



Musical Cartographies of the Transnational City: Mapping Havana in Song

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rendition redrawing the city—and its meaning—for listeners. In his 1994 study of early modern theater, John Gillies challenged us to expand our conception of cartography, remarking that “if virtually any kind of spatial image is a map, theoretically regardless of its material form, then the field of cartography is not so much expanded as exploded. Modern cartography addresses this problem by posing the *reality* of the map in terms of process rather than product; in terms of a semiological (or signifying) activity rather than an inert artifact.”⁵ Songs about Havana represent a signifying activity that serves to orient Cuban songwriters and their audiences during a period of dramatically shifting geopolitical relationships between Cuba, Cubans, and the outside world. Such strategies help their subjects to “create an imaginary world of impressions that tie his or her body to a mobility of space and place.”⁶ Yet if such strategies are to be at all effective, Ronda Lemke Sanford reminds us, “they work by means of shared understanding, assumptions, and conventions.”⁷ The song repertoire produced over the last two and a half decades evidences the shaping of such conventions and the assumptions and understandings that they both respond to and engender.

La capital cantada

Songs depicting Cuba’s capital city became increasingly visible in the 1980s, a time when political geography emerged as a creative focus in many sectors of Cuban arts. Antonio Eligio Fernández, the Cuban artist known professionally as Tonel, has written about the importance of cartographic images of Cuba in the New Cuban Art of the 1980s.⁸ Drawing from the writings of Edward Soja and Soja’s own readings of Michel Foucault,⁹ Fernández discusses Cuban artists’ near obsession with cartographic representations of local geographies at precisely the moment that their art entered in dialogue with the global art scene. Fernández describes Cuban artists’ repeated rendering (and dismembering) of the map or image of the island during this period as “the crystallization of a specific ‘insular consciousness,’” a consciousness that came in part from Cuban intellectuals’ conception of Havana as the center of a radical and revolutionary cosmopolitanism that would include Latin America and the Third World in a transnational and transcultural dialogue.¹⁰

Over the next decade, fallout from events in Berlin, Moscow, and Sarajevo forced creative intellectuals to reconceive the geopolitical location of that center, as the winds of political and economic change blew Cuba into the “West.” Artists used their new visibility to challenge existing cultural hegemonies by graphically amplifying the island’s Antillean reach on a global scale, displacing continents, and shifting seas. (See, for example, artist Alexis Esquivel’s 1989 work, *Obsesión geográfica*, which appears here as Figure 1.) In their relationship to local geographies, however, these same

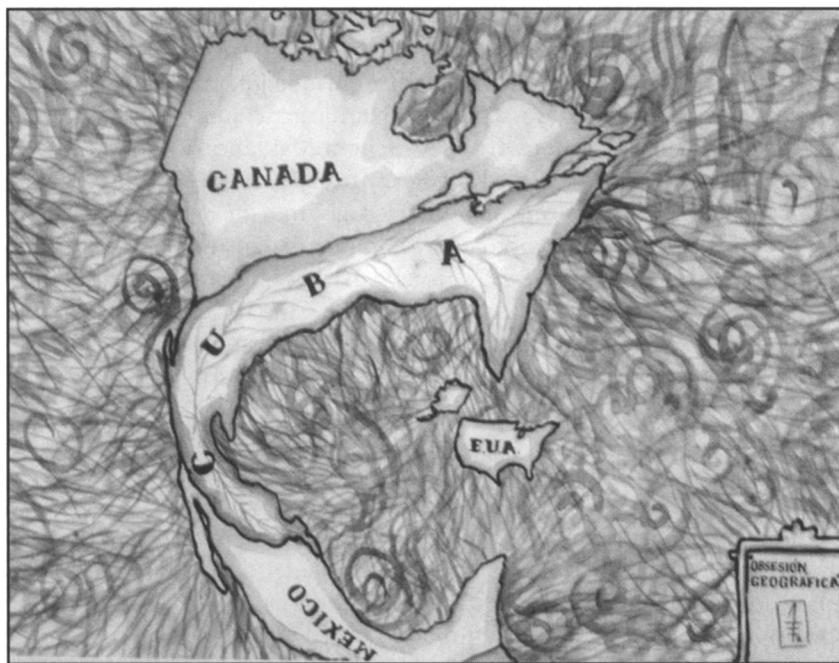


FIGURE 1. Alexis Esquivel, *Obsesión geográfica* (1989). Courtesy of Alexis Esquivel.

artists were reactionary, reinforcing long-held narratives of geopolitical privilege and stasis. The island's external image might be stretched, fragmented, relocated, or multiplied, but its internal geographic locaters, especially the city of Havana, grew increasingly fixed, acquiring deep roots anchored in economics, institutionalism, and nationalist constructions of identity. It was a time, remarks Fernández, when all roads led to Havana.¹¹ While Fernández was writing about developments in the visual arts, his analysis is insightful in considering that since the 1980s Cuban singer-songwriters have exhibited a similar obsession with geography and place. It is not the elongated contours of the island, however, that have attracted the attention of songwriters, but the city of Havana itself.

Musical odes to Havana are hardly a new phenomenon. Indeed, like other modern metropolises such as Paris and New York, the city has long been a musical muse.¹² For Cuban songwriters, Havana's allure has transcended both time and genre, and they have represented the city to quite different effects. Early odes include Armando Orefiche's "Habana de mi amor," Sindo Garay's bittersweet "Adiós a La Habana," and Rolando Vergara's hauntingly beautiful bolero "Hermosa Habana," which was later to be immortalized (and, one might argue, urbanized) by Los Zafiros. The

city's landmarks have been used by lyricists to authenticate local color, as in the many early-20th-century *guarachas* where an exotic and sultry *mulata* struts down Havana's Prado boulevard, or Enrique Jorrín's 1951 hit *cha-cha-cha*, "La engañadora." Havana's draw as an artistic and economic center has been the focus of songs from La Sonora Mantancera's 1956 hit with Colombian singer Nelson Pinedo, "Me voy pa' La Habana," to the title song from Cándido Fabré's *son oriental*-inflected album, *La Habana quiere guarachar contigo*, released in 2000. Post-revolutionary dance music, in particular, has staunchly positioned Havana as a marker of national identity, with songs like Los Van Van's "Havana, sí," "La Habana no aguanta más," and "Havana City," documenting urban experience, Cuban persistence and ingenuity, and a nationalist pride that is expressed in explicitly urban and modern terms.¹³

In contrast with previous odes to a generalized and romanticized Havana, or the collective socio-political appropriation of her, the late 1980s saw the explosion of a repertoire in which the songwriter's engagement with the city is both individual and intimate, and songs depict a city seen, and remembered, at street level. The representation of both space and place in these songs reveals a debt to and a departure from the nationalist poetic discourse and identity politics of the *nueva trova* movement from which these artists emerged, as I will discuss later. Songwriters began to write of local, urban experience as an assertion of Cuban identity, an identity that increasingly has had to re-invent and re-assert itself as the geopolitical boundaries of "Cubanness" have become increasingly amorphous. These songs evidence an attempt to renegotiate Cuban (or at least *habanero*) identity within the spaces and places that created it, and they often dialogue with the past, whether that past be personal or imagined, as the examples below will illustrate. "Haunted places," remarks Michel de Certeau, "are the only ones people can live in," and the Havana-song repertory begun in the 1980s can be read as an attempt to localize not just contemporary identities, but memory as well.¹⁴

Cuban journalist and cultural critic Joaquín Borges-Triana commented on the "Havana song" phenomenon in a 2007 issue of *Temas*, where he made a connection between the preponderance of such songs and the contemporary Cuban experience of emigration. He writes,

La estancia en el extranjero y el contacto con mentalidades y culturas extrañas provocan en estos compositores e intérpretes un profundo sentimiento de nostalgia y de reafirmación de sus tradiciones autóctonas, que con posterioridad encuentran reflejo en su producción artística. He ahí la razón de por qué, por ejemplo, abundan canciones dedicadas a La Habana [. . .].¹⁵

Living in other countries and having contact with foreign mentalities and cultures provokes in these composers and interpreters a profound feeling of nostalgia and of reaffirmation of their native traditions, that later would be reflected in their artistic production. I have here the reason why, for example, there abound songs dedicated to Havana [. . .]

While Borges-Triana is correct in observing that there are indeed a number of nostalgic odes celebrating the Cuban capital, homesickness alone cannot explain the preponderance of such songs nor their impact. In fact, songs dedicated to Havana first emerged as a major trope in Cuban songwriting in the late 1980s when they were the product not of Cuban émigrés, but rather of homegrown singer-songwriters writing in, and about, Havana.

The Role of Place in Nueva trova

Place was not always a central concern for singer-songwriters, or *trovadores*. Indeed, songs produced in the two decades immediately following the revolution were strangely placeless. A socially-conscious song movement that first developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the nueva trova provided both the musical and professional foundations for the generation of songwriters who came on the scene in the 1980s. While these musicians may have eventually pursued musical styles that differ in significant ways from the nueva trova tradition, nearly all of the performers I have spoken with, or who have given extended published interviews, mention the movement as an important formative influence, personally, professionally, and aesthetically. Any discussion of Cuban songwriting in the 1980s and afterwards must therefore first recognize the aesthetic and poetic conventions of the nueva trova, for it is the way that later musicians worked from and against these conventions that makes their explorations of local space both powerful and transformative.

Allying itself both politically and aesthetically with the *canción de protesta* (protest song) and *nueva canción* (new song) movements taking place throughout Latin America, the early nueva trova movement featured a mix of political commentary, social critique, and romantic soliloquies that were generally given voice by a lone singer-songwriter who accompanied him or herself on the guitar. The power of the word was paramount, and the movement valued poetic sophistication over musical (and particularly vocal) virtuosity. Responding to a revolutionary and even utopian zeitgeist, songwriters strove to create music with transcendental appeal that would move listeners to consider other realities, whether they be political, social, or emotional. Trovadores recast Cuban song as a genre that was intellectual and sophisticated, with poetic imagery and musical textures to match.

Incorporating the harmonic sophistication of the jazz-inflected ballad tradition known as *filin* and the avant-garde principles championed by the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (Sonic Experimentation Group) at the Instituto Cubano de Arte y Industria Cinematográfica (ICAIC), the genre took on a decidedly urban and cosmopolitan aesthetic.¹⁶

The nueva trova movement was a national phenomenon that by the 1980s had, as Robin Moore documents, become institutionalized.¹⁷ Cuban youth from across the island flocked to national and regional youth festivals where they had the opportunity to hear established musicians perform their own work, and be mentored by older artists. Local *casas de cultura* (cultural centers) in small towns and provincial capitals alike provided a space and a welcoming environment for aspiring trovadores to hone their craft. Yet in spite of the movement's widespread appeal and the enormous talent being generated across the country, the institutional center of the movement remained in the capital. Lasting connections with the ICAIC, the Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión (ICRT) and, most significantly, with the Casa de Las Americas created permanent ties between the nueva trova and the city of Havana.¹⁸ National recognition would come at the cost of relocation to the capital—or at least frequent visitation.¹⁹

Robin Moore has shown that while the socialist government initially regarded the trovadores' sociopolitical stance as a threat, it eventually chose to appropriate (and better control) their message by bringing them into state-run institutions.²⁰ The Movimiento Nacional de la Nueva Trova, officially founded in 1973, thus moved from being a critical—and occasionally oppositional—voice on the state of the nation to being an official mouthpiece for the nation state. The movement promoted a nationalist discourse in which history was paramount. Even the name, “nueva trova,” cast the movement as the culmination of a songwriting tradition that was popular in the early years of the Cuban Republic (referred to retrospectively as “*vieja*,” or “old,” trova), just as the 1959 revolution was seen as the answer to the frustrated and unfinished revolutionary struggles of the 19th and early 20th centuries.²¹ Vieja trova, with its *tres*, *bongos* and pastoral and romantic lyrics, is a powerful sonic reminder of Cuba's early-20th-century history of migration and increasing urbanization.²²

Foucault noted that nationalist narratives, such as the one that linked the various stages of Cuban songwriting to a larger revolutionary struggle, have had a tendency to privilege time over space.²³ This tendency is marked in the repertoire of the first generation of the nueva trova, which produced a song repertoire that is uncannily ambiguous in its geography, although songs celebrating historic events or dedicated to important revolutionaries are relatively commonplace. Trovadores such as Silvio Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés, Noel Nicola, and Sara González participated in a political and ideological discourse that avoided reference to Cuba's insularity, focusing

instead on the influence of the socialist revolution on the rest of the world. The Dec. 3, 1972 manifesto of the first Encuentro Nacional de los Jóvenes Trovadores made the movement's internationalist aims explicit, "Nos proponemos estimular la creación de canciones que expresen el espíritu internacionalista de nuestro pueblo y su alta conciencia de la solidaridad (We propose to stimulate the creation of songs that express the international spirit of our country and of its strong sense of solidarity.)"²⁴

Apart from a few revolutionary songs that celebrate the events that occurred at historically significant locations (Carlos Gomez' "Habana Libre piso 20" is a prime example²⁵), where spaces or places do occur, they are generally non-specific.²⁶ Like the anonymous jungles in Silvio Rodríguez' "La era está pariendo un corazón," these sung geographies tend to be utopian and indistinct, they are merely the metaphoric backdrop for idealistic struggle. While not referring explicitly to place, songwriters did occasionally use the language of political geography, particularly within the context of love songs. Such geographies are frequently sexualized, using the conquered contours of the female body as a metaphor for revolutionary progress as in "El breve espacio en que no está," by Pablo Milanés, which renders a lover's body with imagery that is explicitly cartographic ("en mi cama su silueta se dibuja cual promesa—in my bed her silhouette etches a promise"), or reproduces spatialized power hierarchies as in Silvio Rodríguez' "Oleo de mujer con sombrero," ("su breve cintura debajo de mí—her tiny waist underneath me").²⁷

The intellectual, cosmopolitan nature of the movement created an atmosphere where harmonic and textural innovation was prized, although the full extent of the younger generations' innovations has not always been appreciated.²⁸ It is in the lyric, however, that the nueva trova's influence is most clearly seen; the movement's emphasis on poetic subtlety, social critique, and a profound belief in the power of language has clearly been a guiding force in the work of later artists. Younger songwriters took hold of the nueva trova's poetic tools and, rather than using them to express internationalist goals, began to explore and construct local identities.

Tropical Flânerie

While location may have been more of a practical than a poetic concern for early nueva trova artists, the new songwriters that came on the scene in the 1980s had a markedly different approach to the role of place in their music. Both lyrically and musically, songwriters such as Gerardo Alfonso, Carlos Varela, and Frank Delgado created a repertory that celebrated, critiqued, and, above all, experienced the local. For these artists, the local becomes a metaphoric exploration of the Cuban experience. In their work, Havana is Cuba.

These songwriters created a musical style that was more self-consciously urban, taking overt (and often controversial) inspiration from the sounds of Argentine, North American, and English rock music.²⁹ While their music stressed international cosmopolitanism, however, their lyrics stressed the local. By the end of the decade, urban life became the focus of their songs, and graphic depictions of Havana served as the backdrop for acute social and political commentary as well as for love songs and nostalgic laments. Their lyrics voyeuristically traced the streets of Havana with a slow-moving gaze and acute attention to detail, each song rendering the city more real. In this sense, the figure of the trovador that emerged in Havana prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union invites comparison with the bohemian flâneur of 19th-century Paris. Educated, male, and with time for leisure, the flâneur was likewise an urban figure, an “eternal vagabond,”³⁰ who spent his time in the street observing the fabric of city life. Indeed, for the flâneur the city was life; his obsession with Paris reflected the centralized nature of French life around the capital.³¹ Similarly, the prominence of Cuba’s capital city in songs written from the late 1980s onward is indicative of Havana’s increasing gravitational pull on nearly all aspects of Cuban economic, cultural, and political life. The affinity of the flâneur, a figure whose existence was propelled by the social and economic upheavals of early capitalism, with songwriters who documented both the apex and the crumbling of a socialist experiment might not seem initially apparent were it not for the intervention of the spaces in which they wrote/composed. The Havana cityscape, itself strongly influenced by that of 19th-century Paris, shaped the explorations and the observations of the trovador, much as the arcades and boulevards of Paris formed the worldview of the flâneur. The Parisian flâneur and the Cuban trovador thus emerge as figures whose relationship with their respective cities is both “a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact,” as well as “a social reality made up of relations that are to be conceived of, constructed or reconstructed by thought”³² (or in song). Such meta-(re)constructions draw on what Jameson has called the “nostalgia for the present,”³³ and both 19th-century Parisian and late 20th-century Cuban explorations of the urban landscape occupy an ephemeral temporal space in which the past and the present co-exist.

In recent years, the idea of the flâneur has been the subject of vibrant critique, much of it focused on the previously ascribed celebration of the bohemian male walker as a “hero of modernity.”³⁴ Feminist critics, in particular, have noted that giving primacy to the flâneur in describing and constructing the idea of the modern city normalizes a certain set of power relations, especially as they relate to gender and class.³⁵ Thus the allusion of an habanero flânerie must be brought to the table with a full awareness of its limitations. Indeed, trovadores’ musical explorations of the city exhibit similarly problematic politics regarding gender, race, and (even in Cuba)

class, and while it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully entertain such a critique, it should be noted that the songs discussed in this paper are the work of a predominantly male, university-educated, and Havana-centered group of songwriters, the majority of whom are white or *mulato*. Recognizing that the young trovadores of the 1980s both witnessed and wrote from a position of relative privilege complicates and enriches our understanding of the construction of Cuban identity, and it allows us to recognize the ways in which this new generation of songwriters pushed against the ideological discourse of the very institutions that had nurtured them.

Anke Gleber attributes the rise of the 19th-century European *flâneur* to a new sense of independence and a heightened awareness of mobility.³⁶ Brought up on narratives of utopian possibility, the late 20th century trovador came of age in an increasingly dense urban environment in which transportation was sparse and “awareness” of one’s mobility (or lack thereof), unavoidable. That the rediscovery of the street by young people in the late 1980s and early 1990s may have been somewhat forced lends an element of irony and irreverence to their treatment of the cityscape. At a time when state policy dictated that young people serve the public good by engaging in productive work and exhibiting proper moral behavior, the willful appropriation of the street by Havana-based trovadores represents an act of resistance. Their work reveals an effort to turn the revolution’s social consciousness inwards, critiquing local, social, political, and economic reality. By making the street—and street culture—visible, songwriters share strategies similar to movements happening simultaneously in the visual arts, with collectives like Arte Calle, Grupo Provisional, and Grupo Puré reclaiming public space and displaying a profound irreverence towards institutional authority.³⁷ In this sense, their treatment of urban quotidian existence can be read as a form of *choteo*, that uniquely Cuban form of humor that Jorge Mañach described as “no tomar nada en serio (not taking anything seriously).”³⁸ More than merely comic, the “jocular contempt”³⁹ of *choteo* represents both disorder and subversion and projects irreverence towards power. It is, as José Muñoz has shown, a strategy for self-assertion that appropriates and repurposes cultural signifiers to aid in the construction of identities that resist dominant cultural norms.⁴⁰

The actions of the strolling trovador stand (move) in direct opposition to the identity constructs of the nueva trova, with its oblique avoidance of space. By making the city a protagonist in his songs, the trovador/*flâneur* draws attention to the “conditions of [Cuba’s] own possibility,” working against the historical discourse of the previous generation to render space itself visible as an active agent in Cuban identity.⁴¹ This sense of the awareness of space is central to Gerardo Alfonso’s ode to Havana, “Sábanas blancas.” A lyric travelogue, Alfonso’s lyrics express his desire to “go down your streets, your neighborhoods, and your places” and enter into a space where

the present and the past are intertwined like lovers and where private lives are part of the public fabric of urban life.

Sábanas blancas

White Sheets

Gerardo Alfonso

Habana,
mi vieja Habana
Señora de historia de
conquistadores
y gente con sus religiones, hermosa
dama
Habana.
Si mis ojos te abandonaran
si la vida me desterrara
en un rincón de la tierra
yo te juro que voy a morirme de
amor
y de ganas
de andar tus calles
tus barrios y tus lugares.

Cuatro Caminos
Virgen de Regla
Puerto del mar
lugares vecinos
el largo muro del litoral
el Capitolio y Prado con sus leones,
sus visiones.
Sábanas blancas
colgadas en los balcones.
Sábanas blancas
colgadas en los balcones.
Habana,
Mi gran Habana.

Havana,
my old Havana,
Lady with a history of conquerors
and people of religions, beautiful
lady,
Havana.
If my eyes abandon you,
if my life leaves me
in a corner of the earth,
I swear to you that I will die of love
and of desire
to go down your streets
your neighborhoods and your
places.
Cuatro Caminos,
Virgen de Regla,
the port to the sea,
neighboring places,
the coastal wall,
the Capitol and Prado with its lions,
its visions.
White sheets
hanging from the balconies.
White sheets
hanging from the balconies.
Havana,
My great Havana.

An urban chronicle in much the same spirit as the bohemian travel-ogues documented by Benjamin and Baudelaire, Alfonso's song guides the listener down Havana's streets, stopping at familiar landmarks on the way. Alfonso selects explicitly historic locations, crumbling and stoic witnesses to architectural (and political) stasis while the human bustle goes on around them and in doing so he inscribes them with new meanings and new possibilities. It is as if, it seems, his desire might someday cause

those Prado lions (or perhaps the people moving past) to awake. Alfonso's voyeuristic stroll thus affirms de Certeau's contention that by "linking acts and footsteps, opening meanings and directions, these words [. . .] become liberated spaces that can be occupied."⁴² Those liberated spaces, de Certeau contends, have "the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden, or permitted meaning."⁴³ Thus Alfonso, who actually voices this song not from the position of an emigrant longing to return, but from his location in Havana's Vedado district, imagines a homecoming in which the city's spaces are inscribed with new meanings and in which "sus visiones" might be revealed.

Alfonso's lyrics also suggest a familiarity with the unseen, domestic and private spaces that lie behind Havana's balconies and crumbling facades (see Figure 2). The white sheets not only reference the mundane artifacts of the labors of daily domesticity, but they also call up images of unseen bedrooms and hidden acts. Moreover, Alfonso's Havana is, as Elizabeth Wilson remarks of 19th-century Paris, "the city sexualized,"⁴⁴ and his desire to know the city is expressed in explicitly carnal metaphors. Whether imagined as an old woman with a "history of conquerors," or symbolized by the Africanized Virgin of Regla, Havana, like the Paris described by 19th-century flâneurs, is inescapably female. Alfonso is not unique in his

FIGURE 2. *Havana Balcony.* Courtesy of Susan Thomas.



explicitly sexualized and gendered portrayal of Havana as a city who has “relations” with her male occupants. Carlos Varela refers to both the city’s promiscuous acceptance of those who entered her port and of her fecundity in his song, “Habáname,” where he sings, “La Habana abrió sus piernas y así nací yo.” (Havana opened her legs and thus I was born.)⁴⁵

Strolling with the Poet of Havana

Perhaps more so than any other Cuban singer-songwriter, Varela is intensely associated with the Cuban capital. Varela’s music and lyrics constantly reference the streets of Havana, especially the leafy, symmetric blocks of the Vedado district where he grew up and continues to live. Called the “Poet of Havana” by *Beat Magazine*,⁴⁶ he has been hailed as an urban chronicler by critics both on and off the island. Whether singing of a young girl’s suicide by leaping from a neighboring balcony (“Como un ángel,” *Como los peces*, 1995), the suddenly increasing crime and corruption that resulted from Cuba’s headlong entry into the tourist economy (“Tropicollage,” *Varela en vivo*, 1991) or of stolen private moments taken within the collective intimacy of the city (“Sombras en el pared,” *Nubes*, 2000), Varela’s songs use the local and the deeply personal to speak to larger truths—societal, political, and human.

It is, in fact, Varela’s commitment to place that provides his music with its aesthetic and political power. Some of his best known works, such as “Jalisco Park” and “Memorias,” (*Jalisco Park*, 1989) use the cityscape as a catalyst for exposés of longing, disillusionment, and broken dreams. “Jalisco Park,” for example, uses well known landmarks to guide listeners past the yellow wall surrounding Havana’s Colón Cemetery to the aging playground located on the corner of 18th and 23rd streets. Varela’s recollection of the golden days of a park that years later would lie rusting and derelict leads listeners to remember nostalgically a past that is both shared and lost, a past that, like the one experienced by Benjamin’s flâneur, “always remains the past of a youth.”⁴⁷

Varela’s ode to the youth of his generation, “Memorias,” famously calls up the icons of Cuban childhood in the 1970s, referring to the children’s cartoon character Elpidio Valdés, Soviet-made television sets, and the rationed allocation of toys. In the opening stanza of “Memorias,” Varela’s use of urban space is general, focusing on the transtemporality of the neighborhood curb to illustrate the slow pace of true sociopolitical change:

Estoy sentado en el contén del barrio
como hace un siglo atrás
a veces me pasan en la radio,
a veces nada más.

I'm sitting on the neighborhood curb
just like a century ago
sometimes they play me on the radio
sometimes not anymore.

On his 2003 album, *Siete*, Varela would revisit the same curb in “El humo del tren,” a fast paced, *timba*-influenced number that features the Cuban dance band Los Van Van. The use of popular Cuban dance music is a departure from Varela’s more international rock ballad style, and Varela’s reference to the earlier song’s lyrics in the opening, “Hey man, sentado en el contén, (Hey man, sitting on the curb)” consciously calls up the stylistic difference as well as the decade and a half that separates the two songs. If “Memorias” affirms post-revolutionary identity in the shared pleasures and traumas of a childhood caught between isolation and globalization, “El humo del tren” is a recognition that while so many more friends have left for other shores, that curb hasn’t budged, and Varela critiques those (including himself) who continue to observe from its perch.⁴⁸

The album itself is a study in contrasts, juxtaposing the thick texture and dance aesthetic of the collaboration with Los Van Van, spare arrangements for voice and acoustic guitar, and the sonorities and rhythmic regularity of rock and roll. References to the city of Havana are woven through the entire album, becoming a thematic thread that binds together the diverse sonic textures at the same time that it ties *Siete* to the six albums that came before. *Siete* also represents an overt recognition of the fact that Varela’s popular success has as much to do with his international reach as it does with his local sensibilities, and the album was aggressively marketed abroad. One of the most internationally visible Cuban artists, Varela routinely travels outside of Cuba, concertizing throughout the Americas and in Europe.⁴⁹ Audiences for his performances include large numbers of relocated young adults whose youth experience in Cuba in the 1980s and 1990s was indelibly marked by Varela’s music.⁵⁰

Like the nostalgic travelogues written by the flâneur, Varela’s songs present urban life as “before all else a *system of signs* in which even the most trivial phenomenon is replete with meaning,” that can, when linked together, “disclose a universe of significance.”⁵¹ In a 2004 interview, Varela noted that the intimate and local character of his songs is a metaphor through which more universal messages can be understood.

Se nota la perspectiva, sobre todo en los textos de las canciones que al principio quizás tenían una mirada más de fotógrafo local y con los años aprendes a descubrir con una visión un poco más universal, que la soledad, que la nostalgia, que las rabias, que las ilusiones y las desilusiones son iguales en cualquier ciudad. O sea, da igual que sea Nueva York, que

sea La Habana, que sea Moscú. Inevitablemente esto viene con los años, con la madurez y con la posibilidad incluso que te da también mirar a tu país desde afuera. Te da una visión mucho más abierta y más extensa de la realidad en la que vives, por eso cuando escuchas los discos te das cuenta que hay textos que siguen conectados con la realidad cubana.

One notes the perspective, especially in the texts of songs that in the beginning perhaps had the viewpoint of a local photographer, and with the years you learn, with a more universal vision, to discover that loneliness, nostalgia, fury, hope, and disillusionment are the same in every city, whether it be New York or Havana or Moscow. Inevitably, this [understanding] comes with the years, with maturity, and also with the possibility that you can also see your country from the outside, this gives you a vision a lot more open and more extensive of the reality in which you live, that's why when you listen to the albums you realize that there are themes that stay connected to Cuban reality.⁵²

Richard Burton, channeling the spirit of the Parisian flâneur, writes, "Tout pour moi devient allégorie,"⁵³ a statement which seems to apply equally well to Varela's treatment of Havana. Throughout his oeuvre, he utilizes detailed references to local places to signify personal relationships, political or social critique, or philosophical stance. Varela's use of place and geography as a metaphor for the human experience can be seen in "Ahora que los mapas están cambiando de color" from his 1992 album, *Monedas en el aire*. Composed following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Varela uses the boundaries of outdated international maps as well as the physical boundaries of Havana's cityscape as a political allegory. The music itself crosses geo-aesthetic boundaries, and is perhaps the most extreme example of Varela's appropriation of an international pop-rock sound, with clear textural and timbral allusions to the music of Sting and Fito Páez.

Ahora que los mapas están cambiando de color (excerpt)

Carlos Varela

[. . .]

Están quemando los libros, están cortando cabezas
Están poniendo en peligro las cartas sobre la mesa.
Está lloviendo en la tierra, están vaciando mercados
Están jugando a la guerra y están borrando el pasado

Ahora que los mapas están cambiando de color.

Cementerio Chino

Creo que esta vez veo tu destino

Y abrirán tus viejas puertas de una vez

Now that the Maps are Changing Color

[...]

They're burning books, cutting off heads
They're putting the cards on the table in danger
It's raining on the earth, the markets are empty
They're playing war and the past is being erased

Now that the maps are changing color.

Chinese Cemetery

I think that this time I see your destiny
And your old doors will open once again.

Here, Varela travels from the general to the local, as he moves from the global upheavals caused by the fall of the Iron Curtain to the metaphoric opening of the iron gates to Havana's Chinese Cemetery. His merging of the graphic representation of political geography with an image that recalls the politics of local human geography is striking. The Cementerio Chino, closed after the exodus of Havana's Chinese population in the years following the revolution, is one of the island's most poignant geographic markers of its current diasporic reality.⁵⁴ (See Figure 3.)

FIGURE 3. *Cementerio Chino (with gates open!). Courtesy of Abilio Estévez.*



In his references to the gates of the Chinese Cemetery in “Ahora que los mapas cambian de color,” or to the ruined boats in “Jalisco Park,” Varela connects material metaphors of the local with the ephemeral community of Cubans who visit such spaces only aurally. Varela’s connection with Cuban émigrés and with their relationship to friends and family on the island is simultaneously artistic, professional, and personal. Songs such as “Foto de familia,” “Detrás del cristal,” and “Jalisco Park” call up the exquisite hollowness of separation endured by “los que se fueron y los que están” (those that left and those that are here).⁵⁵

The Transnational Generation

A generation of musicians grew up listening to the rather oxymoronic aesthetic created by the worldly, cosmopolitan sound and the intimate, local message of the music of Carlos Varela, Gerardo Alfonso, and others. Arriving on the scene in the early 1990s just as Cuba’s economy sank into the “Special Period,” young musicians faced heightened material and institutional challenges. Their music, which merged a sharp-edged social criticism with a cosmopolitan fusion of international sounds and a heightened sense of danceability, did not easily fill the institutional niche created for nueva trova, already stretched and challenged by musicians in the 1980s.⁵⁶ Lacking the support of Havana’s institutional apparatus and unable to record or support themselves financially, an overwhelming number of the singer-songwriters of this generation left the island for a multitude of destinations.⁵⁷ Collaborating across distances with musicians in various locations, these musicians write and perform for a primarily Cuban audience whose “place” is as ephemeral as that of the musicians themselves. Those who remained in Havana have developed their careers with an acute awareness of and participation with the outside world, cultivating relationships with international music labels, traveling throughout Europe and the Americas, and continuing to record and collaborate with Cuban colleagues who moved abroad.⁵⁸

These musicians can be categorized together based not so much on genre or musical style as on a shared ethos of experimentalism and musical fusion, a combination of entertaining and socially critical lyrics, and a strong sense of local (Cuban) identification that is blended with a worldview marked by transnational migration and cultural contacts. While some critics continue to use the term “trovador” to describe the musicians of this generation, it is becoming increasingly common to see them referred to as *cantautores*, which literally translates as “singer-songwriters.” In a Cuban context, cantautor refers to the creators of a variety of musical styles that go far beyond the simple “man with guitar” inference that the term carries

in English. Cultural critic Dennys Matos acknowledges that while the term might seem somewhat ambiguous, it is useful to distinguish the music being made by contemporary Cuban musicians both on and off the island from that of earlier *trovadores*.⁵⁹ Referring more to substance than to style, Matos's conception of the cantautor is a much wider and flexible category than is typically imagined. It is not similarities of genre that connect these artists, but rather a sort of transnational or diasporic sensibility that contrasts with the "insular consciousness" observed by Fernández in the previous generation. Thus Matos can group together the transnational hip hop of artists like Orishas (based in Paris) and Nilo MC (based in Madrid), with the digital experimentation of Havana-based X Alfonso, the retro boleros and worldbeat fusions of Descemer Bueno, along with songwriters who perform with more traditional acoustic guitar or rock format accompaniment.⁶⁰

In *Postnational Musical Identities*, Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid write that changes in production, marketing, and *experience* brought on by the postnational or transnational "turn" have caused the relationships between margin and center to be renegotiated, raising questions regarding "how audiences are imagined and identities performed in a globalized economy; how music reflects and reflects upon new understandings of citizenship beyond the nation-State; how it works as a site of resistance against globalization or nationalist forms of oppression; and how the networks of music production, distribution and consumption may (or may not) become postnational sites of identification."⁶¹

Reconceptualizing contemporary Cuban music making in terms of ethos rather than genre allows us to recognize music's agency in transforming hierarchies of space and place. Music, Martin Stokes writes, is meaningful precisely because it "provides the means by which people recognize identities and spaces, and the boundaries that separate them."⁶² Making music on the margins of both Cuban state institutions and the multinational music industry, contemporary Cuban songwriters, and their borderless Cuban fans, represent an effort to construct a cultural and cosmopolitan *cubanía* that looks away from the stale polemics that had previously framed Cuban nationalist identity.

The Paris-based group Orishas offers an excellent example of how contemporary Cuban musicians have negotiated these boundaries, combining cosmopolitanism with defiant displays of local urban knowledge to situate themselves, and their listeners, within an increasingly widening, diasporic *cubanía*. One of the most internationally successful groups of its generation, Orishas was formed in France by former members of the Havana rap group Amenaza. The group is often cited for its fusing of hip-hop beats with the melodic contours of Cuban *son* and rhythms

drawn from Afro-Cuban *batá* drumming and *guaguancó* and other secular dance styles. Their first album, *A lo cubano* (2000), is remarkable in its incessant retracing of Havana's cityscape, authenticating their Parisian product through their exhaustive knowledge of the Cuban capital, both geographically and linguistically. Of the 15 tracks on *A lo cubano*, 10 refer explicitly or implicitly to the city of Havana, with several numbers, such as "Barrio" and "537 C.U.B.A.," making the city and its geography a central focus of the lyrics.

"537 C.U.B.A.," the title of which refers to the international dialing code used to telephone the city of Havana from abroad (53 is the country code, 7 is the code for Havana), is an expression of frustration and longing felt by Cubans forced to pursue their lives in the diaspora. The title's conflation of the national (C.U.B.A.) with the strictly local (7) is indicative of the ways that artists living outside of Cuba have used Havana as a sign for the nation and as a site for the construction of nostalgia. The song is based on the harmonic progression of Francisco Repilado's song "Chan Chan," which achieved international popularity following the release of the *Buena Vista Social Club* album in 1997. In "537 C.U.B.A.," the citation of Repilado's song is more than a tool to authenticate Orisha's work in Cuban tradition or a savvy attempt to capitalize on the international market's love affair with Ry Cooder and Wim Wenders's highly successful musical and filmic productions. "Chan Chan" is also used as a sign for the migratory experience, and while its chorus, "De Alto Cedro voy para Marcané/Luego a Cueto voy para Mayarí (I go from Alto Cedro to Marcané/Later I go from Cueto to Mayarí)" is never explicitly cited, the song's tale of a traveling migrant longing to return to a woman opens a metaphoric door for Orishas' exploration of their own diasporic reality. Orishas play off the rural associations of the *son oriental* style of "Chan Chan," with a chorus that calls up images of the Cuban countryside, a representation of nationalism well in keeping with the early 20th-century musical style that gives the piece its harmonic foundation.

Vengo de donde hay un río
Tabaco y cañaveral
Donde el sudor del guajiro
Hace a la tierra sonar⁶³

I come from where there's a river
tobacco and cane fields
where the sweat of the peasant
makes the earth sound

The raps, however, express a longing for a Cuba that is explicitly urban. The anguished nostalgia expressed for the distant homeland as "flotando ando pasando mano a mano/sobre el mapa de este mundo (Floating I go, moving hand over hand over the map of this world)," overflows in the climactic final verse of the song as Yotuel's rap spills over with an urgent iteration of Havana's cityscape.

Cayo Hueso, San Leopoldo,
Buena Vista, Miramar,
Alamar, La Victoria,
Habana Vieja, Barrio Nuevo,
Bejucal.
¿Dónde estás tú, mi Rampa?
El Sol que Canta,
La Catedral,
el Capitolio se levanta.
Que he oído de estas cosas,
23 y 12, Vedado, Paseo del Prado,
tus leones lado a lado
forman parte de mis tradiciones,
mis emociones
Eres tú mi Cuba,
Como tú ninguna.⁶⁴

Cayo Hueso, San Leopoldo,
Buena Vista, Miramar,
Alamar, La Victoria,
Habana Vieja, Barrio Nuevo,
Bejucal.
Where are you, my Rampa
El Sol que Canta,
The Cathedral,
The Capitol rises up
I've heard of these things
23 y 12, Vedado, Paseo del Prado,
your lions side by side
form part of my traditions,
my emotions
You are my Cuba
there's no one like you.

Repetition, as Richard Middleton reminds us, grounds us in more than one sense,⁶⁵ and here the attempted grounding is literal, using the repeated place names to locate both artist and listener within a remembered cityscape. Such repetitive revisitations of urban space are a critical part of remembering and maintaining not just a sense of place, but also a sense of Cuban identity. In *Milk of Amnesia*, Cuban American performance artist Carmelita Tropicana remarks on the importance of such remembrances:

I used to play a game in bed. About remembering. I would lie awake in my bed before going to sleep and remember. I'd remember the way to my best friend's house. I'd start at the front door of my house, cross the porch. Jump off three steps onto the sidewalk. The first house on the right looked just like my house except it had only one balcony. The third house was great. You couldn't see it. It was hidden by a wall and trees and shrubs. Whenever I'd look in, the German shepherd sniffed me and barked me out of his turf. I'd continue walking, crossing three streets, walking two blocks until I came to my best friend's house. I did this repeatedly so I wouldn't forget. I would remember. But then one day I forgot to remember. I don't know what happened. Some time passed and I couldn't remember the third block, then the second. Now I can only walk to the third house. I've forgotten.⁶⁶

Cartographic representations of Havana can thus serve as an aid for imagining or reimagining the city, pointing out particular urban markers of local identity. For musicians and listeners in the diaspora, the same cartographic discourse can also be used to map meaning and a sense of belonging onto new locales. Kelvis Ochoa's song, "Cuando salí de La Habana," from the

Habana Abierta album *24 horas*, uses the same strategies songwriters employ to map Havana to situate both artist and listener in a new, transnational reality.⁶⁷ The song's lyrics offer a sort of split screen view of the Cuban experience, with the first half remembering Havana and the second Madrid. The Havana described in the first part of the song expresses the mobility and ephemerality of human geography, Ochoa's memory maps out the city not in physical landmarks but in people and in sound. Introduced by a melody drawn from a Russian children's cartoon popular in Havana in the 1970s, the opening lyrics listen in on Havana's soundscape (*salsa . . . again*) before recounting particular human interactions (a fight between policemen, poet Piñol improvising at a local jam). Conjured as a collection of memory fragments, Havana itself (and later Madrid) becomes a transtemporal curb across which people and sounds fleetingly pass. Reinaldo Román, borrowing from Thomas Tweed's study of diasporic Cuban identities, writes that "[t]ranstemporal," and "translocative" practices map the "natal landscapes" onto new locations and transport displaced peoples to a time before they were torn from their native places, or to the future following the return home. In these ways, identities are deterritorialized, rendered portable, and constituted elsewhere.⁶⁸

This kind of deterritorialization is precisely what occurs in "Cuando salí de La Habana," for as Ochoa leaves Havana for Madrid, the text engages in a new mapping exercise, plotting out streets, plazas, and clubs in Madrid, that mirrors the cartographic songwriting practices typically associated with Havana.

Cuando salí de La Habana
(excerpt)

When I Left Havana

Kelvis Ochoa

Madrid con su intensa Puerta del
Sol
(Montera, luego La Palma)
Armando una bulla en el Suristán
Vanito se huracanaba
Pasamos el veranito (so-so)
Octubre se ostinaba
Flotando en el aire, aquel frío picó
El gorrión que otra vez se chocaba

Teniendo yo que decir
Hace calor en La Habana mi
hermana
Cuéntame de Madrid

Madrid with its intense Puerta del
Sol
(Montera, later La Palma)
Making a ruckus in the Suristán
Vanito was a hurricane
We passed the summer (so-so)
October got obstinate
floating in the air, the cold struck
the swallow (nostalgia) that crashed
again
and I had to say
It's hot in Havana, sister,

Tell me about Madrid

Ochoa's map of Madrid is a transparent one, a superimposition of new urban spaces and experiences on top of older memories and ways of knowing. His poetic geography is thus a game like Carmelita Tropicana's remembering, yet rather than attempting to remember a Havana whose details are already blurred (it is simply "hot"), Ochoa's careful cartographic construction of Madrid evidences a desire to name; to call streets, plazas, and clubs by their proper names, thus making "habitable or believable the place that they clothe with a word."⁶⁹ Contemporary Cuban musicians' strolls through the city no longer construct the flâneur's modernist paradigm in which walking in the city signified being away from home.⁷⁰ Rather, "home" is constructed *through* the city, and urban orientation serves to counteract territorial displacement.

Ochoa's exercise is not exceptional among Cuban musicians living in the diaspora. Madrid-based singer-songwriter Ela Ruiz's 2004 album *Ábreme la puerta* is anchored by juxtaposed odes to her natal city Havana and her new place of residence, her "madre de adopción," the madrileño barrio of Lavapiés. Ela herself describes "Lavapiés" as "the song that marked my arrival to this country," acknowledging the new cityscape's reproductive power in the creation of her diasporic identity.⁷¹ Lavapiés, a neighborhood of immigrants, has also been the subject of musical walkabouts by Gema

FIGURE 4. *Habana Abierta*, posing in front of the Lavapiés metro in Madrid. Courtesy of Vanito Caballero.



and Pavel and Nilo MC, and it figured prominently in the publicity photographs for Habana Abierta's first tour of the United States in 2003, with band members posing in front of the neighborhood's metro station (see Figure 4).

Superimposed maps and geographical play are also at work in Gema and Pavel's song "De Nueva York a La Habana," which appears on their 2003 album, *Art Bembé*.⁷² A double disc collection that also includes a book containing visual art, essays, and poetry, the album's project includes the collaboration of Cuban musicians living in Havana, Miami, New York, and Madrid. Musically, *Art Bembé* is a testament to hybridity, mixing the sounds of Afro-Cuban religious chants, *boleros*, and *guaguancós* with funk, flamenco, soul, hip-hop and borrowed sounds from the Madrid subway and Havana sidewalks. In this track, songwriter Pavel Urkiza reveals a deeply seated interest and fascination in the role of city geographies in defining the contemporary Cuban experience, and he openly plays with the superimposed poetic geographies alluded to by de Certeau.

De Nueva York a La Habana

From New York to Havana

Gema y Pavel

(*Art Bembé*, 2003)

Se rompió el tambor
una tarde del domingo en la
Esquina Habanera
New Jersey tembló, la rumba se
puso buena
y se olvidaron las penas
y se me recordé de aquellas rumbas
en el Central Park
con sartenes y botellas
y esa linda ¡Ay Micaela!
dónde habrás ido a parar?
Contigo se fue la rumba
y el recuerdo del Parque Central

Cuando era niña
tocaban los rumberos reunidos

en la esquina de Prado y Oficios
desde el Malecón arrancaba la
comparsa
arrollando pal Parque Central, que
emoción!

The drumming began
one Sunday afternoon in the
Esquina Habanera
New Jersey shook, the rumba got
really good
and everybody forgot their sorrows
and I remembered those rumbas
in Central Park
with skillet and bottles
and that pretty Micaela, ay Micaela!
where did you end up?
with you went the rumba
and the memory of Central Park

When I was a girl
the rumberos got together and
played
on the corner of Prado and Oficios.
The comparsa played from the
Malecón
to Central Park, what emotion!

Que borrachera, amanecer entre Prado y Neptuno	What drunkenness to see the dawn between Prado and Neptuno
la rumba y la gente buena y no puedo olvidar el cajón y la rumba	the rumba and good people and I can't forgot the cajón and the rumba
sonándome adentro y la clave llevando	sounding within me and the clave
el compás de mi guaguancó	carrying the beat of my guaguancó
(coro)	(chorus)
Del Central Park	From Central Park
al Parque Central	to the Parque Central
la rumba no tiene pa' cuando acabar	the rumba's not going to stop
De Nueva York a La Habana	From New York to Havana
columbia pa' los que tienen ganas de bailar.	columbia for those who feel like dancing

Here, there are three levels of translocality: the New York metropolitan area, Havana, and, not referenced—but clearly inferred—Madrid. New Jersey's commercial Esquina Habanera becomes a literal Havana street corner as Urkiza writes his *recuerdos* in yet another distant *rincón*. The sound of the *guaguancó* functions as a mnemonic device, yet the music not only calls up memory; its vibrations cross over the multivalent boundaries of both time and space, recalling not only the distant rumbas of Havana's Parque Central, but also the famous Central Park rumbas which were shut down by the authorities in 1999.

Musical cartographies are ephemeral, quick to dissipate and decay, sure to fracture and multiply. "Cada ventana es un dibujo diferente de La Habana (each window is a different drawing of Havana,)" sing Gema and Pavel in their song "Domingo a.m."⁷³ Equally they could have said that each song offers a different map of Havana, allowing the listener to explore the city as person, the city as sound, the city as lost dream, as future possibility, as a series of stairs and streets and asphalt and rubble. As the routes to and from the city become increasingly numerous, twisted, and well-traveled, it will be interesting to view how Cuban musicians negotiate the changing transnational cityscape in the coming years.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "From The Arcades Project," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Malden, MA: Blackwell publishing, 2002), 398.

2. "You resemble Havana." Lyrics from Carlos Varela's song, "Detrás del cristal," *Siete* (2003). All translations in this article are by the author.
3. Doreen Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird, et al, (London: Routledge, 1993), 65.
4. Anthony D. King, "Boundaries, Networks, and Cities: Playing and Replaying Diasporas and Cities," in *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, ed. Alev Çinar and Thomas Bender (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 10.
5. John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 54. Quoted in Rhonda Lemke Sanford, *Maps and Memory in Early Modern England: A Sense of Place*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 3.
6. Tom Conley, *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 20. Quoted in Sanford, 4.
7. Sanford, 4.
8. Antonio Eligio Fernández (Tonel), "The Island, the Map, the Travelers: Notes on Recent Developments in Cuban Art," *boundary 2* 29/3 (2002), 81–93.
9. Edward Soja, "History: Geography: Modernity," in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989), 11.
10. Fernández, 84. Such dialogue was anticipated two decades earlier in the internationalist objectives of the OSPAAAL Tricontinental Conference, held in Havana in 1966.
11. Fernández, 80.
12. Lists of songs dedicated to Cuba's capital city proliferate on the internet, particularly on sites or blogs that deal the experiences of Cuban émigrés. See, for example, El Yoyo's blog "Jinetero. . .¿ y qué?" <http://www.conexioncubana.net/blogs/yoyo/2007/09/01/cien-canciones-a-la-habana/> and "La Habana a todo dolor" <http://lahabanaodocolor.blogspot.com/> (the blog's title is drawn from Vanito Caballero's anthem "Habana a todo color," recorded on Habana Abierta's 1999 album, *24 horas*. (both sites accessed Feb. 20, 2009)
13. Vincenzo Perna offers valuable insight in the development of *timba* as a specifically urban, Havana-centric genre. Vincenzo Perna, *Timba: The Sound of Cuban Crisis* (London: Ashgate, 2005).
14. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 108.
15. Joaquín Borges-Triana, "Músicos de Cuba y del mundo: Nadie se va del todo" (Fragmento). Borges-Triana's piece won an Honorable Mention award in the *Temas* magazine essay contest, 2004. Available at <http://www.temas.cult.cu/premio.php> (accessed Dec. 1, 2007).
16. There were, of course, *trovadores* from the first and second generations of the *nueva trova* movement who also drew on rural musical influences. Alberto Falla, Pedro Luis Ferrer, and Alberto Tosca stand out in this regard, and the stylized *sones* on Pablo Milanés' successive albums, *Años* (1980), *Años II* (1986), and *Años III* (1992), notably cover many of the classics of the *vieja trova*, unmasking Ry Cooder and Wim Wenders's 1999 rather fraudulent attempt to present such music as "lost" to those in the socialist island nation.
17. Moore, "Transformations in Cuban *Nueva trova*, 1965–1995," *Ethnomusicology* 47/1 (2003): 1–41.

18. I do not mean to suggest that other Cuban cities did not have their own flowering of singer-songwriters during these years. The city of Santa Clara, in particular, developed a rich songwriting tradition that continues to this day. National success, however, has required relocation to Havana or at least the investment of considerable time in its cultural institutions.

19. A list of “provincial” trovadores whose careers were cemented in Havana includes Silvio Rodríguez (San Antonio de los Baños), Pablo Milanés (Bayamo), Teresa Fernández (Santa Clara), Augusto Blanco (Banes, Holguín), and Pedro Luis Ferrer (Yaguajay). More recently, similar migrations have marked the careers of Kelvis Ochoa (Isla de la Juventud), Vanito Caballero Brown (Santiago de Cuba), Raúl Torres (Matanzas), and Aldo Antonio García (Pinar del Río).

20. Moore, 20–25.

21. Cuban music critics have also stressed the medieval associations of the word “trovador,” playing up the association between the strolling players of feudal Europe and the post-revolutionary poet-musicians and frequently referring to them as “juglares,” or minstrels.

22. Moore points out the forced nature of creating a historic lineage that links nueva trova artists with singer-songwriters from the turn of the 20th-century, noting that the highly educated trovadores of the 1960s and 1970s inhabited a sociopolitical position distinct from that of the largely illiterate, working-class musicians of color who formed the bulk of vieja trova musicians. Moore, 5. It is interesting to note, however, that it is the vieja trova, rather than its “successor,” that exhibits a sense of space. Songs like Francisco Repilado’s famous “Chan Chan,” for example, document the migratory experience of many rural Cubans in the early 20th century.

23. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), 70.

24. Quoted in Clara Díaz, *Sobre la guitarra, la voz* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1994), 270.

25. The 20th floor of the Havana Hilton, later named the Hotel Habana Libre, became the command and control center in the early days of the revolution.

26. Trovador Amaury Pérez’s twice-recorded ode to Havana, “La Habana mía,” (*Licencias del Otoño* 1996; *Amor difícil*, 1998) can be viewed as participating in the popular trend for Havana songs in the mid 1990s, rather than being seen as typical of the nueva trova movement.

27. Lyrics from two of the most famous love songs from the nueva trova era: “El breve espacio en que no está,” by Pablo Milanés, and “Oleo de mujer con sombrero,” by Silvio Rodríguez. This analysis draws from an unpublished paper by Susan Thomas, “*La era está pariendo: Re/producing Sexual Politics in Cuban Nueva trova*.” Paper presented at Feminist Theory and Music 8. CUNY Graduate Center and New York University, New York, New York, June 25, 2005.

28. See, for example, the reactions of more traditional trovadoras Rita Ribadavia and Heidi Igualada to the dance music-influenced work of Habana Abierta in Susan Thomas, “Did Nobody Pass the Girls the Guitar? Queer Appropriations in Contemporary Cuban Popular Song,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 18/2 (2006). 128–129.

29. While these artists developed their careers and personal styles (as well as their fan bases) in the 1980s, the combination of difficult material conditions on the island and institutional inertia slowed the production of their recordings, which

only began to appear at the end of the decade. Carlos Varela's first album, *Jalisco Park*, for example, appeared in 1989. All of his subsequent albums and those of Gerardo Alfonso came out in the 1990s.

30. Benjamin, 399.
31. Elizabeth Wilson, "From *The Sphinx in the City*," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, 419.
32. Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 103.
33. Frederick Jameson, "Nostalgia for the Present," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 18/2 (Spring, 1989): 517–37.
34. Keith Tester, *The Flâneur* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.
35. See, for example, Janet Wolff, "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity," *Theory, Culture & Society* 2/3 (1985): 37–38; Griselda Pollack, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the History of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988); John Tagg, "The Discontinuous City: Picturing and the Discursive Field," in *Grounds of Dispute: Art, History, Cultural Politics and the Discursive Field* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and, more recently, Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough's edited volume, *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).
36. Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 29.
37. See Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).
38. Jorge Mañach, "Indagación del choteo," in *Jorge Mañach: Ensayos* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1999), 50.
39. Damian J. Fernández, *Cuba and the Politics of Passion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 31.
40. José Muñoz views choteo as part of what he terms a "critical *cubanía*." See his discussion in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), 119–120; 135–141.
41. de Certeau, 95.
42. *Ibid.*, 105.
43. *Ibid.*, 105.
44. Wilson, 419.
45. Carlos Varela, *Como los peces* (1995).
46. <http://www.carlosvarela.com/prensa.asp> (Accessed 3/1/2009).
47. Benjamin, 398.
48. The lyrics to "Memorias" recounts the memory of a childhood friend taken on a boat by his father, never to return.
49. Varela thus differs from many younger musicians, who emigrated to other countries to pursue their careers.
50. In a 2003 presentation in Madrid of his album *Siete*, for example, the audience appeared to be approximately 80% Cuban. Being in the theater was a bit like being at a high school reunion, as émigrés who had attended the "Pré" ("pre-university" or high school) or University together suddenly found themselves reunited in another country by the music of a former idol.

51. Richard D.E. Burton, *The Flaneur and His City: Patterns of Daily Life in Paris 1815–1851* (Durham, U.K.: University of Durham, 1994), 2.
52. Carlos Varela, interview with the author. Havana, Cuba. Nov. 1, 2004.
53. “For me, everything becomes allegory.” Burton, *The Flaneur and His City*, 2. For an example of Varela’s allegorical treatment of the city, listen to “Detrás del cristal,” the final track from *Siete*, which begins, “Tú te pareces a La Habana,” (you resemble Havana). The song maps Havana’s landscape onto a lover, projecting the city’s tragic decadence onto a beautiful, yet troubled, love affair.
54. Havana’s Chinese inhabitants, and the neighborhood that recalls their absence, is similarly the focus of Gerardo Alfonso’s song, “Barrio Chino” (*El ilustrado caballero de Paris*, 2001), which, like “Sábanas blancas,” refers to specific streets.
55. Lyrics from “Detrás del crystal,” on Varela’s 2003 album *Siete*.
56. Vanito Cabellero Brown and Alejandro Gutiérrez, whose song “Divino guión” was censored by the state-run media, sing about the cool reception their music received from the institutional apparatus in “Rockasón,” first recorded on their 1995 album, *Entiéndolo todo*, where they performed as the duo Lucha Almada. After becoming part of the collective known as Habana Abierta they later included the song on the group’s second album, *24 horas* (1999).
57. See Susan Thomas, “Cosmopolitan, International, Transnational: Locating Cuban Music,” in *Cuba Transnational*, ed. Damián Fernández (University Press of Florida, 2005), 104–120.
58. Examples of musicians who have remained in Cuba and maintain an international profile include Yusa, X Alfonso, William Vivanco, and the group Freehole Negro, as well as Robertico Carcassés, whose musical collective known as Interactivo has become a site for the musical renegotiation of the Cuban diaspora. Recently some artists who moved abroad in the 1990s have returned to Cuba, feeling that they can now promote their careers more successfully on the island than off. Kelvis Ochoa and David Torrens are prime examples.
59. Dennys Matos, “Mala vista anti social club: La joven música cubana,” *Encuentro* 30/31 (otoño-invierno 2003–2004), 67. See also Julio Fowler’s response to Matos’s article, “A propósito de ‘Mala vista anti social club’: Algunos desacuerdos,” *Encuentro* 33 (verano 2004), 255–263.
60. See also Joaquín Borges-Triana, *Concierto Cubano: La vida es un divino guión* (Barcelona: Linkqua Ediciones S. L., 2009).
61. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro Madrid, *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), ix. The authors draw from Micol Siegel’s work on comparative history and transnationalism, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review* 91, no. 1 (2005): 62–90.
62. Martin Stokes, “Music, Ethnicity, and Identity,” in *Ethnicity, Identity, Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 6.
63. “537 C.U.B.A.,” from Orishas, *A lo cubano* (2000).
64. *Ibid.*
65. Richard Middleton, *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 2006), 137.

66. Carmelita Tropicana, "Milk of Amnesia *Leche de amnesia*," TDR 39/3 (Autumn 1995), 94–95.
67. The song is discussed albeit in a different context, in Susan Thomas, "Cosmopolitan, International, Transnational," 110–114. Full lyrics and translation are included.
68. Reinaldo Román, "Identities and the Cityscape: On Religion and the Mapping of Spaces in the Late Colony and Early Cuban Republic," unpublished paper presented at the 6th CRI Conference on Cuban and Cuban American Studies, Florida International University, Feb. 7, 2006.
69. de Certeau, 105.
70. John Lechte, "(Not) Belonging in Postmodern Space," in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson, eds., *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Blackwell, 1994), 103.
71. Fernando Martín, "La cubana Ela une salsa, pop y mestizaje en el disco 'Á brebre la puerta,'" El País, Dec. 31, 2004.
72. Forming a duo in 1990, Gema Corredera and Pavel Urkiza moved to Madrid, Spain in 1992 and their subsequent four albums were recorded there. In 2007, Gema moved to the United States, while Pavel continues to reside in Madrid. They continue to record, perform, and tour together, releasing *Desnudos*, vol.1 (2009) and *Ofrenda a Borinquen* (2010).
73. Gema y Pavel, *Trampas del Tiempo* (1998).

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