

Queer(ed) Bodies, Spaces, and Forms in Selected Works by Reinaldo Arenas, Mario
Bellatin, and Isaac Chocrón

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Romance Languages and Literatures (Hispanic American Literature)

Chapel Hill
2014

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ABSTRACT

John Stewart Bankhead: *Queer(ed) Bodies, Spaces, and Forms in Selected Works of Reinaldo Arenas, Mario Bellatin, and Isaac Chocrón*
(Under the direction of Alicia Rivero)

This dissertation examines queerness in major works by Arenas, Bellatin, and Chocrón as it may be applied to bodies, space, and forms which have traditionally been normatively controlled. Notions of the queer(ed) body, how it is coerced to perform by heteronormativity and how it challenges normative categorizations are central to queer studies, which will be used to analyze their texts. Queer bodies seek to revel in same-sex sexual relations and, thus, do not fit into heteronormativized sexual spaces. Because these bodies have learned to present non-standard gender performances, they can pervert the rules of gender and sexual-object choice performances in order to contest the spaces previously closed to them and, eventually, open up new, more accepting spaces for the queer(ed) body. This body occupies space similarly to how actors inhabit space on a stage. Like actors, queer(ed) bodies dwell in, perform themselves, and signify differently in a multitude of social spaces. However, Western society's historical space usually has excluded the possibility of queer(ed) bodies engaging in (re)presentational acts in it. Therefore, queer writings and commentaries seek to undermine heteronormative control over the presentation and interpretation of past events and, then, to re-imagine and rewrite them. All individuals performing their gender and sexualities exhibit basic rituals of life in the public sphere and thereby create forms (such as marriage and child-rearing rituals) by and through which members of any given society are able to conduct their

lives. These gendered and sexual enactments performed by queer bodies serve to queer social forms. Because the queering of bodies, space, and forms amplifies possibilities and significations, “queer” has the potential to (re)invent cultural definitions and relationships among the individuals in modern, Western society, even beyond considerations of gender and sexuality.

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Introduction

This dissertation examines selected writings of Mario Bellatin, Reinaldo Arenas, and Isaac Chocrón which highlight similar themes, such as performance and artifice, bodies in space, and social forms, from the perspective of how queer memory and history are (de-)constructed in their texts and how performance¹ of queerness can affect and change discourse, which in turn may alter the perceptions of their readers or audience. My approach to Arenas, Bellatin, and Chocrón is novel because other scholars often characterize the works of my authors, as well as of other authors analyzed queerly, by their interiority, since the texts present closed spaces in which experience, desire, and memory mix together (Balderston 202). To date, no one has considered how these three authors represent queer memory and history as similar to queer artifice and performance in connection with the queer body² acting in social spaces, thereby queering those spaces and, thus, causing social forms, or norms, to be queered.³

¹ “Performance” in this dissertation means “the portrayal of gender and sexual object preference activities in socio-cultural settings either as appropriate according to normative teaching or as deviating from these norms according to queer memory.” Also, “performance” denotes that gender and sexual object choice are understood as roles presented to an audience. That performance is presumed to be perceived either by other queers and/or, perhaps more importantly, by a normative/normativized audience. The performance of gender and sexual preference, which are foundational to identity, are theatrical in nature in that the actors perform according to roles learned in the school of heteronormative appropriateness of gender and sexual object choice presentations.

² “Queer(ed) bodies,” as used in this dissertation, should be considered to include bodies that are, of course, used to engage in same-sex sexual relations. But additionally, “queer(ed) bodies” should be considered to include any body that does not meet heteronormativized society’s notion of what a proper body is, i.e. “queer(ed) bodies” should be construed in this text to refer to bodies that engage in any aberrant sexual practice, in addition to lacking appendages or having scars or other attributes which set them apart. Also, the term “queer(ed) bodies” includes all those bodies that can be construed as queer by having been placed in queer contexts of any sort.

³ Many have considered queer memory and history, queer artifice and performance, and/or the queer body, but have not put all these elements together to adjudge the effects of queer bodies and their performances in social spaces in connection with theatricality, the application of which permits the discussion of those

Memory is inextricably linked with gender performances, how masculinity and femininity are portrayed and how those performances are socially taught. This implicates a type of socio-cultural memory, or group memory. Also it is bound up with the queering of those gender performances by queers either artificially (re)creating them or exaggerating them or undermining heterosexual roles in other ways. These performances are based on queer memory of the heteronormative tenets of what is the “correct” performance of gender.

Queers have been socio-culturally imbued with a memory of heteronormative gender and sexual preference that has taught them to perform per societal constraints, but they also have a subcultural queer memory that has taught them to not readily accept those constraints and to “pervert” “correct” performances in order to explode the socio-cultural constructs that seek to disallow queers space in modern Western culture, or at least to so constrain that space that queers cannot easily move within modern social spaces.⁴ The tension created by these divergent memories operating in tandem open up a space for (re)interpretation of appropriate gender and sexual objects of desire.

The heteronormative and the queer memory components combine when queers’ perform gender and sexuality in the public arena. Of course, these performances of queerness take place in socio-cultural spaces and are performed by queer bodies in those areas, and they can change social perceptions of the queer bodies, which in turn question, and begin a (re)formation of, the forms that govern socio-cultural beliefs and behavior.

Similarly to “memory,” queer “artifice” is closely bound to queer performance of

spaces and societies being queered like an audience and the performers are changed during the performance of a play.

⁴ This is true despite the fact that in the United States there has recently been an increase in the number of states where gay marriage is legal and that there is nowadays greater social acceptance of gay unions.

gender and sexual object choice. These performances can create artifices that may be subtly deceptive in that gender or sexual preference performance is represented according to socially acceptable norms. However, they may be performed in drag, i.e. by a wrongly sexed individual. Thus, the performance itself points out the deception in order to mock and to expose the artificiality of the performance.

All of my literary authors' works illuminate elements of queer and feminist theories that will be discussed in what follows. These authors also share themes of alienation and exile which are pervasive in the construction of queer artifice and its meaning(s). Their manner of representing visual aspects inherent in queer life aids in explaining the way queer artifice projects into discourse, (re)defining individual and collective history, memory, and the performance of a being. These notions will help us understand the dislocation between imagination and the possibility of constructing gender presentations and sexual preference choices outside of the dichotomies that now control those manifestations in modern, Spanish American culture. Bellatin has written in Peru but now works primarily in Mexico, and Chocrón wrote and produced in Venezuela; Arenas did so largely in exile in the United States (but with his Cubanness informing his work). All are contemporary writers influenced not only by the cultural and socio-political conditions of their origins but also by modern globalization.

Although all of the literary works that I am examining have elements relevant to understanding queer(ed) bodies, space, and form, it is especially helpful to consider all three of my authors in this critical analysis because each highlights one of these areas. Arenas's works focus on the body. Chocrón is very conscious of performance in space, and Bellatin intentionally sets out to queer textual form. The selected works of these

three authors listed in what follows illustrate the dislocation between imagination and the construction of gender and sexuality because their narratives are based on uncertainty, displacement, disarticulation, and contradiction. These works arise out of cultural considerations, at least with respect to male homosexuality, that define the male homosexual differently than do many Western Anglo cultures.

As have others, Sullivan has posited the question of whether queer theory is too white (72). That may well be the case, but one cannot forget that the subjected party or group in any discourse based on differences is the “queer” element. Post-colonialism has taught us that the subjugated population is “queer,” feminism that women have been treated as “queer,” racial examinations that people of color are “queer,” and Marxism that the poor are “queer.” All of these groups are subject to control by another group that defines them as inferior because they do not display the primary characteristics of the group which has defined the parameters of the relationships in question. All of the members of these othered groups, which I just mentioned, have that in common with people who are “queer” based on gender performances and sexual object choices contrary to the ideals defined by heterosexism. In each case, there is a powerful subject identity that subordinates an Other who does not live up to the standards demanded by the former.

Traditionally, in the context of sexual penetration involving two males, Hispanic America has often considered the one penetrated to be homosexual, but not the penetrator. The latter retains his machismo, his masculinity, because he wields his penis as the socio-cultural norms in much of Hispanic America dictate, i.e. to penetrate. This is perhaps most evident in the case of Arenas’s writings and to a lesser extent in Bellatin’s *Salón de belleza*. But Arenas frequently mocks the penetrator who is, if not queer then at

least, complicit in performing queerly.

In Bellatin's work, homosexuality itself is not so much what is queer as is the alienation of the sick, maimed, or deformed body. His writings feature bodies that rely on prosthetics, that are dying, that cannot move, that are abnormally small, blind, or are otherwise alienated from "normal" society.

However, because the works of Bellatin, Arenas, and Chocrón arise in and out of the context of globalization, all of the authors are well-versed in modern Anglo definitions of queerness and, therefore, offer their works for examination not only within their cultures' definitions of male homosexuality, but also to analysis by modern Anglo standards of homosexuality, where all those who engage in same-sex sexual acts are deemed homosexual.

The works of these authors are not confined to the parameters of homosexuality but to queerness and, as previously stated, to queer(ed) bodies, space, and form. Arenas's condemnations of totalitarian hegemony place the queer body in the role of forced submission and exile. Chocrón uses unsettling spatial groupings to point out the thinness and porosity of the line separating the queer and non-queer. Bellatin examines the fluidity between genders, sexes, and literary form. In all of these works queerness displaces, disarticulates, and contradicts heteronormative society.

Selected texts of these authors have been chosen because, as alluded to above, the creations of Arenas offer us queer characters who have been dislocated historically and are unsure as to where they might find a home. The productions of Chocrón offer insight into spatial dislocation and alienation and the resulting uncertainty, often because of exile or immigration. In the writings of Bellatin, we find characters whose gender is often

unstable and/or unimportant, those who are separate from social structures that might otherwise constrain them, and others who are frequently contradictory with respect to the social dichotomies that heteronormativity has created in modern, Western culture. Bellatin's writing style also dislocates the readers' notion of literary and, thus, social form.

The narratives and autobiographical writings of Arenas are largely populated by a dazzling array of queers clamoring to define themselves, to be recognized, and to be conceded dignity, equality, and respect. I will investigate these characters specifically in the following works: *Arturo, la estrella más brillante* (1984), *Viaje a La Habana: Novela en tres viajes* (1990), *El color del verano o Nuevo "Jardín de las delicias"* (1999, but finished by Arenas in 1990), and *El portero* (2004, but copyrighted by Arenas's estate in 1990). These same queers can be said to populate *Antes que anochezca* (1992), Arenas's autobiography, which is a reconstruction of his memory (Soto 14), exemplary of the broader spatial/theatrical memory that infuses queer production.

In the case of Chocrón's plays and novels, I will plumb *Amoroso o una mínima incandescencia* (1968), *O.K.: Pieza en dos partes* (1969), *Pájaro de mar por tierra: Novela* (1972), *La máxima felicidad* (1974), *Mesopotamia* (1980), and *Mónica y el florentino* (1980). In Chocrón's constructed spaces, queerness frequently infiltrates the audience's, or reader's, consciousness due to the latter's trying and, often, failing to make sense of his characters' spatial and personal relationships. These spaces and relationships are off kilter and uncomfortable for the audience in that they do not adhere to heteronormative rules of proximity and relationships. The audience tries to normalize spatiality and social relationships because the stage welcomes the audience into the

theatrical work as complicit in defining it, seeking its meaning (Chatman 412).

Similarly, in his narratives and visual art accompaniments Bellatin's audience, reader or viewer, will find it extremely difficult to engage in normalization techniques while interpreting his works.⁵ I will examine Bellatin's *Salón de belleza* (1994), *Perros héroes* (2003), *Flores* (2004); *La jornada de la mona y el paciente* (2006), and *El gran vidrio* (2007). From these works, we learn that in Bellatin's literary world, not being whole (i.e. whole-bodied, normally employed and sized, and conforming to social norms) is "queer," and, of course, no one is truly whole. He uses his disability (a mostly missing right arm, due to a birth defect) as a leit motiv that symbolizes queerness. He brandishes multiple prosthetics in his life and art.

All of these texts focus to some extent on exile or alienation. Arenas's works explicitly point out the alienation that results from physical exile in a specifically Cuban context. Chocrón's texts also deal with physical exile, but, more importantly, they examine the alienation that results from modernization and globalization as a result of Venezuela's petroleum industry. Bellatin's novels suggest the alienation caused by plutocratic Mexican governments and by class separation. Nevertheless, all of these authors, with their images of enclosures and cages that constrict individual possibility, reach into the postmodern Western world and can, from the standpoint of queer theory, be illuminative of modern Western socio-cultural practices and discourses, as well as Spanish American ones.

Queer theory will help to elucidate these unwhole spaces that Bellatin, Arenas, and Chocrón create in order to explain life's rough edges, while celebrating dissonance,

⁵ Many of Bellatin's works include photographs and sketches and/or out of the ordinary styles of typography and layout, and these visual elements become important to the texts' meaning.

by employing elements that clash or that do not seem to relate to one other. Such spaces allow for queer infiltration into the straight world and, thus, for the synthesis of it and the queer world through a new queered discourse.

I. Queer Theory Methodology

I will support my arguments about the works of Bellatin, Arenas, and Chocrón, with the framework of queer studies concerning language, discourse, history, space and performance/performativity provided by theorists such as Anzaldúa, Bazin, Bejel, Butler, Califia, Colebrook, Connell, Foucault, Hall, Kaminsky, LaGrace Volcano, Meruane, Mignolo, Quiroga, Sarduy, Sedgwick, Sontag, Sullivan, and Turner, among others. Examples of some of the foundations that I build from will include an examination of the performance of gender and sexuality in terms of Bazin's notion that the image itself, here the queer body, does not necessarily mean, but rather that that meaning derives from the juxtaposition of images. I will employ Butler's notion that individuals have no identity apart from the categories available to them in a given culture and that these categories both constrain and enable subjectivity.

I will use Califia's notion that a gay, or queer, mythology must be created to challenge the rhetoric that attempts to expunge or, at least, ignore queer desire. This mythology is performed by queer bodies that, according to Colebrook, give rise to myths by the repetition of theatrical representations that organize the bodies and empower them in the (re)created past which they have just performed. I will look at Connell's notion of the semiotics involved in the contrast of masculine and feminine spaces.

I will use Foucault's ideas that discourses are sources of rules that knowing subjects use to specify the objects of inquiry that then may be used to alter the subjects,

that gender and sexuality are historically variable, and that history shapes identity, or subjectivity. Hall provides support that history needs questioning/queering and that modern language regarding sexuality cannot be trusted when used in historical contexts. Sullivan shows how history and discourse construct sexuality in culturally specific ways and that they do so through time and space. Kaminsky adds that the language of the Other “must be stolen, asserted, [and] reinvented” (155).

Sedgwick provides the basis for a study of the language of sexuality and its importance in that she maintains it intersects with and transforms the other languages in modern, Western society’s epistemology. LaGrace Volcano shows how queers are chimeras and hybrids and how their bodies defy binary classification and challenge society to look beyond accepted dualities and, eventually, hopefully to accept the non-binaric. Anzaldúa points out the sexual borderlands that queers must first inhabit before seeking space in the heteronorm. Bejel speaks of the relationship between homoeroticism, homophobia, and national identity. Sarduy hones in on why sexual expressions contrary to the norm are indeed performances in that they embody simulation, mimicry, and theatricality. Turner questions whether everyone is queer. All of these ideas can be more fully developed by examining queer artifice and performance in social spaces, thereby showing how these then queer(ed) spaces act to re-cast the bodies that perform and create queer artifice while, at the same time, socio-cultural norms are queered, thus queering the forms by which social relationships are defined and ordered.

Queer theory has arisen as one of the products of postmodernism, which includes various theoretical frameworks that have attempted to show the (de)constructed nature(s)

of modern social life and the various identities that inform that life. It has been shown by Turner in *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* and other scholars that Foucault's examination of the episthemes within which Western discourses have unfolded serves as a foundational source for these theories; that is to say that the body of ideas that have given shape to the knowledge from which socio-cultural rules are constructed in such works as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and *The History of Sexuality* need to be reevaluated. Foucault believed that truth, as both modern scholars and Western societies are able to approach it, is a function of the application of rules controlling things such as gender presentation and sexuality in the social setting. Postmodernist studies of gender and sexual preference may be examined in light of the rules formulated throughout modern history.

Expressions of attributes of gender and sexuality which differ from the normative may be inserted into the historical past in order to change one's understanding of the past (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*). Turner's application of Foucault's postmodernist notion of "queer," then, begins with the notion that gender and sexual object choice vary throughout history, and it is this variable history that shapes identity, i.e. subjectivity (Turner 20, 26, 29). Because many individuals do not fit the categories which these rules allow with respect to gender and sexuality, queer theory seeks to show that the problem does not lie in these people but, rather, in the categories themselves. Historically, in the West these identity categories have been constructed as dichotomies; therefore queer theorists insist that personhood cannot, and should not, be constrained by the limits of these binaries (Turner 32, 34).

Historic and socio-cultural practices themselves, however, have served as their

own justification. These practices obfuscate the fact that they are arbitrary and that, therefore, the order, or form, of our lives is regulated by systems of classification that have no basis in reality. Nevertheless, these systems have succeeded in creating a socio-cultural authority that has normativized bodies, genders, and sexualities by the very processes of an arbitrary social order. Therefore, postmodern critics, including queer theorists, do not seek formal social structures that resonate with universal values, with “truth,” but rather they look to Western historical events that have served to constitute people as subjects (Turner 55, 59-60).

In order to expose what have previously been considered to be socio-historically universal truths as false, queer theory looks closely at the usage of words in their historic contexts; more than reflecting reality, they have infiltrated our perceptions and modes of thinking. Thus, if “lesbian,” “gay,” “homosexual,” and “heterosexual,” for instance, are not biological givens, they can be shown to be historically constructed. Therefore, queer bodies and selves in the modern society in which these bodies perform can be (re)constructed (Turner 64, 65). That is, gender and sexuality can be measured in relationship to the boundaries of the categories that circumscribe those characteristics. Individuals can either accept or reject boundaries (73). The bodies which reject boundaries can become (re)defined in spaces which were previously denied to them, thereby queering the categories that have served to define gender and sexuality, among other identity determining, foundational elements.

An essentialist standpoint maintained that language reflected the actual distinctions that have always existed in reality, whereas queer theory can be viewed as having moved away from this to the nominalist position that language reflects the

arbitrary distinctions that humans have imposed through their adherence to anomalous binaric systems (Turner 76). Nominalist queer theorists see the need for the development of queer identities as signifiers, as a necessary component of the process of (re)definition (78). A queer body signifier can then combat the Western historical models of gender expression and sexuality.

Before 1700, sodomitic acts had no particular significance in the Western socio-cultural milieu (Turner 79). In London, a specific subculture of men desirous of other men as sexual object choices appeared thereafter, and they met in “molly houses” (taverns or rooms where gay or cross-dressing men could meet). The coming together of these men gave rise to an association between the act of sodomy and sexual identity in England (79). This homo-erotic identity became mired in and defined by concepts of sin closely related to the Bible’s representation of homosexual desire as shameful and sinful in Sodom and Gomorrah (80). In the late nineteenth century, the term “homosexual” came about, and homosexuals began to be characterized psychologically (80).

Nowadays, many social scientists and queer theorists attempt to discover and learn more about sexual minorities, however they were categorized in the past. The resultant knowledge could give rise to more gender and sexuality choices in the present (82). But in order to accept queer choice as one type of natural sexual expression, one may have to go back to ancient Greece and/or to some non-Western cultures in which homosexuality was accepted in differing degrees. However, even in ancient Greece, notions of “family” and “marriage,” generally reject “queer” as a basis for formation. However, queer writing and queer readings and interpretations of literature can expand the options for gender presentation and sexual object choice available presently.

II. Gender in Complementary Feminist Approaches

Feminists have shown how problematic it is to focus on gender roles and meanings. They have contended that the processes of producing gendered meanings and performances of gender should be examined in light of how those meanings attach to individuals (Turner 96-97). In this type of model, gender and sexuality functions would flow from cultural constructions rather than from biology. That is to say that we learn the attributes and habits of gender and sexuality, and that, in the past, subjects became gendered and sexualized prior to the development of schema which would have allowed resistance to gender and sexuality binaries (102). Of course, as Sedgwick and Butler, among others, have pointed out, gender and sexuality do not operate equivalently, but they do operate in conjunction. Accepting the distinctions between gender and sexuality, a substantive issue arises. It seeks to understand the operation of gender and sexuality at both the individual level and at the socio-cultural level (108).

Butler has noted in *Gender Trouble* that perhaps the main aspect of this substantive issue is that individuals have been disqualified socially from having any identity other than that defined within the cultural categories available to them. Therefore, these categories preclude certain identities at the same time that they enable subjectivity. But Butler recognized that daily socio-cultural practices and repetitions resulted in the body's signification of gender, or as she put it "the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles ... constitute the illusion of a ... gendered self" (140). Because of this, the subversive repetition of existing signs of gender has been considered by Butler to have the capacity to denaturalize those signs.

Thus, the bodies which have repeated subversive signs have begun to fracture the categories by which lives have been ordered (140). Queer theorists want to study or illuminate these subversive expressions of signification in order to show that gender and sexuality are constituted in subjects along many random, and often conflicting, identity axes (Turner 110, 114).

Sedgwick has looked at subversive, or queer, expressions in *Epistemology of the Closet* not as signifying in and of themselves, but rather as significations that have gained meaning because of opposition to the norm (134). This opposition has sought to contradict and counteract the Western socio-cultural denigration and exclusion of queers by heteronormativity. This denigration and exclusion have been present in historical aspects of socio-cultural interaction, be it legal, administrative, physical, or definitional. So being queer and proclaiming queerness have been and are ways by which to resist the boundaries of Western socio-cultural categories in order for queers to self-define and to not have their subjectivity limited by historically available definitions in the West (164, 170).

III. Memory, Artifice, and Representation

Memory is used to construct reality, and queer memory is often dependent on fragmented or unreal spaces, very much like a theatrical production in that discrete moments can be excised from the long narrative or continuous action that is remembered life. Then, these snippets can be tied together so that a queer worldview can be constructed outside of heteronormative constraints. This worldview can also effect heteronormativity, expanding the signification of signs of gender and sexuality with which modern, Western society has become instilled and, thus, also Spanish American

society after being colonized by Spain. Queer(ed) memory can infiltrate heteronormativized discourse in such a way that it can change socio-cultural notions of history and language, as we will see. This type of spatial/theatrical memory becomes the basis of queer artifice, an often multi-pronged concept involving notions of “passing” and of flamboyance and the exaggeration of gender concepts, among other attributes and ideas that we will explore in this dissertation.

The relationship among theater and literary space and memory is deep and complex (Carlson 2). Theater and literature, and theatrical and literary spaces, all rely to some extent on the author’s or the characters’ memory and his/her historical perspective. Even if a piece self-consciously seeks to free itself from the cultural past, it cannot be constructed outside of that framework. Because queers have been offered only a marginal position by modern, Western history, they have been forced to create a communal memory that allows them their own representation. The construction of this memory within, and, yet, at the same time, apart from Western heterosexual hegemony is found in theater and literature, as well as drama and other artistic and social forms. Therefore, queer memory can be viewed as having inserted itself into these forms or as having excised the constraints posed by heteronormativity. Queer theory, in part, springs out of the often theatrical artifice that is queer memory and tries to explain the latter’s construction. At times, queer theory has advocated for the acceptance of queer artifice or, alternately, for the destruction of the social conditions and constructs that supply queer artifice’s foundational materials. Queer theory leaps out of queer artifice, avowing that twentieth and twenty-first century intellectual and political attitudes and actions can bar even now queer participation in Western social or communal discourse. Queer

theorists celebrate the unformed and changeable nature of ways of seeing and discussing/presenting/acting identity, thereby exposing the queerness inherent in life and literature (Turner 9). We will also see this from the perspective of Spanish America.

The artifice that has contributed to the birth of queer theory obviously depends for its continued existence (and perhaps its eventual disintegration) on the queers who populate it, on queer spatiality, arrangement, and interaction, and on queer(ed) personalities, bodies and creativity, which we will examine in Bellatin, Arenas, and Chocrón,. In addition to the consideration of gender and sexuality, I will use queer theory to take a look at queer(ed) signs, forms, spaces, and bodies in my authors' texts. Many theorists have pointed out that queer theory should not be pushed too far because, in the end, everyone is queer somehow and that, if taken to its extremes, queer theory may become too diffused to serve a purpose. But I believe that queer theory can go beyond a narrow focus on gender and sexuality to include elements of the queerness of hegemonically subjugated individuals: these are persons who have been "queered" by those who wield political and socio-cultural power in the discourses that have relegated the former to the political and socio-cultural margins. In other words, "queer" can also become synonymous with the exclusion, alienation, and subjugation of marginalized people.

Because marginalization has historically isolated queers, queers have wound up being alone and lonely. Living in isolation has taken community from them. Therefore, they experience the impulse towards using memory as a mechanism whereby to recuperate community. After all, "[v]isibility prececes memory" (Quiroga 3). This urge holds center stage at the end of Chocrón's play *Mónica y el florentino*. The owner of a

boarding house and her sister are left alone on the stage, all of the previous tenants not only having exited, but also having left the boarding house for good. In *Mónica*, the last two lines are between Solita, the proprietor, and Amanda, her sister.⁶ Solita says, “Sin gente ... casi me siento sola,” and Amanda responds, “Casi ... yo también” (67). Similar to queers in modern culture, because of their forced isolation, these sisters cannot find fulfilling companionship between themselves. They, alone, are unable to build a viable community.

IV. Metabodies and Metapersonae

Arenas, Chocrón, and Bellatin recognize the power of words when they are infused with new meanings and wielded differently. To explore this idea, I will look at queer(ed) bodies in their works as metabodies, i.e. as bodies that, of necessity must comment on themselves and the identity(ies) that they contain because any projection of gender outside of heteronormative parameters has to be an observation on potentiality; it has to provide contrasts, alternatives, and new possibilities to conventional social constructions of gender and sexuality. A part of this commentary results from the theatrical aspects of performance inherent in queer presentations of identity. Quiroga speaks of the theatricality of sexuality and how lingual coding in such “representations” by “actors in the public drama” is changed by queer enactors of sexual desire (2). In this sense, it may be that the non-queer can recognize a part of him/herself reflected in a queer body because, as previously mentioned, everyone is queer to some extent in some respect; s/he must be in order to maintain any claim of individuality.

For example, Arenas often turns presumably heterosexual, historical figures into drag queens and locas in his works.⁷ He calls on his heterosexual audience to identify

⁶ It's notable that even the landlord's name, “Solita,” sets her apart as alone.

with the historical figure, to see him/herself as similar based solely on these characters' names and positions in history. Some of the historical figures converted into queer characters by Arenas are Lydia Cabrera, Alejo Carpentier, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Nicolás Guillén, Wifredo Lam, José Martí, Octavio Paz, Cirilo Villaverde, etc. But if the heterosexual audience identifies itself with the historical figure, it is forced to associate itself with the decidedly queer words and actions of the historical figures as well, taking on their new roles as drag queens or *locas*. Thus, those in the heteronormativized center may experience queer presence in a theatrical manner in that they are on the outside looking in, as if they were watching a play, as if they were seeing artificial acts, in artificial spaces, which are seeking to represent reality.

V. The Queer(ed) Body and Identity

In Chapter 2, I will examine the queer(ed) body. Sex is always political, and queer sex, in particular, is marked by conflicts of interest and political maneuvering (Spargo 6). It is as if queers were put in the midst of something that has been previously constructed without them in mind. Therefore, queers stand out, become manifest, and are political beings just by virtue of existing in a heteronormativized society. Like the queers whom Arenas has constructed out of historical figures in *El color del verano*, for example, queers become fictional beings in a heteronormative world. They become parodies and metaphors to highlight the oppressive forces of historical heteronormativity. Furthermore, in much of modern, Western culture and in the works of Arenas, Chocrón, and Bellatin, queers are on display to the heteronormativized power center because they stand out as non-conforming. They perform non-traditional gender and sexual preference choices, and, thus, they use their bodies non-conventionally. This non-conformity

⁷ “*Loca*,” a Cuban slang term, is used to denote or refer to a highly feminized, male homosexual.

highlights the queer body in literature and in socio-cultural contexts.

The fictionality of queers and historical figures just mentioned above is two-pronged. Queers are like fictional beings to non-queers because the former do not conform to the latter's understanding of and adherence to social dichotomies and the norms they ensure. The queerness of the former denies the latter's behavioral reality; Therefore, certain queer behaviors (with respect especially to gender and sexual preference) are made to seem unreal, or fictional, by the heteronorm. Additionally, queers may often perceive themselves as fictional in that the space in which they perform their gender and/or sexual preference is not a space that readily accepts those performances. Thus, queer performances are highlighted as artificial within the spatial context in which they are taking place. This artificiality of performance can cause the queer performer to realize that in the heteronormativized space s/he is mere artifice and, thus, fictional according to the dictates of that space.

One result of the notion of being on display is that the body and its (re)presentation and uses become of hyper-importance in queer theory. Queer theorists find the need to look backwards to the body in history, to remember it differently and to refigure it, in order to explain how the concept of the body is being rewritten and changed in the present. The characters, themes, situations, drama, and commentary in the works of Arenas, Chocrón, and Bellatin are helping in this rewrite. For example, in *Color del verano*, Arenas sets the scene for a speech by one of his characters, Zebro Sardoya, in the following way:

[E]l escenario del teatro es ocupado por una inmensa pantalla. En ella se ve a un travestido obeso con largas pestañas postizas y largos tirabuzones al estilo de la Avellaneda. Lleva puesta una corona de laurel. Se trata de Zebro Sardoya – la Chelo—, quien contoneándose trabajosamente se dirige al público. Se ve el

rostro de Zebro Sardoya en primer plano; detrás, en el mar, la Avellaneda diciendo algo que nadie puede escuchar. (38)

This mechanism allows Arenas to compare a drag queen, in a historical context to “real” characters. At the same time, he queers one of the latter, the 19th Century Romantic Cuban writer, *la Avellaneda*, who is probably leaving Cuba by ship and going to Spain where she would question traditional gender and racial roles in her works. The drag queen mimics the straight world; at the same time, s/he is a facade that, through playacting, becomes real. Also, the drag queen and *la Avellaneda* merge into a new definition of the female body that modern, Western society has previously precluded.

Another example of the rewriting of the body can be found in the third “autobiography” in Bellatin’s *El gran vidrio*. In this section of his text, he so blends himself as writer into the body of the female, midget narrator that the reader is unable to completely separate one from the other. The result is that we are forced to wind up accepting a body that is both male and female, large and small, one-armed and two-armed as a completely rational, well-defined body within the context of the novel. This acceptance can then bleed into the reader’s perception of what is an appropriate representation of *body* in his/her own social milieu. This type of novelistic depiction of body begins to turn on its head what modern society has accepted as the *natural* image of body, and in what type of sexual interactions these more expansively defined bodies can engage.

Male-female sexual interaction has historically had the status of being “natural,” of being taken for granted (Sullivan 119). Because the notion of “couple” contained in the historical Western definition of sexual interaction included the concept that, of the two participants in the couple, one was a biological male and the other a biological

female, the Western recognition of male-male or female-female sexual interaction has only recently come about.⁸ The word “homosexual” in English is of recent vintage (Hall 25). Of course, those types of people whom Western society now considers homosexuals existed in the past and in other societies and cultures as well. By defining them in new ways and giving them a voice, queer writing can bring them into the present and help to change their Western historical functioning. Herein lies the power of naming queers, of providing them with an identity. The name gives them the power to proclaim themselves as socio-political entities that cannot be ignored or shunned. Another aspect of the notion of the displayed body, as it becomes renamed and redefined by queer writing, is that it is given greater mobility; it is allowed to inhabit, to function in spaces where it was previously disallowed admission. The body becomes more mobile, polysemantic, because it has become polyfunctional (Fischer-Lichte 131).

There are and have been opportunities for same-sex (or other queer) relations that do not, or have not, provided for a queer identity (Foster 3), but a new construct of the body may offer queers possible identification in the social order. This redefined body will challenge what has previously been considered the natural order and will seek to be new, or different, and more inclusive. Essentialists have viewed sexual identity as fixed within and by the body, whereas constructionists have tended to see identity, especially sexual identity, as fluid, as a side effect of social conditioning (Jagose 8). In queer writing, these categorical strictures can be exploded. For example, “[n]uevos pensamientos” may include the previously anathematized notion that “[u]n hombre

⁸ Even though our reading of history has taught us that same sex couplings were prevalent in ancient Greece and Rome, for example, these relationships were not definitional of identity as they are in modern culture. The Greeks lacked sexual identity categories like those that modern, Western culture has sought to impose. The most important categories in ancient Greece distinguished between citizens and non-citizens so that sexual preference for them was no more important than preferences in food are for us (Turner 74).

machista tiene el concepto tan elevado de la masculinidad que su mayor placer sería que otro hombre le diera por el culo” (Arenas, *Color* 195). Here the notion of what masculinity has been constructed to be is taken to the extreme in order to shatter the masculinity construct. In this way, a newly defined, queer(ed) body can leap free from any restrictive methods that have tried in the past to explain sexual identity. Queer(ed) bodies can demand recognition as queer and, at the same time, as proper, given enough exposure and consideration. As we see in Arenas’s *Color del verano*, an amassing of like bodies, all demanding attention, can have a powerful effect; they can entice, become alluring, and demand recognition: “[L]a orden de “sígueme” dada por aquel cuerpo, por todos los cuerpos que allí habían entrado, se imponía por encima de todos los terrores y riesgos” of AIDS, venereal or other sexually transmitted diseases, and/or of social condemnation (85-86). Queer writing and discourse that comments on it can recognize and point out this demand by the queer(ed) body to be noticed and help amass queer bodies, explain them, and aid in defining possible new types of accepted identity practices that may actually begin to negate the power of the negatively employed queer identity label heretofore affixed by heteronormativity.

The queer body may begin to be looked at as a metabody in the writings of my three authors. Queer writing implies the power of the queer(ed) body to replicate both hetero- and homosexual experience and to comment on both. In a Bellatin novel, *La jornada de la mona y el paciente*, neither the *mona* nor the *padre* can experience the same sensations. This is true of all human beings. But the queer being can become a commentary on him/herself and on his/her heterosexual counterparts through his/her status as a queer reared in heterosexist society by heterosexuals. Thus, while the queer

individual may label him/herself “queer” or be so labeled, s/he is only queer when measured according to heteronormative standards. A part of the queerness of such an individual is the heterosexual performance techniques imprinted by the heterosexual society which has been the queer’s teacher with respect to gender and sexual preference display.

VI. Queer Space, Performance, and Socio-cultural Aspects

In Chapter 3, I examine the space in which queer(ed) bodies perform. The view in the death-mirror, for example, found in Bellatin’s *Jornada* evokes the notion that language is necessarily variable and that to sleep with the mirror of one’s own death is to see oneself reflected as heteronormativity wishes one to be seen. However, the reflection can be changed in the queer margins into a living reflection because life in the margin is similar to the experience of watching a play. Those on the outside (the audience) are looking in (onto the performers). Theater, throughout much of its history, has been likened to a mimetic mirror, for example, as when Hamlet tells the group of players to “hold ... the mirror up to nature.” Also Metz, extending this notion, has said that the one thing never projected in this mirror is the viewer’s own body. Therefore, the viewer must imagine him- or herself in the mirror (as a part of the play) in order to fully partake of the experience (732). Voyeurism also is implied, at least sometimes. Because a theatrical audience allows for a communal experience, all of the members of the audience are looking in the mirror and all are seeing the queer and the heteronorm reflected back onto all of them. Through this type of imagining, queers can enter the mirror and interact in the center, taking with them the lessons, definitions, and language of the margins. When queers project themselves into a hetero reflection, they often mimic hetero hegemonic

ordering practices, and this occurs, at least, on two levels. Queers may mimic hetero roles in order to fit in with the strictures of the heteronormative world, thus totally masking their identity as queer. Or they may use the same hetero roles and apply them differently in the queer context.

This dissertation also provides an analysis of queer(ed) socio-cultural forms. Without queers having recourse to dictate the terms of their identity in the broader community, insanity can set in. Like Arturo, the narrator of Arenas's *Arturo, la estrella más brillante*, queers have historically been forced by heteronormativity to hide their queerness. Having been imprisoned by Castro's regime to re-learn proper, masculine gender performance, Arturo has to re-adapt in order to survive in the re-training camp. He has to project an image of himself that does not offend the homosexuals who are in jail with him, or the heterosexualized guards (Soto 88).

Queers have had to project images in accordance with the dictates of socio-cultural mores that have excluded them. The patriarchal, hetero mind and its language have dominated Western speech. The prevalence of heteronormativity has, in the past, been unassailable, and it has prevented queers from "speaking" unless they use heteronormativized terms (Sullivan 121-22). The problem of expressing themselves that queers face is wrapped up in time and language. Modern queers live in the present, but current language is a relic of the past. Modern Romance languages have not evolved to include words that can adequately express different performances of gender than those that have historically been accepted in the West. Since actions and words may not conform to one's identity, the result is the social "ataque de locura temporal" (Bellatin, *Jornada* 38), the state when words no longer signify. Thus, Bellatin begins to use words

differently, to put them into unfamiliar contexts, and to cut them loose from their sources so that they can develop different and/or completely new acceptations. A queer reading of Bellatin and of other writers, as well, highlights how queer theory can be applied to them in order to show the plurality of identity and the possibilities of changing one's perceived identity (Hall 64).

As the narrator of *Jornada* notes:

Ambos, mona y padre, sienten el vacío de sus cuerpos aunque, como es lógico, ninguno de los dos comparte con el otro la misma sensación. Estas caídas ... pueden ser similares a la no libertad de la escritura. Lo he pensado más de una vez. A diferencia de la cura analítica —en la que el paciente pretende inscribirse— cuando alguien se decide a escribir algo tendrá que escribir solo y únicamente sobre lo que está escribiendo. Se le está negado el derecho al escribiente de ir construyendo una estructura abierta, interpretativa, para lo cual debe apelar a una serie de subterfugios tales como la asociación libre de las ideas, el recuerdo o el uso de las imágenes propias del inconsciente. No se puede escribir más que de lo que se está escribiendo. Como en el sueño... (15)

This type of oneiric writing in Bellatin can allow for new styles of gendered life/space.

Although the topic, what is being written about, limits the ambit of possibilities, the techniques (the use of free association, memory, and images from the subconscious) greatly expand the acceptations of meaning in today's vocabulary. Bellatin uses psychoanalytic concepts in order to foster a sense of dislocation so that the reader cannot rely solely on his/her perception of reality in order to understand signs. S/he is forced to enter into the amplified meanings that signs have in dream worlds.

The readers of Arenas, Chocrón, and Bellatin become figuratively “queered” by the use of other techniques as well. In Bellatin's *Perros héroes*, the reader meets the *hombre inmóvil*, and, however queer, out of the ordinary, this character seems, readers are forced to identify with him because we, just like him, go about our daily activities with a telephone, if not literally tied to our heads, not far away. One reason that this

character is queer is that he does have a telephone tied to his head that allows him to be in immediate contact with all available information. This is nearly true in modern, Western culture as well. Our smart phones and computers connect us with seemingly unlimited sources of information. We are like the isolated, immobile, odd, out of the ordinary (queer) character in that, even though we are all interconnected, we are, at the same time, isolated by the very things that connect us to one another and to information sources much as the *hombre inmóvil* is isolated by his immobility.

Another mechanism by which the reader is queered is found in in Arenas's metafictional *Color del verano* when the narrator addresses the reader directly, making him/her complicit in activities in the novel and by arbitrarily assigning him/her femininity by addressing him/her as "mi niña" (101). Likewise, the characters in Chocrón's *Amoroso* consciously include the audience as a vital part of the action. We, the audience, can reproduce ourselves in conjunction with the replications of the Auroras, and we can judge our strangeness, queerness, according to Amoroso's lights. Our participation in the play causes us to see ourselves as alienated from the heteronormative world, and we become queered thusly. In the works of all these authors, reader/audience participation is necessary for arriving at any understanding, and the knowledge that results is necessarily queer because the reader/audience is placed in a strange, queer world that cannot be interpreted against the backdrop of a heteronormativized culture. Thus, a new type of discourse is created: it is queer, but not totally defamiliarized, since it uses heterosexualized positions. In this discourse, modern, Western culture can recognize the queer body, and linguistic terms are amplified to encompass queer meanings, in addition to those which heteronormativity has previously deemed appropriate.

The conclusion of the dissertation focuses on queer(ed) discourse as arising out of the interaction of queer(ed) bodies in space and the subsequent queering of form. This discourse opens up space for the consideration of queers as persons, rather than as Other. Queer(ed) bodies inhabiting this discourse call into question the definition of “person” because of the cultural emergence of queer(ed) bodies in their guises as “incoherent or discontinuous gendered being[s],” bodies who appear to be persons but who have not previously conformed to the heteronorms of the “cultural intelligibility by which persons” have been defined (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 17). This discourse appears literarily in Arenas’s *Color* when various of the queers therein realize that they have a place, a homeland, even though it is within a previously heteronormativized society:

Vieron ... el país y el contrapaís. Porque cada país, como todas las cosas de este mundo, tiene su contrario.... El contrapaís es la ramplonería monopolítica y rígida; el país es lo diverso, luminoso, misterioso y festivo. Y esta revelación ... los invistió de una identidad y de una fe. Y comprendieron que no estaban solos, pues por encima ... una tradición hecha de belleza y de rebeldía, un país, los amparaba. (144)

The *contrapaís* of this passage is the world that has controlled cultural notions and acceptations of gender, sexuality, and the appropriate use of bodies and linguistic space. But the *país*, the queer world, exists and inserts itself into the *contrapaís*. The *país* contests and challenges the heteronormative political stance in Castro’s Cuba, where homosexuals were imprisoned or exiled. The discourse of the *país* infiltrates the heteronormative *contrapaís*, melding with it, in order to change it. In this discourse, the “language of sex” intersects with and transforms the language of the other discourses through which lives are ordered (Sedgwick 3). This is a central element of queer writing—the importance of integrating queerness into life by visualizing differently, queerly, and, thus, by writing/reading/critiquing differently/queerly.

The queer writing of Arenas, Chocrón, and Bellatin and the work of queer theorists are in many ways similar to the conscious performance of gender by LaGrace Volcano; it “appropriate[s] attributes, take[s] liberties with signals, play[s] with pos[tur]es, stage[s] manners and take[s] on attitudes that are usually associated” with gender presentations and sexual object choices that conflict with and confront heteronorms (LaGrace Volcano, “Gender Fusion” 131). This forces our discourses to open up, compels people to become amenable to “double exposure[s]” that create “dissonance[,]” contain “gender paradox[es, offer] alternative interpretation[s]” (131) of gender and sexuality. These illusions create gaps, and, in those spaces, appear new formulations of concepts of gender (re)presentations and sexual object choices.

These concepts are expanding and will continue to do so. This notion is explicitly set forth in Bellatin’s *Jornada*:

[P]ara mejorar la situación deb[emos] enfrentar la vida tal como debe ser... Pero eso se supo desde siempre, y precisamente el no poder cumplirlo fue lo que creó ... la situación de crisis... El juego de generar palabras para que éstas a su vez generen otras, puede terminar de golpe si las palabras generadas se vuelven incapaces de ser a su vez fuentes de otras nuevas. Si no existe nadie que las lea y las demande, se irán acumulando hasta formar un cuerpo deforme del cual [uno] no podrá liberarse. (29)

Queer writing and queer reading are generating not only new words but new methods of relating words and new ways of visualizing culture and of understanding the varying components that bleed together in order for that culture to survive. If discourse stagnates, if it disallows entrance to queerness, then the cultural body that it describes will become deformed (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Power*). This is true, in part, because “[o]bjects of inquiry do not await discovery independently of the discourse within which one produces knowledge about them. Nor do scholars come naturally equipped with

universal principles of reason that will guide them to the truth. Discourses constitute both the objects and the subjects of inquiry” (Turner 51). Rather than submit to deformation of the discursive systems by which lives are ordered, deformed/queer(ed) bodies are speaking, inserting themselves into socio-cultural discourses, and changing/queering them. Writers who are writing queerly and queer theorists are creating bodies of work that seek to speak to and create a new audience or, at least, one with a reformulated awareness. The tropes and styles in queer writing are themselves creating this perception by queering its readers and audiences. My three authors are teaching his public new ways of seeing, understanding, and interpreting the expanding parameters of occidental, socio-cultural existence.

Body

Notions of the body, how the body is coerced to perform by heteronormativity and how the queer(ed) body challenges the normative categorizations that seek to limit it are central to the ambit of queer studies and theory. According to the strictures set forth by Western heteronormativity, a homosexual body, for example, is as mutilated as are the damaged bodies found in Bellatin's novels. At times, some of Bellatin's non-whole characters put on and take off their prosthetics much like queers exchange masks to partake of queer worlds or survive in heterosexist society. The very fact that these bodies seek to revel in same-sex sexual relations, like the characters in Arenas's works do, preclude them from fitting into sanctioned, heteronormative sexual spaces. But because these bodies have learned to present non-standard gender performances within these normativized spaces, they can pervert the rules of gender and sexual-object choice performances in order to challenge the spaces previously closed to them and, eventually, to open up new, more accepting spaces that do not condemn the queer body as abnormal.

I. Mimicry/Performance

There are myriad ways of performing gender and sexuality. Modern, patriarchal, Western culture has decreed, for instance, that, in sexual relationships, to penetrate is masculine and to be penetrated is feminine. Because it has defined the penetrator as being powerful by virtue of the act of penetration, men (as constituted by their masculine, penetrating nature) must also exhibit other traits that are considered powerful. Conversely, women (who have been traditionally recognized as submissive) must accept

male domination.⁹ But feminists have long questioned these assigned roles and definitions. These concepts of masculinity and femininity stretch far beyond the realm of adult sexual intercourse to encompass the activities of all denizens of the heteronormative world. Male children are expected to play war games and fight. Female children are expected to nurture their dolls and play at cooking. But now these expectations are being subverted, in part, by the more visible presence of the queer body.

In Chocrón's *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, heteronormativity has created a component of possession that defines the possessor as masculine, i.e. the penetrator. If one can lose the possessive aspect of sexual activity, one will lose the power component, and that can lead to the recognition of bodies engaged in sexual activity without characterizing those bodies as hetero or queer: without the element of power, notions of what are appropriate (re)presentations of masculinity and femininity begin to pale. In fact, Mortimer-Sandilands notes that in some instances, same-sex sexual activity is natural; it may be that affectation, however, is "perverse" (2).

The queer body also challenges the penetrator/penetrated dichotomy because it cannot be described as male-sexed and masculine or female-sexed and feminine, and both are requirements in normativized gender and sexual performances. However, in some parts of Latin America, if two men have intercourse, the penetrator may still consider himself to be masculine and not necessarily gay, whereas the penetrated is seen as feminized. In the case of homosexual couples, for example, the same sexes may penetrate and be penetrated, and each partner can change roles. Thus, these types of bodies, when no longer hidden, demand a reinterpretation of sexual space and who can

⁹ A good example of machismo and its *marianista* counterpart can be found in Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*.

populate it and what types of activities are permitted or doable there.

Continued conformity by the queer body to the sexual norms of heterosexist society only leads to the impossibility of the queer individual to live truthfully or from a place of human wholesomeness, and the resulting falseness exhibited by that body will eventually corrupt society, just as one bad apple spoils the whole bunch. The gay narrator of the third portion of Arenas's *Viaje a La Habana* begins to realize this as he reminisces about his impossible life in that city before his flight from it: “[Q]ue esfuerzo ... para abrazarla y poseerla varonilmente, satisfaciéndola, simulando mi gozo, sin que remotamente comprendiera cuánto necesitaba yo también un cuerpo como el que ella abrazaba.... [Y]o realmente no [soy] lo que aparento” (103). Because this narrator recognizes the falsity inherent in his sexual performance, he flees his homeland and lives in almost complete stagnation in the alien cityscape of New York. But, more importantly, upon his return to Cuba, he attempts to recuperate a past that disappeared with his youth. Havana society has become more closed and autocratic than it was before. Furthermore, although unknowingly at the time, upon his return, the narrator indulges in torrid sexual relations with his son who is now grown and holds a position of power in the new Cuba now so unfamiliar to his father. But the very fact of the sexual relationship between father and son signifies the decay of accepted family dynamics and the national superstructure that, to a great extent, is based on those dynamics.

In the novelistic world of Bellatin, queer bodies are often mangled, sick, distorted, abnormal, misshapen, and/or deformed. These bodies challenge the notion of hale and hearty, masculine men and soft and submissive, feminine women. Bellatin shows us these bodies performing, demanding to be seen and recognized, in very strictly

controlled, hermetic social spheres, spaces of interaction as rigidly regimented as is heteronormative society. But each abnormality demands equal visibility with normative representations.

In *El gran vidirio*, the child narrator of the first, numbered *autobiografía*, demands that his genitals signify: “No podía permitir que la boca de mi madre fuera más importante que el espectáculo que mis testículos son capaces de ofrecer” (12). This demand surfaces out of the mother’s having kept the narrator’s genitalia tightly bound and controlled. She would show them off to her female friends. Here the female exhibits certain power over her male child’s genitalia, but that child is demanding that he and his genitals signify equally to his mother’s painted lips. In this instance, the mother may be seen as violating society’s normativizing type of nurture expected from her. She may be thought of as perverted and castrating, but really, her actions are similar to those undertaken by heterosexist parents, which are used in order to subjugate the inclinations of their queer children. Despite undue harshness, in this example, we can see that the queer body is demanding to be seen in its own right. It demands to perform with its genitals according to its own lights.

Working from the ideas of Butler, Sullivan contrasts the notions of performance and performativity (89). Even though Butler has stated that performativity is a process whereby subjectivity is constituted,¹⁰ and Sullivan agrees, I believe that it is helpful to look at performance and theatricality, in the case of the queer(ed) body, as a means to represent a newly constituted subjectivity. For instance, in Chocrón’s novel, *Pájaro de*

¹⁰ Butler is often cited in discussions of gender performance, even though she only mentions it peripherally in her analysis of performativity. Many theorists and critics have not significantly differentiated the two topics, even though Butler sees the former as a mechanism for the presentation of social characteristics associated with gender and the latter as a means to constitute subjectivity.

mar por tierra, Domingo introduces Micky to the 72nd Street neighborhood in Manhattan:

“[E]ntraron a la gran cafetería en Broadway y la 73 donde frente a los ventanales posan maricas estrambóticas con caras distorsionadas por el maquillaje” (39). To a certain extent, these *maricas* have already claimed a certain, exaggerated female subjectivity as their own. To more firmly hold onto it, they (re)enact it in public, and this (re)enactment serves to set new parameters of recognizable public performance, i.e. that the male body can present itself in the guise of femininity and, indeed, use that femininity to attract male sexual partners who prefer the exaggerated femininity of the *maricas* to the normativized femininity required in heterosexist society. This type of performance, however, does not transform the male-sexed bodies of the *maricas* into representations of femaleness.

Rather, the male bodies and certain female-gendered characteristics combine in the public sphere and thereby subvert normative sexual preference/gender limits. The *maricas* may be understood as performing new definitions of femininity. Thus, the performance itself becomes performative both internally (subjectively) and externally (objectively).

Sullivan further contrasts performance and performativity by indicating that performance is like a theatrical production and that performativity is a mode of discursive production (89). We perform our gender and sexuality as actors exhibit their character’s personae onstage; that current discourse comprises the types of gender presentation and sexual desire available to be presented in that discursive instances of performativity, which delimit the boundaries of acceptable performances. Arenas’s novel, *El portero*, exemplifies this dichotomy at the same time that it presents certain performances that become, via the reader’s experience, a discursive production. In the second part of *El portero*, the animals recognize the dangers of mimicking the humans, and vice versa.

This can be understood from a speech made by one of the animals (citizens of an anti-normative, parallel world) to the others:

[P]ero en el hombre, al que ustedes por desgracia imitan en vez de dejar que sea él quien nos imite, la vida se ha vuelto un juego sucio, y, lo que es peor, ese juego se ha tomado tan seriamente que ha dejado de ser juego para convertirse en un deber, es decir, en algo abrumador; tan abrumador que ya ni ellos mismos conocen lo que es la libertad ni mucho menos cómo disfrutarla. (207)

The animals (queer bodies) have imitated the humans (heteronormativized bodies) to such an extent that the mimicked behaviors have become required, and, thereby, both groups have stagnated and become unable to achieve their potential, either separately or together. The animals fail because they live in false bodies, and the humans fail because they are incomplete. If the theatrical performances of the animals' imitation of the humans were to end and if they were to create a new theater in which their real bodies performed, it can be inferred that a benefit would be had in both camps. Through this type of reading of Arenas, the theatricality of the performance of the queer body can be understood as aiding in the production of changed and changing discourses relative to the body, which will, in turn, transform and amplify the types of options for display the body has available to it.

Sullivan also states that, in the performance of gender or sexuality, a subject is not separated from his/her actions (82). Because of this, the performance becomes performative. The actions and the body of the performer coalesce into a manifestation of subjectivity. When this subjectivity is presented and experienced, then its exhibition is available for future bodies to use as a model for their (re)presentations. For, as Beaver notes, one cannot be a thing until s/he pretends to be it (107). The problem with this in any normative society is that the subject may take on a false subjectivity. As the monkey

in *El portero* complains, “Nuestra verdadera identidad es un disfraz incesante, una broma infinita” (Arenas 208). The masks frequently worn by queers may not ever fit quite right. There may always seem to be a certain falsity to the performance because the mask is antagonistic to the artificially heterosexualized reality in which queers must live. A truly queer reality may be one that is always just beyond reach in the heteronorm.

In Arenas’s *Arturo, la estrella más brillante*, in the prison world in which Arturo has been confined, while he longs for a same-sex relationship, for him that does not entail taking on a false femininity. But in order to survive, and in spite of the intentions of those who have imprisoned him that he (re)learn manliness, he does become feminized, despite the damage that it does to him as a subject:

[S]i quería sobrevivir tenía que adaptarse o fingir adaptarse como quizás hacían otros que ahora mismo lo atropellaban, tenía que hablar como ellos, tenía que reirse [sic] como ellos, tenía que hacer los mismos gestos que ellos, y Arturo manipuló aquella jerigonza afectada y delirante, comenzó a lanzar la típica carcajada de la loca histérica, cantar, modelar, pintarse los ojos y el pelo y los labios con lo que apareciese, hacerse grandes y azules ojeras, todo esto lo hizo él hasta dominar y adueñarse de todas las jergas y ademanes típicos del maricón prisionero, todo esto lo logró Arturo y aún más.... (37-38)

In heteronormative society, for example, Arturo has two choices. He can be false to himself and accept the limitations of the dichotomies of sexual activity and gender to which that society adheres or he can become a delirious representation of a femininity with which the heteronormative is familiar. Nevertheless, the heteronorm requires that this type of display of femininity be kept out of the realm of possibilities for a male-sexed body. So Arturo chooses to perform the gendered and sexual roles that have been allowed to him. Thus, as we see through the course of the novel, his performance creates a false subjectivity with which he cannot finally identify. In fact, what should be his very own subjectivity has been enforced upon him in such a way that his status as an

object reinforces heteronormativity.

Another example of this same type of normativizing control shows up in Bellatin's *El gran vidrio*. The narrator of the third *autobiografía* states: "Aquel día ... mi danza tuvo un éxito que nunca más se repitió. Mis hermanos ayudaron a mi padre a subirse a los restos de muro. Desde allí manejó los hilos atados a mis muñecas y a mis tobillos" (152).¹¹ The narrator is the puppet of her autocratic father and must perform according to his dictates. Thus, she is performing a false identity, one that we grow to understand is impossible to live with as she mutates throughout this *autobiografía*. Nevertheless, her forced performance re-enforces the boundaries of heteronormativity. Only by cutting the strings that bind her, defying normative categorizations, will she be able to meld her subject being and its performance into a unity.

But performances, or styles of performance, are shaped by history, and, in normative society these histories condition and limit the subject's ability to perform (Sullivan 89). However, in queer writing, oftentimes, queer subjects' individual actions and the actions that the reader or viewer expects from those subjects collide. The collision creates uncertainty and opens up the possibility for the queering of normative space or for the existence and acceptance of queer social spaces. In Chocrón's play, *La máxima felicidad*, for instance, his stage directions at one point allow us to see a "perversion" of a woman's expected role: "[PERLA] saca de la caja una inmensa colcha de retazos multicolores y acerca una de sus puntas a LEO y otra a PABLO." Shortly thereafter "PERLA ... va a su silla, se sienta considerando dónde coserá. PABLO y luego LEO hacen lo mismo. Los tres ensartan sus agujas y comienzan a coser" (45).

¹¹ Imagery in this passage also brings into play the sexual connotations of binding, i.e. the relationship between the dominator and the dominated and that between master and slave. Of course, here, incest figures in as well.

Pablo and Leo are defying the heteronormative concept that sewing is a feminine activity.

The normativized audience/reader has already been cast adrift in this play by the uncertainty of the relationship that exists between two men and one woman, and now it/s/he is being even further unsettled by the men taking on feminine chores. This is another indication that the gender or sexual performance by a queer body or a queer performance by a non-queer body can expand the available performance categories in normativized space or create new space.

A queer performance is theatrical in that either the revelation of the queer body or the performance of non-standard sexual or gender choices removes the performance from the accepted norm and, thus, becomes highlighted. It forces society to take note of differences (queerness) lurking just underneath the carefully controlled surface of social interaction. These performances take place in the present, even though they may be a reclamation or (re)interpretation of past sexual or gender roles, and therefore approach Auslander's definition of theater, i.e. that it is a performance in the present (15). If we are to experience literature queerly, we need to be able to see and understand the theatricality of queerness and how it is viewed in the society in which it is performed, and we need to be able to understand the nature of the change(s) that can result from queer performance. We can understand heterosexist society's supposition that the incorporation of queerness into its heteronormative structure is impossible; yet, at the same time, we can see an appreciation of queerness in literature and theatricality and realize that performed queerness can change heterosexist society. For example, in Chocrón's *Pájaro de mar por tierra*,¹² Yvette, a heterosexual lover of the homosexual

¹² It is interesting to note that this title comes from a Venezuelan common saying which is addressed to someone who finds him/herself in a location with which s/h has little experience.

protagonist, Micky (who is now, as a bisexual, “*un pájaro de mar por tierra*”), proclaims, “Me encantan los homosexuales. De todo hacen un chiste. Se burlan de ellos.... Yo pienso que cada quien debe hacer con su cuerpo lo que quiera” (131). Later, she adds, “Bueno, cuando lo conocí [a Micky] me gustó y me di cuenta que a él le gustaba la *chose homosexuel*. A mí me gusta más *un homosexuel* que un hombre. Son mejores amantes, más atentos” (131). From these two declarations, we see that normativity understands homosexual performance, i.e. can recognize queer mannerisms and actions, but, at the same time, it does not quite recognize the homosexual male as a man. Nevertheless, it can appreciate the attributes of caring and attention (normally feminine characteristics) as they are expressed by the homosexual male. Also, at least part of normativity realizes that a body is meant to express the subjectivity of its owner, not necessarily a normative subjectivity, which if it is impressed onto a queer body becomes a façade, a sham.

The changes in the previously normativized viewer of queer performance flow from notions of gender or sexual preference performance as theatrical event in that theater is a place where “men” and “women” (human beings) come together “to see themselves reflected” as they are and as they could or should be (Nigro 52). If they see themselves reflected as queer, they may begin to approach an acceptance of queer elements within their own natures. “Queer” can present itself as do the clothes horses in the “Que trine Eva” section of Arenas’s *Viaje a La Habana*. In fact, often, queers have to learn to act queerly. They have to model their behavior on others, in some cases on that of gay male gender presentations and performances of women. In other cases, they can base their comportment on the out-sized, mimicked behavior of same-sexed beings who

have learned to exaggerate femininity to express those qualities without ever becoming female. Eva notes, “[M]odelamos toda la tarde.... También ensayamos algunas danzas exóticas e inventamos extraños pasos que nos quedaron estupendos” (15). Eva and Ricardo seek public acclamation through their outfits and movements. They precede modern-day, street performers. They, like gay male drag queens, for example, have to practice exotic, strange, and extraordinary movements and actions and to create marvelous outfits in order to attract their audience. They do gain the acclaim they seek. The out of the ordinary becomes pageantry. Once the spectacle wears thin, then the extraordinary can become commonplace.

Like Eva and Ricardo, Arenas’s Arturo becomes a mime as well, mimicking femininity, but his mimesis draws attention to the fact that his is a deficient impersonation (Solomon 1). It is inadequate in that to him it is not natural; rather it is learned. However, it is an impersonation that manages to subvert the heteronorm, to a certain extent. The following description of Arturo exemplifies the overemphasis of his femininity. Yet, it also shows that this exaggerated femininity succeeds in luring a heterosexual soldier into a sexual relationship with a man; this expresses a homosexual desire, despite the fact that presumably the soldier is the penetrator:

[Y] en la barraca, a la hora de gritar, así, con voz de soprano histérica, era él quien más alto lo hacía, a la hora de modelar en las fiestas prohibidas y perseguidas por los soldados que participaban en las mismas como entusiastas espectadores, era él, ya, quien llevaba siempre la falda más escandalosa, quien más se pintarrajeaba, quien ostentaba la peluca más estrambótica, y quien cantaba al final el cuplé más provocativo con su evidente sentido obsceno reforzado por ademanes, pestañeos, miradas y visajes, y luego de la fiesta, el mismo soldado que lo vigilaba en el corte le otorgaba el mismo gesto, y los dos se adentraban en el cañaveral.... (19)

The penetrator’s invasion of a false femininity, an acted womanliness, is obviously not the entrance into femaleness. Here the male (soldier) does not penetrate a female and the

act of penetration of Arturo is queer, despite the notion of machismo, which Arenas presents in his autobiography, that seeks to remove the piercing male from a homosexual classification.¹³ Arturo's performance itself makes it clear that he is not female; he is Other. This is another means whereby queer performance can subvert heteronormative gender and sexual dichotomies.

As readers or spectators, when we become aware of and knowledgeable of queer signs, we can become complicit in the queer social conventions that allow us to accept a collective illusion that includes queerness in heteronormative society. Our role as spectator demands such an acceptance (Solomon 3). Thus, queer theorists and queer writing can change (or queer) the reader or spectator by teaching queerness or exposing heteronormativity to queerness. There may be a sense of taboo in watching queer performances and interactions, but as we begin to realize that we are spectators in the theater of gender and sexuality performance, the illicitness of our watching connects us even more closely to the queer performances we watch. We, as spectators, become queered to an extent by the secrets we begin to share with queer performers or queered performances. We can begin to see as Arenas sees. At one point in his autobiography, *Antes que anocheza*, Arenas writes of what he sees on a visit to a beach:

Los hombres iban con sus mujeres y se sentaban en la playa a jugar, pero a veces entraban en el balneario, donde se desvestían y tenían sus aventuras eróticas con algún otro joven, y luego volvían a atender a sus esposas.... Por cinco minutos le era infiel a su esposa de una manera increíble. Después lo vi de nuevo con su mujer del brazo y su hijo; una bella imagen familiar. (126)

Arenas, as spectator and voyeur, sees a scene that is very different from the

¹³ Speaking about his leaving Cuba during the exodus of homosexuals, among other groups, from Mariel, Arenas says: "Al llegar me preguntaron si yo era homosexual y les dije que sí; me preguntaron entonces si era activo o pasivo, y tuve la precaución de decir que era pasivo. A un amigo mío que dijo ser activo le negaron la salida; él no dijo más que la verdad, pero el gobierno cubano no consideraba que los homosexuales activos fueran, en realidad, homosexuales" (*Antes que anochezca* 301).

heteronormativized idyll apparently presented by the version of family life performed at the beach. Arenas sees beyond the norm of the heterosexualized family to a queer element seemingly central to the ability to maintain the normativizing performance, or he may see bisexual males who need to maintain two lives, which they cannot integrate into a heteronormative society. As readers gaze through his eyes, they, too, see the queer performance as an integral representation of gender and sexuality that, even though queer, becomes naturalized. It also provides a comment on infidelity in any gendered relationship, as well as hypocrisy. Arenas, here, broadly criticizes a heteronormative, duplicitous society.

In the case of drag queens, we are able to see another example of façade, or playacting, as mimicry. Arenas's *Color del verano*, for example, is populated by myriad drag queens. Their mimicry of the straight world clearly constructs façades that envelop them; however, their playacting becomes real. As the narrator in *Arturo* notes with regards to the *locas*: [S]us máscaras que ya de tanto usarlas habían pasado a ser sus propios rostros” (Arenas 13). Here the *locas* have become what they perform. Muñoz believes that a drag performance is not an attempt to imitate femaleness, but that rather it is an approximation of the notion of femininity (76). This notion is put into practice by the *locas* imprisoned along with Arturo, the *locas* who teach him femininity, “pintándose el rostro con lo que apareciese improvisando pelucas con flecos de yagua y hojas de maguey” (12-13). Neither accouterment of femininity is real, nor is the *locas*’ construction of femininity. But what is ultimately performed is an approximation of femininity and the performance is achieved by a non-female body.

Perhaps queers are destined to perform their own take on gender and sexuality

and base their presentation of each in the signs learned from the empowered, hetero world. In *Mesopotamia*, Ismael indicates that he feels possessed from inside, and Mateo and Marcos enter into a short discussion of Hebrew dybbuks (souls of dead sinners who have transmigrated into living persons), which “se apoderan de un alma que en algo tiene que ver con ellos” (Chocrón 228). The hetero power center has so imbued its definitions of masculinity and femininity in the heteronorm’s queer denizens that, often, it is only by way of these definitions that queers can perform themselves as gendered and sexual beings. Thereby, they can create double bodies, and the double bodies open up space where queerness begins to intrude into normativity and overtake it. As Phelan has stated, homosexuality and acting are strongly associated in Western culture because acting is about the creation of this type of double body. The actor pretends to be another person, and s/he is trained to reproduce the gestures and bearing, the very being, of another’s body (89).

As Eva tells us in *Viaje*, “Tú, Ricardo, inventaste pasos increíbles (seguramente, ya desde entonces tratabas de opacarme)” (Arenas 17). The homosexual Ricardo trains himself and Eva to represent other, heteronormativized bodies, really to live those other bodies, and his performance outshines hers. His enactment is such that he finally is noticed as the performer, not for the quality of his exhibition. At the end of “Que trine Eva,” Ricardo leaves with his newly found gay lover, and Eva is left alone. The representation, or reproduction, of a normativized body winds up as queer vindication. The queer body takes its place in society because it has performed itself by accessing the tenets of heteronormativity and reconstructing them in the queer body. This also implies a criticism of heteronormative society. Familiarity with these tenets

makes the queer body visible and, at least to some extent, understood.

Nevertheless, in Western culture today, we are confronted by a general refusal on the part of heteronormativity to accept queer elements in society. Worldwide, the American Red Cross, supported in its actions by the governing body in the United States responsible for its regulation, refuses blood donations made by gay men. This refusal is a type of “cultural management.” It is the attempt to enforce negative, heterosexist perceptions of queerness on the queer body by characterizing it as diseased and subject to undisciplined sexual activity (Bennett 2). We see the same type of imposed subjectivity in the case of Oscar Times I and Oscar Times II in *El portero*. They are “homosexuales” who “conforman como una sola persona, hasta el punto de que muchos inquilinos que nunca los habían visto juntos afirmaban que se trataba de un solo personaje” (Arenas 21). The heteronorm, the *inquilinos* herein, is seeking to deny homosexuals the right to a self-constructed identity; it is seeking to control the performance of homosexuality. The denial of queer blood donation is emblematic of Arenas’s assertion that “el tema homosexual” is “un tema tabú ... para casi todo el género humano” (*Antes que anochezca* 15).

But this heterosexist attitude against the queer body can be overcome when we are made to realize that, despite the heteronorm’s notion that the gender of the object choice for purposes of sexual relation is determinative of sexuality (Sullivan 38), the subject who chooses a same gendered partner may not fit well into either of the categories (hetero- or homosexual) allowed by heteronormative society. Mickey, in Chocrón’s *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, is a case in point. His choice of sexual objects includes both male and female objects, even though he really seems to prefer same-sex

sexual relationships. However, Micky “no se comportaba como un homosexual ni tampoco como un heterosexual” (61). He is something other than either of the binary choices offered.

II. Personae/Characters

Characters like Micky broaden the possibilities of sexuality and gender behavior. Schettini has said that characters are out-of-the-ordinary beings that are presented in order to be informative, illuminating, or for didactic purposes (8). As is the case with Micky, queer characters often deconstruct the heteronorm’s ideas with regards to appropriate presentation of gender and sexuality. These characters can become theatrical in that they require their audience (readers or viewers) to gaze back upon themselves, just as it does when Mina, a character in Chocrón’s *O. K.*, opens the play by inspecting the audience (33). Her inspection throws the audience’s gaze back onto itself. Self-inspection from the point of view of an Other can change self-perception. Sullivan notes that if modern, Western societies are forced to perceive unfamiliar modes of embodiment, i.e. if bodies’ performances are not consistent with existing categories of gender and sexuality, it is reinforced in those societies that subjectivity is ambiguous (115). Thus, it may be that one can begin to understand the shift necessary to view *las locas* in *Arturo* as *ellas*, not *ellos* (13). Moreover, our conception of *ellas* in this case is not the same as of the *ellas* we could use to refer to female-sexed subjects. Once queer stretches available gender definitions, Arturo’s dream of an *él* to complete his own masculinity (16) is converted from impossibility into possibility.

“Queer” teaches that a form of “masculinity,” since we have no other word at this point to describe it, can exist in the confines of same-sex sexuality. This increase in

notions of gender and sexuality in queer literature or by queer interpretations of literature based on their performance by queer bodies is similar to the expansion of the possibilities of the damaged or otherwise abnormal bodies in Bellatin's prose, an amplification that allows them to take on new dimensions, dimensions that previously have been considered non-realizable in the heteronorm (Guerrero 5).

III. Queer(ed) Bodies in Socio-cultural Interactions

Because bodies are read in the confines of any given culture and are understood to be cultural statements (Molloy 142), the queer body has generally not been able to have been read in the past because it was usually not admitted into the cultural sign system. Therefore, in order to give the queer body a voice, it is being inserted into modern culture in queer literature and via queer theories and criticism of literature. When the queer body becomes apparent and readable, it begins to influence cultural norms because the performer, who is using his/her body, influences the audience (as part of the culture) and vice a versa (Auslander 68). Rather than disappearing, the theatrical queer body becomes a visual sign that contains a statement capable of changing its audience.

In *El portero*, the *portero* realizes that he cannot let the heteronorm, in the guise of Rozeman, a dentist, radically alter his appearance by removing all his teeth and giving him perfect dentures. If the *portero* were to lose his own bite, so to speak, “desaparecía para siempre y con él aquella insólita ... misión de la que se creía responsable” (Arenas 119). That is to say that, even though influenced by the heteronorm (given the rules of gender and sexuality with which to perform itself), the queer body cannot do other than utilize those rules differently to perform a type of queer(ed) gender and sexuality that can then influence its audience.

The distinctions between performer (the queer[ed] body utilized) and the audience, however, cannot be eliminated because that would negate the possibility of theatrical performance (Auslander 65). Thus, the relationship between the queer(ed) body and heterosexist culture creates the space for a (re)evaluation of gender and sexual identity in much the same way that Franco is forced to re-evaluate his relationships with Mina and Angela in *O. K.* when the two women change roles (Chocrón 129). There is a melding of the two in Franco's understanding of each.

In his discussion of Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes*, Montero has indicated that that text seeks to rescue the banished queer body in order to permit a performance by a queer subject (170). That same type of rescue can be found in Arenas's "Viaje a La Habana" section of his novel of the same name. At one point, Ismael emphasizes that for him to realize his existence as a gay male in heteronormative society, he must achieve that realization as a Cuban in Cuba, not as a homosexual in the unfamiliar world of New York where he has been exiled (117-18). We can understand from this passage that, in order to achieve subjectivity, the queer body needs to realize itself in the heterosexist culture from which it has been vanquished, not in a queer ghetto cut off from the rest of modern culture. In Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes*, the body of Christ is restored to Havana, and in Arenas's "Viaje a La Habana," Ismael's queer body is, as well, returned to Havana. In the former, the body becomes a desacralized logos, whereas in the latter Ismael goes back to his home country in which gays are deemed "undesireables" and were expelled from the port of Mariel, for example.

Likewise, queer literature and queer interpretations of literature are seeking to send the queer body into the bosom of the heteronorm, thereby changing the latter into a

more pluralistic society, ideally, by altering its understanding of categories of gender and sexuality. Similarly, in *El portero*, there is great attention to erotic performances because that is the most difficult space to navigate between sexuality and politics. That is the space where queer, sexual subjects and queer, political subjects can begin to emerge (Ortiz 44). This is consistent with Bejel's notion of the homoerotic, Cuban social system that has called and still calls on an esthetics of destabilization to inform national culture. As Arenas himself states, "Nunca he podido trabajar en plena abstinencia, porque el cuerpo necesita sentirse satisfecho para poder dar rienda suelta a su espíritu (*Antes que anochezca* 127). That is to say that the queer body realized sexually allows for queer creation.

Previously, in modern, Western culture, social spaces have been geared towards bodies that are whole (and heterosexual), and these bodies have had more ability to move (to perform) in social space because they have been granted more value than others (Clarke 98). The narrator of *Arturo* criticizes this view:

[S]iempre había un orden rigurosamente preconcebido, legalizado, respetado, según el cual el más alto podía humillar al que le seguía y así sucesivamente hasta llegar a ellos, los humillados por todos, los que ya no podían humillar a nadie porque allí terminaba la escala de humillaciones.... (Arenas 55)

This lowest group on the scale about which Arenas writes has historically been filled with the sexually queer and other so defined, abnormal bodies. In his discussion of *Perros héroes*, Schettini states that such bodies live in a world constructed on the basis of sickness because it is only through their defects that the characters can link themselves to the world (9). Sontag has noted that all people have "dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick" (*Illness as Metaphor* 3). Then, if these queer(ed) bodies seek to express themselves they must do so through that which makes them queer,

be that gender, sexuality, sickness, or deformity. Rather than follow the heteronorm's dictates that either the queer body does not exist or, if it exists, then it must be forced to conform, the queer body speaks and performs its difference in order to create its own subjectivity.

Pablo mentions an aunt in *La máxima felicidad* who, “pérfidamente, malévolamente, convencía a mis padres para que la Nochebuena o en los cumpleaños me regalaran guantes de boxeo, bates de baseball, máscaras de esgrima, todas esas armas deportivas” (Chocrón 35) that a boy should have; in opposition to such a perspective, the queer body asks for a space within its culture that will allow it to become gendered and sexualized according to its own dictates rather than be forced into compliance with heterosocially defined masculinity and femininity. In fact, Pablo rebels in much the same way by creating a family that in no way adheres to the social norms, then that family is performed before audiences previously subject to those same norms. The performance of the queer family arrangement can queer the audience who perceives that the spectators must begin to question society's traditional concept of family or at least begin to understand another notion of family.

The writings of Arenas, Chocrón, and Bellatin fit with Ingenschay's belief that the Latin American system is not fixed and closed (9). This is the case whether, like in some of Arenas's works, heterosexual men are obtainable by homosexual males or whether there is a postmodern vanguard in my authors that is emancipatory, as in some of the works of Chocrón and Bellatin (9). Ingenschay notes that in Latin America there are at least two important aspects of gay culture today. On the one hand, queerness may be seen as deviant behavior, as it has been since colonial times, and, at the same time, there

is a discourse that is gay and postmodern that may serve as a model for European and U. S. cultures with respect to elements of queerness like transvestism and camp (8). In Latin America and other modern, Western cultures, camp can illustrate that the “idea(l)” of the masculine or of the feminine can never be achieved (Sullivan 196).

The performance of the queer(ed) body in the works of Arenas, Chocrón, and Bellatin repeatedly assert the same doctrine. Arenas’s queer bodies, Chocrón’s manipulation of space so that it becomes queered, and the queer(ed) and damaged bodies in the novels of Bellatin vociferously demand that attention be paid to a queerness that opens up space for the expansion of cultures’ conceptions of gender and sexuality. Like Eva notes of Ricardo in “Que trine Eva,” we queers “tomamos poses estupendas, bailamos, modelamos constantemente.... [T]ambién inventa[mos] pasos increíbles” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 17). The poses, dances, and other steps of the queer body are becoming noticed in the heteronorm, shifting the requisites of its cultural, organizational systems.

IV. Transformation

Much as Guerrero and Bouzaglo describe the ill body (i.e. the non-normal body) frequently presented in modern, Latin American fiction, the queer body has multiple social representations. It is an illusion that is created in its perception by others (36). The multiple, queer embodiments achieve authenticity when they perform themselves in all their variations in front of the society that seeks their normativity. As is noted by the monkey (one of the “queer[ed]” animals in *El portero*), we queers “[s]ólo somos auténticos si cambiamos incesantemente” (Arenas 208). The constant variations, the constant changes in what is queer, unbalances heteronormative space and forces it to

transform itself, to become less normativized and more accepting of different gender and sexual object choice performances.

Bellatin seems to be in accord with the monkey's thesis. His bodies are "animal, monstruo, viviente, cadáver, travesti, deforme: instancias de la transformación del cuerpo y también del dominio del cuerpo, instancias del gobierno sobre el cuerpo, de la manipulación del cuerpo, de la clasificación del cuerpo y de la ingobernabilidad del cuerpo" (Schettini 16). These bodies truly are multiple; they all begin to signify, and do so queerly. Yet, they are understandable to the heteronorm when they express themselves within its confines. They are like the *locas* of whom Arenas speaks in his autobiography: "ya no [tienen] nada que perder ... y por lo tanto, [pueden] darse el lujo de ser auténticas, de 'partirse,' de hacer chistes y hasta de decirle algo a uno" (*Antes que anochezca* 207). They recognize their queerness and gladly perform it on their own terms. To think of these queer bodies, or of Bellatin's disabled ones, as they perform themselves in queer literature or are interpreted queerly in criticism or by readers, is not to signal them out as different or inadequate, but as the corporeal "sites of possibility" where de-formations are enablers of new channels of desiring and of self-expression (Shildrick 122).

These bodies challenge the sexual categories available in modern, Western society. Doctors and parents of intersexual infants make their decision to create these children as male or female based primarily on notions of penile/vaginal penetration. They question whether it will be easier to create a vagina from the hermaphroditic sexual organs that can be penetrated by a penis or easier to create a penis that can penetrate a vagina. Questions of future gender and sexual object choice rarely, if ever, enter the

picture (Clarke 118). Queer representations of these choices in modern society unbalance the strict dichotomy on which the doctors and parents of said intersexual babies make the decision of which sex these children shall have.

Arenas performs his sexuality in his biography. He stages his body, and his sexuality becomes the source of his creativity. His desires and the creative impulse to express them become a sword by which to transform society and literature (Angvik 43). Queer representations also show that effeminacy and male homosexuality are not necessarily congruent. Sexuality and gender performance are two separate things (Bak 72). What is going on here is theatrical in nature in that queer performances are changing their audiences in the same manner that Blau envisions viewers of theatrical spectacles evolving into a new entity. He believes that any group of onlookers is a body of thought and desire which cannot exist until a performance creates it. The viewers become a newly constructed consciousness; the latter is what “happens” when it responds to a performance’s signs (25).

With each queer performance, the representations and the signs integral to those representations are (re)creating new tenets that challenge heterosexist norms. Thus, the queer body, in the guise of an effeminate body that is gay and male, for example, can create a rupture in what has been culturally determined to constitute a male body and the female gender representations that are signified. This body’s performance of an altered elucidation of maleness and a different interpretation of femininity disrupts the male/female binary (Bak 77); this is similar to how the combined variations between the masculine and feminine tendencies and characteristics embodied by Elisa disrupt their perception by the principal narrator in “Mona” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 67-91). In

fact, the very body of Elisa challenges normativity. S/he is a man (Leonardo da Vinci) disguised as his own creation (la Gioconda) entering life as a woman with a voracious male sexual appetite who devours masculinity at the same time that s/he shimmers into being as a feminine man who demands possession by the same masculinity that s/he devours (85).

This type of gender ambiguity is important to queer theory in that it is used to dismantle binaries (Sullivan 99). Ambiguity becomes central to “Un personaje en apariencia moderno,” the third “autobiography” in Bellatin’s *El gran vidrio*. At one point the narrator notes that “[e]s curioso que con mi edad ... y con mi figura ... pueda ser considerada tía de alguien. Menos aún novia de una alemana” (124). Her appearance belies her body’s possibilities. The ill, deformed, partial, and queer bodies in Bellatin’s works flicker between two or more variations, as did the body of Elisa/Leonardo in “Mona,” each one real in its own right.

In Bellatin’s works, the body is central to the text, as it is in gay literature. The central role of bodies is not usual in Latin American literature where the concept of bodies develop from their characterizations. But the foregrounding by Bellatin of bodily representations is like that found in the works of Sarduy and Donoso. These foregrounded bodies are disarticulated (they become separated from the contextual nexus in which they appear) (Palaversich 35-36), and they, in turn, take apart heteronormative concepts that try to control the possibilities of gender and sexuality performance.

The body of Sergio/Ismaelito in “Viaje a La Habana” destabilizes heteronormativity in this way. As the narrator notes “Sergio no era Sergio. Era como una aparición.... Y al desabrocharle la camisa, Ismael supo que aquel joven no era una

aparición, sino ... un joven y bello cuerpo deseoso de ofrecerse (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 104-05).” In reality, Sergio is Ismaelito, Ismael’s son. He offers his body up to his father like the queer body offers itself up to its heterosexist parent, demanding to be allowed the right to signify. In the sexual encounter between Ismael and Ismaelito, we can understand that there is a meeting of one’s own body because of the fusion of the father and son; it is an act in which past and present are combined. An encounter with the Other (a being considered to be an object because it lacks the subjectivity of the self as interpreted egocentrically) becomes a reencounter with the self (Prieto Tobaada 178, 179).

Because heteronormativity depends on the belief that gender is determined by one’s biological sex and that sexuality flows from gender, the queer body must insert itself into heterosexist culture if it is, indeed, to signify; because it has done so, there are discontinuities in the heteronormative dichotomies. There are breaks in all types of sexual activity (Sullivan 86). These disruptions occur because it has been impossible for heteronormativized society to disregard all heterosexual sex acts that do not involve vaginal penetration. Thus, heterosexuality has queered itself by engaging in oral and other types of sexual activity, opening up the possibility of signifying sexual acts performed by non-heterosexuals. Heteronormativity has tried to reduce the body’s possibilities to categorizations based on anatomical sex (Kemp 161-62) and reproduction, but bodies that defy those classifications insinuate themselves into society and have begun to queer it by becoming recognizable and understandable.

As Chocrón has indicated, queer writing and queer criticism are about “cómo se va a defender el individuo de la masa de la cual forma parte” (quoted in Vestrini 23).

The queer(ed) body is, in many instances, the defender of the queer individual. With respect to the couple in “Que trine Eva,” Smith has said that the body’s need to be looked at is a response to the laws in Cuban society of that time against extravagance (265). Likewise, the queer response in queer writing to subjugation is meeting its oppressors with a demand to be seen. The bodies in “Que trine Eva” are decorated bodies. They are marked and performing bodies, bodies that stand out. Similarly, queer bodies are distinct; they are conspicuous if not hidden or obscured.

V. Highlighting the Queer(ed) Body/The Queer(ed) Body as a Sign

In the very recent past, queer bodies, as exemplified by those of gay men, for example, have been marked bodies in exile because they do not conform to the gender and sexual ideals of the heteronorm (Ríos Ávila 109, 112). In fact, Angvik characterizes Arenas as a man and writer inhabiting an isolated, exiled body in which queer sexuality and its socio-political repression in Cuban society under Castro mingle, informing a different sort of textuality (42). Like the porter in *El portero*, Arenas can be seen as a *puerta* (Arenas 136), a conduit to new realizations of gender and sexuality. His, body, (con)textualized in his autobiography, becomes an opening into previously forbidden territory. A primary intent of queer theory is to bring bodies like these out of exile, to remove them from obscurity, and to insert them into modern culture so that heteronormative binaries can be recognized as the sham limiters of gender and sexuality that they are.

Sullivan points out the falsity of these parameters by questioning the heterosexist idea that, in the case of gay men, femininity resides in a masculine body. If it were true that two feminine souls desired each other as sexual object choices, it would be

impossible to classify the bodies as gay, male homosexuals; rather, the relationship would more truly resemble lesbianism. But then how could the bodies be classified (6)? The same difficulty with classification can be seen in the case of transsexuals and their partners. For example, if the transsexual is male-to-female and his/then her partner is male, is the partner homosexual before and heterosexual after the transformation?

These types of problems with identification can be seen in Arenas's autobiography and in Chocrón's *Pájaro de mar por tierra*. In the former, Arenas says, "[M]uchos ... eran ... homosexuales activos. Para ellos templarse otro joven no era signo de homosexualidad; el maricón era el templado" (74). But the act of being penetrated by a penis does not turn a male-sexed being into female; nor does the act of penetrating a male body allow the penetrator to claim a full-blown heterosexuality, so to speak, in that he is not adhering specifically to the binaries offered in heteronormativized societies, even in some of those in Latin America. If the phallus has been understood as the ultimate signifier, as that penetrating instrument which has centralized hetero-male power in the heteronorm (Dolan 42), it has been recognized to signify power in its ability to penetrate woman, but not necessarily femininity. A character in *Pájaro* is confused by this exact type of role-playing. He is the penetrator in a sexual relationship with Micky, the protagonist, who is repeatedly portrayed as masculine. He asks, "¿Qué somos? ¿Hermanitos? ¿Padre e hijo? ¿Hermanas ?... ¿Qué somos?" (40). In this way, queer bodies obviate the available categories. New, less limiting classifications are forced to be born.

If these bodies are seen and demand to signify, then they cannot be inserted into social discourse without considering new sorts of gender and sexual behavior. As

Chocrón states in the beginning of his play, *La máxima felicidad*, “[l]os puntos suspensivos son parte integral del texto” (4). The queer(ed) body is creating ellipses in modern, Western society. In the space of those ellipses can be found the expansion of gender and sexual classifications and categories; thus we begin to understand that there is no absolute man or woman (Sullivan 100). Just as there are multiple variations of the possible characterizations of the *locas* in Cuban society (Arenas, *Antes que anochezca* 103-04), there are many alternatives in the possibilities of all bodies, hetero and queer alike.

VI. The Challenge of the Queer(ed) Body

Heteronormativity has sought to deny this multiplicity of gender and sexual object choices. Case speaks of the idea that, in some instances, society refuses to recognize identities that are originated differently from the norms by its marginalized members and seeks to allow only those identities that are received, i.e. in reality, those that have been normativized as receivable, or possible. The latter mimic the identities permitted by heterosexist dictates. That is to say that queer identities are disallowed: furthermore, any queer being must assimilate his/her gender and sexuality choices to the masculine/feminine and hetero/homosexual binaries readily available. However, the mimicking of these characteristics serves to disrupt the cultural referents that have been determined traditionally (Case 94). An example of how normative culture exercises its resolve to ignore the queer in society is seen at the beginning of Bellatin’s *Flores*, where the doctor who examines the Nobel Prize winner as a child ignores his prosthetic arm:

Recuerdo cuando acudí donde un anciano y reputado médico homeópata.
Me llevó mi padre, yo era un niño. En ese tiempo ya usaba una mano ortopédica.

El médico la asió para tomarme el pulso. Yo estaba tan intimidado que no hice nada para sacarlo de su error. El honorable médico atenazó con fuerza la muñeca de plástico. Pese a todo, en ningún momento me dio por muerto. Al contrario, mientras iba contando las supuestas pulsaciones le dictaba en voz alta a su ayudante la receta que curaría todos mis males. (7)

Not only does this doctor, representative of the heteronorm, ignore the narrator's disability, he also is sure of how to cure all the abnormalities that the narrator may have. Nevertheless, as we progress in this novel, we learn that all of the multiple narrators are somehow deformed and that they insinuate themselves into the cultures around them to such an extent that our understanding of subjectivity formation begins to evolve radically. The reader must accept the potentiality of these queer characters in order to hope to understand the novel. The characters become potent signs that challenge the heteronorm; in reality, they challenge all of normativity.

But hetero-hegemony continues to seek to stamp out queerness. In Arenas's normativizing, Cuban society, laws were promulgated that forbade the appearance of being homosexual (Brown 258) under Castro. As Arenas himself writes, "Toda dictadura es casta y antivital; toda manifestación de vida es en sí un enemigo de cualquier régimen dogmático" (*Antes que anocheza* 119). In his autobiography, Arenas challenges closed, hermetic societies by affirming his own queerness. Mignolo describes this struggle against hegemony as the fight merely to be, rather than to be in the way that the power structure seeks to impose (10). In his novels, Arenas creates a level of flamboyance that is antithetical to any laws banning such behavior. We perceive the queer body perform itself and become significant. We see it challenging heteronormativity, and we realize that there are cracks in the heteronorm that offer up spaces in which queer flamboyance, or queer stolidity, may take root and continue to challenge normative culture. Phelan has

said that any representation of homosexuality is okay in modern, Western culture if it is linked to disease (88), but Arenas's homosexuals are free-wheeling, open, and challenging.

Although the queer characters in the works of Bellatin may be linked to deformity, disease, and disability, their bodies scream a loud and clear challenge to society that perhaps the deformed, diseased, and disabled are more representative of the norm than are normativized characteristics. Thus, these infirm queers threaten normativity.

Shildrik notes that to perceive disability and queerness together is dangerous to heterosexism in that such a perception unsettles the normative constraints that have tried to rigidly limit sexuality (128). Thus, in queer writing and queer interpretation, we see queer(ed) bodies that define themselves and defy the norm. By doing so, they become a clear challenge to heteronormative society and weaken, or destabilize, the binaries that have been used to limit society's gender and sexual object choices. Queer bodies' performances of queer gender and queer sexuality are a protest against the forces that seek to constrain and control them. Arenas notes that this is the case in Castro's dictatorial Cuba: "[C]omo una protesta contra el régimen, las prácticas homosexuales empezaron a proliferar cada vez con mayor desenfado" (*Antes que anochezca* 132-33).

It is the queer bodies engaged in these acts that matter. They demand that one look to the body and its materiality in order to understand queer significance (Nigianni 3). Through performance, the queer(ed) body actually generates its own meaning and inserts itself into modern, Western society in order to challenge the previous power structures that have held sway over matters of gender and sexuality. The

queer(ed) body itself is a space of fresh possibility, where original gender and sexual histories complete with new significance can be written. As the *sheika* (a high priest in Islam and, in this case, surprisingly, female) in Bellatin's *Vidrio* notes, "Cada ser humano es una transcripción del ser, por esa razón es potencialmente perfecto" (109). Each body in a social construct; even the queer(ed) body is potentially perfect and meaningful.

Space

The queer(ed) body occupies space similarly to the way actors inhabit space on the stage. Just as actors can (re)create life as we know it, expect it, or dream it to be in divergent stage settings, so can queer(ed) bodies dwell in, perform themselves, and signify differently in a multitude of social spaces. Colebrook has written that theater is not really about the presentation of plots, characters, or desires; rather, it is a form, which relies on the use of space, to empower our shared past, our communal history (22). However, Western society's historical space (with, for example, exceptions such as in ancient Greece) usually has excluded the possibility of queer(ed) bodies engaging in (re)presentational acts in it. Therefore, queer writings and commentaries seek to undermine heteronormative and heterosexist control over the presentation and interpretation of past events and, then, to re-imagine and rewrite them. Chocrón has implicated the freedom that unchaining the power of times past has given him in his writing: "Venezuela es un país que no tiene pasado. El pasado es el de ayer y se acabó anoche" (quoted in Vestrini 19). In this context, the past is constantly changing as the future comes to be the present. In that sense, the past is changed into a different entity with the end of each day.

I. Queerness in the Historical Record

Queer(ed) bodies seek similarly to put an end to historical space as tradition has created it. These bodies look to and for a yesterday that may be revamped to challenge the acceptance of the denial of queer embodiment and significance. They look to

perform their meaning in newly envisioned, historical places that are actually being created presently, partly through the insistence of the modern, queer(ed) body itself that it has existed and signified in all types of locations and sites contained within the shared chronicle of modern, Western society. The modern, queer(ed) body is now eradicating the false, antique space in which its presence was rejected and is demanding acknowledgement in a reworking of historical places. At the same time, it claims a role in the unfolding chronology that stems from present enactments and proclamations of queer(ed) bodies and pushes their meanings both forward and backward in time to (re)create past and future, queer significance. The queer(ed) body exacts the right to name itself.

Like the children of an autocratic father in the third section of Bellatin's *El gran vidrio*, the queer(ed) body searches for a way to defy the naming power of the father who has, by virtue of the defining of his children, constrained their possibilities. The narrator, one of the children, says of her brothers that the father "[a] uno lo bautizó como constructor y al otro como empleado de la compañía de aviación" (155). And that is how the brothers now identify themselves. The narrator understands this authoritarian control as painful and limiting. She refuses to see herself as only the "grácil marioneta popular" of her father (154). She indicates that the father's control over his children, like the heteronormative past's control over its queer constituents, causes suffering for the whole family because it disallows the individual family members the power to name themselves. This leads to no one in the family being able to realize his/her potential (155-56). Thus, the modern queer(ed) body seeks an alteration of historical perception that will include it on its own terms; it seeks the right to name itself, to present itself as it

comprehends itself, not as it has been previously circumscribed.

In writing about gays and the Cuban revolution, Ocasio says that oppression of gays by their home country is responsible for death and exile (“Gays and the Cuban Revolution” 94-95). The queer(ed) body often has been destroyed or denied by its home societies, and now it intends to recreate the false history that has repudiated it and to open up new spaces, in addition to the newly reconstructed historical ones that embrace it. In *El portero*, the animals, as representatives of the queer(ed) body, declare that “intentaremos buscar una solución ... ‘una salida’, o ‘una puerta.’ Una puerta ... para nosotros. No para ellos ... que no la necesitan porque ni siquiera se han percatado de que están presos” (Arenas 155). The opening(s) that the queer(ed) body is making manifest in our collective record and its performance of itself in current, social spaces can benefit all of modern, Western society. When the queer(ed) body creates for itself an exit from the darkness where it has been chained and a doorway, or entry, into communal time, even those who have been blind to the constraints of heteronormativity may wake up and discover they have lived in servitude to a brand of heterosexism that has limited their potential. The queer(ed) body, in this way, can become representative of everyman, because it is symbolic of the possibilities that have been rejected in heteronormativized, historical space, and it is representative of future possibilities undreamed of heretofore by some.

The traditional rejection of queer bodies is emblematic of the painful erasures that have occurred and continue to occur in Western, cultural memory (Davy 59). Many of these erasures have been intentional so as to deny queers any place in normative society. If a queer body has demanded recognition, despite the heterosexist insistence on its

expurgation, then heteronormativity has sought to discount and/or silence any impact that body may have had; the tightly controlled social milieu has already preordained that gender choices not consistent with biological sex and same-sex sexual attraction will not be recognized because they are inconsistent with heterosexist views that have ordered the gender and sexuality dichotomies. In his autobiography, Arenas notes the destruction of queer lives by the Castro dictatorship, when he speaks of those youths who were caught practicing homosexual acts in a “machista” society, here in an encampment for instilling the appreciation for and dedication to the Revolution:

Los muchachos que eran sorprendidos en esos actos [homosexuales] tenían que desfilar con sus camas y todas sus pertenencias rumbo al almacén, donde, por orden de la dirección, tenían que devolverlo todo; los demás compañeros debían salir de sus albergues, tirarle[s] piedras y caerle[s] a golpes. Era una expulsión siniestra, por cuanto conllevaba también un expediente que perseguiría a esa persona durante toda su vida y le impediría estudiar en otra escuela del Estado ... y el Estado ya empezaba a controlarlo todo. (*Antes que anochezca* 71-72)

But, notably, within the power structure created by the State to further its intent to deny queers access to any space for development of anti-*machista* traits, the queers themselves began exploiting state-controlled, heteronormative space in order to subvert it, in order to open up areas within the heterosexist, revolutionary society that sought to expunge them, and in these places queer elements were introduced into that very anti-homosexual society. According to Arenas, encampments, such as the one previously described, served to open him and others up to homosexual possibilities that previously were explicitly denied by the state and that, by fearful custom, had been self-denied (71).

Nevertheless, Arenas also notes the difficulty that queers always face in inserting themselves, as meaningful social entities, into heteronormatively authoritative cultures. In *El portero*, the *paloma torcaza*, one representative of a subjugated class redolent of

queer experience in heteronormativity, notes: “El tiempo y el cautiverio me han hecho perder destreza en todos mis músculos, ligereza en el vuelo, percepción en la vista, astucia para burlar la escopeta o la trampa y tal vez hasta constancia para buscarme por mí misma el sustento” (163). Likewise, current notions of the historical record have worked against queers in such a way as to weaken queer entities to the point that they have not always been able to speak for or on behalf of themselves. Queers have often been forced into strict conformity with normative, cultural perceptions, which has weakened queer embodiments as historical possibilities in the same way that the dove’s captivity has undermined its ability to fend for itself.

Therefore, like the animals in *El portero*, queer(ed) bodies are looking to create a space where they can self-identify and have an impact in the structure of a socio-cultural unit that has heretofore demanded strict adherence to the gender and sexual object choice dichotomies. The latter have striven for the denial of queer existence. The state, in its role as eradicator in these highly dichotomized, heterosexist societies, has become “[u]na casa de sordos.... Y como buenos sordos, cada quien oye lo que cada quien quiere oír” (Chocrón, *La máxima felicidad* 21). Therefore, queer theory, writing, and criticism sets out to dig out spots in which the queer(ed) body can signify, can have meaning, in a present that has recreated historic tendencies of queer disavowal into admissions that the queer body has been ever present. These studies and writings endeavor to make the *sordos* hear beyond what they choose to hear.

One way of opening the ears of the *sordos* is precisely through a revamping of known history. Cacheiro points out that Arenas’s novels are doing this because, in their attempts to escape history, they are becoming part of it, since the narrative structures

themselves become part of our communal understanding (792). Arenas's novels often infect history queerly by subverting it, as he did in *El color del verano* by rewriting his island's history, as well as by redefining well-known, historical characters as drag queens and *locas*. He also recreated Cuba's past in the "Viaje a La Habana" section of the novel by the same name. Therein the father's longed-for queer past becomes his son's future. Furthermore, in his autobiography, Arenas lays out the homosexual terrain that Cuba was never able to stamp out no matter how hard its authoritarian government tried to do so.

The insistence by queers that they are part of historical fact and that, as such, they are an inescapable part of the socio-cultural saga can be realized through a queer reading of the "Amapolas" chapter of Bellatin's *Flores*. One of this novel's narrators speaks of how common congenital deformities have produced terror in the population. However, "hubo una pronta resignación y, una vez que fueron detectadas las características de las deformaciones en todos sus aspectos, se comenzó a tratar a las criaturas como si nada hubiera sucedido" (29). Likewise, the "deformity" that heteronormative societies have decreed to be part of the queer experience can turn out to be neutralized by queer writings and readings entering into the record of modern, Western culture's shared past. Thus, historical rewriting allows for the negation that queerness is truly queer by showing that it has been one of the building blocks of historical facts, even though the circumstance of queerness itself has previously remained hidden. The depiction of queerness as of no real consequence, as if nothing ever had happened to mark queerness, can begin the process of breaking down the traditional, confining dichotomies that have constrained gender and sexual object choice. Queerness inserted into history through narrative structures becomes part of that history, thereby

exposing the intrinsic unreliability, indeed the falsity, of the gender dichotomies.

Ahmed has indicated that history is comprised of lines “drawn in advance” which are then followed into the present (16). These lines are maintained and reinforced by the heterosexist power structure that has designed, and demanded adherence to, the fraudulent dichotomies that control gender and sexual object choice. The oppositions in those categories have been used to negate queer possibility. That this power structure is at work in authoritarian societies becomes manifest in *Antes que anocheza*. Arenas writes: [C]omenzó el *parametrage*, es decir cada escritor, cada artista, cada dramaturgo homosexual, recibía un telegrama en el que se le decía que no reunía los parámetros políticos y morales para desempeñar el cargo que ocupaba y, por tanto, era dejado sin empleo o se le ofertaba otro en un campo de trabajos forzados” (164). The Cuban revolution’s heteronormative bent was determined to reject any queer inclusion; in order to achieve that goal it attempted to erase queer contributions to culture.

Like the unintelligibility of the *hombre inmóvil* in Bellatin’s *Perros héroes*, it has traditionally been deemed that queers speak some other language, one not understood by heteronormativity. In *Perros héroes*, the *Central de Informaciones* is the repository of all cultural knowledge, but that repository cannot include queerness because the rules governing it forbid it from having the ability to translate information that might come from damaged individuals, such as the *hombre inmóvil* or queers. Traditionally, queers have not been envisioned as capable of being understood by a rightly heterosexual person. We see this precept in action in *Perros héroes* when the *hombre inmóvil* attempts to contact the *Central de Informaciones*. The novel’s narrator states: “[A] pesar de establecerse la comunicación la llamada no llega a buen término. La Central de

Informaciones da por finalizado el contacto antes de que el hombre inmóvil pueda pronunciar la segunda vocal” (31). The *hombre inmóvil* and cultural knowledge are unable to interact because the *hombre inmóvil*’s queerness, his inability to communicate with those considered “whole,” has erected a barrier to his ability to access the information supposedly available to everyone in society. His disability, like being queer, relegates him to a space outside of that which heteronormative society deems to be the site of all cultural knowledge. Therefore, the *hombre inmóvil* and queers, in general, can only be understood as beings that are ex-centric, extra-social, set apart.

Historical knowledge can be rearranged. It can be changed. In the Cuba of Eva and Ricardo in Arenas’s “Que trine Eva,” heterosexist historical education may be seen to be epitomized by the furniture of *mamá*, which Eva and Ricardo sell to create ever more flamboyant costumes (*Viaje a La Habana* 28). The traditions guarded by *mamá*’s generation are being exchanged for the accoutrement of attention-getting pageantry by Eva and Ricardo. They are changing history by re-imagining its possibilities.

History is really nothing other than the memory shared by individuals of any given culture. Ahmed notes that any human orientation is the aligning of a body in space and that memory is the configuration of the body in space and through time (7). Of course, traditionally, the accepted orientation has been heterosexual, and the enforcement of heterosexist gender and sexual object choice norms has disavowed the homosexual, or otherwise queer body. We can begin to understand how the erasure of queerness may have been achieved in the first section of Bellatin’s *El gran vidrio*. In it, the narrator states, “De las mujeres mostradoras de genitales se recuerdan muchos detalles, pero de sus hijos exhibidos se ignora todo. Luego supe que los mataban sin piedad” (17).

Heterosexual parents proudly show off their heterosexual children's heterosexuality. However, if that sexuality proves not to be absolute, it, and the child as well, is stamped out.

The insertion of the queer body into the historical timeline disrupts the flow of history and causes a questioning of past realities. In his autobiography, Arenas points out how the false history created by heteronormativity restricted and curtailed his gender and sexuality development when he speaks of his youth: “[S]eguía empecinado en mi absurdo machismo.... Yo entonces era muy macho; trataba de serlo y, aunque a veces tenía relaciones platónicas con otros muchachos, eran relaciones varoniles, relaciones de fuerza; simulacros de lucha y juegos de manos” (75). Arenas's *machismo* was necessitated by the cultural belief that queers are penetrated and that, therefore, they are undesirable in their weakness: as was noted previously herein, “[T]emplarse a otro joven no era signo de homosexualidad; el maricón era el templado” (74).

As Ahmed observes, what bodies tend to do are historical effects (56). That is, they perform as history allows them to perform. Therefore, in Arenas's past, homosexuality was not culturally tolerated and could not be performed acceptably because the penetration of the *maricón* signaled his unworthiness. However, *Antes que anochezca*, by its very existence, changes the precedent of which Arenas speaks by belying the reality customarily asserted by the sociocultural power center. This biography is almost orgiastic in its depiction of queer sex acts in a past that had formerly required the renunciation of any queerness in sexual activity. This saturnalia of queerness questions the power structure's repudiation of same sex relations and, by doing so, highlights the social façade which had previously been erected and which has

attempted to hide queerness. *Antes que anochezca* changes our concept of historical fact, and queerness seeps into its chronology.

Like feminism, queer theory springs, in part, from an acute mindfulness of the exclusion of queer possibility from the set of human potential (Dolan 3). This prohibition evokes the need for queerness to seep into historical notions of human behavior because, even though denied, queerness with respect to gender and sexual object choice speaks in and from many individuals in modern society and in our collective yesteryear. To make heard that which was silent, there is a need for queerness to be discovered in times gone by. Otherwise, queers become shadow figures, exiled to social margins and never fully participatory in social interaction. They are like Ismael in Arenas's "Viaje a La Habana." They live in a world that "nunca será su mundo, que no le[s] pertenec[e], y...[es] el único sitio donde, como una[s] sombra[s], podría[n] seguir existiendo" (*Viaje a La Habana* 136). In order to circumvent this life in the shadows, queers presently seek a "sitio donde, al margen de tantas calamidades, podamos ser nosotros mismos" (Arenas, *Antes que anochezca* 171-72). It is sought to create a space that will be cognizant of queer possibility in order to open up places heretofore foreclosed due to the false, heteronormative constructs, that have up to now been imposed on human existence with respect to social representations of gender and sexuality.

Once the notion of queerness becomes part of historical fact, the possibilities of queer performance and performativity come into being. As Solomon has noted, both gender and theater are auto-mimetic; the same can be said for sexual object choice and theater as well (13). Because of the human ability to emulate, the art of theater is possible. In much the same fashion, our inability to replicate queer gender and sexual

characteristics has, in the past, restricted gender and sexual interpretations to those approved and countenanced by the heteronormative dichotomies. But with the inclusion of queer gender representations and sexual object choices within culture and society, queer gender and sexual traits can begin to be modeled, despite the intent of heterosexuals to keep them quashed. Chocrón has noted such imitative potential and the effect that it has had on his work. He has suggested that, when one lives surrounded by options that feel almost real, they actually can be converted into reality (quoted by Vestrini 19). Thus, if queer gender and sexual object choice portrayals are inserted into our communal past, we can take them and make them present reality.

II. Queer Invisibility

With some exceptions, traditionally, queer spaces and queer bodies have been invisible, i.e. they have not signified in heteronormativity. But that is certainly not to say that they have not existed. As long as queers could hold the longings for queer places and figures in their dreams, these things have had a type of intangible existence, and their insertion into the common, Western history (with some scant examples of exceptions as mentioned before with respect to ancient Greece) merely makes concrete the heretofore ephemeral. Thus, as queer gender and sexual object choice representations are performed, queer bodies and queer spaces are (re)called into the open and given substance. At the same time, these representations are theatrical in nature, and queers are emulating a newly (re)created past. As also is the case with theater, such emulation is a reflection of who we are as a socio-cultural group, but it also reflects individual solitude and aloneness (Chocrón, *Tendencias* 55)—the latter are often characteristic of queer lives.

Previously, the queer individual has been denied social areas in which to be and has been forced to characterize him/herself according to the dictates prevalent in heteronormativity. Therefore, there has been a missing space into which the possibilities of queer representations have been sucked, as if into a vacuum, and sealed away from heteronormative image projection. Nevertheless, the vacuum has not been absolute, and fragments of queer portrayal have seeped into queer consciousness, causing the questioning of the status quo by both queers and those others in the heteronorm who have become disquieted by the conscious ignorance of queer existence.

This unease is seen clearly at work in “Que trine Eva,” the first section of Arenas’s *Viaje a La Habana*. Even at the height of Ricardo and Eva’s fashionista triumphs, Ricardo is constantly on the alert for the one person who is not taking notice of them, the one queer person out there who could make Ricardo resonate in a real locale that has heretofore been absent from his reach. Ricardo is instinctively aware of an elusive something which exists in his milieu, but from which he has consistently been denied: he intuits that there is some phenomenon that really does exist but which he cannot name, because he does not have the necessary words. His certainty infects Eva as well. Both become fraught in their quest for that one factor that will make Ricardo whole. Eventually, that one item is found. It is a queer representation of humanity in which Ricardo can find himself.

He can naturally copy the queerness exhibited by the gay man whom he “[presentía] que no nos estaba mirando” (24). His ability to mirror allows Ricardo to find the nexus which connects the world of his interior being to the normative world in which he has been obliged to live. He had not been consciously on the lookout for queerness

before he found it because queer performance was extraneous to the social existence which he had learned as “acceptable.” But the exhibition of solely heteronormative gender and sexual constraints are in many ways unconnected to gay identity. Thus, Ricardo had been seeking a queer space, even though he had been unaware of the specific nature of that for which he had been searching. However, Arenas’s written insertion into literary history of Ricardo’s meeting of the man who will become his gay lover helps open up queer space that will aid in delivering queers from the invisibility decreed by heteronormativity.

This is just one instance via which we can see that, even in the denial of their possibility by heterosexist society, queer fantasies exist; these are the building blocks through which a sense of self may be fashioned (Sullivan 64). This self-image, when constructed from queer desire, has traditionally had no place in which to arise naturally out of the heteronormatively determined dualities of existence. But with the opening up of queer spaces, new representations of identity become possible.

Much of Chocrón’s theatrical work is redolent with the creation and (re)presentation of such sites. For example, in *La máxima felicidad*, Pablo, the originator of a decidedly unconventional living, loving arrangement says:

Por los siglos de los siglos la pareja ha sido un equilibrio erróneo. Surgió para imitar torpemente la aparente dualidad del universo. ¡Aparente! ¡Día y noche, frío y calor, blanco y negro! Pero más rico que estos pares es cuando existe una situación intermedia entre los dos, cuando entre el frío y el calor hay también un clima templado, cuando entre blanco y negro hay gris, cuando entre día y noche hay crepúsculo. Entonces tenemos tres factores que juegan entre sí, que producen mayores tensiones, que ofrecen mayores posibilidades de variedad. (49-50)

From this speech it becomes amply clear that Pablo is trying to break free of the dualities that have governed the possibilities of heteronormativity. He has consciously created a

new space within his dually oriented society in which the couplings of three individuals point out greater possibilities of interaction, connection, support, sexual experimentation and being than those endorsed by the dual dichotomies that normally control gender performance and sexual object choice selection.

In much the same way, queer spaces created within the heteronorm amplify human possibilities. Rather than license the continual perpetuation of the intentional disappearance of queerness, these queer spaces break down the gender and sexuality oppositions previously decreed, and very strictly adhered to by modern, Western social constructs. They call into question the binaries that have excluded and denied queerness, that have decreed queer invisibility, and they countenance, indeed necessitate, the expansion of individual potential.

Phelan writes that there is a space left after a body has disappeared (after a person has died, for instance) and that the outline of those bodies still exists for the ones who have lived through the disappearance; that is to say that there is a space for those bodies even in their absence, because those left behind still long to touch them (3). In much the same way, despite a social denial of queerness, the outline of queer corporeality exists in certain locations within the heteronorm because queerness longs for the queer bodies that have been intentionally made to disappear. Such spaces may be evanescent or ephemeral, but they become more and more real as queer writing and queer theory, in conjunction with the determination of queer bodies themselves to signify, aim to delineate definitively queer space and, then, to incorporate it into the already accepted social locales in which the performances of daily life are carried out.

This is seen happening in Chocrón's *Mesopotamia* when Ismael begins to enter

into the previously closed space occupied by the others in the play. The passing away of one of the others provides an opening for a new entity to come into the household, similar to the way that the lessening of strict normativity highlights the need for new means of individual expression (Chocrón 219). The infiltration of queerness into the heteronorm sparks the process of transforming what is queer into what is customary and of making sure that it is accepted on its own terms.

This happens because bodies are affected by the spaces they find themselves in (Ahmed 53). For example, Leo and Perla, in *La máxima felicidad*, discover that they must compare themselves to the others who have previously shared the ideal of the ménage a trois with Pablo, who has deemed it necessary for a fuller expression of the possibilities of human interaction (Chocrón 31). The past bodies which Pablo has known now affect Leo and Perla because the latter are filling the replicate of the space once occupied by those others. Therefore, past queerness affects bodies and their representations, or performances, in the present. The spaces infected with queer bodies are capable of being queer(ed). These newly queered bodies and spaces become interdependent, so that queers and queerness grow to be a part of socio-cultural interactions and human relationships.

Another example of historical invisibility has been discussed by Foster, who has spoken of a “homoerotic silence” in Latin America. He believes that giving voice to queerness is one way to challenge what has previously been queer silence and to make visible the heretofore unseen (“Homoerotic Diaspora” 185). But now Latin American writings such as those by Arenas, Bellatin, and Chocrón, who follow in the tradition of a few earlier writers such as José Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy, deny queer invisibility

and avidly strive to tear down the curtains behind which homoeroticism has been veiled. Once, Hispanic American queerness, like queerness in general in Western society, along with queer bodies, were nothing other than “cuerpos en trance de desaparición” (Bellatin, *Salón de belleza* 26). The very fact that Bellatin writes these queer, disappearing bodies into Latin American tradition, as did, for example, Sarduy with his androgynes, homosexuals, transvestites, and drag queens, calls them and queer space out from the shadows and shines the light of day on them so that rather than depending on foreign influences to speak to homoeroticism in Latin America, Hispanic queerness is speaking on its own behalf and, indeed, throughout the modern, Western socio-cultural world.

Another such example is found in the beginning of “Que trine Eva” when the title character speaks/writes to an absent Ricardo, saying: “por ti es por quien tejo ... aunque tú no vas a ver este tejido” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 11). Contrarily, by the end of this first installment in the novel, we know that Ricardo is now knitting a new life for himself, one in which queerness speaks of itself and for itself. Heterosexist raiment will no longer cover his queerness. A new, queer Ricardo has stepped forth from invisibility. He will not have to live in the shadows so that no one is witness to his life. Rather, he very publicly runs away with his new lover, the one who refused to gaze on heterosexist pageantry (52-53). Ricardo and his lover open up fresh, queer environs, which can now be seen not only by queers, but also is visible to and in heteronormativity.

Previously, the heteronorm has demanded queer silence and inconspicuousness, but we can resort back to the narrator’s statement previously mentioned from the first *autobiografía* in Bellatin’s *El gran vidrio* for an example of the queer(ed) body casting off its invisibility: “No podía permitir que la boca de mi madre fuera más importante que

el espectáculo que mis testículos son capaces de ofrecer” (12). The narrator’s very visible testicles are emblematic of the potential for visibility of queer sexuality, and those testicles, along with queer gender and sexual object choice, seek to (re)define themselves and insert themselves into newly available spaces that do not hide or refuse to recognize queer existence and that challenge the power of heteronormativity.

Another type of invisibility that has resulted historically is that which has been caused by the existence of “the closet.” The gay closet has endured because of the power of the heteronorm to inflict scare tactics on queers. The closet is where almost all queers have been able to hide their queerness. Because most people have been raised in heteronormativity, they have learned how to act according to heterosexist dictates. Queers have learned to present gender and hide sexual object choice because, since early childhood, books, films, television, social organizations, and almost countless other sources have indoctrinated us with the concept that heterosexualized gender and sexual object choices must be displayed in order to “pass” and in order to avoid the social and legal punishments that traditionally have been visited upon queers who strayed from the closet’s confines.

Even though closeted space has provided invisibility, that does not necessarily signify that queer space itself has always been unavailable. In fact, this hidden queer space is huge, like a black hole in the midst of heteronormativity, which has sucked in queers and asked us to accept marginalization in order that we may express our queer essences apart from the normative rules which govern the structures that limit the possibilities of our lives. In an analysis of Arenas’s *El portero*, Cacheiro explains that the marginalized (animals in the novel and queers in reality) are relegated to a

claustrophobic space (such as the closet) because the rich and powerful (heterosexists) take up so much available space. The claustrophobia in that tightly enclosed space leads to the formation of a vanguard for revolution (762). Additionally, the closet is bereft of hope; it offers no options for living self-actualized lives. It is a space in which queers live “atento[s] a la más mínima señal, sabiendo que aún cuando lo consiguiera[n] ... nada iba a cambiar, nada iba a resolver, ninguna paz, ninguna felicidad o reposo iba a encontrar” (Arenas, *Arturo* 31-32).

Nevertheless, during our sojourns within the confines of the closet, queers have learned that it is shared space, that we are not alone, and we have further discovered that the rigid boundaries believed to be governing a confining space can be fluid (Desert 17), i.e. that we can easily slide into and out of the hidden space and interact in it and in heteronormative space, as well. We have also gathered that, in certain circumstances, such as in camp productions and in mockery, we are, in fact, able to perform our closeted behavior on the stage within heteronormativity. But as more and more queers take their in-the-closet beings and perform themselves in non-closeted space, those behaviors become increasingly habitual in social spaces shared with non-queers.

Heteronormativity does fight against these performances, largely because it assumes that queers can stay in the closet, invisible, and somehow gain rights impalpably (Bennett 14). But, as in the case of Arturo, who “de tanto hacerse presente llega a ser ignorado” (Arenas, *Arturo* 47), queer performance comes to be less and less marked; over time and with repetition, it begins to be considered not as uncommon and unacceptable as normative society once believed it to be. Once queerness is no longer considered exceptional, due to recurrent acts of self-presentation, it becomes capable of

breaking through the established dichotomies of gendered and sexual behaviors.

Olivares believes that much of the tension in *Viaje a La Habana*, for instance, is between hiding (in the closet) and revealing information (about the closet to heteronormativity) (286), but as Trini, in *Mesopotamia* states, “Cualquier lugar donde uno vive es una celda” (Chocrón 204). However, displaying queerness within the heteronorm itself explodes the impediments separating closeted space from normative space at the same time that it causes the implosion of the barriers erected by heteronormativity to keep queerness out of normativized society. The cells mentioned by Trini cease to be because they can no longer be kept systematically hermetic. The seals are broken, and the former dichotomies no longer serve to either identify or classify gender performance or sexual object preference.

III. Queers as Exiles/Queer Textuality

As mentioned previously, one method by which queerness becomes visible, causing heteronormative dichotomies to malfunction, is the process of coming out, or discovering a sense of one's queer self. It has been contended that this process requires 1) some amount of privacy from those who think they know one in order to explore one's queer self, 2) a community that will claim the queer self, and 3) a space to express queerness without fear of retribution (Gray 5). In many ways, queer theory and analysis and queer writing can provide that privacy, such a community, and that kind of space. Queer textuality opens a space into which once closeted queers may escape and offers clues of how to deal with being queer despite heteronormative dictates.

However, before the option of coming out became available, an act which has assisted in the shattering of the cells that required the social invisibility of queerness,

queers had been forced into exile within the very communities in which they had lived. This forced exile is still very prevalent in contemporary, Western society, despite some political advances with respect to queer rights.¹⁴ As Davy notes, community is the desire for mutual understanding and group identification and loyalty. Therefore striving for commonality all too easily implicates the exclusion of those who do not conform (92). Queers, obviously, by the very fact of being “queer,” do not fit in.

In fact, the strong desire to seek and reinforce commonly held beliefs with respect to human behavior, particularly with respect to accepted gender performances and sexual object choices, has sometimes led to the “expulsion” of homosexuals by heterosexuals. This expulsion has taken place in the legal, administrative, physical, and definitional levels of social organization and has enforced the desire to present oneself publicly as heterosexual (Turner 164). The expulsion of queers on all of these levels has reinforced many queers’ desire to remain closeted. In a society filled with closed-off spaces in which social actors cannot act queerly, many queers fear self-expression because they believe it can only serve to publicly alienate them.

This notion is seen at work in Chocrón’s *Mesopotamia* when Hugo hypothesizes that one thing that keeps individuals from expressing difference is the fear of oneself, the fear of one’s differences (217). Nevertheless, in this play, we are offered a view of how people can leave the life they know, where they may have hidden many facets of their beings from others, and join non-judgmental, communal entities that proffer a sense of peace. In many queer writings also can be found the pursuit of openings which will offer

¹⁴ One of the points that Meruane makes in her *Viajes Virales* is that AIDS, because of its association with queerness (male homosexuality), has caused many to become actual exiles from Hispanic America in search of same-sex sexual object choice acceptance in less machista societies or in societies where there exist more accessible queer spaces.

relief from self-fear and self-denial, at the same time that they may allow more freedom for queer self-expression.

In Arenas's *El portero*, for example, the wasp in the second half of that novel speaks to and on behalf of the animals, i.e. the downtrodden, the queers, who were kept isolated and in subjugation by the all-powerful heteronorm presented in the first part of the novel. The wasp offers up as one reason for revolution the following: “[B]usquemos el sitio donde, al margen de tantas calamidades, podamos ser nosotros mismos” (170-71). It is presumed, that in that site, queerness can be freely explored and expressed, and the possibility of the opening up of such a locale, despite the deterring influence of the powerful elite highlighted in the first part of the novel, offers hope for queer reclamation of social space and for loosening the grip that heteronormativity has maintained on the common definitions of “appropriate” gender and sexual behavior.

The works of Chocrón offer further explication of spatial permutations and how they have functioned with respect to a striving for queer expression. In *O.K.*, spaces in the first and second act appear to be exactly the same: the set is unchanged. Nevertheless, the second act occupies a very different emotional space than the first. This is due to the development of a queer dynamic, specifically, the burgeoning ménage à trois and its subsequent dissolution, as the interrelations of the three characters break up into separate and ever-changing interactions à deux. Even though the physical space remains consistent, the ways of filling that space, or interacting in it, change dramatically.

This type of spatial potential is also evidenced by Eva's words in Arenas's “Que trine Eva” when she reminisces on her relationship with Ricardo: “Siempre has tenido no se qué toque Ricardo, para ganarte la amistad de los muchachos. Pero si de algo estoy

segura ... es que siempre me fuiste fiel. Fiel hasta el fin del viaje” (*Viaje a La Habana* 36-37). But the trip did end and, with it, so did Ricardo’s faithfulness to the gender and sexual, behavioral requirements placed on him by the ruling, heterosexist regime wielding power at that time in Cuba. Ricardo escapes into another spatial dimension that he finds within the then very narrowly defined area of Cuban sexuality. He runs off with his same-sexed lover. Thus, queer textual space is capable of aiding in the (re)definition of gendered and sexual space.

Another example of queer textuality is available to us by the existence of the pamphlet of photographs that accompanies Bellatin’s *Perros héroes*. In it there is a photograph of a hawk sitting atop what appears to be a hamper for dirty clothes in a bathroom with an open, tiled shower stall clearly seen in the background. This room is certainly not a natural setting for a bird of prey, but the hawk, through the very act of its photography in the confines of the bathroom, becomes an occupant of that room. The hawk’s unnaturalness within the place in which it is photographed, in effect, queers the bathroom. Its presence changes the boundaries of potentiality for what has been considered appropriate for and to the use of an interior bathroom.

In much the same way, the photographic booklet queers the textual space that the book itself purports to inhabit. Because the photographs can be understood as integral to the text’s meaning, the novelistic space becomes queered. Likewise, the description of a hawk hunting in a bedroom within the section of *Perros héroes* that may be considered an image of what normative, textual space once looked like queers the notion of “bedroom” (72). That chamber becomes hybrid—a bedroom as we know it and, at the same time, the preserve of an animal of prey.

Similarly, it can be understood that queers and other exiles occupy the same sorts of physical spaces, in which they are not completely separated from the dominant power group but, nevertheless, are always made aware of their differences (Ríos Ávila 103). Therefore, the heteronormative spaces in which queers live are unnatural places for queer expression of gender and sexual object choice. The logic of heteronormative perceptions of gender and sexuality lead to the displacement of queers from their “homeland” and forces them into exile from it (Eng 13). This is very clear in the case of Arturo when, towards the end of the novel by the same name, he is faced with his own mother’s treachery. He:

descubrió con irrefutable claridad que quien ... encabezaba ... [la] tropa de soldados que, arma al pecho avanzaban ... hacia él ... no era uno de los tantos tenientes o subtenientes del campamento, iguales todos ... sino su madre ... enfurecida y vestida de militar quien, escopeta en mano, le gritaba maricón, ahora sí que no te me vas a escapar. (Arenas 90-91)

Even though Arturo may accept the enmity of the soldiers, who are expected to enforce the norms of heteronormativity, he is also obliged to face as well the rage and hatred of his own mother who considers him a despicable *maricón*, this from the one who propagated him and would normally be expected to care for him. Thus, he is alienated from and isolated within his “homeland.” Nevertheless, queer expressions of gender and sexuality seep into heteronormativity by virtue of queer presence, queering heteronormative space.

Even though the heteronormative universe, which lesbians and gays have found themselves occupying, has taught them a lot about filtering their individual lives for particular groups (Connors Jackman 121), these queer, sexual outlaws still may manage to find truer replicas of what may really be encoded in various signs in the straight

world. When they interpret those codes queerly within heterosexual space, heterosexism is weakened. At the opening of *La máxima felicidad*, for instance, the audience sees a double bed (“una cama matrimonial”). The reader or spectator may think: Aha! This play will be about a heterosexual couple. But next to the *cama matrimonial* is a single bed (Chocrón 15). Will there be a child in the play, perhaps? No, the program lists only three characters, two men and one woman, the youngest of whom is nineteen (11). Eventually, when all of the characters enter and interact, we, the audience, suffer an almost total break with respect to the worlds that we have been able to imagine. We learn that all three of the characters alternate, without regard to sex, in their use of the two beds, sharing the one and sleeping singly in the other, without regard to biological sex. By the end of the first act, what we at first have supposed to be a play invoking heterosexism is negated. We find it necessary to face the fact that the presumed heterosexual signs no longer signify completely heterosexually. The play’s world becomes ever more queer for the audience.

Additionally, Arenas has written in his autobiography that he “parecía condenado a vivir en [su] propio cuerpo lo que escribía” (*Antes que anochezca* 222). Thus, like the beds in *La máxima felicidad*, Arenas’s very body becomes a sign that no longer signifies a heterosexualized being. The writing of his autobiography throws the author’s queerness as a fact in the face of the heterosexist oligarchy, and the act of reading the biography opens up the reader, whether hetero or queer, to queer interpretations of the signs that the human body can represent.

Because this type of queer writing promulgates the understanding of queer interpretations of previously, and uniquely, heterosexualized signs, it fulfills one need

that the heretofore exiled, queer body has yearned for, its “repatriation” from exile to the dominant culture and the latter’s acknowledgement of the former’s inclusion as capable of having meaning within the context where the two cultures will have fused once repatriation is complete. This is a partial fulfillment of one of the goals that opens up and points out the queer places within heteronormative space (Desert 19). A queer testimonial, written to the narrator/character, Chocrón, who is purportedly a persona of the real author of the book being written about Mickey in *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, pointedly emphasizes this goal. The writer of the testimonial says: “Quiero que se enteren de que hay hombres de 35 años que llaman a sus amantes, hombres de 55, ‘papi, mi papi’. Y tú me preguntarás, ¿Por qué quiero que se enteren? ¿Únicamente por escandalizar? No, Chocróncito, quiero que se enteren porque es verdad” (27). The queer voice of the metafictional testifier speaks its queerness to the persona of the real author so that the narrator-author will disseminate queer truthfulness to the presumed heterosexuals that will read the novel, which is actually being written by a queer author.

In order to be heard from their place of exile, queer voices must speak aloud, and definitively, about who and what they represent and speak of the queer (re)interpretations of signs once rigidly maintained by heterosexual social constructs. These voices need to combat the fact that heterosexuality is silent, i.e. that it is unmarked in contemporary, Western culture, and show that if sexuality is culturally and historically defined, then heterosexuality is no more natural than any other sexuality construct (Sullivan 119). Arenas recognizes the difficulty of achieving this when, in his autobiography, he writes: “[l]a inmensa mayoría de la humanidad no nos entiende y no podemos tampoco pedirle que nos entienda ... aún cuando quisiera” (*Antes que anochezca* 330). He recognizes the

unwillingness of the powerful, heteronormative constructs to become porous enough to allow the entry of queer interpretations of common signs into the language of gender and sexuality. Despite this disinclination, however, Arenas's act of writing his autobiography and, in it, queering the very definition of the signs that the heteronorm expects to maintain as images of its own self, is part of a process of queers visibly occupying space within the heteronorm. Here, an opening becomes available for queer definition to take hold and be receptive to queer expressions of gender and sexuality.

As members of a Western, sociocultural unit, such an opening is vital for queers in that, under the control of heteronormativity, we have not had gender control within our grasp. Usually, Western society has been organized around the beliefs that there are only two genders (Clarke 41) and that biological sex is determinant of which gender any given individual has been allowed to (re)present. Sexuality has followed gender categorization, and, thus, sexual object choice has been predetermined, also based on biological sex and reproduction. This is yet another way that queers have been controlled by the societies in which they have found themselves, and they have been locked out of true self-expression. They have either been isolated or hidden, exiled but yet present. In the suicide letter that is published at the end of his autobiography, when he is dying of AIDS, Arenas notes the very real, human damage done by exile from one's home: "Los sufrimientos del exilio, las penas del destierro, la soledad y las enfermedades que haya podido contraer en el destierro seguramente no las hubiera sufrido de haber vivido libre" (*Antes que anochezca* 343).

The type of pain to which Arenas refers here results, in part, from an "unnatural," bodily orientation. Ahmed notes that gender is the way in which bodies get directed by

their actions over time (60). Since queer actions have often been denied their place in history, queer gender and, concomitantly, sexuality have not been capable of being expressed in the social environs in which queer bodies have found themselves. The narrator in *Arturo* mentions this exact type of exile when he refers to “una tradición, de una ley, que a él, a ellos, los excluía” (Arenas 27). In fact, queers have been explicitly denied participation in civic space. That gays cannot donate blood provides one example of this ban, and the denial of queer participation by virtue of being considered “unclean,” as was previously mentioned (Bennett 2), thus, becomes woven into the fabric of our national identity.

In the context of such a concept of national identity, bodies and their enactments and the locations in which they can act are circumscribed with respect to queer gender and the expression of sexuality because these human traits are rigidly controlled by the heteronormative power structure. Thus, very real pain ensues. Forbidding queer bodily expression, in turn, perverts the body not allowed to express itself and makes it ill psychosexually. In fact, it is noted in *Arturo* that queer performance within the confines of Cuba’s communist heteronorm¹⁵ also destroys the geo-political body that considers itself heterosexual: “éste no sólo no se conforma con desmoralizarse a sí mismo, sino que también nos desmoraliza a nosotros, al país, a la patria” (Arenas 27). But it is not queer representation that is damaging Western nations and homelands. Rather, it is the insisted upon perversion of queer bodily manifestation itself that has caused internal exile and the resultant damaging of specific bodies within a culture and the holding of those bodies as prisoners. Such bodies suffer and, because they are part of the wider social fabric, they cause distress in the larger entity itself, much

¹⁵ This mistreatment of queers also happens in other communist countries, as well.

as an infection in one's foot can spread up the leg and on into and throughout the body.

This poison ensures that homophobia, perhaps especially in Latin America, secures the internal and external exile of queer people, specifically of gay men and lesbians (Foster, "Homoerotic Diaspora" 184). The conditions of exile observed in the works of Arenas studied in this dissertation, such as *Arturo*, *El portero*, and *Viaje a La Habana*, clearly portray various types of exile and point out the resultant fragmented sense of self present in the queer body. Queer bodies can suffer homelessness, dislocation, and alienation both inside and outside of Cuba (Vickroy 118). With their exile, they may become ungrounded (116), unable to find means of expression or reveal themselves and, thus, unable to be. For example, in his exile in New York, in "Viaje a La Habana," Ismael has intentionally separated himself from every other resident of that city.

Even though the exiled doorman in *El portero* seeks the redemption of those around him, he essentially fails because he himself is living in exile and cannot serve as a conduit for or to understanding. Acting alone, he does not have the skillsets necessary to effect such massive change in an alien world (Prieto Toboada 175). Nevertheless, the *portero*, while keeping watch over a doorway, does have threshold experiences (Ortiz 46). Because these experiences do occur in the borderland between exile and the norm,¹⁶ his alienated state begins to have an impact on how the power structure's rules of socialization have forced him to live cut off from participation in society.

Thus, by its very presence in heteronormativity, even though it is often historically "invisible" in determinedly heteronormative cultures, the queer body begins

¹⁶ Mignolo points out that all subjugated people live in borderlands, and, thus, their forms of thought become borderland, rather than territorial (11). Anzálúa adds that borderland dwellers begin to exhibit characteristics of hybridity due to and through their "consciousness of the Borderlands (99).

to make inroads into the various, cultural spaces heretofore unavailable to it by living on the thresholds of those sectors and by imparting queer, entryway experiences into them. The access of queer bodies is forbidden to normativized space. They live in its borderlands, which they utilize transformatively, despite continually having to question, as does Ángela in Chocrón's *O.K.*, when she describes her feeling of alienation in the many places that she has visited. She has always asked herself: "¿Qué hago yo aquí? ¿Qué hago yo aquí?" (56). Nevertheless, she does encounter accepting, queer(ed) space which opens itself up to her in Mina and Franco's apartment. Like Ángela has done, queer bodies can enter into heteronormative space. They do so through the constant questioning of their roles in those areas accessible by them and also by examining the parts they may play in the acquiescence to their coerced alienation in those places. The borderlands have become unsealed enough for queer bodies to slip into them. They can perform their queer beings within heteronormativity, thereby queering spaces previously closed to the belief in the existence of queer bodies. These queer(ed) spaces then permit new (con)textual uses and interactions which should lead even further towards queer inclusion.

It has been noted that there are (con)texts that offer up an articulation of spaces available for transition (Angvik 39). These are spaces in which changes may be wrought so that the forms might have the capacity to hold queerness that has heretofore been excluded, implicitly or even explicitly. These areas are open to various interpretations. They are similar to the gaps previously alluded to in the play, *La máxima felicidad*: "Los puntos suspensivos son parte integral del texto" (Chocrón 11). The ellipses countenance the insertion of numerous prospects, perhaps very different from those imagined by the

heteronorm. When such openings become queer(ed), the power of the heteronorm to enforce its own rules wanes.

Because space is a commonly defined area occupied cognitively or physically (Desert 20), the shared definitions can become altered through (con)text. For example, in the very first section of his novel, *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, Chocrón emphasizes the nude body of Micky, just after an act of masturbation, describing it in a lascivious manner:

Podía verse en el espejo el cuello grueso, las anchas espaldas, los dos huesos que a los lados del cuello empezaban su pecho, y los pocos pelos que bajaban por todo el medio hasta el ombligo. El pecho ancho disminuía en tamaño a medida que se acercaba a la cintura estrecha. Los dos pezones eran redondos y rosados, como redondo y rosado pero cóncavo era el ombligo en el medio del estómago plano. Abrió el grifo ... y se lavó el estómago. Reclinando sus muslos contra el lavamanos, se echó agua por entre las piernas, jugando otra vez con su mano derecha. Cerró el grifo, se secó con una toalla frotándola por las dos piernas largas, musculosas y velludas. Volvió a mirarse en el espejo, sonrió y siguió mirándose sin sonreír ... allí parado en toda su espléndida desnudez.... (10-11)

This description of the male body is erotic. It is like descriptions that readers are accustomed to seeing when the female body is textually depicted, but this description, coming on the second page of the novel, signals that it is a very different type of text than that which its readers might expect. Thus, the common definitions with which we might normally approach the reading of any novel become skewed, or queered, by the inclusion of male body erotica in the opening of the novel.

Even if we choose, initially, to perceive this adoration of the male body as not of major significance, it certainly changes our conceptions of what might transpire within the covers of the novel, especially given that the story of Micky is not pornographic. Rather, at times, it is sensual, but the sensuousness revolves around the male body, not that of the female, which would be appropriate according to machista heteronormative,

cultural tenets. By presenting the male body as erotic, in contravention to heteronormative, literary expectations, the novelistic space of this text is queered. Perhaps, this is especially true given that the spectator (here, the reader “viewing” Micky’s body) is assumed to be white, heterosexual, and male, i.e. that he represents the primary image that serves as the point of departure for the dominant culture (Dolan 1).

Therefore queer(ed) texts, to a certain extent, may alienate many of their readers, those who are comfortable with and secure in the knowledge of the heteronormative, bodily standard. On the other hand, the vision of Micky’s body so erotically drawn in *Pájaro de mar por tierra* entices the heteronorm’s exiles into a dawning belief that they may be central to a text. The text queers itself and the space that it offers to its readers is queer(ed). Both of these facts work together to suggest new options for interpreting queer bodies.

A similar queering of space comes about early in Chocrón’s *La máxima felicidad*, when Pablo says, “[y]o no soy un viejo solo. Los tengo a ustedes dos ... (tocándole la barriga a Perla). A los tres” (29). The line begins with the scene firmly anchored in the heteronorm, a man touching the stomach of his woman and claiming her and her child. But then Pablo goes on to include Leo amongst his possessions, caressing him as he has Perla. Acting out a satirized role reversal, he claims the man in the same way that he claims the woman and child, in an act of (con)textual queerness. Also, it may be that the child is Leo’s, which once again implicates the intimacies all three have shared.

(Con)texts resembling these provide us with doors that serve to transport the non-queer reader into a queer new world. They are (con)texts that may function as symbolic entrances of the type over which the doorman in *El portero* maintains vigil. They serve

to point out queer differences, as Mateo does in *Mesopotamia* when, trying to explain the dissimilarities between him and the men with whom he cohabits and those outside of their home, he says: “[e]ntre los demás, hay gente como él y gente como nosotros” (Chocrón 215). In *El portero*, the doorman serves to connect those on one side of the door, so to speak, with those kept forcibly on the other side of the door. That is to say, he hopes to deliver the heteronormativized populace into the more fluid world of those whom, traditionally, heteronormativity has very determinedly kept apart.

The new world order visualized by the *portero* is presented as liberating because the types of social interactions permissible in it are more varied than those allowable under the direction of the dichotomized constructs of heteronormativity. The strictures on gender and sexuality performances can be seen as falling away in that the peculiarities of each particular animal, for all of whom the *portero* becomes a leader, defy the previous requirements of normalcy in the world of the privileged who set the standards of acceptable behavior by both animals and doormen.

Mesopotamia and *El portero*, both of which organize worlds in which heretofore unimagined social possibilities might become the norm, are opening up new, and queer(ed) space in which narration can break down the styles and tropes of heteronormativized literature. Rivera Garza has stated, “Narrar es estar habitado. Narrar produce una habitación. Un espacio. Un cuerpo” (15). The *habitaciones* produced may be insular, in that they stand alone and apart in such narrations as these, but they are inextricably interconnected, as they create a new body that reveals queerness.

Another example of queer(ed) context comes out of the works of Bellatin studied here. In each of them, every paragraph creates a “room” of its own, but if the reader

enters one room, s/he must continue throughout all of the others before the room first gone into can be fitted architecturally into one or more of many possible houses. Even though the “rooms” (the paragraphs) may be complete unto themselves, they lack coherence because they are frequently disordered. The reader needs to look at all of them together as a whole in order to begin to formulate his/her own narration that derives from the author’s narrative act. This type of fragmented unity begins to queer literary acceptations, and the reader, in traipsing from one “room” to another, begins to recognize the queerness that may be found within him/herself.

Prieto Taboada has stated that exile is the place of imagination, that there is no “home” in *El portero* or “Viaje a La Habana,” and that, in these works, there is no home in one’s own country or in the land of one’s exile; therefore the only home possible can uniquely be found in the realm of imagination (180, 184). But often readers, like Arturo in another of Arenas’s work, *Arturo, la estrella más brillante*, find out that the imagination’s images are often difficult to capture: “[A]llí estaba *él* [emphasis in the original],¹⁷ riéndose y desnudo.... Arturo trató de acercársele, de hablarle, de tocarlo, pero el muchacho se escapaba” (64). Nevertheless, Arturo manages to attain a sort of freedom of self through the images that he creates in his fantasy writing while exiled.

Thus, the readers of the works of Arenas, Bellatin, and Chocrón may begin to be able to grasp the potential for charge that may be harnessed by the imagination. They may even begin to collude in the creation of images specific to themselves as individual readers, given the (con)textual interrelationship of the readers’ realities and that of the

¹⁷ *Él* is the human, male object that will complete Arturo’s life. He is the object of Arturo’s sexual fantasies, as well as the free portrayer of the gender and sexual identities that have caused Arturo to be imprisoned. *Él* may also be understood as representative of Arturo himself, were the latter free from heteronormative dominion.

works. Perhaps, also, the (con)texts of the works of Bellatin push the reader even further into queerness because they demand that the reader live in and try to make sense of all of the discrete images and sections created and to somehow, at the same time, create his/her own, new meaning out of all these “rooms” in juxtaposition. With the creation of new meanings, new significations, a queering of (con)textual space takes place. Such space, then, tenders the queer body access and the option of performing itself queerly therein.

IV. Queer Performance in (Con)Textual/Social Spaces

One type of queer performance that enters into and changes (con)textual space is camp,¹⁸ which represents a cultural criticism that challenges prevailing philosophies that attempt to restrict or suppress sexual or gender identities (Soto, “Queer Parody” 249).

The characters in Arenas’s works are particularly adept at displaying campiness, which in turn subverts heteronormative doctrine. Despite often severe repression, his *locas* openly defy prevailing cultural norms and present themselves as of the genders and sexualities they perceive as relevant for them. In its zeal for controlling (con)textual space, heteronormativity often perverts and/or distorts it to such an extent that whole factions of any given normative culture are evicted from participating in it. Women, people of color, and queers, to name just a few, are representatives of those groups.

There is a clear depiction of this type of exclusion in “Viaje a La Habana.”

Ismael, living in exile, longs for his homeland but when he finally does return to Cuba, he finds that the homeland that had lived in his memory no longer exists (Prieto Taboada 177). His (con)text is no longer available to him, so he must create a new framework in which he is able to pursue his identity and achieve his goals, despite governmental and

¹⁸ I use “camp” here and elsewhere in the sense in which Susan Sontag defined it in her article “Notes on Camp,” published in 1964: camp is a “sensibility” that relies on artifice, stylization, theatricalization, irony, playfulness, and exaggeration, rather than substance (Sontag, *Notes on “Camp”*).

cultural efforts to deny the existence of his perspective. By inserting himself into the Cuban environment upon his return to the island, Ismael succeeds in queering it. The fact that, in his lost homeland, he and his son engage in sexually fulfilling acts together points the reader toward the consideration that a future queering of heteronormative (con)texts is underway.

A very different type of (con)text queering is found in the works of Bellatin in that his fragmented texts are created from rubble: they neither come from nor reflect the whole; rather, each fragment is an essential component of the entire creation (Rodríguez 67). Literary fragments can readily be understood and taken on by queers in that life in the heteronorm has served to make them fragmented creatures. Therefore, given (con)texts refashioned from broken bits, they are able to recreate heteronormative rules in such a way as to give rise to semblances of queerness, thereby opening up spaces in which to be more fully as they perceive themselves to be, despite the heterosexist authority of heterosexism and heteronormative control.

Another example of authorial queering of (con)text is found in Chocrón's decision to (re)create himself in his novel, *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, as a character. The cover and title page let us know that he is the author of the novel, but he also presents himself as one of the personae in it, in fact, as the writer of a forthcoming book based on the information presented by the metafictional text that we are in the process of reading. This technique bestows upon queers the opportunity of authoring their own beings within (con)textual openings previously denied them. When that transpires, they will then have available to them the prospect of performing queer existence as part and parcel of a newly queer(ed) normativity.

Because of the provisional nature of the formation of these kinds of (con)texts, queer writing and performance are necessarily incomplete. As we learn from the Bosch interview with Mario Bellatin, no book/life may be considered complete as long as there is the possibility that a reader/performer may recreate his/her own book/(con)text (Bellatin, “Bola negra,” interview by Bosch 254). The closing pages of *El gran vidrio* provide a startling example of this potential when the reader encounters Bellatin the person, Bellatin the author, and Bellatin the character all commingling in a world that is neither real nor completely fictional, in a world of opportunity, where commentary by Bellatin on his own novels converts into signposts pointing the direction towards a new reality in the literary world of the reader. They also point to new pathways in the life (con)texts of that same reader divorced from the novelistic experience.

As the writer/author/narrator Bellatin notes: in order to continue onward, it becomes necessary to “borrar todas las huellas del pasado, de difuminar lo más que se pueda una identidad determinada, basada principalmente en la negación del tiempo y el espacio que supuestamente debían corresponder.... Cambiar de tradición, de nombre, de historia, de nacionalidad, de religión.... Evitar el recuerdo” (*El gran vidrio* 159-60). For queers, it is necessary to erase the normativized memories of the past in order to blur the outlines of identities once allowed to them so that new, more accommodating fora are launched for performances of innovative and more flexible gender and sexual object choice preferences. Queer writings, such as those of Bellatin, push through to the outer limits of normativity and beyond, and the queer beings who inhabit these fresh regions create additional universes, which can no longer be easily classified (Bellatin, “Bola negra,” interview by Bosch 252). Nor can they be so strictly controlled by the normative

power structure which has previously codified gender and sexuality potential.

Queers have not been granted selfhood because the cultural milieus in which they have lived, normatively controlled, have offered them no stages on which to perform their inherent queerness. Poststructuralism has taught us that the person's immersion into the "cultural" is what creates his/her sense of self (Sullivan 41). Nevertheless, there has to have been something prior with respect to homosexuals and other queer beings because non-normativized individuals do not spring from a void. Additionally, we should consider the fact that the norm has always needed something against which to assert itself. Therefore, even though unrecognized or denied podia from which to speak and act its nature specifically, queerness has permeated normativity. Now it is in search of spatial changes which will admit it onto the cultural stage. This signifies more than the following dialogue between Leo and Pablo in *La máxima felicidad* may seem to indicate:

Leo: [S]igues viviendo en una sociedad.

Pablo: Ocupo un espacio. No vivo en la sociedad.

Leo: ¿Entonces para ti todo lo de afuera...?

Pablo: Sí, para mí todo lo de afuera no cuenta. (Chocrón 60)

While Pablo's living as one angle of an active threesome is entirely queer, judged according to the lights of the heteronorm, he still believes that he occupies social space, even though he claims that his personal life is unaffected by its dictates. Nevertheless, his kind of private life has been harassed by normativity, especially the part of his relational status that includes Leo. Heteronormativity in the Occident has passed laws outlawing sexual activity between two people of the same sex, and, even when these laws have fallen by the wayside or been overturned, others have been put in place to ensure inequality of relationship status between people of the same sex, such as constitutional

amendments to invalidate the ability of same sex couples to marry.

Therefore, in order to claim selfhood, one political intention of queers is that *todo lo de afuera*, indeed, does impact queerness and, of necessity, must be altered so as to permit queers to come out into the open within the larger, normative culture that surrounds them. A mere quarter of a page after the last dialogue cited in the play, Leo's line sums up the need for openly queer spaces within heteronormativity: "Quiero hacer cosas, ser alguien, triunfar en algo, sentirme que valgo la pena. Para mí eso es la vida, no solamente amar a dos personas y gozar la máxima felicidad. ¡Quiero más!" (60). It has become clear in our poststructuralist age that there must be more than the discrete and finite moments of happiness that life in hiding is able to confer.

Reinaldo Arenas suffered from homosexual exclusion in a post-revolutionary, dictatorial Cuba, and his autobiography may to some extent be regarded as a complaint against the perversion of queer identity when one is faced with the dichotomized rigidity of heteronormativity. He avers that a more tolerant culture is a more open, honest, and beneficial society which provides access to all its citizens:

En Cuba, cuando uno iba a un club o una playa, no había una zona específica para homosexuales; todo el mundo compartía junto, sin que existiera una división que situara al homosexual en una posición militante. Esto se ha perdido en las sociedades más civilizadas, donde el homosexual ha tenido que convertirse en una especie de monje de la actividad sexual y ha tenido que separarse de esa parte de la sociedad, supuestamente no homosexual que, indiscutiblemente, también lo excluye. Al no existir estas divisiones, lo interesante del homosexualismo en Cuba consistía en que no había que ser un homosexual para tener relaciones con otro como un acto normal. (*Antes que anochezca* 133)

The reader should grasp from this passage how clearly the heteronormative concept of heterosexuality has needed homosexuality against which to define itself and accord social power to itself in order to subjugate and separate out homosexuals and

homosexuality or, at least, to force homosexuals into hiding. In the non-dichotomized, Cuban society that Arenas describes prior to the Revolution, sexual activity between men was normal as long as one was the macho, active penetrator. Making such acts queer in modern, Western society has now led to a new type of revolution in which the clandestine queer locales demand insertion into heteronormative settings so as to point to these spaces as normal and, by reference, proclaim queerness as natural. Unless the normalcy of queerness is recognized, normativized culture is defining itself against a standard that has endured and continues to survive naturally, despite attempts to eradicate or, at least, deny it. In other words, the restrictions that normativity has set up to encompass gender and sexuality are, in fact, abnormal because they are self-defined as against a standard that exists in nature.

Ahmed has said that socio-cultural “lines,” which implicate both temporal and spatial, national development or change, are created by being followed and are followed by being created. These are the lines that direct us socially towards possible performances of who we are. Therefore, they are performative in nature. They depend on the replication of norms and social conditions, but they are also created as a result of repetition (16). When queer culture produces lines within heteronormative space, it proposes new routes that may be followed, even though it may fashion these connections out of the heteronormative materials encoded in the social links that pre-existed the demarcation of queer lines. In “Viaje a La Habana,” the narrator points out the futility of queers in accepting the denial of their being that heteronormativity has decreed: “Cómo volver al lugar que nos ha marcado y destruido para siempre.... Porque una vez que dejamos el lugar donde fuimos niños, donde fuimos jóvenes ... seremos ya para siempre

una sombra, algo que existe precisamente por su inexistencia” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 116).

It is this fictional non-existence that the making evident of queer practices exposes. Whereas the families of queer *niños* and *jóvenes*, in heteronormativity, force the latter into *inexistencia*, queers, “al crecer y madurar desechamos la familia heredada para escoger una nueva familia” (Chocrón, Introducción, *Teatro* 2: 7). This *nueva familia* inhabits cultural space to which queer areas have been admitted, and the *nueva familia* is overtaking heteronormativized places. It is open to queer space as normal. The area of the *nueva familia* is logical and continuous in that it does not deny sexual and gendered spaces that are inherent to any overarching, actualized socio-cultural locale.

Physical spaces conform to social logic and are continuous in the ambit in which we conduct our daily lives. The mental interval that visualizes and makes possible social behaviors holds closely to an allied logic and continuity. The social behaviors in question are the performances that the socio-cultural rules that govern human behavior sanction as available to those so governed for display in public and, even, private sites. The theaters in which these behaviors are enacted transform them into performances, which are theatrical in nature in that, like in the playhouse, they are the result of social logic and continuity and also representative of these things (Auslander 20). Furthermore, in arenas for the representation of social behaviors, we watch one another perform and comment on those performances, as is done in the “Que trine Eva” section of *Viaje a La Habana*:

[S]e hizo un silencio de muerte por parte de todo el público que nos miraba paralizado y nosotros avanzamos por el comedor.... [L]legamos hasta una de las mesas desocupadas.... Mientras esperábamos a que nos sirvieran, oímos el murmullo de la gente.... A veces, yo hacía como que te hablaba y extendía los

labios con una sonrisa imperial. Tú asentías.... “De dónde serán”, preguntaba una mujer.... (Arenas 14)

Queer performance within public space is viewed by the public in the heteronorm similarly to the way in which the public watches Eva and Ricardo’s presentations. But in this latter instance, performances that are adjudged to be queer are considered to be very much out of the ordinary as exhibitions of banned social behaviors. But once queer performance can make itself truly visible in the public sphere, it begins to have the ability to insinuate itself as yet another valid performance of gender and sexuality. Therefore, the answer to “¿De dónde serán?” obviously becomes: “They’re from here.”

The performance of queer gender and sexuality characteristics stems from longing. The audience for this variety of performance also contributes its own concepts and interpretations of desire to the interaction that happens between its members and the performers. The notion that viewers bring their own wants to performances allows them to express themselves and feel an intimacy with the performers (Davy 81-82). Thus, a normativized audience can begin to meld queer gender and sexuality with the beliefs about these two criteria that it already possesses.

Ensuing from a mixture of such opposing principles is that both queer and normativized acceptations of each begin to evolve. Queer performance validates itself by presenting what is essentially a theatrical performance in a physical space that serves as a stage and, thereby, opens up queerly imagined spaces that can cohabit with the normative strictures in existence in physical and social spheres. As a result, queerness begins to become less queer because now there are heteronormativized witnesses who could begin to think beyond the boundaries of the dichotomies they have previously learned.

Queer performance may present itself as illusion. However, as Merleau-Ponty

suggests in a different, phenomenological context, illusion can be converted into a part of a contiguous, social reality because it passes itself off as phenomenologically authentic (22). Queers show themselves as being in two places at once, one the hidden realms of exile and the other heteronormativity. The hetero audience initially recognizes only the latter environment because that is what it is used to seeing. Nevertheless, they witness queer performance in that environment, which may open the latter and the audience up to queer potentiality.

Thus, the queer individual can begin to “sentir que entre él y el paisaje no había hostilidad, sino, por el contrario, una dulce y sensual sensación de complicidad, donde todas las fronteras quedan eliminadas” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 118). This is the state Ismael longs to find upon his return to Cuba from the land of his exile, a state that is representative of queers’ longing to be part of the homeland from which they have been expelled. Via performances of queer genders, sexualities, and beings and the (re)claiming of self-definitional rights, we can (re)enter those spaces from which we have been expelled.

One example of queer performance is the portrayal of butchness by a lesbian. Neither her gender characteristics nor her sexual object choice is correctly dichotomized according to the lights of heteronormativity. Her butch performance denotes her refusal to play a “proper” role in the heterosexist binaries that modern, Western cultures have constructed. Butchness, like gender in general, is learned behavior, which feels natural to the individual portraying it, but the process of learning it or, at least, parts of it can be self-conscious (Solomon 167). Learning butchness, as well as effeteness, can be the result of the homogenizing pressures of heteronormative society. In order to be natural,

the queer may have to exhibit the ordinarily expected attributes of heterosexual interpretations of gender and sexuality, but the biological sex of the person evidencing these heterosexual traits is not congruent with them. The butch lesbian, for example, does not necessarily adopt masculinity, but rather puts “quotation marks” around it (Solomon 17) by creating a type of “camp” performance from the way in which she displays masculine traits. That is to say that she may have to adopt overly dramatic, non-conforming, male gender and sexuality characteristics in order to be “seen.” The “seeing” of the performing queer is what reinforces his/her eligibility to be included in the broader culture from which s/he has been barred.

In *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, Micky wants to be “seen” by all, so he marries Gloria. But he begins to feel the pressures of a too-confining hetero life soon after entering into the marriage. He cannot maintain a completely actualized heterosexual relationship because he is not purely heterosexual. He can engage in heterosexual sex acts, but the core of his individuality lies in his chameleonic homosexual activities, as well as in his heterosexual couplings. He becomes constrained and feels he must escape the confines of the strictly dichotomized, heterosexually oriented, socio-cultural milieu of his life post-Gloria: “Micky, a medida que los círculos se iban haciendo más concéntricos, comenzó a tratar de volar fuera de ellos” (Chocrón 143). Queers, like Micky, often want to fly free of heterosexism. But they also feel the need to be inserted as valid actors into the heteronormative culture that surrounds them. A mere two pages later, Micky is speaking to the character in the novel who is called “Chocrón” who is writing a book about Micky, and he mentions his need to belong, to serve, and to be an effective cog in the social web. He says to Chocrón: “Conviérteme en un

personaje. Méteme en una trama.” Chocrón responds: “¿Pero por qué insistes tanto en esto? Yo no entiendo.” And Micky’s plea is that of modern queers: “Para algo tengo que servir. ¿Es que no valgo la pena?” (145).

In order to achieve self-actualization and social validity, queers need to be socially worthwhile. Their performances have to matter. In the authors studied herein, we see the insistence on these types of performances. They are carried out by Arenas’s *locas* and Bellatin’s characters afflicted with an amorphous, fluid, changing sexuality and in Chocrón’s manipulated social spaces that provide the stage for the challenging of the rules of power constructed by the heteronorm.

V. Multiple Spaces

Heteronormativity originally claimed the term “queer” to denigrate homosexuals and to warn heterosexuals against the vicissitudes of homosexuality along with its perceived attempt to erode heterosexual mores. This is made abundantly clear by the opening words of Chocrón’s *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, when the father, upon the eve of his son Micky’s departure for New York, says to him, ““¡Cuidado con las [sic] maricas!”” (9). The father’s warning makes it abundantly clear that, in the eyes of Micky’s determinedly heterosexual and macho father, queers are predators and that, perhaps worse within the heteronormative context, they cannot lay claim to masculinity. Mickey’s father closes the door of masculinity on *los maricas* by feminizing them with that term.

However, “queer” has come to be a contested term dependent on the location of its usage (Browne and Nash 2). Through their intent to coopt, rehabilitate and use the term in order to queer heteronormal spaces (particularly those social spaces in which

definitions of gender and sexuality have become culturally important and which queers hope to co-inhabit), “queers” have chosen to flip the negative connotations of “queer” so that it becomes a term of power to be used in order to advance the emerging themes of queerdome.

Nevertheless, queerness is not only determined by sexuality and gender, but also by race, ethnicity, postcoloniality, and class (Gorman 97). Thus, the spaces open to (re)interpretation through a queer(ed) lens are decidedly multiple. These spaces are currently inhabited by many sexualities and genders beyond those which have been recognized by the heteronorm.

The hetero-defined world has been the traditional site of familial interaction. But this once closed domain is being expanded by the commonalities intrinsic to “chosen” families, which are very different to those maintained by the strictly biologic family that held sway in the historic, heteronormative structuring of most Western socio-culturality. Chocrón mentions this idea, and its theatrical importance, in his “Introducción” to the collection of his plays found in *Teatro*, Tomo 2. He says, “la relación con la familia heredada es inevitable y natural; la relación con la familia que uno escoge es revocable y llena de tensiones” (7). Because these latter types of families are revocable, they are by definition changeable. The apertures wherein they transform can be used by queers to bring about the queering of previously heterosexualized social spaces.

Bellatin’s *Perros héroes* provides its reader with one type of situation that is as fluid and varying as the localities that queer theory might envision. In this novel, there is a bureaucratic department called the “*Central de Informaciones*,” previously mentioned herein. The *hombre inmóvil* has hooked into this system so that he will have

all information at his fingertips. But his interpretation of the knowledge and information provided alters the meanings of that which is received. Queer theory and queer(ed) writing seek to provide alternative connotations in and use of the social constructs that have sought to confine sexual and gender possibilities. What is more, this type of theory and writing can set into motion evolutionary, spatial changes to such an extent that other areas of life and culture once deemed “queer” by the heteronorm can also develop more ample implications and uses.

Returning, for a moment, to Chocrón’s concept of the *familia heredada*, we begin to see that the very insertion into that type of family of a queer member, and his/her recognition by the family as queer, begins the process of queering the conception of the heteronormatively defined family. Queerness has “descub[ierto] que es fácil integrarse ... poco a poco ... a cualquier realidad ... y que en cualquier sitio hay oportunidad para perderse” (Arenas, *Arturo* 23). But more than the integration of the individual into an othered reality, queerness proffers the transformation of real places into spots that are open to queerness.

This transformative possibility exists, at least partly, due to the theatrical nature of the relationships of the people who occupy the locations capable of metamorphosis. Individuals are not merely connected as actor and viewer (similar to the connection between actor and audience), but their relationships can also be strengthened (like those enacted during theatrical performances) by the general sense of always being connected to other people (Auslander 61). The power of this feeling of connection influences queers to occupy spaces in which non-queer others interact with them and also demands that those others witness or respond to queerness. When the spaces in heteronormativity

are infiltrated by queerness, their normative values become skewed; therefore, the heterosexist power structuring tilts, even if only slightly in some cases, towards queer beings, awarding them some functions of self-definition and social control.

A similar type of infiltration can be seen in Chocrón's *Mesopotamia*, in which five men have created their own normativity apart from outside society. One of these men is dying, and another brings an outsider into the normative confines of the five's living situation. Throughout the course of the play, Ismael, the outsider, causes moments of tension and/or dissonance because he is not controlled by the social requirements within the home in which he is a visitor. Nevertheless, his difference (his queerness) instigates change in the functioning of the household. At the end of the play, with Juan's death, Ismael becomes part of the household which has been queered by his presence. Of course, the household has also exerted its influence on the outsider as well. The two antagonistic worlds no longer are separate; rather, a space has been created in which a new, melded world develops differently than along the normative path the previous rules had determined.

At times, these types of spaces can be amplified within the normative social context in order to allow queer infiltration because queers have been living in normative borderlands (according to Anzaldúa, a social, cultural, and sexual place that all of us in living along these lines occupy and that also inhabits us) throughout socio-cultural history. Sullivan has described these areas as being "constituted" by the margins of multiple, overlapping territories (116). This idea is in agreement with the postulations of Gorman mentioned previously indicating that queerness is not only a representation of sexuality and gender behaviors, but also of things such as race, ethnicity, and class.

In Arenas's *El portero*, we see one of these border zone dwellers, the doorman, as he struggles to open a door between the normativized world of the residents and the queer world of the animals. We learn that he intends to try to “conducir a la gente a una especie de región desconocida e irreal que él mismo no podía precisar con exactitud dónde estaba, pero que, de eso sí estaba seguro, no se ubicaba en la realidad en que todos vivimos” (49). The doorman, a border personality, living in a border area contiguous to the normative world of the building where he works, does not necessarily discern what queer, new world may lie in the mixing of two realities, but he does know that normativity does not permit his true existence. Therefore, his determination to open a new door installs him in a normative social setting which becomes charged by his queer presence. Thus, the doorman's border zone location and the normative world collide—each being queered by interaction between normativized culture and the queerness entering into it from out of the border zones.

Queerly charged spaces created from and, subsequently, open to socio-cultural interactions are related to the understanding that actual, geographic cities and landscapes can do double duty as heteronormative and queer spaces, just like, for example, any capital city doubles as a lived-in city and as the seat of government (Desert 21). The different purposes and intents of each type of municipality may often ignore the other's converse purpose, but, in fact, they collide, interact, and meld together creating new types of socio-cultural sites of interaction not otherwise available. Examples of queer physical spaces set down amidst heteronormativity can be found in the locales explored by Micky, in *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, and by Arenas, as subject, in his autobiography.

In New York's Times Square, Micky “vio una multitude de hombres solos que lo

agarraron o lo desnudaron o lo lamieron o trataron de pegarle o le pidieron que él les pegara o le juraron amor eterno o ... lo miraron con ojos alertos y deseosos” (Chocrón 55). Arenas speaks of his discovery of bars for homosexuals where “[h]abía ... una gran catidad de hombres; unos muy machos, otros extremadamente femeninos, pero el ambiente y la camaradería eran de absoluta complicidad. Aún en aquel momento existían esos sitios en Holguín y en todas partes de la Isla” (*Antes que anochezca* 89). These homosexualized areas, even though present within heteronormativized, geographical space, remain apart and only offer a specialized means of escaping the powerful hold of the normative world.

Perhaps, where a true blending of queer space and normative space begins to come into play is in the commercial world, where the queer dollars spent in Times Square or in the gay bars enter into parity with the heterosexual dollars spent elsewhere in any defined, geographic area. Also, when the queers come out of the zones designated for their separate use and perform the same identities in heteronormativity that they have performed in queer-only space, a melding of functions begins, and an amplification of accepted sexuality and gender presentations is effectuated.

I believe that this blending is theatrical in nature because it is emblematic of a type of double vision. Solomon says that understanding theatrical representation depends on seeing both the actor and the character, for example, as separate beings. Yet, at the same time, these different entities are perceived as a blended personality that makes them one within the setting of the play (16). When queers come out from queer-designated areas and into generally available, social space, this type of double vision applies. The queer is queer, but as s/he inserts him/herself into the normative world, taking on some of

the same social functions as the heteronormativized populace, a new character is created.

Beaver has noted that homosexuals do not “live” in an alternate culture but in duplicate cultures of constantly interrupted and overlapping roles (106), like the “vida homosexual ... subterránea, pero muy evidente” of which Arenas speaks in his autobiography (*Antes que anochezca* 130). Perhaps, then, the new characters showing up in various queer guises in normative spaces could be described as “queer-normal,” in that the queer being is normalizing his/her function in spaces previously denied to him/her. S/he is focusing on or is perceived to be exhibiting fluidity and inter-subjectivity (Holman Jones 197). This new character then, has the ability to transform and (re)collect him/herself in various ways in the assorted sites into which s/he enters and serves to change the definitions of sexuality and gender previously adhered to by normativity.

Such characters are emblematic of queer exiles (re)entering their homelands and (re)claiming these as “home.” Also they are becoming visible in spaces in which, previously, they were ignored because they had been decreed to be invisible. These types of spaces are, in many ways, similar to the geographical spaces in the United States that Cuban exiles entered into upon escaping Castro’s dictatorship. They are alien spaces in which outsiders (Others, queers) are seeking to gain a toehold. The queers, once installed in these spaces, find themselves faced with competing socio-cultural dualities.

All of this is akin to the plural narrator in Arenas’s *El portero* (which is representative of the exiled Cuban populace living in the United States) who is struggling to survive between two cultures, where one culture’s mores is disruptive of the other’s. We, the readers, along with the *portero*, are urged towards the creation/understanding of yet another place (Prieto Taboada 167). We are all being pushed into opening a door that

will allow the recreation of actual, normative space into queered space.

Queer exiles are seeking, as previously quoted in Spanish, the borderlands site where we can be ourselves (Arenas, *El portero* 171-72). Queer theory and queer writing can recreate normative realities to such an extent that socio-cultural theories of gender and sexuality are highlighted by a brilliant spotlight that shows up the fallacies of the heteronormative dichotomies. They serve the purpose that Cleopatra, a dog, one of the animals living among the humans, espouses to the *portero*. She says, “Queremos hacerte comprender ... que ninguna de las personas por las cuales tú tanto te preocupas te han entendido una palabra; es más, ni siquiera te han escuchado y hasta están planeando echarte” (154). Heteronormativity throughout the ages has excluded queer individuals from full participation in the cultural milieu constructed by its tenets. Now reclamation of the word “queer” and the determination to exercise control over its meaning seek a (re)examination of normative spaces and a reconfiguration of them that allows for queer inclusion. These types of spaces can recreate the concept of “home” so that queers, like the exiles that they are, can go back to it.

These social areas are very much like modern, theatrical space in which one of the main tensions is that exerted between the poles of unity or plurality: are we one or are we many? Or, rather, how can we be individuals and part of society at the same time (Chocrón, *Tendencias* 26-27)? The queer answer is that, of course, we are many because we are queer in multiple ways, but we are one with one another and one with the heretofore normativized world because every one of us is an individual who is different from all others. We are all, by that standard, queer. Thus, queer acceptations intrude into heteronormative definitions of sexuality and gender and open up spaces in the

heteronorm where we, indeed, are one and many at the same time.

Otherwise, our socio-cultural ceremonies and traditions become closed, and are part of dying societies, like those in the falsely artistic and self-important community of the jet set, where Micky visits for a time in *Pájaro de mar por tierra*: “el mundo alrededor era únicamente un escenario inerte por donde tenían que transitar para verse unas cuantas noches por semana” (Chocrón 128). The stage on which these people act out their lives is deformed by inertia, incapable of a change of scenery, just as are the stages upon which heteronormativity is enacted. It is a setting confined and cut off by virtue of the application of its own definitions of what is alien to it, by what is not allowed, rather than by possibility.

Because “public fantasies” or cultural narratives become internalized, they become a part of the self (Sullivan 61). Therefore, when queers insinuate themselves into “public fantasies,” queerness can deliver added potential to the cultural narrative; this can provide movement and growth. It responds to the question of are we one or are we many: the answer is that we are multiple and equal. This reply should allow any number of stages to be erected in the theatrical spaces in which we carry out our socio-cultural interactions. Furthermore, all of these stages can collide, cross, and merge so that the mini-theatrical events occurring on any given stage spill over onto others at various times throughout the performance.

VI. Sexual Spaces

Heretofore, the number and types of stages and stagings, with respect to sexuality and gender, have been based mostly on heterosexual desire. This has created a patriarchal power construct in which one participant has been othered (Sullivan 124).

That is to say that the female partner in a coupling reflects weakness; she is the opposite of masculine power in that she has been defined as the one who is penetrated. In displays of homosexual desire, the heterosexist power construct has determined that one participant engaged in a same-sex sexual act must be the one who is penetrated. That actor, male-sexed, is nevertheless deemed “female” (Kemp 150). This false female is a traitor to the masculine role in heteronormative socio-cultural interactions and is, thus, a threat to the constructs that hold the heteronorm in place.

As stated previously, in many Hispanic American cultures the other participant, the penetrator, may still be seen as a macho actor, in that he is fulfilling the male role of domination despite the fact that the sexual intercourse is an act involving two men. As Benito, one of Micky’s brothers in Chocrón’s *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, speaking of the brothers’ relationships growing up together, says, “todos los varones ... tuvimos unos más y otros menos nuestras experiencias fuera de orden. Esas las tienen casi todos los hombres; que algunos las nieguen es otra cosa” (14). But when Benito speaks of his brother, Fermín, who has had “verdaderas relaciones amorosas” with other men, he describes him as “descarado.” This takes the definitional role away from the distinction between penetrator/penetrated and places it squarely on concepts of affection between members of the same sex.

Also, in many Western cultures, the penetrating male participant is believed to pose a threat to the existing heterosexist power construct in that he is penetrating what is unsuitable for penetration. Therefore, he, too, is weak and does not adhere to the required characteristics of masculinity. Thus, his behavior must be included among those that serve to undermine the sexuality and gender dichotomies controlling the display of

both traits within heteronormative space. This denigration of both parties to the homosexual sex act is bleeding into Hispanic America (Foster, *Sexual Textualities* 2-5), especially given the prevalence of modern homosexual depiction in both the non-Hispanic and Hispanic countries in the West in which there are few cases that display one partner as the one who is always penetrated and the other only as the penetrator.

The construct that both partners to a homosexual sex act are “perverted” leads to persecution of all gay male queers, despite which role they may take on in a homosexual encounter, in order to rid the heteronorm of the perceived threat to its institutions. As is pointed out in Arenas’s “Viaje a La Habana,” every homosexual act, “aún la más apasionada y sincera, es una maldición en un sitio donde ... sólo la hipocresía nos conduce ... a la supervivencia” (109). In these sites within the heteronorm, for example as in *el Morro*, the Cuban prison where Arenas was confined, “a los homosexuales no se les trat[a] ... como a seres humanos, sino como bestias” (*Antes que anochezca* 206).

That treatment results because homosexuals, queers, do not exhibit the sexual preference and/or the gender traits that the communist heteronorm expects. Therefore, many queer folks find themselves compelled to leave “home” (La Fountain ix-x) in search of a space in which they can express their sexuality and gender as they see them and, thus, perform their identities.

The site of their exile may be, and historically has been, a sort of queer ghetto carved out from locales that once were within the heteronorm, but which have fallen into disfavor or disrepute because of other prohibitions of the heteronormative, power construct, such as racial or ethnic make-up or poverty and the criminal activity incidental to it. For example, Sánchez-Crispin notes that gay male spaces in Mexico City are often

concurrent with zones of prostitution (199). But when these areas become the location of gay exile, they become even further separated physically from heterosexual, geographic space. They become isolated, physical spaces in which the body, dreams, illness, physical attacks, or infirmity intersect, as they do in various modern, Hispanic literary works, such as many of those of Arenas and Bellatin, for example (Guerrero and Bouzaglo 37). Here runs a queer axis set apart from the homeland, from which queers have been deterritorialized. It is where “‘el flete’ ... cambió sus riesgos tradicionales (chantaje, golpes, robo, enfermedades venéreas) por un riesgo en verdad mortal ... la terrible plaga llamada SIDA” (Arenas, *El portero* 97), the last of which caused Arenas to kill himself. It is a space in which *los otros* (the guardians of heterosexist ideals) (Arenas, *Arturo* 13) do not penetrate and in which *ellos* “con sus gestos excesivamente afeminados, artificiales, grotescos” (12) try to construct a queer counterpart to the heterosexist construct that has instilled in them the heternormative definitions at the heart of sexual preference and gender performance. Even though these spaces, in and of themselves, do not necessarily help to aid the fulfillment of queer, theoretical, socio-cultural agendas, they may offer a beacon of hope to “los demás, los que estaban en distinto infierno, en pueblos y ciudades, y vestidos de civil caminaban bovinos, temerosos y casi agradecidos por las aceras custodiadas” (15-16).

These ghettos can be the initial sites where queers relocate their sexual, and textual, practices (Molloy and Irwin xiii) in an effort to define themselves and perform their beings according to those definitions. But these sites, finally, are not places of hope and completion because they all too frequently revolve solely around sexual practices and gender caricatures rather than around human interaction. As the narrator in Bellatin’s

Salón de belleza indicates, when he speaks of his experience at the gay baths, queers in these ghettos can feel cut off, isolated, and devoid of fuller opportunities because the space in which they find themselves is all too limited:

Mientras se descende, una sensación extraña comienza a recorrer el cuerpo. Después los cuerpos se confunden con el vapor que emana de la cámara principal. Unos pasos más y casi de inmediato se es despojado de las toallas. De allí en adelante cualquier cosa puede ocurrir. En esos momentos siempre me sentía como si estuviera dentro de uno de mis acuarios. (19)

Even though in these baths exists the opportunity for almost unlimited and uninhibited gay sex, the space itself is truncated; it is unreal in that it does not reflect any potential to realize a fully imagined relationship of the queer being to all other beings that have had input into its development. The baths offer the possibility of sexual satiation, but they do not provide food for the soul or the spiritual sustenance sometimes found in relationships consolidated within spaces that are not so strictly constructed around only one component of humanity, the sex act.

The strict adherence to the trappings of the sexual act is seen in most queer ghettos, at least initially, and in these acts as they are first experienced by new arrivals. In the case of gay men, for example, the ghettos are all filled with

[h]ombres iguales ... quizás más altos ... o más chistosos ... o más dóciles ... [un] ejército de viejos, gordos, flacos, jóvenes, americanos, latinos, europeos, oficinistas, peluqueros, vendedores de corbatas en Saks, afeminados, viriles, románticos, viciosos, espléndidos, o precisos quienes después de preguntar la hora o pedir un fósforo, iban directamente al grano: 'What do you like to do?' (Chocrón, *Pájaro* 51)

It all boils down to the act of sex. The inhabitants of these homosexualized zones become objects involved in sexual barter. Because relationships are consequently so limited, life in these ghettos is all too finitely and exclusively circumscribed. The ghettos cannot substitute for spaces in which one might live a fully realized existence, but they

have substituted as places in which to hone a queer identity that might then be transposed into the heteronormative world.

Such a transposition is one of the functions of activism which seeks to challenge the status quo and paralysis within queer communities. It seeks to reconstruct and “open up” the ghetto so that it bleeds into heteronormativity and as a normativized population enters into a queerly organized construct, the two worlds blend (Ingram, “Making Room” 376). This type of activism and the results thereof are capable of making a worldwide impact because globalization has had a profound impact on gay life. The notions of postmodernist theories, on which queer theory is firmly based, have had a profound impact on gay life in the modern, Western world. Therefore, queer, Hispanic American culture, for example, seems to occupy an area defined by two separate poles: the “local” pole of the desire for same sex sexual activity and the pole affected by both local and international characteristics. This bounded area, in many ways, imitates attitudes of capitalistic consumption (Ingenschay 10). With the comprehensive reach of modern media into Hispanic America, modern, Latin American literary output is steadily being influenced by and interpreted through the tensions between the local and the global, so the two poles come into play in the literary works studied herein.

In the spatial worlds created by Chocrón in many of his works, consumerism often becomes central, frequently because the characters seek to create personal meaning in a globalized world. In the ménage a trois created by Pablo, Leo, and Perla in *La máxima felicidad*, for instance, all of these characters are surrounded by products and conventions globally available, but on the very local level of desire, the three alternately replicate heteronormativity and queerness, both performed in the same surroundings. For

example Pablo caresses Leo tenderly, telling him “Vamos a ser felices” (19), and the next moment he and Perla kiss and caress (19). By the play’s end, as previously noted, Leo tells Pablo, “[S]igues viviendo en una sociedad,” but Pablo responds, “Ocupo un espacio. No vivo en la sociedad” (60). However, the final line of the play is Pablo’s, and he says, “Vamos los tres” (62), as they all three prepare to enter into the “outside” society to change it and be changed by it. The local queerness that we see in this play is meant to be performed before normativized audiences, into which the play’s internal queerness permeates. The audience finally must prepare itself for the entrance of the queerness of the threesome into its midst.

Another instance of local queerness intending to insert itself into national and international spaces is the homosexuality and homosexual acts found in Arenas’s autobiography. Here we can understand homosexuality as emblematic of resistance to authoritarianism, wherever it may be found, because the needs of the body can never really be denied (Foster, “Homoerotic Diaspora” 171). This treatment of homosexuality locates it within the power constructs of the heteronorm and demands that heterosexual societies wake up and take notice: all of the latters’ intentions to thwart homosexual possibility must fail because that which is considered queer is just as real as that which is thought to be the norm.

Homosexuality, queerness, cannot effectively be subjugated indefinitely because it is pushing into spaces where its presence was once denied. As Arenas writes:

[H]ay una fuerza erótica que, generalmente, supera todos los prejuicios, represiones y castigos. Esa fuerza, la fuerza de la naturaleza, se impone. Creo que ... son pocos los hombres que no han tenido relaciones con otros hombres; en ellos los deseos del cuerpo están por encima de todos los sentimientos machistas que nuestros padres se encargaron de inculcarnos. (*Antes que anochezca* 40)

Bellatin goes even further and foresees societies opened up to and by queerness. In *Flores*, one dictate of the *ayuntamiento* “consistía en descubrir cuántas variantes de sexo podían encontrarse en los distintos grupos de ciudadanos y estudiar así la forma de implementar oficinas de auxilio para cada una de ellas” (43). So the reader does see homosexuality literarily defying the heteronorm that has sought to limit or even eradicate it. Queer desire is now becoming visible in the sexual places within the once normativized, Western societies, so that these geographies can no longer be readily denied within modern, Western cultural contexts.

VI. Queer Challenging/(Re)Claiming of Space

Modern theater, like queer activism and its underlying theoretical framework, also rebels against a stagnant, normativized society (Chocrón, *Tendencias* 83). Theatrical space mimics that in which individuals in society live their daily social lives but, at the same time, it expands the possibilities of the concept of the way that space can be used and manipulated. It contests the limits and norms of the spaces in which daily life is enacted. Queerness, likewise, challenges the heterosexually dictated sexual and gender norms that the past has taught. The confrontation initiates a process of change.

The audience of Chocrón’s *O. K.* is warned fairly early that changes are on the horizon when Mina declares, “No podemos seguir viviendo día tras día sin que haya diferencia entre día y día. Algo tiene que pasar” (44). In other words, modifications in what space can encompass theatrically or socially must come or be brought about. And that is exactly what the introduction of Ángela soon thereafter accomplishes. Ángela disrupts the normative, social notions that a pair, one male and one female, is the only permissible unit on which to base a relationship. As in *La máxima felicidad*, a threesome

fills space that normativity views as only rightly occupied by a heterosexual couple, and the audience, viewers living in the normativized world, are made to, if not accept, at least, admit the possibility that such a use of space can exist.

Similarly, queerness can revisit historical space in order to change it. This is exactly what occurs in Arenas's "Viaje a La Habana." Ismael returns to the Cuba which forced him into exile, hoping to recapture his lost past, only to change it instead (Olivares 281). The result of his incestuous, sexual relationship with his own son (who robs him after the sexual encounter), shows us that Cuban homosexuals are no longer merely victims; they are aggressors capable of redress and of insinuation into the fabric of the ruling dictatorship.

Nevertheless, normativity has attacked, and continues to assail, queerness, but, just as Annubis, an attack dog in *Perros héroes*, bearing a very similar name to the ancient, Egyptian god of the dead, can be derailed from an assault by the garbled sounds of the *hombre inmóvil* (Bellatin 29), heteronormativity's powerful hold on the definitions and acceptable performances of gender and sexuality can be turned back by queer voices making themselves known, despite the norm's pretense that such voices are unintelligible. Queer voices may find it difficult to make themselves understood, but, in a society once trained to attack every such voice, the queer voice can now begin to deflect that attack by infiltrating, and challenging heteronormativized space.

Any narrative is always told in context, and we are taught that it does not "mean" (as in the sense of being able to reflect truth) outside of its proper environment. Queer voices can use this cultural teaching to highlight the idea that heteronormative voices, then, only "speak" in very limited areas. A parallel to this is that a queer voice should

also be able to create its own narrative within normative contexts, to insinuate queer narrative into previously heteronormativized spaces so that that context itself becomes queered (Gorman 100).

In Chocrón's *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, Bofors tells Micky, "te enseñaron a creer en Dios. Pero no te advirtieron que Dios está dentro de ti mismo. Mientras no creas lo suficientemente en ti, ¿de qué vale creer en Dios?" (99). Similarly, the "they" referred to by Bofors (the heterosexists who have been in charge of imparting cultural mores) have taught us queers to believe that the queerness that resides within each of us is an unnatural and unacceptable variation of the traits permissible under the rule of the heteronormative dichotomies. That is to say that we have been taught not to believe in ourselves. But as queers create self-narratives that defy and, thus, queer normative dictates and space, belief in self strengthens and the narrative itself becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This prophecy is one of the queer word unfolding and creating queer worlds and queer space where before few existed. It directly challenges heteronormativity by throwing down the queer gauntlet in order to claim presence and make room for queerness. In Arenas's *Arturo*, the narrator says that Arturo "se aferró a la idea de que para que el delicioso joven hiciese de nuevo su aparición, él, el amante, debía seguir construyendo, sí, debía construir un lugar, un sitio ideal, digno de su recibimiento" (68). Arturo understands that he must create a new site, one that has not existed previously, in order that the spaces in it might be filled by queer bodies which have been ejected from socio-cultural participation.

Ingram has said that a queer site is a point in physical space where positive or

impartial attitudes to queerness can be found and that queer space is an expanding set of queer sites that serve to destabilize heteronormativity (“Strategies” 447-48). Therefore, queerness can become normalized, or if we normalize queerness, it can develop into a norm. In either case, if queerness succeeds, it will no longer be queer.

In the meantime, it is necessary to foster unease in known and mutually understood, normative worlds; it is crucial to disconcert in such a way that perturbation becomes agreeable. This can be said to be one of the effects of the Bellatin novels studied herein (F. Rodríguez 64), in that the spaces that author creates exhibit deterritorialization, ambiguity, and/or the unexpected. At the same time, there is always a frisson of pleasure to be found in these queer worlds.

This type of world is also found in the queer space drawn in Chocrón’s *La máxima felicidad*, in which every member of the threesome, regardless of biological sex, “t[i]en[e] que dormir con todos, que todos t[i]en[en] que contar[se] todo, que la vida communal significa” (46). These three characters live in a world that destabilizes their audience’s reference points with respect to the dual nature of normativized sexuality. Nevertheless, that these three comprise a family lends a sense of pleasure despite the queer dissonance of their interrelatedness. So the stage that they occupy can be labeled “queer space,” and that space has, to some degree, pleasurably queered the social settings with which the audience is familiar, thereby inserting a queer toehold into the normative world.

The challenge by queer theory to heteronormativity and its categorization of acceptable gender and sexual performances makes it almost impossible to rigidly maintain strict identity categories such as “heterosexual” and “homosexual,” even though

the words themselves are certainly possible (Sullivan 15). Even before queer theory's direct challenge, the claim that reproduction is of the utmost importance for designating heterosexuality as "normal" had been challenged by the evidence of extensive same sex sexual behavior in the non-human animal kingdom (Mortimer-Sandilands 11). The queer sexual behavior exhibited by these animals adds to the signification that homosexuality, i.e. non-reproductive sexual behavior and queer gender practices, is a natural inclination (Bell 137). Sullivan, among other theorists, points out the fallacy that heterosexuality must be central in our socio-cultural systems by noting that the term *woman* only has meaning in heterosexual, conceptual and economic systems. (I believe that Sullivan and others agreeing with her, in part, mean by this that "woman" can only be defined in this context as being not male and as the appropriate receptacle [i.e., sexual object] to relieve male desire.) Therefore, lesbians should not be identified by that term because their sexual behavior is clearly not based on the centrality of reproduction (122) and does not serve to satisfy male sexual cravings.

As a practical matter, rather than draw such seemingly esoteric distinctions, LGBTQ psychologists, for instance, seek to challenge prejudice and discrimination and the privileging of heterosexuality by promoting LGBTQ concerns as valid focal points for psychological research and by promoting non-heterosexist and non-genderist approaches to inclusive research, thereby affirming LGBTQ individuals (Clarke 6). To a certain extent, I have attempted to do the same by using the terms "we" and "us" to both include me, as the writer of this dissertation, in the group of queers agitating for certain queer, literary ansocial considerations as well as in the larger social group that, though representative of a normativized tradition, is integral to the implementation of queer

theoretical viewpoints within heterosexist society. I, as a member of both groups that are referenced by “we” and “us,” help queer the larger group by my including myself in it even though I have also identified myself as queer, a status generally rejected by normativizing social attitudes, but into which I am injecting myself as queer.

Like some theater which does not recognize the spatial and temporal characteristics of live performance (Auslander 51), this challenge is theatrical in the sense that it does not recognize the controlling spatiality and temporality set up in heteronormativity. Arenas, in many of his works, similarly challenges heteronormativity by creating bodies which can readily be understood as actors in camp or queer performance. They entertain the reader on the levels of discourse, plot, and story, but, at the same time, they underline the hostility of heteronormative morality to expressions of sexual difference. As Ahmed has said, “The skin of the social might be affected by the comings and goings of different bodies” (9). It is in this sense that the ménage a trois brought together by Pablo in *La máxima felicidad* acts as a group of queering bodies. Pablo tells Leo and Perla that he has chosen them because, as he puts it, “[l]es vi las posibilidades” (Chocrón 30). These three bodies also challenge the “skin of the social” because they are different, they are queer.

These characters, like many of those in the works of Bellatin mentioned herein, cause in their readers or audiences a sense of deterritorialization (Palaversich 28), i.e. the upheaval of the expected world and the creation of one in which the unexpected (the queer) is given free range. This is also true in the case of the doorman in Arenas’s *El portero*. He has to change the order of the world and introduce others to the new order so that he himself will have a place in it (143-44), so that he, the exile, can return home.

All of these bodies generate a sense of being out of place in those who experience them, or a sense of not belonging in the space in which they interact. They function theatrically in that they occupy literary or stage space in which some combination of seeing and being are intertwined with the notion that all of the participants are also being watched (Blau 7). Queer bodies can represent the juxtaposition between the hetero and the queer worlds that queer theory hopes to knit together, just as for the narrator in *El gran vidrio*, “la sheika no era más que un punto entre una instacia y otra. Es decir, que servía de referente para estar seguro de la existencia tanto de un mundo material como de uno conformado sólo por el espíritu” (Bellatin 93). Both of those worlds are real, and they coincide in at least one point. In the Bellatin example, that point is the *sheika*, a body that embodies both worlds, as queer bodies can embody both queer and hetero characteristics because of the shared tradition from which queers have been excommunicated, but refuse to leave. The images of these bodies play with the borders between what is real and what is fictitious, between pretense and simulation (Palaversich 29), between norms and queerness. Their insertion into normal and abnormal situations, their performances in space, challenge heteronormativity and begin its queering. As will be seen in the next section, queer bodies performing in and queering previously normative space also redefine and queer the forms by which members of modern, Western, socio-cultural groupings order and conduct their interactions.

Form

Individuals performing their gender and sexualities exhibit basic rituals of life in the public sphere and, thereby, create forms by and through which members of any given society are able to conduct their lives within the cultures in which they live. These gendered and sexual enactments are akin to those of actors onstage. The representations of the actors create theater, or theatrical form. Also, although characters in fiction are not live actors, they execute literary “life” on the pages of texts and, thereby, create novelistic constructs. These systems are filtered by the spectator of a theatrical event or the reader of a literary text through his/her own personal experiences, which s/he then reflects back onto the rituals. This interaction changes the substance of the model so that the spectator or reader, in narrating or otherwise presenting his/her interpretation of the theatrical event or text, alters it when s/he (re)interprets his/her experience of it to another.

Similarly, when queers interpret the rituals of life via the filter of their own experiences and speak or act those queered versions of social customs, the communally accepted methods of presenting life forms become queered as well, offering up further possibilities for the queer body to perform in the public sphere. Of course, these performances alter, as well, the systems by which we all live. Because gendered and sexual practices have not historically been open to queer configurations, such rituals are exploded by queer performance and put back together again so that queerness may enter into the formulae which we, as social beings, use to delimit our lives.

I. Bodies in Space Create Form

Traditionally, in Latin America and also in the United States, identities that are based, at least in part, on same-sex sexual attraction are considered lesser, and those exhibiting queer characteristics become Others. Or they have been labelled as having marginal identities with respect to the construction of masculine and feminine social categories. In either case, they have been stigmatized or ignored and, therefore, silent (La Fountain xvi). This rejection of queers by the centralization of sexual power and gender management in heterosexuality can be seen in the exile to the United States of the homosexual Cuban, Ismael, in Arenas's "Viaje a La Habana." Nevertheless, on his return to Havana, Ismael enters into sexual congress, unknowingly at the time, with his son, who has been accepted into the same power structure that previously exiled his father for engaging in same-sex sexual activity. Ismael initially believes this sexual engagement has set his spirit free: "Sensación de diluirse, de integrarse, de fundirse a alguien que siendo él mismo ... es el opuesto, la resistencia anhelada y amada, *que siendo uno mismo puede darnos el placer de ser otro, ese otro yo tan desgarradoramente dado ya por desaparecido y de pronto ... encontrado*" (147-48) (emphasis in the original).

Through this homosexual act (that is essentially auto-eroticism in that he possesses his own body in the form of his son and is taken by his son's body in return), Ismael becomes capable of (re)defining his own identity so that he no longer accepts the degradation imposed on him by heteronormativity. Through a fulfilling homosexual act, that takes place in the land from which he has been exiled, Ismael becomes capable of (re)defining his own identity even within the dictatorial, socio-cultural norms that are in

control in Havana. And because the sex is with his Communist party-member son, Ismael's queer sex brings Castro's government directly into the act thereby, effectively, even though partially, queering the power center that has so vilified him.

Ismael has lived his life on the outside looking in. He has been in the position that Connors Jackman claims is essential for the researcher studying queer psychology within anthropological organizations, i.e. that the researcher needs to retain the sense of an outsider while learning the details of the rituals and forms by which the group s/he is studying lives (119). This is very similar to the position occupied by queer individuals growing up in heterosexist and heteronormative societies. They are always on the outside looking in. Nevertheless, they learn the intimate details and role-playing involved in the social situations that they encounter, even though these do not resonate with them in their personal applications of the tropes they are learning. But if they actively and openly apply them queerly to their sexual practices and gender presentations, the normative significations currently in acceptance will be reformed into more expansive signifiers that will then enter into normative society so that its understanding of sexuality and gender are queered. Thus, normativity is opened up to new significations that are proliferated by the sexual and gender performances of queers. We see this same type of proliferation at the end of *El portero* when the small group of animals (exiles, queers) seeking a new, more accepting kingdom is exponentially added to by the untold number and types of disenfranchised animals who join the small original group led by Cleopatra (Arenas 242-43).

This queer expansion is representative, in fact, of a historical look backward, a glance that then encompasses new interpretations of history so that the historical

meanings of social forms expand. We are able to witness this type of backwards, historical examination and its effects embodied in the gay child. Stockton has said that queer children are “history’s future act of looking back” (9) She explains this by noting that history is all of the viewpoints that exist to be read (or understood) at any given time. Therefore the present-day gay child cannot go back to a text to seek its meaning in its own time because the views of queer children did not then exist. The text (and current gender and sexuality performances as well) become queered because of the instability of queer identities and the recuperation of lost identities via present meanings (9).

Historical form itself becomes queered in the past via a social consideration of queer children growing up within heteronormativity. These queer children are always with us as they grow older and are, in turn, replaced by more queer children. As a heteronormativized society, we may try to act as if they are not present with us, but their presence is felt nonetheless. As a socio-cultural entity, we often find ourselves in the position of Ricardo in “Que trine Eva.” At one point Eva, as narrator, speaks to the Ricardo who existed in the past of which she was a part: “Acaso pensabas –sí, estoy segura que así era— que el que se negaba a mirarnos estaba ahora en la casa, en un rincón, de espaldas a nosotros” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 30). The imagined boy who declined to watch the over-the-top, heterosexually stylized performances of Ricardo and Eva was already part of their world just as queer children are part of ours, and both are able to redefine the structures of the worlds in which we live. The non-watcher, who Ricardo and, eventually, Eva believed to be present at their spectacles, was the boy who would tap into Ricardo’s queerness, which also was already in existence. This same boy would also wrest Ricardo from the grips of heteronormativity, which had closed its forms

to the likes of Ricardo.

The one who declined to watch is analogous to the performers of whom Roach speaks. He maintains that performers are always someone else; they are neither the character nor the spectator. Rather, they fill the spectators with “flesh and blood matter” that the latter can then imagine into existence as characters. But the performers are perched precariously between exposing themselves and erasing themselves (9). Ricardo imagines the boy who will not watch his and Eva’s performances into existence, and he becomes real “flesh and blood” that finally enables Ricardo to enact his queerness. The actions of the boy and Ricardo acting out queer sexuality together within normativity are an instance of queer performance doubled; however their enactments create a stronger positioning for homosexual actions within a normative culture even though such (re)presentations of sexual forms are contrary to heteronormative tenets.

In *El gran vidrio*, the female narrator of the third *autobiografía* asserts that she has a female lover, but at times her female lover is transformed into the writer, “Mario Bellatin” (129). Here, the author is imagining into existence queer performances which he then inserts himself into as a participant. That he enters into the queerness destabilizes the heterosexist, sexual power center previously defined and controlled by the heteronorm. Also, the narrator, shortly after this episode, notes that “mi padre me ordenó dedicarme a un oficio más acorde con mi sexo y mi situación. Creo que estaba viendo la posibilidad de que llegase a formar mi propia familia. Era una opción que me aterraba” (130). The possibility of following normative dictates is a terrifying prospect for this queer narrator. Therefore, she enacts her life according to new rules of her own creation, rules which are ephemeral and changeling. Thus, she becomes envisioned by the reader

as something distinct, not merely as a queer, but as an innovative and special being, as someone truly out of the ordinary.

The forms by which the narrator fashions her existence lose all sense of the sexual object choice and gender dichotomies constructed by heteronormativity. Merleau-Ponty has said that when the color red, for instance, is perceived as an area on a background, then “red” is no longer merely a color; it becomes more in that it is now also an area distinguishable from the background. It has taken on substance that increases its significance and separates it from the surroundings (13-14). In the case of the female narrator in *El gran vidrio*, the performance of what some would consider abnormality right in the midst of heteronormativity ensures that it is transformed into something other than mere queerness. It integrates itself into the normativized social setting in which it is being enacted and, therefore, changes not only the quality of queerness, but also the quality of normativity. It modifies the forms which govern our perception of appropriate gender and sexuality performances so that these categories are greatly expanded. New practices of gender and sexuality, heretofore not permitted by the dichotomous, normative categories that have controlled their definitions, come into being.

Not only are the forms by which we enact our gender and sexuality changed, but the authors whose works I examine in this dissertation queer other forms by which society has been ordered as well. Chocrón has queered theatrical presentations by denying the viewers/readers of his plays the satisfaction of having their expectations regarding character interaction met. Bellatin has queered the norms that readers have agreed upon by which novels are to be created and read, intentionally writing texts that go on changing, seemingly, *ad infinitum* with the input of each individual reader. Arenas

has even queered the type of narrators one expects to find in literary adventures. In *El portero*, for example, the narrator is first person and plural, and it is not just plural in the sense of “we” as a couple or a few; rather, the reader is often reminded, “No olviden — ya hemos dicho — que somos un millón de personas” (145).

Sullivan has mentioned that one movement in queer theory has been that which has intended to normalize queerness, i.e. it has expounded that homosexuals are the same as heterosexuals with unimportant, secondary characteristics (23), and to a certain extent this may be the effect of Arenas’s million-person plural narrator. Because this narrator uses the voices of exiles and because there are so many of them in agreement with respect to undermining normativity by their (re)interpretation of it, their understanding of the fallacies of the norms by which lives in modern, Western culture have been ordered becomes normalized.

Another sense possible from Arenas’s plural narrator is that queers are legion. Much of queer theory, however, tends to highlight the differences between the outsiders (the narrators in *El portero*, for example) and the norm (heterosexist-powered social constructs) in order to show that these differences matter at the individual level but that, overall, in the scope of the human condition, they really count not in the least. Gender and sexuality differences are, in many ways, like the physical defects and other deformities found in the writings of Bellatin, which are regularly put on display and thereafter ignored or overcome.

Another example of normalizing attitudes is found in Chocrón’s *Pájaro de mar por tierra* in the relationship between Micky and Gloria. Gloria has lived her entire life within the confines of the heteronorm. It has fashioned her understanding of the

proprieties of the relationship between a man and a woman. Micky, although having lived in the heteronorm, as well, has not been molded by it. He has escaped his roots, his upbringing, the society in which he grew up, and he has lived in the queer geographies available to him within the midst of a bustling New York City. Nevertheless, “Gloria y [Micky], en apariencia diferentes, en antecedentes diferentes, dos personas que no parecían tener nada en común, encontraron sin embargo que se complementaban convirtiéndose casi in una misma persona” (138). Micky is Venezuelan. Gloria is North American. Micky has immersed himself in the cruising scene in New York, and Gloria has been a member of the international jet set. Micky has been pretty exclusively homosexual, and Gloria has been heterosexual. In their relationship, we can see the heteronorm and queerness combining seamlessly.

Fleeing the culturally acceptable forms that a subject identity may present, however, will not free those who have been subjugated and/or marginalized. In order to help us see beyond the nostalgia felt by diasporic people who have had to leave their homeland and live in a foreign country, in his autobiography, Arenas writes:

Yo sabía que en aquel sitio yo no podía vivir. Desde luego, diez años después de aquello, me doy cuenta de que para un desterrado no hay ningún sitio donde se pueda vivir; que no existe sitio, porque aquél donde soñamos, donde descubrimos un paisaje, leímos el primer libro, tuvimos la primera aventura amorosa, sigue siendo el lugar soñado; en el exilio uno no es más que un fantasma, una sombra de alguien que nunca llega a alcanzar su completa realidad; yo no existo desde que llegué al exilio; desde entonces comencé a huir de mí mismo. (*Antes que anochezca* 314)

Therefore, for the exile, whether s/he be queer or an otherwise denigrated individual, to live fully within the common culture and to contribute fully to the social wellbeing, the forms which govern social interactions must be altered (expanded) sufficiently so that the queer has available to him/her an increase of possibilities with respect to gender and

sexuality (re)presentations in order that once normativized social environments can flourish. As Ahmed has written, “what is other than me is also what allows me to extend the reach of my body” (9).

II. Queer Forms Have Traditionally Been Forbidden

Queers (with certain exceptions such as for those in ancient Greece) have not heretofore generally been allowed to interact or contribute to Western culture because of strict adherence to the artificial constructs of “proper” gender presentation and sexual object choice. The social strategies that have been used to hold these constructs in place have been rooted in ritualized performances of gender and sexuality that have denied non-hetero representation via the force of social prohibition and taboo (Hyner 1). The social power systems centralized within heteronormativity demand adherence to its systems and use fear and denigration to keep the power constructs supreme.

An example of this is found in Bellatin’s *Perros héroes*, and oddly enough, it is the maimed figure of the *hombre inmóvil* who wields power in this instance. His *enfermero-entrenador* is often dissatisfied with his station and sees the *hombre inmóvil* as too rigid and single-minded. But every time the former mentions leaving, the latter threatens to kill all of the animals in his care, to which the enfermero-entrenador is adamantly opposed (41). Here, power ignores the wants and desires of an element not aligned with its precepts. Likewise, cultural taboos and prohibitions have determined that queerness has no access to power (again remembering the exception of ancient Greece), and, hence, it has traditionally had no voice in the structuring of the doctrines of the Western heteronorm.

To maintain this *status quo*, heteronormativity has enforced adherence to

“straight” time, i.e. it has succeeded in naturalizing time to the extent that temporality itself excludes queers. This is tied to the notion that queers were not present in the past and that, therefore, there is no model for queer behavior. It is also related to heteronormativity’s insistence on procreation. Because of this latter aspect, queers have no role in the continuation of social interaction over time. The mechanism whereby this is possible lies in the modern, social assumption that there can be no future that radically breaks with the systems in force in everyday life in the present. This serves to enforce the idea that queerness, once accepted, will tend to eliminate any future that is based in reproductive authoritarianism. That is to say that queers do not have offspring and that they, thereby, endanger the present socio-cultural practices, along with the very future of society itself. Because of this, it is collectively necessary to require heterosexuality. According to modern, heteronormative dictates, to do otherwise is to face extinction. Heterosexual fear of elimination keeps heteronormative systems in power.

An example of such fear can be interpreted from the following dialogue in *Mesopotamia*:

Hugo: Lucas es hipersensible y todo le viene de la niñez.

Lucas: Igual que a todo el mundo. ¿De dónde le viene todo, a todo el mundo? De atrás; no de adelante.

Ismael: Pero entendiendo, hay la posibilidad de erradicar. (Chocrón 210)

This is to say that if all impetus to the human spirit does not come from the systems of the past, then those systems embraced by humanity face the possibility of eradication. Surprisingly, this belief provides hope for queerly theorized potential systems of inclusion. It is not that the past is necessarily to be eradicated. Rather, it needs to be (re)interpreted in order to change the present understanding of history so that a new future can be attained, one that is not static, but that is able to evolve and benefit from

queer involvement in it.

The loss that rigid social constructs have inflicted on the cultures in which modern societies live can be understood by reference to theater. Theatrically speaking, Blau says that modern, Western cultures have lost much of their history because they have turned it into spectacle that is the result of a displacement of historic peoples and actions: history has been screened so that it adheres to the practices permitted in and by the present, favored social constructs (3). That indicates that we have created a false spectacle in our theatrical, social representations to such a degree that history has been rewritten in accordance with modernly accepted social practices. But queer historical (re)interpretation can lead to a fuller, truer concept of history. Also, it must be remembered that spectacle is one of the many forms by which social interactions are ordered. Of course, queer (re)presentation in social space is performance, itself a theatrical practice, which questions and re-positions historical fact and positions it differently so that a queer-positive future can be envisioned as a social and cultural possibility.

Without a re-positioning of conventional belief, we queers are a people without a future in the context of dominant, heterosexist culture. We do not have access to the “complete” life offered by heterosexuality because the temporality that encompasses such a life is based on notions of reproduction, of repeating heterosexual beings. In the face of tradition, then, queers, though they continually seek, will not find succor within heteronormativity because they are excluded from accessing normativity in that they do not necessarily reproduce themselves. Therefore, despite the fact that there is a growing legalization of gay marriage and a greater acceptance of gay unions and gay adoption in

the United States at the time of the writing of this dissertation, queers may not be seen as fully productive members of society. But if we examine this notion more closely, one could conclude that some queers, who do indeed procreate, and some heterosexuals, who do not, should exchange places within social power structures: queer, biological parents should be allowed entry into normative culture and childless, heterosexuals should be excluded.

That this inversion does not happen highlights the strength of the forms that result from and, subsequently, control social constructs. In this context, the central formulas are those that organize the presentations of gender and sexual object choice that have previously been socially determined by patriarchy as necessary for reproduction, despite whatever reproductive evidence that may, indeed, exist. Therefore, queers, faced with stringent social systems that bar them from participation, must either constantly search for spaces in which they may act so as to find some cultural resonance or accept their exclusion on account of the heteronormative models currently holding sway.

The character of Micky, queer and at loose ends, in Chocrón's *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, exemplifies a sense of lost wandering and of hoping to find definition to his life. Near the end of the novel, he converses with one of his friends, a male ex-lover who still hopes they may have a chance of being a couple, i.e. that, together, they may have the opportunity to model a queer marital form in and through which they will live despite social pressures in contravention. We realize Micky's dilemma through the following dialogue. His friend speaks first:

--¿Qué piensas hacer? ¿Seguir así, siendo el objeto amado? ¿Hasta cuándo? ¿Hasta que desaparezca tu belleza? Desaparecerá, mi amor, desaparecerá. ¿Y luego qué?
--Antes de que eso suceda, yo encontraré algo.

--¿Qué?
--No sé. Por eso estoy buscando.
--¿Pero qué te interesa ahora? ¿Qué te llama la atención? ¿Dinero?
--Dinero. Sí. Teniendo un ingreso, todo lo demás irá encajando.
--¿Y cómo piensas encontrar ese dinero? ¿Trabajando? ¿En qué?
--En algo que me interese.
--¿Y qué es ese algo?
--No sé. Por eso ando buscando.
--Hablamos en círculos.
--Ese soy yo. Círculos. (175-76)

Here we see that heteronormativity steals linearity from queer lives, leaving them to wander in circles as modern, Western culture marches in a line from one accepted form to another.

But is it that gays and lesbians themselves may actually be heteronormativizing forces? That is to ask whether dichotomous male/female gender presentations and male/female characteristics involved in the choice of a sexual partner are so ingrained into all modern, Western individuals that even queer actions themselves enforce heteronormativized gender and sexual ideals. Turner says that acts define identity and that if the act is sodomy, then the identity label is homosexual (155). But if we examine the homosexual act from a heterosexist perspective that tries to affirm the machismo of the “penetrator” in Hispanic American culture and, thus, attempts to “naturalize” said act along heteronormative lines, we have a penetrator involved in the act, who is engaging in supposedly masculine behavior (penetration) and one who is penetrated who is fulfilling a suitably feminine role (opening himself to penetration). Therefore, the participants in the act of sodomy, even though both are biologically male, are perpetuating to some extent heteronormative constructs. Thus, a queer sexual form is very close to that which is considered appropriately heterosexual, the only real difference being that the feminine partner does not risk pregnancy.

Of course, if the heterosexual penetrator and the one penetrated use some sort of pregnancy prevention during vaginal intercourse, then the feminine partner in this duo does not face impregnation either. In this case, there is very little distinction between the two pairs with respect to the notions of reproduction implicated by the heteronorm's masculine/feminine dichotomy. In this way, queers can themselves enter a step or two into the heteronormativized social form that is the sex act between two people that involves penetration. But, at the same time, the queer partners, because both are biologically male in this example, are changing the form of the act of sexual penetration within the context of the heteronormativized social/sexual setting and (re)creating it into something that is both heteronormative and queer at the same time. Likewise, anal intercourse is used by some heterosexual couples.

Unless gender and sexual actions are examined queerly, queers are kept in stasis, forever circling within linear, Western society. One of the witnesses in the "Mona" section of Arenas's *Viaje a La Habana*, when trying to describe the sexual activity involved in that tale, states: "[D]igo *ella*, y tal vez deba decir *él*; aunque tampoco sea *esa*, quizás, la mejor manera de llamar a *esa cosa*. Ya veo que desde el comienzo *ella* (¿o *él*?) me enreda, me confunde. Si ... termino [este alegado], si alguien lo lee, si alguna persona cree en *él*, tal vez pueda salvarme" (67, emphasis in the original). Thus, the reader can understand that, if the forms of the heteronorm and of queerness become blended, then social activity within these systems may become capable of cycling as well as of going forward, thus combining history and possibility into a more unified relationship.

Another way that heteronormativity has maintained queer denizens in exile or

isolation has been by disallowing them a “name.” They are all labeled “queer,” and, thereafter, what they do and how they think is concomitantly queer. We find an example of this notion throughout the entire text of Bellatin’s *Perros héroes*. There are no named characters in the whole novel. The marginalized do not have names. That way, it is easier to keep them in the margins. Within heteronormativity, if one is labeled queer, s/he loses his/her identity.

The heteronorm is controlled by power structures that have created nations with the authority to disallow queers the names they might otherwise have claimed. But Ríos Ávila has noted that the idea of “nation” is too narrowly defined because it leaves no space for those who do not fit in (1088). Therefore, we queers and others who do not fit must claim names and seek entry, find a doorway through which we can initialize social access. We can look to the *portero* in Arenas’s *El portero*, who also lacks a name because he, likewise, has been marginalized by the normative inhabitants of the building in which he serves. Nevertheless, he manages to lead his band of queers, each one of them individually, to “[u]na inmensa puerta ... donde [cada uno] ... encontraría su paisaje añorado al que se integraría de inmediato” (247). The *portero* is able to see beyond normativity and imagine queer possibility. Thus, he opens doors into the heteronorm through which the queers can access the socio-cultural forms available in ways previously inaccessible to them. They need no longer be nameless or excluded because those forms can become queered and still be usable by the non-queer.

III. Social Concepts of Forms Determine and Are Dependent on Appearances

It is important that queers presently be apportioned entree to the practices open for expressions of gender identity and sexual object choice because the present is not only

a reflection of history, but it will also become part of the past and then be altered in a putatively unknown future. However, the future as an unknowable pattern of forms is actually mythical in that society uses the present and the past, which has led to the present we find ourselves inhabiting, to create the future (Case 14). Therefore, once queers enter into the heteronorm and demand that its rituals expand or metamorphose so as to allow queer access, not only the present is changed, but also our interpretation of past possibilities and future configurations becomes transformed.

At one point in *Perros héroes*, there is a short passage that notes that the hunting falcon housed by the *hombre inmóvil* in the midst of parakeets and dogs is kept tied: “[S]e desvanece la idea de que el ave de cetrería está amarrada de una de sus patas por temor a que la devoren los perros. Parece que atando al ave se busca preservar más bien la vida de los pericos” (Bellatin 24). Two forces, the *perros* and the *pericos*, have very different potential relationships with the bird of prey. The falcon may be called upon to represent the tension between normativity and the queer perspective with respect to their opposing positions regarding the gender and sexual object choice dichotomies that have been put into place, ostensibly to protect the heteronorm from grave danger. The dichotomies have served to keep the dogs at bay. But once modern society admits the possibility of queerness into the present in which we live, we are forced to reconsider which group is the predator and which prey. It becomes all too obvious that it is really the parakeets (the queers) which have always been in danger because of the willingness of the heteronorm to attack them unequivocally. With this change of perception comes the realization that the heteronorm’s dichotomies have been used to deny queer possibility and, thus, to make queer evolution difficult, if not impossible.

Insertion of queerness into modern cultures' social constructs obviously opens the latter up to queer contact and to the possibilities of queerness in the future. This results because, if queerness is found in the forms that members of society live by and through, it is imputed to matter, and actions involved in the rituals that forms dictate are performative, i.e. they are provisional until performed and indeterminate until put into the practice of social forms (Graham 184). Then queer substance (queer people and the queer(ed) practices they are able to adapt from the prevailing models) is able to have signification beyond itself as it constitutes newly queer(ed) social relations. Thereby, these achieve new mechanisms whereby humanity may be constituted queerly in the future.

For example, in *La máxima felicidad*, at the end of Act 1, Pablo and Perla are on stage together preparing for bed, but slowly we begin to realize that they will not be the pair sleeping in the double bed. Rather, Perla goes to the single bed and reminds Pablo that he and Leo must sleep together because they have quarreled. The audience, thus, commences to have the capacity to grasp the truth of what Pablo has said: “[A]l crecer, al madurar, uno desecha su familia y escoge gente extraña para crearse otra familia” (Chocrón 36). Whereas the heterosexually anchored family has perhaps been the most significant mainstay of modern, Western society, a queering of the familial formulae by which everyone all lives opens up the possibility of reinterpreting “family” and then, also, of the other systems which have made up what has accepted as being the only possible social relationships.

Despite the efforts of queer theorists and writers to gain acceptance within the realm of social communication and to develop a queer presence within newly recognized

spaces in the heteronorm, the queer community itself, perhaps especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, held fast to the gender myths perpetuated by heterosexism. As Sullivan notes, this frequently took the form of disdain for drag queens and those engaging in transgender behavior by queers and their allies (68); both groups were seeking to uphold the boundaries of the outdated dichotomies so that they might cast queerness as similar to heterosexual performance. Literary evidence is exposing queerness within the heteronorm and revealing the life experiences of queers in gay and lesbian ghettos on the periphery of straight society abounds. One example of this may be found in *Pájaro de mar por tierra*:

[S]e tomaban ... en algún bar donde la clientela eran homosexuales discretos, cuidadosos de su reputación. Casi todos se conocían y se saludaban con la cordialidad distante.... Nunca fueron juntos a los bares donde bailaban hombres con hombres, ni donde las maricas llegaban vestidos de mujeres, ni tampoco donde marineros de todo el mundo se ofrecían para que las locas les brindaran tragos.... Con su amigo, Micky solo frecuentó los cuatro o cinco bares de hombres con trajes oscuros, corbatas oscuras, hablando en voz baja ... dando todos la impresión de ser un grupo de ejecutivos esperando la llegada de un tren o la partida del cadáver que en algún lugar oscuro del bar habían estado velando. (Chocrón 164-65)

Chocrón's style criticizes the restrictive attitude of the quiet, scared men described in this passage who refuse to accept that gender performances are not necessarily constricted to the role that heterosexist society has dictated and who live in a fear of openly embracing their queerness.

But drag and gender-bending offer queer possibility in ways that quiet mimicking of straight roles cannot. They are histrionic in their presentations within social settings and further highlight how performing queerness is theatrical. As Solomon has said, "transvestism is what makes theater the queerest art form" (2). Theater must dress itself up in drag of some sort to present a show that is meant to be accepted as a slice of or

comment on reality.

In the *sheika* section of Bellatin's *El gran vidrio*, the narrator is a writer who meets his characters. He is like an actor who meets his character on the stage and like queers who have tried to take on the roles of heterosexualism only to find that they must create new creatures because an acceptance of the roles that gender myths have delineated denies same-sex sexual object choice. Therefore, in order to survive, queers often have needed historically, at first, to accept and then deny the roles readily accessible in the heterosexist gender and sexuality dichotomies. In the final denial of these roles, new rituals have been created whereby to relate queerly in friendly, romantic, or sexual relationships. When that aspect of history (the choice of denying the dictates of heterosexist dichotomies) is recognized, pointed out, and pushed into open spaces within the heteronorm, past and future cultural practices become queer(ed). Queer past and future meet as they do in "Viaje a La Habana" when Ismael visits his wife and Ismaelito (with whom Ismael has had sex only the night before) comes into the room (Arenas 151). Past and future collide when Ismael recognizes Ismaelito as his son, and both become queer(ed). This confrontation highlights how appearances can create form and how form can be altered to allow for the creation of new appearances.

Phelan has stated that memories are not bodies but that, as they arise, they help us to understand bodies (172). Thus, if a society begins to remember queerly, the queer body becomes a reputable memory that can take part in the gender and sexuality models that govern modern, Western cultural and social interactions. This queer body, arising out of cultural memories, helps queers to claim the word "queer" as an affirmation instead of a negation, as prideful instead of shameful, and, thus, use it to resist, defy, and

transform heteronormativity (Clarke 41). Otherwise, we queers run the risk of continuing to allow the heteronorm to define and subsume us like Bofors, in *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, finally admits he did with Micky: “Yo traté de que se comportase como lo concebía.... [D]ebía sentirse incómodo; conmigo él no era él.... Si me sorprendió ... [al] final fue porque reaccionó como él era y, por supuesto, yo no conocía a esta persona” (Chocrón 121).

The heteronorm must be surprised by queer self-presentation because we queers are not what they, the enforcers of heteronormativity, have invented, and they cannot know us till we (re)claim social forms for our own inhabitation. In so doing, we need to reject, as the only possibilities, the limited gender and sexuality classifications available and expand these categories to include our public (re)presentations. We need to allow the drag queens and *locas* to take pride of place along with the penetrators of same-sex object choices.

Queer commentators and queer writings are beginning to fracture the heterosexism that has negated queer possibility by exposing new forms of social interaction that have traditionally been denied or, at least, hushed up. Because of this, and as more and more queers allow themselves and their bodies to speak in the public sphere, there are more and more who reject heteronormative concepts of gender and sexuality. According to Clarke, all of these people are “queer,” as well (43). If one takes this statement to the extreme, one could aver that there are queer heterosexuals, which, of course, there cannot be (at least if they are only classified by their preference of having one male and one female involved in the sex acts in which they engage). Therefore, it becomes necessary to look anew at social forms and how appearances have maintained

those configurations in the past, but also at how appearances are now altering social customs.

In the past, queers have frequently been deleted from political concerns and have been culturally manipulated (Molloy and Irwin xiii). Modern queer writings, such as those by the authors examined in this dissertation, can expose these errors and can also serve to mock, disestablish, undermine, and, thus, unseat such mistakes, even within the milieu of cultural beliefs in force. Queer writings can ask, for example, why are the gender and sexuality forms that a homosexual male is allowed and/or expected to embrace and exhibit different from those that a heterosexual male is expected to adhere to or exemplify?

In *El portero*, Arenas, as the persona of the author, mocks himself a la heterosexist belief systems at the same time that he points out the essential ridiculous nature of such mockery: “En cuanto a Reinaldo Arenas, su homosexualismo confeso, delirante y reprochable contaminaría a todas luces textos y situaciones, descripciones y personajes, obnubilando la objetividad” (152). He puts these words in the mouths of the multiple narrators, who, themselves, are exiles and, as such, are living on the cusps of normative society. When one peripheral group parodies another using the language of the power center, the charade itself becomes mocked, and the reader is able to realize the veritable weakness of the bases for the mockery.

Another example of the destabilization of the heteronormative, cultural power structure appears in Bellatin’s *Salón de belleza* when the homosexual narrator, who is sick, presumably with AIDS, says: “[R]ecuerdo aquel dicho popular que señala que al hombre se le seduce por el estómago. Y no solamente lo escuché con frecuencia, sino

que en más de una ocasión lo puse en práctica” (58). This saying, in its normal context refers to the social belief that a heterosexual woman must be able to cook well (an attribute that has been culturally defined as feminine) to attract the attentions of a virile, heterosexual man. Such a man must maintain his strength and vitality in order to propagate himself. This man is more interested in eating than in a loving relationship, and that is to be expected, since these traits have also been culturally defined as elements of masculinity. Nevertheless, Bellatin turns both masculinity and femininity on their heads in that the body of the cook here is male, and he intends to seduce another male, which is not at all consistent with cultural definitions of conventional sexual relations. Nevertheless, it is inescapable that the form of the body is male at the same time that it is clear that the male bodily form has been engaged in the supposedly feminine social custom of cooking. Additionally, the appearance of the body which is to eat is male; yet, this male-seeming, bodily form is able to be attracted by the hybrid configuration of the cook. These two masculine biological forms, both with feminine traits, at least in accordance with the expected interpretation of the aforementioned saying, intend to engage in sexual activity and thereby propagate themselves by offering up new, hybrid gender and sexual practices that may be followed in the recently emerging cultural situations that are being created by the destabilization of traditional, heteronormative cultural systems.

These types of assaults on the heterosexist forms instigated by heteronormativity endeavor to change conceptual approaches to gender and sexuality, political perspectives, and possible self-identification practices, as does the adoption by queers of “queer” as a revolutionary term (Browne and Nash, “Queer Methods and Methodologies” 3). As the

narrator of the third autobiography in *El gran vidrio*, through whom Bellatin, as author, pointedly speaks at times, says: “Es quizá por eso, por pensar demasiado las cosas, que mi forma de hablar es una especie de híbrido” (152). This hybrid means of communication in a uni-dimensional, normative society acts as a destabilization technique.

Queer writings, in fact, do seek to amplify the possible meanings of the social arrangements by which all individuals in society conduct their lives, thereby necessarily creating hybrid practices that have arisen due to the visualization of increased possibilities for entering into or exhibiting social rituals. These configurations will go on changing because, as the original and subsequent forms become subjected to subversion, the resulting structures cannot be predicted; even though each participant in an act signifies separately from the act itself, s/he cannot control the signification which a viewer perceives (Sullivan 91).

This type of ambiguity is of importance in the “Mona” section of Arenas’s *Viaje a La Habana* in which Leonardo da Vinci has visualized, and painted, himself as the Mona Lisa. But when the story’s narrator sees the painting come to life, it is as Elisa, who, later, transmutes back into Leonardo. Along with these transformations, the forms holding together heteronormative concepts of gender and sexuality keep blending, fading, changing, and developing, dependent not only on their enactment but also in accordance with their perception.

IV. Fragmentation and Disruption of Form and Textuality

Theatricality determines for the viewer the display and perception of the social and cultural forms of sexuality and gender. The desire for difference and the desire for

illusion are closely intertwined. Theater has a grand capacity to produce captivating fantasies; at the same time it struggles to banish illusion from the audience's perception of what is occurring onstage (Blau 217). The same desires and struggles are evident in queer desire for and effectuations of changes in gendered and sexual forms. Queer theory seeks to highlight queerness as one possible, social reality so that individuals might imagine themselves enacting queerness on the communal stage rather than solely imagining themselves as restricted to heterosexual performance or confined to the periphery of cultural interaction.

As Cleopatra, the leader of the queer refugees in *El portero*, says to all the animals: "Cada uno de ustedes ... aspira a algo distinto o por lo menos no exactamente igual a lo que el otro quiere. ¿Es imposible, entonces, encontrar un lugar donde poder vivir en relativa armonía? No lo creo" (Arenas 232-33). Cleopatra believes that all the animals can live together in harmony. Furthermore, many of the aspects and many of the voices of queer theory believe that queers can live in accord in normative society, once that which is presently considered to be "normal" undergoes transformation.

This change must be effectuated by the insistence of queers to speak their own truth. We cannot be like the narrator of "Un personaje de apariencia moderno," who says, "Una de las características principales de mi personalidad es mentir todo el tiempo. Creo que eso, de alguna manera, me hace más graciosa ante los demás" (Bellatin, *El gran vidrio* 146-47). Despite the heteronorm's willingness to tolerate queers if we lie about who and what we are and if we perform false self-representations, we must not succumb to the perceived ease of a life in which we are tolerated as long as our enactments of gender and sexuality adhere to the strictures laid down by social centers of power that

believe they are closed to our infiltration. As is apparent from *La máxima felicidad*: “[L]a mezcla de nuestras edades, de nuestros sexos, de nuestras diversas experiencias, produce la máxima felicidad” (Chocrón 57). To that list can be and needs to be added 1) the mixture of our various performances as gendered beings of masculinity, femininity, and a combination of the two so that everyone’s gender may be more adequately expressed and 2) the possibility, which, of course, is indirectly illustrated in Chocrón’s play, of varying sexual object choices.

These once taboo mixtures can infiltrate the heteronorm because identity categories are not fixed, despite the dual system that heterosexual power seeks to portray as invariable. Ways of identifying oneself and others “multiply,” “metamorphose,” and “fracture” as a direct consequence of “conceptual conflicts” (Sullivan 149). In Bellatin’s *Flores*, for example, the reader is witness to a mask of the author merging with the narrator, with the former’s maleness infiltrating the latter’s femaleness, in order to evoke the concept of a voice who speaks out of the simultaneous experiencing of two genders. The queer being is able to speak its multiple-gendered experience out of the very social forms that have governed gender display.

Another way of looking at this is to say that within the queer body lies the possibility of “Everyman” representations. The acceptance of these emergent, odd cultural representations of gender forms, though decidedly not a given, does have some basis as is pointed out by Bellatin’s work “Un personaje en apariencia moderno:” “[c]ambiar de tradición, de nombre, de historia, de nacionalidad, de religión, son una suerte de constantes” (*El gran vidrio* 160). The narrator who utters these words is speaking of the evolution of modern families from traditional ones and the ability of

families to (re)invent themselves at various times and in varying circumstances. Queer theorists and writers have become able to visualize the queer possibilities that such traditional metamorphoses offer up for creating fluctuation in the social concepts of thinkable gender enactments and sexual object choices.

Moreover, one can look to Bellatin's *Flores* for a direct example of the transformation of the forms by which patriarchal society has ordered itself and told its history. All chapters in this novel are separate and complete. It is not required that they must be tied together. "La intención inicial es que cada capítulo pueda leerse por separado, como si de la contemplación de una flor se tratara" (Bellatin, *Flores* 9). But even though the flowers, the life stories, offered by each chapter are complete within the confines of the individual chapters, the "book" is not complete without all of them. All of the chapters and the life stories really are interrelated, just as the communities in which people conduct their social lives may seem to offer the idea of completeness for some individuals, when in fact the "community" is not complete without all of its segments being interwoven and (inter)related.

This interrelatedness may be realized via an examination of the way in which queers "try on" gender stagings and experiment with their sexuality. All queers are born into heterosexuality. At first, being human, they may tend to ape gender and sexuality, just as they copy language and other socio-cultural forms such as proper eating and cleaning etiquette. They are like literary characters when these are introduced to the reader of traditional texts. The characters are at first defined by the reader's expectations. Then they undergo changes as they evolve, along with the unfolding of their actions and interrelationships over the course of the work. Queers may at first mimic what is socially

expected of them, but, over time, they realize that the mimicry is just that and cannot offer self-realization. Rather, they must break with normativized social forms as do the three characters in *O. K.*, who celebrate their matrimonial union, despite it being tripartite in nature:

Mina: Yo ... brindo por los tres en uno.

Ángela: ¿Qué quieres decir los tres en uno.

Franco: Ángela, ¿no te das cuenta? Somos tres en un ... matrimonio. (Chocrón 114)

Queers are obliged to splinter themselves and the forms that first constrict them in order to become the subjects they have not been allowed to be because of heteronormative rules governing social interaction. Once the queer being is fragmented, s/he must put all the pieces back together again so that they all now fit together differently. Then, as newly-minted subjects, they are able to enact gender practice and sexuality rituals in ways divergent from those pursued by the heteronorm.

Nevertheless, just as *Flores* is not a whole unless all of its chapters are broken apart in the reader's mind and reformulated so that there is a new integration of them into a different whole, the heteronorm cannot continue its re-creation in spite of queer presentations. Heteronormativity is inescapably altered when queer (re)presentations enter into normativizing structures and offer up new models by which to order social (inter)action and relationships. The alteration of expected form in *Flores* teaches that there is a nexus between every chapter, even if the reader does not see it clearly. Queer theory seeks out the interconnectedness of modern social practices and relationships at least in part in order to help maintain communal health.

As Molloy and Irwin point out, queer enactments of traditional social forms problematize normative structures (xii). For example, Mark and Micky, in *Pájaro*

de mar por tierra, go to “ver una película donde Doris Day se comportaba con su novio en casi la misma forma que Mark se comportaba con Micky: muy silenciosamente, casi invisiblemente, dejando caer la mano izquierda junto al muslo derecho de Micky y mantenerla allí sin moverla, sin presionarla, mientras Doris Day por fin besaba a su novio en la mejilla” (Chocrón 32-33). Modern, cultural innocence of the sort in the film between Doris Day and her companion, with respect to representations of sexual interaction, is troubled by the heteronorm’s having to face a male hand lingering on another male’s thigh while watching Doris Day engage in similar opposite-sex activity onscreen, perhaps with Rock Hudson. This is not to mention that not too many years later, the heteronormative configuration of sexuality was seriously destabilized when it was revealed that Rock Hudson had died of AIDS contracted through same-sex sexual activity.

Because the rule of heterosexuality is a “cultural effect” based on systems of power and knowledge, it can be questioned and changed (Sullivan 39). Bellatin’s *Perros héroes* questions the “cultural effect” of the novelistic form by including as part of the text a booklet of photos and two pages of drawings before the first word is written. These non-word images force the reader to confront the fact that s/he may no longer be able to expect a novel to be made up solely of words and sentences that create chapters, and that, ultimately, these produce the novel. Likewise, the Mark/Micky relationship enacted in contrast to Doris Day’s performance of heterosexuality and the subsequent revelation of Rock Hudson’s homosexuality problematize normative cultural structures by making them unstable and exposing them, not as set, but rather, as variable. This destabilization of heteronormative constructs is inevitable, given situations such as these, in that because

heterosexuality is the dominant ideology (i.e. it is seen as compulsory), once a decision contrary to the ideology is made, heterosexuality is exposed as nothing other than one more construct that can be deconstructed. For example, once a man shifts his sexual object desire to another male figure, as in the cases of Mark and Micky and Rock Hudson and his homosexual lovers, the idea that masculinity is “natural” becomes suspect (Dolan 63).

Queer theory seeks to use this suspect nature of one of the bases on which modern, Western civilizations have established the social forms that control notions of masculinity and appropriately masculine sexual behavior to advocate on behalf of the role that queerness can play in society and to protect queers from the adverse ramifications of living in heterosexist cultures. For example, often, when parents know their child is gay, the child they once perceived as theirs disappears and is replaced, in the parents’ view, by a “sinister version” of the child (Stockton 17). Bell sees this transformation as the result of a clash between nature and culture and he advocates that, rather than continue with the myth that all behavior is learned, one should learn to combine the differences between the two into a unified concept of “natureculture” (143). This idea has the potential to make it easier to understand that a representation of femininity, for example, does not require a female body (a male body can enact femininity by embodying character and/or personality traits generally thought of as feminine), and that realization serves to denaturalize our notions of social gender mandates (Solomon 97).

Flores shows how one entering into a new, or queer, situation is theatrical in that once a border is crossed and the voyager begins to experience the novel environment, s/he becomes like a character on a stage: “La mirada del escritor se queda fija en una de

las flores durante largo tiempo y, poco a poco, logra introducirse en su esencia. Una vez cruzado el corazón de las violetas, el personaje se halla dentro de un escenario” (Bellatin 97). The writer, or the creator of an identity, must gaze beyond the form in order that personality might be revealed, even if the resulting personality defies the forms among which s/he exists.

Ingenschay writes that Arenas destabilizes the heteronorm when the latter creates his queer parodies, which criticize and challenge cultural norms. He describes Arenas’s works as not only being destabilizing, but also as creating a type of “transitory discourse between life and death,” a “sort of thanatography and erotography at the same time” (14). Ingenschay’s ideas here point out not only the unstable nature of the human relationship with life and death, but also the transitoriness of the forms by which humans (re)present and enact the erotic elements included in the definitions of gender and sexuality. For example, in the “Mona” section of *Viaje a La Habana*, one of the narrators says,

[M]e dirigí ... a Reinaldo Arenas para ver si podía insertar [mi texto] en la revista *Mariel*. Pero Arenas, con su proverbial frivolidad ... a pesar de estar ya gravemente enfermo del SIDA, de lo que acaba de morir, se rió [sic] de mi propósito, alegando que *Mariel* era una revista contemporánea y que este tipo de “relato a la manera decimonónica” no cabía en sus páginas. (Arenas 63)

This quote, seemingly, points out the instability of life itself as well as the futility of consciously adhering to a past and traditions that are no longer valid.¹⁹ But it also ties human and individual sexuality to life and death. That is to say that one’s sexuality is as incontrovertible as are life and death, with respect to identities that may be taken on and represented within the confines of the human condition.

¹⁹ Here “*Mariel*” is the name of a magazine, but it should be mentioned that the port of Mariel, from which Arenas began his life in exile, may also be seen as representative for the author of the instability that is truly a characteristic of human life. It also refers to the massive boatlift of Cuban exiles to the United States in 1980.

Although much Latin American, gay writing may be characterized as a “borderland literature” with characters living in the margins of society (Ingenschay 12), Bellatin creates absurd but perfectly coherent literary universes inhabited by unclearly drawn characters, universes which have claustrophobic, or oppressive, and depressing atmospheres (Palaversich 27). This type of writing, instead of focusing on the “othered” nature of queerness, emphasizes that the forms that control the cultural universes which have been accepted as valid traditionally are, in fact, worlds that are constantly evolving, changing, and transforming in often very disconcerting ways.

Bellatin’s precise, dispassionate language is misleading, and it most assuredly does not lead to clear meaning (34-35). For example, in *Flores*, the chapter entitled “Buganvillas” begins with: “El joven travesti que suele conversar con Eva a través del agujero de la ventana que comunica el patio con la cocina, concibió al hijo con una mujer con quien lo unía cierta amistad, para que ella y su novia fueran al fin madres del bebé que tanto ansiaban criar” (95). This single sentence is dense with possible interpretations and emotions, but the style of writing itself is unemotional, almost scientific in feel. Bellatin may be said to be satirizing psychology/psychoanalysis for its traditional views of human sexuality. Nevertheless, his textual worlds mirror the fluid and transformative properties found in twenty-first century social environs in that they exhibit a lack of meaning and stability (25). The queerness in “real,” inhabited worlds is also unstable, like the “creation” of Micky in *Pájaro de mar por tierra*, about which the “writer” remarks: “A parte de todo lo anterior, lo único que queda para recordar a Micky son estas páginas. Ellas componen un recuerdo bastante tenue, sumamente inventado, sin pretensiones de ser un homenaje, escritas a lo mejor porque el ser vivo intrigó al autor lo

suficiente como para crear una mentira, una invención, con visos de verdad, de realidad” (Chocrón 183). Queerness is a chimera, but within the many faceted and ever-changing (queer(ed)) world, there is a core truth—that society is fluid, changeable, and changing—which demands recognition from the heteronorm itself that initially spawned then excluded the queers.

In the works of Bellatin, various characters allude to possible interpretations of the texts in which they exist (Palaversich 26). In much the same way, queer theorists, queer writers, and queer individuals indicate a multitude of ways in which to interpret queerness. As Chocrón has stated, “Los escritores de teatro, novela, poesía, etc., son seres que ven ‘a través de ...’. [E]stamos viviendo una transición hacia un nuevo estado de cosas” (quoted in Vestrini 23). Likewise, queers are living a transitional existence, the public enactment of which will lead to a new status with respect to the social forms that have been created to represent the structured cultural existence shared with normativity. Queerness, its performance and its fearful, partial embrace by certain social strata, are causing the evolution of which gender performances and sexual object choices are possible within the structures governing modern societies.

Queerness is also infecting literary texts, like those of Arenas, Bellatin, and Chocrón, to such an extent that bifurcating textual paths result, which include alternate possibilities within the same text, as in *Flores*, for example. In that work, the myriad paths repeat the same basic stories with multiple variations (Vestrini 32). Palaversich claims that this novel gives us the illusion of legibility, when, in fact, it is illegible (26). That is not to say it is meaningless. Queerness is illegible in the heteronorm because it does not signify in the systems constructed to reflect heteronormativity.

Nevertheless, it has meaning and seeks to instill that divergent meaning into social forms through repetition, changing meanings, and new and different (re)presentations of the very structures that have tried to exclude it. In *Flores*, the writer, who is a character in the book, is the nexus between the reader and the text, but it seems as if he is writing as we read; the meaning is constantly changing. Queer performances of social forms have a similar effect. As the performances are enacted and then perceived, their meanings change. Repetitions create ever more interpretations. The entrance of queerness into previously heteronormativized worlds is like the entrance of destabilizing forces into the worlds that Bellatin has created in *El gran vidrio*. The result is the fragmentation of these worlds, with each being “siempre acumulativo, desjerarquizado de la novela en que se eliminan los parámetros geográficos, temporales y las relaciones de causa y efecto” (Schettini 8).

As previously mentioned, the booklet of photographs and the pages of drawings included as part of the text of *Perros héroes* queer the novel form. Also, in other of Bellatin’s works, the narrator’s/author’s direct comments about a novel’s settings, form, and characters serve to queer novelistic structure. For example, “La verdadera enfermedad de la sheika” begins, “Los protagonistas del último libro que he publicado, curiosamente se sienten satisfechos con la obra. Creo que quedan muy mal librados, pero no parecen darse cuenta de ser ellos los personajes retratados” (Bellatin, *El gran vidrio* 73). This commentary gives separate life to the characters; they become real in another world unconnected to this novella that we are reading as part of a greater narrative, as is typical for metafictional works. Likewise, queerness gains a life of its own through commentary on the ways in which it usurps social forms and transforms them queerly to

be refitted into the larger social whole.

Another type of queer, literary commentary can be found in “Viaje a La Habana,” when the character and the author’s persona, Arenas himself, become separately identifiable via print styles. The regular print clearly refers to the character Ismael. The italic print, however, is ambiguous with respect to whom it is referring, perhaps to Ismael as well, but certainly indicating the experiences of the exiled Arenas, the author, himself:

[É]l quiso ser aquel joven, solitario e independiente que nadaba en un mar transparente, *no como estos de aquí fríos y cenicientos donde nunca se les ve el fondo*; quiso sentir la Brisa de su tierra, *no este viento cortante que nos obliga a forrarnos con trapos de pies a cabeza*, quiso, sólo por una vez más en su vida, *en mi muerte*, pasearse por las calles donde había sido joven, donde había sido él, *no por estas calles donde siempre he sido un extraño....* (Viaje a La Habana 117-18)

It should be pointed out that upon closely rereading the passage, one realizes that the regular print refers to Arenas, the author, as much as does the italic print. The author and his character have become hopelessly intertwined, just as queers become entangled as the creators of queer forms and the subjects of their creations. The telling and creating of a life becomes the living of a life.

Bellatin queers literary form in *Perros héroes*, where the reader finds one paragraph to a page. Each paragraph forms a complete story. All information for each story is found in each paragraph, but the story changes when all the paragraphs are put together. As is the case with *Perros héroes*, perhaps one queer performance is complete unto itself, although that performance needs to be repeated and placed into different contexts for a more complete integration. This type of queer(ed) literary form, along with that found in *Arturo*, which is free-flowing with many repetitions and no periods, help us to understand that queer readings of a text are akin to the living of a life.

It is one long exhalation in combination with endless variation. These are queer(ed) forms that highlight that life itself, so given to change, evolution, and permutation, is queer.

V. Learning to Speak/Signify in a New Way

Individuals, whether queer or not, faced with unfamiliar contexts, can produce queer texts in society (Holman Jones 207). The interaction of the unknown youth and Ricardo in “Que trine Eva” results in a queer(ed) text for Eva. She is now able to understand queerness in the world that she has, until this moment, blithely assumed to be perfectly heteronormative, despite the fact that she has known all along that Ricardo has been unsettled and searching for some something which he, also until now, has been unable to find. The youth finds Ricardo, and Eva achieves a new, queer(ed) comprehension of the world which invalidates her previous perceptions and expectations.

We understand this when Eva, as narrator, says:

Vi al muchacho ponerse de pie, echar a andar con pasos viriles, atravesar todo el salón y dirigirse hasta el extremo donde tú [Ricardo] estabas desfallecido. Lo vi llegar hasta ti, y mirarte. Lo vi extender una mano y ayudarte a incorporar.... Y en ese momento comprendí.... Sí, porque cuando el muchacho, envuelto en no sé qué resplandor, se puso de pie y decidió mirarte, comprendí que no era yo precisamente quien tenía los ojos más hermosos del mundo.... (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 52)

Eva, surrounded and succored by heteronormativity, finally realizes that her sex is not the only possible source of attraction for Ricardo’s male body. She understands that her heterosexuality is not as appealing as the youth’s homosexual promise. She also further realizes that the youth is virile and resplendent, not a feminine caricature, but rather a strong male, sexual being that is ready and proud to offer himself up to another male. The youth is the new replacement for Eva, heretofore unavailable, until the introduction

of queerness into the sexual forms that have governed Eva's life.

The narrator in *Arturo* writes, "[A] la imagen que se padece hay que anteponerle, real, la imagen que se desea, no como imagen, sino como algo verdadero que se pueda disfrutar" (Arenas 51). In like manner, queers must replace heteronormative images with real, queer images that change the sexual and gender formulations that have before now held sway. In "Mona," one of the male narrators engages in anal intercourse with Leonardo/Elisa who has become transformed from the latter into the former during the sexual act. The narrator says,

Y mientras lo poseía lo llamé por ese nombre [Elisa]. Pero él, en medio del paroxismo, volvió el rostro, mirándome con unos ojos que eran dos cuencas rojizas.

--¡Llámame Leonardo, coño! ¡Llámame Leonardo! --dijo mientras se retorció y mugía de placer como nunca antes vi hacerlo a un ser humano.
(Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 85)

Similarly, queers are demanding the right to have coitus in their own way, all the while proclaiming their own, queer names.

To achieve its goals, queer theory, in my opinion, must push itself to the limits, until queerness no longer signifies as "queer." That is when at least one of its objects will be realized. At the outer limits of queer signification lies the realization that queerness is not only natural but also normal because, to some extent, everyone is queer in some way. It becomes a matter of making different queernesses resonate socio-culturally. The writer in *Flores* commented on his work as follows: "señaló que se trataba de una novela donde cada personaje busca encontrar una sexualidad y una religión personales" (Bellatin 57-58). The search for one's own sexuality will reveal that that sexuality is queer once contrasted with the sexuality of any other individual. Therefore, sexual interaction, in itself, may be understood as queer when all of its manifestations bump up against one

another.

This realization comes out of the dreamlike trance that encompasses individual sexual acts. The structure and the unexpected juxtapositions and retelling of stories in *Flores* create a literature that is like a dream, in which transformation of queerness into the acceptable can occur (Rodríguez and Bellatin 63). From such a dream context, one may comprehend that, irrespective of divergent sexualities, as Eva realizes about Ricardo in “Eva:” “[C]asi siempre habíamos sido la misma persona” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 33). We are similar in that queerness resides in each of us when our sexual proclivities are compared with those of another.

In dreams are found notions and examples of the instability of the characteristics that feed into identity. Queers look to the poststructural beliefs that these characteristics are multiple with respect to gender and sexuality (Jagose 3). The meanings of the signs that appear in dreams are very often at variance with the significations imparted during waking life. Similarly, the words and narrative structures in queer writing are pretexts to say things that may not resonate if stated outright or to say things that do not signify now in heteronormativized society (Bellatin, interview by Bosch 253). The perverse and dispassionate voice of Bellatin, for example, leads to new meanings (Paz Soldán 17). But once words are uttered queerly, queer significations leave unreality behind and gain a substance that demands recognition. Words gain new meanings when faced with queer interpretation. Witness the confusion, mentioned previously, of one of the narrators in “Mona” when he is unable to decide between *él* and *ella* by which to call his subject (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 67). Even if he cannot decide, the reader knows that it really does not matter because both *él* and *ella* have gained new acceptations merely owing to

the narrator's confusion.

Such an expansion of possible significations is important to queer theorists because everything's inherent nature is dependent on the language used to describe it (Turner 137). We see in *El gran vidrio* the importance of the word, the term that is the root and the object of desire: "[E]l verdadero deseo terminó siendo la palabra, no solo crearla sino compartirla ... para tratar de desentrañar el sentido oculto de los textos" (Bellatin 161). Queer forms create new significations for words that speak to queer desire; then, those words are able to represent new forms of desire now available in queer(ed) (con)texts. Solomon notes that "performative" is "reiteration by which discourse produces the effects it names" and is really not different from common ideas about what performance is. In theater, there is a contradiction of the stated by the shown (3-4), or in the case of queer performance in a social context, there is a contradiction not only between stated and shown, but also between shown and stated.

For example, the narrator in *Flores* notes:

[E]l escritor ha descubierto a un grupo de muchachas que, vestidas como hombres, se reúnen todas las tardes en un local.... A esas mujeres les atraen los hombres que gusten de otros hombres. Casi ninguna logra emparejarse de la manera adecuada, pese a que tienen conocimiento de que en otras sociedades ese tipo de relación encierra una carga erótica bastante compleja. (Bellatin 44)

Nevertheless, the mere speaking of these words gives rise to the possibility of such erotic congress in the context of the world in question. Also, in this novel the character called the "writer" is *deformed*, as Bellatin himself is deformed, and he writes *deformities* as also, it may be said, does Bellatin, in that neither the author in the novel nor Bellatin adheres to traditional narrative form.

Vickroy articulates that Arenas writes "trauma narratives," which are a critique of

the way that socio-political structures create and perpetuate upset (111). Likewise, queers are *deformed* according to heteronormative dictates, and their *performances* of sexuality and gender are a means of “writing” new systems which extend possibilities for sexual and gender presentation. Thus, the dichotomy heterosexual/homosexual is destroyed, perhaps in favor of heterosexual/queer. But in reality “queer” is not an opposite: it holds an entire range of sexual and gender possibilities within its lexicography. Therefore, the dichotomy ceases to exist, and society finds itself living along a line of sexual possibilities that has no beginning and no end. This exemplifies what may be called “liberationism” in that it will transform society by ridding it of traditional notions of gender and sexuality in order to achieve queer sexual and socio-political freedom in modern cultural settings (Sullivan 31).

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined queer(ed) bodies performing in queer(ed) spaces and the consequent creation of queer(ed) forms. The notion of performance is prominent in that it has allowed me to be able to analyze queerness according to concepts of theatricality. In life, as in theater, socio-cultural groupings of individuals (actors) have constructed “sets” around which and in which modern societies have determined that gender performances and sexual behaviors should unfold and from which these activities should take their cues. Of course, in heteronormative society, masculine and feminine actions and representations have been constructed in ways that social communities have determined to be appropriate manifestations of biological maleness and femaleness. They have also deemed it necessary that maleness/masculinity and femaleness/femininity seek each other out as the only possible way to interact in the forms of sexual congress to which individuals have traditionally been limited .

It should be remembered that, despite the heteronormative requirements of these performances and the norms of acceptable gender and sexual object choice presentations, masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/queer, in fact, are mere constructs. They are artifice posing as reality. Nevertheless, like sets and stage dressing in the theater, these artifices exist in the reality of the social settings in which individuals perform life. In theater, the magic comes into play when the audience meshes the real stage setting and the real actors into different places and characters and accepts this second recreation as a reality of equal, or more, importance than the first level of realness experienced upon

them entry into the theater. Likewise, queer performance makes queer bodies real by allowing the social audience to watch them as they (inter)act in spaces once thought to be completely heteronormatively controlled, thereby queering those spaces and also enabling the audience to accept that the resultant queer forms of gender presentation and sexuality are as real and as capable of being accepted within the newly expanded spaces as the previously acknowledged normativized forms.

I. The Need for Queerness

There is a need for queerness and for queerness to be socially accepted because a sizeable number of individuals in every modern, Western society suffers unnecessarily due to social artifices that have been constructed solely to maintain power in the hands of the heterosexual, patriarchal male figure. In “Viaje a La Habana,” Ismael says, “[Y]o sé cual es el sentido de la vida porque yo sí he sufrido verdaderamente, porque yo sí he visto lo que es verdaderamente el horror” (Arenas, *Viaje a La Habana* 113). Out of that type of vision springs the inclination to express queerness, to put it on display, not just in the queer ghettos, but also within heteronormative spaces.

The narrator of the “Un personaje en apariencia moderno” section of *El gran vidrio* says, “Quise decírselo a mi padre, pero su mirada me hizo callar (Bellatin 134). Now, the queer voice has the means to speak of and for itself despite the heterosexual patrimony’s disapprobation and is no longer willingly self-silencing. Silence, traditionally, has led to the ignorance and/or the disavowal of the entire segment of queer populations living within heteronormativity. As Marcos, in *Mesopotamia*, declares, “Nadie es una razón cuando hace falta algo” (Chocrón 230). Unless queerness is spoken, nothing in queer life has meaning.

La Fountain has noted that homophobia in Latin America and in the United States has led to (e)migration (15), taking away from intolerant areas talents, disrupting families, and creating unnecessary social schisms, but the queer voice may have the potential to right these types of inequitable distribution problems. Bellatin ends *Flores* thusly:

Mientras tanto las relaciones entre padres e hijos, entre lo anormal y lo normal en la naturaleza, la búsqueda de sexualidades y religiones capaces de adaptarse a las necesidades de cada uno de los individuos, seguirán su rumbo, como si de una complicada estructura sumeria se tratase. Es posible que frente a esto el lenguaje de las flores sea más expresivo de lo que parece. Confiemos en ello. (117)

Yes, the language of flowers,²⁰ queer language, infiltrating heteronormative spaces and newly describing traditional forms, offers fresh possibilities of enactment of gender and sexuality and of means of self-expression within the interrelationships constituting modern, Western approaches to socio-cultural behaviors.

The point of “the language of the flowers,” according to Molloy and Irwin, is to question normalcy that is prescribed, whether the normalcy addressed is cultural or sexual (xvi), in order to point out that “[n]o se debe temer lo desconocido” (Chocrón, *Mesopotamia* 211). When queerness becomes commonly performed within our social spaces, when queerness is “spoken,” it becomes known, and its forms, such as gay marriage, for example, become less and less fearful.

Phelan indicates that traditional fear has arisen from the inability of queer people to be “seen,” but queer performance makes it so that the queer gaze must be returned (164). Once that queer gaze becomes capable of being returned in spaces where it was once heteronormatively proscribed, queer information is no longer withheld and queer

²⁰ Flowers have been used as a coded language of love in different countries, a fact which Bellatin, in this novel, subverts.

silence ceases (Gorman 103). Through such a system of reciprocity, governmental entities may begin to be forced to count queer identities, and this in turn will legitimate them (Browne 231). Because gender and sexual identity has been integral to the control of queerness and its subjugation to heteronormative schemes, once queerness achieves governmental legitimation, sexuality and gender become more free to vary, and do so considerably, over time (Turner 172). This becomes very important, socio-culturally speaking, given that humans are not all male, female, black, white, or of the same ethnicity, etc., but all are gendered and sexual, no matter how varied our genders and sexualities may be.

II. How Queer Theory and Writings and Queer Interpretation Bring About Change

Lorenzano says that bodies and writing are both covered and constituted by our scars and our desires and that together these things create history (Introduction to *Perros* 1). Therefore when individuals and societies infuse queer scars and desires onto public bodies and into public writing, they begin (re)creating history so that it includes queerness as an integral component of social interaction. That is because socio-cultural entities embody the discourses that exist within the social constructs. They become “constituted” by them (Sullivan 41). As Mina asserts in *O. K.*, “Si quieres [estar vivo/a], si de veras quieres ... ya has comenzado a estarlo. En el sólo querer comienza todo” (Chocrón 97). Queer desires expressed is the beginning of the acknowledgement of the reality of queer beings. Concomitantly, queer performance of desire causes the vital disorientation that is necessary for the opening up of queer spaces within heteronormativity or of making previously normativized spaces available to queerness (Ahmed 157).

Such expansion occurs because readers/viewers are searching for meaning, and because the author, narrator, and reader are all complicit with regards to the verisimilitude of a work, be it literary or in a performance (Palaversich 30). This collusion requires that queerness be weighed and found meaningful if any of the parties evoke the reality of queerness. There is an interchange, exemplary of this notion, between a wannabe queer character and his potential author, which we have already seen in the context of the need to find space in which to perform queerness, in *Pájaro de mar por tierra*: “‘Conviérteme en un personaje. Méteme en una trama’, le decía Micky. ‘¿Pero por qué insistes tanto en esto? Yo no entiendo,’ le contestaba Chocrón, y Micky lo miraba sonriendo y le decía muy despacio: ‘Para algo tengo que servir’” (Chocrón 145). Thusly, “queer” seeks to change memories. Because queer literature, performance, or queer reading/viewing refuse to accept the order of traditional, heteronormative discourse and the reduction of life to its proscriptions, queerness becomes a “perfect vehicle” for subverting heteronormativity (Kuhnheim 118).

III. What is “Queer?”

Sullivan intimates that there is no such thing as queerness outside of a system in which some conception of queerness already exists (146), but queerness has to subsist separate and apart from the characteristics of the heteronormative power center in order to advocate for the destabilization and eventual reformation of that normative control over society. Through this oppositional stance, “queer” derives its meaning, not necessarily referring to something, but because of its resistance to the norm (Turner 134). Browne and Nash agree with this assessment and go further, asserting that “queer,” in addition to being “anti-normative,” seeks to challenge “stabilities” (7). When those

gender or sexuality characteristics which normativity has deemed necessary and fixed for the support of the heteronorm are questioned and shown to be mere constructs, rather than fundamental reality, and when those attributes are irrevocably reformed by queer performance, that is when “queer” takes on a true power of its own.

It is then that “queer” resists the boundaries that heteronormativity seeks to impose; in so doing, it is able to proffer its own self-definition (Turner 170). “Queer” is the bird in *Perros héroes* which “desordenaba en forma desesperada los objetos a su alrededor,” the only act which could cause the *hombre inmóvil* to “ensaya[r] una sonrisa que de alguna manera podría considerarse beatífica” (Bellatin 72). Queering (dis)orders; out of the chaos, it brings unexpected freedoms. By subversion, it destabilizes while, at the same time, it shows that “queer” is not really queer at all; it merely offers other forms of gender and sexual object choice expressions. These are, indeed, forms that have existed throughout social history but which have heretofore been severely limited with respect to their expression.

Queerness amplifies the possibilities available to the individuals forming socio-cultural confederacies, and the old normative rules are shown to be fictive. It allows for the understanding that all texts and all performances are open to varying interpretations, and, therefore, they are all potentially queer (Sullivan 202). “Queer” is not “una locura,” not “una extrañeza”; it is “una manera diferente de vivir” (Chocrón, *Mesopotamia* 234). It amplifies possibilities and significations and it has the possibility to continue (re)inventing cultural definitions and relationships among the individuals in modern, Western society even beyond considerations of gender and sexuality.

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