

Queer Hybridity and Performance in the Multimedia Texts of Arroyo and Lozada

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Abstract: In his article "Queer Hybridity and Performance in the Multimedia Texts of Arroyo and Lozada" Ed Chamberlain examines the unconventional writing of Puerto Rican writers Rane Arroyo and Ángel Lozada. Arroyo and Lozada craft texts which can be interpreted as performances and these performative texts blend internet-based writings with more traditional genres including the novel and poetry. Arroyo's and Lozada's stylistic approaches exhibit a queer sensibility which resembles the way in which Latina/o queer people construct and perform their cultural identities. Chamberlain argues that these queer performances suggest we can neither create nor identify absolute truth in matters of identity and sexuality. Thus it becomes necessary to embrace the fiction and playfulness of everyday life whether it be online or face-to-face.

Ed CHAMBERLAIN

Queer Hybridity and Performance in the Multimedia Texts of Arroyo and Lozada

In the digital age, many new kinds of research have arisen, and one of the most transformative frontiers is the way that new media forms such as the world wide web allow for original modes of Hispanophone culture. While some polling groups, such as Pew Research hypothesize a digital divide between Latina/o people and the Anglophone world, there exists evidence that many Latina/o communities have taken ownership of diverse digital milieus (see Gonzalez-Barrera, Lopez, Patten <<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/03/07/closing-the-digital-divide-latinos-and-technology-adoption/>>). Many Latina/o artists are producing poignant forms of art which integrate and mirror digital domains. Thea Pitman and Claire Taylor contend that "while there is now a surplus of studies devoted to the performance of facets of identity, such as nationality, gender, race and ethnicity in virtual environments, very little of this material focuses on those matters as apparent in Latin American usage of the internet" (2). Just as Pitman and Taylor and others suggest, relatively little attention has been given to how Latina/o artists produce diverse forms of cybercultural expression. One of the Latina/o enclaves which has demonstrated a savvy in web-based expression, but has not been considered by many academics is Puerto Rican men, who self-identify as gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. This group's engagement with the online world becomes clear when we consider the writing of Rane Arroyo and Ángel Lozada—both of whom have self-identified as Puerto Rican in ancestry and published writings which display queer Latino characters.

In Arroyo's collection *How to Name a Hurricane* and Lozada's novel *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía*, several Latino men appear to use the internet to avoid loneliness, extend their friendships across vast distances, and meet new people. These texts go beyond simply recapitulating the men's usage of the net insofar as these works duplicate and reformulate more traditional genres, including love poetry and epistolary fiction. The authors layer these forms with web-based forms of communication, such as chat dialogues, thus creating a *mélange* which resists categorization. The authors' atypical brand of genre mixing coincides with another key textual element within Arroyo's and Lozada's texts: the performance of a phenomenon I call "queer hybridity." I view this occurrence as manifesting in several ways in the authors' texts, including in the contexts of the characters' identities and by way of the antinormative quality of the texts themselves. The authors create hybrid texts by merging different genres and languages such as English and Spanish. This deviation from the textual norm mirrors the way the characters stray from their cultures' inculcated sexual paradigms. Lozada's novel explains this idea most clearly at the beginning of his text where his protagonist, who self-identifies as "la Loca," describes himself in the third person, "Lo combina todo" (*No quiero* 22). Such words encapsulate his thought process and that of Arroyo's text insofar as both synthesize several textual materials and cultural experiences. In light of these aspects, I contend that these Latino texts exhibit a queer performance of hybridity which resists the divisiveness of homophobia and ethnocentrism that is often predicated on the dominant US-American culture's ideals of moral and cultural purity.

To develop this discussion, I focus upon the texts' generic elements and the characters therein, because these textual components mirror one another to a significant degree. Both Arroyo's collection of poetry *How to Name a Hurricane* and Lozada's novel *No quiero* exhibit similarities which call upon us to consider the significance of their unusual, parallel approaches. A textual analysis of these texts' similarities provides a more nuanced understanding of the way that these queer Latino men communicate, perform a range of identities in the online world, and respond to daily challenges. For instance, within Arroyo's writing we observe a character describe his online identity as a "mask," thus signaling that in the online world we create different versions of ourselves, some of which may appear untrue by the U.S.'s dominant standards (*How to Name* 21). This same idea is echoed in Lozada's text, and therefore, these layered portrayals encourage us to move beyond reductive notions of Latina/o identity, as well as beckon us to consider the ways in which sexuality complicates parochial views on ethnicity and identity. I do not assign any identity in my explication of these texts; rather, I examine how the subjects portrayed in these texts negotiate the experience of creating queer Latina/o hybrid identities online. The characters' identities appear multifaceted and at times partial. This suggests that these queer hybrid experiences are by no means easily generalizable or uniform. My use of the phrase

"queer hybrid identities" allows me to theorize a portrayal of collective experiences which comments on today's diverse queer Latina/o life-paths. To begin, I interpret these two texts' forms and their characters as composites of several disparate elements and therefore resembling what Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes might call "ghetto bricolage" (*Queer Ricans* 141). La Fountain-Stokes understands queer Puerto Rican artists as building upon the materials available to them in their local, or as some say, ghetto environments. Like La Fountain-Stokes, I posit that the writings of Arroyo and Lozada are written intentionally for the purpose of expounding on the struggles of today's queer Puerto Rican people who cope with a powerful heteronormative order that attempts to bash lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as a threat to civil society and family. The texts make the comment that embracing hybridity in its various forms is a creative means of responding to the constraints and so-called truths which antigay groups try to impose upon queer Latina/o people today.

Before comparing these texts, I acknowledge the challenges of carrying out such a project. For instance, as I assembled my archive of texts, it became clear that not all characters identify themselves or their activities with the same kind of terminology whether it is sexual or ethnicity-related terminology. Still, some terms, such as the words "gay" and "queer" certainly have gained currency in the larger Latina/o world. In view of this I wish to foreground my use of the term "queer" because it is one of the overarching ideas which animate my analysis, and as Siobhan B. Somerville suggests the term can cause "confusion" (187). For the purposes of my project, I employ the term "queer" to elucidate the characters' shared condition of being in opposition to the dominant gendered and sexual norms, which often consign them to alterity. In using this lens, I remain cautious because I believe that without providing context, this framework can appear limiting. Further, while I recognize that this terminology often connotes a pre-given, essentialist identity, I strive to avoid imposing a fixed identity upon the protagonists. Rather, I attempt to make sense of the characters' actions as they explore and reflect upon their social anxieties and desires. Moreover, I use the term "queer" as a way of linking my texts' protagonists—not for the purpose of erasing their distinctive sense of self—but for the sake of uniting these individuals who have similar experiences under one sign. In doing so, we may gain a more comprehensive knowledge of the social experiences and vulnerability Latina/o queers encounter.

By bringing these characters together, I write about a set of experiences which Latina/o queers experience in artistic expressions, the mainstream U.S. media, and the real world. In particular, the texts' protagonists challenge the idea that Latina/o queers must adhere to the truths and knowledge of an Anglophone, heterocentric world that commands Spanish speakers to "Learn English" (*No Quiero* 26). They carry out this challenge by offering us a queer knowledge—of themselves and their community—which comes in the mixing of textual forms and privileging of hybrid cultures. Arroyo and Lozada proffer a pair of mosaics, which consist of a set of the men's daily experiences. To understand these experiences, I interpret the protagonists' dialogues as performative utterances which conjure questions about desire, hybridity, and truth. Rather than maintaining a fixed, monolithic notion of truth, these texts embrace the multitudinous realities of human existence, and they suggest that it is possible to find alternative kinds of social experience, in which queer Latina/o folks produce their own subjective, community-based versions of knowledge and truth. In depicting these characters' social experiences as hybrid, the texts offer up a blueprint for living without the constraints of the dominant culture's vision of legitimacy. Through their queer hybridity, the characters find versions of knowledge and truth which empower them and cannot be disciplined.

Arroyo's prose poems and Lozada's novel instantiate this queer hybridity by embedding online communications within conventionally printed books, creating multimedia texts which build upon the narrative forms of epistolary fiction. Historically, in English literature the epistolary genre dates back to the eighteenth century when Samuel Richardson published *Pamela*, a story about a servant who tries to avoid her master's advances of seduction. Like Richardson's text, the works of Arroyo and Lozada similarly explore the human issues of desire, although their texts take a fresh approach inasmuch as they merge the epistolary narrative with other genres such as novelistic writing, personal essays, and poetry. Debra Ann Castillo, Luis Correa-Díaz, and Patrick P. Garlinger analyzed this trend with regard to electronic texts. Castillo analyzes two e-mail based narratives: Cristina Civale's short story *Perra Virtual* and Rosina Conde's novel *La Genera*, showing how these texts encourage readers to explore new kinds of writing, as well as generate new interpretative strategies. Castillo writes that "internationally, internet and web-conscious narratives have begun to consolidate into an increasingly

large and recognizable print subgenre" (234). Castillo's exegesis of cybertexts offers a sophisticated analysis and while I agree that there indeed has been a proliferation of web-conscious texts, I remain unconvinced that these works constitute a "recognizable print subgenre" because of how these cybertexts are composed in a wide variety of ways.

I view these texts as less of a subgenre and more of an unruly, hybrid phenomenon which links varying materials for a bevy of purposes. This unruly quality causes the texts to exhibit a queer sensibility because they deviate from the conventions of mainstream storytelling, in which writers utilize a linear plot and style to tell a story. In contrast, the hybridity of these texts demonstrates a queer resonance because it pushes the boundaries of aesthetic beauty and "good form." And certainly, the queer hybrid quality of these texts may surprise some, while others familiar with the work of Nestor García Canclini may observe consistency as well: "hybridity has a long trajectory in Latin American cultures. We remember formerly the syncretic forms created by Spanish and Portuguese matrices mixing with indigenous representation" (241). García Canclini suggests that what Arroyo and Lozada are doing with their work is to some extent in keeping with cultural trends, yet he never takes into account how queerness factors into hybrid cultural expression. Thus as Arroyo and Lozada tell their stories, they can be read as extending the creative practices of Latin American traditions, synthesizing multiple elements from the queer Latina/o communities to offer an alternate form of knowledge.

In the case of Arroyo's writing, his collection *How to Name a Hurricane* consists of a mixture of prose poems, which touch on several subjects. More specifically, Arroyo's anthology offers a set of e-mail poems which mainly have been sent to a fictional man named "Santo." His name brings a quasi-religious undercurrent to a text which would otherwise appear as irreligious or even blasphemous. Arroyo appears unconcerned with the writing of the life of saints and he appears more interested in painting Santo as a good friend to people who send him web-based messages. The character functions as a "saint" to the extent that he prevents his friends from being lonely. However, he never heals anyone in the physical sense, nor does he ever signal that he has overcome loneliness himself. Much like the writing of Lozada, we see a frustration with isolation mitigated to some extent through the characters' online flirtations. Readers observe Santo's own propensity to socializing in the e-text's coquettish and light-hearted messages. While readers never learn Santo's real identity, we see that he performs the role of a sociable, queer Latino man in the online sphere. He enjoys the male physique, as well as demonstrates an interest in Caribbean history and religion. These qualities become apparent in several e-mail poems called "Cyber Conquistadores" (see *How to Name* 21). These original pieces resemble prose poems, which bridge the past and present, while suggesting that today's Latina/o queers have substantive connections to their European forebears. Although in this case the queer Latina/o people ostensibly have conquered the online world by mastering the knowledge of the world wide web's geography.

Yet even as these queer Latino characters demonstrate familiarity with the online world, readers never gain a complete knowledge of who these characters are and they remain elusive and partial. In Lozada's novel, the main character never reveals his full name and he prefers to use a multitude of names within the text. This lack of information bespeaks his tendency to perform many identities instead of one singular, stable identity. Mostly, he calls himself *la Loca*—a term which may be translated as either an antigay pejorative ("faggot") or as a moniker re-claiming Latino queerness ("queen"), which can be seen as a form of resistance to homophobia (*No Quiero* 11). *La Loca's* identity at times appears difficult to discern as we only receive fragments describing his Puerto Rican heritage and time in the United States. Yet, this fragmentary self mirrors what we see in Arroyo's text insofar as both protagonists are shown from a point of view which resists generalization or unification. These portrayals offer a mosaic-like quality where multicultural identities are displayed as they integrate several forms of cultural identity. In Arroyo's case we can observe a set of identities informed by Spanish-speaking ancestry, English-speaking experience, and an understanding of queer cultures. This mixing of languages and personae signals a rejection of pure forms. That is, in choosing to select a variety of personae and materials, the authors (and characters) craft nontraditional (self)presentations that privilege hybridity and encourage us to celebrate the multidimensional aspects of humanity.

In studying this hybridity, it behooves us to conceptualize these textual aspects and characters through the lens of performance. By considering how these hybrid, queer texts and identities are performed (and performative), we open up avenues for critical interpretation. Through this lens of per-

formance, we understand how the texts contest the dominant culture's demand for a fixed sense of identity. Andil Gosine, Lisa Nakamura, and Juana María Rodríguez studied the performance of ethnicity and race in online spaces demonstrating the manner in which cyberworlds create our experience, affect our socializing, and sometimes shape perceptions of identity. In addition, Carla Kaplan writes that "performativity can be a subversive practice because it reveals that identities are not really 'our own' and that we are not really 'what we are'; rather, we are how we identify—a process which is mutable and changeable" (126). Like Kaplan, I emphasize that we must remain attentive to the unstable and evolving ways in which people, such as my texts' queer characters, speak of themselves and others. In building on Kaplan's work, it is imperative to consider the ways in which queer Latino men perform the discontinuities of their lives online and deal with the experience of being attributed prohibited, unrecognizable, or unreal desires. These men perform their lives at the fringe because, according to Arroyo's character, they shirk the majority's penchant for the "missionary position" and they offer a more positive way of looking at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (*How to Name* 27). An integrative framework of critical performance studies provides a means to examine how the characters' performances challenge the oppressive truth-claims of ethnocentric and homophobic groups.

Textual performances add up to something dissimilar from the majority of writings publishers produce year after year. Unlike the preponderance of texts which focus on the love of two heterosexual people, Arroyo's and Lozada's texts center on the comings and goings of many lovers in the life of a main figure, or character. Judith Roof addresses this subject in her book *Come as You Are* where she speaks to how the vast majority of published narratives rely on a heterosexual story formula or "heteroideology" (xxii). The immense number of texts following this well-worn path have created a standard which precludes queer people who aim to join together in loving or social ways. And while queer people have found ways of reading these straight stories against the grain, such as by looking at moments of homoeroticism, the lack of queer visibility has left many readers without hope, role models, or inspiration. Yet recent texts from the past several decades, including that of Arroyo and Lozada tell another story, in which heterosexual coupling is not the main focus or outcome of the plot. Within their work, we observe queer Latino men openly expressing countercultural desires for several men outside of committed relationships, and this approach does not lead them to the over-idealized outcome of coupling. Instead, these men's lives lead us to see the difficult challenges which can occur in the so-called true path of coupling and settling down.

Lozada builds his web-conscious narrative by departing from a dominant paradigm which he calls the "Puerto Rican love story" (48). Lozada explains this idea partially by way of a set of notes which frames a major chapter. The chapter shows how the protagonist *la Loca* engages in a relationship, but then loses his companion to another man. The narrator appears to write about these matters to understand them, giving his writing a journal-like quality. In the first section, Lozada's character also explains how he has attempted to publish his writings about relationships, but these did not mirror the Puerto Rican love story. He says that after submitting his work to several critics, "they demanded of him, by emails that he deliver to them a novel with plot" (*No quiero* 31; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). While this implies that there are problematic limits created by publishing norms, Lozada's words also expose the way publishers subjugate some unestablished writers and force them to offer a less radical, uniform text. At the close of his chapter, the text's narrator sarcastically says to his critics, "Oh Bitches, I am so sorry. I am so sorry that I could not give you a Puerto Rican love story. I am incapable of writing a good plot" (48). His irreverent comment shows a campy, theatrical quality, even as the story maintains the protagonist's continued desire to find companionship. The narrator's sarcasm is significant because it is a performance of something other than the truth: Lozada—and his main character *la Loca*—are indeed well educated. Lozada and his protagonist use the critics' denunciation as a means of defying the dominant conventions associated with the so-called Puerto Rican love story. As such, Lozada dismantles a singular notion of reality by linking his text to others such as the love story creating a chain of textual realities. In so doing, Lozada's narrative suggests there is no single version of artistry that is authoritative, original, or true.

Instead of performing the indoctrinated social standard, in which an author submits to a publisher, or a man finds long-lasting love with a woman, Lozada's text depicts a queer man who repeatedly defies convention. Lozada's protagonist, for instance, seeks out multiple partners online. In the past Andoni Alonso, Pedro Oiarzabal, Jennifer Brinkerhoff, and Anna Everett and considered the digital di-

mensions of diasporas, but it appears few researchers have considered the queer dynamics of digital-based art created by Latina/o people in diaspora or otherwise. One of the scholars who studied this subject, Juana María Rodríguez, documented the circumstances which hinder online amorous encounters for Latina/o people. She notes that she herself has been regarded with skepticism in lesbian or bisexual chatrooms because of how some internet users, such as heterosexual men, perform the role of a lesbian online (130-33). As Rodríguez shows, this dissembling generates a problematic sense of mistrust and unease in online spaces. These anxieties associated with knowing the true identities of others are dramatized most clearly in Lozada's work in which *la Loca* worries that one of his online suitors may turn out to be a "serial killer" (74). The character's concerns for safety underscore the stakes of online socializing, as well as reinforce Rodríguez's view that our cultures' imperatives to have trustworthy acquaintances can at times diminish or disrupt online interactions.

In prior studies, scholars of epistolary fiction including Linda S. Kauffman investigated the romantic dimensions of letter-based narratives asserting that desire and trust play substantive roles in animating the characters' actions. Kauffman's analysis of epistolary writing suggests that it is particularly well suited to non-traditional gender performance: "amorous epistolary discourse subverts so many conventional dichotomies and explores so many transgressions and transformations" (26). The transgressive quality of amorous epistolary writing provides fertile ground for the performance of queer Latino lives, which often defy the propriety of Hispanic cultures. In this way, the epistolary pushes boundaries and calls attention to the meaningful social links between characters or a character and a reader. Kauffman's observations grant a lens to theorize the performative aspects of Lozada's beginning, in which his epigraph speaks to the discontinuities of a queer Latino man's social roles. Lozada's epigraph consists of this definition: "The being: that performance, a chaotic pastiche of displacements and clichés, always mutant, never fixed" (9). Lozada's epigraph calls attention to the chaos which results when people are compelled to perform the human experiences of social change and movement. Lozada's words "desplazamientos," "mutante," and "jamás fijo" intimate the experiences Latina/o queers feel when people exclude them: displacement and detachment. This idea is reinforced in his wording of "el ser," which points to the idea of individual difference and isolation. Instead of a unifying social experience, readers receive the idea of an alienated, solitary being. This set of feelings appears to be the result of homophobic sentiment, which the character *la Loca* encounters in Puerto Rico and leads to his desire to remain within the U.S.

Lozada's epigraph mirrors some of his book's other paratextual materials which set the stage for an unconventional narrative. Lozada's text provides descriptions on the back cover which speak to the book's focus. While most texts offer something similar, these fragments play an important role in readers' experiences because they give a road map for understanding Lozada's dynamic work. Lozada's back cover reads, "It is a novel in Spanglish that shows a great ability in his capacity to manipulate texts of diverse origin (internet, popular music, advertising language and canonical literature among others)". In much the same way, Arroyo's back cover alerts us that his text as well transgresses boundaries: "There's no denying it, media culture has ushered in a new era of visibility for gays in America. Yet somehow the gay Latino doesn't fit into this sound-bite identity and usually isn't included in national media images. Rane Arroyo offers a corrective." These paratexts are informative as they offer a new knowledge about Latino queers, which is necessary to comprehend how these texts are pioneering art forms. Notably, Lozada's wording about the "sound-bite identity" invites us to ponder the ways people think about queer culture. Usually the mainstream media imagine queers as being white and affluent. With this text, we can appreciate how it reveals the diversity of queer cultures, as well as challenges us to think about the ways in which the sound-bite media sometimes mislead us with half-truths. Further, the title of Lozada's novel, another key paratext, encourages readers to take stock of another significant aspect of his narrative. The titular phrase *No quiero quedarme sola y vacía* is especially fitting after *la Loca* loses his long-term companion to another man. *La Loca* tries to avoid being lonely, yet he feels isolated, and this feeling is not limited to his own romantic experiences. He greatly misses his mother and her absence intensifies his desire to connect with others. Because of this, *la Loca* spends significant amounts of time searching online for a new partner.

In the process, readers may note that the process of finding a companion online is a performative one because when the characters go online in the works of Arroyo and Lozada, they create screen-names, which have the effect of creating an identity. When *la Loca* is going online, he talks about him-

self in the third person, using the identity of "la Ansiosa," one of the feminine identities he performs. Lozada's narrator says that "the anxious one puts personals on the web: Puerto Rican looking for LUV: In search of LTR: Spanish/Puerto Rican/Portuguese/ African: In this AOL Masquerade Ball, LoVe Vs.Lust, Lets See What Magic U Have 4 this boy ... that's a lie, she's looking for sex. But, like almost all queens on the internet, she's dishonest" (60). In an echo of Arroyo's mask imagery, *la Loca's* statement about the "Masquerade Ball" speaks to the playful and performative dynamics created by online communications. In his masquerade, he bends the truth, creating personae which are fiction and fact. In this, we gain a new knowledge of la Loca's desires and his viewpoint on the truth: even though he deceives online, he ultimately tells readers some truth, thus making us complicit. *La Loca* reveals he will not be constrained by the dominant culture's want of a true self. The text connotes that Latina/o queers should live the life they wish for, or the life they design for themselves: they should not be limited by dominant social pressures which mandate adherence to a majority's sense of truth.

Arroyo's prose poems exhibit this nonconformist dynamic as the figures in his e-mail messages speak about changing their usernames, as well as refer to one another with names such as "LocoCowboy" and "NinePiratas" (21). These half-Spanish, half-English usernames function as a move beyond earthly physiques, traditions and truths which link these Latino writers to biological families; as a result, these users exhibit a hybrid status as part-virtual, part-human. In Lozada's work, we see the use of these screen names play out in a chat session between the protagonist la Loca and one of his suitors in a chatroom called "Latino M4M," which suggests that this space is meant for Latino men who are interested in other men. La Loca takes the screen name of "WasHts," and by taking on this role, he performs a local identity because he lives in Washington Heights, New York—a place known to have many Spanish speakers. In this performance, he begins to chat with a user named "BoricuaBestial"—a man who becomes a suitor. In this chat, the two Puerto Rican men use colloquial speech laden with abbreviations, typographical errors and code-switching. Notably, the name of *la Loca's* suitor, "BoricuaBestial," is challenging to translate as the word Boricua is used to describe a person indigenous to the island of Puerto Rico, yet many present-day Puerto Rican people self-identify as Boricua regardless of whether or not they were born on the island of Puerto Rico, hence suggesting the idea of hybridity. This mixedness is reified by the word "bestial," which implies the man is beast-like, or half-human, half-animal. Although we learn little of this suitor, his presence reinforces the idea that hybridity is positive element, and hence it encourages us to look beyond the negativity that is sometimes associated with mixed identities. In contrast to Lozada's novel, which depicts a character who is concerned with finding a suitor for the present and future, we see the hybrid characters in Arroyo's prose poems concerned about the past—both the recent and distant past. These references call attention to two kinds of history, or to be more precise, a historical knowledge of the characters' past and the colonial history of the New World. Despite looking back, Arroyo's text consists of web-based communication, and these exchanges resemble performances, which consist of playful banter between the queer Latino man Santo and his friends, who converse about myriad matters, ranging from web-surfing to the history of the explorer Christopher Columbus. In these web-conscious texts, the men use ludic screen-names to perform their social identities: "Dear Santo, sí, you, dude, the internet is like gay heaven minus the Sundays! You were right! Gracias, ese for setting up my Pinta to explore new worlds. Didn't believe we'd still be friends when you moved to Houston. But here u are! We are. Wow, lots of links to studs and angels. Eye candy tastes better with J-Lo feeding the ears. What borders? Oh yeah, my new name is LocoCowboy. Amigo, gotta go. Will send pix soon! In birthday suit? ... In cyber space, I'm a rope bridge over an abstract chasm. Columbus, each man is a world" (*How to Name* 21).

In these cases, Arroyo's characters articulate their knowledge of Columbus in a context far outside the fifteenth century, linking the explorer to the present and to queer social life. An intriguing aspect of the passage is the way in which this queer Latino man relates to a larger "world." The "Pinta" appears to be a computer connected to the world wide web, while an unnamed character interpolates Columbus—making it appear that he and Columbus are talking casually about their love-lives. This approach brings Columbus into a queer social circle, whereby the e-mailer alters our perception of him. Through this alteration, the e-mailer establishes striking parallels between exploring the New World and the online world, signaling the virtual world is ripe for exploration. While this mix of Columbus and sexuality suggests a reimagining of history, it also creates a temporal hybridity that links past

and present, putting truth and fiction on equal footing. Such a balancing act encourages us to consider the merits and similarities of these two related notions of existence. In a similar way, Arroyo's text develops this hybridity as he incorporates the thematics of Biblical texts and merges them with a queer-positive point of view. Readers observe this idea in an e-mail from another Latino e-mail writer, who says to Santo: "I'm not jaded, amigo, just want a country of my own. I want to be president of Sodom & Gomorrah ... Ignore pictures of me naked under palm trees because I'm not wearing sun block and glow like an apple begging to be kidnapped to Eden. An impulse, these days, is similar to building a permanent statue in God's mind" (23). In this portion, the e-mail writer chooses to side with the supposedly immoral cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; through this approach, he hybridizes a queer sensibility with religious knowledge, reconstituting the meanings associated with Sodom and Gomorrah. In stating his desire to be the "president" of these Biblical scenes, he also empowers himself; a significant move when we acknowledge how many antigay activists use the Sodom and Gomorrah story to demonize gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. The e-mail writer thus plays a new role for his reader(s) in a queer way, allowing for a re-interpretation of this overdetermined religious narrative. His performance of a queer Latino leader in a religious scene leads us to see the potent possibilities that web-conscious texts offer to readers and writers.

While Arroyo's work shows a set of distinctive scenes, it also mirrors Lozada's text because his writing speaks to the problems wrought by HIV/AIDS. In one of the e-mail messages, a writer implies that Santo has become ill with the syndrome. Arroyo's text reads: "Santo, idiota, there are men in cyber space waiting for u2. Was the hospital terrible? No tacos there, I'm sure. I'm checking on flights ... Flesh comes with problems ... SIDA isn't a death sentence anymore" (23-4). This depiction of Santo's AIDS (or SIDA)-related condition suggests that Santo now has a new hybrid existence. He is now host to a virus which changes not only people's health, but also how others treat him socially. Instead of dwelling on this, the e-mail writer looks for a travel itinerary so that he can spend time with his ill friend. Yet this time in the hospital cannot prevent Santo from passing. Before Santo dies, we see that the e-mailer creates a virtual connection to Santo. One of the e-mail writers says, "My homepage is dedicated to mi amigo, Santo. He is in Heaven for sure or else Satan does have a monopoly on the cosmos. I invite Santo to be the ghost in my machine, free rent" (25). By way of language, Santo's persona becomes embedded in the memory of cyberspace, creating a supernatural figure. This electronic, hybrid ghost allows Santo's identity to endure. Santo's knowledge is saved digitally, and this online preservation fosters a performance of his identity, particularly as the readers look upon these texts. In our reading of Arroyo's poems, we summon his ghost and become enmeshed in his story. Therefore we ourselves become hybrid with the cybernetic and supernatural.

In conclusion, Arroyo's collection of poems like Lozada's text concludes without a clear sense of finality. The socializing between his fellow webservers continues after Santo's death, implying these online performances of identity are perpetuated as they are stored on computers or in new cloud technologies. This is not to say that these identities are entirely coherent or duplicates of their organic counterparts. Rather, these digital versions of the self enable us to envision the linking together of diverse elements which constitute these Latino queer lives. The texts of Arroyo and Lozada indicate that online socializing can disrupt simplistic notions of identity, knowledge, and experience. Rather than denouncing these effects, the characters gain a means of celebrating and exploring their hybrid, multi-layered selves. Certainly, the internet may not recreate the characters' selves, but through these web-conscious texts, readers are shown there is no sense of a true self. Instead, there is insecurity that complicates human experience such as desire suggesting that there is neither true nor pure forms of identity or sexuality. Our notions of desire—like our visions of identity—are always constructed in hybrid and ephemeral performances. These texts suggest we should not be bogged down by contradictory dynamics and instead embrace the fiction, masks, and playfulness which cyberculture offers.

Note: Minor parts of "Queer Hybridity and Performance in the Multimedia Texts of Arroyo and Lozada" are from Ed Chamberlain, *Speaking Out to Survive: Literary Activism and Queer Domesticity in Life Writing*. Ph.D. Diss. Bloomington: U of Indiana, 2012. Copyright release to the author.

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