

Here Comes the Hurricane¹: Interview with Jesús Hilario-Reyes

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ABSTRACT

This two-section article and interview with Jesús Hilario-Reyes, a queer, non-binary, Afro-Caribbean artist, explores their artwork to connect trans new media histories to contemporary trans Chicanx scholarship via recent notions on “glitch” and “stitch.” The introduction connects Hilario-Reyes’s uprootedness to trans thoughts on “the cut” and trans Chicanx scholar Francisco Galarte’s concept of “Brown transfiguration.” In Section One, Hilario-Reyes discusses their new media practices in relation to land, water, displacement, and diasporic disembodiment. The interview in Section One reveals their experiences with migration, as they reflect on their 3D animated work about Puerto Rico’s post-Hurricane Maria flooding, and their role as a DJ creating queer Black space. Section Two delves deeper into their 3D art and music as a healing response to displacement, mourning, and “destierro” (being ripped from one’s homeland). Hilario-Reyes’s creativity, expressed through 3D animations, performance, and sound, becomes an embodied and world-building practice infused with resistance and queer Black sovereignty. Their perspectives on “glitch, love, and storms” offer adjacent strategies to resistance optics, addressing the visibility/invisibility dynamics inherent in transphobia and white supremacy. Their understanding of climate change’s white supremacist root cause affecting Puerto Rico leads to a transformation of the disembodiment effects of systemic violence through trans and Black-informed gestures. Through Hilario-Reyes’s 3D animations and video games, the article connects their work to larger trans scholarship, new media, and trans video game histories. Embodying non-binary and Afro-Caribbean thought, Hilario-Reyes re-engages the body, love, humanness, and their multiple possible selves, turning systemic violence’s cataclysmic failures into trans and Afro-Caribbean liberation.

INTRODUCTION

This republished and edited interview² engages the work and perspective of queer, non-binary, and Afro-Caribbean visual and performance artist, Jesús Hilario-Reyes. Hilario-Reyes is a celebrated interdisciplinary artist at the crossroads of sonic performance and new media incorporating 3D

animations, and more recently, video game design. In their own words, “[t]hrough iterative works,” they grapple with the “impossibility of the black body, the failure of mechanical optics, and the reverb of cultural dissonance,”³ to render their queer, trans, Black, and Caribbean experience of their environments, and their familial migrations through various geographical locations, as visible and legible. By making 3D visualizations of kin, flooded islands, and their non-binary position in these landscapes, they engage motifs of storms and hurricanes (see Figures 1-5) in their larger body of work. The images seen in this article repeat 3D renders of a flooded Puerto Rico. Examining these images, the article will unpack how they embody trans and non-binary thought, often featuring their own animated body or the 3D scanned bodies of their relatives from the island affected by Hurricane Maria (see Figure 4).

In the following interview, Hilario-Reyes speaks to trans thoughts on disembodiment and embodiment, fracture and fragmentation, and a sense of being uprooted, all found in their work practice as a 3D animator, game designer, and internationally renowned DJ. Specifically, these themes are explored through an understanding of their sense of being diasporic Afro-Caribbean, connecting to up/rooted African musical traditions in Puerto Rico called bomba, and their location for dance, the Batey, discussed in Section One of this article. The Batey connects to contemporary queer nightlife, which take special significance in their newer work with 3D scanned and stitched dance floors, explored in Section Two. In the 3D scanned images of their family and dance floors, Hilario-Reyes makes performances and 3D animated video works, “remixing, fragmenting and abstracting” their “positionality and history as a second generation, queer, Black-Indigenous immigrant, born in Puerto Rico, and whose family emigrated from the Dominican Republic.”⁴

Unpacked throughout, this interview/assessment of Hilario-Reyes’s work connects the systemic failures to register Black-Caribbean, Afro-Latinx subjectivities to Legacy Russell’s *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020), and other feminist, queer, and trans methodologies in game studies⁵ in the tradition of Jack Hablerstam’s crucial work on error and failure, *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). This article also explores how the Afro-Diasporic term “destiero,” an untranslatable Spanish term that is most akin to being “torn from the land,” connects through trans thoughts of rupture in trans theory to disembodiment and stitching of the trans-Latinx self. These notions are explored in Chicane trans scholar, Francisco Galarte’s book *Brown Trans Figuration* (2021) as a theoretical framework to describe and draw attention to what happens when transness and brownness coexist within the social and larger queer, trans, and Chicane/Latinx historical narratives and material contexts.”⁶ Though brownness and blackness cannot be conflated, through Afro-Latinx and diasporic scholarship, we might draw further connections to Hilario-Reyes’s trans-embodied Afro-Caribbean themes and new media practice as a suture, tying these frameworks together. As Galarte specifies, “[t]he notion of brown trans figurations is also about the individuals in proximity to the brown trans subjects.”⁷

Section Two of this article also summarizes a virtual visit Hilario-Reyes made to my 3D Animation 1 course at Vanderbilt University. There, they shared their processes with 3D animation and video-game design expanding upon their unfinished 3D animation work, *A Field of Islands*, formerly titled *La brisa va, la brisa viene*. In that classroom visit, they mentioned their theoretical acceptance of “failure” in their process, letting go of precepts for their work, and allowing room for error, which relates to queer and trans histories, as well as Legacy Russell’s notions of Glitch Feminism, specifically glitch as an error, and trans identity as an expressive and transgressive glitching of gender. In the initial interview Hilario-Reyes unpacks Legacy Russell’s trans theory assesses

glitch's illegibility as an “adjacent”⁸ route on our different journeys toward liberation, one of many, multitudinous methods toward liberation.

Larger scholarship on the understanding of “glitch” as a queer potential for error and artistic possibility can also be charted in recent scholarship such as, “A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors” by Whitney (Whit) Pow (2021), and “Queer-Alt-Delete” by Andie Shabbar (2018), which will be unpacked concerning Hilario-Reyes work in Section Two of this essay. Though Hilario-Reyes does not engage in glitch aesthetics particularly, they put me onto Glitch Feminism. Andie Shabbar's writings overlap with Hilario-Reyes's interest in considering Black fugitivity, and the failure of optics and technology to render as visible, queer, Black—and I'll add Latinx—bodies, people, and spaces. To this effect, Shabbar's insights on surveillance, and glitch as a method of creative protest against “sexual surveillance,” and to “corrupt binary cis-terms of surveillance,”⁹ are pertinent to our discussion. Additionally, Galarte reminds us, “brown trans figuration is propelled by proximity and characterized by forms of relationality that threaten the borders of bodies and identities. Brown trans figuration thus reveals the multiple social, political, and cultural actors who are all ‘entangled, reshaped and transfigured.’¹⁰ In this proximation to brownness, Hilario-Reyes’s Afro-Caribbean illegibility to systems of racial hierarchies might be better read, or seen, as a body that “threatens” the borders of racialization, something that Hilario-Reyes questions as they doubt Russell’s reliance on the ideas on “illegibility” and “glitch.”

Precisely rendered legible through 3D animation, their former/failed experimental film, now an in-progress video game with scenes discussed below, expresses themes of cultural uprootedness, loss, and land related to Hilario-Reyes’s Dominican ancestry. The following article, stitched together from a previous interview and a more recent Zoom recording of a classroom visit, shares biographical details of Hilario-Reyes’s lived experiences with familial migrations, personal reflections on their 3D animated work, performance practice, land art (see Figure 5), and their role as a DJ cultivating queer Black space for community, movement, and simultaneous queer “dis/embodyment.” Our conversation specifically unpacks their family’s experiences of displacement due to natural disasters.



Figure 1. Jesús Hilario-Reyes, Still from A Field of Islands a 3D video-game work-in-progress. Image provided by the artist, 2021.

Hilario-Reyes's ties to the archipelago and the legacy of dictatorships in the Dominican Republic lead to compelling intersections with curator and writer Legacy Russell's trans-affirming investigation into glitch aesthetics and cultural ramifications in the age of digital avatars, with gender and race "serving" new possibilities and multitudinous forms or radical and self-affirming expression.¹¹ Hilario-Reyes relates Russell's manifesto to my suggested reading of "After the Hurricane: Afro-Latina Decolonial Feminisms and Destierro" (2020) by Yomaira Figueroa, an expert scholar in Afro-Diaspora Studies. Hilario-Reyes's thoughts on glitch, love, and storms reveal multiple and adjacent tactics of decolonial resistance and uprootedness itself as a resistant stance to white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal culture.

This interview grapples with mourning, resistance, and radical love in the lived and felt communal Black and queer-affirming nightlife and cultures Hilario-Reyes is a part of, and creates, through their labor as a DJ. Through a follow-up interview, this revised interview questions how they as an artist, working with new media, relate to or "transfigure" and "transform" the ways that non-binary Black identity is embodied and aestheticized from their locality and specificity as part of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. These "transfigurations" as transformations, specifically relate to recent trans scholarship by Francisco J. Galarte, tracing histories of Chicanx and Brown transformation and transcendence. Galarte's "brown trans figuration" serves as a theoretical framework here to describe how transness and brownness relate to queer Latinx historical experiences in those racial economies in which Hilario-Reyes works.

Hilario-Reyes's work connects to this idea of transfiguration, as they explore creativity and self-enunciations through 3D animations, performance work, and rendering queer nightlife as visible through 3D scans, as their embodied practice (see Figure 6), a life-giving practice, latent with resistance, and non-binary Afro-Caribbean self-sovereignty. Through these renders, they critique and make trans the utopian promises of queer nightlife, stitching together dance floors collected across various continents and cultures, into a new body of work. This *Untitled* work evoke micha cárdenas, writing in "Trans of Color Poetics: Stitching Bodies, Concepts, and Algorithm" (2016), about the "cut" as "creative incisions" and the "stitch" as "intended to join, in the service of healing and creation, rather than in the service of destruction."¹² Legacy Russell reiterates cárdenas's work in relation to their notion of Glitch Feminism. They cite cárdenas "as the basis for a theory of feminist making, which values the forms of knowledge practiced daily by oppressed people as they make their lives in the face of violence."¹³

That violence, like floods, uprooting migrations, and ravaged landscapes in the wake of Hurricane Maria, or climate change's exacerbation of environmental racism, which in turn compounds exodus due to dictatorships in the Caribbean, all influence the artist. Through their DJ moniker, Morenxxx, they tour the underground queer, electronic nightlife of NYC and the world. They are most interested in the creative and communal spaces; "they exist in cyberspace or in real life (IRL); these projects grapple with multiplicity and safety."¹⁴ Their practice as a DJ, working in queer Black underground spaces, as well as the incorporation of sound art into their performance work, calls to mind the work of Andrew Brooks who writes in "Glitch/Failure Constructing a Queer Politics of Listening" (2015) about glitches in experimental music and sound art as a productive framework to understand minoritized identities and alternative methods of knowledge production. Brooks

promotes not only glitch as an aesthetic and theoretical framework, but also as a method of listening, a queer listening practice to observe and critique power.

From a non-binary and Afro-Caribbean understanding of the white supremacist root cause of climate change and this unique artist's relationship to the disembodied effects of hurricanes and uprooting forces of colonialism, we might re-engage the body, love, our humanness, and multitudes of possible selves, despite the cataclysmic 'failure' of white supremacy's destructive toll on planet Earth. Hilarios-Reyes environmental concerns, thoughts about living in the digital age, and return to land, familial ties, and love, posit a critical and radical position wrought from their non-binary, Black, and Caribbean self, at a nexus of multiple and continual trans figuration and transformations.



Figure 2. *Jesús Hilario-Reyes Still from A Field of Islands a 3D video-game work-in-progress. Image provided by the artist, 2021.*

SECTION ONE

Benavides: Thank you for sending me so many images of your work-in-progress, [*A Field of Islands* formerly titled *La brisa va, la brisa viene*], the work you've been making throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This work and your past work contend with hurricanes, disasters, and your personal experiences within the Afro-Puerto Rican diaspora. We see lots of images of water and flooding. What does water mean to you? How are you relating to water as a material for making these digital images, and how do you feel about depicting these flooding or overflowing images?

Hilario-Reyes: I am a huge fan of Drexciya, an American electronic music duo composed of James Stinson and Gerald Donald, who were based in Detroit, Michigan, and were a huge leading star in the development of techno. They created this expansive sonic realm that envisioned Drexciya as this underwater civilization composed of mutated human beings who were able to adapt and sustain life underwater. These Drexciyan's were descendants of newborn babies thrown off the ledge of ships during the middle passage by enslaved African women. This world-building not only expanded in the deep ocean but also in deep space, a sort of trajectory that was hopeful and transformative of generational trauma.

I'm a true fanatic but also a techno-centric DJ and their ideologies show up a lot in my ideas. I believe the practice of Love has a lot to do with the ability to imagine otherwise (I will talk about this later). With that in mind, water is incredibly bigger than us. Water often feels like a vehicle, it sort of brings you back... every time. It reminds you of your mortality, the fragility of life, and the expansiveness of this world, this planet. It shrinks you and undoes you—spiritually, and physically in every way. It also holds so much and has space for it. It's abundant and scarce at the same time. It has the potential to destroy you, your home, and your sense of stability. It can completely destabilize an entire nation—especially in the case of Puerto Rico.

I want to emphasize; I do not believe space is the place, I do not believe deep-underwater civilizations are the answer. I truly believe we are just enough. We as human beings on Earth are just enough. These images and scenes with flooding water create an uninhabitable (for comfortable human life) or ravaged scenario, where the character is moving through this space, burdened. This is the exact absurdity that comes with the reality we exist in.

My concern is how this work reads to my family and other environmental disaster survivors. I'm trying to handle this project with care. So, I ask my family how they feel about it, and what surfaces when they see these images. My mother, who has persevered through many hurricanes, tells me about how her experiences or thoughts around hurricanes resurface, but she isn't retraumatized. She's more supportive of the ways I'm navigating these heavy ideas. I've asked my family who lives there now, and it's the same response from them. Talking about this as a means of coping and transforming their experience into a healthier, more sustainable understanding of community.

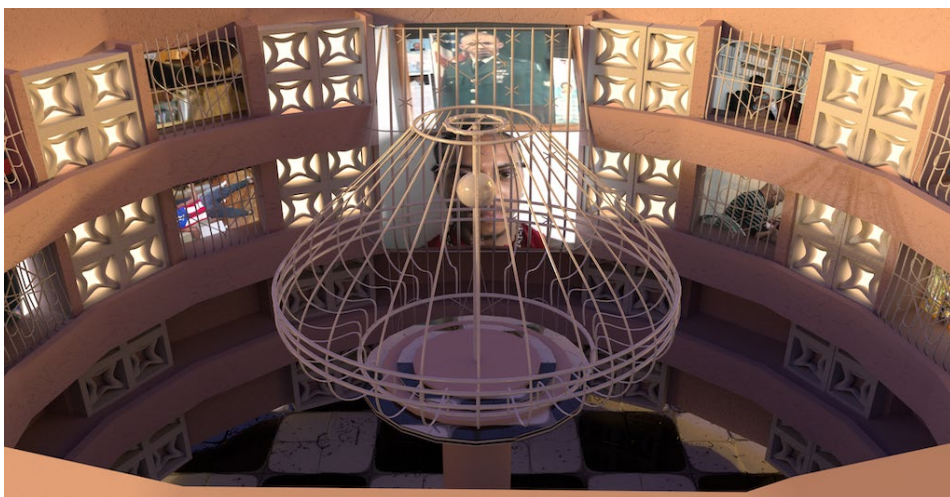


Figure 3. Jesús Hilario-Reyes Still from A Field of Islands a 3D video-game work-in-progress. Image provided by the artist, 2021.

Benavides: Yomaira Figueroa describes “the concept of destierro” as “an untranslatable term for exile in Spanish, which is akin to being torn from the land because destierro remains a relevant and precarious condition for Black and Indigenous peoples.” You mentioned having some conversations about displacement and Puerto Rico with your mother after reading the essay. What did you talk about, and how do you feel about this notion of destierro?

Hilario-Reyes: Ever since reading about this concept of *destierro*, my understanding of my work has deepened profoundly. I feel this concept was what I've been making work around for a while now, but I didn't have the language for it. I recently have been having conversations with my mother, my aunts, and my grandfather. Many of these conversations surrounded their migration to America. But through further inspection, it turns out this move toward the artificial American dream was a response to the job crisis due to the Rafael Trujillo dictatorship [in the Dominican Republic, 1930-61].

That was news to me, and then further contextualized what I've been thinking about regarding fugitives and immigration. And then what ignited the move toward the States was the scarcity of available jobs/careers on the islands a result of political corruption. I think about *destierro* in all of this. How the trickle-down effects of political and economic ruptures dispossess, specifically Black and Brown communities, in this false race for the American Dream. It also applies to the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, and how it has forced many people off the island, forced them to move to the States, and even face homelessness.

Yomaira mentions M. Jacqui Alexander's work *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005) with these quotes: "Alexander argues that people in exile/diaspora 'have grown up metabolizing exile, feeding on its main by-products —alienation and separation' (274). She asks us to think specifically about the position of being "African American and exiled on the spot where one is born. To be Caribbean and exiled on foreign soil produces a longing so deep that the site of neglect is reminiscent of beauty" (274).

I felt particularly understood towards the end of this essay, where Yomaira states, "Across these works, the act of remembering and awakening the memories of home/lands, land practices, and resistance to uprooting are tools of resistance against *destierro*." Simply and deeply I feel so seen. This is what I have been doing without knowledge of this writing.

I recently attended a Zoom panel discussion with Yomaira Figueroa, Sarah Bruno, Anais Delilah Roque, and Beth Colon Pizzini entitled "[Puerto Rican Studies: Current and Future Practices](#)." Here, I was able to directly ask Yomaira and Sarah questions in regard to all of this. I forget what I asked exactly but Sarah responded with such a beautiful answer:

I'm thinking through Bomba as a place of healing, particularly after the earthquakes and after Maria and within the diaspora where it becomes the Batey or the dancefloor/circle. It really operates outside of time and outside of pinned geographic space, and because it's built on care and intimacy, and its embodied long enduring history that... it's within the body, it's within the music, it's in the rhythm, and it's inscribed into the Batey itself. It becomes a balm for *destierro*. For those who have been ripped away or born not knowing, knowing that you're just never going to be able to see sovereignty.

And so, in that way I see it also akin to Blackness, and how it's centered in my understanding of bomba as well as the Caribbean. And I see it more so with fluidity, bomba is also is a space where I see migration from the rest of the Caribbean, and it becomes this place in Puerto Rican history, where other people from—St. Croix, from Haiti they come to bomba, because of its musical resemblance, and it becomes a place of welcome. And it really

reestablishes Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the diaspora back into this Black geography that the United States has worked so hard to really distance us from. (2020, Zoom panel)

When I tell you I was jumping in my chair!!! This is what it's about, this is how we've done it, this is how it's evolving. Every time I visit home, I go to Terraza de Bomba Bonanza, where they play bomba--which happens every Monday night. I felt it... that feeling of liberation, healing, love, transcendence, community, and care that Sarah mentions.

But it was also similar to, and reminded me of, the feeling I get from dancing for hours at raves specifically organized by Black and Brown queer people. It is in these spaces that centralize queerness and Blackness, where these ideas surrounding blurring, subversion, and futurity, are embodied, practiced, and taught. It is important to understand that these places can and do exist, and theory is important, but the experience is even more felt within! There are also other things that come into the conversation in regard to raves, police, and the culture of social media, but sometimes, and I mean that sometimes, dance liberation is at the heart of it all.



Figure 4. Jesús Hilario-Reyes Still from A Field of Islands a 3D video-game work-in-progress. Image provided by the artist, 2021.

Benavides: I think there's a flow between Legacy Russell's Glitch Feminism, and what Yomaira Figueroa is saying when she writes "destierro takes form as a dispossession of spiritual syncretic practices, alienation from the body, refusal of memories, and the physical deprivation of land. Across these works, the act of remembering and awakening the memories of home/lands, land practices, and resistance to uprooting are tools of resistance against destierro" (2020, 226). Could you describe the connections to land, transformation, and liberation in your current work?

Hilario-Reyes: My bad, I guess I already started going into this, but yeah...

I think you're right, Legacy Russell and Yomaira Figueroa both identify ways glitch goes about subverting and nuancing in relation to the systems at play. That being said, I think that land practices in relation to the work I'm doing feel most akin to the ideas brought about in *Glitch Feminism* and "Destierro." Specifically in *Akin to the Hurricane* [performances from 2018 - 2022] and now currently in *La Brisa Va, La Brisa Viene*, they both employ this sense of mobility. Movement and masquerade are important in both of these works because of the ways in which they resist identification.

In *Glitch Feminism*, Russell states "Still, the machinic bias enacted by the panopticon of the mapping of the body through digital technologies is filled with hopeful holes, leaving us to ask: If a body is not legible as a body, and therefore cannot be read, will it be "seen"? Can it ghost, skirting the omnipresent digital eye? Failing recognition, can it successfully cease to exist?" (2020, 139). And I am beginning to grapple with disappearance and ghosting in the coming scenes of *The Breeze Comes, The Breeze Goes* [*La Brisa Va, La Brisa Viene*]. But, more so finding autonomy and liberation within it. Of course, in strategic ways.

I'm not sure if I fully agree that this "strategic illegibility" is a move toward liberation, but it certainly is a movement of resistance. I worry also, and question if, these modes of resistance aforementioned are akin to the modes of glitch Legacy talks about. A part of me doesn't feel they are akin to one another. But more so adjacent. Nonetheless, liberation is at the spearhead of my practice; the feeling of it is the fuel for its trajectory. That is in tandem with the motif of transformation transpiring in my recent work.

I still struggle with ideas that tend to exalt Black people into something more than human, mutated, or god-like as a means to elevate Black culture and our love for ourselves. I don't agree with that notion, we should not have to do such things. That sort of performativity of success is toxic and deeply capitalistic; it leaves no room for the actual humanity of Black people. But I do find it empowering to practice autonomy in the ways in which we conduct change.

Benavides: To move from just these academic theories toward your lived and day-to-day experiences as a non-binary Black and Caribbean artist living in diaspora, how might you relate to the idea of destierro "as a term that can capture the complex and multiple forms of dispossession and impossibilities of home for Afro and Indigenous descended peoples in the modern world," (2020, 223)? Could destierro or this kind of embrace of the storm or becoming the storm in your work, "push [...] toward liberatory practices, and map different forms of dispossession and resistance across intersecting identities," (2020, 223)?

Hilario-Reyes: I think this embrace of the storm is absolutely a "push" toward liberatory practices. In much of the rhetoric behind my work and even my collaboration with Leah Solomon's *In Hot Time* (2019), this motif of vortical motion—this whirlwind—disorients or circumvents the viewer, or at least seeks to. This everlasting state of motion is fugitive, and that fugitivity is in tandem with the nature of Blackness and Queerness. This whirlwind or the storm, in this case, becomes a symbolic space. To embrace the storm is synonymous with the blur. Fred Moten is probably one of my favorite writers and in his book *Black and Blur* (2017) he elaborates on the blur. He states,

Disorder is our service, our antidote, and anteroom, our vestibule without a story. We can't survive intact. We can only survive if we're not intact. Our danger and saving power is an always open door. Our venue is mutual infusion, the holy of holies in the wall, glory in a

kind of open chastity, where the explicit body reveals itself demure in the disappearance. Unenforced, slid, venereally unnatural, and convivial, we claim slur against drill and document. Confirmation of the flesh is queer and evangelical. (2017, 213).

I've held onto this statement for a while now, and I think about this in regard to what Sarah spoke about—saying, “Bomba is the balm to destierro.” In these fractured, fragmented, bodies—disorder becomes that “push” toward liberatory practices. That in the improvisational, sporadic, gorgeous, melodic, harmonious, chaotic space of the Batey we find our antidote. That, through dance we're able to disembody while simultaneously being embodied.

This embrace of the storm is definitely not about welcoming natural disasters and having that be the method of this idea. I firmly believe that climate change is an agent of white supremacy, and that climate change disproportionately affects communities of color and lower economic status.

It's clear to me how the things that fall under this idea of destierro have affected me as well as my family and those around me. I mentioned before that political, governmental, and economic turmoil in our mother country was the agent that caused our migration. As well as how Hurricane Maria has affected my family and their relation to nature and land, also how it has affected much of the Puerto Rican population. Even in the most familial sense, there are forces far larger than the individual that urges us to move outward, away—growing up queer in the Midwest with a heteronormative family and not having access to a community will unearth you. And it did.



Figure 5. Jesús Hilario-Reyes, Crossing (Iteration 05), Land Installation, 2022, Fisher Island, New York.

Image provided by the artist.

Benavides: Among other things, Legacy Russell is really interested in amplifying the blurry lines between our IRL [in real life] and AFK [away from keyboard] selves. From your unique intersection of identities and experiences with the performance and art world as a DJ in the queer underground dance world in NYC and from your personal history in Milwaukee and Chicago, can you describe the very real and felt connection to community and the virtual world building you're

into or the digital worlds you're creating and how they're connected to your day-to-day of being Afro-Puerto Rican and non-binary?

Hilario-Reyes: After reading *Glitch Feminism*, I started to embrace more of the URL [Uniform Resource Locator] aspect of it all. I read this book while I was on a social media hiatus. At times and honestly, as I write this, I feel like the internet isn't the most hospitable for me. I definitely think there are beautiful moments that happen in this space, and it allows us to exist in multitudes, and that's sort of the promise of the internet. It's an endless space that is bountiful with information and can answer many of your questions.

But much of it is unfulfilling, I think we're living in this dystopian cyberpunk reality that people want to reimagine time and time again. It's as simple as this quote from *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998), a Japanese sci-fi anime TV show where Lain the protagonist who developed a unique connection to virtual reality network called "The Wired," states that the "internet is awesome, but you can't download love."

Sure, this anime was made before the invention of social media. I believe the failure of the internet is within its promise, we cannot expect this space to be boundless when it's so deeply intertwined with transactional relationships. It costs to have access, and within its commercial root, we lose the capability to really transform ourselves, our interest becomes commodities. Most things feel performative and tied to branding or some sort of revenue. Even if it's authentic, this is the nature of social media. Although we have these architectural incapacities, the internet, especially for queer people, does become or can become a space to extend community. The internet has probably morphed every bit of myself, it's so deeply communal that it can be very anxious.

Obviously, the internet/virtual world is massive and definitely has room for expressions of love. Recently, I organized a memorial celebration with Club Quarantine for my late best friend Terrell Davis, who was and is one of the most recognizable and prolific designers working with CGI in the revival of Y2K aesthetics! Terrell would always be in Club Quarantine (a group of organizers creating and hosting parties on Zoom throughout the Covid-19 pandemic). And I think about the conversations we had in regard to raves and parties organized by queer people of color and how he didn't feel comfortable in those spaces. And that's kind of what I hinted at before in how these spaces don't exist in a vacuum—that these spaces also deal with a status quo.

But during his celebration, I really felt this beautiful expression of love and community within my body. It had me tweeting and yelling out loud IRL that "LOVE IS REAL" in all caps because it felt so embodied. It felt like he was there with us, and it made me think about how he will exist online even past his death. How the online or URL aspect of people live on in this stagnant state well after their death. But also, how love can be shared through this space. I don't know...I'm still processing the effects of the pandemic. I see how I'm contradicting myself...but I feel like that's okay.

I truly believe that World Building is a practice of Love.

SECTION TWO

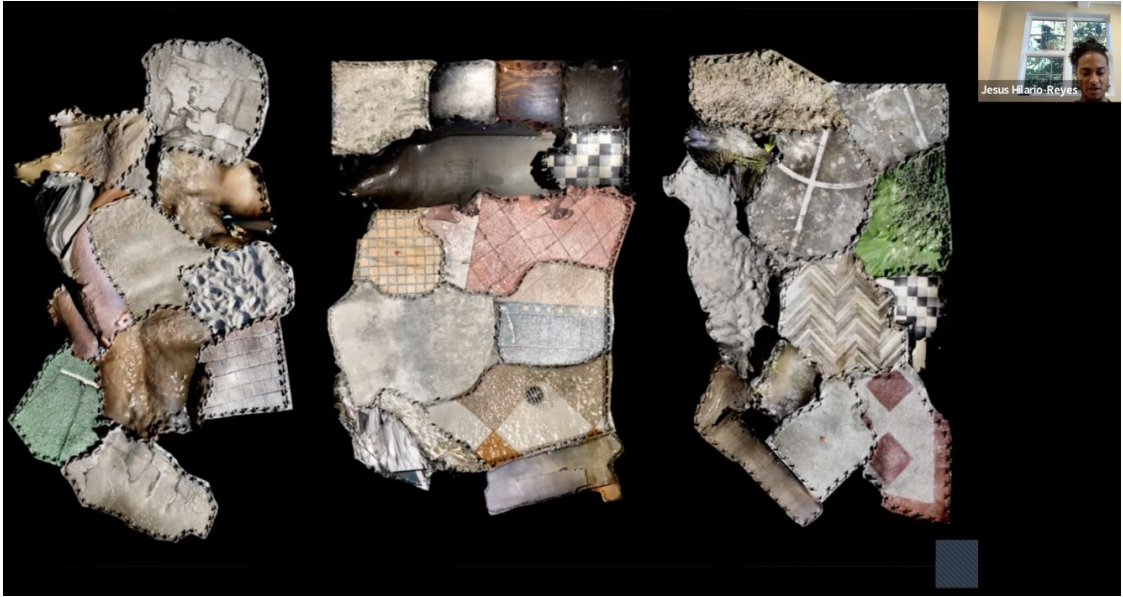


Figure 6. Screenshot of Jesús Hilario-Reyes, untitled, 2022, 3D digitally quilted LIDAR scans of queer dance floors presented in Jose Luis Benavides' Digital Animation 1 class at Vanderbilt University. Image courtesy the artist Jesús Hilario-Reyes.

This second part of this article provides an update since Hilario-Reyes and I initially conversed in 2021. I invited them as a guest-artist to speak to my Digital Animation 1 class at Vanderbilt University, where they joined via Zoom to share about their art practice, their past, and current work. Hilario-Reyes commented specifically on the evolution of their ongoing work, *A Field of Islands*, noting that their project is no longer functioning as a cinematic film and moved to a video game format. They also shared about their newest, *untitled project*, featured in a solo exhibition titled *Dishonest Dancers*, a video installation of two related bodies of work, held at [Real Art Ways](#) in Hartford, Connecticut in 2022. The exhibition described Hilario-Reyes's work as exploring "notions of Black and queer fugitivity."¹⁵ The exhibition text further notes:

The exhibited works include video documentation of multiple iterations of *Crossing(s)*, the artist's series of ephemeral land works. Alongside footage of these "sand weaving" events, Hilario-Reyes displays *Untitled*, an animated series of "digital quilts" constructed from three-dimensional scans of dance floors after nights of transportive dancing. Developed as a partial archive of evidence gesturing toward queer utopia, the series incorporates club and rave spaces at the center of queer communities, as well as potential spaces, moving bodies, and bodies of water. This work largely contends with truth, applying the concept of 'critical fabulation' as a means to rupture or complicate reality.¹⁶

As our interview indicates, *A Field of Islands* has transformed from an expanded cinema project to a 3D video game Hilario-Reyes will work on as they begin their MFA program at Yale in Fall 2023. The work's progress, seen through Halberstam's queer art of failure or in trans theories of

rupture and transition from one form to another, from a cinematic experience toward a haptic and bodily experience through video gaming, trans gaming and new media histories, is not surprising. In fact, we can situate Hilario-Reyes's use of 3D video game design and 3D rendering of queer space in a trans history of video game art and glitch art, through the scholarship of Whitney (Whit) Pow. In their essay, "A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors" Pow traces the video game and glitch work of Jamie Faye Fenton, a queer and transgender computer and video game programmer as the trans progenitor of a long lineage of glitch and video game artists, a transparent of glitch, if I may.

Similarly, trans video game scholars, Cody Mejeur and Xavier Ho have visualized data about trans and queer representation in video games, creating data visualization¹⁷ for content of the [LGBTQ Video Game Archive](#), "a curated/researched collection of information of LGBTQ content in digital games from 1980s-present."¹⁸ Mejeur and Ho have presented recent research on the "increasing Whiteness of queer representation" or lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the representation of playable and non-playable queer video game characters,"¹⁹ in their 2021 study, "Drawing Queer Intersections Through Video Game Archives." Aligned with queer video game studies, Hilario-Reyes's video-game contributions offer a breath of fresh air to "de-center the Whiteness of queer games and queer game studies."²⁰

Thus, we can precisely situate the transformative work of Hilario-Reyes into a queer and of color legacy of trans video game production and scholarship because, as Pow writes, the history of computational media production and glitch art is a transgender history.²¹ During our classroom visit, they accounted for their transition with this work from the field of expanded cinema to video game design, seen in their emphasis on "iterative" and "gestural" practices in their work. They spoke on 3D animation to re-tell the difficulties and impossibilities of visualizing their familial migration stories through "critical fabulations," attributed to the work of Saidiya Hartman. This gesture of "critical fabulation" can be seen as adjacent to "brown trans figurations" as Galarte described:

I see it as a form of brown trans figuration. That is a term I use to describe moments that index brown affective positions such as pleasure, *dolor*, and longing in relation to trans that signal fleshiness, movement, vitality, becoming, and embodiment, while "figuration" refers to moments when brown and trans become animated to reset the "stage for possible pasts and futures."²²

These histories of creative and resistant error in art help position Hilario-Reyes in a tradition of non-binary, queer, aesthetics, digital art, and surveillance of Black and Latinx bodies. Hilario-Reyes's emphasis on queer, gestural, and iterative practices that emphasize small moves, re-interpretation, and re-engagement with their work and themes, a re-turning to, re-imagining, and reworking of their own body of work, fits well with the tradition of Juana María Rodríguez who writes extensively on queer gestures in a Latinx radical feminist tradition.²³

Hilario-Reyes embraced the failure to successfully render out their expanded cinema film, *A Field of Islands* pivoting to live engine video-game renders, citing this failure as generative, like most failure can be in an artist's creative exploration. This failure echoes the tradition of queer and trans scholarship in Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, as both a theoretical and radical positioning of queer aesthetics and subject position.

Additionally, I curated their untitled “digital quilts” in an exhibition of 15 Latinx video-artists at Stove Works in Chattanooga, TN called *Éramos Semillas*, on view from July 7, 2023, to November 11, 2023. The [gallery guide](#) for *Éramos Semillas* describes Hilario-Reyes’s digital quilts of queer dance floors as “influenced by traditional Black American quilts, that historically archive or code messages that assisted enslaved peoples’ journeys toward liberation. And thus, amidst the lasers and foggy blurs of queer nightlife, these ideas of liberation are deeply desired while simultaneously disembodied.”²⁴ I stretch this connection to Black diasporic knowledge and stitch-making quilt traditions to the stitching of trans bodies, on that “journey toward liberation.” Hilario-Reyes’s digital stitches coincide with the vast legacy of trans authors who have piecemealed a multitude of literature, only a few are referenced in this essay, charting trans triumph and trajectories toward our collective liberations.

CONCLUSION

As they noted in part one of this article, “liberation is at the spearhead” of Hilario-Reyes’s new media art. Their liberatory trans-praxis proves to be “in tandem with the motif of transformation”²⁵ inspired in their work. By better understanding their relation to queer nightlife, stitching together placeless 3D dance floors, we might better understand their caution toward trans-thought, such as Legacy Russell’s Glitch Feminism. In part one of this essay Hilario-Reyes questions if Russell’s thoughts on ‘strategic illegibility’ “is a move toward liberation,” adding, “but it certainly is a move of resistance.”²⁶ This nuanced distinction may hold the key for an Afro-Caribbean subject often read illegibly between hypervisible U.S.-centric and internationally exported Blackness set against an invisibilized Anti-black Latinidad constantly read as foreign and other in the U.S. Is “strategic illegibility” viable for queer, trans-Latinx people in a world that rewards clicks, likes, and commodifiable hypervisibility to consumable and disposable bodies? Are there benefits or causes to utilize ‘strategic illegibility’ for perpetually and illegibly hyphenated identities or subjectivities?

Jesus Hilario-Reyes demonstrates that radical love, communal dance, movement, and uprooting our sense of place, self, and history is often needed to transcend these systems of oppression. Even more so, their ability to transform geographies and dance floors through their practice as a non-binary Afro-Caribbean, Black Puerto Rican of Dominican heritage, can further complicate fixed notions of identity, place, and origins, in an increasingly disembodied digital age, full of questions, and infinite online searching. These devices have provided some solace, connection, and community while challenging us to find radical acceptance, love, and bodily autonomy in other selves, other shores, perhaps beyond the beaches of any promised utopias. After the storms, and environmental racism’s devastation “en la isla de encanto” or as the common phrase describing Puerto Rico describes, “the island of enchantment,” surfing the net might still be an anxious, if not tumultuous, and grief-latent shore for enchantment and liberatory transfiguration.

Through their work, the music of the African rhythms of the Batey, akin to the queer dance floors, become “the balm” or ointment for the uprooting fissures or destierro, the healing patch for diasporic dislocation, and perhaps a salve for the stitches of transitioning. Learning from trans folks, our society definitely could use a healing balm applied to the wounds of multi-level oppression. Putting Chicana/Latinx Studies into dialogue with Trans Theory, Hilario-Reyes’s work speaks to broader audiences, and charts new paths through the stormy waters of multi-gendered, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic liberations.

ENDNOTES

1. Here Comes the Hurricane is a queer, Black, vogue anthem and serves as a dramatic, campy, and visceral reminder of environmental catastrophes' disproportionate effect on Black, poor, and especially vulnerable communities, including queer BIPOC communities. Kevin Jz Prodigy, "HERE COMES THE hURRICANE - LEGENDARY KATRINA (feat. LEGENDARY KATRINA EBONY)," 1:00, Feb 18, 2022 <https://youtu.be/J2ssj0IzEPU?si=msCpiJUj2A1Phb78>.
2. An extended edit of this interview, without the introduction, update, or assessments featured here, was previously published. That interview explains how Hilario-Reyes suggested Legacy Russell's Glitch Feminism to me, and I suggested Hilario-Reyes read Yomaira Figueroa's "After the Hurricane: Afro-Latina Decolonial Feminisms and Destierro." Since my suggestion, the concept destierro has made it fully into their practice, as demonstrated by their subsequent performance title *Destierro* on Fire Island at Cherry Grove Community House and Theatre, and other exhibitions and materials describing Hilario-Reyes' work within the concept of destierro. Jesús Hilario-Reyes, "Destierro: Glitch, Love and Storms with Jesús Hilario-Reyes," interviewed by Jose Luis Benavides, Jul 16, 2021, <https://sincintaprevia.com>.
3. "Jesús Hilario-Reyes: About," artist website, last modified 2022, <https://www.jesushilario.com/blank>.
4. "Jesús Hilario-Reyes"
5. For more on the intersectional feminist scholarship in Queer Game Studies, as well as an avant-garde read on gaming art practices, see Ruberg, 2020; and Ruberg and Shaw, 2017. For a reparative history of gaming, see Pow, 2019. And for a broader look at social justice initiatives in gaming, see Gray and Leonard, 2018.
6. Francisco Galarte, *Brown Trans Figurations* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 9.
7. Galarte, *Brown Trans Figurations*, 18.
8. Jose Luis Benavides and Jesús Hilario-Reyes, "Destierro: Glitch, Love and Storms with Jesús Hilario-Reyes," Sin Cinta Previa, July 16, 2021, <https://sincintaprevia.com>.
9. Andie Shabbar, "Queer-Alt-Delete." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 46, nos. 3 & 4 (2018): 195-211.
10. Galarte, *Brown Trans Figurations*, 18.
11. Legacy Russell. *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (London: Verso 2020).
12. Intentionally spelled with lowercase, micha cárdenas identifies how trans and gender nonconforming artists, especially artists of color, rewrite algorithms to counter violence and develop strategies for liberation. "micha cárdenas," author website, last modified August 23, 2023, <https://michacardenas.sites.ucsc.edu>.
13. micha cárdenas, "Trans of Color Poetics: Stitching Bodies, Concepts, and Algorithms," *S&F Online* issue 13.3-14.1 (2016). <https://sfonline.barnard.edu/micha-cardenas-trans-of-color-poetics-stitching-bodies-concepts-and-algorithms/>.
14. Benavides and Hilario-Reyes, "Destierro: Glitch, Love and Storms with Jesús Hilario-Reyes."
15. Real Art Ways, <https://www.realartways.org>.
16. Real Art Ways.
17. Cody Mejeur and Xavier Ho, "Queer Lives are Not Side Quests" *Public Books* (October 14, 2022). <https://www.publicbooks.org/queer-representation-videogames/>.
18. Adrienne Shaw. "LGBTQ Video Game Archive," last modified July 19, 2020, <https://lgbtqgamearchive.com>.
19. Cody Mejeur and Xavier Ho, "Drawing Queer Intersections Through Video Game Archives" (lecture, Global Digital Humanities Symposium, Michigan State University, East Lansing MI, 2021).

20. Mejeur and Ho, "Drawing Queer Intersections."
21. Whitney (Wit) Pow. "A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors." *Feminist media histories* 7 no.1 (2021): 197-230.
22. Galarte. *Brown Trans Figurations*, 101.
23. Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).
24. Jose Luis Benavides, ed. *Éramos Semillas / We Were Seeds*. Chattanooga, TN: Stove Works, 2023, <https://www.stoveworks.org/seeds>.
25. Benavides and Hilario-Reyes, "Destierro: Glitch, Love and Storms with Jesús Hilario-Reyes."
26. Benavides and Hilario-Reyes, "Destierro: Glitch, Love and Storms with Jesús Hilario-Reyes."

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Jose Luis Benavides is a Latinx and queer photographer, moving image maker, and lecturer of digital animation at Vanderbilt University. They are simultaneously an adjunct at Tennessee State University and the City Colleges of Chicago. Working primarily with a range of personal archives, their work explores issues relating to gender, sexuality, culture, and migration. Their experimental documentary film, *Lulu en el Jardín*, tells the story of their lesbian, Latina mother's coming out in Chicago during the 1970s. Their work has screened at Reeling: The Chicago LGBTQ+

International Film Festival, US (2020), and other festivals around the world. Their work has also been exhibited at the International Museum of Surgical Science, Gerber/Hart Library and Archive, and Chicago Art Department. As an experimental documentarian and video art programmer they open conversations, space, and time for diverse perspectives from feminist, queer, trans, and Latinx moving image makers for the virtual archive [SinCintaPrevia.com](http://joseluisbenavides.com). Find more about their work at [http://joseluisbenavides.com/](http://joseluisbenavides.com) and IG: @lu3ge

Jesús Hilario-Reyes is currently based in Brooklyn, New York (born 1996, San Juan, Puerto Rico). They are an interdisciplinary artist with a Bachelor's in Fine Arts Studio from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and are recent recipient of the Drawing a Blank Artist Grant, the Leslie Lohman Museum Fellowship, the Lighthouse Works Fellowship (2022) and the Bemis Center Residency (2022) program. Jesús Hilario-Reyes has exhibited/screened/performed most notably at e-Flux (NYC), The Kitchen (NYC), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Black Star Film Festival (Philadelphia, PA), Mana Contemporary (Chicago, IL), Real Art Ways (Hartford, CT), Rudimento (Quito, ECUA), Parasol Unit (London, UK), and Gladstone Gallery (NYC). While situating their practice at the crossroads of sonic performance, land installation, and expanded cinema, their iterative works examine carnival and rave culture throughout the West, intended to take on a remedial approach to the effects of “destierro.” Destierro is an untranslatable Spanish term that is most akin to being “torn from the land.” They have contextualized the term to traverse towards ideas of Black and Queer fugitivity. Interwoven in the midst of these notions is a concern for the im/possibility of the Black Body and the failure of mechanical optics.