to shopgirls and future employees in New York, s/he also stretches the truth in the virtual world. La Loca,

“como casi todas las locas en el Internet, es deshonesta” (60). The narrative voice elaborates, “porque en AOL lo que a los patos les gusta son los straight acting” (58). La Loca verifies, then, that s/he must lie in order to be like everyone else, in order to fit in, and in order to feel – if only for the duration of a sex act – less *sola* and *vacía*. La Loca, echoing the “Im taking care of myself” statement in her AOL profile, acknowledges, “tengo cuidado con todos ellos que vienen siempre desengañando” (61) and even though s/he participates actively in the online lies, s/he laments, “¿Por qué será que el amor viene siempre acompañado de mentiras?” (61). La Loca resents the lack of honesty with regards to matters of the heart, and yet s/he perpetuates the dishonest cycle by participating actively in it: in her online personal ads, s/he lies about her weight, subtracting 40 pounds, her waist size, shrinking it by 6 inches, and her penis size, adding 1.5 inches to its length (Lozada 60). S/he also lies about that for which s/he is looking, as the narrator notes, “Tampoco busca una LTR, eso es mentira, busca sexo” (60), though the vacillation between wanting and not wanting a long term relationship is so continuous that one wonders if La Loca is really just deceiving herself. What does s/he want? And how will s/he ever get it if s/he continues dishonestly and in this cyclical nature? The narrator concludes, “Su existencia era un rosario de mentiras” (61), highlighting the repetition of her lies – as Catholic rosaries are prayers or petitions that are repeated – and her continuance of the deceit, as the rosary itself is a loop with no end. This circular symbol demonstrates that La Loca’s recreation of the Self and participation in group lies and

deceit will only continue without end, much like her desire, which cannot be fulfilled.

In an attempt to find love – however temporary it may be – La Loca searches online and then comments about the online profile of a Black lover with the user name LTNRIGENO4U: “su profile anuncia: Computers: PR, AGE 33, 5’11, 190#, 35”W, 43”C (COLLEGE GRAD) 7”5c” (129). This profile only reveals the most basic details of the man, who, like La Loca, searches for sex on the Internet: the information LTNRIGENO4U provides refers to his age and physical appearance, his education level (arguably a comment on his social class), and the size of his penis. His profile declares his potential as the active partner in a sexual relationship. This man’s online profile fits perfectly with the proposals and purposes of an online chat room created for the sole purpose of hooking up. He provides the information necessary to instigate a real-life sexual encounter without providing too much information, which could tamper with fulfilling a desire for anonymity. In other cases within the novel, it is not the profiles that share pertinent details, but rather the user names or the chat room spaces they frequent. Many of the chat rooms helps users to briefly specify race, certain fetishes or sexual behaviors, and preferred sexual position, for example, in the case of DomBlk4SubWhm, dominate black men who seek submissive white males and vice versa, in very few letters. The use of highly intentional user names is not unique to gay chat rooms, however, and Rodríguez writes of her experience as a female in lesbian chat rooms, saying, “I would see the traces of a woman, with a soft and feminine name. From her email

address I surmised that she posted from Spain” (114). In very few alphanumeric characters, usernames can tell a person a lot about their owners. Profiles and user names help to eliminate the need for excessive communication and allow Cyber-persons like La Loca to engage efficiently in the conversation they want to have: Where, when, and how are we going to fuck? The coded language facilitates copulation, which would temporarily fill La Loca — both physically and emotionally — but the sex act, once completed, will only perpetuate the cycle of desire, leaving La Loca once again *sola y vacía*. This causes her and other like her to continue to search online for love and/or sexual fulfillment even though none of what society — online or off — can fill the void s/he feels.

Because language is the primary tool used in Internet chat exchanges, the type of language used in the chat rooms La Loca visits is typically subtle, calculated, and succinct. The conversations represented in the novel are short but full of tacit detail. Since the majority of Cyber-persons whom La Loca meets in the chat rooms are searching for anonymous sex, the profiles and *nicks* highlight details that refer to preference of sexual position – in the case of gay chat rooms, Top or Bottom – and eliminate the need of elongated conversations while also hiding identities so that the pseudo-premeditated sex act, which is not exactly spontaneous since it requires a certain level of planning with regards to the real-world meeting of strangers but is not as premeditated as an romantic encounter between established lovers, can still feel anonymous, which is what they both desire. Although the chat rooms are often public forums, real-life chronicler Rodríguez, fictional La Loca, and other Cyber-

persons real or imagined treat these virtual spaces as if they were private spaces by using secret and intimate language. La Loca transcribes a chat she has with PuertoRicanTopLrgck, a Puerto Rican male who is presumably well-endowed and prefers to act as the penetrator during anal sex, as his user name would imply:

PuertoRicanTopLrgck: Sup

SubLocaNYC : chilando and U?

PuertoRicanTopLrgck: chillaxing

SubLocaNYC: Did U get my pic?

PuertoRicanTopLrgck: Just breading [sic] it now

PuertoRicanTopLrgck: sent

SubLocaNYC: what do u get into?

PuertoRicanTopLrgck: Ur azz gonna be sore

SubLocaNYC: i love it papi. I like when it hurts for days

PuertoRicanTopLrgck: Then u are gonna be my bitch tnght

PuertoRicanTopLrgck: Have U ever had a hand up ur azz? (131)

Their conversation is brief – in this case, owing to technological problems, which caused La Loca’s Internet connection to cut out — but prior to the signal collapse the pair chats unabashedly about their mutual goal to end the online conversation with real-life fucking. Neither one of them exchanges pleasantries beyond “Sup” prior to beginning their informal contract: PuertoRicanTopLrgck will be the penetrator, as his user name suggests, and La Loca, using the nick SubLocaNYC, will bottom. There is a certain order in the chat rooms; a system is already set in place.

The role of written language is very strong in virtual worlds such as the chat room and the individuals use language unique to the cyber domain. Nakamura (2002) notes, "The Internet has spawned a whole new set of vocabulary and specialized terminology because it is a new tool for communicating that has enabled a genuinely new discursive field" (1). Similar to the parenthetical orthographies present in certain parts of the novel, cybernetic language also is creative, though it serves more as a secret code between the Cyber-persons or chatters. Though these Cyber-people speak via keyboard and screen instead of F2F^[41] they are still able to express themselves in a personal manner. As in the chat rooms and other Internet forums represented in the novel, "Most profiles are designed in one way or another to provide 'a way of expressing who you are to other people'" (Livingston 473). Las locas were well-connected already, and this online network connected them even further. According to Livingston, "Social networking sites enable communication another ever-widening circles or contacts" (469). Though there are many studies about "gayspeak," or the role of the lisp in phonetics perceived as gay (Bowen), the intonation and diction (Clark and Smyth, Jacobs and Rogers, among others) there are not many scholarly studies about the "cyberspeak" by gay men. The use of a keyboard and written language disguises voice and spoken intonation, which would also hide the possible presence of a lisp or other speech affects commonly associated with queerness. Also, the screen does not accurately portray faces and bodies. These Cyber-persons, then, depend on their online profiles and cybernetic

aliases – which are both linguistic constructions – to express and/or recreate themselves.

Notably, the Spanish language has been impacted by some of this webspeak or cybernetic jargon. The Spanish language is problematic for visitors of web spaces like the one mentioned above because it categorizes nouns and pronouns as either masculine or feminine in gender. In Spanish, a queer structure does not yet exist; how then can La Loca categorize herself as a queer person when she uses a language that limits herself to hegemonically defined categories? Rodríguez examines the problems of a binary language and the solutions queer people have come to find for use in their chat rooms:

[E]vident in the original Spanish-Language version [of certain online posts] is the use of the *arroba* or @ sign in the words *nosostr@s* and *otr@s*. This is a creative linguistic intervention in the highly gendered structure of Spanish, and appears to have emerged in Spanish-language cyber communities... The orthographic @ impacts the semiotic, the metaphorical, the phonetic and categorizing function of a word... (126)

La Loca and her chat room lover evade binary language and also employ bilingualism, which further marks their identity as unfixed. Although a definitive Cyber-queer language does not exist, in chat rooms and throughout the Internet, the abbreviations used represent a new code that is only understood by certain insiders: the people who are hip to the jargon of this space, which I deem to be

heterotopic. La Loca, with her screen name “WasHts” chats with a Puerto Rican who assumes the nick “BoricuaBestial”:

WasHts: 9 inches?

BoricuaBestial: y ... TOP y tu?

WasHts: Aiiight, versatile, it depends... (94)

The individuals vacillate between Spanish and English, but they only exchange information regarding topics that fit within the rituals of chat rooms, in this case: size, preferred position, physical appearance, etc. Their conversations in the virtual world serve to arrange a real-life encounter. It seems clear from their brief dialogue that there is no intent to develop a relationship that will go beyond the physical act of coitus. Their identities are shielded by self-selected user names so that the sex they intend to have will remain in the realm of anonymity. In her discourses with PuertoRicanTopLrgck and BoricuaBestial, La Loca follows the codes already put in place within the virtual world. Rodríguez affirms: “Cyberspace, like the theatrical stage, implicates the real outside the machine, as it produces its own real inside the machine. Both serve as a catalyst for the radical reconceptualization of reality, its representation, and its reproduction” (119). Much like the theatrical stage, chat rooms as Rodríguez describes and novelist Lozada represents them are seemingly perfect examples of Foucauldian heterotopias.^[42] The chat rooms connect the real with the virtual: living people interact in a virtual realm.^[43] Although typically seen as a public forum, these Internet spaces offer protection from gay-bashers or other threats^[44] and enable persons seeking same-sex partners online to do so without

fear of violence or even without coming out to their families. There is a certain protection – Internet as safety net – in the realization that each person who is logged in to the chat rooms is (a) purportedly gay and (b) searching for sex. The chat rooms then become a gay or queer space where Cyber-persons feel less sexiled because of the disapproval they are wont to feel in public spaces outside of the virtual realm. Additionally, the queer persons in these chat rooms are able to cloak themselves in the safety of anonymous cybernetic aliases. These virtual spaces and the anonymity its user names provides allow for a double protection for the queer chatter: as the conversations take place virtually, the Cyber-person does not run the risk of a violent encounter, but also, as the chat room user creates nicks and self-constructed identities specifically for use on the Internet, the individuals who participate in these chat rooms remain disguised and anonymous.

On the flipside, however, these online chat rooms can inhibit LGBTQ individuals by creating for them an alternative closet which allows them to “try on” certain sexual behaviors or proclivities without having to commit to them in real life. Thus queer individuals no longer must participate in the act of coming out of the closet to their family or loved ones, as they can pursue their fetishes or desires in an online closet which cocoons them in a safe environment and eliminates the need to be “out” in the real world. Representations of La Loca throughout Lozada’s text suggest that s/he is out of the closet with many but not with everyone.^[45] The Internet is considered an online oasis in which threats to safety are minimal, in a sticks-and-stones-can-break-my-bones-but-words-can-never-hurt-me way, as gay-

bashers do exist online and may troll websites to express their opinions, but many queer-minded chat rooms are monitored by vigilante committees^[46] who boot off users who do not have the intentions which are delineated in the chat rooms' names, protecting the space in order to keep it safe for persons who are LGBTQ, like las locas in Lozada's narrative.

According to the narrator, "Las Locas were well-connected" (39). The Internet quite literally serves as a network, which connects the locas and serves as representative of the second principle of heterotopias according to Foucault.^[47] The social — or in certain cases, the historical — function of gay chat rooms similar to the fictional ones portrayed in Lozada's book is to unite people who are queer with other people who are queer with the final goal of culminating the relationship in a sexual manner. However, it is difficult to categorize how or where these chat rooms fit within heterotopic spaces. Are chat rooms heterotopias of crisis or heterotopias of deviation? Foucault writes:

...there is a certain form of heterotopia I could call crisis heterotopias, i.e. there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis... But these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed. (3)

Since the figure of La Loca is indeed in a state of crisis — economically because of her debts, socially because s/he is in New York away from and, as illustrated, estranged from her family in Puerto Rico, etc. — the chat rooms to which s/he refers and visits for support and/or physical sensation exemplify heterotopias of crisis, though at the same time, as La Loca is considered marginalized by deviation according to heteronormativity — i.e. because s/he is homosexual in a world marked by heterosexuality — it seems that La Loca designates these chat rooms as heterotopias of deviation since the men who visit them are also marginalized or marked by society as the “other.” S/he is judged and ostracized by society (and notably, her home country) for her homosexual desires and yet, at the same time, it is impossible to ignore the economic crisis that La Loca is experiencing throughout the novel, as the narrator constantly reminds the reader of her credit card and student loan debt. The regular reminders of deviation and crisis serve to further remind the reader of La Loca’s personified fluidity: even her heterotopias are queer and in flux. Not only are these chat rooms queer spaces, which serve to link individuals who are queer with private codes and rituals within a public space, but they also encapsulate the queer tendency to demonstrate and reiterate the fluidity that exists among identities and qualities by not fitting neatly in one single category.

La Loca, existing as a set of binaries – being both New Yorker and Puerto Rican, masculine and feminine, Spanish-speaker and English-speaker, etc. – also does not fit easily into a single category, as I have previously stated throughout this chapter. This can be tricky in Cyberspace, “an environment comprised entirely of 0’s

and 1's: simple binary switches that are either off or on. No in-between. No halfway. No shades of gray" (Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman 1). La Loca has many facets, but online, s/he can only present herself in so many ways. In real life, s/he contains multitudes, but on the net s/he has to streamline her self-representation and place herself firmly on the grid of intersectionality – as a gay male Puerto Rican Bottom living in New York – in order to maximize the potential for offline sexual encounters. In La Loca's online self-authorship, s/he highlights her Puerto Rican heritage with great gusto and fervor. S/he seeks to create a more racialized body than her milky complexion ^[48] would imply, as s/he makes the Puerto Rican flag a focal point of her AOL profile (107) and greets chat room users as a "Puerto Rican btm" searching for "Black Maculine [sic] TOP men" (121). In a place where self-recreation is the norm and race should not matter, La Loca uses race to set herself apart. However, race is something that very much exists on the Internet, as Daniel Punday elucidates:

quite contrary to the early belief that cyberspace offers a way to escape gender, race, and class as conditions of social interaction [...] critics [Shannon McRae, Stephen Shaviro, and Lisa Nakamura] suggest that online discourse is woven of stereotypical cultural narratives that reinstall precisely these conditions. (199)

One of the critics Punday cites, Nakamura, along with her co-editors Beth E. Kolko and Gilbert B. Rodman, clarifies:

You may be able to go online and not have anyone know your race or gender – you may even be able to take cyberspace's potential for

anonymity a step further and masquerade as a race or gender that doesn't reflect the real, offline you – but neither the invisibility nor the mutability of online identity make it possible for you to escape your 'real world' identity completely... [We] can't help but bring our own knowledge, experiences, and values with us when we log on. (4-5)

La Loca's portrayal of herself as an exotic, racialized body is something that pervades her online life because it is a significant part of her offline life. This self-racial profiling lends itself to be an example of what Nakamura calls "cybertypes" in her 2002 book of the same name. Nakamura

coined the term *cybertype* to describe the distinctive ways that the Internet propagates, disseminates, and commodifies images of race and racism. The study of racial cybertypes brings together the cultural layer and the computer layer; that is to say, cybertyping is the process by which computer/human interfaces, the dynamics and economics of access, and the means by which users are able to express themselves online interacts with the 'cultural layer' or ideologies regarding race that the bring with them into cyberspace. (3)

It is because of cybertyping that chat room representations in Lozada's novel are named "DomBlkSub4Whtm" (121) and "Latino M4M, blkm4blkm, NYC m4m now, Blum 4 latinom, y TRUCKDRIVERSM4M" (160). The groups are organized into categories of race and desire, as well as geographical proximity of the suitors, with Truck Drivers as a niche category that denotes social class and profession. In

contrast to the fictionalized La Loca, some real-life chat room or MUD users choose to hide their race. In an interview with Nakamura, a player on LambdaMOO writes,

I never outright (in my desc [description]) said I was Asian, because I felt that IRL people already have stereotypes and felt that it would be at least as bad here, and I wanted to have a character that was free from that. Even before being experienced with net interactions, I pretty much feared what kind of people I would attract just by virtue of saying I'm an Asian woman. But then it bigs [sic] me that people just assume you're white if you don't say otherwise. Which is interesting because [sic] a lot of people here don't just assume you're heterosexual. They are careful to say SO [Significant Other] instead of GF/BF [Boyfriend/Girlfriend] and use [androgynous] pronouns or whatever. (quoted in Nakamura 57)

It is interesting, given the above scenario, to notice how easily one can give a transgendered performance online, whereas performing a different race is much more difficult. Online, you can cross-dress, but performing any sort of race that is not the one with which you were born crosses a line.^[49] La Loca, in Lozada's fictional text, performs as a male – albeit one with homosexual desire – but s/he plays up her race. The Internet obscures her appearance so it is easier for her to enhance her Boricua background whereas her blanche skin tone IRL may belie her Caribbean roots.

The Internet as it exists in the United States, due to its democratizing and increasingly widespread availability, also serves to mask La Loca's socio-economic status. La Loca's ability to stay connected to an online network would imply that s/he lives in an area with access to Internet, which, in New York City, is not overly difficult, and that s/he pays her Internet bills (or phone bills, in the days of dial-up) on time, which is less likely. Nakamura posits internet access as a class issue (10) and notes, "*lack of access* to Internet – often found along raced, classed, and still, to a narrowing extent, gendered lines – continues to cut particular bodies *out* of various histories in the making" (xii, emphasis in original). La Loca is mostly described as someone with easy access to the internet as s/he spends copious amounts of time plugged in to her chat rooms cruising for sex; however, there is one scene in which her Internet cuts out: "Pero de momento se cae la red cibernética" (131), interrupting her online chat and dashing any hopes that her virtual tryst might become authentic: "Al caerse el internet los límites del placer esta noche quedan fuera de su perímetro" (132). Citing episodes of Internet failure similar to the one La Loca experiences, Nakamura continues, "this online roadkill is, quite simply, the poor and people of color" (xi). La Loca then, is to be considered online roadkill, ^[50] adding insult to the injury of her interrupted plans for intercourse.

The majority of the time, however, La Loca's Internet connection remains intact, and s/he is able to arrange a real-world romp with one of her online paramours. It is when this occurs that her digital self must reconcile with her real-life persona and La Loca welcomes men who are essentially strangers save for brief

conversations in public online forums into the private space of her domestic sphere. S/he opens her doors to these men in order to have penetrative anal sex with them sans condom, commonly referred to as 'barebacking,'^[51] because according to La Loca, "Si no sangro y no me dan duro no gozo" (64), but s/he also prepares her body to receive these men physically while s/he waits for them at home. The Internet then only serves as a portal that connects real-life lovers with La Loca's most intimate spaces, her home and her *hueco*.

IV. Home Page: La Loca Offline and in the Bedroom

As previously established, La Loca catalogs her tastes and interests online so that she may sift through the online potential suitors and meet a partner who exists *in real life* and meets her ideal criteria: "Sus keywords son: African American or Latino, 24-40, male looking for male, gay, 30 miles radius, with Photo, masculine, HIV negative, bareback o 8+" (60), and whom s/he will then invite into her home in order to experience the physical – as opposed to virtual – act of coitus. Though La Loca claims she prefers an HIV-negative partner, she cannot ensure that these anonymous lovers do not have HIV or AIDS. Her anonymous partnering, the position she prefers, and the large amount of sex partners she has adds to the normal risk that accompanies casual, unprotected sex. Additionally, La Loca invites her anonymous partners to her very home, increasing her risk for bodily harm. It is quite possible that the character of La Loca actually desires this risk as exemplary of Freudian death-drive. Judith Butler states, "The male homosexual is figured time

and time again as one whose desire is somehow structured by death, either as the desire to die, or as one whose desire is inherently punishable by death” (*Inversions* 83). It seems as if La Loca could be actively pursuing behavior that puts her at a higher risk of contracting AIDS so that the fear of contamination is one less thing to worry about,^[52] as if avoiding AIDS is just something s/he could “get over with” and s/he can focus on more important things, like how to avoid feeling *sola* and *vacía*.

These strangers whom La Loca meets online leave the heterotopic chat rooms to enter her private, domestic space, but they also arrive at her home in order to come inside her. La Loca prepares both her home and her body for the Cyberperson’s entrance. S/he cleans the space of her apartment but s/he spends the majority of her time physically emptying out her bowels, which the narrative voice calls “el placer del vacío” (121). In “Track 1/9 (Evacuation Instructions),” the narrator describes La Loca’s process of preparing for anal stimulation and penetration by purging her nether regions:

...su deseo ahora es que un negro con labios anchos le coma el culo le salive la entrada y las parades [sic] del intestino con su lengua... y de ahora en adelante limpiárselo bien y dejarlo vacío para que los labios no encuentren feces trazas particulares olores que sepan a mierda... entonces se desata toda una rutina para prepararse a la entrada: la Loca se levanta de la silla apaga la computadora y prepara una enema de dos litros de agua tibia con jabón de castilla y se la pone y le dan uno dos tres espasmos antes de evacuar todo lo que lleva dentro en el

inodoro en la bañera hasta en el piso a veces cuando no puede
aguantar como si su culo fuese una manguera vacía su intestino
grueso y luego se baña y se seca con la bandera de Puerto Rico para
limpiarse la peste y se come un yogurt para no perder la flora... (121)

This process entails inserting a soapy concoction into her rectum only to empty it out again in hopes of it being yet again filled, but this time with her lover's erect penis. The repetitive nature of this routine – filling, emptying out, filling again, and removing, wash, rinse, repeat – mimics the circuitous nature of La Loca's desire and the cyclical nature of her consumer/debt relationship with capital. In her attempts to feel less empty, s/he must first empty herself out entirely. It is when s/he is truly empty, having used the enema and her Puerto Rican flag to remove any fecal matter that might prove olfactorily unsatisfactory, that La Loca begins to worry and to fantasize. "Soy experta en documentales de serial killers" (13), s/he claims, after admitting that her television set is "el command center de su vida" (12) and that, according to the TV show *Law & Order*, "I fit the profile of a sex offender" (13). La Loca is – as much as highly dramatized television programming can inform – well versed in the ways of serial killers and rapists. S/he knows that her online actions, by crossing the threshold into the real world, could set her up for danger, and secretly, this fact thrills her. She realizes that inviting a person to her home – her private, intimate realm – requires a trust that has not been established yet. Also, inviting someone to her house could mean inviting that person in to abuse or even kill. But according to Butler, the male homosexual is "always already dying, as one

whose desire is a kind of incipient and protracted dying” (*Inversions* 83). If this is the case, then, La Loca desires this risk and this potential for death. S/he is already in a state of dying. Her risky behavior – online and off, and not just limited to her sexual positioning but also the dangerously excessive consumer acts in which s/he participates – catapults her even closer to death, or at least death as s/he imagines it. La Loca’s imagination runs wild, as the narrator states:

la Loca corre el peligro de que el invitado y desconocido no se parezca a la foto intercambiada o un ladrón que venga a robarle a cortarle la cara o un serial killer que venga a descuartizarla o peor que la dejen esperando plantada después de haber pasado tanto tiempo vaciándose y amanecer en su cama toda la noche mientras *intenta no quedarse sola. Y vacía.*” (122, emphasis mine)

La Loca’s first concern is that this stranger, upon leaving Cyberspace, will not look like the photograph he has provided or will somehow not match up to the physical expectations La Loca has created in her mind. Throughout the development of the novel, there is no doubt that La Loca is shallow or superficial, but this prevailing preoccupation marks her as yet even more superficial. The second concern of hers seems more logical given the scenario, and it also represents more of the Death Drive fantasy s/he has begun to demonstrate: La Loca does not know this guest outside of the virtual world, and he will soon enter the most intimate site of her real world: her home and, assuming all goes as planned, her anus. What if, though, the invited guest and would-be sex partner decides instead to kill her? This man could

be a gay basher who cruises the Internet for a very different thrill than that which La Loca pursues. Or he could be a serial killer as La Loca suggests. It is highly likely that La Loca merely fantasizes this all in an attempt to fulfill the damsel in distress role. That being said, one of the greatest fears — if not the absolute greatest fear — that La Loca has is that the sexual encounter will not roll out as she has planned, meaning she fears unfulfillment more than death itself. The most noteworthy concern for La Loca is the idea that her guest will not come to her house and she will have been preparing herself mentally and physically only to end up feeling abandoned, *sola y vacía*. Her fear is not death, nor robbery, nor facial disfiguration due to a hook-up gone bad, but that after all of her work — of re-creating herself online, of trolling websites and prowling for worthy men, of emptying herself out with a castile soap enema, and of dousing her depleted body with CK1 (122) — La Loca will still remain empty, alone, with unfulfilled desires and with no true home to which she can return. Instead of her island, Puerto Rico or even cold Manhattan, s/he must “Vivir en un país imaginario: en una nación virtual, sin puertorriqueños que me molestan. En un país cibernético...” (64). Though while s/he is surfing the web in New York, s/he dreams of surfing the waves of Puerto Rico: “Say it again: En el sexilio, durante el invierno más frío, tener screen savers de las playas de Puerto Rico para que me calienten mientras surfeo” (64). La Loca is alone, lonely, and feels cast out of her homeland because of her predilection toward men, a penchant that, in Puerto Rico at least, marks her as not adhering to sociocultural hegemonic norms.

Because La Loca cannot conform to heteronormative expectations in Puerto Rico, s/he seeks fulfillment in other ways, namely through the purchasing of consumer goods and by adding more notches to those designer belts in the form of sexual activity. To conclude, I ask, how then does the space of the Internet (and its language and the use thereof, including identity formation, community forming (what Nakamura refers to as 'cybertyping') within) function to aid (or hinder) La Loca's search for fulfillment (absence of emptiness) and inclusion? In my reading, La Loca searches online for a new, more immediate^[53] (instantaneous) family on the Internet, which could act as an alternative source of affection (albeit through semi-anonymous and oft no-strings-attached sex), a home (in the Internet and its chat rooms), stability (in that the Internet will always exist or from repeat chat rooms and their users), and understanding (by increasing an ability to connect online with similar-minded individuals). However, in La Loca's quest to seek out the things she seems to lack from her biological family life via the Internet, she is besieged, as the repeated titular phrase would suggest, by loneliness and emptiness. La Loca relies so heavily on the Internet for social interaction that these cybernetic spaces begin to perform as a secondary closet: with the aid of the Internet, it is unnecessary for La Loca to come out as queer or address her biological family and/or any other members of her real-life social circles. La Loca turns to the Internet (and not the human individuals using it) to fulfill her emotional and psychological needs. S/he becomes a consumer of technology with only very weak ties to persons either on- or offline, which results in further unfulfillment and isolation as Internet interaction

takes preference over human interaction. ^[54] The closeting attribute of the Internet allows La Loca to continue her offline life in such a way that suppresses her true self and inhibits familial real-life relationships, but her online life does not fair much better, since in the end the Internet only aids in reinforcing La Loca's isolation and cyclical sense of emptiness and reinforces her sense of *soledad* and *vaciedad*.

[1] *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* (143)

[2] To the point where it almost becomes campy, as per Judith Butler's definition (*Gender*, xv)

[3] I myself have had trouble deciding which gender pronouns I should use to refer to La Loca, since s/he flows so effortlessly between genders and the author and narrative voice switch between masculine and feminine pronouns throughout the text. In *The End of Gender* (2005) Shari L. Thurer calls this sensation a "category crisis," giving a name to the postmodern "panic that is sometimes induced by blurry boundaries" (25). This difficulty or category crisis is owed to what Martine Rothblatt has labeled "a linguistic prison of sex" (134) after asking the question, "Is language dual sexed because people are dual sexed, or was language intentionally made sexually dimorphic to reinforce an apartheid of sex on an unwilling populace? These are important questions, because it will be difficult for people to adopt a continuum of sexual identities if language keeps forcing them back to 'him or her' and 'she or he'" (124). Rothblatt poses this question in 1995, well before the

prevalence of linguistic movements, which seek to advance the use of gender-neutral pronouns like “ze” and “hir.” While I am aware of such vocabulary, I will employ more traditional masculine and feminine gender pronouns in keeping with the pronouns used in Lozada’s original text. For the sake of uniformity while also seeking to reinforce La Loca’s gender fluidity, I will use “s/he” throughout to refer to La Loca, unless a specific quote or passage is being analyzed, which might require a more gender-specific pronoun. When deciding between “her” or “him” or “her” versus “his,” I will lean toward feminine pronouns – after all, the title of the book is *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* in which both adjectives describing the central character end in a feminine gendered “a” sound – unless the context dictates otherwise.

[4] Please note that Pedro Lemebel employs a similar spelling tactic in *Loco afán: crónicas de un sidario* (1996) with special attention to words like SIDA (AIDS) or ano (anus) and its variations. For example: “La María Lui-Sida,” “La Insecti-Sida” (65-66), “ciudad-ano,” and “anal-fabeto” (125). I explored this during a conference presentation at University of Oregon on 19 November 2010. While the dashes Lemebel uses create a rupture or fissure within the word to set apart the themes of “SIDA” or “ano”, Lozada’s parenthetical highlighting – with the exception of “Lo-que-era” – allows for terms and preferences like “Loca,” “Pata,” and “anal” to be embraced as demonstrated visually by parenthesis.

[5] Shari L. Thurer argues that these categories are not so neat and tidy in her analysis of what she calls “the falsity of binary oppositions” (47) and admits, “Slippery gender may be as torturous as any binary” (150).

[6] See Homi Bhabha, who states, See Homi Bhabha, who states, “It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. By 'partial' I mean both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'.”

[7] Leslie McCall claims intersectionality may be “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with other fields, has made so far.” (1771)

[8] Brian Massumi posits gender/sex differentiation as the primary locator for the placement of bodies on the grid of intersectionality.

[9] Jasbir K. Puar asserts “intersectionality attempts to comprehend political institutions and their attendant forms of social normativity and disciplinary administration.” (Becoming Intersectional 63)

[10] In her seminal article on cyborgs, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” Donna Haraway defines the term cyborg as follows: “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a creature of social reality as

well as a creature of fiction.” (28). As the character of La Loca is fully human (that is to say, not part machine) I have dubbed her, and online chatters like her, a “Cyber-person.” Since La Loca does express a desire to become a utopian cyborg (see page 74 of Lozada’s text and page 36 of this chapter), I will refer to her current state – a very “plugged in” human being – as a Cyber-personhood.

[11] According to Joy James, “[The cyborg] is shaped by imagination and memory, longing and aversion.” (61) This definition serves quite well with regard to La Loca, who is marked by a longing for inclusion that stems from rejection in the past, but to avoid confusion with any human-machine hybrid, as the term cyborg typically conjures, I will refer to La Loca as a Cyber-person.

[12] This is a label the tourism industry has given to Puerto Rico.

[13] Rothblatt notes the inequality of gender expectations and the treatment of those who do not adhere to them, saying, “Women can mimic (but not too much) the powerful entrenched men. But men who try to be ‘womanish’ face the kind of vicious scorn reserved for traitors” (19).

[14] Lozada uses the more creatively spelled “(s)exilio” on page 53 of the text.

[15] I will switch to masculine gender pronouns here, as that is what was used in this portion of the text.

[16] Shari L. Thurer notes, “Today the gym body is a cultural marker of the gay man, both ‘to have’ on one’s body and ‘to hold’ in one’s arms” (48) Thus, the chiseled abdominal muscles La Loca so desires would not mark her as a heterosexual male but rather signifies her as a gay man.

[17] “The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (Butler *Gender* xv).

[18] “A photo of me with the Puerto Rican flag as a bandana” (Lozada 107)

[19] Some psychoanalysts (e.g. Freud) describe the excrement as a “gift” to the mother, so in this sense La Loca is giving this “gift” to the motherland via the symbol of the flag.

[20] “La Loca... prepara una enema de dos litros de agua tibia con jabón de castilla u se la pone y le dan uno dos tres espasmos antes de empezar a evacuar todo lo que lleva dentro el inodoro en la bañera hasta en el piso a veces cuando no puede aguantar como si su culo fuese una manguera vacía su intestino grueso y luego se baña y se seca con la bandera de Puerto Rico para limpiarse la peste” (Lozada 121)

[21] IRL is a commonly used webspeak acronym for “In real life,” often referring to Internet users’ offline lives. (See also Rodríguez 118.)

[22] *Hueco* is defined in English as a gap, an opening, or an empty space.

Colloquially, however, and according to UrbanDictionary.com, *hueco* is synonymous with the pejorative term “faggot” and is often used to refer vulgarly to one’s hole (the anus).

[23] Lozada even mentions Derrida, which would make the supplementary act of writing seem almost meta-supplementary: “if supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement *par excellence* since it proposes itself as

the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign, taking the place of a speech already significant” (Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* 281)

[24] Kristeva’s definition of the abject designates bodily discharges, excrement, or expulsions, which are then labeled “Other.”

[25] “Segundo ritual matutino de la Esquizoide, ya no en la casa: Meterme el dedo hasta dentro y disimuladamente sacarme los mocos públicamente en el subway donde nadie me conoce ni se da cuenta, uh, y pegarlos debajo de los asientos o limpiárselos en los muslos” (18)

[26] “bajarme en la 191 que es donde vivo, para ser tratada como una vaca no sacra, ser acorralada en un tapón de gente sudada cansada edgi” (14)

[27] “She could never afford an apartment in Tribeca, paying 2,000 dollars a month, mientras ella lo único que podía pagar eran 500 dólares. She could not afford it, could not afford it. Y se rehúsaba a vivir como esas locas de Chelsea, que eran casi todas secretarias y que se ensalchichaban cuatro y cinco como ratas dentro de un estudio, pagando 800 dólares cada una por una esquina. Jamás, jamás ella podría vivir en esos apartamentos decentes del West Side porque tenía su crédito destruído y nadie le aprobaría un lease” (55-56)

[28] “En Chinatown compro cuanto gadget electrónico sale al mercado... Y lo más importante, gafas Dolce Gabana a cinco pesos” (17)

[29] “con gafas Ray Ban compradas en Harlem” (21)

[30] As I was editing this chapter, blogger Oliver Burkeman for *The Guardian* wrote a piece on consumerism, noting that people like La Loca “who use material goods as

a measure of success – or who use shopping to try to relieve unhappiness in some other area of life – get trapped in what's been called the 'loneliness loop'. They shop in part to relieve feelings of loneliness – yet the result is that it makes their loneliness worse.”

[31] This compulsion toward excessive spending and debt could be seen as mimicry of Freud's death-drive.

[32] “¿cómo me veré desnuda a los cincuenta? Si no me apresuro a conseguirme un marido pronto, he de quedarme sola, vieja y caída si antes no me muero de SIDA. Y me preocupa, busco un verbo que exprese una preocupación al máximo, al borde de la ansiedad y turbulencia” (53)

[33] “Primer préstamo de la Lo-que-era: como estudiante, antes de graduarse de la Universidad, le preaprobaron una VISA y, como cada vez que salía gastaba más de mil dólares, enseguida le aprobaron una Master Card Gold con un línea de crédito de cinco mil dólares que gastó completitos en una tienda de Hugo Boss” (59); “Segundo préstamo de la Loca: se metió en Macy's, vio una vajilla de platos de southwestern motif para ocho personas y la necesitó. Pero no tenía chavos y una mujer colombiana o sudamericana – ya no recuerdo – le ofreció el crédito de Macy's: se lo aprobamos al instante y le damos 10% de descuento sólo por solicitar. Yo como lo ofreció en Español, la Pertubada solicitó la tarjeta de crédito y se la aprobaron con un línea de mil dólares que gastó íntegramente en la compra de los platos” (62); “Préstamo Number Three que la valida, que le da la entrada al crédito que finalmente la hace ciudadana, que establece en los Credit Bureaus la verdadera

personalidad de la oca: una American Express Platinum pre-aprobada” (63); “Cuarto Préstamo en Circuit City” (64) “Séptimo Préstamo: la Tocada se compró un carro. Un volkswagen cabriolett descapotable para usarlo en la ciudad de New York. ¿Y por qué no?” (76); Octavo Préstamo: VISA de Signet Bank (78) and “Debía setenta y cinco mil dólares en préstamos estudiantiles” (79)

[34] “Pepita es el modelo que ando buscando” (32)

[35] Her idols are predominantly wealthy, white women who have more agency than the Latina women who reared her. These white women can be seen to represent sexual desire more than they represent maternity or the home. For more on this topic, see Hilton Als’ *White Girls* (2013), wherein a black drag queen fantasizes about being a white woman: ““That’s what I want you to make me feel like, baby, a white woman. A white woman who’s getting out of your Mercedes Benz and going into Gucci to buy me some new drawers because you wrecked them. Just fabulous.”” (189) or a black man reminisces about seeing *Gone with the Wind* in the theatre and hearing Billie Holiday croon the song “Strange Fruit”: “Vivien Leigh was so pretty... At any rate, I didn’t like Billie Holiday for a long time: her voice didn’t make sense to me, nor did those black bodies... I was in love with Vivien Leigh and not all those niggers...” (140-41).

[36] Although La Loca prefers feminine gender pronouns, it is noteworthy that s/he dresses in more masculine clothing. Shari L. Thurer explains this, saying, “Gender behavior, like sexual anatomy, doesn’t come in two flavors tied to the shape of a person’s genitals” (92)

[37] “Identity is the first thing you create in a MUD [an acronym short for Multi-User Dungeon, a computer-based text or virtual reality game that several players play at the same time]. You have to decide the name of your alternate identity – what MUDDers call your character. And you have to describe who this character is, for the benefit of the other people who inhabit the same MUD. By creating your identity, you help create a world” (Rheingold 148)

[38] Although s/he spends much of her time browsing and reinventing herself, La Loca’s purported primary purpose online is to find semi-anonymous sex partners who are willing and able to meet for a real-life sexual encounter with relative immediacy.

[39] See Haraway, p. 29: “[The cyborg] is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence.”

[40] The use of a #hashtag online aids in the categorization of search terms and facilitates online users to be able to better find that for which they are looking.

[41] Face-to-face in Cyberspeak according to Rodríguez (115)

[42] According to Foucault: “[C]ertain ones [spaces] that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.” (2-3)

[43] For Foucault, these heterotopias are: “[R]eal places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real

sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” (3)

[44] “Because of social disapproval of homosexuality many gay men are forced to find gay space ... [and] the ability to establish and confirm identity usually necessitates relationships with other gay men” (Hughes 6)

[45] For example, s/he was discharged from the Navy for admitting to homosexuality but then told all of her buddies s/he was dismissed because of vision impairment.

[46] In “Welcome to the Global Stage: Confessions of a Latina Cyber Slut,” Rodríguez admits to being given a questionnaire about feminine products in order to assess her ability to take part in the conversation that took place in a lesbian chat room (130). The woman giving Rodríguez the quiz wanted to ensure that Rodríguez was, in fact, a woman and presumably would have denied her access to the group if she did not meet the members’ requirements.

[47] “The second principle of this description of heterotopias is that a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another.” (Foucault 4)

[48] See: “mi piel [es] de color bone white gris” (14),

[49] Puar confirms this assertion: “They mess around with gender but at the expense of race, which must remain transparent and stable, a hallmark of much feminist Marxist scholarship” (*Terrorist* 48)

[50] Radhika Gajjala calls the opposite side of this spectrum the ‘digerati’ class, claiming, “Race, gender, age, sexuality, geographical location and other signifiers of ‘Otherness’ interact with this class-based construction of ‘whiteness’ to produce complex hierarchies and contradictions within the Digital Economy. While we can continue to call this ‘whiteness’ because the status quo is still based upon a cultural hegemony that privileges a ‘white’ race, it might be more appropriate to refer to this upwardly mobile subject as a ‘privileged hybrid transnational subject’ who is a member of the ‘digerati’ class.” (6)

[51] Tim Dean lists and analyzes other reasons gay males might prefer barebacking over condom use, saying, “What I learned in my research is that gay men are pursuing bareback sex not just for the thrill of it, but also as a way to experience intimacy, vulnerability and connection. Emotional connection may be symbolized in the idea that something tangible is being exchanged. A desire for connection outweighs adherence to the rules of disease prevention.”

[52] Contracting AIDS is also understood as a form of strategic solidarity with other gay males or AIDS patients and can be seen, yet again, as another attempt for La Loca to be included in a specific social group. Tim Dean asserts, “Viewed as socially dead, H.I.V.-positive gay men began to experiment with making their own forms of life through viral exchange. Even as H.I.V. disease slowly has become less

stigmatized, it also has come to be eroticized by some members of the world in which the virus is prevalent. It has become a sexual preference, as well as a foundation for kinship, connection and community.”

[53] I use the word immediate to refer to this relationship in a right-here-right-now way, in the sense that it is instantaneous and linked via cybernetic chat rooms (which are available 24 hours of the day) as opposed to comprised of biological first-degree relatives connected by blood, who, in La Loca’s case, live far away.

[54] Could this be a critique of contemporary society?

**Chapter2: Amazon [pu(n)to] com:
the Diva is online and so is the reader
Diva studies, cyborgs, and multimedia convergence
in Alejandro López's *Keres cojer? = guan tu fak* (2005)**

Alejandro López's sophomore novel,^[1] *Keres cojer? = guan tu fak* (2005) is the first in a trilogy^[2] that deals with the libidinous online lives of cousins Ruth and Vanessa, who split their time equally between the city of Buenos Aires and the spaces the Internet provides. Vanessa is a single-breasted transgender female who, at the beginning of the novel, has a lopsided, Amazonian appearance because she paid for her breast implants in installments before the Argentine market crashed in 2001.^[3] Predominantly through chat room correspondence between the two cousins, the reader learns that Vanessa works as a prostitute in order to afford her other *teta* and has an estranged brother, called El Toro, who returns to the city to seek refuge from drug lords.^[4] Though the novel itself sports an ensemble cast, for the purposes of this chapter I will condense my observations to those that examine the epistolary nature of cousins Vanessa's and Ruth's online communications, the author's representations of Vanessa's body in transition, and the multimedia approach through which the narrative is produced. Though the main character Vanessa is the initial example of cyborg and diva characteristics in the text, the

structure of the novel itself is one that creates cyborgs out of its readers and manifests itself as an object that performs in a manner akin to that of the diva.

Keres cojer? = Guan tu fak emphasizes reader experience over any sort linear narrative trajectory. However, through bits and pieces, the reader is able to surmise a very loose plot. Transgendered Vanessa and her cousin Ruth live in Buenos Aires but are both from Goya in the southwestern portion Corrientes province, and since they were young, they have wanted to take the same flight path as the swallows that migrate to San Juan Capistrano, California from Goya. ^[5] As adults, they still dream of being free like birds. This freedom is difficult for the two cousins, as Ruth is a fugitive from the law, having been charged with the abduction of minors, and Vanessa's body has been left disfigured after an interrupted operation, which resulted in an appearance is an aberration from the norm. Let me reiterate: the plot is nearly indiscernible, but the connecting force for all the characters' vicissitudes is the online chat room dialog that Ruth and Vanessa maintain. In it they discuss the following: their business (child trafficking), drugs, sex, murder, scams, fraud, and other foibles.^[6] Another prominent topic of conversation for the cousins is Vanessa's impending trip to California, which would allow at least one part of the duo to be able to follow the birds' trajectory. In a review of the book for Argentinean newspaper *Página/12*, Mariano Dorr calls the text "un libro objeto, experimental e inclasificable" and highlights the reader experience over plotline, emphasizing, "la lectura de la novela es un ejercicio de la paciencia ante tanto error ortográfico y gramatical, abreviaciones y otros elementos de la comunicación vía chat y mail"

(n.p.). The cousins forgo prescriptive grammar rules, the transgendered protagonist rejects any preconceived or commonly upheld notion of gendered-body norms, and the text itself relinquishes any idea of the clear narrative trajectory. The only clear path in the text is that which the beloved swallows follow from Argentina to California, which ends up being the same path that a *travestí* from the provinces follows in an attempt to garner her second breast.

In this chapter, I will analyze how López employs what Henry Jenkins would characterize as a convergence of media types in order to illustrate for his audience a multifaceted narrative, whose end result serves to remind the readers of their own connectivity to the Internet and reliance upon advanced technology. This multimedia narration relies heavily on reader participation due to the author's inclusion of motley elements, which bridges print and digital media, while also furthering the plotline. These narrative approaches include, namely, chat room dialogs and email correspondence. Later in the chapter, I will perform close readings of some of these communications and argue that they align *Keres cojer?* = *Guan tu fak* as a modern epistolary tale. Additionally, the masturbatory (read: solo) experience of online chats allows for deeper analysis of language, and the excessive online connectivity as represented in the novel creates "plugged in" cyborg beings within and outside of the text (the characters and the readers, respectively). Characters like Vanessa and Ruth demonstrate Donna Haraway's definition of the cyborg because of their constant connection to the Internet. Vanessa, as a transgendered person in transition, also illustrates many Amazonian and diva-like

qualities. López has created a character that is both cyborg and diva. Despite her ongoing quest to fully transition through cosmetic surgery, Vanessa celebrates difference in a way that exemplifies diva propensities, specifically in a diva-as-monstrous way. These two entities, divas and cyborgs, are seen as aberrant or mutant, and particularly as demonstrated in the case of Vanessa, in a state of flux or constantly becoming what they were not originally, just as the novel transitions from ink and paper to something larger, with digital inclinations that are heightened by the reader's experience. In this chapter, I explore the narrative approaches López utilizes in order to demonstrate how this novel, like its protagonist Vanessa's body, is in transition from analog (a paper-bound book) to digital (short films accessible via the Internet) to create a hybrid experience for the reader. This multimedia experience forces the readers to become cyborgs in the style in which the text demands, in such a way that the readers acknowledge their own cyborg status and proclivities, and the text itself demonstrates certain traits rather befitting of a diva like the one described in the novel, therefore representing a performance of divadom while also relaying a narrative about a diva.

I. Body/Language: "Let me hear your body talk"^[7]

Let's start with the body. My chapter on Lozada's *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* touched on corporeal representations and how La Loca's body is one that defies categorization and fails to align easily on a plane of intersectionality.

Vanessa's aberrant body also flouts any sort of gender cataloging, as her transition is

not yet complete. These two figures are decidedly queer because of their ideas about their bodies. In La Loca's case, it is the body s/he wants, whereas in Vanessa's case, it is the body she has. La Loca is a queer figure in that s/he contains and desires both femininity and masculinity: s/he wants the masculine gym rat abdomen and the feminine pin-up girl's bosom. La Loca sees her body as something that can be idealized but not categorized. S/he does not identify with any gender. Vanessa, the transgendered protagonist of *Keres cojer? = Guan tu fak*, also repudiates hegemonic gender norms with her single breast and remaining penis, though in a manner that is different from La Loca's self-perceptions. José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification, in which he states, "Identification itself can also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narrative of self that surpass the limits prescribed by the dominant culture" (95) can be applied to both Lozada's La Loca and López's Vanessa. Neither adheres to the bodily expectations of their culture. La Loca self-exoticizes and defies categorization as s/he identifies as female while wearing designer suits made for males, whereas Vanessa's grotesque body is hard to classify as it is in a state of both post- and pre-operative transition. Vanessa is forced to disidentify with femininity or female-bodiedness because of her financial status. In the case of both protagonists, their queerness is inherent in their lack of conformity or ability to be classified, which is caused by an observed disidentification with what can be considered more commonly accepted gender identities.

La Loca has already had her chapter. Now it's time to talk about Vanessa, specifically, her single breast implant. Vanessa's elective surgery, as it was originally

intended (with two boobs instead of the lonely, lopsided uniboob), should not be seen as an act of drag,^[8] in which a biologically born male is made to appear feminine, as instead Vanessa is transgender. Transgender and drag are not the same, as the latter does not imply a bodily transformation, but simply a performance of gender that maintains the male body intact, which would be considered, as per Muñoz's definition, an act of disidentification. However, Vanessa seems to identify herself as a woman, and tries to bring her body in line with that identity, but because of her financial limitations, her body ends up producing the effect of disidentification in the viewer or reader. Vanessa's transitioning body remains in a state of flux, and because of Argentina's tumultuous economic state and Vanessa's personal financial status, the surgery that would mark her as more advanced in her transition was interrupted, so the protagonist is unable to afford the other portion of her bust enhancement. Her body remains marked by difference until she is able to afford the additional surgery, and for this reason she squirrels away the funds for her operation with the money she earns as a prostitute.^[9] Until she fully transitions through plastic surgery, Vanessa will remain in limbo and, perhaps more pointedly, unbalanced in her bodily proportions. Vanessa's embodied disfiguration sets her apart from the norm, and her lack of alignment to any prescribed coordinates of intersectionality because of a type of disidentification that is perceived by the reader marks her as queer:

Playing on this difference, between the subject being queered and queerness already existing within the subject (and thus dissipating

the subject as such), allows for both the temporality of being (ontological essence of the subject) and the temporality of always-becoming (continued ontological emergence, a Deleuzian *becoming without being*). (Puar *Assemblages*, xxiv)

Vanessa's single-breasted figure is reminiscent of that of the mythological Amazons. However, Amazonian women were said to lop off one breast in attempts to become better warriors so as to be more adept and skilled with a bow and arrows, and, instead of removing a breast like the Amazons (biologically females but arguably more masculine-bent subjects), Vanessa has one breast added to bring her body in line with what she considers to be her identity as a woman. Despite her unconventional mien and anomalous body, which are the outcome of Vanessa's interrupted attempt to become female, she takes the resulting monstrousness and builds it into a diva performance. In this way, she embodies the notion of diva-as-monstrous. Shari L. Thurer claims, "Deviant bodies are inherent spectacles" and that "the grotesque body has a radical potential for being subversive. Because it is deemed repulsive, it can be slyly deployed to disturb the onlooker..." (62). In this regard, Vanessa uses her body as both Siren and weapon. She entices and offends simultaneously and equally because of her bodily divergence. Given the aftermath of her butchered operation, a post-operative woman like Vanessa could have just gone into a depression, for example, and might choose to never again leave the house, perhaps out of embarrassment or fear for her own safety from ridicule. Instead, Vanessa exercises power from the place of the deviant, in a performance of

disidentification or deviation. As an empowered deviant, she disturbs and delights, or at least fascinates, others. Vanessa's body is a spectacle. It does not represent the normative expectations for either a man or a woman, nor does it even exemplify the body for which Vanessa had planned post-operation. However, Vanessa sees this transition period as an opportunity to celebrate and profit (quite literally, as she earns money through prostitution) from her *body-as-spectacle*. Vanessa's body alteration did not turn out quite how she had expected, but the diva has a way of making everything seem intentional. Wayne Koestenbaum writes, "I identify with the diva's inability to choose her life, though her willfulness and indomitability make us think she has sculpted her fate" (89). Vanessa chooses to wear her aberrance as a mark of pride and treats it as an act of will, celebrating the difference, even if it is not something she planned. Koestenbaum elaborates: "For the diva-to-be, difference is power; she seeks profit in her deviance. For the nondiva, difference only leads to ridicule" (91). Thus, Vanessa the Diva finds power and monetary gain from her difference, and, as the diva is wont to do, she makes it seem as if it were all part of her plan. Anyone else in her stilettos would be embarrassed, but Vanessa is laughing her diva's laugh all the way to the bank, or at least to the next operating room to have her second brassiere cup filled.

The diva brings the marginal to the forefront, an act which many observers find to be unsettling, and, perhaps more simply put, she is terrifying because she does what she wants with her body.^[10] In López's novel, Vanessa's lopsided form bewilders onlookers on the streets of Buenos Aires and even confounds some of the

would-be amorous pursuits she encounters online. Her body can be seen as a terrorist in its nonconformance because others perceive it as monstrous and terrifying. Vanessa is subversive in her defiance of hegemonic norms, and she can be classified as a diva in her embrace of this difference. Furthermore, Vanessa is empowered by her singularity as a means of survival. Her bodily anomaly, though accidental, is embraced as a tactic to disrupt the norm and create spectacle. While writing about subversive drag superstar Vaginal Crème Davis, Muñoz asserts, “sometimes misrecognition can be tactical” (95).^[11] Vanessa’s bodily aberrance may not have been intentional, but her personal acceptance and public display of her irregular figure is a tactic that excites others. By acting in disaccord with prescriptive norms or expectations, Vanessa, like Vaginal Davis, reasserts herself (or her agenda) in an act of subversion.^[12] Vanessa’s queer, misshapen body, like Vaginal Davis’s performances, “appropriat[e], terroristically, both dominant culture and different subcultural movements” (Muñoz 95). What Vanessa’s racialized performance threatens, then, is not just heteronormativity but white normativity. Until she has that second breast implanted in her chest, Vanessa’s body will be characterized by her inability to conform to hegemonic concepts of identity, and her actions will continue to be marked by her overt snubbing of perceived societal bodily and behavioral norms. This failure to comply with social norms is an act of both terrorist drag and disidentification.^[13]

Vanessa makes it look as if she is in control of her fate, and her attitude demonstrates an inner strength. Koestenbaum states, “I write diva prose if I am

weak but want to pretend I am strong” (85). Vanessa’s sass belies any self-doubt she might be hiding. She stands tall as a pillar of lopsided strength. The diva is a role model for female (and in Vanessa’s case, trans) empowerment. The diva, though traditionally linked to operatic singers, is inherently linked to queer culture.^[14] Postmodern divas have “[positioned] the diva as a fan of gay men as well as gay men as fans of the diva” (Leonardi & Pope 208). The diva’s relationship with gay male culture is symbiotic when it is not so deeply enmeshed as to be indiscernible where the gay ends and the diva begins. Furthermore, “Divaspeak is not limited to opera culture. It is a gay dialect. It resembles the techniques of ‘shade’ and ‘reading’ that Latino and African-American drag queens use” (Koestenbaum 132). As a transgender figure that also lives in Latin America, Vanessa is modeled after the diva, but her performance,^[15] style, voice, and sass is also reappropriated by other (perhaps more mainstream or well-known) divas. Vanessa is the consumer of diva culture as well as consumed by diva society. She is both subject and object of the diva story. ^[16]

II. Amazon.com: The Diva is also a Cyborg

Quite similar to the diva, the cyborg also is marked by repulsion or repugnant reactions: “[The cyborg] is shaped by imagination and memory, longing and aversion” (James 61). Both divas and cyborgs are marked by superiority and the grotesque^[17] and both are used as commodities. Cyborgs are intimidating because they are part intelligent machine and seen to be capable, whereas divas are seen as

formidable for their talent and boldness.^[18] Both divas and cyborgs are seen as deviant monsters. Along with Patricia Clough, Puar uses the term viral to refer to “uncontainability.” The diva, at least certainly in the historical operatic sense, is uncontainable in girth and the volume of her voice. The cyborg is uncontainable in its incapacity to be categorized. Vanessa, then, is certainly viral. “The viral brings a porosity of boundaries, with the ease of crossing them, or the requisite to cross them with the expectation of transformation.” (Clough and Puar 15). As a diva/cyborg hybrid^[19] – not to mention a transgendered queer subject – Vanessa embraces this porosity of boundaries just as she embraces her bodily difference. Vanessa’s is a body in transition or process, similar to what Rodríguez calls the “politics of ‘not yet’” (7) or what Alarcón refers to as “subject in process” (137). This process of becoming is one that Rodríguez insists, “does not insinuate a progressional, unidirectional development; instead the process is often spastic and unpredictable, continually unfolding without origin or end, an act of becoming that never ceases” (7). Brian Massumi notes gender/sex differentiation as the primary locator for the placement of bodies on the grid of intersectionality,^[20] bearing this in mind, I ask, with a body in transition, how does Vanessa fit? And how does she correspond to any such group as a queer cyborg individual in transition? Throughout the duration of López’s experimental novel, Vanessa is in a constant state of becoming: searching for funding for her second breast, finding it, pursuing it, and finally, as we see in one of the videos, a 0:12 second clip titled “Tetas,” obtaining it.^[21] Prior to completing her set of breasts, however, Vanessa’s body

conflicts with most expectations of the body: she has one breast and one penis.^[22] By possessing this disproportional body, Vanessa certainly undermines any preconceived ideas of binary opposition within the body. Arun Saldahna reminds us, “The theory of intersectionality holds that there is no actual body that is a member of only one set” (289). Vanessa’s body spans different quadrants of intersectionality, namely that of sex or gender. She, like divas before her and the cyborgs that threaten to come after, is uncontainable and defies categorization.

III. Online and in print: representations of the chat room

The titular phrase, “¿Querés coger?” asks the reader, “Do you (*vos*) want to fuck?” In this case, *coger*, Argentinean slang for “to fuck” can have myriad interpretations:^[23] the author questions the reader, do you want me to fuck with your mind? to fuck with the concept of the traditional novel? to fuck with the perceptions of readership? López does all three. Like our story’s protagonist, the novel itself defies categorization. In a review of the novel written for *Rolling Stone* magazine, Marina Mariasch writes,

Keres cojer? no sólo violenta las conceptualizaciones tradicionales de novela con la inclusión de los diálogos de internet, sino que se aventura más allá: cada tanto, cuando una secuencia de fotos da el pie, un pequeño recuadro (*o hipervínculo*) invita a traspasar los límites del libro con una visita a la página web de la editorial [interzonaeditora](#), en la que se puede ver un video, alterando así la idea del libro como

objeto acabado y a salvo de la promiscuidad y del vértigo mutante de la web. (n.p.)

The Internet becomes not just a space represented in the text, but a tool that facilitates queer writing. In many ways the Internet spaces represented within the novel demands as much attention as do the two protagonists who cling to it as a communication tool. The space itself is as significant as Ruth and Vanessa with regards to the story's trajectory. The cousins are not only represented as spending much of their time in the cybernetic realm throughout the text but their story also beckons the reader to meet them online (via hyperlinked videos found online at the end of our diva-like text's Siren's song.) Even when the reader is offline with his nose in the book, the Internet and its representations affront him throughout the text. Mariasch elaborates:

El chat no reproduce la conversación, es una conversación. La inmediatez, la velocidad, la espontaneidad, las frases o palabras incompletas, la superposición e interrupción de temas e interlocutores son características de la charla que también se encuentran en el chateo. El chat admite la abreviatura, el atajo, la incorrección ortográfica. (n.p.)

The bulk of the plot is told through Vanessa's and Ruth's chats with each other, as I have mentioned, but the narrative also revolves around chats with online strangers and emails exchanged between friends. The text is a modern-day epistle aided by the immediacy the Internet provides. Patrick Paul Garlinger explores Spanish

epistolary^[24] novels and in his analysis he contributes insight into email exchanges as well: “Materiality is of course central to discussions of epistolarity: letter writing denotes the substitution of one form of materiality (paper) for another (the body). ... All the more so in email, where the materiality of the paper gives way to the virtual reality of the computer screen” (165). Handwritten letters are nostalgic (see Garlinger 158), whereas the Internet is more immediate. Instead of face-to-face conversations, which, like online chats, also occur in real time, we observe conversations that are filtered through screens and keyboards and linked by cybernetic chat rooms and email providers, not to mention also benefitted by that handy delete key. Vanessa and Ruth (and the other internet users portrayed in López’s novel) are connected in an immediate epistolary exchange, which is aided by the Internet. Vanessa and Ruth exist both inside and outside this cybernetic realm, and in the following chat exchange, the space of the Internet is misconstrued as real:

ruthyta131@hotmail.com dice:

hoy me quedo a dormir aca

vanessavip969@hotmail.com dice:

adonde

ruthyta131@hotmail.com dice:

aca en el ciber (115)

The space of “el ciber” in this context could be either the cybercafé or cyberspace itself. It is unclear to the reader, as oftentimes the two cousins spend so much time

online it appears to be a second home.^[25] The girls live their real lives both off and online. According to Rodríguez, “Cyberspace is not the final frontier; it is not a space of liberation; it is not a decolonized zone where gender, nation, and the constraints of a culture lose meaning. Existing ‘in the machine’ does not assuage the social, economic, or political conditions that construct both ourselves and our new mechanical habitats” (117). Vanessa exists as herself online: she does not allow the Internet or the computer screen which divides her real world body from its online representation to misidentify herself as anything other than a transgendered, uni-boobed female. López’s representations of Vanessa confirm Peter Brooks’ idea that “stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations” (xii). Vanessa’s post-operation body is part of who she is as a character and a definitive part of the novel’s storyline, as we have established. In a chat room exchange with a male who calls himself Soldado, Vanessa, using the screen name Traviesamal, coquettishly explains her situation:

Traviesamal: te gusta chupar?

Soldado: no para chupar yo prefiero

teta

Traviesamal: ok yo tengo una

Soldado: una o dos

Traviesamal: una

Soldado: y la otra

Traviesamal: la otra todavia no me la

puse

Soldado: en serio

Travesamal: de verda

Soldado: por

Travesamal: y por q estaba pagando

en cuotas viste

Soldado: aa

Travesamal: y después la crisi q se

yo no pude y ya tenia una viste

asi q..

Soldado: sos como las amazonas

Travesamal: por que?

Soldado: las chabanas tenian una

sola teta (192-93)

Howard Rheingold's analysis of virtual reality and teledildonics ^[26] implies that conventional moral notions are more often cast aside during online exchanges, as real-life threats (of disease, pregnancy, etc.) become lesser. With this in mind, it is easier to see how an online exchange could escalate quickly to a virtual sexual encounter, as the above quote would imply. Vanessa and the man called Soldado begin chatting in a more conversational tone, with Vanessa telling Soldado "no busco sexobb solo hablar" (183), though the conversation, as shown above, takes a more lubricious turn. With the Internet as a barrier between Soldado and

Traviesamal, Vanessa could easily lie about her body, or pretend to be completely transitioned or biologically female. Vanessa does not choose to hide who she is behind a computer screen. Additionally, as Rodríguez asserts, the Internet is not an entity that erases markers of race, gender, politics, or social class. The Internet links individuals together in spite of – or better yet, because of – these things. ^[27] Online, sex is a linguistic act, an idea that Alas affirms: “El cibersexo es muy estimulante si uno tiene imaginación y sabe utilizar el lenguaje para excitar a ese otro de quien sólo conoce las medidas y los datos que haya querido suministrarle” (263 qtd. in Robbins). I cling to the latter part of Alas’s quote in my analysis of López’s text: Soldado (and Vanessa, for that matter) only has the information about his virtual sex partner which she has elected to give him. These measurements and tidbits of information are constructions that, Alas continues, “pueden ser falsos” (263).^[28] Despite the availability for online deception, Vanessa flaunts her disfigurement like a peacock flaunts his feathers.

Cybersex allows for a rewriting of the self and/or an imagined reality. One sexual partner may write or script out a scene for his audience, the other online sexual partner, but without the imagery and computer connection, the end result is a masturbatory, singular act, perhaps voyeuristic or exhibitionist in nature, but when it comes down to brass tacks, all that the cybernetic lovers have are the words they chose to share with their partner. “Sexual stimulation is, of course, purely linguistic” (Robbins 109). Though her quest is to be able to afford that second boob, she sees her lopsidedness as something that makes her unique, and luckily for her,

so does her chatmate. Soldado is fascinated by Traviesamal's Amazonian nature, and though their Internet conversation is cut short and thus unable to culminate with virtual sex, the chat acts as a sort of foreplay aided by imagination and virtuality.^[29] Soldado is able to imagine Vanessa's body as he would like it to be, and Vanessa is able to receive his advances toward affection without sensing judgment at her asymmetrical body. This is owing to what Rodríguez calls disembodiment, "this sense of being there and not there simultaneously" (127). The individuals are thus able to have a sexual experience (in this case: virtual foreplay) together but on their own terms. Much of the encounter is marked as a shared imagination or mutual masturbation that exists solely on a linguistic plane. According to Jill Robbins, "Linguistic performance in the sex chat rooms is akin to masturbatory re-appropriation of dildos in this sense: it uses the very communication technology developed to control bodies within and between nations – Spanish – for the sole purpose of disseminating non-reproductive sexual pleasures in clear defiance of the rules and conventions, the grammars and dictionaries, associated with the language" (113). Virtual sex is really a solo act, with interlocutionary interludes from the chat mate acting as each virtual sex partner's script. Alas links writing and masturbation together, as they are both solitary pursuits:

Los cybergays, navegadores solitarios de un espacio sin entidad física, parecen hallar placer en el mero hecho de conectarse virtualmente, sin que importe demasiado que el despliegue de mensajes intercambiados conduzca a encuentros reales entre los conectados. Internet es en este

sentido un invento masturbatorio, perfecto para una época como la nuestra, en la que la castidad y la contención van disfrazadas de lujuria y hedonismo. Pero a la hora de la verdad nada de nada: sólo palabras, palabras, palabras. (264 qtd. in Robbins)

This Internet, “a masturbatory invention”, as Alas puts it, allows for non-reproductive, non-threatening (read: no-strings-attached and no risk for sexually transmitted infections) sex.

One issue with the Internet is that it eliminates the threats to safety that make sex so scintillating. Claudia Springer reminds us, “There is a long Western cultural tradition of associating sex with death; now, sex is being replaced by computer use, which provides the deathlike loss of self once associated with sexual pleasure” (718). Cyberspace is a place of refuge for some individuals who may see the real world as a place replete with violence and physical threats. For a queer individual like Vanessa (or like La Loca, as discussed in the last chapter), the Internet is thought to be a place that serves as a sort of safety net that should, in theory, protect its users from real-life bodily harm. Though Vanessa does not seclude herself to the Net as a permanent recluse, it would not be unreasonable for a person in her situation to do so whilst living in Buenos Aires, a city known for its aesthetics and plastic surgeons. Vanessa performs in such a way that makes her monstrous body alluring, but this performance is based on a fear of bullying or self-loathing. Generally speaking, societies tend to fear that which they do not understand, and, as a result of that fear, deviants from the norm are treated with

unkindness or acts of intimidation and violence. Thus a queer figure like Vanessa might turn to conversations with cyber strangers or even sex on the Internet as an attempt to assuage her fears, if only temporarily, of threats of physical violence or bodily harm that she may suspect are lurking on the public streets of her city. Seeking solace and/or intimacy online is a temporary distraction from the threat of violence that pervades her life in the real world due to her disfigured and seemingly grotesque body. To communicate online, Vanessa needs not body language but simply language. As Alas informs us, language usurps the dildo in its penetrative power, and according to Springer, the computer is beginning to trump death. Computer communication is, I remind you, reliant on words, words, words. Thusly, the pen – or keyboard, as it may be – is mightier than the sword, nay, the pen is mightier than the penis.

IV. You've Got Male: Genderqueer victims of Cyber-bullying

Not everyone celebrates Vanessa's singularity quite as much as she does. Offline, as we have established, she is seen as monstrous, but even online sites are not immune to threats of violence. Chapter 12, "El Miedo," demonstrates the polarizing perspectives and attitudes toward Vanessa's figure through two concurrent online chats between Vanessa, using the nick "Lobacaliente" and a chat user called "Soldado" as well as an individual who claims the screen name "Te parto". The layout of the text forces the reader to choose which conversation to follow, similar to how Vanessa is required to navigate multiple conversations at

once. Soldado's and Vanessa's conversation follows prescribed social norms and includes a salutation^[30] and brief introductions,^[31] but the conversation the man called "Te parto" begins is aggressive and straightforward:

Te parto: quiero que seas mi loba

Te parto: quiero hacerte toda la cola

Te parto: lobita mia

Te parto: quiero que seas mia

Te parto: quiero penetrarte y

llenarte de leche

Te parto: que tomes mucha leche

Te parto: quiero cogerte por todos

lados y de todas las maneras

posibles (184)

Te parto continues his advances for twenty more lines before Vanessa, as "Lobacaliente" responds, "no busco sexo papi" (185). Te parto either assumes that, based upon her chosen screen name, Vanessa is biologically female and eager for sex or that she passes for female as a passive drag queen. Either way, his message is clear in his desire to possess and penetrate her. Even online, Te parto expects individuals to conform to certain preconceived expectations or norms, and he types his desires from a place of masculine power.

Te parto continues to cajole his co-chatter Lobacaliente for twenty-one more lines until, without responding to Te parto, Vanessa switches her name^[32] to

“Traviesamal”^[33] to indicate her transgender nature and eliminate his harassment. Vanessa renames herself and changes the terms of this online communicative exchange. By putting into play various monikers for her cybernetic pursuits, Vanessa creates and recreates her identity through a process of renaming herself, which is arguably a diva act. Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca A. Pope recognize the privilege of choosing a name for oneself as something often reserved for the divine or the diva, observing individuals who “[take] on the div(a)ine and masculine privilege of naming” (212). When Vanessa renames herself via a new login name she reclaims her Self and reasserts herself as both divine and diva, despite the repercussions and reactions of her co-chatters, Te parto and Soldado. Vanessa sees her body as unique^[34] and, appropriating a campy tactic employed by divas past, she uses her situation to her advantage. She sees her body as divinely diva even though she is predisposed to be virtually attacked by online chatters like Te parto who, upon learning she is transgendered, see her body as perverse. She performs what Norma Alarcón calls a paradox of the “identity-in-difference” (129). Ever the diva, Vanessa finds triumph in her dissimilitude and accentuates her unique body shape despite the availability to hide the truth behind a computer screen. By renaming herself she is reclaiming herself, and her diva performance serves as a type of performative armor that protects her from the type of words that are spewed online with the intent to hurt her.

During her chat with Te parto, the Internet is not a safety net for Vanessa, as it attracts and emboldens those who feel comfortable – cowardly, from behind a

screen – insulting her.^[35] Because the Internet allows for anonymous communication, cyber-bullying is more difficult to prevent and regulation of chat room communication is cumbersome. Clay Shirky writes, “the standard anonymity of internet users [...] made [online] conversations effectively impossible to police” (12). As the Internet includes so many individuals, chats cannot be regulated, and Vanessa is left to her own devices to defend herself, as Te parto hounds her with the repetitive use of the word “puto” across multiple pages (188, 192-93). As Vanessa is still chatting with Soldado, she is unable to log off in an attempt to suppress Te parto’s affliction. She is juxtapositionally connected to Soldado and alienated by Te parto. Jasbir Puar acknowledges this phenomenon: “technologies [...] create simultaneous sensations of exposure (the whole world is watching) and alienation (no one understands)” (CODA 151). Juana María Rodríguez echoes Puar’s sentiments, claiming that the Internet allows for “disembodiment, this sense of being there and not there simultaneously” (127). In just one chat space, Vanessa is both welcomed for who she is and ridiculed for what she is not. The mere act of logging on has subjected her to affection and enmity, inclusion and ridicule. Rodríguez and Leopoldo Alas see online interactions as solitary pursuits, using language such as “alone” and “masturbatory” to describe them. Though Vanessa uses the Internet to reach out and/or to meet others, she is, in the end, left to her own wits and devices to entertain and protect herself as needed.

As the online attack suggests, Vanessa is harassed for being perceived as different and not conforming to heteronormativity.^[36] This is another attribute of

the diva: “The diva is demonized: she is associated with difference itself... Mythically, she is perverse, monstrous, abnormal, and ugly” (Koestenbaum 105). This perceived ugliness or abjection is part of what sets the diva apart (while also forging them together with other diva-like entities).^[37] Vanessa, as she is represented in López’s novel, seems to be more than anything else, misunderstood and maligned. “Divas, like gay people, fall under the reign of the sick, the maimed, the deranged. The diva is associated with disease” (Koestenbaum 102). Vanessa may not be diseased per se, but she can be and often is viewed by others as disfigured, no matter whether she self-identifies as such.

Though offline onlookers and online individuals may try to bring her down, the diva takes ownership of her life and the path she has taken, whether it leads to fame or toward notoriety. For Vanessa, that path often takes place online, as she is constantly plugged in and logged on to the Internet in such a manner that would qualify her as a Harawayan cyborg. Additionally her life’s offline trajectory included botched plastic surgery that left her appearing monstrous. A part of her is constantly linked in to cyber-world, her old body has been left behind, and yet she still lacks a fully transitioned postoperative body. Lisa Nakamura’s *Cybertypes* (2002) reveals a “‘postbody’ ideology that reproduces the assumptions of the old one” (5). With regards to Vanessa’s postbody experience, her form is aided (or depending on the viewpoint, flawed) by plastic surgery. This breast implant is embedded under the skin in order to change her body, but Haraway asks, “Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?” (36). In my reading,

Vanessa has two prostheses, both of which add to her cyborg status and her diva flair: her singular breast implant – which we have discussed at length – and her constant Internet connection. By this interpretation, Vanessa is not only a character that exhibits diva traits by taking ownership of her life’s trajectory and her body, but she also meets the requirements of a cyborg who, “inhabits the intersection of body and technology” (Puar Cyborg 56). Vanessa’s post-surgery body and online inclinations allocate her as anorganic^[38] and one who is treated as if she were subhuman rather than divinely diva-esque. However, I argue that Vanessa is equal parts diva and cyborg.

V. The Real World: Cyberspace

The online chatter’s body, and the representations of gender it may manifest, is not necessarily hidden by online trickery, nor does our protagonist Vanessa seem to want that to happen, as the previous close reading of her chats with Soldado illustrates. Citing Judith Butler’s *The Psychic Life of Power*, in which attempts to leave the body behind only results in a renewed affirmation of the body itself (33) Rodríguez elucidates, “The body never disappears in cyberspace; it is continually reaffirmed, reimagined, reified – written and rewritten, over and over again” (142). With every change of a nick, and with every self-description, Vanessa reinvents and reaffirms her body to a new audience. She is continually making and remaking her diva debut. As López has illustrated, some audiences are more accepting of that body and her representations of it than others. The cyber-bullying scene involving

Te parto reveals that “Rather than being left behind, bracketed, or ‘radically questioned’ the body – the raced, gendered, classed body – gets ‘outed’ in cyberspace just as soon as commerce and discourse come into play” (Nakamura 11). In the case of Vanessa’s (as both Lobacaliente and Traviesamal) and Te parto’s discourse, Vanessa outs herself, but only after she has been verbally assaulted and berated as a “puta”. The Internet and its chat rooms is not then a space of freedom for Vanessa, but it is a space for her to experiment^[39] and meet others. She still puts herself at risk for assailment while online. However, Vanessa, ever the diva, is empowered by her difference, and the Internet becomes her stage.

This stage may exist online, but based on Vanessa’s and Ruth’s perceptions of reality, it is latent in real life as well. According to the cousins, the Internet is a real space,^[40] which is as real as the cyber café they use to access their online chat rooms. Can we then call the cyber café a portal to the virtual world? Is the cyber café to be seen as a liminal space? The Internet, like the cyber café, is a shared space. They both offer private refuge, but not quite. They are public spaces with private nooks and niches. They allow for immediacy and intimacy, but not complete privacy. William J. Mitchell acknowledges that spaces that exist online, like the chat room, are constructs of communication technologies “just some computer software that brings the participants in the conversation and thus – in some abstract fashion – performs the basic function of the room” (114 qtd. in Robbins). The chat room space is created out of links and digital synapses, which fabricates the illusion of a real space. Calling the forum a chat *room* implies that the space itself is partitioned from

other areas of online communication and that it has clearly delineated boundaries, as a room in a building would have a ceiling, floor, and walls. These constructs are imagined by the chat room user and kept in place by the commonly held beliefs of all chat room visitors. William Gibson calls cyberspace “a consensual hallucination” (qtd. in Braidotti *Posthuman* 185). Rodríguez affirms this idea, saying, “Cyberspace is an imagined terrain” (121). Representations of cyber space to the chat room user will vary by chatter, and lest we need a reminder, López’s novel is fiction. Chat rooms in real life are creations of the mind. These chat rooms are figments of a work of fiction. The chat rooms represented in López’s novel are thus a type of meta-fiction: fictional (imagined or virtual) spaces created in a fictional literary text.

The online experience can be divided into two parts: what is happening inside the machine (online) and what is happening in the space where the individual is typing (in the real world, or, more specifically, in the cases of Vanessa and Ruth, in the cyber café). Rodríguez writes of her experiences online: “We sit at a computer screen alone; it is perhaps the privacy of this solitude that encourages exchanges that are less guarded. Are we writing to ourselves?” (121). Perhaps we write to ourselves in privacy (alone), as Rodríguez suggests, but the Internet is forever, and putting our imprint out there is often seen as a public act. The Internet and its public forums give a false sense of privacy or even intimacy, after all, as Alas puts it, online interaction is nothing but “palabras, palabras, palabras” (264) and it is through these words that users find connections with others. Internet intimacy is aided by its semblance of confidentiality, as Rodríguez states, “But the illusion of

privacy remains an integral aspect of Internet communication, a necessary fiction that constitutes the premise of most online interactions” (129). Falsified privacy is a fulcrum of Internet-based communication. However, as these chats are recorded and often saved on hard drives or web servers, other chatters see digital communication as more of a recording of real-time conversations. In an interview with Nicola Green, a teenager acknowledges that text messages and Internet chats are a kind of memory (256) and that the idea of being able to “retrieve them one at a time” when desired is appealing. Granted, Green interviewed individuals regarding their usage of digital communication in real life, whereas López writes fictionalized chat room dialogs in a new epistolary form.^[41] However, Green’s teens treat their chats and text messages as if they were pieces of literature – a book on a shelf that can be revisited and reread as many times as is desired – that were coauthored with their peers. López’s text features imagined accounts of web chats in a book that can be reopened and/or re-shelved upon a whim. If teenagers see texts as literature, López’s novel is a grand case of art-imitating-life (and yet, then, the novel itself drags the reader out of the book pages and into its web pages.) Another teen relays that reading other people’s text messages or IMs [Instant Messages] is comparable to reading someone’s diary (Green 257). In fictional prose, “The chat ... is itself an elaborate fiction, complete with setting, plot, characters, and dialogue” (Robbins 108). As readers of López’s novel, then, we are allowed a peek into the characters’ dialogues-as-diaries and innermost thoughts, as the plot unravels from various voices and perspectives, while additionally using a mixed-media approach to

narration. As readers we have insight into López's characters, as their fictionalized thoughts are made available through chat room dialogs, but also on another level, as the text demands us to log on and see the filmic representations of the protagonists and thus forces us to recognize the similarities between Ruth's and Vanessa's internet habits and our own. We empathize with the characters because we realize we have become frighteningly similar to them with regard to Internet usage and connectivity.

The Internet and its chat rooms are spaces that Vanessa and Ruth are able to enter, but there is also the option to log on and connect themselves to the Internet as if it were a device that can be put on or removed, like a physical prosthesis. In reading about this process, and in being coaxed to the publisher's website by the text, we become aware of our own computers as being prostheses. Once their fingers touch the keyboards and their eyes lock onto the screen, it is as if Vanessa and Ruth become physically plugged into the computer itself. We readers mirror Vanessa and Ruth. Our fingers are like their fingers; our eyes become their eyes. By logging on to the Internet in such a fashion, internet users can be categorized as cyborgs under Haraway's definition: "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. ... The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience" (149). Internet interlocutors like Vanessa and Ruth are then, as per Haraway's definition, cyborg individuals comprised of (what is represented in the novel as)

both real and virtual experiences. It is in such a way that in the case of López's novel the Internet or the computer acts as prosthesis. If "language itself is a communication technology" as Robbins asserts (126), then the Internet is a meta-technology which aids online communicators in their circulation of information. It is interesting to observe how Internet technology and language can be a globalizing force, wherein the Internet unifies and links individuals but also marks Vanessa as a third world queer subject.^[42] López's use of these hyper-connected characters in the novel serve to introduce the reader to the concept of a Harawayan cyborg, and make us as readers more aware of our own cyborg status.

VI. e-Reading a Paperback Book:

How López brings the analog into the digital age

Perhaps I should back up and describe the unconventional format of López's novel. It consists of 21 chapters, whose narrative techniques include 11 online chats (on two different internet platforms or social networks), six emails, seven transcribed phone logs, five newspaper clippings, ten photographs, four handwritten notes, seven legal documents, and a screenplay with seven videos (made available online but referenced in the book) that complement the barely-there plot. Dorr calls it "una novela múltiple que explora la literatura desde sus márgenes." (n.p.) The fragmented novel is presented in different media forms and from different, predominantly marginalized, as Dorr points out, viewpoints: chats,

police reports, emails, newspaper articles with advertisements, and in the most novel way, videos that often follow a more melodramatic format. Melodramas,^[43] like the ones López creates to accompany his novel, allow the viewer – or in this case, the reader – to look beyond mere appearance and recognize or (re)connect with lifestyles or individuals who are less often presented by heteronormativity or the hegemonic ruling class (see O. Hugo Benavides 42),^[44] in this case, that of a transgendered individual. The video clips do not compete with the writing style, but rather they enhance it.^[45] The links to the video clips appear at the very end of their corresponding chapters and encourage the reader to close his book and open his laptop. The author then creates certain expectations of his readers.

The text is demanding of its readers, much like a diva is demanding of her audience. Neil Young, in an interview with Henry Jenkins, explains how placing multifaceted demands on consumers (or, in the case of López's audience, readers) can limit fan growth but also inspires devotion. (Only those who have made certain sacrifices can be considered true fans.) Consumers who do succumb to the whims of the author have a more in-depth experience, but the number of those consumers shrinks. Young states, "The more layers you put on something, the smaller the market. You are requiring people to intentionally invest more time in what it is you are trying to tell them and that's one of the challenges of transmedia storytelling..." (qtd. in Jenkins *Convergence* 130). Because López's readers have been instructed to switch mediums before turning the very page they are reading, the pace at which the digital information is disseminated can vary for each reader depending on his

ability to connect to the publisher's website.^[46] The Diva Text, which is to say: the text that performs a type of divadom, is authored in a way that suggests that true fans would leap at the chance to follow its orders, though for some, doing so would require extra effort. (But isn't the diva worth it?) Even though "[i]nternet servers are (supposed to be) always switched on" (Lee and Libenau 268), not every reader of López's novel will have immediate access to its online videos. The Diva Text's unusual format may force its readers to become cyborgs (or at least recognize the facets of cyborgdom that exist in their lives and habits), but a reader of an analog book likely does not gravitate as heavily toward cyborg status like that which the protagonists Vanessa and Ruth exhibit. To get the full trans-genre literary experience – and to solve the mystery portrayed in the perplexing storyline – López requires his readers to have Internet access, whether at home or in a cybercafé similar to the one the cousins often occupy.

Though it would vary by an individual's age, location, and social class, in this day and age it is rare for a person to be disconnected from the Internet, whether via mobile devices or hooked up to a computer, but one might suppose that readers of books in print (as opposed to e-books) are not always wont or able to access the internet at any given moment.^[47]

For different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to the flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't ... it is also about power relationships to this anyway – differentiated

mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it... This is, in other words, a highly complex social differentiation. There is the dimension of the degree of movement and communication, but also dimensions of control and initiation. (Massey 61-62)

The availability of Internet access speaks not only to the Digital Divide,^[48] but also of those whose Internet activity borders on affect.^[49] By requiring Internet connectivity of his readers in order for them to access the full, multimedia scope of the narrative plotline, López suggests a certain type of audience who is connected and savvy. He as an author posits a readership that is connected, and the text sets demands (like a diva) on them to stay connected (like cyborgs).

López's *Keres cojer? = guan tu fak*, follows the format of a more traditional *novela policiaca*^[50] wherein the storyline serves to solve the mystery of a purported crime,^[51] however, the author develops the reader experience further with a bricolage approach: eschewing traditional narration for transcribed online chats and emails, newspaper clippings, and online video recordings that offer the audience clues. The readers then assume the role of detective and must step outside the novel and log onto the World Wide Web, making them aware of his cyborg facets and tendencies, much like the author's fictional characters Vanessa and Ruth, whom I have argued to be Harawayan cyborgs, to get the complete story. These extra steps of involvement would implicate what Henry Jenkins calls convergence theory.

Jenkins defines convergence as the following: “the flow of content across multiple media platforms ... [which] represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (*Convergence* 2-3). Jenkins further clarifies that this mixed-media approach to narration is “a means of expanding the storytelling experience” (*Convergence* 8). The audience then shifts its role from reader to viewer.

In a convergence culture world, the reader is asked to seek out new information from the various ways content is disseminated. Jenkins claims to be “against the idea that convergence should be understood primarily as a technological process bringing together multiple media functions within the same devices. Instead, [...] convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (3). The concept of the novel is edited and its content is complemented in a way that causes us to question more traditionally held norms, much in the way that Vanessa’s body is reconfigured in a way that causes us to question representations of gender and femininity. This novel is a queer text in that it ignores convention and adds different story-telling media (namely videos) to make its categorization damn near impossible. Is there such a thing as queer norms? (If so, I would find it easy to argue that our diva Vanessa, with her off-kilter body, defies them.)

The idea of *literatura de izquierda*, as coined by Interzona editor Damián Tabarovsky, can help us position the text. ^[52] Whereas “el mercado y la academia

escriben a favor de la reproducción del orden, de su supervivencia, a favor de sus convenciones” (18), texts that Tabarovsky classifies as *la literatura de izquierda* “sospecha de toda convención, incluidas las propias. No busca inaugurar un nuevo paradigma, sino poner en cuestión la idea misma de paradigma, la idea misma de orden literario, cualquiera sea ese orden” (20). This means that a text that refuses to satisfy market demands or academic norms can be classified as *literatura de izquierda*. López’s novel can be seen as such because it does that, and furthermore it casts a wider net to include short films on the Internet. *Keres cojer? = Guan tu fak* is *literatura de izquierda* because of “su incapacidad para convertirse en mercancía (como la produce el mercado) y su resistencia a transformarse en obra (como la supone la academia)” (26). López’s text will not conform to academic or commercial expectations, but nevertheless it expects its readers to follow through on certain requests and postulations. The text itself models diva behavior because it places demands on its readers: if you want the rest of the story, you must go to a certain website. Reading becomes a production. The text is a spectacular show-off.

The decision of when to read and when to watch is left to the reader; the author makes the material available to his audience, but he cannot dictate how the text will be consumed, no matter the matter in which the Diva Text coquettishly purrs or maniacally screeches her demands. The practice of reading López’s multifaceted text then becomes something personal that may be read out of order or watched out of context; “the fragments exist so that consumers can make the connections on their own time and in their own ways” (Jenkins *Convergence* 121).

The fragmented novel with its incorporated multimedia approaches becomes an enriching experience, a puzzle worthy of solving. Jenkins acknowledges, “In a hunting society, kids play with bows and arrows. In an information society, they play with information” (Jenkins *Convergence* 134). The multimedia text thus becomes a playground for individuals born of the digital age. What López so ingeniously does through this text though, is make the readers think they are in control when really, the Text-acting-as-Diva has been pulling the strings all along. The readers have some control of how or when the information is perceived or accessed, sure, but the Diva Text still wins by forcing them to recognize how reliant upon technology we have become.

To sum up, this text, like the partially transgendered cyborg diva, is monstrous and uncategorizable. It is disturbing and frustrating because it doesn't conform to the expectations we have for literature. It is too big to be contained because it crosses genres and storytelling media. It places demands that we are not always able to meet. Specifically, this text is frightening because it makes us aware of our own cyborg status. López's novel is the diva who refuses to be typecast; it is constantly reinventing itself, and in the reiterations and revamping of its own queer aesthetic, we readers are made hyper-aware of our own hyperlinked lives. The diva leaves us wanting more, but when we shout, “Encore!” she ignores us and neglects to publish the remaining two-thirds of the promised trilogy, or even keep us abreast of its progress. The diva places demands on us, but she cannot be bothered with our

cyborg requests. The Diva Text has sucked us in, making us aware of her superiority, and then leaves us mere cyborgs waiting – indefinitely – for more.

[1] López's debut novel, *La asesina de Lady Di*, was first published in 2001 and awaits its filmic representation.

[2] The other two parts of the trilogy, (22 x 7) *Flor de Chongo* and *Las aventuras de Vanessa en América* are purportedly forthcoming, though word about the project is limited, to the point where it would not be unreasonable to suspect that the project's completion was postponed indefinitely or perhaps even scrapped completely.

[3] Though this novel was published in 2005, transgendered individuals are still topics of discussion in the Argentine media. As recently as August 2014, *La Nación* published an article revealing that Argentinian politician Hugo Curto claimed in an interview, "Los travestis tienen una enfermedad; no es algo normal."

[4] The combination of drug lords and plastic surgery is also explored in Colombian novelist Gustavo Bolívar Moreno's *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* (2005) and its subsequent telenovela renditions.

[5] This just so happens to be Alejandro López's hometown.

[6] It would seem Vanessa and Ruth are not the only divas-turned-swindlers. The sensational Beyoncé's 2008 hit song "Diva" repeats in its chorus: "A diva is a female version of a hustla'."

[7] This is a lame attempt to quote an Olivia Newton-John song, a recording artist whom some regard as a diva.

[8] “Drag performance strives to perform femininity and femininity is not exclusively the domain of biological women” (Muñoz 108). Furthermore, “The ‘woman’ produced in drag is not a woman, but instead a public disidentification with woman” (Muñoz 108).

[9] On a personal note, while living in Argentina in 2008, I met individuals who claimed they had sex with transgendered prostitutes for reasons I, at the time, found confounding: they told me that having sex with a *travestí* was not considered cheating on one’s wife, because the prostitute was biologically a man and yet the sex act was also not to be considered (derogatorily) “gay” because the prostitute was a woman. Apparently one can assume both genders contemporaneously.

[10] As opposed to that which hegemonic society expects her to do.

[11] Vaginal Davis’s drag performances have been categorized as a type of drag terrorism.

[12] Another “drag terrorist” diva, Austin-based CHRISTEENE, models the same sort of disruptive behavior that Vaginal Davis performs on stage. In an interview with VICE Magazine, Paul Soileau, the New Orleans-born man who dons CHRISTEENE’s black wig, touches on the mystique of a disruptive diva, saying, “I think CHRISTEENE speaks on many things that we are all feeling deep inside, but is just ‘decorated’ in a way that brings it to another realm – almost not human. I would like to think of CHRISTEENE as a gatherer of emotions and hawt hawt rumblings from within.”

(n.p.) The diva is disturbing because she creates within her audience an emotional stirring that causes them to confront their own reality or disillusion.

[13] Muñoz expands the implications of his concept to include the idea that disidentification is “a way of overcoming white normativity” (xii), which he further defines as “a survival strategy that is employed by a minority spectator... to resist and confound socially prescriptive patterns of identification” (28).

[14] Think of Madonna (a woman who reinvents herself so often she can easily be seen to possess an embodiment of drag) and her influence on the gay club scene in the 1980s, or, in more recent years, RuPaul’s infiltration of Western popular culture with shows like *Drag Race*, which has marked her as drag queen diva *par excellence*, or at least one more easily accepted in mainstream media.

[15] “Gender performativity, just as any other form of performativity, must occur within social constraints to be intelligible; it must be intelligible if it is to be efficacious; and if it is not efficacious it cannot succeed as performative.” (C. Jacob Hale 225)

[16] “The story of the diva is necessarily a story about a female body that is both object and subject.” (Leonardi & Pope 95)

[17] In reference to pop singer Annie Lennox, Leonardi & Pope mention the “diva themes of beauty and decay” (Leonardi & Pope 224)

[18] “the diva’s ‘voice’ could serve as both a mode of and a metaphor for female empowerment in a culture that traditionally placed women on the side of silence” (Leonardi & Pope 74)

[19] Vanessa is not the only diva/cyborg hybrid. In an interview with *The Guardian's* Paul Lester, Janelle Monae, arguably a diva in her own right, affirms her claims to be part android.

[20] Leslie McCall claims intersectionality may be “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with other fields, has made so far.” (1771)

[21] In a handwritten chapter titled “La Lengua,” wherein López shares Vanessa’s personal English-Spanish dictionary, replete with phonetic spellings, the following phrase is scrawled: “BifoR GuANTiT, NOU TU = ANTES 1, AORA 2” (335).

[22] Puar reminds us, however, “Haraway’s cyborgs are meant to undermine binaries” (Cyborg 56).

[23] See also Octavio Paz’s essay on the many uses of the verb “chingar” in Mexico.

[24] “letter writing as a form of *sermo mutuus absentium*, a virtual or deferred dialogue in which both speakers are absent” (Garlinger x)

[25] As I mentioned in my other chapter, La Loca also claims the Internet as her home. “Vive en los chat rooms” (Lozada 60).

[26] The term teledildonics refers to sex toys that can be controlled by a computer to enable an individual to reach orgasm, allowing for mutual masturbation even from remote distances.

[27] Nakamura notes that “machines that offer identity prostheses to redress the burdens of physical ‘handicaps’ such as age, gender, and race produce cybertypes

that look remarkable like racial and gender stereotypes” (5) in such a way that render race and gender inescapable online.

[28] Alas catalogs possible falsities that may arise in a cybersexual encounter: age, height, weight, the amount of hair one has, length or color of hair, and what he considers fundamental information: the size of one’s penis (263).

[29] “Virtuality is deemed an improvement of technology and often connotes a positive, if not utopic, space since it supposedly allows for the ideological fantasy of enjoying bodily pleasures without bodies, or at least, without inhabiting our own bodies but those generated by a computer” (Garlinger 165).

[30] “**Soldado:** hola

Lobacaliente: ola soldado...” (183)

[31] “**Lobacaliente:** Contame algo de vos” (183)

[32] “Most servers give users the option of changing their nicknames at will, allowing users to create, deploy, and often juggle separate and distinct online personas as they enter different channels, or even within the same channel.” (Rodríguez 128)

[33] Soldado reacts less vehemently to the name change:

“**Soldado:** te cambiaste el nick

Traviesamal: si te molesta?

Soldado: no todo bien” (186)

[34] “It is a camp style of resistances and self-protection, a way of identifying with other queer people across invisibility and disgrace” (Koestenbaum 85).

[35] “And just as in real life, the millions of users who engage in Net sex routinely experience romantic attachment, sexual harassment, and obsessive desire”

(Rodríguez 147)

[36] “Homonormativity can be read as a formation complicit with and invited into the biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of heteronormative norms” (Puar *Assemblages* 9).

[37] Rodríguez analyzes the diva’s role in queer spaces, particularly those that exist in online realms: “*Divas* are a breathing, swishing, eruption of the divine, a way of being in the world, of claiming power as movement, glances, voice, body, and style.

Atrevidas dare to fill desire, challenge assumptions the world has given us.

Entendidas share a knowledge, understand the significance and nuances of queer subaltern spaces...” (24, emphasis in original). As per Rodríguez’s definition,

Vanessa can be categorized as both Diva and Atrevida, but is she an Entendida?

[38] “There is a rebooting of ontology in order to give weight to the *ahuman*, *anorganic*, and the *asubjective* as ground of being and knowing.” (Clough and Puar, 16)

[39] Martine Rothblatt notes, “technology will be used to try on genders and to pave the way for people being liberated from a single birth-determined sex” (153)

[40] The idea that cyberspace or the Internet is a space entirely separate from the real world is echoed in the succinct author biography of national bestseller *Mr.*

Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore, A Novel (2012) in which Robin Sloan describes

himself with the following single sentence: “Robin Sloan grew up in Michigan and now splits his time between San Francisco and the Internet.”

[41] Robbins comments on this phenomenon in her analysis of María Felicitas Jaime’s *Cenicienta en Chueca* (2003) saying, “And of course, this story is not a chat itself, but part of a book that is bought and sold in public places and occasionally discussed in conference papers or articles...” (117)

[42] Vanessa’s chats with biological men of a perceived higher social standing are similar to those that Robbins explores in María Felicitas Jaime’s *Cenicienta en Chueca*, wherein “the distances and approximations between characters are not only physical, but also psychological and linguistic, and these communications and miscommunications are occasionally represented by the texts they write to one another.” (108)

[43] “Melodrama, therefore, as one of the most successful contemporary forms of popular culture, is enormously invested in the hegemonic reformulation of Latin American society. The success of melodrama, like that of hegemony, is secured in its being able to state similar forms of political domination in differently oppressive ways.” (Benavides 196)

[44] While López’s vignettes do not encompass the full scope of a Latin American telenovela, it is interesting to recognize that “the telenovela is the continent’s most lucrative legal industry.” (Benavides 5)

[45] Regarding the emergence of new media and its possibilities for multimedia approaches, Jenkins asserts, “Cinema did not kill theater. Television did not kill radio. Each old medium was force to coexist with the emerging media.” (14)

[46] I speak from experience here, as the first time I read the novel I was reading poolside, unplugged, without any way to access the website or its videos.

[47] Temporarily ignoring issues of social class, I think of individuals who read on the subway and don’t have Internet access, for example.

[48] The Oxford English Dictionary defines Digital Divide as follows: “the gulf between those who have ready access to current digital technology (esp. computers and the Internet) and those who do not; (also) social or educational inequality resulting from this.”

[49] For example, see Ángel Lozada’s figure of La Loca, whom I examine in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[50] The narrative effect is similar to that of López’s fellow Argentine and predecessor Manuel Puig in *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976). Across the Atlantic, in a similar vein, Nazario Luque’s comic book *Anarcoma* (1983) narrates the life of a transgendered detective in Barcelona.

[51] According to La Biblioteca Nacional de España, “La novela policíaca es un género narrativo en donde la trama consiste generalmente en la resolución de un misterio de tipo criminal. El protagonista en la novela policíaca es normalmente un policía o un detective, habitualmente recurrente a lo largo de varias novelas del mismo autor, que, mediante la observación, el análisis y el razonamiento deductivo,

consigue finalmente averiguar cómo, dónde, por qué se produjo el crimen y quién lo perpetró.” Dorr acknowledges that, in the case of *Keres cojer? = guan tu fak*, “la novela policiaca sirve como excusa para la experimentación literaria.” (n.p.)

[52] Just as a reminder, Interzona is the publisher of López’s text and of the purported forthcoming remaining portion of the trilogy.

Chapter 3: An Open-and-Shut Case for Linking Diva Fandom and Gaming Culture With Self-Love in Cristina Peri Rossi's *Playstation*

Thus far in my dissertation, we have examined two novels authored by Latin American males, which highlight queer protagonists whose quests for belonging and a reconstruction of the Self or body were aided by the Internet. Cristina Peri Rossi's 2009 book of poems, *Playstation*, shares some commonalities to Alejandro López's and Ángel Lozada's novels with regard to the themes of the Internet, international trajectories, and queer sexuality. However, the poet-author's work diverges in many ways from the two texts that were authored by novelists and analyzed in previous chapters, as she is obviously not a pre- or post-op male-to-female transsexual, and, though she was born in Uruguay, she emigrated to Spain as opposed to the United States (so there are different cultural parameters as well as an elimination of the bilingual theme we observed in the other two texts). Additionally, Peri Rossi was born in 1941 and has – to date – 37 published works under her belt, many of which are novels. As a well-published author born biologically female in Uruguay and currently residing in Spain, she has clearly had experiences that diverge sharply from those of Lozada and López. Her first work, *Viviendo* (1963), was published five years prior to Lozada's birth. She writes from the perspective of a different generation, a different continent, a different gender, and, in the context of the collection analyzed in this chapter, a different genre: poetry. As we have observed,

contemporary authors Lozada's and López's sophomore novels can be considered both bilingual and transgender/transgenre, as the nontraditional format of the texts attempt to replicate queerness, as represented by the queer identities and gender-bending protagonists within the narration, within the genre-bending texts themselves. However, Peri Rossi's poems reflect queer themes in a different way, as throughout the *poemario* the poetic voice rejects any notion of heteronormativity that tries to creep into her lesbian relationships, and she jettisons any lover who might try to replicate so-called "traditional" practices of marriage, family, or partnership.^[1] Furthermore, as another common theme between the two aforementioned novels, both Lozada's and López's texts narrate physical journeys to the United States (exile to New York and travel to California, respectively) from Latin America, which were facilitated by the Internet and new communication technologies. Peri Rossi's poems likewise reference the Internet and transnational trajectories through references to literary translation and the Spanish-language literature market, but perhaps the most notable physical trajectory is the poet-author's own exile from Uruguay to Spain, which is referenced in her work. Whereas the works of male authors Lozada and López have created a framework from which we can compare the protagonists' quests for self-fulfillment, Peri Rossi's contrasting perspective as represented in her 2009 book of poems breaks with any preconceived notions of what it means to be a queer user of the Internet.

Not only does Peri Rossi's poetry offer a new perspective on queer Internet habits, but moreover, the two bookending poems – on whose themes this chapter

will focus the bulk of its reading – synthesize some of the concepts we have seen before, namely that of the diva and *sexilio*, while also introducing a new form of online community: gamers. *Playstation* consists of 28 poems that deal with questions of performance (divas and the theatre),^[2] the literary market (influential literature and authors who inspired her work, translation, and writing as practice),^[3] travel and exile, as well as technology and self-love. The titular PlayStation doesn't appear in the text until the eighth poem "Convalecencia", where we see it as both coping mechanism from boredom and as praxis for self-love. However, whereas Lozada's and López's novels have illuminated a lack that its protagonists feel (with regards to belonging or to the body), Peri Rossi's poetic voice diverges from this longing for inclusion and seeks out a technology-based fantasy that facilitates solitary play over real life opportunities and lovers that have been made available to her. In certain sections of the *poemario*, this technology-based fantasy includes YouTube clips of the unattainable diva that serves as a referent for Peri Rossi's own past and in latter poems, the fantasy stems from an avatar-based video game life that encourages the manual stimulation of a tiny joystick. Peri Rossi uses the figure of the diva and her PlayStation video game console as symbols of self-love and metaphors for pleasure or masturbatory thought. I title this chapter an open and shut case because the two themes – diva worship and video gaming – are discussed predominantly in the two bookending, or opening and closing, poems.

I. The Diva is an Equal Opportunist:

Self-Realization, Sapphic Fandom in “Fidelidad”

The first three poems in Peri Rossi’s *Playstation*, “Fidelidad,” “Fidelidad II,” and “Teatro,”^[4] share a theme of theatre and performance. “Fidelidad,” the opening poem, serves to connect the *poemario*’s recurring motifs of a diva’s performance and the experience of exile: ^[5]

A los veinte años, en Montevideo, escuchaba a Mina
cantando Margherita de Coccianti
en la pantalla blanca y negra de la Rai
junto a la mujer que amaba
y me emocionaba

A los cuarenta años escuchaba a Mina
cantando Margherita de Coccianti
en el reproductor de cassettes
junto a la mujer que amaba,
en Estocolmo,
y me emocionaba

A los sesenta años, escucho a Mina
cantando Margherita de Coccianti

en Youtube, junto a la mujer que amo,
ciudad de Barcelona
y me emociono

Luego dicen que no soy una persona fiel.

This is the first poem in *Playstation*, and it serves to introduce the lyrical voice and also to elucidate the ideas of diaspora as it may pertain to Peri Rossi's personal history (or that of the poem's lyrical voice, which mimics Peri Rossi's biography while also not quite being the same with regard to dates and geography, as I will later clarify further.) The poem also sets the stage for Mina and her importance throughout the *poemario*. Anna Maria Quaini, more often referred to as Mina Mazinni, is an Italian rock and roller-cum-pop star known for her tall stature and bad girl image.^[6] This gender-bending diva creates a space for self-recognition and allows for a sense of solace to individuals who, like Peri Rossi, identify as queer and likely had never before witnessed – on national television or elsewhere – any sort of representation of same-sex desire or non-heteronormative behavior. If we are to combine Peri Rossi's biography with information provided in the poem in order to ascertain an estimate for a time frame, the lyrical voice witnessed the female rock and roller on Uruguayan broadcasting during the 1960s, a time in which Sapphic love or subversive women were not so often seen in the spotlight. ^[7] The diva, Mina, becomes a personal referent for the poetic voice, allowing for an epiphany in which she realized she was not alone in her desires and she was neither freakish nor a

total aberration from the norm, as the absence of such powerful female role models could have suggested.

The song thrice referenced in the poem “Fidelidad”, like the songstress who sings it, is unwavering in each stanza. ^[8] Borrowing the words Riccardo Cocciante composed in 1976, the Italian diva Mina is singing about her desire to possess a woman called Margherita.^[9] This is an example of homosexual desire, even if the song and the Sapphic situation caused when a female sings it was scripted by a male. When the lyrical voice – then in her twenties as per the poem’s first stanza – heard the queer element of the song, i.e. a female songstress declaring her love for the titular Margherita, another female, the Sapphic situation that played out through the song lyrics and Mina’s performance of them reaffirmed the lyrical voice’s own sexuality.

The final line of the song mentioned in the poem, “Margherita è mia” marks Margherita, a female figure, as something to be both lusted after and possessed. The song is a reminder of the poetic voice’s past, and the unflappable pleasure she derives from listening to Mina’s rendition has a twinge of both nostalgia and possessiveness. In her twenties, the lyrical voice identifies with Mina because she is a powerful female singing about love for another female. The twenty-something lyrical voice recognizes herself in the queer aspect of Mina’s performance. As she matures and grows as a writer and poet, the lyrical voice may well also identify with the diva aspect of Mina’s performance, as evidenced by her list of adorers (fans and lovers) and her transnational itinerary (to be discussed further in the next

paragraph). The lyrical voice's identification with Mina and her song evolves over time, but the signifier is still constant. This signifier can be seen as queer because although it refers to a single singer, song and composer, it does not maintain the same signified in the sense that the speaker changes and so does the affective charge of the song.

In "Fidelidad," three cities are directly mentioned: Montevideo,^[10] Stockholm,^[11] and Barcelona.^[12] These named cities suggest the transnational geography that reflects the lyric speaker's life has changed over the decades, but a diva is forever, and the memories she evokes are fraught with emotional charge. Generally speaking, the diva is international and, due to burgeoning technology, she is made accessible across borders and oceans. We also see the trajectory the poetic voice has traced: from Montevideo, Uruguay to Stockholm, Sweden and then finally to Barcelona, Spain over a span of 40 years' time. Her love for Mina has never faded even though her relationship and self-identification to her has evolved over time. On the other hand, the company she keeps (*la mujer que amaba, la mujer que amaba, la mujer que amo*), the cities in which she resides, and the technology made available to her in order to listen to her beloved songstress – a referent for her own queer self-realization – have changed throughout the years. The last line of the poem argues that the poetic voice has been called fickle and yet, her adoration for the diva and what she represents remains permanent and fixed, unchanging even when geography, lovers, and technology all have adapted to the changing times.

The repeated structure of the poem emphasizes what has changed (age, cities, lovers, and technology utilized to listen to music) in such a way that the thing that has not changed, the emotional charge that listening to Mina incites in her, is made more pronounced or significant. This poem is not about lovers or cities, or even about the poetic voice's fickleness. It is about the poetic voice's devotion to and adoration of the diva.^[13] Generally speaking, the diva threatens gender norms with her performance. In assuming her place on stage and demanding attention, she causes men, women, and everything in between to fall in love with her, to want to consume her, or to want to be her.^[14] To see the diva as something special and set aside in this poem, we must first observe the objects that are changing: her lovers, global technology, and her city. It is notable that Montevideo, her city of origin, is plotted on the first line of the poem: "A los veinte años, *en Montevideo*, escuchaba a Mina" (emphasis mine) whereas in the other two stanzas, Stockholm (Estocolmo) and Barcelona are placed in the penultimate lines.^[15] In doing so, Peri Rossi aligns (literally, by placing them on the same line of the poem) Montevideo with Mina. Fittingly, both begin with the letter M, but perhaps more importantly, both create within the poetic voice a sense of nostalgia. Alliteration then becomes allusion. Mina, although Italian, is someone whom Peri Rossi associates with Montevideo and with the earlier stages of her life.

The poem spans forty years and references the changing trends in music technology. In Montevideo, she heard the song and saw its performance on a black and white television set. In Stockholm in the 1980s, Mina's voice was recorded to a

cassette tape, which allowed the poetic voice a repeat performance of the song and easy access to the flood of memories with which she associates Mina's voice. The cassette tapes lack a visual component, but the poetic voice is able to view the performance she once saw in her mind's eye. These sonorities, as recorded in the tapes, allow for her memories to flood back, and they created a form of desire for her own sexuality. Essentially, as she listens, the poetic voice is performing a type of memory-invoked masturbation alone (in her memories) and with others (the changing women who sit at her side).

Peri Ross's wry sense of humor emphasizes that the poetic voice is committed to the diva and her song, even if she is not permanently committed to a place or person, as they say.^[16] Perhaps the final song lyric should be changed to "Mina è mia"? Mina acts as a referent to the lyrical voice's past, and in a way, transubstantiates from gender-bending Italian diva to coming-of-age Uruguayan lesbian. In the poem, Mina is a stand in for the lyrical voice herself, so the desire she feels for the diva is really self-love and self-desire.

In "Fidelidad II," the second poem of the book and a continuation of the thought begun in "Fidelidad", the poet mentions Mina yet again, amidst references to all that is going on in the world, such as recent politics and the Internet boom (including a direct mention of Google) and still, after all this time and all that is going on in the world, she listens to Mina.^[17] The refrain "Yo seguía escuchando a Mina / cantando Margherita de Cocciante / y a las mujeres que yo amaba les gustaba" is repeated four times in the poem. The refrain recounts the same song, the

same singer, and different audience members, but all of the women for whom Peri Rossi plays the song applaud her choice of music. Peri Rossi's knack for boasting is also made evident in the following lines: "Usted acaba de tener el honor/ de ser incluida entre los mil mejores autores vivos del mundo," a stanza that precedes the Mina-centric refrain of the poem. It is safe to say that Peri Rossi has mastered the art of humble bragging, and again, by linking that stanza with the next one about Mina, she likens herself (a literary diva) to one of the musical variety. Aretha Franklin, in an interview with David Letterman, defines divas as "female artists who are very particular." Through her poem "Fidelidad II" we learn that Cristina Peri Rossi, whom colleagues consider a force with which to be reckoned, can be considered as such.

In Chapter 2, I argue that the brashness of López's text coupled with the demands it places on its readers make it reminiscent of a diva's performance, but I also commented on the symbiotic relationship of the diva to gay male culture (think Madonna's reappropriation of 'voguing'). Wayne Koestenbaum links gay male culture to the diva with respect to fandom in his book *The Queen's Throat*, in which he states, "gay culture has perfected the art of mimicking a diva – of pretending, inside, to *be* divine – to help the stigmatized self imagine it is received, believed, and adored" (133).^[18] The diva then becomes a sort of salve that heals emotional wounds or a balm that protects her fans from the harshness imposed upon them by heteronormative society and the hegemonic standards and expectations it imposes upon them.^[19] The diva has a healing effect on her audience and allows for an individual to experience escapism from cruel reality. Brett Farmer echoes this belief,

since he sees divas “as imaginary figures of therapeutic escapism” (169). The diva is therapy and she is dichotomous in both her beauty and ugliness and her good and “bad girl” behavior. She is healing, she is protective, and she is comforting, in addition to being non-conforming, monstrous or impetuous.

The diva is a queer figure. ^[20] Her power, which arguably emanates from her voice and throat, is linked with both the feminine and the masculine, as the locus of sound is both phallus (the throat) and an orifice (the mouth).^[21] Mina, as a subversive, tough-acting singer in Italy during the 1960s and 70s exhibited some of the fluid-gendered aspects one expects to see in a diva.^[22] By claiming her place in the spotlight, the diva – in this case, Mina, who serves as a stand-in for the poetic voice – is to be considered subversive; she challenges societal norms by obtaining a position of power, which under hegemonic norms has long been considered a more masculine trait. Let us focus this reading, then, using Susan J. Leonardi’s and Rebecca A. Pope’s “analogy between throat and vagina” (215) and idea of “the larynx as labia” (215) so that we can identify the inherently queer desire of a woman’s ongoing passion for the diva’s song, as we observe in Peri Rossi’s “Fidelidad”.^[23] Using Leonardi’s and Pope’s analogy, the throat and mouth have become sex organs, and thus singing becomes a sex act. The locus of the diva’s power is genderqueer. Everyone has a throat and mouth; the diva just uses them to her advantage. There is something fabulously queer about the diva, and yet there is also something queer to be said about female diva fandom or the self-desire she might stir in others. ^[24]

This situation of intense diva adoration and fandom, as Peri Rossi expresses in the poem, then, is not unique to gay men. The diva is an equal opportunist. The performer seeks to stir up emotions in her audience. With regard to musicians and the listeners' desiring of them, Sheila Whiteley observes, "[P]opular music provides a specific insight into the ways in which fantasy – whether through watching a live performance, or in the intimacy of listening to music in the private space of the bedroom – can signal both what is denied and what we would like to experience" (251). The public setting of a concert venue differs from the intimacy of a fan's home, but the diva still creates in the listener a sense of awe and room for obsession. In an interview with Koestenbaum, we hear from another female fan of the diva that goes by the name of Elsie: "The diva's voice... 'meant as much to me as parents, a husband, children, or anything most women attach themselves to'" (qtd. in Koestenbaum 15). Regardless of gender, the fan worships the diva. For some fans, like Elsie, the diva usurps the idea of home or family. The diva's presence in a queer subject's life allows for an opportunity to "transfigure the oppressive banalities of the heteronormative everyday" (Farmer 169). The diva's presence – even if it is only felt through her voice – is transformative. She allows for an auditory taste of a new and improved life. She is a promising harbinger of hope. For Brett Farmer, "[the diva] provided not just the promisory vision of a life different from and infinitely freer than the one I knew, but the phantasmatic means through which to achieve and sustain this process of transcendence" (169).^[25] The diva is an inspiration to many individuals, queer or not, and her vocal abilities inspire introspection and self-

realization. Koestenbaum expands on the importance of the diva's voice in claiming, "The volume, height, depth, lushness and excess of operatic utterance reveal, by contrast, how small your gestures have been until now" (44). The diva is a force to be recognized but she is also a force that commands reconciliation with the Self. ^[26] Her song allows for contemplation and motivation for transformation. The diva's song allows for a "transport of feeling, but also a delirious transcendence of embodied identity itself" (Farmer 177). A diva's fan may derive strength from the siren's song, and arguably, the diva's strength comes not just from her voice but also from her fans.^[27] It is a symbiotic relationship that exists between a diva and her fans, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, but here it reflects symbiosis not as a gay male privilege but rather as something open to fans of all gender identities. As we read in Peri Rossi's poem, the poetic voice is a fan that feels emotion – what Farmer calls "delirious transcendence" – when she hears the diva's voice (which emerges from the songstress's throat, which is linked to the vagina) and it conjures excitement for Mina, Margherita, and Montevideo, which all represent her past and her Self. The diva instills in the poetic voice a strong sense of self-desire.

The song as sung by Mina involves much allowance for queer desire. By positioning the song in a place of prominence within the female-authored poem, we as readers are able to observe different levels of queer desire. These strata are as follows: the singer (Mina) desiring the song's protagonist Margherita, the diva's voice causing the poetic voice to desire her, and finally, through an act of poetic

transubstantiation, the idea that the author's desiring of the diva songstress is actually a desire for herself, resulting in a queer act of self-infatuation.

In Peri Rossi's poem, we are able to see that the diva is capable of creating queer desire. Leonardi and Pope tell us that "[the diva and her] voice seduce men to their destruction and women to their perversion" (13) and additionally they remind us, "divahood corrupts virtue" (13). In this case, neither the songstress Mina nor her audience is deemed virtuous by hegemonic societal standards. The diva – about which I speak in general terms that do not exclude Mina as a worthy example of diva status – does not conform to hegemonic norms or expectations. She can be seen as queer and subversive. She challenges expectations that are set upon women by society. Likewise, Peri Rossi, as a lesbian woman living in homophobic Uruguay, aligns with the diva in that she flouts hegemonic norms or expectations. In the context of the poem, Mina the diva is a conduit of memory for the poetic voice and author, bringing her back to a moment of time that took place Uruguay, ^[28] where she first came to realize that, as a queer individual, she was not alone and that there were others, like Mina, like her.

Though Peri Rossi's poetic voice cannot – nor would want to – return to the past or to the Motherland Uruguay, at least not physically, her favorite diva Mina allows for a type of cathexis or transference that gives her erotic pleasure and enables her to find an association with her Self and her past whilst in Montevideo, Stockholm, or Barcelona. The diva is a uniting force. She goes beyond the power of music to not only incite emotion but also to create a space for adoration that travels

with the poetic voice. What the poetic voice feels for the diva should not be misconstrued as amorous love (as it is stated in the poem that there are/were other women she loved and presumably these women have changed over time), but still the diva brings to her a heightened emotion, which supersedes or goes beyond romantic love, and represents – as Peri Rossi’s poetic voice recognizes herself in the diva – a type of masturbatory self-love and admiration. At the end, the poetic voice jokes that she has been accused of being “infiel” or unfaithful to her real-life lovers, but the poetic voice argues that she is not fickle as others may believe, but rather that her loyalty has remained with Mina (and her rendition “Margherita”) throughout the years and despite all of these changes. Through an act of memory-induced transubstantiation, we observe that the diva, Mina, serves to represent the lyrical voice herself, who shares many similarities with Peri Rossi, and this love and loyalty is actually directed toward the self. The diva brings the poetic voice back home. Lovers can and do change, and, like Peri Rossi, the lyrical voice’s geography has also changed. People and places should be able to provide for the lyrical voice a sense of home, but in their stead, the diva supplants that need. Peri Rossi’s poetic voice makes it clear that she rejects the Uruguay that rejected her as well as the notion of family (as we will later discuss), and Mina is all she needs. When we observe Mina as a stand-in for Peri Rossi’s poetic voice, we can ascertain a type of self-reliance and self-indulgence that goes beyond typical diva worship. Landscapes and lovers have changed, but the diva is constant. It’s not just the diva that is constant in Peri Rossi’s poetic voice, but also the memory it supplements and the

emotional change it evokes. The diva is a reminder of the moment in which a young Peri Rossi learned she was not the freak of nature that society condemned her to believe, and that there were other women who challenged norms like her and thrived, and through the wonders of technology, the poetic voice is able to revisit a moment in time, and in doing so, the cultural referent allows for Peri Rossi her own spot in the limelight.

The bond that links the diva-performer and the diva-poet continues to grow in the next three poems. As *Playstation's* story arc unfurls, we transition from the theatre to the library, a realm in which the literary diva Peri Rossi finds herself most comfortable. The seventh poem is titled "Biblioteca", and in this poem the poetic voice explains to an unnamed fan of Peri Rossi's poetry why she has given away her old books and does not yearn for them, as she prefers to leave them in the past: "Me gusta amarlos a la distancia [...] para no decepcionarme."^[29] Quite similarly, as we readers observe through the poetic voice's rotating cast of girlfriends, to how she tosses away old lovers once they are no longer useful to her. In a later poem, "La melancolía de la literatura", the poetic voice compares her experience as a writer to that of Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Proust, and Kafka. She thinks highly of herself by placing herself in the company of such lauded literati, all of whom are men. As a female author and poet, she asserts herself as a diva in the literary realm. In another poem, "Entrevista", in which a student from the United States wants to interview her, she (the poetic voice) compares herself (Peri Rossi) to Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf (finally a woman among the group!), William Saroyan, Norman

Mailer, and Charles Bukowski. ^[30] We readers learn more about the literary profession and its market in “Para qué sirve la literatura”, wherein the concept of being paid to write and how books impacted her life are discussed.^[31] Other poems reference the universality of her oeuvre and its need for translation (“Espejos circulares,” “Anna”, “Estado de Exilio,” and “Advenimiento”) and the transnationalism that poetry festivals promote (“Recitales de poesía.”) She discusses her love of literature and the impact it has had on her life, as contrasted with the lives of recent readers. She ends the tenth poem of the 28-poem collection, which answers the question, “What is the purpose of literature?” by stating: “y les dije creo que para lo único que sirve / la lectura / es para escribir poemas.” So that, in a way, she responds to the market (her readers, her customers) that the most important thing about literature is that it exists so that she can do her job as a poet. Somehow she makes something as universal as literature into something self-focused or narcissistic, in a diva sense. Ever the diva, she turns the subject back to herself.

II. YouTube, WeTube:

Online Community Formation through Comment Boards

As we read in the opening poem, “Fidelidad”, the poetic voice is able to revisit a pivotal moment of her past through the diva because of technology, which has evolved in the confines of time represented in the poem. In Chapter 2 I discussed who the diva is (or perhaps better stated: who she isn’t; the diva defies

categorization). At this point I shall discuss the ways in which technology mediates the relationship between desired and desiring subjects, like the diva and her fans. In Peri Rossi's poem, though Mina's rendition of "Margherita" is the song of choice, the author's age and geographic location, as well as the company she keeps while listening to the operatic oeuvre and the auditory devices utilized to facilitate such listening differ from each other in each of the first three stanzas. As this is a dissertation about literary representations of technology, I want to focus at this moment on the referenced technology: a black and white television set does not allow for much at-home audience participation in Montevideo, nor does a cassette player create a convergence of performer/spectator in Stockholm. However, YouTube, the online video-sharing platform with its dubious comment feature, does allow for fan participation in their experience. Moira Burke, Cameron Marlowe, and Thomas Lento use the term "content consumption" as a way to refer to user monitoring of material shared online "that is not specifically targeted at a given user, including friends' 'broadcasts' to wide audiences" (2). This would include things like amateur videos, blogging, "vlogging" (the combination of video-blogging), and sharing of other content, whether bootleg (a concert filmed by a cellphone or scrubbed from a television airing) or original (a step-by-step makeup tutorial or a video diary.^[32]) The act of sharing a video, link, or status update through Facebook or other social media avenues is another way to share an intimate or erotic moment with community. Though Burke, Marlowe, and Lento's study was condensed to sharing via Facebook only, I would include fan forums and passive reading of such

threads under this umbrella term of “content consumption”. Through the beauty of YouTube, a viewer can access the same video as countless others, and whether she wishes to share her sentiment in the comment board or merely observe the others’ quips and observations as a content consumer, a YouTube viewer is able to participate – actively or passively – in the formation of a fan-based community, which I conceive to be an alternative form of kinship.^[33] The diva is known for her voice; through online technology, her fans have been given a voice.

Diva fandom is empowering for both the songstress and her devotees (particularly in the case of Peri Rossi’s poetic voice, as the fandom evolves into a robust form of self-love and devotion), and the linking together of such fans – through official fan clubs or unofficial message boards, as the poem’s allusion to YouTube and its comments would insinuate – allow for a community to form in such a way that the initial purpose of aggrandizing the diva is usurped by the relationships forged online. Just as diva devotees feed off of the diva, they also feed off of each other’s ideas and comments on online forums, as Stacy Wolf’s research on fan-girls implies: “[online] fans parse out details of the characterization, interpret the ... meaning [of the performance], and also [make the performance] relevant to their lives. Through their debate, the girls build on each other’s comments, cementing intellectual and ethical community” (48). Wolf’s observations are based on tween girls and their obsessions with the musical *Wicked*, which has won numerous awards since its onstage premiere at The Gershwin Theatre in New York in 2003; however, Wolf’s remarks can be universally applied to all diva devotees

who find the Internet as an outlet for their thoughts and feelings regarding their object of infatuation. For many, the diva is a conduit toward community. Conversing about the diva allows fans to verify their allegiance to her and identification with her.^[34] Instead of competing for the songstress, or arguing about whose devotion is strongest among the group, fan-based forums allow for a network of devotees united by the diva. The Internet is a safe space to explore fandom and devotion.^[35] I reiterate the idea that, because of the highly communicative and easily accessible nature of the Internet and web forums, these online groups foment the idea of diva/fan symbiosis: we feed the diva with fandom, and so she gives us something over which to fawn. Jodi Dean elucidates this phenomenon in her book *Blog Theory*:

Contemporary communication networks are reflexive: we, the users, are creating them. We are producing the environment we inhabit, the connections that configure us. We provide the feedback that amplifies or ignores (or write the code that provides the feedback that amplifies or ignores). We are configuring the worlds we inhabit... (123-124)

By forming these communities and communicative exchanges with other fans, the diva devotee not only creates a rapport with other like-minded individuals, but she also tells the diva (the object of devotion) what is desired from her (whether the diva will listen and use her ears instead of her powerful throat is up to the songstress, but the fan still is able to believe in a sort of autonomy of fandom). By participating fully in the discussion, a diva's fan is given the opportunity to express the direction in which they hope the diva will continue or the nuances of a

performance. If a diva is paying attention to her fans, she can evolve and improve based on their vocalized wants. The diva is known for her voice, but once the fans are also given a voice through online forums or YouTube comments, a convergence has occurred: “Convergence does not mean ultimate stability of unity. It operates as a constant force for unification but always in dynamic tension with change” (Pool 53-54). The diva’s fans are united in their affinity for the songstress, but convergence culture allows for a change with regard to how that affinity is portrayed or processed. As fan comments are added beneath a video of the diva’s performance, the fans themselves are given voice and are able to perform their fandom for an audience of comment readers. We now see two performances: the video recording of the diva, and the written commentary of her fans, which allows for sub-comments and ongoing communication. The Internet, or more specifically, YouTube, as in the case of Peri Rossi’s poem, allows for the diva’s fan to feign a dialogue with her idol, the diva. The diva is both artist and muse;^[36] her performance inspires observers and sparks communication between her fans, whom the Internet links together. These online communication forums forge community, as Dean explains:

Blogs, social networks, Twitter, YouTube: they produce and circulate affect as a binding technique. Affect, or *jouissance* in Lacanian terms, is what accrues from reflexive communication for its own sake, from the endless circular movement of commenting, adding notes and links, bringing in new friends and followers, layering and interconnecting

myriad communications platforms and devices. Every little tweet or comment, every forwarded message or petition, accrues a tiny affective nugget, a little surplus enjoyment, a smidgen of attention that attaches to it, making it stand out from the larger flow before it blends back in. (95)

The diva starts the conversation, but her fans continue it, adding rich layers of text to the conversation. These discussions cement the group together, binding them as Dean says, with the enjoyment derived from a shared interest. Online communities, like those found on YouTube, create what Clive Thomas calls a social proprioception, in which we as online observers and participants in a shared dialogue are able to keep tabs on others constantly.^[37] What began as a conversation about one woman, the diva, becomes a global discourse about multiple people, as authored by those who are united in their devotion to the diva. The diva creates community, but the communities themselves are self-sustaining due to their state of being constantly (and consistently) plugged. ^[38]

III. Girl Gaming: Playing with ourselves, with others

The world of online and/or video gaming is another online community that allows for – and often demands – constant communication and plugged in status of its members. Peri Rossi's *poemario* is titled *Playstation*, so I would be remiss if I left gaming out of this conversation. Video games are a part of the “broader context of neglected media” (Reichmuth and Werning 47), and, like the queer individual that

Peri Rossi's poems seek to illuminate, they are marginalized. Video games allow for those who have been cast to the sidelines to have a space in the limelight in a way that enables the gamer to become both starring role of the visual narrative and author of its script. ^[39] Video gamers are thus viable versions of Donna Haraway's definition of the cyborg: "a condensed image of both imagination and material reality" (150), wherein the screen allows for the imaginative imagery and the materiality of the joystick or controller – as manipulated by a real person – to aid in the reality of the experience. The gamer exists both in the real world (as the gamer) and in the virtual reality realm (as an avatar.)

In his seminal article "Ludology Meets Narratology", Gonzalo Frasca comments on how the practice of lumping video games together with narratives merely because they both contain characters – who are often action-driven – and settings ignores the very fact that these video games are *games* (Frasca, n.p.). ^[40] To address this problem, Frasca has coined the term ludology to refer to the "discipline that studies game and play activities," taking the Latin word *ludus*, meaning "game" (n.p.). Frasca clarifies his terminology, stating, "*Ludus* have a defined set of rules. These rules can be transcribed, and easily transmitted among different players" (n.p.). Video games and video gamers follow certain prescriptive rules. When a gamer adheres to these set rules, he or she will either succeed or fail in the game's mission or reach the promised end of its trajectory. ^[41] This is crucial because, to distinguish the difference between the terms 'game' and 'play', there must be a clear outcome, as Frasca explains, "*games* have a result: they define a winner and a loser;

plays do not.” (n.p., emphasis in original). Many video games are story-based (thus the previous allowance for narrotology-based analysis) and involve ornate settings and scenery. The gamer gets to immerse him or herself into this new, artificial world.^[42] The video game, like the diva we analyzed earlier, allows for escapism: “neither art nor games can change reality, but ... they can encourage people to question it and to envision possible changes” (Frasca 93). Gaming gives agency to the individual and is a pastime, which allows for community-formation and alternative kinship. Frasca’s definition of ludology is helpful in framing gaming discourse.

It is not until the 8th poem, “Convalecencia,” that the poet introduces the titular PlayStation. The lyric speaker plays video games in bed as her broken leg heals during a three-day period of convalescence, as she has decided that books are unnecessarily sad: “La literatura es un residuo / un excremento de la vida,” and television is equally horrible. PlayStation allows her to escape. Other manners of escapism directly referenced in the *poemario* are travel (when she is not confined to spending her time in bed in order to heal) and, before it was shit, literature. The way in which the poetic voice plays these games – in bed, alone – is evocative of another solitary act, masturbation, especially when one takes into account the topography of the console’s controller, which has a tiny joystick, reminiscent of the clitoris, tucked between the four rounded edges of the controller’s body, two larger (labia majora) on the outside edges and two smaller (labia minora) closest to the interior.^[43]

The final poem in Peri Rossi's *Playstation* further illuminates the titular gaming system and demonstrates how the desire for time spent on the console (by herself, in bed, with a tiny, clitoral joystick) usurps the lyric speaker's desire for time spent with family. The poem is titled "Formar una familia", and it closes the book with Peri Rossi's obsession with her gaming system (whose controller is shaped like the female genitalia) as well as her notion of what constitutes family:

Aquella mujer me gustaba mucho
pero me propuso que formáramos una familia

ella ya tenía un hijo
de su primer marido

tenía padre madre hermanos y primos

Otra familia me parecía una redundancia

¿Para qué quieres otra familia? – le contesté
¿Para que vea cómo tu hijo no baja la tapa
del retrete por miedo oculto a la castración
y cómo tu hermana no cierra la puerta del baño
para no perderse nada de lo que ocurre en el salón?

¿Es tu idea de una familia?

me preguntó

No, además tenía otras ideas:

gente con la cual yo no me tomaría un café

si no mediara un parentesco

gente que se discute por dinero

propiedades cuentas bancarias

gente que no se habla por un asunto

de reparto de sillas o de sofás

y que se reúnen una vez al año

–por Navidad –

sin por tener ganas

y se pasan la noche anterior

y el veinticinco de diciembre

comiendo y bebiendo

y haciendo mucho ruido.

¿Tú qué haces por Navidad? – me preguntó, entonces.

Busco una emisora de música clásica

- le dije -

y juego a la playstation.^[44]

Peri Rossi's poetic voice declares that she would rather play PlayStation games by herself with strangers met online as digital witnesses than spend time with her family: "gente con la cual yo no me tomaría un café /si no mediara un parentesco". Given the lyrical voice's state of exile, it is not unreasonable that she would forswear her family of origin. However, in addition to rejecting her biological family - those she left behind in Uruguay - the lyrical voice also shuns the idea of forming an alternative family with "aquella mujer que me gustaba mucho." She does not miss her old family (the rejection was, it would seem, mutual) and she does not want to create or merge with a new one (she repudiates any notion of heteronormativity that dares show its face in a queer relationship). Why would she want to deal with a son who doesn't put the toilet seat down or a sister who leaves the bathroom door ajar while using the commode? She does not possess a sense a desire for such things; but rather, she finds abjection in them, as evidenced from her references to bathroom usage - which would involve bodily excrement ^[45] - in both of the aforementioned examples. Family is a nuisance to her, and her Motherland rejected her. She has been expelled like the bodily waste to which the poetic bathroom references allude. Likewise, she rebuffs any former familial ties. Peri Rossi does not lack for amorous relationships - the multiple women referenced in

her poems would attest to that – and she does not wish to have family ties, as she links family with the abject.

Video gaming has afforded Peri Ross with the availability of solitary self-stimulation as well as a voyeuristic community via technology, even as she rejects the possibility of the company of her family or lovers.^[46] The gaming community is expanding because of the global proliferation of Internet access and the increasing popularity of video gaming culture.^[47] Her PlayStation is more reliable than people; it is there when she needs it. Her family of origin is on the other side of the Equator. Her lovers sit beside her, but their preoccupation with heteronormative expectations like marriage or the fomentation of an alternative family are exasperating to her. As I mentioned, Peri Rossi's poems insinuate that the poetic voice does not lack companionship in the real world, and what I find interesting is that when it is offered to her (in the form of the woman who sits beside her as she listens to Mina, as we saw with the opening poem, or in the form of an adopted son who would create for her an alternative family in conjunction with her lesbian partner, as the final poem suggests), she rejects it in favor of online fantasy and self-pleasure, made available to her through the beauty of technology and the willingness of strangers online.^[48] She does not look for affection or a sense of home in the real world; she finds these things within herself, and the diva (Mina, the symbolic referent) and the PlayStation console (the stand-in for female clitoral stimulation), act as reminders of the poetic voice's true desire: herself.

IV. Gaming and Addiction: Community vs. Competition

Video games allow for the gamer an opportunity for escapism and intimacy as she inserts herself into a new, fictional realm, while also cloaking herself in an avatar's skin.^[49] The gaming console allows for moments in which she could be with herself or play with herself. Video games, and more specifically, their avatar involvement, "commodify our cyborg desires, our will to merge with and become technology" (Lahti 166). Avatars allow gamers to express who they are or become who they are not, if only temporarily in this virtual world, which they enter through the gaming system.^[50] Phillip Penix-Tadsen, in his research on ludology in Latin America, observes both arguments that claim video games allow for certain "invisibilit[ies] of cultural portrayal in games" (179) but also implications that games can "erase, at a stroke, every contribution to human inequality that stems from body differences" (Castronova 258 qtd. in Penix-Tadsen). Online identity creation is something I've discussed at length in other chapters of this dissertation so I limit my discussion of the matter for this chapter, however, gaming does allow for a deeper understanding of what Peter Case and Erik Piñeiro call to attention as being the other important facet of online lives: "the intensity with which users dedicate themselves to virtual interaction" (760). Video games are programmed to be highly addictive, and thusly, gamers are prone to dedicate themselves intensely to their hobby. Throughout the *poemario* and especially in its closing poem, Peri Rossi illustrates her loyalty to her gaming console. She notably prefers it instead of human, real-life interaction. On Christmas Day, Peri Rossi would rather be playing

video games (in bed, by herself) than spend time with her family or loved ones. She would rather be plugged in than hugged in an embrace by her family members. Jack Flanagan explains why such a preference might occur:

Video games are built to exploit this part [the reward system] of our brain. Kill monster, get points. Complete level, get happy music. Win game, feel satisfied. It's a very simple and primitive part of who we are. We react the same way to everything, from food to sex, in education and even in our relationship with our parents, who, if they are good parents, scold bad behaviour and reward good. (n.p.)

Why would Peri Rossi need another family when, as Flanagan explains, games fulfill that parental role of rewarding good behavior and punishing the bad? Video game developers construct their products – and the virtual worlds within them – to be rewarding and even demanding of their players. In addition to the pleasure of reward, there also exists discipline and punishment throughout the game, a sort of sado-masochistic experience for some. The gamers feel needed and in control; the game controller is literally in their hands. When life can be unpredictable, there is something comforting about the familiarity of the video game's constructed settings and recognizable avatars. You know what you're getting. You have a clear-cut goal. The video game console becomes, then, consoling. Gaming is often seen as a way for the participant to distract herself from real-world issues or concerns at home. This desire for escapism is briefly met while playing a video game, which perpetuates the gamer's inability to face her problem, which leads to greater issues – namely:

anxiety, addiction, and dependence – which bolsters even more desire to escape reality via video game playing, and then the problem and resulting need for more escapism continues. The problem is cyclical. Like the diva that feeds off of her fans' enthusiasm, which is fed by the diva's voice, the video game feeds off its users while also providing for them a temporary respite from the woes of real life, or an impermanent thrill from the tedium of their quotidian lives. This interim reprieve results in causing more problems for the gamer in real-life, as the gamer allows gaming to become a distraction from real world matters of contention. Addictive game playing is considered a "bad coping strateg[y]" according to Joseph Hilgard, who continues by giving an example of non-gaming but equally technologically-bent escapism familiar to many Harawayan cyborgs: "just like refreshing my browser tabs because I'm nervous and want to keep my mind off of something, gamers are often playing to forget their real-life problems" (Hilgard qtd. in Flanagan). Likewise, the video game offers something to its players that they are unable to find in real life: "If someone has a powerful imagination, the real world doesn't really cut it anymore." (Flanagan n.p.) Gaming allows for an escape from reality and an immersion into a romanticized, fictitious world.^[51] This routine diversion doesn't quell quotidian problems but many times results in allowing them to fester while the gamer is off playing online.

Consider this: Peri Rossi's poetic voice's solitary (read: masturbatory) gaming pursuits are so self-satisfying that she seems to now lack any carnal need for others. She no longer seeks amorous or even platonic relationships. Armed with her

clitoral joystick, she is able to please herself in bed alone. Though at times she seeks female company, she sloughs off her lovers as soon as she has come and gone. They are stations for play. Once she has used them and her need has been met, she is on to the next adventure, be it virtual or real.

While online gaming can allow the user a temporary retreat from her offline familial or even amorous relationships, video games do involve interaction with other individuals in the cyber (or gaming) realm. Many games involve some sort of team effort, as Peri Rossi implies when she assures her editor in the 21st poem, “Homo Ludens (Johan Huizinga)”, she is playing “con las máquinas... [que] me acompañan,” implying that there is some measure of community or teamwork involved, both between woman and machine and among gamers who work toward a common mission.^[52] Because of the phrasing Peri Rossi uses, it is easy for the reader to confuse other gamers as the subject of “me acompañan” instead of the aforementioned “las máquinas” in one of the lines preceding it. Can machines provide company? Must we identify as part machine to find consolation from our gaming consoles? Should we see this as another version of Haraway’s cyborg, or in this case do the machines serve as a metonymy for the people who use them? They are the company she chooses, in direct contrast to the family, which is defined in the *poemario* as the people you are obliged to accompany but with whom you’d rather not consort. If “máquinas” is a metonymy for the people behind the console, these gamers are playing with Peri Rossi toward a common objective, as opposed to against her as adversaries. These synergistic goals can create a system of peer

pressure, which encourages a teammate to forego real-life obligations or skip out on social engagements in the real world just so the gamer can meet the expectations of her fellow teammates. This relationship results in a subtle form of cyber bullying, crafted in such a way that neither bully nor bullied is always aware. “Social obligation may be yet another hazardous game feature” (Hilgard, Engelhardt, and Bartholow). Though the poem does not expressly address this issue, the lyrical voice’s clear preference for Internet gaming interaction over real-world duties illustrates how a gaming community can affect its users’ offline lives. Even if the gamer does not utilize the gaming system for escapism but rather to fulfill an intrinsic need for self-pleasure, she cannot escape the time-suck that the gaming community creates for her.

V: Where the Online Ends:

Blurring Boundaries Between Virtual and the Real

Similar to the fictional characters we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, the lyric speaker in Peri Rossi’s work would rather spend her time online. Virtual lives have become just as important – if not more so – than individuals’ offline life.^[53] This may be because “electronic technologies have begun to shake the distinction between inner and outer space, by blurring the difference between being here or there” (McLuhan and Powers 148).

Our lives (and the life as depicted in Peri Rossi's poem) are so interconnected to the Internet and myriad gaming systems or cell phone applications that it is difficult to see where one ends and the other begins. This is problematic, as Case and Piñeiro note that technology inhibits our preternatural ability to communicate with one another. Technology hinders us instead of helping. Providing commentary about discussions held on computer programmers' online forums, Case and Piñeiro observe that computer programmers are "accustomed to the limitations that [computers] put on human interaction" (757), implying that individuals who are not always as plugged in or knowledgeable might not be as keenly aware of a computer's shortcomings. Online communications cannot replace face-to-face conversations. And yet, we have become Harawayan cyborgs – a state of being of which López makes us hyper-aware, as I pointed out in Chapter 2 – and the line between man and machine has become blurred. If it was not documented on Facebook or Instagram did it really happen? ^[54] On the flip side, does some task a video gamer completed in a virtual realm count for anything in real life? ^[55] Are we incapable of living separate lives, or is our online identity so intertwined with who we are in real life that we cannot discern between the two? Penix-Tadsen elucidates how our online experiences have impacted our other lives: "Real-life experience today is melding with virtual experience, and virtual experiences are contributing ever more to the way we live and understand our real lives" (185). Amy Bruckman echoes this idea, with special consideration for gamers, acknowledging, "Many players notice that they are somehow different on than net than off, and this leads

them to reflect on who they are in real life. It helps people to understand the concept of identity and the ways in which we construct ourselves” (n.p.). What then does this say about Peri Rossi’s priorities as a PlayStation junkie, addicted to her own joystick-clitoral stimulation? Unlike the characters we have seen in Lozada’s and López’s texts, the poetic voice here does not seek to belong, but rather to be alone with her masturbatory pleasure. La loca sought solace with temporary sexual pleasure as s/he fornicated with pseudo-anonymous partners in the real world, and Vanessa craved completion in her breast enhancement surgery. Peri Rossi does not seem to represent in her poems that she feels as if she is missing anything. If anything, her poems demonstrate that she is complete and fulfilled on her own, and she rebukes anyone who suggests she might need familial ties or real-world relationships. With this in mind, virtual life and online experience allow for the gamer (another example of a Harawayan cyborg, as the case may be) to recreate herself online *as well as* offline. Online experimentation allows for a safe passageway to real life applications.

As Peri Rossi’s *poemario* suggest, she does not want a family: not the biological family she left in Uruguay nor the alternative family the woman referenced in the last poem offered to her. She is just fine on her own, and diva-worship and video gaming allow her an outlet to her own self-love. She places idols before family: the diva is her deity and PlayStation is her practiced religion. The two bookending poems, “Fidelidad” and “Formar una familia”, demonstrate how Peri Rossi rejects supposedly feminine values of fidelity and family in favor of a habit

that has been traditionally held to be more masculine (gaming ^[56]) or queer devotion (Sapphic obsession for the female diva). ^[57] The concepts of the gaming console as consolation and the diva-as-salve are linked by these bookended poems. The video game system places demands on its gamers, like the diva who demands attention from her audience. The gamer, however, does glean something from the video game – self-derived pleasure – and the relationship is even more reminiscent of the symbiosis between diva and fan. As I’ve mentioned, the diva is both artist and muse, and the gamer is both author and character in his or her immersive narrotological pursuit. ^[58] Peri Rossi’s diva fandom and gamer habits allow her to eliminate her need for kinship in the real world, opting instead for self-adoration and clitoris-flicking pleasure.

[1] Given the inclusion of many autobiographical details throughout the *poemario*, it is easy for the reader to confuse the lyrical voice or lyric speaker with the poet. For the sake of consistency, I opt to refer to the poetic voice, though many times it seems as if Peri Rossi herself were speaking directly to her audience.

[2] By which I mean performance in the realm of the *litterati* (wherein the poetic voice finds her place in the spotlight)

[3] As a profession with demands from editors and the market

[4] In this poem, the poetic voice narrates from a dream, which places her under the glow of stage lights. The first lines read: “Soñé que estaba en un teatro / y no me sabía el papel.” The poetic voice assumes her place in the spotlight.

[5] What she calls “a great metaphor of the human condition” in an interview with Psiche Hughes (270)

[6] As we saw in Chapter 2, the diva is uncontainable and the diva is subversive. At 5’10” (considered quite tall for an Italian woman in the 1960s and 1970s) and with a penchant for dying her hair and shaving her eyebrows, Mina fits the bill.

[7] Given Peri Rossi’s birthdate of November 12, 1941, claiming the lyrical voice to be a direct repositing of its author becomes problematic since a quick Google search shows Mina’s performance to have taken place in 1978. Thus, the poet and the poetic voice are different entities, though they share many similarities.

[8] In case the reader wishes to run the numbers, Peri Rossi fled Uruguay for Spain in 1974, two years prior to Cocciantè’s performance of his rendition. A YouTube search lists Mina’s live recording in 1978.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoIfA-qJWJA>

[9] “Io non posso stare fermo
con le mani nelle mani,
tante cose devo fare
prima che venga domani...
E se lei già sta dormendo
io non posso riposare,

farò in modo che al risveglio
non mi possa più scordare.

Perché questa lunga notte
non sia nera più del nero,
fatti grande, dolce Luna,
e riempi il cielo intero...
E perché quel suo sorriso
possa ritornare ancora,
splendi Sole domattina
come non hai fatto ancora...

E per poi farle cantare
le canzoni che ha imparato,
io le costruirò un silenzio
che nessuno ha mai sentito...

Sveglierò tutti gli amanti
parlerò per ore ed ore,
abbracciamoci più forte
perché lei vuole l'amore.

Poi corriamo per le strade

e mettiamoci a ballare,
perché lei vuole la gioia,
perché lei odia il rancore,
poi con secchi di vernice
coloriamo tutti i muri,
case, vicoli e palazzi,
perché lei ama i colori,
raccolgiamo tutti i fiori,
che può darci Primavera,
costruiamole una culla,
per amarci quando è sera.

Poi saliamo su nel cielo
e prendiamole una stella,
perché Margherita è buona,
perché Margherita è bella,
perché Margherita è dolce,
perché Margherita è vera,
perché Margherita ama,
e lo fa una notte intera.

Perché Margherita è un sogno,

perché Margherita è sale,
perché Margherita è il vento,
e non sa che può far male,
perché Margherita è tutto,
ed è lei la mia pazzia.

Margherita, Margherita,
Margherita adesso è mia,

Margherita è mia...”

[10] Where Peri Rossi was born and lived until 1972.

[11] Home to musicians like ABBA.

[12] Where Peri Rossi presently resides and published *Playstation*.

[13] In this case, the diva is a referent for the poetic voice’s self-realization that her queerness is not abnormal, as her home country might suggest, but something that, like the diva herself, could be celebrated. In many ways, while worshipping the diva, the poetic voice is actually worshipping herself in a form of self-love.

[14] Jackie Stacy notes “an intense, often homoerotic bond between idol and worshipper” (145).

[15] It is curious to me that Stockholm is listed as one of the three cities, situated between Peri Rossi’s city of origin and her current city of residence. Stockholm conjures up ideas of capture-bonding or Stockholm syndrome, in which those held hostage feel empathy for their captors. Is it possible that Peri Rossi’s positive

associations with Montevideo – the place that rejected her because of her lesbian identity – are meant to be construed as relics of Stockholm syndrome?

[16] Peri Rossi uses the third person plural form of the verb “decir,” allowing for an open interpretation of who the subject of that verb phrase may be. Personally, I interpret “they” to be ex-lovers or perhaps other female friends.

[17] In another poem, titled “Biografía”, Peri Rossi yet again references Mina as a figure integral to her own autobiography.

[18] In referencing the diva as divine, I would be heedless to omit the infamous drag queen who bears the name Divine. Her performance deconstructs the idea of the divine using camp and an acquired trashiness that can be seen as ugly, but which also attracts the onlookers’ gaze.

[19] Prior to the Stonewall riots, many gay males in the United States found the diva to be “a therapeutic corrective” which helped “to counteract their own sense of powerlessness as a vilified minority” (Harris 22)

[20] “Divahood is ever a gender disorder.” (Leonardi & Pope 163)

[21] “[T]he female singer’s throat has consistently been linked with her vagina. On the other hand, the diva’s throat has been repeatedly figured in phallic terms” (Leonardi & Pope 20)

[22] “We have suggested that literary and historical divas of the revisionist tradition break down binary gender and sexuality categories through their ‘masculine’ behavior and stance toward the world.” (Leonardi & Pope 241)

[23] Though Mina's performance is of that which can be considered a torch song, Iris M. Zavala's description of a bolero is pertinent to this poem: "Un desafío particular [de los boleros] son los referentes secretos – el *tú* amorfo, proteico, acuático, andrógino de muchos textos, que permiten que el *tú* sea hombre o mujer, y que el discurso amoroso sea heterosexual y homosexual, mayoritario o minoritario."

(120) With regard to the singer, Zavala observes that "los boleristas juegan a la ambigüedad sexual, pero al mismo tiempo – hombre/mujer, mujer/mujer, hombre/hombre, que éstas son las variaciones—dicen el goce, un una liberalización extraordinaria." (16)

[24] The diva is certainly gender queer (or at least non-normative in her fluidity) but the diva's fans can also be seen as non-categorical, according to Brett Farmer, who states, "it is the enormous potential of diva worship for the transgression and disorganization of various categorical boundaries" (171).

[25] For what it's worth, Farmer's diva of choice was Julie Andrews.

[26] "the diva is a figure that is 'fabulous' in both senses of the term, as 'marvelous and astonishing' but also 'fable-like, fictitious, and invented' and, in her fabulousness, the diva extends to her devotees untold possibilities for the production of equally fabulous modes of empowered selfhood" (Farmer 189)

[27] The diva requires adoration from her fans in order to feed their desires for her, as is the case with much of participatory culture: "fans are central to how culture operates" (Jenkins *Fans* 1). Could a diva without her fans be considered as such?

[28] Montevideo is the same homeland from which Peri Rossi was expelled for the very reason that she was thought to be indecorous or lacking in virtue. Peri Rossi's relationship to her own experience with sexile "[e]s una cosa de la que yo no hablo porque... fue cuando yo tenía diecinueve años, Montevideo, a pesar de tener fama de ser una sociedad liberal, social-demócrata toda la vida, con leyes muy avanzadas de protección de la mujer, era homofóbico." (Peri Rossi qtd. in Pérez-Sánchez 61). Peri Rossi, like the protagonist in Lozada's novel, *la loca*, is a victim of sexile. As I quoted in my chapter on Lozada's *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía*, Manolo Guzmán coined the term sexilio to give vocabulary to "the exile of thousands who have had to leave their nations of origin on account of their sexual orientation" (227). Sexile exists for queer individuals because there exists "a politics of shame [that is] routinely mobilized... to stigmatize and thus discipline queer subjectivities" (Farmer 167). Peri Rossi plainly states that she left Montevideo, Uruguay because the city was homophobic. As Peri Rossi is a lesbian, such an atmosphere of hostility would be problematic for her. She fled her homeland not because of her sexuality, but because of her homeland's attitude towards it.

[29] This can be seen as similar to the desire for the diva, erotic pleasure, creativity and the process of creation.

[30] This poem becomes more prose-like, wherein she is asked the question "¿cree que la literatura sobrevivirá a las nuevas tecnologías?" (29) and answers it in paragraph form.

[31] In discussing how books and writing has impacted her life, she writes, “no tenía zapatos nuevos / pero no me faltaba un Faulkner o un Onetti” and laments “ahora la gente joven está en las discotecas / no en las bibliotecas,” again linking music (singing) and books (writing).

[32] In 2014, 22-year-old Californian Elliott Rodger kept a vlog, which he posted on YouTube, wherein he detailed his rationale for committing mass-murder on his college campus.

[33] Through YouTube the viewer can even recuperate the nostalgia of the black and white television or the cassette tape because the image is in itself an object for pleasure.

[34] “Girls who post on fan sites are performing their spectatorship and their fandom” (Wolf 45)

[35] “the Web becomes a public/private place for their [teen girls’] thoughts and feelings” (Wolf 60)

[36] Likewise, Peri Rossi becomes both artist (poet-author) and muse (object and recipient of her own self-desire.)

[37] Thomas explains this concept with a situation that draws from his experience with the social network Twitter, saying, “When I see that my friend Misha is ‘waiting at Genius Bar to send my MacBook to the shop,’ that’s not much information. But when I get such granular updates every day for a month, I know a lot more about her. And when my four closest friends and worldmates send me dozens of updates a week for five months, I begin to develop an almost telepathic awareness of the

people most important to me.” (n.p.) He notes that this scenario allows for comparisons to “proprioception, your body's ability to know where your limbs are.” (Thomas, n.p.)

[38] Communities that are in the habit of sharing information can be seen as beneficial to society as a whole. Michael Marien catalogs the positives of an information-sharing society as having higher rates of democracy, education (particularly the sciences), and individualism as well as encompassing a greater sense of the global economy through global consciousness (45.)

[39] The gamer “is not an external observer. Observers are passive, the player is active. If the player does not act, there will be no game, and therefore no session at all. It is a completely different activity to watch a game and to play a game” (Frasca n.p.)

[40] “To claim that there is no difference between games and narratives is to ignore essential qualities of both categories” (Aarseth qtd. in Frasca)

[41] “Adventure videogames usually have at least one ‘correct’ path to win the whole game. There is a right sequence of solving that will lead to the triumphal denouement of the adventure’s ‘story’” (Frasca n.p.)

[42] These settings help make games an interactive, holistic, and enveloping experience: “games fundamentally transform ... cerebral cartography by providing an immersive experience” (Penix-Tadsen 176)

[43] Once an Argentine man told me the accordion was the sexiest of all instruments because of the way it was played low and between the legs. Given the general

placement of hands, resting on the lap, while fondling a joystick, what could be sexier than a video game controller?

[44] Peri Rossi doesn't name the games she plays (though she does reference her preferred gaming system, Playstation), but we can surmise that these games contain an amalgam of "familiar motifs from popular literature, art, cinema, or even political discourse" (Reichmuth and Werning 46)

[45] Though Freud sees excrement as a child gift to the mother, for the sake of my reading I see the referenced bodily refuse as what Kristeva would consider the abject.

[46] Another one of Peri Rossi's poems is called "Homo Ludens (Johan Huizanga)," and its title is a reference to the book of the same name, which was authored by the man in parenthesis, a Dutch cultural theorist and historian who claims that play (*ludus*) is necessary in the formation of culture. In this particular poem, Peri Rossi demonstrates the sense of conviviality she feels online: "Yo sólo juego con las máquinas – le digo a mi editora / Contra ellas, querrás decir – me corrige / No, juego con – respondo, / me acompañan". With this distinction from the editor's original understanding – that Peri Rossi plays with the other gamers, and not against them – we as readers can surmise that Peri Rossi finds solace or company in the presence of the other gamers instead of competition.

[47] "Technological advances have widened and democratized access to computer applications whose complex graphical user interfaces permit a new set of personal

and inter-personal relationships to be forged with and through the networked machine.” (Case & Piñeiro 770)

[48] Turkle notes that online interpersonal interactions permits for computer users, in this case, gamers, the “illusion of companionship without friendship.” This implies that online relationships require less maintenance and care than face-to-face friendships.

[49] A 2009 study by Zaheer Hussain and Mark D. Griffiths found that 41% of its participants admitted to gaming as a means to escapism. In a blog post for *The Economist's* Science and Technology forum, N.L. elaborates on the problem that occurs due to correlations between gaming and escapism saying, “One risk factor is found in players who are trying to ‘escape’ through fantasy immersion or role play. Indeed, their game use may be a symptom of some other underlying problem, say social phobia or depression. Playing can then generate a vicious cycle that is hard to treat if the game is a way of self-medicating.”

[50] Like the diva, virtual gaming realms allow individuals an opportunity to act as they truly see themselves in a way that proffers renaming rights, elaborate costumes via avatar imagery, and the chance to live in a limelight not offered in the gamer’s real world life.

[51] It is my understanding that these worlds are more often dystopic than utopic.

[52] Blogger N.L. explains: “ Some games involve social obligations, where players have to work together. This can mean a player feels obliged to play along as the rest of the group wants to play.”

[53] Shauna Niequest reminds us that there is danger in this comparison, since our online lives are so highly curated. “The danger of the Internet is that it’s very, very easy to tell partial truths—to show the fabulous meal but not the mess to clean up afterward. To display the smiling couple-shot, but not the fight you had three days ago... My life looks better on the Internet than it does in real life. Everyone’s life looks better on the internet than it does in real life. The Internet is partial truths—we get to decide what people see and what they don’t. That’s why it’s safer short term. And that’s why it’s much, much more dangerous long term.”

[54] Indie songstress St. Vincent croons about this dilemma in her song titled “Digital Witness” asking, “Digital witnesses, what’s the point of even sleeping? / If I can’t show it, if you can’t see me / What’s the point of doing anything?”

[55] For example, when Mike Hoyo hacked the video game *Zelda* and made it so that all the gender pronouns were changed to the feminine version in an attempt to make his daughter feel more empowered.

[56] Another strong example of female gaming protagonists in Latin American literature is Flavia, one of the main characters in Edmundo Paz Soldán’s *El delirio de Turing* (2003).

[57] Historically, gaming was considered a more masculine hobby, but in 2013, there were “more adult women playing games (30 percent of all gamers) than there [were] boys younger than seventeen years old (23 percent)” (Penix-Tadsen 176) so this claim is no longer valid assuming the trend has proliferated and will continue.

[58] “Because games are experienced through an interactive interface rather than passively observed, their study requires a shift from a strictly narratological perspective to a ludological viewpoint” (Penix-Tadsen 177)

Conclusion: “One of these things is not like the others”^[1]

The end of this dissertation is near, and we can conclude at least one thing: one of these things is not like the others. I’m talking about that fact that two of the chapters deal with male-authored novels and the last chapter concerns a female poet’s book. But to be fair, there are some similarities among the three texts, and if the third chapter seems tacked on as if it were an afterthought, well, I hope to show you that there was a reason why.

I. Same, same but different

As far as key similarities go, all three texts configure queer bodies or individuals in spaces that cross national boundaries as well as the threshold between real and virtual realms. It’s as if our protagonists and poetic voices reside in three different localities: the homeland, the adopted new place, and Internet space. In the text I selected for Chapter 1, Lozada’s *la loca* straddles Puerto Rico and New York cultures, and the bulk of her time is spent in Internet chat rooms in search of a real-life paramour who will make her feel less alone and empty, if only temporarily. In the novel chosen for Chapter 2, López’s Vanessa leads a life that is both transgender and transcontinental as she, through connections made on the internet, makes her way from Buenos Aires to California and undergoes her second breast implant operation in hopes to feel more complete. And in Chapter 3, Peri Rossi’s *poemario* provides the first female voice and weaves together stories of

(in)fidelity, the literary market, and video gaming. Throughout the text, the poetic voice eschews any thoughts regarding a need for fulfillment from outside sources (human or virtual) and instead finds pleasure in solitary and/or masturbatory acts. So, to sum up: all three texts feature physical trajectories of individuals with queer bodies or who practice queer aesthetics (Puerto Rico to New York, Buenos Aires to California, and Uruguay to Spain) and heavy entrenchment in virtual spaces (chat rooms, websites, and video games) with mixed results and varying opinions as to what composes desire and its fulfillment.

II. But wait... There's more!

Internet use, physical journeys, and queer aesthetics are not the only things these three texts have in common; there is also a shared theme of consumerism and consumption. As we explored in Chapter 1, *la loca* is a slave to consumerism, buying in to every trend. However, in Chapters 2 and 3, we are able to view the lives of figures who are – to varying degrees and in various ways – consumed. As Vanessa is a prostitute and Peri Rossi's lyrical voice is an author who divulges facets of her personal life for profit, the two individuals sell themselves, one literally (using her figure) and one figuratively (using her literature.)

Vanessa and Peri Rossi may sell themselves, but *la loca*, who is also the only colonial subject of the bunch, is a sell out. S/he buys in to every trend and is indebted to whatever is de rigueur. As *la loca*'s desire for more stuff increases so do her credit card debt and her subsequent feelings of societal and economic inequity.

La loca is a consumer. Marketing, branding, and the social echelon to which she aspires to be a part influence her purchases. S/he will buy anything to stay *au curreant* in her dream world of the New York high society. S/he is consumed by her consumption. Debt becomes her. [2]

In contrast to la loca's consumption-driven behavior, the character Vanessa (as written by López) and the lyrical voice represented in Peri Rossi's poems are driven by a desire to be consumed. They sell themselves. In Vanessa's case I mean this quite literally, as she is a prostitute who sells her body and services for monetary gain. With regard to Peri Rossi's lyrical voice, the poet represented in the poem is selling her written work. Though the type of offering they proffer – Vanessa's is of the flesh whereas the lyrical voice's is more spiritual or of the mind – and their customer-audiences (in Vanessa's case, johns; in the lyrical voice's case, her readers) vary, they still seek economic fulfillment by giving of themselves to others.

Vanessa sells herself (her body, her physical presence) to those who want to consume her, temporarily, for a price. [3] She does this so that she is able to some day pay for the breast enhancement surgery that will change her lopsided bust line from monstrous to robust, perky, and complete. The transgender diva pursues this operation because she has succumbed to societal pressures and trends of high beauty expectations in her appearance-obsessed Argentine city. Her economic payoff will allow for her own personal and physical realization.

Peri Rossi's lyrical voice sells a different type of herself, her writing, to a market. In doing so, the lyrical voice is subject to the market and her editor's whims and caprices, despite otherwise having not put up with society's demands (see: references to the lyrical voice's rejection of heterosocial norms like marriage and family.) Her editor tells her what to do, and turns her words into something deemed profitable. The literary market dictates what will sell and therefore be produced, so the lyrical voice (whose life parallels Peri Rossi's in many ways) is wont to bend to her will in order to make money. Can we then argue that Peri Rossi's *poemario* is about being sell-out, while the text itself refuses to become one? Do we argue that the lyrical voice stands her ground? Like Peri Rossi, she refuses to succumb to heteronormative social pressures. However, economic pressures create necessity, which then can cause conformity. Peri Rossi's critique of the literary market comments on a willingness to "give in" to the literary market in order to sell her work, which in turn provokes her to not capitulate to a society that prizes hegemonic marriage and the nuclear family.

All three protagonists and voices represented in this dissertation buy into trends. For *la loca* her crux involves fashion trends; she endebts herself in order to possess anything that may allow her to experience more of her dream world and to be included as a member of New York high society. Her desire for fulfillment goes beyond sex and anonymous relationships. She also desires a higher societal position. She may want to get into male strangers' pants, but she also wants to wear designer trousers. For Vanessa, her trendiness is represented by patterns in the crime-

riddled underworld, and trends of beauty expectations in a city known for its plastic surgery. Her body is monstrous and abnormal, and though she embraces it, she desires a body that conforms to the high beauty standards her metropolitan city filled with silicon-breasted women has placed on her. For Peri Rossi and the poetic voice in which she writes, the primary trend is the kind that the literary market follows. She may be hooked to video games, but it's literary trends that dictate her livelihood. And whether she chooses to buck them, the trends pervade her professional life. The novels and poems may some day be considered trailblazers and trendsetters, but the characters and voices represented within the texts are unabashedly following trends.

III. You've Got Male (Again):

Where are the women on the Internet?

It was difficult to find a female perspective on the issue of queer Internet habits and use. Why is this so? Are lesbians to be shoved in the closet – yet again – because so few of them write about the Internet? Does this mean men use the Internet more than women? It's not uncommon to find male-authored books about the Internet, but it was tricky to find a female perspective on the World Wide Web.^[4] Other Latin American novels with a heavy Internet focus include *El delirio de Turing* (2003), a cyborg-riddled novel written by Bolivian author Edmundo Paz Soldán and *El pornógrafo* (2010), a novel that was originally published as a blog written by

Argentine Juan Terranova. However, notably lacking is the female voice (other than Juana María Rodríguez's nonfiction account of her internet entanglements) in the world wide web of literary Internet connections.

The lack of female occupancy and agency on the Internet is troublesome. Social media sociologist Nathan Jurgenson has some thoughts on why women aren't as welcome on the Internet as their male counterparts. ^[5] Many times women cannot separate their professional and personal lives online. Jurgenson notes, "Telling a woman to shut her laptop is like saying, 'Eh! Just stop seeing your family,'" he says. If a woman is made to feel unwelcome online, how can she foment commonalities with like-minded peers whom she doesn't know in real life or keep in touch with faraway family? Anonymous hackers or cyber-bullies are just that: anonymous, but women with professional or even personal web pages (an online business directory, a Facebook page, or a dating site profile) often link their face to a name. This is problematic to female web-surfers, since "[a]busers tend to operate anonymously, or under pseudonyms. But the women they target often write on professional platforms, under their given names, and in the context of their real lives. Victims don't have the luxury of separating themselves from the crime" (Hess). When an online life is threatened, "one person is feeling the reality of the Internet very viscerally: the person who is being threatened," Jurgenson notes. In contrast, "It's a lot easier for the person who made the threat—and the person who is investigating the threat—to believe that what's happening on the Internet isn't real." The Internet has become a very real place, with actual real-world

consequences. Women have been underrepresented on the Internet because women, like other marginalized individuals, have been under more risk for harassment or cyber-bullying.

In the literature this dissertation analyzes, we see how those real-world reactions to Internet instances are recreated in fiction or poetry. Connections are made virtually and, as a consequence, real life interactions may fizzle or fade. This is certainly the case with many of the figures represented in the literary works this dissertation covers. In Chapter 3, Peri Rossi's lyrical voice prefers the company of gaming strangers to that of her girlfriend du jour, and her familial relations are further strained by her addiction to video games. In López's novel, which was analyzed in Chapter 2, Vanessa would rather spend her time "aca en el ciber" than in real life, and she seeks out remote strangers via the Internet in order to improve her life and her body. And as we saw in Chapter 1, La loca's life is so intertwined with the Internet that an entire chapter is voiced in computer code. All three Internet users take advantage of the Internet as a means of escapism. For Vanessa and la loca, that escape is a literal one from Latin America to the United States; for Peri Rossi's lyrical voice, the circumvention is temporary and travels from offline drudgery to online fantasy worlds. Hess likens individuals on the Internet to travelers, and notes a difference between male and female users: "On the Internet, men are tourists and women are vagabonds." While I am hesitant to include la loca, Vanessa, and Peri Rossi's lyrical voice under the problematic umbrella term "female," I think it is safe to say that genderqueer individuals are highly subjected to

threats offline as well as on, as we witnessed in Chapters 1 and 2 with la loca's and Vanessa's episodes of cyber-bullying. If we can then assume female and genderqueer web surfers are considered to be threatened online more than those who succumb to heteronormative expectations, and that, as per Hess's definition they are to be also deemed online vagabonds, then they both are considered unsettled, temporary, and even mendicant. If straight male users are seen as tourists, they are thought to be moneyed and with a destination in mind. They have purchasing power. Men on the Internet can surf with purpose; female and genderqueer users must browse with caution and are seen as ambulatory. It's anomalous then that the lyrical voice in Peri Rossi's poems feels at home online. Fewer women write about the Internet because fewer females feel safe on the Internet. Women and genderqueer individuals may have a homepage, but it is hard to feel welcome in a place that treats you like a drifter or barrages you with threats.

IV. The Dream of the '90s is Alive on the Internet ^[6]

There are some common threads that each of the texts studied in this dissertation share, and we have established that it is rare to find female-authored texts about the internet, so much so that Peri Rossi's lyrical voice's obsession with gaming is aberrant to the real-life experiences of women and queer individuals on

the Net. But can we talk about one more thing? How is it that Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," published in 1991, is so apt today? According to Haraway,

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction.

We have already established that the characters and voices represented in this dissertation's primary texts reflect cyborg aspects and tendencies. By splitting time between the Internet and actual reality, *la loca*, Vanessa, and Peri Rossi's lyrical voice are "creature[s] of social reality as well as [creatures] of fiction." Haraway's cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries. The bodies figured within the texts this dissertation explores transgress borders, both real (physical trajectories between nations) and imagined (from actual reality to virtual spaces) as well as bodily transgressions that straddle biological norms or heteronormative expectations. *La loca*, Vanessa, and Peri Rossi's lyrical voice are all cyborgs. But, then again, so are we.

Donna Haraway writes about the tools to which we have access and the blurring lines between technology-fueled science fiction and a more analog social reality. ^[7] She did not predict the iPhone or wearable tech back in 1991.^[8] She's not responsible for the tech boom, nor did she foretell the extent to which we now are reliant upon hardware and Internet software. She did, however, identify how women (and men) have become – or perhaps always have been – cyborgs. She

claims, “The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women’s experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.” (150) Haraway claims then that the line between fiction and reality is not fading; it never existed. She claims that her “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (155). A gender-queer in exile, a misshapen prostitute, and a non-conforming poet/gamer all fit the mold of being transgressive and ripe with purportedly dangerous possibilities in that they threaten hegemony and society (even, in the cases of *la loca* and Vanessa, in their attempts to conform to its expectations.) They are cyborgs, just as we are. Lozada, López, and Peri Rossi’s written works make us more keenly aware of our cyborg status. Whereas Haraway concludes by saying “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (181), Jasbir K. Puar, in an article published 21 years after Haraway’s manifesto, states, “there surely must be cyborgian goddesses in our midst” (63). Perhaps we can view *la loca*, Vanessa, and Peri Rossi’s lyrical voice as representations of such cyborgian, prima donna goddesses, and as we are able to see a bit of ourselves reflected in literature, we will then begin to see ourselves as cyborg divas, too.

V. Are you sure you want to quit?

So then I ask, what’s next in the world of Internet-laden literati? In particular, how will the Internet’s impregnable nature continue to mold Spanish-language

literature? How has Spanish language changed as the Internet interferes? Are dialects to be lost or muddled? As news and trends spread on an international level, and ideas are disseminated at an unprecedented rate, how are subcultures (like the ones to which queer individuals may pertain) affected? Is the Internet a boon to marginalized communities or does it threaten the pre-established system (as David Halperin suggests)?

As we've observed, the Internet is a means toward community formation, but it also closes off individuals from the real world (whether for their benefit — in times of ostracism — or detriment, — as a means of temporary escape that only prolongs the problem.) It can be a secondary family but it also exists a secondary closet. The Internet may seem like a safety net, but it also can trap its users. Though Internet users may seek to reinvent themselves online, the World Wide Web is not a faceless place, and online actions have real-life consequences. Many of the Internet spaces portrayed in the primary texts of this dissertation demonstrate that online spaces mimic the outside world: marginalized individuals create and/or find spaces and subcultures because, as individuals who do not succumb to heteronormative mandates, they oftentimes do not feel welcome elsewhere. The Internet and the spaces contained within are not utopian, but rather, heterotopic. Cyberspace will continue to be a complex place, and in many ways it continues to reinforce the hegemonic rules and expectations in place in the outside world.

[1] To be sung in the tune of the song of the same name from *Sesame Street*, as written by Joe Raposo and Job Stone.

[2] As opposed to “Death Becomes Her,” the title of a 1992 movie. Fitting, since debt can be seen as a type of death, as I argued in Chapter 1.

[3] La loca, however, gives her body freely in a quest for romantic love or fulfillment.

[4] Other than Juana María Rodríguez’s nonfiction account of her Internet entanglements, which was tremendously helpful to my research.

[5] I find it further infuriating that the voice on the matter is a male one.

[6] A riff on the satiric *Portlandia* song, “The Dream of the ‘90s is Alive in Portland”

[7] “[T]he boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.”

[8] American-born humorist David Sedaris, an openly gay author who expatriated to Europe, discusses his obsession with his preferred fitness tracker, the FitBit, in a essay in *The New Yorker*.

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