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Listening to the Internet: Cultural Discourses, Vicente Fernández, and Hearing YouTube Comments

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ABSTRACT

Listening to the Internet: Cultural Discourses, Vicente Fernández, and Hearing YouTube Comments

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In the digital age, the possibility for interlocutors to engage with one another across time and space has increased dramatically. My project focuses on public discourse, specifically YouTube comments, surrounding the music video for Vicente Fernández' s song "Por Tu Maldito Amor." The comments (along with thinking about YouTube in general) add to and complicate Christopher Small' s conceptualisation of musicking in that they exist beyond their direct involvement in the musical process; they serve no necessary part in the composition, distribution, or formal critique of Fernández' s musicking and yet provide context for critical engagement. Part of this project explores the unique characteristics and complications that come with listening to the internet and engaging with it as a site (literally as a website and metaphorically as a place of interaction) of cultural discourse. I employ the term performance-politics to show how in the discursive and digital interactions of social media, there is a unique structure of cultural politics in action that circulates discourses of nationalism and masculinity between the music video and the comment section. While this project is situated around a music video by the famous ranchera singer, I am more interested in the quotidian interactions in the comment section and the scholarly potential of thinking about listening to the internet. I use music as a point of departure more than an object of analysis, as a way to understand how people interact and engage in cultural politics. I focus on the comments on Fernández' music video to be able to center the agents who make his music culture.

Introduction: Internet Listening

Here' s a story: It' s well after midnight. I sit there, at my laptop, tequila in hand. Like a good *machista* (if I could ever become one), I don' t drink my tequila with much in it: a

single ice cube, a squirt of lime, and a dash of *tajín*. I can feel my cheeks warming up as the alcohol kicks in. I remember what my mom told me once about tequila, “you feel it in your chest.” Ranchera music isn’t for sober listening—for sober ears—you *feel it in your chest*. No *charro* (Mexican cowboy) would sing “Por Tu Maldito Amor” sober. Like any good Mexican, I too contemplate with Chente in the cantina, thinking of all the woes and lovers who have wronged me. Chente and I have a pretty big difference, though, since I am a *maricón*, a faggot, and thus in juxtaposition to the strength of the *machista* and the *charro*, the two iconic figures of who a ‘real’ Mexican man is. But I have another indulgent secret: not only am I a *maricón* and a *puto*, I’ m a *niño-niña*, a boy-girl. My own betrayal of the Mexican man I am ‘supposed’ to be, my trans-femme queerness (which is a word as foreign to many Mexicans as *maricón* might be to you, the reader), is surprisingly not at conflict with the music video I am watching.¹

Because of your damn love. I might let a tear fall down my cheek if I think about him enough. I might also get choked up on my own thoughts, my own feelings, my inability to let out what I want to say, what I need to say. For a moment, I am transported to the rancho.² I don’t know who I am in this scene, though. Am I Chente, the man who lost the woman he loves, or Patsy, the one who got away, only to be remembered (historicised, perhaps)? The part of me that knows the Butlerian concept of gender performance, who wants to consider how gender is invested in by institutions and individuals and is historically contingent on power and material conditions inevitably falls mute to the affected self that I have become when listening to (watching? experiencing? YouTube-ing?) this music video.³ How can it be that a queer trans-femme *maricón* can have as much empathy for a *machista* as I do when I unsobberly listen to Vicente Fernández’ s voice? There is a specific ontological condition, a particular lens at which to understand the present, when you know you’ ve had too much, when it’ s too late, and you’ re still thinking about them. The formation of a drunk reality, a drunk ontology, is a crucial framework for understanding how people think, feel, and do Vicente Fernández’ s musicking.⁴ While his music is listened to at all times of day, in different spaces, and with his wide-ranging fans (myself included), I feel as if there is a special kind of contiguity that occurs when you hear, see, and ultimately, *feel* Chente when you’ ve had a little bit too much.

I’ m also listening *on* and *to* the internet in this moment. How can it be that someone listens to the internet? Are the practices of listening, the embodied experience of wearing headphones (or perhaps singing in the shower), different from the concert hall, the dance floor, or church pew? Navigating the internet is an intimate experience; as interlocutors, observers, listeners, and consumers we engage with sites (both in the literal sense of

websites and in the metaphorical sense that a site is a particular space) within the realm of our own screens in front of us. Yet, we are not merely acted upon by the algorithms that ‘the Web’ has imposed on us, formulating the *habitus* (in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense) by which we engage with digital and social media, thus confining our tastes. We, too, imprint ourselves onto the reality of the internet, forming social chains by means of sharing, referencing and, in some cases, combining.⁵ Listening to the internet, as an action and a practice, means we make the digital realm part of our own realities and social media (as a product) an aspect of everyday life by means of use, consumption, and selective focusing (framing). The quotidian nature of social media is what allows us to listen to it both individually and collectively. When I tune in to a Netflix show, scroll through TikTok, or turn on a Spotify playlist, I know I am not listening, watching, or *doing* the internet alone. People, across time and space, are there with me. That is the beauty of internet listening.

Gretchen McCulloch explains how “the internet and mobile devices brought us an explosion of writing by normal people ... We write all the time now, and most of what we’re writing is informal: our texts and chats and posts are quick.”⁶ McCulloch, who is a trained linguist, focuses on the everyday aspect of written language that shows itself in internet cultures. For her, understanding internet conversations is important because it is an increasingly common way for language to develop. I bring up this position because interactions on the internet, with intimacy forming an in-group identity and the seemingly overwhelming totality of The Internet (as a socially constructed concept), are transported and mediated through language.

Elsewhere, McCulloch brings up the concept of the Internet Person. Whilst in the book she theorises multiple categories of persons within the history of internet use, simply considering the concept of the Internet Person is enough for formulating, by extension, an understanding of the Internet Listener. Just as the focus of our written interactions has shifted from literal mail to email, instant messaging, texting, and now messaging apps, so too have we shifted where and how we listen to the world around us. For this new wave of Internet Listeners, music listening apps now dominate and supplant the position that radio might once have had.⁷ In the same way that linguists like McCulloch reimagine the function of written language and the act of listening in the internet age, we too as music and audiovisual scholars must make shifts in how we view Internet Listening as another aspect of social life (to borrow from Thomas Turino).⁸

Just as internet speak helps Internet People to communicate more easily, we also must understand that the Internet Listener is unlikely to be listening under the same

parameters that we prescribe to concertgoers and listeners in formal contexts. The formal written English that I am using in this paper is not superior to the form of English that I use when I text someone (or other forms of English that I use). Faced with the character limits of SMS messages, it would be impractical to write out “Hello, mother. How are you doing today? Expect me home around 6 pm,” where instead I would text “hi mom how r u? I’ ll b there @ 6.” Likewise, we cannot imagine that Internet Listeners will be listening in the same way that they would at a concert hall (or even at a pop music concert); I personally (and, I imagine, most others) do not find myself not clapping after a performance, or cheering on a performer when watching online videos as I would if it were live. I might even find myself dancing differently or doing other things whilst listening, such as eating. I surely do not bring my laptop and write when I am at a concert, even though I am listening to one now as I write. This is not to suggest that every listener on the internet will be particularly distracted, especially on a multi-sensory platform such as YouTube, simply *I suggest that we consider the social life of internet musicking to be a part of commutes, dinner-making, shower routines, and generally, the quotidian.* The Internet Listener, then, uses music as one of the many ways to log in, to touch base with the rich world around them.

So, for the sake of configuring a theory of the Internet Listener (and their/our practice of listening to the internet), what then is the internet? One of the first things to consider is that it is a resource, something that one may (or may not) have access to. As with other resources, such as water, electricity, and food, people facing abject material conditions may be lacking in access to the Internet. In the US and other wealthier countries, the internet is viewed as a commodity, a product, and a service; since so much of our life takes the internet as a given (“of course you would apply for a job online”), we remove the value of not/having and instead value it as other products in the market (where we ask, “what is the best?”). This lens is important to note because it focuses on the relationship that people in the US have with the internet. In a society that claims to be in ‘the digital age,’ as it is colloquially referred to, the internet is a given; it is something that one could not fathom being without. Semiotically, then, the internet signifies as an everyday space, a site.² The internet becomes an arena in which other aspects of daily life—conversation, commerce and, as I have discussed, listening—occur.

In my project, I am dealing specifically with a music video posted to the video-sharing website YouTube, so I would like to pivot towards a more focused discussion of internet listening *vis-à-vis* YouTube. Carol Vernallis states that “YouTube is a polysemic, heterogenous phenomenon. It speaks differently depending on how and with whom you experience it.” ¹⁰ In some senses, we create community by the site’ s ability to share

clips to virtually anyone, and to anyone virtually. My mom sends me a Facebook message with a link to a recipe video to try out; my mother's coworker sends her a Weird Al Yankovic parody video in an email chain; I look up video tours of potential graduate schools in the middle of a pandemic that restricts my ability to travel. Simultaneously, YouTube-ing can be a private, isolated event. "But as a solitary viewer, apart from friends and colleagues, my experiences differ," Vernallis writes, where "YouTube offers me the experience of the *flâneur* wandering through low-rent districts, shadowy drug dens, and public urinals. How can it be that 1,257,000 have seen this clip, but now, while I'm with it, I feel I'm engaged in my own private peepshow? I assume no one else is here."¹¹ YouTube challenges the taxonomical split between the self and the other, the individual and the collective. Not only is this a site of accumulated individual experiences, viewings, and YouTubian instantiation, it can be shared, distributed, and displayed to form a community of viewers. Later, Vernallis states that "we can't see the edges of YouTube; the site is in a continual state of flux," which highlights the lack of centrality and grounding in the aesthetics, discourses, and overall function of YouTube as a whole.¹²

Vernallis writes that "we used to define music video as a product of the record company in which images are put to a recorded pop song in order to sell the song. None of this definition holds any more. On YouTube, individuals as much as record companies post music video clips, and many prosumers have no hope of selling anything ... we might thus define music video, simply and perhaps too broadly, as a relation of sound and image that we recognise as such. YouTube especially makes it hard to draw a line between what is a music video and what is not."¹³ Thinking about music videos in their broadest sense, even if Vernallis's definition could be deemed too expansive, better supports our understanding of the Internet Listener. Music videos are then defined by the combination of two senses' semiosis—hearing and seeing. A third sense, the kinesthetic, is affected (because of the fleeting nature of the music video) by the process of experience. As such, music videos are cultural texts with rich meaning because they can be understood as discursive practices that are in dialogue with other practices, discourses, and texts. They are simultaneously historical sites, where memory and affect (as aspects of the sensorium) demarcate the relationship of these sites (as digital and corporeal space) to their users, producers, interlocutors, and distributors.

I seek to complicate this definition further. A YouTube video not only is a recognisable presentation or performance of sound and image, but it is also a literal site of cultural production, public discourse, and memory. One of the elements of YouTube music videos that I am interested in is the discursive and historicising quality of the comment section.

As this project demonstrates, the comment section of a music video is a space of rich cultural knowledge sharing and, at other times, tension among fellow Internet Listeners. YouTube comments problematise the definition of a YouTube video because they broaden the scope of the object of study. To me, they show how people make sense of YouTube videos, their role in everyday listening practices, and how people connect with one another as Internet Listeners.

The main argument of this paper is that by listening to the internet, we are able not only to see discourses unfold, but to *hear* them. Listening to the internet challenges our understanding of listening in the first place, by dis-locating the site of listening. I posit listening to the internet within a broader theory of music, sound, and performance, alongside the cultural discourses that I apply to my case study, such as masculinity and nationalism. As a way of showing the practice of listening to the internet, I make an in-depth discourse analysis of YouTube comments under the music video for Vicente Fernández' s song "Por Tu Maldito Amor." My discourse analysis will further explain how, although these comments are not sonic in nature, they are to be listened for (and to) as a way of interacting with the music video under the parameters of internet listening. This project incorporates gender studies, postnationalist studies, and performance studies to situate all of the discourses that listening to this music video can highlight. I will also analyse this music video and Fernández' s performance, as well as the discourse markers within the comments themselves, within the contexts of Mexicanidad and machismo to interpret it on a deeper level.

When you' re scrolling on the internet, browsing social media, you tend not to stay in one spot too long. For a project that deals with material related to social media, it seems fitting to not stay on one scholarly 'page' for too long as well. In this project I am not particularly interested in being able to articulate new knowledge about a given object, method, or discipline. Instead, I am interested in developing a more complex theory and analysis of internet listening practices and all of the tensions, frictions, and hypocrisies that they come with. It is this perspective that allows me to shift between musicological interpretations of nationalist studies, queer theoretical readings of masculinity in performance and semiotic analyses of YouTube comments throughout the project. With listening as the focus of my argument, I am able to maneuver around any specific disciplinary home in this project because, as I will demonstrate, listening involves much more than just sound or music.

Performance-Politics and the Nation

While I explore more than sound and music alone in the project, it is nonetheless situated around a music video by the Mexican artist Vicente Fernández. Since one of the cultural discourses deals with postnationalism within the comments and in relation to the music video, I will begin with a discussion of music's relationship to the nation. Within music studies, Arved Ashby points out that "musicology is the systematic, institutionalized study of music and its history, and the discipline has explicitly and implicitly turned musical discussions to political ends during processes of nation building," where the creation of musical canons creates a certain hierarchy of (national) musical traditions.¹⁴ Ashby continues, stating that "postcolonial thought contributed to the expanding ethnomusicological initiatives in American academia over the past fifteen years to twenty years," where ethnomusicologists' focus on oral transmissions points to how "music [is] a cultural rather than textual process."¹⁵ In this process of taking postcolonial and postnational perspectives in music studies, we see the discipline of musicology (along with ethnomusicology) engaging in a reflexive identity crisis of its own. He writes that "musicology finds itself torn between the text-oriented scientism that originally defined it and the subaltern perspectives that promise to redeem it and make it socially useful."¹⁶ Since a postnational framework and the discipline of musicology may not be perfectly aligned, it may become more fruitful to think of this project within the more general term "music studies," to allow us to refine our nexus of study (music) while allowing for a multiplicity in scholarly foci.

To clarify, I use the term performance-politics jointly in order to demonstrate that these YouTube interactions are not only performative utterances (to borrow from John Austin), where these interactions do not just announce but are themselves actions, but to distinguish that they create the political structure within the cultural politics of a YouTube video.¹⁷ I use performance-politics to signify that my analysis is distinct from an analysis of the performance *of* politics or performances that comment on existing political structures. I acknowledge that political issues - such as Black Lives Matter, Indigenous land issues, reproductive rights, and many more - are not just performative, but are real experiences that affect peoples' livelihoods. Performance-politics, then, is a lens that balances the reality of late-stage global capitalism with the subjective experience of the scholar and discourse at large. I employ performance-politics to demonstrate how in the

discursive and digital interactions of social media there is a unique structure of cultural politics in action.

In this section, I discuss the discourse surrounding conceptualisations of the nation-state and its relation to music studies, with special attention to the US and Mexico in order to provide context for how Internet Listeners are hearing Chente in this video and interacting with each other. The nation-state acts in real ways that affect its inhabitants. In this sense, the nation-state exists as an object and subject of analysis (e.g. American Studies), as it can act and be acted upon by people and institutions. However, as a theoretical way of analysing culture, the concept of the nation-state fails to provide a sufficient, comprehensive model. Instead, people interact with cultural products and each other on a quotidian level in a way that disrupts our common associations of the nation. These interactions, as I will highlight in my project, use the language of the nation-state in order to negotiate a musico-political structure that deconstructs its conceptual realness. These interactions are examples of performance-politics.

Jesús Ramos-Kittrell, in the introduction to *Decentering the Nation: Music, Mexicanidad, and Globalization*, asserts that “the nation became decentered because the global traffic of symbols, meanings, practices, people, and capital produces transnational sites of identification, which made nationalists’ cultural narrative and symbols less important.” ¹⁸ Similarly, Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid argue that “current scholarship in the humanities and social sciences recognises the limitations of attempting to understand the history and practice of cultural manifestations within the boundaries of the nation-States.” ¹⁹ They continue, stating that “a postnational condition refers to its crisis and shortcomings as reflected in a wide variety of social and cultural events.” ²⁰ Ramos-Kittrell asserts that “the feeling of dislocation caused by the prevalent crisis of representation affecting the nation-state has led some scholars to inquire about a postnational condition ... Postnationalism became particularly pertinent in gaining insights into the globalising and local elements that influence culture formation, and that challenge nationalist narratives of culture promoted by the state.” ²¹ The violence that nation-states have committed, both epistemic and physical, signal that scholars need to recognise the affects that theorising the nation-state implicates.

Corona and Madrid write that “music is always in constant flux, music is the perennial undocumented immigrant; it has always moved beyond borders without the required paperwork.” ²² They urge scholars to embrace the flexibility that a postnational music studies framework provides, stating “a postnational study of music can only be possible from an inter or multidisciplinary angle, given that the incorporation of aesthetic values,

performatic and performative aspects, and social reception and meaning are integral parts of the musical experience—and they change in every context that the music is experienced.” ²³ As music scholars—from (ethno)musicology and music theory to adjacent fields such as performance studies, popular media studies, and gender studies—we have the ability, through a postnational study of music, to be able to critically engage with music and understand its impact beyond aesthetic meaning. The authors assert that “musical meaning is found at the intersection of production, distribution, performance, and consumption,” which “allows us to understand music as a medium for the representation and negotiation of identities within specific social contexts” ²⁴ That is precisely where this project stands; it will start with one aspect, consumption, to investigate how people navigate identificatory and disidentificatory processes within the performance-politics of YouTube comments on Fernández’ s music video. Corona and Madrid explain, “recognizing the contingency of the essentialist discourses about nationalist meaning would allow us to better understand the continuous processes of identity negotiation that permit citizens of a given nation-State to establish effective transregional and transnational relations.” ²⁵

Vicente Fernández, “Por Tu Maldito Amor,” and Mexicanidad

Vicente Fernández (affectionally called “Chente” by his fans) is one of Mexico’ s most recognised singers, as a ranchera singer and popular artist, with a performing career lasting over fifty years. A real-life *charro*, Fernández owns his own ranch and horse arena in Guadalajara, Mexico. Additionally, he has starred in multiple movies, like other great and earlier singers from *el época de oro*.²⁶ The biography on his website states that the singer “has maintained his standing as *Mexico’ s greatest living singer*, coupling an operatic range with a deep understanding of ranchera music’ s rural roots. Through the years he inspired hundreds of imitators, but *none could ever match his operatic power and range*.” ²⁷ While a greatly admired singer by Mexicans and listeners of many ages, Fernández has not escaped public controversy. Notably, in 2019, the singer refused to receive a liver transplant because he stated that he did not want to “sleep with my wife with the liver of some other guy [in me] ... I don’ t even know if he is a homosexual or a drug addict.” ²⁸

As a short aside, I find that there is a lot of potential from learning about Chente through his own “official” biography. This biography is a mediated form of knowing the singer, in the literal sense, which informs me about how Fernández presents himself. It should come as no surprise that there is an almost fantastical relationship that a public figure would have with the public itself. If we consider this *vis-à-vis* Erving Goffman’s concept of the social actor, Fernández asserts and constructs himself in his biography as a public history and discourse.²⁹ Since the scope of this project does not necessitate a more in-depth analysis of Fernández’s performing career, I cannot expand further on his biography, but I encourage the reader to read through it all to understand Chente’s relationship to the public.

Musically, Fernández describes himself as an interpreter (*intérprete*) as opposed to a songwriter (which in Spanish are called *compositores*, or composers), since many of his songs, including “Por Tu Maldito Amor,” are written by someone else. I think it is important to highlight this vocational difference in this project because the way that we, as listeners, encounter Chente is through his voice and performance; we do not seek out Chente to find out new poetic information, but instead listen to what his voice tells us what the lyrics mean. This internalising process in ranchera music is an interesting affect within the genre and is part of the reason that I am drawn to his music for this project. Additionally, it should be noted that most of Fernández’s recordings are of him singing alone. When we listen to Chente, we sing with him, we embody the lyrics that he is interpreting, and feeling those feelings *with* him.

Since this project focuses on interactions with a cultural product of Mexican origin (the music video), it is important to understand scholars’ theorisations regarding Mexican identity, and specifically how it interacts with music. Jesus Ramos-Kittrell’s description of Mexicanidad is particularly useful in demonstrating the decentering process when analysing “Mexican” cultural products. He writes that Mexicanidad “is a construct historically steeped in difference, which nation-states (Mexico and the U.S.) have used to promote ideas of cultural legitimacy in relation to modern national political projects of social and economic development that are now under strain.”³⁰ While Mexicanidad escapes a specific definition, a basic English translation would be Mexicanicity, or possibly Mexican-ness. Mexican, and thus by extension Mexicanidad, is problematic in this case—a point of departure—more than the paradigm by which culture and its agents operate. Ramos-Kittrell “uses Mexicanidad as a critical lens to shed light on the *transactional* and *transgressive* aspects of human imagination and behavior through which people negotiate difference in order to situate themselves, and that problematize Mexicanidad as an identitarian construct” that was formed after the 1910 Mexican

Revolution.³¹ In regard to music, Alex E. Chávez notes how the *canción ranchera* (country song) has specific ties to Mexican nationalism, writing that:

In the Mexican case, there is a long-established project of musical nationalism that has relied on the relationship between music and a specific geographic landscape—*el rancho*, or the idealized countryside. Indeed, ranching and agriculture, as important modes of organizing regional economies existed for most of colonial New Spain and Mexico’ s history up through the twentieth century.³²

Chávez continues, asserting that the nostalgic focus on the *rancho* in *cancion ranchera* is an extension of the colonial project; the period of *el rancho* is where the hacienda system flourished, directly correlating to the subjugation of indigenous and mestizo people at the hands of the land-owning Spaniards (or *castizas*). In this sense, ranchera is more than problematic in the way that Mexicanidad acts, but also in the colloquial sense, where ranchera represents oppressive and violent forces.

Figure 1. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

A prime example of Mexicanidad within the YouTube comments is one user, who comments “admit it, if you are MEXICAN you need to by law know a song by Vicente Fernandez” (Figure 1). While it is easy to dismiss that this comment essentialises a specific notion of Mexican subjectivity, understanding this comment through the lens of performance-politics gives us more to consider. We can see how, while there is no law written by the Mexican government about citizens being familiar with the discography of this particular artist, we do see that in the cultural politics of this video there is indeed a set of cultural laws that this user prescribes upon those who claim to be Mexican. In the performance-politics of this music video, through my analysis of these YouTube comments, we see that we can have a postnational understanding of Mexicanidad that accounts for these articulations of cultural and national rhetoric while also decentering

the hegemonic status of the nation-state in our thinking. I am able to understand the users' discursive commenting as a way of further informing my theorisation of postnationalism and Mexicanidad.

"Por Tu Maldito Amor," the name of both the song and music video, comes from the album of the same name released in 1989. The song is written by Federico Mendez but sung exclusively by Fernández (see [Appendix](#) for full lyrics). The music video was published to YouTube in 2009 on Fernández' s official YouTube channel.³³ At the time of writing, the video has over 236 million views, with 616 thousand likes. The music video takes place in some sort of *hacienda* (a ranch owner' s house). At first, this scene appears quite tranquil, with a beautiful plaza and fountain, birds chirping and a rooster crowing. In walks Fernández, dressed in full *charro* gear. He calls for his lover Patsy, racialising her as a fair-skinned and blonde woman (*güereja*).³⁴ When he realises that his lover has left him, he crumbles up her note, and proceeds to throw a bottle (possibly of tequila) at a portrait of her.

The next scene (roughly at 00:45) begins with the start of the song. The setting is shifted to a cantina. Fernández is seated at a table with a bottle of tequila in front of him. While he is singing, we see into his memories with his lover. Overall, there are pastoral themes that overarch this section which include the pair riding horses and dancing in a meadow. By the chorus, we return to Fernández singing contemplatively, the lens zoomed into his face as we hear (and watch) him sing "por tu maldito amor." We do not only hear his pain through the music, but through the music video we see his pain, we get access to the suffering that he is experiencing in the remembering of the woman who betrayed him. In the final section of the video, Fernández returns to the portrait and wipes away part of the broken glass so he can see her face one last time. This final part lines up with him singing a twist on the song title, switching from *maldito* to *bendito*, offering a more melancholic ending than the title suggests.

I focus on the music video because it allows entry for a critical intersection of what is sung, what is lyrical, and what is discursive. I highlight these three aspects (the sung, the lyrical, and the discursive) not to separate them as distinct entities that culminate in the

Figure 2. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, "Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor," October 3, 2009, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

video, but as perspectives by which we, as listeners, viewers, and interlocutors, can engage with it. By participating in all three as both a participant and scholar, I can interpret as I experience. In this way, I cannot claim that my “readings” of the video are entirely objective—and yet, since my project is overall concerned with something as subjective as the comment section of a YouTube video, it feels entirely appropriate to maintain this position.

What is interesting about this song, and what I think draws so much affect for its listeners, is that since it is written in the first-person, it is a formally gender-neutral song. The only indication that this song is about a woman is through the music video, where we see images of Chente and Patsy together and when Chente calls her a *Güereja*. While I may not go so far as to say that there is queer potential in the song, since it seems that it is more of a stylistic choice by the *compositor* that it is written that way, I would argue that alluding to the possibility of such, and the general e/affect of queer potentiality, points towards understanding the song/video’s use of gender. First, I will explicate the affect/effect of queer potentiality. Queer theorists generally consider *queering* as the discursive act of queer lens work, to signal the displacement of norms. On queerness, Martha Humphrey states that it “is about making the given seem strange,” which makes queering that process.³⁵ These “queer readings” are an effect of queer potentiality in given works, histories, and discourses (although, when the queer theorist tries hard enough, they/we can see everything in such light). Now, queer affect is also an effect of queering by which affect becomes a symptom of understanding the hetero-world in friction with queer reality. *We know that the heteronorm is constructed because we find ourselves in a forced opposition to it.*

Returning to the lyrics, I argue that since they can point in multiple (potentially queer) directions, their “neutrality” is what drives Fernández’ s hyper-masculine performance, which inversely demonstrates a fragility (and as I will later describe as a *tragedy*) of masculinity. Only through Fernández’ s performance of gender and sexuality, and explicitly so in the Mexican notion of the *charro* (by which we encounter the *machista*), are we able to understand that he projects the lyrical affect of the song onto a woman and heterosexual relationship. This is in line with Judith Butler’ s assertion that gender “is only real to the extent that it is performed,” and in this particular performance, we see that it portrays itself under the parameters of Mexicanidad, portrayals of the *charro*, and *machista* sexuality.³⁶

What makes this song so special, though? Why is there so much feeling and affect connected to it? Looking at the comments we see that one commenter writes “I hear the

sadness *in* his voice ☹” (Figure 3, my emphasis).³⁷

This comment leads us to look *into* Chente’ s voice, not just materially but also emotionally. In a music video setting, we cannot separate the man from the voice, we hear the strong, operatic voice and then see the *charro* outfit, the cantina, and the pain on his face. We see a body that is literally moved by something else, almost compelled to sing his lamentation. In this way there is a double materiality to Chente’ s voice, where the voice becomes a vessel for his emotions, for an affective discourse.

Figure 3. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

Queer theory’ s use of affect is that it puts us into relation to the worlds, discourses, and contexts that we come into contact (metaphorically and physically) with. On the subject of affect theory, Lauren Berlant writes that “it can provide a way to access the disciplines of normativity in relation to the disorganized processes of labor, longing, memory, fantasy, grief, acting out, and sheer psychic creativity through which people constantly (consciously, unconsciously, dynamically) renegotiate the terms of reciprocity that contour their historical situation.”³⁸ To make Berlant’ s point shorter: affect theory puts us in (a) place. As a queer theorist, I can use, manipulate, and dance with affect to accept and embrace what I do not (and must not) know.

An affective discourse, then, is a discourse that is guided by the indeterminacy in affect and emotion; thinking about such a discourse is to invest in the uneasiness that something so indulgently subjective presents. In a way, this type of discourse channeled through (and *within*) Chente’ s voice escapes any objective claims of ‘knowing’ what the voice ‘does.’ The lyrics of “Por Tu Maldito Amor,” combined with Fernández’ s performance, point toward a specific, *machista* emotional condition that is explored in the video. This condition, which I will now elaborate on, is specifically *machista* in nature because of the performance of Mexican masculinity, heteronormativity, and ranchera singing itself. The *charro* outfit, the setting, and the tequila point us towards reading him as a Mexican man in the strictest sense. This Mexican man though, succumbs to emotion only through singing, and thus his voice literally holds his emotive potential.

The main focus that the song and the music video portray, aside from its setting within nationalist Mexican and patriarchal *machista* culture, is on Fernández' s own grief as he mourns the woman who left him. In the video, we see a weakened Fernández, a man who is the owner of this extensive property, now alone in a cantina and only able to remember the woman he loves. He does not even have the power to spite her, to hate her; instead, he returns back to a shattered portrait and thinks of her love as blessed. We see the tragic breakdown of a stoic, powerful man. I make this specific interpretation clear because the notion and performance of gender in this instance is still connected to power, race, and nationality. The juxtaposition of power and Chente' s tragic masculinity reminds us that there is a delicate balance that the *machista* must uphold in order to keep his strength—whose masculinity can easily be broken by a woman.

I also want to clarify that in this analysis of the tragedy of masculinity that I describe, we still feel empathy towards Fernández. Of course, we can criticise him through anti-nationalist and feminist lenses, but affectively, we (as listeners) bear the burden with him. The emotive burden that I highlight is that of masculinity, which creates a closet (to borrow from queer theory again) in its own right, where the masculine subject is denied emotional acknowledgement except in song. I return to thinking about, and with, affect in this instance because its indeterminacy, the secrecy of knowing it, is what allows the façade to push forward; we can think that we are having a private, experiential moment of emotional release when listening to “Por Tu Maldito Amor,” but, in reality, it is a performance of the self that we have always known, and have been afraid of.

The (Post)Nation

Moving forward, I will relate the comments on this video to discussions of nationalism *vis-à-vis* a postnationalist framework (among other cultural discourses I have talked about earlier) as a part of internet listening. First, though, I would like to elaborate more on postnationalist theories and why they work with my project, even when the comments may not always relate to postnationalism specifically. My interest in postnationalism is an equally personal and intellectual investment in disempowering the nation-state' s role as an identificatory signifier in our daily lives. As a Chicana person and scholar, I still get confused when people would ask me “Where are you from?” which always means that my home was never my *real* one. In Chicana circles, we say that “*no soy de*

aquí, ni de allá” (“I am not from here, nor from there”) to signal that as displaced people, we neither exist as members of the United States nor as extracted, diasporic Mexicans. Our self-conceptualisations of the nation-state are complicated ones—relationships that are founded on the economic disparity brought by the signing of NAFTA and the ensuing violence that occurs at the border to this day. When Donald Trump vowed to “Build a Wall,” I saw the painful scars that nationalism creates for marginalised and minoritarian subjects. Although this project does not directly address issues and discourses of Chicanidad, as one of the ways that I walk through and see with the world, it becomes important to me to acknowledge my Chicane engagement with this project. When I make claims that Vicente Fernández’ s performance signifies Mexicanidad in ways that resonate with people outside of strict Mexican nationalist senses, I say so from my own personal relationship with what it means to “be” Mexican.

Similarly, as someone who is conscientious and affected by the United States’ legacy of settler-colonialism, and recognises the limitations of settler’ s positionality, a postnationalist perspective in this project seeks to restructure the epistemological framework around my analysis to factor the impact of (neo)colonialism and late-stage capitalism. Christopher Aplin notes that from Indigenous perspectives, conceptualisations of modernity are linked to their adherences to nation-states:

A general assumption of modernity is individual and local sublimation under the broader and more abstract social and organizational needs of a nation-state. And if one were to posit an Indigenous modernity, they might note Native peoples’ incorporation into modern nation-states through long-term, powerful acts of colonial violence. This is a valid starting point. But the symptoms of modernity are as a result sometimes described like an external contagion—something imposed from the outside without content, complicity, or opposition. As a sociological term, modernity-as-concept can be as indeterminate and mysterious as the alienating bureaucracy, industry, and technology it critiques.³⁹

It therefore becomes imperative that this project be grounded in a postnational framework in order to see how my interlocutors use their positions within nation-states as reference points for the cultural exchanges that take place in the comment section. I do not employ their public discourses as a way of representing how various cultures intersect in harmonious ways, but instead find myself in agreement with Homi Bhabha’ s notion of the Third Space. He posits that “cultural diversity is an epistemological object—culture as an object of empirical knowledge—whereas cultural

difference is the process of *enunciation* of culture as ‘knowledgeable,’ authoritative to the construction of systems of cultural identification.” ⁴⁰ Third Space, the in-between, is where the “problem” of cultural intersection lies. Performance-politics, as a theoretical framework, is crucial for performance and music scholars who invest in Third Space and diverts attention away from a nationalist conception of “pure” cultures. My analysis of performance-politics theoretically displaces the (epistemological) hegemony of the nation-state in order to acknowledge the framework that Third Space necessitates.

The nation-state acts in ways that affect its inhabitants, materially, physically, and in other more “real” and “tangible” ways (as opposed to the more theoretical ways I will soon mention). In this sense, the nation-state exists as an object and subject of analysis (in disciplines such as American Studies, or of a scholar being known as a “Latin-Americanist”) that can act and be acted upon by people and institutions. However, as a theoretical way of analysing culture, the concept of the nation-state fails to provide a sufficient, comprehensive model. Instead, people interact with cultural products (and as cultural producers) along with each other on a quotidian level in a way that disrupts our common associations of the nation. These interactions, as I highlight in my project, use the language of the nation-state in order to negotiate a musico-political structure that deconstructs its conceptual realness. These interactions are examples of performance-politics.

Seeing YouTube Comments in Action: Discourse Analysis and Semiotics

For most of this project I have only referred to the comment section on this YouTube video in specific cases. As I have mentioned elsewhere, I choose to highlight the comments in order to talk about and engage with the interactions that happen around and through the video. While I could make assertions and claims from just an analysis of the music video, or by situating Vicente Fernández’ s performing career within the broader milieu of Mexican regional music (both of which I do), throughout the course of the research process I found myself repeatedly drawn back to the comment section for insight (and complications) about the theories I was working with and how they informed my analysis. In some senses, *they spoke to me*. It is only fitting, then, for the final section of

this project to pay tribute to and focus on the comments that so deeply influenced the rest of my work. I can only hope that the countless people who made these products, who are the cultural producers of the material I work with here, know that they make a considerable impact on our understanding of culture, listening, and public discourse. Without trying to generalise too much, I also hope that this project can show us how, by *listening to the internet*, the deep complexities of culture are always at our fingertips.

Before getting into the analysis, I want to briefly explain my process for selecting comments and what methods I used to approach their analysis. At the time of writing, there are over fifteen thousand comments on the video. It would take a significant amount of time to go through the whole data set and look at trends in comments, both when there are surges in comment production, but also, with the use of scraping, key words that come up in the comments across time. Besides this amount of effort being out of my personal time constraint for completing the project and my unfamiliarity with quantitative analysis, I have found that taking this more subjective, observation-based scope to be sufficiently productive for the work that I am doing in the project. I find that in the nature of thinking about myself as a scholar-user, and the relationship that I have to social media, this type of comment selection is not only appropriate for my theoretical understanding of the internet but is analogous to the practice of listening to the internet. With my comment analysis being used as an example of my own internet listening practice, I invite the reader to listen to these comments with me.

One of the methods that I will be applying in this section is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a method used in linguistics that looks at the “bigger picture” of discourse, as opposed to individual words, sentences or phonemes; simply put, discourse affects the meaning of individual sentences.

Figure 4. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed November 4, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

Zellig Harris writes that “language does not occur in stray words or sentences, but in connected *discourse*.”⁴¹ In the context of YouTube comments, they all have to be framed as such in order to make more sense. For example, Figure 4 demonstrates a comment thread, where each of the replies are all in relation to an original comment. So, seeing “lmfao” on its own provides little more information than the acronym itself (“laughing my fucking ass off”), but knowing that it is framed as a reply to the original comment, that it is a user reaffirming that the original comment’s joke “lands” for other users and is thereby an effective one. By looking at YouTube comments through discourse analysis, and in relation to performance-politics, we can see how internet listening (which I do as part of my discourse analysis) involves more than just the sonic elements of the music video that I analysed.

However, the goal of this project is not to merely point out content in YouTube comments and make claims of “comment X brings forward issue Y with reference to Z,” but instead to understand what the process of comment-making and listening *means*. For understanding meaning (or at least trying to) we must turn to semiotics. Suzanne Langer writes that “all genuine thinking *is* symbolic, and the limits of the expressive medium are, therefore, really the limits of our conceptual powers.”⁴² Simply put, we exist in symbols, and our entire reality is caught up in it. Eduardo Kohn takes this idea further to claim that “all life is semiotic and all semiosis is alive. In important ways, then, life and thought are one and the same: life thinks; thoughts are alive.”⁴³ To use semiotics, then, is to try and understand the lives of these commenters by listening to and for their semiosis. Through semiotics, we can listen to the ways that we make meaning and connect ourselves to the internet, the world, and each other.

To return to the discourse analysis, we can see that it is in time and therefore relational to events that frame what commenters refer to. Let us look at Figure 5. The commenters here situate themselves (within the comment itself) as being “there” on New Year’s Day of this year. During my research I saw trends like these happen at other times, most of which were holidays of some sort. At first, I found these to be a nuisance, as merely superfluous comments where users “proved” that they still listened to older

music in modern times. Upon further review, though, I now see that these comments mark and focus listeners to listen together. They incite more discourse by encouraging other listeners to announce that they too are listening. Figure 6 has a comment that asks: “who is listening in quarantine?” which requires the situational framing that they are referring to the quarantine period during the Covid-19 pandemic (which is still occurring at the time of writing this paper).

Figure 5. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

Figure 6. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed November 4, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

Commenters know this structure and framing too, since one commenter jokingly adds that “I’m from the future the year is 2082 this still lit” (Figure 7), which further shows that it is not just in analysis that we are aware of how comments are situated but that the discourse itself understands itself to be situated by its structure.

Figure 7. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

This is what I was alluding to earlier when I define performance-politics within the purview of a structure of cultural politics. There are parameters for making a comment that are necessary for them to be engaged with properly on a video, even if the parameters themselves are highly contested. We cannot just see them as speech acts, or even in Austin’s case of the performative utterance, even though they do in fact *do* something; these comment-acts engage with one another simultaneously within opposition but also agreement with one another. For example, Figure 8 shows a comment that addresses how they are seeing a lot of comments in English and from users outside of Mexico, which shows that not all listeners are particularly comfortable with the notion that this song is being interpreted by non-Mexicans.

Even though this comment is somewhat oppositional to my postnationalist framework that I have discussed earlier in the paper, I think that this tension is something important to listen for because it shows how discourse is not a harmonious, unifying process. The messiness that comes in dialogic processes mean that cultural discourses, as symbolic action, represent conflicts and the limitations of postnationalist studies, for example.⁴⁴ Similarly, there are

Figure 8. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

commenters, such as in Figure 9, who leave a comment to “prove” that they are real fans of Fernández’ s music, and “know” his music better than other listeners. With a fan needed to prove that they are a real fan of Mexican music demonstrates that there are enough tensions and frictions among fellow internet listeners whose own listening practices (in a postnationlist rupture of the Mexicanidad of the music video) threaten this commenter’ s Mexican ownership over this cultural text.

Figure 9. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

An interesting trend that I saw come up during my research were comments that referred to a comedy bit by Gabriel Iglesias (whose nickname is Fluffy).⁴⁵ In some cases, like in Figure 10, users come to the video because of the comedian’ s bit.

Figure 10. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

It is unclear in this comment whether they mean the Netflix special (which was released in 2019), or the YouTube video that was released later that year. Since the comment has forty “likes,” we can also assume that many people come to access the video by Iglesias’ s reference to Fernández in the bit. As a part of my own internet listening, I was actually unfamiliar with the bit even though I have watched Fluffy’ s work before. To go on a journey with these internet listeners, as their references led me to a different corner of the internet, was significant to the research process because I was being taken out of the music video (and shown how people go into it) from a perspective and influence that I had yet to consider. As Clifford Geertz says, “culture is public because meaning is.” ⁴⁶ I now have a cultural bond with these interlocutors because even though I had to reverse maneuver the link between cultural texts, *I am able to relate to them by the practice of listening* I have shown throughout this project.

In Figure 11, we again see that someone finds the video because of Iglesias, but also that more “loyal” fans find this annoying, with one commenter stating that

“Apparently everybody here from that new Gabriel Iglesias, but real G’ s knew this even waaaay before that.” Other comments, like Figure 12, bring in references to the bit, like the almost verbatim quote from it (“Looking like a big Ol bottle of Tapatio”) as another signal that they are an Iglesiasian-turned-Chente fan.⁴⁷

Figure 11. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

Figure 12. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

In the music video, when the music starts, the drinking starts, and Chente is sitting at the cantina, ready to sing. I have talked about this drunk ontology earlier in the paper as it relates to my own listening practices, but I want to highlight how tequila is symbolised in Mexican society and comes to be represented in the comments. On tequila, Mary-Lee Mulholland writes that:

Despite the consumption of tequila at a variety of events and places in Mexico, tequila, and drinking in general, is still considered very much part of the masculine domain. For example, cantinas and plazas are male spaces that few ‘decent’ women frequent, and the ability to ‘handle’ liquor is a positive male attribute. As one friend reminded [her], tequila is a masculine noun (*el tequila*) after all. This link between tequila and masculinity or, perhaps more aptly, between tequila and machismo is situated in the mythic and historical representation of tequila as the drink of the men who fought the [1910] Revolution.⁴⁸

References to tequila and drinking (especially being *borracho*/drunk) can be seen in Figures 13 and 14. Alcohol becomes a symbol of melancholy and ranchera music; the tragedy of masculinity (as I have discussed earlier) can only come to light when we are under the influence of a drunk ontology.

Figure 13. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, "Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor," October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

Figure 14. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, "Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor," October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

taco after watching this," which shows how sensorially, this music video metaphysically transforms food into something essentially Mexican (Figure 15).

By referring to alcohol, it points to the willingness to confront gender under the specific discourses and contexts of Mexicanidad. It becomes apparent that there is a certain taste that Mexican music and Fernández evoke, where to listen to ranchera music and Chente's somber voice means to drink. One commenter so succinctly puts it where they say their "burger turned into a

Figure 15. Screenshot from Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez.

The semiotic shift from reading to listening to YouTube comments is an important distinction to make. Reading comes from a code that I have learned, a code that was taught to me. The signs that I needed to know in order to read are contextual and arbitrary although deeply telling for my ability to communicate the symbolised world to others.⁴⁹ However, when I encounter these YouTube comments, I come to live with them, and as living semiosis, I need to listen to them for their interaction within cultural discourses.⁵⁰ I do not read them for their coded meaning but instead listen to them for musico-cultural extra-sonic semiosis. In more plain terms, the comments help me understand sound, performance, and culture in the context of this video by telling me the stories of what people think about these discourses.

Conclusion: Listening to the Internet

In the beginning of this project, I introduce my writing as a form of *chisme*. Now that we are reaching the concluding section of this paper, it is fitting that I can officially present to you the title, as my reader, of being a *chismosa*. The process of intellectual *chismeando*, as part of my scholarly nonchalance surrounding academic discipline, is

what drives the analyses, theories, and stories that I write about. As a scholar-*chismosa* I see this project, and by extension listening to the internet, not with a goal of truth-seeking or knowledge-making, but more in line with storytelling: *chismeando*. By using theory and analysis to explore intersections of culture, music, sound, and the internet, I have been able to construct the meanings, connections, and interpretations that this project has unfolded.

For me, listening to the internet requires a reimagination of sound and meaning in a way that allows for non-sonic and non-musical meaning making to be a fundamental part of our listening practices. This is how I can say that the YouTube comments I analyse *speak to me* because I truly do listen to them as I do to “Por Tu Maldito Amor.” Although I do not listen to them in the same way that I listen to music, nor in the same way that I experience this music video, I engage with the internet as a listener because it is by listening that I bring these comments into my musical understanding. To again briefly touch upon Christopher Small’s concept of musicking, this further expands this concept because *by listening to, for, and in the internet we come into contact with musicking* in ways that might make us question the musical “integrity” of this study.⁵¹ But, by investing in this type of listening practice I have been able to show how cultural discourses and perceptions of Vicente Fernández are shaped and negotiated by fellow internet listeners.

Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that by listening to the internet, as I have shown through my YouTube comment analysis, we are able to *hear* the discourses (tensions included) surrounding machismo, Mexicanidad, and Vicente Fernández in relation to music and performance. By listening we immerse ourselves into such discourses. By hearing discourse, instead of seeing or reading it as an object, we come into contact with it in a way that we do not need to seek truth or create new knowledge around machismo, Mexicanidad and even Fernández. By using listening as a theoretical practice, I can use and interrogate discourses that are relevant to my work (postnationalism and gender, mainly), without needing to make claims about the overall study of nation or gender. As listeners, we are trained to understand dissonances and tensions as a necessary aspect of the heard world. Inherent tensions in nationalism, masculinity, and the status of music in the project are now a fundamental aspect of listening to the internet where this friction points us in the direction of what is occurring and unfolding in the discourse itself. Like a good *chisme*, we ought not know exactly what is being said, but we know we must listen anyway. So too, do I listen to the internet.

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Appendix

“Por Tu Maldito Amor” full lyrics (translation by the author)

Güereja!⁵²

(Reading letter)

Perdóname por dejarte

Pero no te quiero

Como yo pensaba

Adiós, Patsy

(singing)

El día que te encontré me enamoré

Tú sabes que yo nunca lo he negado

Con saña me lograste enloquecer

yo caí en tu trampa ilusionado

De pronto todo aquello se acabó

Faltaste a la promesa de adorarnos

Me hundiste en el olvido por creer

Que a ti no llegarían jamás los años

Por tu maldito amor

No puedo terminar con tantas penas

Quisiera reventarme hasta las venas

Por tu maldito amor, por tu maldito amor

Por tu maldito amor

No logro acomodar mis sentimientos

Y el alma se me sigue consumiendo

Por tu maldito amor, por tu maldito amor

	English Translation
No quiero que regreses nunca no	
Prefiero la derrota entre mis manos	
Si ayer tu nombre tanto pronuncié	Patsy, where have you gone?
	Güereja!
Hoy mírame rompiéndome los labios	
	Forgive me for leaving you
Por tu maldito amor	But I don' t love you
No puedo terminar con tantas penas	Like I thought
Quisiera reventarme hasta las venas	Goodbye, Patsy
Por tu maldito amor, por tu maldito amor	
Por tu maldito amor	The day I found you I fell in love
No logro acomodar mis sentimientos	You know that I've never negated it
	Viciously you managed to drive me crazy
Y el alma se me sigue consumiendo	And illusioned I fell into your trap
Por tu maldito amor,	
Por tu maldito amor	Soon all of that was over
Por tu bendito amor	You failed on the promise of adoring each other
	You drowned me in oblivion for believing
	That to you the years would never come
	For your damn love
	I can' t stop with all these pains
	I'd like to reinvent myself up to the veins
	For your damn love
	For your damn love
	I can' t manage to comfort my feelings
	And my soul continues to consume me

For your damn love, for your damn love

I don't want you ever to come back

I prefer destruction in between my hands

If yesterday I pronounced your name too much

Look at me today breaking my lips

For your damn love

I can't stop all these pains

I'd like to reinvent myself up to the vains

For your damn love

For your damn love

For your damn love I don't manage to comfort my feelings

And my soul continues to consume me

For your damn love

For your damn love

For your blessed love

Biography

AM's research is at the intersection of performance studies, media studies, and sound studies. Theoretically, AM is influenced by semiotics and affect theory, with interests in psychoanalysis and thing theory, all leading towards broader questions regarding the ways in which people come into contact and resonate with the internet: sonically, performatively, and ontologically. They are equally motivated by queer and trans of

colour critique, and their work explores representations and performances of abjection as a way of contesting notions of intrinsic queer/trans “beauty.”

Originally from Portland, Oregon (USA), AM earned a Bachelor of Music (magna cum laude) from the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music, winning the Clyde Duncan Prize. AM's undergraduate thesis was a multidisciplinary investigation into the post-national yet intimate interactions and discourses between YouTube commenters on a music video by Vicente Fernández. They’ re proud to have participated in the Graduate School Exploration Fellowship with the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, and have conducted research at Rutgers University. Additionally, AM has presented research at the Midwest Graduate Music Consortium at the University of Michigan and has recently joined the editorial board for the Journal of Undergraduate Research in Music started out of James Madison University. Currently, AM is a Ph.D. student in Integrative Studies at the University of California San Diego, Department of Music.

Footnotes

1. If you find yourself wondering what music video I am talking about, do not fret. Like all good stories, there is a time and place for knowing certain things. Listen to the *chisme* (gossip) as you read and find yourself committing to the Foucauldian incitement to discourse. [↵](#)
2. I’ ve never been to one, of course, but I assume they are pleasant. [↵](#)
3. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531. [↵](#)
4. For more on “musicking,” see Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). [↵](#)
5. In this latter formulation I consider the aspects of social media by which people can merge two (or more) existing entities together, forcing a relationship between what may

have been unrelated internet “objects.” For example, the Quote Retweet function of Twitter allows for a forced contiguity between the “original” and the “quote” tweet, allowing for a single object, the Quote Retweet (as a combination of the original “quoted” Tweet and its commentary), to be understood and interpreted to have meaning in its own right. [↵](#)

6. Gretchen McCulloch, *Because Internet: Understanding the New Rules of Language* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019), 2. [↵](#)

7. I think that societally, too, we have become more acclimated to internet listening. My mother used to tell me stories of boyfriends who would make her a mixtape, or a CD that they would burn to make a playlist for a roadtrip. Now, my roommate talks about how her best friend sends Spotify playlists as gifts, or for special occasions. Before a party on campus, organizers will make a playlist just for the event to curate the listening experiences and overall vibes of the event. While writing this paper during the Covid-19 pandemic, I have “been” at countless recitals, concerts, and listening parties when music-making was required to go virtual. [↵](#)

8. Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). [↵](#)

9. Interestingly, with the internet being a site, and visualised as a sort of space, we can also see how the internet has borders. While they are hard to distinguish, since so much of our daily lives are on the internet, and especially with the Covid-19 pandemic forcing academic and social life to exist online, it is worthy to note that we now make distinctions between “live” or “in-person” events versus online ones. [↵](#)

10. Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 149. [↵](#)

11. *Ibid.*, 150. [↵](#)

12. *Ibid.*, 154. [↵](#)

13. *Ibid.*, 208. [↵](#)

14. Arved Ashby, “Nationalist and Postnationalist Perspective in American Musicology,” in *Postnational Musical Identities*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 24. [↵](#)

15. *Ibid.*, 31. [↵](#)

16. *Ibid.*, 35. [↵](#)

17. John Austin states that “to say something is to do something,” whereby the performative utterance, the statement, alters reality for its subjects. See: John L. Austin, “How to do things with words, lecture II,” in *How to do things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press (1962 [1975])), 12-24. [↵](#)

18. Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell, “Introduction: Post-Mexicanidad apropos of the Postnational,” in *Decentering the Nation: Music, Mexicanidad, and Globalization*, ed. Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), xxiv. [↵](#)

19. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, “Introduction: The Postnational Turn in Music Scholarship and Music Marketing,” in *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 3. [↵](#)

20. *Ibid.*, 4. [↵](#)

21. Ramos-Kittrell, *Decentering the Nation*, xxiv. [↵](#)

22. Corona and Madrid, “Introduction,” 5. [↵](#)

23.

Corona and Madrid, “Introduction,” 5.

Corona and Madrid use Diana Taylor’s term performatic (borrowed from the Spanish term *performático* used in the Americas) to reiterate the theatricality of performances, as opposed to the adjective performative. Taylor writes that “the performative becomes less a quality (or adjective) of performance than of discourse,” so a shift to the performatic informs us about the theatrical nature of performances. See, Diana Taylor, “Translating Performance,” in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 3rd ed., ed. Henry Bial and Sara Brady (New York and London: Routledge 2016), 371.

[↵](#)

24. Corona and Madrid, “Introduction,” 7. [↵](#)

25. *Ibid.* [↵](#)

26. *El época de oro*, or “the golden age,” refers to the period between roughly 1930-1950, when the Mexican cinema industry was at its peak. For more, see Jacqueline

Avila, *Cinesonidos: Film Music and National Identity During Mexico's Época de Oro* (Oxford University Press, 2019). [↵](#)

27. “Biography,” The Official Vicente Fernandez Site, August 5, 2015. <https://vicentefernandez.mx/en/biography/>. [↵](#)

28. Eduardo Cepeda, “Vicente Fernandez Refused a Liver Transplant for Homophobic Reasons & Really?,” *Remezcla*, 9 May, 2019, www.remezcla.com/music/vicente-fernandez-refused-a-liver-transplant-for-homophobic-reasons-really/. [↵](#)

29. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959). [↵](#)

30. Ramos-Kittrell, *Decentring the Nation*, xxvi. [↵](#)

31. *Ibid.*, emphasis in original. [↵](#)

32. Alex E. Chávez, *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 131. [↵](#)

33. Vicentefernandez, “Vicente Fernández - Por Tu Maldito Amor,” October 3, 2009, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfm2zSgQ8cQ&ab_channel=vicentefernandez. [↵](#)

34. Besides this short calling out to Patsy in the opening scene, listeners also seem to racialise her as white. See Figure 2. [↵](#)

35. Martha Umphrey, “The Trouble with Harry Thaw,” *Radical History Review* 62 (1995): 23. [↵](#)

36. Butler, “Performative Acts,” 527. [↵](#)

37. Figure 25 is similar and in English, or also, Figure 26. [↵](#)

38. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 53. [↵](#)

39. Christopher T. Aplin, “Get Tribal: Cosmopolitan Worlds and Indigenous Consciousness in Hip-Hop,” in *Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America*, ed. Victoria Lindsey Levine and Dylan Robinson (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press), 116-117. [↵](#)

40. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1994), 49-50. [↵](#)
41. Zellig S. Harris, "Discourse Analysis," *Language* 28, no. 1 (1952): 3. [↵](#)
42. Suzanne Langer, "Discursive and Presentational Forms," in *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Charles Innis (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985), 95. [↵](#)
43. Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 16. [↵](#)
44. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). [↵](#)
45. Gabriel Iglesias, "Meeting Mexican Elvis | Gabriel Iglesias," August 19, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3pdLtOoR5A>. [↵](#)
46. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 12. [↵](#)
47. For those who may not know, Tapatio is a brand of Mexican hot sauce. The Tapatio bottle features a man with a moustache and sombrero, which are key markers of the *charro*. In the skit mentioned, Iglesias describes seeing Fernández as "looking like a big old bottle of Tapatio," which is what this commenter makes reference to. [↵](#)
48. Mary-Lee Mulholland, "Mariachis Machos and Charros Gay: Masculinities in Guadalajara," in *Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico*, eds. Víctor M. Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico: 2012), 239. [↵](#)
49. Ferdinand de Saussure, "The Linguistic Sign," in *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed Robert Innis (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press: 1985), 24-46 [↵](#)
50. Kohn, *How Forests Think*. [↵](#)
51. Small, *Musicking*. [↵](#)
52. *Güereja* is Mexican slang for a light-skinned, blonde woman. [↵](#)