

# AFTERWORD

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I am here because of a surprising convergence in Gainesville between my mother (from Ormond Beach, Florida) and my father (from Havana, Cuba) while they were students at the University of Florida and its eventual fruition in Miami. My writing life that includes and prefigures *The Florida Room* might be a working through (with my own symptoms) their deep and resolute attachments to the state and to the island. Being born into this fascinating melancholy is part of what trained me to listen out of place with strong feelings of being in place. I was raised in the listening arts of transference. The Floridian convergence offers a skill set to hear songs such as Duane Allman's "Please Be with Me" and Archie Shepp's "Invitation," together with Los Van Van's "Soy Todo" and N. G. La Banda's "Los Sitios Entero," as a spiritual and material home in this extended, and to my stubborn heart, temporary away time in New York and New Jersey.

Some cannot leave Miami because the structure won't allow it. Others who do may leave it because of proclivities for what Little Beaver suggested in both parts of "Party Down." Others have long fled for political reasons or for a general inhospitality to their misfit sensibilities. Still others need to leave to find work. Those who leave, for whatever reason, often have a hard time staying alive while away. There are also those who move for the ordinary curiosities shared by those in other island nations about what else and who else is out there, up there. My reasons are a mix of these, and life on the road has meant a collection of fragments that spoke to my ambivalence to this place I never, in truest body, left. The unrelenting longing and more-fleeting revulsions for Miami were mirrored in other cutaways and found in the unlikelyst of places. One of my favorites involves the Frank-

furt school, a foundational place of exile and theory. Miami unbelievably and expectedly appears in Theodor Adorno's correspondence to his parents after they had fled Germany, and while living in the first phase of their exile in Havana. In a 1939 letter he gave them the following warning: "I would urgently advise you against Miami, one of the most ghastly places I have ever seen, a desert littered with house palm-trees and rip-off bars . . . [do] not spend more than 24 hours in Miami." And then, an outward change of heart. Just over a year later, Adorno wrote to them again, now in Miami, "We are now seriously considering spending our holidays with you in Miami . . . it would be lovely if we could come. . . . We would like to know if you would be able to find someone who would drive us around in the car a little for some money and kind words, and if you could advise us regarding clothing (elegance? Will we need warm clothes? How are the nights?)."<sup>1</sup> The pivot from horrified disgust to the appeal for some much-needed togetherness, dressed to impress with loved ones, is what many Miamians, those of the past and present, feel whether we are living there or not. It is a pastime of many, especially those who remain, to talk about how much they revile Miami. There is much to discuss: its terrifying politics, the continued apartheid made of race and real estate, the stripping of public institutions, the traffic, the violence, the starkness of unlivable poverty and the most brazen wealth locally and internationally extracted, the environmental destruction, and other strange events that seem unique to there. But they keep staying, and we keep going home.

Part of the internal conflict that made the writing of this book take so long, was that question that nags so many who can't live where they're from: How to write from the trenches if you can't actually be in them full-time? But then a directed imperative to *do it*, on so many of the musicians' and interviewees' cues threaded throughout *The Florida Room*. Directives were everywhere actually, even appearing while walking down the street in my New Jersey town. I was wearing a Miami Heat shirt that day when a Legba figure approached me and asked, mid-stride, "You like the Heat?" I answered, "That's my hometown." He said: "Miami?" Me: "Yep." As he walked away, he fully roused the spirits with this aural gift, "Go with it! Go with it!" I went with it. Because of Miami's history of everyday razing and amnesia, there was an urgent composite portrait I needed to put together and share, all at once, like this. I can barely recognize where I'm from, even as I visit for extended periods several times a year. Writing with and through and despite the disorienting buildup has given me all the more reasons to set some things down for the collective record.

The Floridian convergence is a baroque altar that gave me the great fortune to be in so many places at once. The annual experiencing of Daytona's Bike Week and Miami's Calle Ocho in the same month. Concerts at Bayfront Park with typical lineups that included KC and the Sunshine Band, Santana, and Celia Cruz. Joe Walsh forgetting the lyrics at Metro Zoo. Parking-lot Bass in the dancing outer bands of the party inside Luke's. Prince's Glam Slam club when South Beach started to figure out the cover charge. Underage nights with New Order in the Grove at Upstairs. Funk at Rose's Bar. Disco nights at the Cameo. Roller-skating sessions to "Boogie Shoes" at the Kendall Skating Rink and, later, Pretty Tony's "The Party Has Begun" at Hot Wheels Skating Center. Eddie Mix spinning at South Miami Junior High. DJs opening stores at Dadeland. The Dade County Youth Fair and its jammed signals between the patrons' Freestyle and the ride operators' classic rock. The Super Q commercial jingle, the Opa-locka/Hialeah theme song. The jukebox and concession at Bird Bowl. Tropical Park Bass dance-offs. These are not signposts for nostalgia but marks of my generation *still*. The city that bursts with nightlife in multiple languages, even in the daytime, remains fast and strong. Those who remained and those who keep arriving continue to add to its ongoing shanty. They are creating even more dimensions for the greater Florida room, conceptualizing it differently and beautifully in ways and spaces far beyond the million-dollar condos with the art to match, or the clubs with bottle service. Making do with the makeshift is their only structural code.