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Cuban Routes of Avant-Garde Theatre: Havana, New York, Miami, 1965-1991.

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CUBAN ROUTES OF AVANT-GARDE THEATRE:
HAVANA, NEW YORK, MIAMI, 1965-1991

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Theatre

by
Eric Mayer-García
B.A., University of Washington, 2005
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation interrogates how the movement of artists between Havana, New York, and Miami shaped experimental theatre aesthetics, formed a shared discourse of theatrical thought, and introduced a particular vein of experimental practices into U.S. American avant-garde theatre, especially as it intersects with U.S. Latina/o theatre and LGBTQ theatre. I interrogate the theatre history of these three cities as horizontal and contiguous, challenging historical narratives of U.S. American neocolonial dominance and superiority, as well as narratives of diaspora that position Havana as an authentic origin. The central contribution of my dissertation is to synthesize the archival evidence that documents connections between the theatre scenes of these three cities, while repositioning well-known artists like Obie Award-winning author and director, María Irene Fornés and Pulitzer Prize-winning author and director Nilo Cruz within the avant-garde traditions touching Greater Cuba (Cuba and its diasporas). By doing so, this study addresses the absence of scholarship in English-language U.S. American Theatre Studies that discusses Latin American and U.S. Latina/o theatre as cutting-edge and artistically innovative vis-à-vis global and Western theatre movements.

Each chapter in my dissertation follows a distinct aesthetic movement or theatrical phenomenon, arguing that each approach experimented with feeling "Cuban" in a unique way. Artists thrust Cuban being upon a stage where it was affectively transferred across difference to also become something beyond the reaches of the island and the diaspora. Avant-garde theatre gave these artists a potent set of tools to deterritorialize the stories, tropes, motifs, symbols, aesthetics, and performance practices associated with an extremely nationalistic theatrical tradition. Through avant-garde theatre, these theatre artists moved experiences particular to Greater Cuba into the realm of the "universal" human experience. Cuban avant-garde practice

Cubanizes the "universal" through its ways of reinterpreting modernisms and universalizes the Cuban by moving its perspective—its way of looking at the world—to the center. The act of positioning a Havana-Cuban, Miami-Cuban, or New York-Cuban expression as the voice of the "universal" human experience is a political act to assert citizenship in and belonging to the Western (U.S. American and European) dominated discourse of the humanities.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: AVANT-GARDE WITHOUT BORDERS

"Por ahí corre un chiste que dice: 'Ionesco se acercaba a las costas cubanas, y sólo de verlas, dijo: Aquí no tengo nada que hacer, esta gente es más absurda que mi teatro...'"

"A joke is going around here, which goes like this: 'Ionesco was approaching the Cuban coasts, upon having merely seen them, he said, 'Here I have nothing to do, these people are already more absurd than my theatre...'" —Virgilio Piñera

Quoted from his own introduction to his 1960 theatre anthology, *Teatro Completo* (*Complete Theatre*), the epigraph is one example of how playwright, poet, and novelist Virgilio Piñera (1912-1979) often moved the center of the avant-garde to Cuban shores. With this humorous gesture, he repositions Theatre of the Absurd as a quintessentially Cuban expression. In this dissertation, I argue that Piñera and other experimental Cuban artists gave substance to this joke; through their work, the avant-garde was made Cuban and Cuban theatre became avant-garde. I examine the ways that Cuban avant-garde theatre is much more than "Cuban." Specifically, my case studies retrace the routes of the Cuban diaspora that connected the experimental theatre scenes of Havana, New York, and Miami during the period subsequent to Piñera's generation, the late 1960s-1980s. The movement of Cubans between these three global cities in this particular corridor of movement is but a single glimpse into the many ways avant-garde theatre transculturated as artists from other shores comingled and transformed their practice. In this sense, artistic practice has a genealogy, a life that can be identified and, in part, retraced. Theories of translocality by anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai or James Clifford have challenged scholars to redefine culture through movement. The movement of borders, immigrants, refugees of economic and political crisis, as well as individual mobilities make the

culture of a given place a complex global tapestry.¹ The routes of Cuban movement and the itineraries of individual Cuban lives map conceptual routes where Cuban culture also became Latina/o, LGBTQ, and U.S. American. I argue that models of translocality ought likewise to inflect conceptions of avant-garde theatre in the mid-late twentieth century, restoring a sense of the Cuban mark to what is all too often a Eurocentric discourse. In order to do this, I identify and trace Cuban avant-garde practice as it transculturated with other approaches in the creation of U.S. American experimental theatre, and within that Latina/o theatre and LGBTQ theatre.

Cuban avant-garde practice runs in two different currents along a continuum of hybrid or transcultural art making. The first direction "Cubanizes," giving the ostensibly "universal" avant-garde movements of continental Europe a distinctly Cuban twist by reproducing experimental aesthetics within the affective spaces belonging to Greater Cuba (Cuba and its diasporas).² Universal in this sense is code for white or European in the Eurocentric discourse of modernism. The second direction experiments with traditional and iconic Cuban cultural forms in a way that positions them to intervene in this "universal" discourse philosophically, politically, and aesthetically. This experimentation with quotidian understandings of Cubanness resulted in a trans-Cuban way of speaking in defiance of Eurocentric or U.S. American colonial hierarchies of

¹ Appadurai argues that through innovations in communication technology and transportation, human movement increases with greater frequency throughout the last half of the twentieth century creating, ever more complex contact zones and transculturation. He proposes that the culture of a given city must be understood as consisting of many "ethnoscapes," rather than a planar and static notion of culture. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); James Clifford takes up translocality in his book *Routes*, where he argues that culture also becomes translocal through the itineraries of individuals, citing cases of world travelers among the residents of seemingly remote villages. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

² Ana López coined the term Greater Cuba to represent Cuba and its diaspora defined by cultural identity. Ana López, "Greater Cuba" in *The Ethnic Eye: Latino Media Arts*, ed. Chon Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 38-40. Lillian Manzor introduced the concept into the study of Cuban and U.S. Cuban theatre and performance.

culture. The two currents are a dialectical description of a single phenomenon; Cuban avant-garde practice Cubanizes the "universal" through its ways of reinterpreting modernisms and universalizes the Cuban by moving its perspective—its way of looking at the world—to the center, applying it to other experiences.³

I propose that the process of Cubanizing, or making avant-garde practice Cuban, staged the re-making of the Cuban self through performance. Following Piñera's cue, artists not only made avant-garde theatre Cuban, but the avant-garde theatre discussed in this dissertation gave artists the means to experiment with feeling "Cuban" in new ways. Artists thrust Cuban being upon a stage where it was affectively transferred across difference to also become something beyond the reaches of the island and the diaspora. Experimental theatre gave these artists a potent set of tools to deterritorialize the stories, tropes, motifs, symbols, aesthetics, and performance practices associated with an extremely nationalistic theatrical tradition. Cuban avant-garde theatre embodied much more than an intervention into Eurocentric and neocolonial cultural hierarchies. It embodied historical negotiations over *latinidad* (Latina/o-ness), nationality, race, gender, and sexuality in U.S. and Cuban contexts.

³ A note on my use of the term universalize: I am indebted to Queer theorist Jack Halberstam, who theorizes how Queer film can create a transgender gaze, meaning a film that assumes a transgendered audience. Halberstam writes that Harry Dodge and Silas Howard's film *By Hook or By Crook* (2001) "universalizes queerness without allowing its characters to be absorbed back into the baggy and ultimately heterosexist concept of the 'human.'" Halberstam's phrase "universalizes queerness" does not mean that the film makes all queer experience the same thing. Rather he means the film makes queer difference, in this case, transgender difference the defining quality of the film's gaze. It is in this same sense that I use universalize to mean that Cuban avant-garde artists, Piñera above all, made Cuban ways of seeing the world the organizing principles of the worlds they created onstage. Judith Halberstam. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies: Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 95.

My dissertation interrogates how the movement of artists between New York, Miami, and Havana shaped experimental theatre aesthetics, formed a shared discourse of theatrical thought, and introduced a particular vein of experimental practices into U.S. American theatre. This project is one of many possible narratives synthesizing the history documented by hundreds of feet of archival theatre materials in the Cuban Heritage Collection.⁴ I present performance historiographies for thirteen different theatre productions, organizing them each under one of three different aesthetic trends, none of which is mutually exclusive from the others: *creación colectiva* (collective creation), *teatro de la crueldad* (Theatre of Cruelty), and a practice that I christen “palimpsesting,” a way of performing transculturation through a layering of diverse cultural sources.⁵ The three approaches outline a large part of the avant-garde theatre of New York, Havana, and Miami from 1965-1991, creating a set of parameters defined by artistic practice rather than geography or identity. Certainly each trend produced a unique affect that emphasized and captured aspects of becoming Cuban, Latina/o and LGBTQ. But instead of focusing on individuals or communities, focusing on trends allows me to approach how this avant-garde theatre embodied and made palpable conflicting, fluid, and changing experiences of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. I assert that artists transformed categories of self through experimental theatre, as much as they were themselves shaped by these same categories.

Although each production spoke in relation to its specific historical and cultural context, and thus

⁴ Working with archivists like Lesbia Varona at the University of Miami, Dr. Lillian Manzor has assembled the complete records of many theatre artists, playwrights, and theatre companies that document the cross-border, hemispheric connections between Cuba and the U.S. Much of Manzor’s scholarship has been dedicated to establishing these connections, while grappling with the differences and tensions between Cuban artists on the island and in the diaspora. Her scholarship has already given shape to the discourse I am writing in, and thus, her writing also figures heavily into my bibliography.

⁵ Palimpsesting is my performative retooling of José Quiroga’s “Cuban Palimpsests,” a theory of Cuban cultural production. José Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

embodied transforming subjectivities in a unique way, I contend that strong resonances connect these processes across borders and distances in time, just as tensions around shared themes, like *machismo* (chauvinism) and Cubanness, make for striking points of differentiation.

If we are ready to come to grips with the fact that theatre in the United States and in Cuba has been shaped and created through hemispheric if not global cultural currents and artist mobilities, then how do we recognize the Latin American within the American, or the American within the Cuban? How do we begin to talk about these complicated and undeniable translocal processes that continue to make theatre in the U.S. what it is and theatre in Cuba what it is? What does this mean for theatre scholarship divided into geographic and ethnic area studies? Will those in LGBTQ, Latina/o, or African American theatre and performance increasingly feel the pressure to understand Cuban theatre history, as much as mainstream or white U.S. American theatre history? Will the names of Herberto Dumé or Magaly Alabau become as familiar as Ellen Stewart or R.G. “Roney” Davis of the San Francisco Mime Troupe for those studying the second wave avant-garde in the U.S.? My dissertation urges scholars of American theatre to pay attention to Cuban roots of the avant-garde branching from Cuban routes of mobility connecting theatre production across the hemisphere like rhizomatic channels. Conversely, *Cuban Routes* adds to Cuban theatre scholarship’s long time interest in the importance of the U.S. American avant-garde to understanding productions on Havana’s stages.⁶

In this introduction, I begin by positioning my study within three separate discourses of theatre and performance scholarship: Cuban Theatre Studies, Hemispheric Theatre and

⁶ James Clifford uses the homophone Routes and Roots to explain the importance of translocality in the globalizing world of the late twentieth century. I am retooling Clifford’s concept as a way to define Cuban avant-garde theatre as a translocal practice that also belongs to people and spaces beyond the island and its diaspora. From here forward in this dissertation I simply use the word routes to refer to avant-garde theatre’s roots in human movement. Clifford, 1-7.

Performance Studies, and Avant-garde Theatre Studies. Then I explain the stakes of my intervention, particularly in scholarship on avant-garde theatre. I define the key terms of my study, “Cuban,” “routes,” and “avant-garde.” I then outline the parameters of my project and describe my research methodologies. I conclude the introduction by briefly summarizing each of the following chapters.

Intersecting Cuban Routes of Avant-Garde Theatre

As a contribution to Cuban theatre history,⁷ my work is in conversation with historian Rine Leal, whose work fomented Cuban theatre history as a discourse from the 1960s-1980s. Leal’s books cover Cuban theatre history in every century from the Taino Areíto’s of pre-Columbian history to the theatre of the Revolution. He was the first director of *Conjunto*, the first journal of Latin American theatre, and he is one of the first scholars to promote the work of Teatro Escambray, a political theatre group that changed the shape of theatre of the Revolution. His work has inspired and fostered an innovative and challenging discourse.⁸ One cannot mention Cuban avant-garde theatre without evoking the work of Rosa Ileana Boudet, whose influence parallels Leal’s, but in twentieth century Cuban theatre history primarily. Boudet has written important books and edited key anthologies on avant-garde theatre of the Revolution

⁷ José Juan Arrom of Yale University was one of the first and foremost scholars of the study of Cuban dramatic literature. His work predates Leal’s and should be mentioned, but his work does not inform this dissertation directly. Juan José Arrom, *Historia de la literatura dramática cubana* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944).

⁸ For Leal’s work on the history of Cuban theatre before 1868 see Rine Leal, *La selva oscura: Historia del teatro cubano desde sus orígenes hasta 1868* (La Habana: Arte y Literatura, 1975); For history of Cuban theatre during the anticolonial wars of independence see Rine Leal, *La selva oscura: de los bufos a la neocolonia, historia del teatro cubano de 1868 a 1902* (La Habana: Arte y Literatura, 1982). For an anthology of Teatro Bufo as an anticolonial vernacular expression see Rine Leal, ed *Teatro bufo: Siglo XIX, antología, tomo 1 y 2*, ed. José Triana (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Cultura, 1975). For a structuralist take on the work of political theatre group Teatro Escambray see Rine Leal, *La dramaturgia del Escambray* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1978). For an encyclopedic take on Cuban theatre history see Rine Leal, *Breve historia del teatro cubano* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980).

from the 1980s to the present. As the first director of *Tablas*, the journal for national performing arts in Cuba, Boudet instilled an emphasis on avant-garde theatre that the journal still has today.⁹

There are many other Cuban theatre scholars whose work contributed to the flourishing of the field during the 1980s and 1990s that I engage with in this dissertation. However I do not have space to summarize their work here.¹⁰

⁹ For a discussion of the creación colectiva and nuevo teatro movement in Cuba see Rosa Ileana Boudet, *Nuevo teatro: una respuesta* (Habana: Editoriales Letras Cubanas, 1983). For a contextualization of avant-garde Cuban theatre of the 1990s see Rosa Ileana Boudet, "Prólogo," in *Morir del texto: diez obras teatrales*, ed. Miriam Ocaña Santiesteban, selection and introduction by Rosa Ileana Boudet (La Habana: Ediciones UNION, 1995), IX-XXXIV. For an introduction to the theatre of playwright Abelardo Estorino, Rosa Ileana Boudet "Estorino: decir la verdad y no engañarnos," in Abelardo Estorino, *Vagos Rumores y otras obras*, ed. Mayra Hernández Martínez (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1997), 5-14. On contributions of women to Cuban theatre history see Rosa Ileana Boudet, "La mujer en el teatro cubano: ¿una ausencia?" in *De las dos orillas teatro cubano*, eds. Heidurn Adler and Adrián Herr. (Madrid/Vervuert: Iberoamericana, 1999), 149-156. For a collection of essays on various cases from twentieth century Cuban theatre history see Rosa Ileana Boudet, *Teatro cubano: relectura cómplice* (Santa Monica, CA: Ediciones de la Flecha, 2011).

¹⁰ To begin Graziella Pogolotti is one of the pioneers that defined Cuban theatre of the revolution. Graziella Pogolotti, ed. *Teatro y revolución* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980). Vivian Martínez Tabares, whose work on Caribbean theatre, Indigenous theatre of the Americas, and contemporary Cuban and Latin American playwrights has been constant and influential. She was also the director of *Tablas* from 1987-1990. Alberto Pedro Torriente and Vivian Martínez Tabares, *Teatro Mío* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 2009); Vivian Martínez Tabares, *El teatro de la América indígena*, (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1993). Inés María Martiatu not only used her critical capacity to bring much needed attention to Afro-Cuban playwrights like Eugenio Hernández Espinosa and Tomás González, but according to Pedro Pérez Sarduy, as a critic Martiatu fostered and inspired Afro-Cuban artists to put their work forward. Pedro Pérez Sarduy, interview by author, Baton Rouge, LA, 17 November 2015. Her work on the vernacular theatre and on Santería-inspired theatre is singular and irreplaceable. Certainly her scholarship contributes to the history of Cuban avant-garde theatre, choteo, and the vernacular theatre, and I draw on it repeatedly throughout this dissertation. See Inés María Martiatu, "Teatro de dioses y hombres," in *Wanilere Teatro*, ed. Inés María Martiatu, (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2005); Ines María Martiatu, "Sin similitudina posible. Una mirada otra al teatro bufo cubano," *Bufo y nación: interpelaciones desde el presente*, ed. Ines María Martiatu (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2008); Inés María Martiatu, *El rito como representación: teatro ritual caribeño*. (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2000); Carlos Espinosa Domínguez is one of the most prolific critics of Cuban letters and Latin American theatre. His books, essays, and interviews on theatre of the revolution have informed my study. Works like his recompilation of interviews and other primary sources about Virgilio Piñera have added need resources on Cuban and Latin American

My understanding of Cuban avant-garde theatre is greatly informed by the work of playwright and critic Raquel Carrió, who has theorized a sustained history of experimental theatre that has integrated vernacular forms as a way of Cubanizing theatrical modernisms, starting with the Cuban Romanticists of the nineteenth century. She writes that Cuban modernism has operated through integration rather than reproduction or imitation of Eurocentric “universal” models. Through this integrative process, Cuban theatre transgresses and transculturates universal models as a means to stay current while giving these approaches a Cuban stamp.¹¹ The work of Omar Valiño on Teatro Escambray marks an important shift towards historiography in scholarship on theatre of the Revolution that greatly informs my work.¹²

The success of the Revolution in 1959 radically changed Cuban theatre history and its discourse. The Revolution quickly broadened the scope of experimental theatre, and a new generation of playwrights emerged, José Triana, Gloria Parrado, Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, Pepe (José) Carril, José Brene, Abelardo Estorino, and Héctor Quintero. However by mid-1960s, cultural policy was drastically changing and the parameters of what could be considered “revolutionary” cultural production narrowed greatly. Everything falling outside of this definition became suspect, or worse deemed antirevolutionary. Socialist realism was soon established as the dogma of the day, and the avant-garde went underground and into exile. This crisis split Cuban theatre discourse as many playwrights, artists, and critics ended up in exile. Critic José Escarpanter and playwright and director Julio Matas continued lively debates in U.S.-based Latin American forums, like *Latin American Theatre Review* about avant-garde

theatre for historians. Carlos Espinosa, *Virgilio Piñera en persona*. (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2003).

¹¹ Raquel Carrió, "Teatro y modernidad: 30 años después," in Adler and Herr, 29-31.

¹² Omar Valiño, *La aventura de Escambray* (Pinar del Río, Cuba: Ediciones Almargen, 2004).

playwrights Virgilio Piñera, Carlos Felipe, and José Triana at a time when the work of those playwrights was not being taught or discussed in Cuba.¹³ Playwright and critic Matías Montes Huidobro continued writing plays in exile even though limited space for Spanish language plays on U.S. American stages created precarious conditions for their production. His volume on theatre of the Cuban Republic (1902-1958) added a much-needed contribution to Cuban theatre history at a time when critics in Cuba disregarded much of this history because it is what came before.¹⁴

A new generation of U.S. Cuban theatre critics that emerged in the 1990s made important steps in merging the split discourse and found ways to include Cuban theatre of the diaspora in conversations about theatre happening in Cuba. Although it had a broad focus including Latin American and Latina/o theatre, *Ollantay Theatre Magazine* edited by Pedro Monge-Rafuls was an important venue for this work. Monge-Rafuls's independent press, also called Ollantay, printed key publications like the anthology *Teatro: 5 autores cubanos* edited by Rine Leal, which put the work of five key playwrights of the diaspora in conversation with Cuban theatre on the island.¹⁵ *Ollantay* contributor Lillian Manzor created new visibility for Cuban-American artists whose work is also a part of U.S. Latina/o theatre, like performance artist Carmelita Tropicana. The experiences, aesthetics, and politics of this 1980s-1990s generation of artists set them apart from Cuban exile playwrights. In her introduction to an anthology of plays by

¹³ Julio Matas, "Vuelta a *Electra* Garrigó de Virgilio Piñera," *Latin American Theatre Review* 22 (1989): 73-79; José Escarpanter, "Introducción," in *Carlos Felipe Teatro*, ed. José Escarpanter and José A. Madrigal (Boulder, CO: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1988), 11-63.

¹⁴ Matías Montes Huidobro, *El teatro cubano durante la república: Cuba detrás del telón* (Boulder: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 2004).

¹⁵ This was one of Leal's last works and it included a Spanish language translation of María Irene Fornés' *Fefu and Her Friends* (1978), *Fefu y sus amigas* (1995) translated by Fornés herself. Rine Leal, ed., *Teatro: 5 autores Cubanos*, (Jackson Heights, NY: Ollantay Press, 1995).

"usanocubano" (U.S. Cuban) playwrights, she argues that U.S. American theatre institutions like the Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Laboratory at INTAR in New York, and the Latino Theatre Workshop at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles shaped the work of this generation of usanocubano playwrights, like Caridad Svich and Nilo Cruz. Their work employs a hybrid aesthetic approach connecting Cuban theatre with U.S. American theatre in new ways.¹⁶

Manzor's work also engages a separate yet interconnected discourse of Hemispheric Performance Studies. My project aims to do the same. The work of Diana Taylor and the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics based at NYU is at the center of this discourse. Taylor's efforts, like the creation of multilingual performance studies journal *E-Misférica*, continue to shape the multidisciplinary field of Hemispheric Performance Studies. In her book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2005), she theorizes how repertoires of embodied knowledge performed as acts of transfer have been connecting performance across the hemisphere for centuries, and this is a central theoretical premise of my current study.¹⁷ Not only is my project in conversation with Taylor's theories, but my research serves to historicize its development. One of the theatre movements that I draw on to compare and connect the theatre of Miami, New York, and Havana called *creación colectiva* was one of the major impetuses during the 1970s and 1980s leading to the Hemispheric turn in the study of Latin American theatre and performance. During this period, events like Chicano Theatre Festival TÉNAZ's 1974 meeting in Teotihuacan, Mexico demonstrates how Hispanic and Latina/o theatre groups and institutions in the U.S. actively pursued dialogue with artists in

¹⁶ Lillian Manzor. "Más allá del guión: el teatro usanocubano," *Teatro cubano actual: Dramaturgia escrita en Estados Unidos*. Eds. Alberto Sarrín and Lillian Manzor (La Habana: Ediciones Alarcos, 2005), XIII-XVI.

¹⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

Latin America. Part of this connection came from the fact that scholars of Latina/o theatre, like Jorge Huerta, were forced to publish their work and network with Latin American theatre scholars because, barring special “minority theatre” editions, venues like *Theatre Journal* and *TDR* were closed off to them. Latina/o theatre was considered a part of a discourse on “foreign” culture.¹⁸ Although Latin Americanists like George Woodyard and Juan Villegas eventually created a welcome home for U.S. Latina/o theatre scholarship,¹⁹ the gate keeping active in University presses and academic journals goes to show how Eurocentrism, white parochialism, and the politics of race divided U.S. American theatre discourse during the 1970s and created dangerous obstacles for U.S. Latina/o theatre in its struggle to emerge as a subfield. Diana Taylor’s work provides the theoretical work to rectify the Latina/o and Latin American connection in academic discourse, not only as grassroots, but also as a part of a long history of cultural exchange across the hemisphere.

Although my work in Cuban and Latina/o theatre participates in this Hemispheric turn, I position my work mainly as an intervention into the discourse about the avant-garde. My project intersects with recent critical historiographies by James Harding and others that challenge the Eurocentrism of traditional conceptions of “the avant-garde.”²⁰ I see this dissertation in many

¹⁸ This gate keeping is also exemplified by Huerta’s struggle to find a publisher for his first monograph, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms*, now considered a definitive volume of Chicana/o and Latina/o theatre studies. See Adrián Vargas and Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, “En el teatro chicano actual los enfoques estéticos e ideológicos son mucho más claros,” *Conjunto 50* (1981), 51-52; also see Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms* (Ypsilanti, MI: Bilingual Press, 1982).

¹⁹ George Woodyard was the longtime director of Latin American Theatre Review, and Juan Villegas was the longtime director of GESTOS, perhaps the preeminent hemispheric theatre journal.

²⁰ For further reading about the current conversation about avant-garde performances, see James M. Harding and John Rouse, eds. *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006); James M. Harding, *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-*

ways a continuation of the conversation forged by James Harding and John Rouse's *Not the Other Avant-Garde* (2006), a volume that framed movements of avant-garde theatre in India, Africa, Japan and the Americas in their own right and not in imitation or reaction to continental cultural production. Scholars contributing to this volume brought the inclusive reach of performance studies into historiography of twentieth century avant-garde theatre. Their interventions do not take issue with European avant-garde artists so much as they challenge the historiography of the avant-garde written by scholars like Renato Poggioli, Matei Calinescu, and Peter Bürger,²¹ which impose similar hierarchies of aesthetic categories favoring the written text, reinforce "European cultural prerogatives," and organize their historical narratives with respect to a universal and linear teleology.²² The collection of essays document and argue that "the first- and second-wave avant-gardes (pre- and post- World War II) were always already a transnational phenomenon; and that the performative gestures of these avant-gardes were culturally hybrid forms that emanated simultaneously from a wide diversity of sources rather than from a European center."²³ Chapters by Adam Versenyi and Jean Graham-Jones position Mexico and Argentina, respectively, as important centers of avant-garde movements.²⁴ These interventions

Garde (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012); James M. Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s): Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

²¹ Renato Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987).

²² Harding and Rouse, 6

²³ Harding and Rouse, 16

²⁴ In connecting the experimental theatre of Buenos Aires with the volume's global historiography of the avant-garde, Graham-Jones argues that the particular contributions avant-garde theatre artists made during the *Nuevo Teatro* movement of 1960s Buenos Aires could not be subsumed into foreign imposed paradigms like "Theatre of the Absurd." Playwrights like Grisleda Gambaro, Osvaldo Dragún, Eduardo Pavlovsky were creating avant-garde theatre that combined abstraction and experimental aesthetics with direct commentary on a socio-political

parallel those made by Virgilio Piñera to a Eurocentric discourse of the avant-garde, as Mexico City's and Buenos Aires' experimental theatre artists demanded to be understood on their own terms. My discussion of Cuban avant-garde theatre assumes a similar stance towards Eurocentric historiography of the avant-garde in English-language theatre scholarship, first illuminating Havana as a center of avant-garde theatre in its own right. Only then can I discuss how Cuban avant-garde theatre emerged and transformed in relation to its ongoing exchange with European, U.S. American, Latin American, and Caribbean experimental theatre scenes.

The central contribution of my dissertation is to make a needed intervention in avant-garde theatre discourse through a Hemispheric Performance Studies approach, bringing Cuban Theatre Studies to shed light on the blind spots of a theatre history that too often has disregarded Latin American and Caribbean contributions to avant-garde theatre. In order to do this, I synthesize archival evidence that documents connections between the theatre scenes of Miami, New York, and Havana, while positioning well-known artists like Obie Award-winning author and director María Irene Fornés and Pulitzer Prize-winning author and director Nilo Cruz within the avant-garde traditions touching Greater Cuba. By doing so, this study addresses the absence of scholarship in English-language U.S. American theatre studies that discusses Latin American and U.S. Latina/o theatre as cutting-edge and artistically innovative vis-à-vis global and Western theatre movements.

Artists practicing avant-garde theatre on Cuban routes were not assimilating to U.S. American and continental practice; rather, they transculturated their practice with the continental

context. Marta Minujín's happenings dwarfed in scale the work of Allan Kaprow, one of her collaborators. Collective Teatro Grupo Lobo collaboration with The Living Theatre complicates the "origins" of ensemble-based work inspired by Artaud's writings. Jean Graham-Jones, "Aesthetics, Politics, and Vanguardias in Twentieth Century in Argentinean Theatre" in Harding and Rouse, 168-170, 179-181.

and U.S. American avant-garde approaches they encountered in diaspora, as well as in Havana. I contend that artists were conscious agents in how they used the approaches they adapted from a diverse range of cultural sources.²⁵ Ultimately, their efforts transformed their practice as it transformed theatre in New York and Miami. Havana artists had their own tradition of experimental theatre and strategies for Cubanizing the avant-garde, which they brought to new scenes across the globe and which became resources for minority voices to revise “universal” theatre. But this is not merely an argument about how Cubans changed theatre in Miami and New York. This is an argument about how hemispheric movements, connections, and exchanges of art and artists shaped and continue to shape avant-garde theatre transnationally.

Through avant-garde theatre, artists moved experiences particular to Greater Cuba into the realm of the "universal" human experience. The act of positioning a Havana-Cuban, Miami-Cuban, or New York-Cuban expression as the voice of the human experience is a political act to assert citizenship in and belonging to the Western (U.S. American and European) dominated discourse of the humanities. Such an act disrupts the white U.S. American or Eurocentric entitlement over that discourse while repositioning Cubans, Latin Americans, or U.S. Latinas/os as authors of that discourse.

Furthermore, by synthesizing the archival history of this hemispheric movement along the Atlantic coast corridor of the Cuban diaspora, a movement that connects the theatrical production of these three cities, my dissertation establishes the great importance of global centers across the hemisphere, like Havana, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, or Caracas, to the artistic production of global cities like New York or Miami. In other words, my dissertation adds to a

²⁵ My thinking is guided by Diana Taylor’s rethinking of transculturation and avant-garde theatre. See, Diana Taylor, “Transculturating Transculturation,” *Performing Arts Journal*, 13.2 (1991): 96-101.

body of emerging scholarship arguing that “American” theatre can no longer be placed in a vacuum that looks towards Europe and looks past Latin America and the Caribbean in search of the cultural fonts, which have fed its own theatrical production and theatre history. In the next section I begin my discussion by defining the central terms of this study: “Cuban” of Cuban avant-garde practice, “routes,” and “avant-garde.”

Defining Cuban Routes of Avant-Garde Theatre

Defining "Cuban" is a formidable endeavor as the cultural currents crossing, circling, or drifting from the Cuban archipelago are expansive. In defining what is Cuban, I will elucidate the diversity of those currents since my aim is to complicate the limits of *lo cubano* (what is Cuban) and therefore, its center as well. In order to orient unfamiliar readers, I will begin that definition with a brief history of Cuba.

Cuba is located on the largest island in the Caribbean and its surrounding keys and smaller islands. José Juan Arrom and Rine Leal both begin Cuban theatre history with the Areíto, a Taíno “song-dance” celebration that included hours of feasting, singing, dancing, and storytelling.²⁶ I mention this because before Columbus landed in Cuba in 1492, beginning a long project of Spanish conquest and settlement, the island was settled, conquered, and contested between the Guanahatabey, the first known inhabitants of Cuba, the Ciboney, who controlled the western half of the island, and the Taíno, who conquered and ruled the eastern part of the island, along with all of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico.

Spanish colonization meant the decimation of indigenous populations, although one account states that Taíno and Ciboney Indians were counted among whites starting in 1770.²⁷ For centuries much of the population of the island resided in Havana in the west and Santiago in

²⁶ See Leal, *La selva oscura* and Arrom.

²⁷ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (London: Fan Books, 2001), 14.

the east, which were important harbors for shipping routes between the continent and Spain. These ports also held geopolitical military significance for control of the waters of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. Aside from those ports, the island remained largely uninhabited until the nineteenth century, when the Haitian revolution brought sugar production and a plantation system to the island. Congo, Carabalí, and Arará who were brought to Cuba in slavery, some of whom were emancipated, comprised Cuba's black population prior to the Haitian Revolution.²⁸ African cabildos de nacion (councils of nation) were cultural associations that bolstered ethnic identity of distinct African cultures for slaves and free people of color.²⁹ Slavery increased with sugar production. As planters increased the population of African slaves on the island, new African populations were introduced to Cuba.³⁰ Most notably at this time, many Lucumí (Yoruba) were brought to Cuba in bondage. Their impact forever changed Cuba, where today creolized Yoruba religion has become a national rite of passage, especially in Havana and Matanzas.

Abolitionist movements coincided with Cuba's Romanticist movement of the 1840s.³¹ From that period on antislavery movements were often couched in anticolonial politics. The literature and particularly vernacular theatre played an important role in articulating Cuban

²⁸ Judith Bettleheim. "Negotiations of Power in Carnaval Culture in Santiago de Cuba," *African Arts* 24.2, Special Issue: Memorial to Arnold Rubin, Part I (1991), 68.

²⁹ Solimar Otero, *Afro-Cuban Diasporas in the Atlantic World* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 112-119.

³⁰ Fernando Ortiz defines Cuban history through a transculturation Indigenous, African, and Iberian cultures that transformed one another through the production and cultural use of tobacco. Ortiz opposes the careful and meaningful cultivation of tobacco to the sugar plantation, which he connects to slavery, capitalism, industry, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1963), 54-55.

³¹ Doris Sommer, *Proceed with Caution, When Engaging Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 195.

national consciousness.³² In 1868 armed resistance against Spain broke out on a large scale. The struggle for independence lasted 30 years and spanned three separate wars. The final war of independence was successful because exiles in New York, Tampa, and Key West organized by José Martí coordinated their efforts with revolutionary forces on the island led by Afro-Cuban General Antonio Maceo.³³ Afro-Cuban revolutionaries were fighting to create a nation where they would no longer be oppressed by a racial order of white supremacy, but that dream never came to fruition.

The intervention of the United States in 1898 during the Spanish-American War usurped Cuban independence and led to a period of transition overseen by U.S. forces.³⁴ The first president of Cuban Republic elected in 1901, Tomás Estrada Palma, was the first of many U.S. backed candidates.³⁵ Beginning in 1902, the Cuban Republic was politically turbulent with many corrupt leaders, and U.S. interests were always represented in the Cuban government. For example, the Machado government embezzled millions from the lottery during the onset of the Great Depression. A decline in sugar prices following the Depression destabilized the Cuban economy. These factors led to the Revolution of 1933, which removed Machado from power. One of the leaders of the revolt was Fulgencio Batista. From 1933 until the Revolution, Batista held key appointments in the Cuban government as a military officer and as a politician. He backed candidates that protected U.S. interests, as well as his own.³⁶ Batista was elected president himself in 1940, serving one four-year term. He ran again in 1952. When his chances to win the

³² Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba 1840-1898* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 16.

³³ Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 23-30.

³⁴ Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983).

³⁵ de la Fuente, 62-63.

³⁶ Thomas, 352-372.

election seemed bleak, Batista took over the government by force setting up a military dictatorship and dissolving Cuban democracy. Widespread discontent led to the Cuban Revolution,³⁷ which slowly built momentum following Fidel Castro's failed attack on the Moncada Barracks the following year in 1953.

During the Republic, Cuba had close cultural ties to the United States. Cuba also had strong cultural connections to Europe as well. Both cultural exchange with U.S. American and European artists is evident in the avant-garde theatre of the Republic. One of the first Cuban avant-garde directors, Luis Baralt, brought Nicolai Evreinov's *Storming the Winter Palace* to Havana in 1936.³⁸ Spanish actress Margarita Xirgu who produced and starred in productions of Federico García Lorca's tragedies had extended tours to Cuba, as did Sarah Bernhardt.³⁹

Starting in the 1930s, Cuban playwrights experimented with a wide range of modernist approaches. By the 1940s, playwrights used avant-garde theatre to interrogate and demystify Cubanness. For example in *El Chino*, Carlos Felipe uses Pirandellian metatheatricality to dramatize the paradox of insularity, a dilemma created by life on an island where, as Rine Leal puts it, an arrival only leads to another departure.⁴⁰ José Escarpanter points out that the play's protagonist, Palma, reenacts a scene from her past, not to recover her lost lover, but to incorporate the lost past in the present.⁴¹ Whereas this proves to be impossible, it is something that Palma compulsively reenacts. Flora Díaz Parrado experimented with symbolism inspired by Strindberg and Maeterlinck to distort Cuban costumbrismo. Rolando Ferrer drew on Afro-Cuban

³⁷ Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 45-49.

³⁸ Montes Huidobro, 322.

³⁹ Raúl R. Ruiz, Fernando López, and Francisco Rey, *La huella cubana de Sarah Bernhardt* (Matanzas, Ediciones Vigía, 1998).

⁴⁰ Rine Leal, Prólogo: Ausencia no quiere decir olvidado," *Teatro: 5 autores cubanos*, ed. Rine Leal, (Jackson Heights, NY: Ollantay Press, 1995), ix

⁴¹ Escarpanter, 37

spirituality to recast tragedy and tragic fate with supernatural forms belonging to Cuba. Inspired by Lorca, he critiqued Cuban machismo through the drama of tragic heroines.⁴² These are some of the ways playwrights used vernacular forms to transform avant-garde approaches through Cuban practices.

As I approach a definition of the Cuban stamp in avant-garde theatre, it becomes imperative to ask how does *cubanía* (performed Cubanness) make itself in performance? Judith Butler has argued that the performative "is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse" through citation.⁴³ Like performatives, theatre makes meaning through the repetition of established conventions. By co-opting the authority these conventions impart, theatre innovates, contests, and transforms said conventions, the truth they seek to establish, and the worlds they create. However, as Diana Taylor has rightly asserted, unlike performatives, theatre exceeds discourse. Theatre is both a discourse and what lies beyond it, "*lo performativo*," an exchange that includes embodied knowledge and experience not reducible to language and written documents alone. Taylor's theorization of "the scenario" and its transmission in Latin American theatre clarifies her intervention. In observing the transmission of the scenario, she writes, "we can draw from various modes that come from the archive and/or the repertoire—writing, telling, reenactment, mime, *gestus*, dance, singing. The multiplicity of forms of transmission reminds us of the multiple systems at work. One is not reducible to another; they have different discursive and performative structures."⁴⁴

Cuban theatre is no exception to Taylor's observations, but like much of Cuba's cultural production, its theatre is transcultural. In fact, it is markedly transcultural, meaning Cuban

⁴² Montes Huidobro, 355-360, 539-544.

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 171.

⁴⁴ Taylor, 31-32.

theatre often calls attention to transculturation as a way of creating a distinctly Cuban expression. Transculturation is the innovation and transformation of cultural forms that takes place at the intersection of two or more cultures. As a process of cultural reinvention, transculturation also works through the citation of conventions and the transmission of embodied knowledge, citing and transmitting consciously and selectively between multiple cultures.⁴⁵ Cuban theatre has highlighted transculturation in a number of ways. *Teatro vernáculo* (vernacular theatre) represents transculturation through the interaction of its social and racial type characters. The plays of Eugenio Hernández Espinosa or José Brene, dramatize the syncretized rituals of Santería. In the avant-garde theatre I discuss in this dissertation, metarepresentational practices like *Verfremdungseffekt* (defamiliarization) or *choteo* (Cuban grotesque humor)⁴⁶ consciously comment upon transculturation in the world of the play, the play's aesthetics, or the representational logic of the production. Although Cuban theatre engages with the larger discourse of Western theatre, by large, its artists rely on transculturation to make their mark in that discourse.

If becoming Cuban results from transculturation of particular cultural fonts touching Cuba and its diaspora, and if Cuban culture is comprised of cultures from every region of the globe, locating roots on every continent, then the Cuban stamp is not about origin, but about process. My use of the phrasing Cuban *routes* is a way to acknowledge the translocality of Cuban avant-garde theatre as a cultural genealogy *rooted* in movement.

⁴⁵ Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation theorizes that cultures in contact transform one another. Even power in relationships of colonial subjugation, the colonizer is changed by contact with the colonized. A retooling of acculturation, transculturation better explains Caribbean cultures and cultures of the Americas characterized by the coexistence of heterogeneous cultural elements within one creolized fabric. Ortiz, 99. Quoting Ángel Rama, Diana Taylor points out that transculturation is not random, but is a selective process. Taylor, 104.

⁴⁶ I define this term at length in Chapter Two, 68-70.

According to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, *translocality* concerns the performance of locality beyond the geographic space of its origin where the means of its reproduction necessarily shifts in contact with new communities and cultures, new resources and limitations.⁴⁷ Appadurai first uses the term translocality to describe locality as it is performed within the tourism industry, creating complex relationships between the nation-state, tourists, and what is presented as “local” culture for outsider tourists and anthropologists.⁴⁸ The production and reproduction of locality also becomes translocal in cases where human movement across borders and shifting frames of reception create challenges and instabilities for the reproduction of *neighborhoods*, Appadurai’s term for any social form where locality is experienced. Performance studies scholar Alicia Arrizón defines translocality as “a change in the relationship among territory, identity, and political affiliation. The movement of people across borders... is a key characteristic of process—labor migration and diasporic community-building, for example—in which translocality emerges beyond the limitations of fixed territory and hegemonic grounds.”⁴⁹ Like transnationality, translocality then is the product of multiple kinds of border crossing that deteriorates the supremacy of the modern nation-state. Where human mobility traverses

⁴⁷ Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai first defines translocality in his book *Modernities at Large*. To begin, he defines “the local” as a new base unit for the location of culture in cosmopolitan spaces where many cultures continuously interact and transform alongside one another, and especially during the late twentieth century when globalization and technologies of transportation were accelerating transcultural interaction. In these spaces, which comprise the majority of the world’s population, fixed common-sense links and naturalized connections between geography, national borders, and identity were rapidly being deterritorialized. Appadurai defines *locality* as a “phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of context.” For Appadurai *locality* is experienced as affect, and thus not necessarily spatially situated, although it can reproduce itself spatially with material outcomes. Appadurai, 178-9, for translocality see 192.

⁴⁸ Appadurai, 192

⁴⁹ Alicia Arrizón. *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 18

geographical, regional, and national borders, migrants and refugees carry their multiple localities with them as micro-cultures in relation to or in tension with their national culture of origin, and, despite challenges and instabilities that they face, enact these localities within or alongside the new localities they traverse.

In the theatrical productions I analyze in my dissertation, translocality illuminates how movement defines themes, aesthetics, performance traditions and embodied practices. Translocality refers to at least four distinct cultural outcomes resulting from human movement. In the first sense of the term, all places are translocal through ongoing human movement and the mobility of community members in a globalized world.⁵⁰ The second outcome is a culture that retains ties to many places past and present. Translocality in this sense names the embodied and culturally embedded histories of colonialism, specifically the cosmopolitan transculturation that took place as a response to conquest, slavery, and indentured servitude that forcefully created a world where the cultures of different localities comingled. The third sense is the result of intercultural cosmopolitanism created by more recent human movement. The fourth type of translocality directly relates itinerancy and aesthetic as the layering of affectively experienced localities. Through these four outcomes, translocality defines how contemporary and historical movement shapes aesthetics through the affective reproduction of co-existing spaces.

⁵⁰ The first sense of translocality is exemplified in the notes of Amitav Gnosh, an anthropologist working in a remote Egyptian village. Gnosh writes that he was surprised to find, “‘villagers with passports so thick that they opened out like ink blackened concertinas... And none of this was new: their grandparents and ancestors had relatives that had migrated too, in much the same way as mine had in the Indian subcontinent—because of wars, or for money and jobs, or perhaps simply because they got tired of living simply in one place.’” Regarding Gnosh’s notes James Clifford observes, “This ethnographer is no longer a (worldly) traveler visiting (local) natives... Instead his “ancient and settled fieldsite” opens onto complex histories of dwelling and traveling, cosmopolitan experiences.” Clifford, 1-7.

Having assembled most of the theatre collections at the University of Miami and knowing the contents of the archive well, Lillian Manzor suggested to me that a translocal approach would find traction in a comparative study of the theatre history of Havana, Miami, and New York. In part, my project is an attempt to explain how the archives of these three cities are interconnected. Retracing the interconnections reveals that Cuban avant-garde theatre does not only belong to the island, but also to the routes (material, cultural, migratory, remembered, and imagined) that reach beyond the island, some in the direction of New York, some in the direction of Miami, and many others leading elsewhere around the globe.

Translocality informs my method of comparative analysis, and therefore, the structure of my dissertation. In each chapter I focus on the production of Cuban avant-garde theatre as the reproduction of localities of experimental affect transmitted through a specific repertoire of approaches to the stage and embodied practice. I compare instances of each trend from Havana, Miami, and New York. For example in Chapter 3, I discuss *creación colectiva* as a specific aesthetic approach that recreated affective spaces of nationality as experiences of *latinidad*.

Comparing the theatre of three cities rather than the theatre of two countries is more than a rhetorical gesture to move beyond the obvious Cold War antagonism built between Cuba and the U.S. from the 1960s through the 1990s. By viewing the Cuban avant-garde theatre of Havana, Miami, and New York side by side, I frame the theatre productions in this study as expressions of a singular shared cultural practice. These separate sites were connected by material transnational migrations and embodied knowledge transmitted through a range of experimental approaches to the stage. It is astonishing how much theatrical exchange continued across national borders during the Cold War, and I take pause to appreciate the power of cultural

practice to render a very real political divide porous, flexible, and changeable. In this sense, theatre embodied the ongoing connections that the national politics of both countries sought to obscure.

By emphasizing Cuban avant-garde theatre's translocality, I show how it was remade through a shared practice that was rooted in movement. This focus allows me to embrace the fact that an artist's national background does include or exclude them from this history. Non-Cuban directors, actors, designers, and playwrights that shared a practice with Cuban avant-garde artists in New York and Miami during the 1970s and 1980s also traversed Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre. Translocality gives me a way to theorize how one could become a Cuban avant-garde artist in New York, or how a Chicana/o theatre collective from California was a part of Cuban avant-garde theatre in Havana. And these realities would be excluded through a comparative analysis of two nations or even a transnational analysis of the artistic production of the Cuban diaspora.

If avant-garde theatre is defined as anti-illusionist or anti-*gesamtkunstwerk* by Brecht, an assault on the senses by Artaud, the deconstruction of "universal" theatrical conventions by Buenaventura,⁵¹ or as a lofty art of "tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow" by Lorca,⁵² then since the beginnings of *teatro bufo* (short comic farce with music) in the nineteenth century, there has

⁵¹ Also the "traumatic cross-assimilation of "decadent" and "popular" cultural expressions from a postcolonial center. Enrique Buenaventura, "Theatre and Culture," trans. Joanne Pottlizer, *TDR: The Drama Review* 14.2 (1970): 151-156, reprinted in Richard Drain, *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 306-9.

⁵² Federico García Lorca, "The Prophecy of Lorca," *Theater Arts* 34.10 (1950), 38-39, reprinted in David Krasner, *Theatre in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 205. Lorca looks to the future in this speech, but in "Juego y teoría del duende" (1930) he looks to the present rooted in the past or tradition, as if muertos or muses touched the artists through affect. Federico García Lorca, "Juego y teoría del duende" in Drain, 263-5.

always been something avant-garde about Cuban theatre.⁵³ However, my use of the term *avant-garde* will refer to a set of interrelated late modernist approaches that Cuban artists played an important role in creating and that form the basis of movements like *teatro del absurdo* (Theatre of the Absurd), *teatro de la crueldad*, and *creación colectiva*. Many of these approaches were created with close attention to the plays of Lorca, Piñera, Brecht, theories of Artaud, and the staging techniques of Luis Baralt, Erwin Piscator, Francisco Morín, Adolfo de Luis, and Andrés Castro.⁵⁴ When and where I use the term avant-garde, it indicates art-making that necessarily challenged the artistic order of its historical moment in some way. In making a rupture with “tradition,” the avant-garde stops the progressive time of modernity, while it hurls itself forward in another direction. Over time these approaches in and of themselves may cease to be avant-garde, but they remain experimental as they challenge any audience accustomed to literal

⁵³ Carrió, 29-30.

⁵⁴ The works of Brecht and Piscator were foundational to the aesthetics of these ensemble-based, collectively generated performances, which created theatrical defamiliarization (*Verfremdungseffekt*) through the changing of roles by ensemble actors and the use of song as a diegetic modality. Theatre collectives of the 1970s were also indebted to the 1960s experimental collectives that were inspired by the writings of Antonin Artaud, like the Living Theatre. However, another key early twentieth-century continental artist whose work is rarely mentioned in relation to experimental political theatre collectives is Federico García Lorca. As a director, García Lorca led his own theatre collective, La Barraca (The Barrack) through rural Andalucía to bring modernist renderings of Calderón and Lope de Vega to populations with little access to theatre in the metropolitan centers like Barcelona and Madrid. Lorca's plays, much like Brecht's, employ folk music and ballads to create a diegetic modality, but towards a poetic rather than political commentary. Lorca drew from the entire gamut of turn of the century avant-garde movements to continuously interrupt the present dramatic action of his plays with abstract expression and adornment in costumes, masks, allegorical and symbolic characters, dance, puppetry, ritual, and poetic verse. Defamiliarization is just as much a part of Lorca's theatre as it is a part of Brecht's. The role of Lorca's theatre in shaping the aesthetics "Political Avant-Garde Theatre" collectives of the late twentieth century must be given more weight. In comparing the production history of experimental theatre of Havana, Miami, and New York, Lorca's theatre was produced at greater frequency during this period than Brecht's, although Brecht's plays also hold a significant presence. "Teatro Estudio," Archivo Fotográfico de la Casa Editorial Tablas-Alarcos, Habana, Cuba; INTAR Theatre Records, n.d., 1966-2004, Sub Series 3: Theater Posters, undated, 1978-2005, University of Miami, Cuban Heritage Collection; "Imágenes de Lorca Program," Teatro Avante Collection, Box 1, University of Miami, Cuban Heritage Collection.

representations and the conventions of realism, an artistic approach that makes itself invisible through its painstaking imitation of time as it is conceived in the dominant ideology of Western modernity. *Avant-garde* relates to the newness of art in a particular historical moment, whereas *experimental* refers to an approach that remains non-conventional.

Another definitive quality of the term avant-garde in this dissertation is its challenge to “universal” theatre as an invisibly white theatre. María Irene Fornés, like the many artists belonging to Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre, challenged racial, gendered, and cultural hierarchies by crafting her plays with respect to “universal” questions, exposing the white supremacist patriarchal values undergirding the reluctance of critics to accept a woman’s experience or a person of color’s experience as “universal.”⁵⁵ Fornés’s challenge is necessarily *avant-garde*, especially in New York during the 1960s-1980s, and it exemplifies the other side of the coin of a paradigm of universal humanism that obscures its white middle class heterosexual male center.⁵⁶ In theatre history this same white male center has occluded the intrinsic relationship between avant-garde art in the United States and people of color, women, and LGBTQ artists. Perhaps no venue exemplifies that minoritarian theatre was inseparable from the avant-garde than Ellen Stewart’s cultivation of avant-garde theatre at the La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, where the bilingual Latino theatre collective the Teatro Dúo Theater was in residence during the mid-1970s.⁵⁷ The history of La Mama historicizes that the very creation of a

⁵⁵ María Irene Fornés, “Creative Danger” *American Theatre*, September (1985), 13.

⁵⁶ My thinking on universal humanism here is guided by Jill Dolan’s theory of theatrical spectatorship and dominant ideology, in which every spectator’s individuality is erased as they are subsumed into a singular mass that is assumed to represent the status quo. Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 1-2.

⁵⁷ Michael Smith, “Theatre Journal,” *The Village Voice*, 6 Dec 1973, Manuel Martín, Jr. Papers, 1972-2000, Box 1, Folder 11, “Programs, Clippings, and Photographs: Francesco: Vida y Milagros de los Cenci,” University of Miami, Cuban Heritage Collection; “Spanish-English

play with a protagonist of color was avant-garde, as it challenged the established conventions of representation and spectatorship in New York during the 1960s-1980s. Across the Americas, artists of color have been at the front lines of experimental art movements, at least since the Harlem Renaissance, which was arguably the first multidisciplinary avant-garde movement in the United States.

Avant-garde theatre is always a challenge to its present context. Avant-garde theatre breaks with mainstream trends and conventions as it glances to the future, beckoning new possibilities and changes in trajectory. Yet it rarely changes the dominant path, and its manifestos, plays, and production ephemera become the residue of abandoned utopias. The legacy of avant-garde movements resides in continued practices, the majority of which remain experimental. Perhaps more importantly, the writing of theatre historians determines whether or not movements are remembered or are even recognizable as avant-garde. Eurocentric inertia and the politics of race, gender, class, and sexuality in theatre history have kept Cuban theatre isolated from the avant-garde. My dissertation is a challenge to that inertia and those politics.

Reading Three Archives, Three Decades, and Three Cities

Three separate archives ground the parameters of this project in understudied primary materials that form the foundation for new and needed performance historiographies. Those archives are the Cuban Heritage Collection's vast theater archives, The Photographic Archive of Tablas-Alarcos Press in Havana, and Chicana theatre artist Ana Olivarez-Levinson's personal photo diary. The Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami holds the complete records of many theatre artists, playwrights, and theatre companies documenting the hemispheric connections between Havana, New York, and Miami. The Photographic Archive of Tablas-

Ensemble Theatre, Inc." Duo Theatre Folder. Theatre Ephemera Collection Box 2, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries.

Alarcos Press is the archive for Cuba's national theatre and performing arts journal and leading theatre studies press. The archive is repository for photos, ephemera, and documents left by theatre critics and researchers after they finished their projects. Ana Olivarez-Levinson took many trips to Cuba during her time as a member of Chicana/o theatre collective Teatro de la Esperanza. She lent me her photos and gave me permission to scan them in order to write this historiography.

Within those archives, my choice to study avant-garde theatre is as much about my politics as it is about scholarly significance. Choosing Cuban, Latina/o, and LGBTQ experimental theatre and choosing to call it avant-garde are political choices. It is my aim to include Cuban, Latina/o, and LGBTQ theatre history in a discourse from which it is often excluded. My project dispels the same Eurocentric tendencies in avant-garde theatre history that Harding, Rouse, Versenyi, Graham-Jones, and others have challenged. Furthermore, "avant-garde" is an ideal frame for the goals of this study because avant-garde theatre is a global ecosystem of artistic expression that questions all borders in its content, form, and transnational collaboration. This dimension of my study in particular draws on queer theory to explain the important transformations of self and transgressions of categories of race, nationality, gender, sexuality, and class that this theatre embodied and that its history conveys. Avant-garde theatre on Cuban routes did not merely question national borders, but also the temporal confines of Western modernity, as well as the boundaries of the self, making Queer Studies an appropriate discourse from which to write historiography about productions that staged Cuban, Latina/o, and LGBTQ being and becoming.

The field of Cuban studies determines the date range of this dissertation 1965-1991. This frame is not only necessary in order to meaningfully include Havana's theatre in the discussion,

but also a way to show how what happens in Havana affects New York and Miami. Whereas most of my case studies take place in the 1970s and 1980s, my study begins in 1965 because the year marks the beginning of the Decenio Gris (The Grey Years). During this period, changes in Cuban cultural policy and narrowing parameters that defined the role of art in the Revolution isolated the Cuban avant-garde from state theatres.⁵⁸ It was also during the mid-1960s that the state instituted an ideological campaign against antirevolutionary behavior. Authorities included homosexuality in a list of social ills that the Revolution wanted to eliminate, in short, sanctioning the persecution of sexuality. This campaign further isolated avant-garde artists, many of whom left Cuba for exile. Some of these exiles continued artistic practice in New York and Miami changing experimental theatre in those cities. Those who remained in Cuba lived a life of “inxile,” living on the island in a state of erasure or absence, alienated from the means of having an artistic life. At times avant-garde inxiles found ways to continue their practice underground in unofficial salons, or in rural areas outside of the capital.

The Mariel Boatlift of May-October 1980 takes place in the middle of my period of study. Mariel began with an act of political dissidence and ended with the denigration of a courageous generation of exiles.⁵⁹ It marked a period of increased human movement between Havana and Miami especially with the beginning of family visits to Cuba starting just the year before. Many avant-garde playwrights and theatre artists left Cuba during Mariel, fleeing the repressive climate of the Grey Years. Yet it was also at this time when cultural policy in Cuba

⁵⁸ For an overview of cultural debate from period see Graziella Pogolotti, *Polemicas culturales de los 60* (La Habana: Editorial Culturales, 2006); For a perspective of a marginalized “inxile” playwright see Antón Arrufat, *Virgilio Piñera: Entre él y yo*, (La Habana: Ediciones Union, 1994), 42-45.

⁵⁹ Julio Capó, Jr., "Queering Mariel: Mediating Cold War Foreign Policy and U.S. Citizenship among Cuba's Homosexual Exile Community, 1978–1994," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29.4 (2010): 78-106.

began to relax. Raquel Carrió marks the 1980 return of the international Havana Theatre Festival, which took place in January that year as the return of the avant-garde to Havana.⁶⁰ The Rectification policy of 1986 introduced major changes to theatre that benefited the avant-garde. First it split the Ministry of Culture into five separate councils, including one for scenic arts, and it started a “proyectos” system of funding project by project.⁶¹ Omar Valiño argues that these changes to the funding structure actually boosted theatre production through 1993.⁶² And this was the case despite the fact that these four years coincided with the onset of the Special Period, which was an extreme economic crisis in Cuba lasting from the dissolving of the Soviet Union in 1989 until the start of the new millennium.⁶³ My final case study, Teatro Obstáculo’s *Ópera ciega* (1991) is a representative example of this prolific period that Valiño discusses.

The movement of the avant-garde away from Havana’s theatres to other cultural centers outside of the country, to other places on the island like the mountains of Escambray, or to underground salons in private homes pushes the parameters of my study beyond geographic boundaries. The trajectory I chart in *Cuban Routes* retraces artistic movements and the movement of artists, which cross the terrains of time, language, affect, and cultural memory. Along this flight, Cuban avant-garde practices appear at different times in different places. Such a trajectory demonstrates that Cuban avant-garde theatre is much more than Cuban, Caribbean,

⁶⁰ Carrió, 37.

⁶¹ Randy Martin, “Cuban Theatre under Rectification: The Revolution after the Revolution” *TDR* 34.1 (1990): 44-45.

⁶² Omar Valiño, “3,” in *Escena Cubana Actual: Oscilaciones, Notas Sobre Teatro, Institución, y Espacio Social*. Matanzas: Ediciones Vigía, 2001).

⁶³ Frederik’s book is an amazing account of anthropologist studying theatre in Santiago and Guantánamo, Cuba during the Special Period. For a definition of the Special Period see pages 3 and 18. Laurie A. Frederik, *Trumpets in the Mountains: Theatre and the Politics of National Culture in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). For an account of theatre of Havana in the Special Period see Yael Prizant, *Cuba Inside Out: Revolution and Contemporary Theatre* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013).

and Latin American. Although it is all of these things as well, these areas keep scholars of U.S. American theatre from recognizing how closely Cuban theatre is connected to their sites of study.

In writing the history of these productions, I interpret the plays and archival manuscripts the productions are based on as scripts for performance. I draw on archival records and in-depth oral history interviews with surviving artists to augment and guide my interpretation of the scripts. Specific choices of artists evident in interview transcripts, program notes, reviews, and design sketches illuminate my representation and analysis of past performances. However, archival documents are not self-evident and objective.⁶⁴ Archives offer sources, like clippings, notes, letters, essays, and theatre reviews that need to be critically assessed and historically contextualized.⁶⁵ In addition to critical assessment and proper historicization, I analyze videos, scenic design sketches, photographs, and creative writing through cultural and literary theory. Oral history interviews that I conducted inform this dissertation and differ from archival documents in the kinds of challenges they present. While they bridge some of the gaps in the historical record, the artists' memories supplement, rather than substitute missing archival documents. The interview produces a unique kind of primary source document—one created through a direct collaboration between the artist and myself as a researcher. Accounting for memory is another vital consideration when analyzing transcripts, as remembering the past is a

⁶⁴ EH Carr, "The Historian and His Fact," *What is History?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961) http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/carr-edward_historian-and-his-facts-1961.html web 10 April 2014

⁶⁵ Tom Postlewait, "Theater Events and Their Political Context: A Problem in the Writing of Theatre History," *Critical Theory and Performance*. Eds. Reinelt, Jan and Joseph Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 198-222.

fluid and subjective experience.⁶⁶ Interviews document how this theatre history lives on with the artists. In collaboration with the artists, I synthesize their memory with the memory of the archive, highlighting tensions and contradictions in my historiography.

Mapping Cuban Routes of Avant-Garde Theatre

The aforementioned shift in the Revolution's cultural policy during the mid-1960s, which shaped Cuban theatre and Cuban theatre studies on the island and in diaspora, also gives shape to the organization of this dissertation. No event could better define the crisis of the mid-1960s than the Theatre Seminar late in 1967 when experimental artists were divided on how to continue under the new mandates by the ministry of culture. As a result of the meeting, Vicente Revuelta's group Teatro Estudio, split with thirteen artists following Sergio Corrieri into the Escambray Mountains to form El Grupo Teatro Escambray and the remaining twelve artists reorganizing themselves as Los Doce, a laboratory theatre group. Jaime Gómez Triana writes this split took on mythic proportions in the history of Cuban theatre, and the "bifurcation of feeling" developed into a division between teatro de sala (Studio Theatre/Laboratory Theatre) and creación colectiva (Collective Creation/Theatre for Social Change).⁶⁷ Gómez Triana delineates that the latter trajectory follows the Latin American vein of experimental theatre, and the former follows the European and U.S. American vein. Both paths were prevalent in Cuba, yet both were traversed with a Cuban cadence.

My dissertation draws on the distinction outlined by Gómez Triana of creación colectiva vs. teatro de sala to organize my comparison of the avant-garde theatre history of Havana, Miami, and New York. The last two chapters in my dissertation compare productions

⁶⁶ Paul Ricoeur, "Memory and Imagination," *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004), 6, 21.

⁶⁷ Jaime Gómez Triana, *Victor Varela: Teatro y Obstáculo* (San Antonio de los Baños, La Havana: Ediciones Unicornio, 2003), 43-45.

participating in these aesthetic movements from each city. In Chapter Three I present performance historiography for *creación colectiva* across these three cities and Chapter Four does the same for *teatro de la crueldad*, as a key style of the European and U.S. American vein of Cuban avant-garde theatre. But first in Chapter Two, I present a hypothesis for identifying the Cuban stamp in the avant-garde theatre. Giving a strong emphasis on examples from Miami and New York, the productions compared in this chapter bring into sharp relief the Cuban “vein,” as theatre artists working in diaspora glanced towards Cuba find a center of gravity for their art-making. To summarize, the theatre presented in Chapter Two emphasizes the Cuban vein, Chapter Three emphasizes the Latin American vein, and Chapter Four the European/U.S. American vein. All three veins are necessary to understanding the avant-garde theatre connecting Havana, New York, and Miami, as the avant-garde theatre of any one of these cities embodied all three veins.

Chapter Two, “Performative Palimpsests: Towards a Definition of Cuban Avant-Garde Practice,” studies the movement of experimental artists that were marginalized during the Sovietization of cultural production in Cuba during the mid-1960s. Many avant-garde artists in Havana were also persecuted because of their homosexuality, forcing Cuban avant-garde theatre underground and into exile. Those who left Cuba for other shores had a tremendous impact on the theatre of New York, Caracas, Miami, Paris, and elsewhere. Retooling José Quiroga’s literary theory, I propose that Cuban theatre transculturates in diasporic contexts by *palimpsesting*. Palimpsesting is multitemporal and translocal layering that reflexively performs Cuban avant-garde theatre’s displacement and transformation in new contexts. The theatre of experimental director Herberto Dumé and playwright José Corrales exemplifies the importance of palimpsesting to understanding how avant-garde theatre on Cuban routes drew from a

transnational genealogy of embodied practice to create early LGBTQ and Latina/o theatre in New York. Staged in a basement theatre in midtown Manhattan, Dumé and Corrales's 1971 production *La faramalla* (*The Sham*) was a radical adaptation of French playwright Jean Giraudoux's *La Folle de Chaillot* (*The Madwoman of Chaillot*) (1945). The production reinterpreted the abstract farce through the comedy of Cuban vernacular theatre and the camp of New York's Stonewall era drag scene, recasting the principal roles as drag personas of theatre's greatest divas, Sarah Bernhardt, Elenora Duse, and Margarita Xirgu. Histrionic monologues taken from the "failed" women of Tennessee Williams's theatre interpolated the performance text. *La faramalla* enacted Cuban theatre's intimate connection with U.S. American and European theatre as it layered these "foreign" worlds within its own to create something totally new for New York's pan-Latino Spanish language theatre audience.

Chapter Three, "‘Feeling Brown’ Like You: El Nuevo Teatro, Creación Colectiva, and Trans-Latino Affect," follows the history of the creative process called *creación colectiva* (collective creation), which dominated Latin American theatre during the 1970s and 1980s. Artists using *creación colectiva* employed experimental ensemble-based methods to create original dramaturgy, appropriated popular cultural forms familiar to campesino (rural peasant or farmer) and proletariat audiences, and critiqued the status quo with the aim to change social reality through artistic practice. As a hemispheric movement, *creación colectiva* was built upon cross-border collaboration among theatre companies across Latin America through tours and international theatre festivals. I argue that *creación colectiva* was a performative apparatus that allowed ways of being Colombian, Cuban, Chicano, or Nuyorican to become felt as ways of

being Latino(*americana/o*).⁶⁸ Building from the theory of José Muñoz and Juan Flores, I call this phenomenon trans-Latino affect. In the works for theatre that I discuss in this chapter, trans-Latino affect is paradoxically felt as both ludic and painful. The ludic is necessary for the movement and interaction across borders to take place, a kind of movement that creates Latina/o and Latino(*americana/o*) ways of being in performance. Pain accompanies this movement, especially when that movement is related to a person's geographic migration across borders, which is often the result of economic or political crisis.

In Chapter Four, "Undoing Cubanness and Heterosexist Nationalisms in Teatro de la Crueldad," I present the performance historiography for several productions that Cubanize Antonin Artaud's theories of the Theatre of Cruelty. These productions enacted a ritual destruction of Cubanness through theatricalized acts of sadomasochism, subverting the biopolitics and ideological institutions that order Cuban subjectivity, like the petit bourgeois family, machismo, and the New Man of the Revolution. I draw on Queer BDSM studies to theorize performatives of renaming and recognition in teatro de la crueldad that enacted the undoing of ideological institutions and the national subjects they prescribed to create a space where new kinds of subjectivities were provisionally embodied in performance.

Together these three chapters build upon one another to argue that avant-garde theatre on Cuban routes was a resource for staging renegotiations of national and cultural belonging. In New York, avant-garde theatre on Cuban routes provides a window into the structures of feeling

⁶⁸ Latino(*americana/o*)s is an orthography that I propose to represent Latinas/os in the U.S. and Latin Americans together. Very similar to Diana Taylor's orthography Latin/o Americans, Latino signifies the concept of Latino ways of being, as theorized by Muñoz, within the Spanish word for Latin American, latinoamericano. I hope that by spelling "Latino" in English and "American" in Spanish represented by italics, my orthography will estrange both signifiers for an English reading audience.

that organized the emergence of LGBTQ and feminist Latina/o identities challenging patriarchal Latino cultural nationalisms. Production histories in Miami show theatre's role in the renegotiation of nationality as 1.5 and second generation youth felt more American than their parents' generation, and artists challenged *machista* models of Cubanness that reproduced violent paradigms of a divided nation. In Havana, avant-garde artists marginalized on account of their sexuality reinscribed their fugitive status as a position of power from which to lay bare the hypocrisy of a Revolution that reinforced bourgeois patriarchal norms of gender and sexuality. Avant-garde productions in Havana deconstructed the misogyny within the gendered institution of the model citizen, staged the scapegoating of women as tragedy, and reclaimed the Revolution as a space for women's empowerment. The productions of Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre echoed specific ruptures with nation, patriarchy, and modernity. Each rupture opened a space for new kinds of becoming. Cubanness, latinidad, and sexuality are my chosen points of analytical entry and comparison, but they also chart a trajectory of becoming embodied by avant-garde theatre that expanded the limits of what it means to be Cuban. *Cuban Routes of Avant-Garde Theatre* pays careful attention to the many intersections of culture, time, space, affect, identity, and practice, as well as the continual crossing of those intersections. This movement inspires and informs my research practices, especially the methods, parameters, and structure of my project. Where have these Cuban routes come from and to where do they lead? What are the footprints that their travelers have left behind?

CHAPTER 2. PERFORMATIVE PALIMPSESTS: TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF CUBAN AVANT-GARDE PRACTICE

The connection between two theatre productions separated by time and space exemplifies what I see as a defining thread of Cuban avant-garde theatre. The first production is INTAR's *Swallows*, a docudrama with music written and directed by Manuel Martín, Jr. (1934-2000), which premiered off-Broadway in 1980. Martín created *Swallows* from interviews he conducted with Cubans citizens and Cuban exiles. The piece staged the painful rift between Cubans on the island and exiles in the U.S. by dramatizing personal stories, like the story of a woman who leaves Cuba by hijacking a boat only to see her daughter drown when the boat capsizes, the testimony of a rural farmer whose life is greatly improved by agrarian reform, or the memories of a young man whose parents force him to emigrate on his own as a child through Operation Peter Pan. One of the stories depicted in the "docu-musical" recounts the events surrounding the second production—national premiere of *Los mangos de Caín (Cain's Mangos)* (1965) by Abelardo Estorino. *Los mangos* is one of Cuban theatre's most well known one-act plays by one of its most prolific playwrights. The play premiered in Havana as an independent production directed by Magaly Alabau (b. 1945). Independent productions were extremely rare in revolutionary Cuba, but after having been investigated, tried, and expelled from the Escuelas Nacionales de Arte (National Art Schools) on account of her sexual orientation, Alabau and other Gay and Lesbian artists who were removed from state schools and blacklisted from participating in state sponsored productions had no other means of art making, so in 1965 they formed a group called Teatro Joven to stage Estorino's first experimental play.¹

¹ The School of Theatre is a translation of La Escuela de Arte Teatral in Cubanacán, now called Instituto Superior de las Artes (ISA), *Swallows*, 30-32, Also see Magali Alabau, "Recordando a Manuel Martín: Teatro Dúo," in *Celebrando a Virgilio Piñera, Tomo I*, eds. Matías Montes Huidobro and Yara González (Miami: Plaza Editorial, 2013), 131; Lillian Manzor, "De

In *Swallows*, the characters do not represent the entire performance of the play itself, but rather focus on depicting a real-life scene at the box office, outside of the theatre where *Los mangos* was performed. In the scene from *Swallows*, Señor Machado, the President of the Communist Youth League, shows up after the curtain of a sold out performance to inform María, the character based on Magaly Alabau, and her co-producer Milton that their production must close immediately. In the scene, María and Milton protest, but the President quickly dismisses their efforts:

Milton: Everything has been done legally. Very respected artists have donated their time and money for this production and...

President: We know exactly where the money came from. We also know that everyone involved in this production was expelled from The School of Theatre, and that each and everyone is also a homosexual. Which means this play should close at once... Compañera, the Revolution is trying to purify the arts from immoral and unnecessary aberrations. You and your kind have a distorted view of life that shouldn't be presented before the masses.²

While the President's homophobic diatribe literally digresses into gibberish, María turns towards the audience (the interviewer) and says:

There was no coherence in anything that he was saying. It was repetitious language, so repetitious that it didn't make any difference if one tried to interfere. I think unconsciously we did the play to defy the authorities. The play had to do with Cain—a true revolutionary—and his encounter with authority, in this case Adam, and furthermore, with the Lord. Since we were under strict censorship, the plot could be interpreted as having a second and very political meaning. The Lord could be Fidel, Cain, a dissident. Now, I also realize that this play was the first Gay production to be done in Cuba. We did it to demonstrate that in spite of everything we could survive. The play closed that afternoon, never to open again. Since I had already tried suicide, exile was the next best thing, so in 1966 I left for the U.S.³

homosexual marginado a ñángara: Virgilio Piñera en las tablas norteamericanas (1969-1987)," *Celebrando a Virgilio Piñera. Tomo II*, eds. Matías Montes Huidobro y Yara González Montes (Miami: Plaza Editorial, 2013), 35.

² Manuel Martín, Jr. *Swallows*, unpublished manuscript. Manuel Martín, Jr. Papers, 1972-2000, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, 31.

³ Martín, 31-32.

Alabau's lived experience, as it is represented by María's story in *Swallows*, was not uncommon among avant-garde theatre artists in Havana from the late 1960s through the 1970s. Many of Havana's experimental theatre artists were also sexual minorities and were ostracized from state companies on account of their sexuality, in addition to their intellectual and artistic investment in abstract approaches and socially critical expression. Although many experimental theatre artists never chose life in exile, much of Havana's avant-garde theatre community left Cuba during this period, and soon after made a huge impact on experimental theatre scenes around the globe, including New York, Miami, Paris, Caracas, and Los Angeles.

In this chapter, I propose several critical lenses that help to identify the imprint of the Cuban avant-garde, before I demonstrate, in the following chapters, how it fades into U.S. Latina/o theatre, U.S. American theatre, or how the interaction with the scenes of New York and Miami affected Havana's experimental theatre. Below, I analyze four productions as key examples of Cuban avant-garde theatre taking place in three distinct cities: Teatro Joven's *Los mangos de Caín* (Havana 1965), Grupo Prometeo's production of *Electra Garrigó* (Havana 1948), a later staging of *Electra Garrigó* by the production company RAS (Miami 1978), and Dumé Grupo Estudio's production *La faramalla* (New York 1971).⁴ These three scripts are

⁴ *La faramalla* and RAS's *Electra Garrigó* were staged by Cuban directors that had worked on these productions in Havana before immigrating to New York. In the case of Morín, *Electra Garrigó* was his most famous work and he had staged it multiple times before in Havana. In the case of Dumé, he had acted in Giraudoux's *La Folle de Chaillot* in Cuba, and had planned to stage the Giraudoux's play with Grupo Guernica before leaving Cuba. *Electra* in Miami and *La faramalla* featured a pan-Latina/o casts and addressed majority pan-Latina/o publics. In this sense, these productions were Latina/o theatre. Because the directors were extending directly from a repertoire that was established in Havana, I will discuss these productions as Cuban avant-garde theatre, with the acknowledgement that the Cuban stamp was already becoming porous, especially in the case of Dumé Grupo Estudio.

initially adaptations of texts from other shores across the Atlantic. Avant-garde artists Cubanized these "universal" plays and stories as they universalized their Cuban perspective in the ordering principle of the world of the play.

In order to contextualize these productions within the history of Cuban avant-garde theatre, I discuss the role played by the Grey Years, a period of intense censorship spanning from the late 1960s through 1970s, in the emergence of Cuban avant-garde practice in Miami and New York. A result of the Sovietization of cultural policy, criticism and practice during the Grey Years ostracized the work of artists like playwright Virgilio Piñera and director Francisco Morín, labeling avant-garde movements originating during the Republic as suspect towards revolutionary goals and thus inauthentic as national expression. The case studies I have chosen for this chapter exemplify the movement of Cuban avant-garde practice underground and into the diaspora during this period.

The first production history I present is Teatro Joven's national premiere of Abelardo Estorino's *Los mangos de Caín*, a production that was censored by Revolutionary authorities on account of the sexuality of the theatre artists. As discussed above, the production history of this controversial premiere was dramatized in INTAR's 1980 production of *Swallows*. I do not see the connection between these productions as an anomaly, but rather an instance of translocal intertextuality that helps me to theorize (hypothesize really) how Cuban avant-garde practice transculturates in diasporic theatrical contexts, which is the reason why I present this performance historiography first. Retooling José Quiroga's theory of Cuban palimpsests, I purpose a hypothesis that *palimpsesting* is a distinct practice belonging to Cuban avant-garde theatre. To summarize Quiroga's theory, as a result of political conflict and economic crisis, Cuba is continuously dismantled and dispersed in fragments of cultural production, fragments

that, surfacing on other shores, reproduce Cuba elsewhere. Reemerging in the diaspora or on the island after a period of time, residual fragments recreate Cuba much like a palimpsest, by layering Cuba of the past within the present.⁵ Seen as a performative, palimpsesting is an interpretive lens that can help to identify Cuban avant-garde theatre's footprint in diasporic contexts. Palimpsesting frames the Cuban avant-garde's way of "Cubanizing the universal/universalizing the Cuban" as a practice, and in this light, gives theatre scholars a new way to recognize the Cuban stamp in avant-garde theatre that has taken place outside of Cuba.

Having theorized the interpretative lens of palimpsesting, I present the work of playwright Virgilio Piñera and director Francisco Morín, whose collaboration on *Electra Garrigó* in 1948 is often remembered as the reinvention of avant-garde theatre as a Cuban expression.⁶ Through this brief history, I highlight the complex artistic layering in Piñera and Morín's breakthrough to argue that palimpsesting has long been a resource for making avant-garde theatre Cuban. I then analyze two case studies in order to demonstrate felicitous and infelicitous instances of palimpsesting. The case studies are the 1978 Miami production of *Electra Garrigó*, also directed by Francisco Morín, and the 1971 New York production of *La faramalla* directed by Herberto Dumé. These productions are two examples of Cuban avant-garde practice staged by two of Cuban theatre's greatest experimental directors in the diaspora.

⁵ José Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

⁶ Matías Montes Huidobro, *El teatro cubano durante la república: Cuba detrás del telón* (Boulder: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 2004), 429-430. The last half of the Rosa Ileana Boudet's anthology about the theatre journal *Prometeo* from the 1940s and 1950s is dedicated to reviews and program notes from the production. Rosa Ileana Boudet, *Los años de la revista Prometeo* (Santa Monica, CA: Ediciones de la Flecha, 2011); Carlos Espinosa, *Virgilio Piñera en persona* (La Habana: Ediciones Unión: 2003); Sarah J. Townsend, "Electra Garrigó," in *Stages of Conflict: A Critical Anthology of Latin American Theatre and Performance*, eds. Diana Taylor and Sarah J. Townsend (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

Fuera del juego: Censorship and *fidelismo*

Following mandates by Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara in their respective essays "Palabras a los intelectuales" (1961) and "El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba" (1965), the Ministry of Culture developed schools, publications and funded artists to cultivate the new art created by and for the New Man of the Cuban Revolution.⁷ Part of this movement was not only the creation of new art that expressed the socialist reality, but a "dismantling" of the old, which leaders framed as a threat to the revolutionary project. Modernist art became suspect in this climate, even though before the Revolution succeeded, the avant-garde aided the Revolution in its ideological rise and critique of the bankrupt bourgeois social order. The new cultural policy constructed the Revolution in opposition to "foreign" influence, while at the same time; it mystified foreign influence within its own philosophy and policy. For example, as Rafael Rojas points out, the essay by Che Guevara, an Argentinian activist and intellectual, resembles the works of Sartre and Fanon whose ideas of decolonization and underdevelopment strongly affected the way the state began to define the Revolution's role in regard to history during the 1960s.⁸

By the time Guevara's essay was published, ideology against writers and intellectuals was already being translated into governmental policy as a state led witch-hunt for "antisocials" and "antirevolutionaries." Graziella Pogolotti's recompilation of essays on cultural policy and the Revolution published between 1963 and 1966 presents a striking glimpse into heated debates between Cuban critics, authors, filmmakers, musicians, and artists over how to translate the project of transforming society into cultural production. Even at this early point in the

⁷ Lillian Guerra, "Gender policing, homosexuality and the new patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965-70," *Social History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 273.

⁸ Rafael Rojas, *El estante vacío: literatura y política en Cuba* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2009), 31-35.

Revolution, the risk presented by dogmatism, witch-hunts, censorship, and the mistakes of the Soviets in cultural policy were discussed openly. Avant-garde musician Juan Blanco and filmmakers Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutierrez Aléa were some of the strongest voices in opposition to dogmatism and warned against the institutionalization of strict criteria for judging what art could be considered revolutionary, or worse, what art would be deemed antirevolutionary.⁹ On this last point Juan Blanco in particular raised concerns over the too quick demonization of "abstract" art.¹⁰ As Graziella Pogolotti points out in her analysis, even though abstract art was praised by many revolutionary critics, socialist realism because of its immediacy and explicit message became more readily adaptable to the larger project of social transformation, she writes:

las rápidas transformaciones de la sociedad y sus consecuencias en el campo de los valores acentuaban las expectativas en torno a su repercusión en el ámbito de la creación artística que, por primera vez, dejaba de estar confinada a exiguas minorías. Esas demandas reforzaban una visión que privilegiaba una percepción ideológica explícita en tanto reflejo de los fenómenos de la inmediatez. Entroncaba así, sin proponérselo, con los preceptos del realismo socialista.

the rapid transformations of society and their consequences in the area of [social] values emphasized expectations with respect to their repercussion in the field of artistic creation which, for the first time, was no longer confined to a small minority. These demands reinforced a vision that privileged an explicit ideological perception as much as it reflected the phenomena of the immediate reality. Without it even being proposed, [this vision] connected with the precepts of socialist realism.¹¹

⁹Julio García Espinosa, "Vivir bajo la lluvia," in *Polémicas culturales de los 60*, ed. Graziella Pogolotti (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2006), 11-12; Tomás Gutiérrez Aléa, "Notas sobre una discusión de un documento sobre una discusión (de otros documentos)" and "Donde menos piensa salta el cazador... de brujas," in Pogolotti, 95-96, 111.

¹⁰ Juan Blanco, "Los herederos del oscurantismo," in Pogolotti, 5-7.

¹¹ Graziella Pogolotti, "Los polémicos sesenta," in Pogolotti, xix.

Artists with fidelity towards cultural movements of the Republic, even if they incited revolutionary fervor, became suspect in the changing environment of revolutionary Cuba.¹² This nationalistic stance, which quickly grew into reactionary dogma, created serious conflict and disillusion for intellectuals, who had shared long term cultural exchange with intellectuals in cosmopolitan centers across the Americas and Europe.

Works of Cuban writers that contradicted the new revolutionary dogma were also censored. For example, Antón Arrufat's 1968 national award winning adaptation of *Seven Against Thebes* was later censored when it was read as and critiqued for treating the Revolution as a struggle between two brothers rather than as a struggle between a neocolonial metropol and a neo-colony. Polinice, the traitor who returns from exile to challenge his brother Eteocles, is buried in Thebes; his errors are presented sympathetically and become a source of empathy.¹³ Poet Heberto Padilla's book of poetry *Fuera del juego* expressed the compromised condition of the poet in revolutionary Cuba and won the national prize for poetry. However, before the book could be published it came under criticism from officials, and Padilla was forced to publically apologize and confess to being an antirevolutionary. The incident created international controversy with intellectuals outside of Cuba decrying this humiliating act of censorship.¹⁴

¹² By the 1970s, even Rine Leal changed his position to critique artistic production of the Republic as suspect of foreign and U.S. imperialist influence Rine Leal, *Breve historia del teatro cubano* (Habana: Union, 1980), 128. Compare with how the work of Grupo Prometeo is characterized in *En primera persona* (Habana: Instituto del Libro, 1967), 46-48, 130-131, 277-280.

¹³ Many interpreted the drama as alluding to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. Rafael Rojas, *El estante vacío: literatura y política en Cuba* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2009), 39.

¹⁴ Laurie Frederik, *Trumpets in the Mountains: Theater and the Politics of National Culture in Cuba*, (Raleigh, N.C., Duke University Press, 2012), 73-75.

Homosexuality was also persecuted as part of the campaign for cultural transformation, which stereotyped homosexual men in its propaganda as decadent bourgeois parasites.¹⁵ The expulsion of Allen Ginsberg from Cuba in 1965 for his open support of El Puente (a group of writers that critiqued the state for authoritarianism and homophobia) is evidence of the onset of the persecution of homosexuals following the dogmatization of homophobia in revolutionary ideology.¹⁶ That same year, the Communist Youth closed Teatro Joven's production of *Los mangos de Caín*, experimental director Herberto Dumé left Cuba, and Cuba opened its UMAP work camps for the rehabilitation of those citizens it deemed to be antisocial—evangelical Christians, "long-haired" counter culture subversives, and those thought to be "homosexual." As Lillian Manzor has argued, it must be recognized that the Revolution did not invent homophobia, but by integrating it into its dogma, the new government institutionalized homophobia in contradiction to its mission to eliminate the bourgeois values in Cuban society.¹⁷

In 1971, Padilla was arrested, and the Sovietization of Cuba's academic and cultural production deepened significantly, creating greater restrictions and narrowing the parameters of what was considered revolutionary cultural production.¹⁸ The repressive cultural policies of the late 1960s and 1970s forced many intellectuals and avant-garde artists underground and into exile. Writers like José Corrales, and directors like Francisco Morín, Miguel Ponce, Malagy Alabau, and Herberto Dumé left Cuba for life in exile between 1965 and 1970, bringing Cuban avant-garde practice to scenes in New York, Miami, and Paris. Avant-garde authors who remained in Cuba like Piñera, Arrufat, José Triana, Reinaldo Arenas, René Ariza, and Héctor Santiago were censored and ostracized during the 1970s. In his memoir *Virgilio Piñera: Entre*

¹⁵ Guerra, "Gender policing," 273, Manzor, "De homosexual marginado a ñángara," 32-34.

¹⁶ Rafael Rojas, 29

¹⁷ Manzor, "De homosexual marginado a ñángara," 33.

¹⁸ Rafael Rojas, 10, 66, 75-79.

él y yo, Antón Arrufat reports that Piñera labeled this period the "muerte civil" (civil death).

Where the state has control over cultural production, to be ostracized is near absolute erasure.

Arrufat writes:

Nuestros libros dejaron de publicarse, los publicados fueron recogidos de las librerías y subrepticamente retirados de los estantes de las bibliotecas públicas. Las piezas teatrales que habíamos escrito desaparecieron de los escenarios. Nuestros nombres dejaron de pronunciarse en conferencias y clases universitarias, se borraron de las antologías y de las historias de la literatura cubanas compuestas en esa década funesta.

They stopped publishing our books. The published [editions] were removed from bookstores and surreptitiously retired from the shelves of public libraries. The theatre pieces that we had written disappeared from the stages. They stopped uttering our names in conferences and university classes, and [our names] were erased from Cuban anthologies and histories of literature that were composed in that dismal decade.¹⁹

Arrufat describes how some marginalized authors in Havana kept their work alive during the 1970s through a tertulia (writer's salon) that met at Abelardo Estorino's house in the Vedado neighborhood. The tertulia that met regularly was structured in three parts. In the first part, the authors read their new work to the other writers and artists gathered in the living room. In the second part, they moved to the dining room to share a spaghetti dinner cooked by Virgilio Piñera, and in the third part they returned to the front room to further discuss the work that was presented.²⁰

Arrufat explains that the writers of the salon, including Piñera, had an inclination that this regime of censorship would not last forever. Not all Cuban writers who were ostracized during this period shared in Arrufat's hopeful inclination. Arenas, Ariza, and Santiago were imprisoned and each of them later left Cuba for exile during the Mariel exodus in 1980. José Triana, who

¹⁹ Antón Arrufat, *Virgilio Piñera: Entre el y yo* (La Habana: Ediciones Union, 1994), 42.

²⁰ Arrufat, 44-45.

Arrufat mentions as a regular member of Estorino's tertulias also left during the Mariel Exodus.²¹ Yet as Arrufat had predicted, cultural policy began to shift again in Cuba throughout the 1980s, and avant-garde works of the 1960s by authors that had fallen out of favor returned once again to Cuban stages through the efforts of Teatro Buendía, Teatro Estudio, and others. Tragically, Piñera never witnessed this changed cultural environment before his untimely death in 1979. The movement of writers and theatre artists off the island at the beginning and at the end of the Grey Years forever changed Cuban theatre history and my discussion of the period here is not meant to pass moral judgment on a revolutionary policy of the past that has long since been abandoned. Rather, because of the large exodus of writers, actors, and directors, I am obligated to historicize this moment in Cuban theatre, which consequently changed theatre in Miami and New York.²²

To refer once again to José Quiroga, his critique focuses on how the palimpsest, as a literary approach, particularly expressed the fractured subjectivities of embittered Marxists and dissidents, exiles and in-xiles of the Special Period in Cuban cultural production, both on the island and in the diaspora.²³ However, Quiroga's first example of *La loma de Angel* by Reinaldo

²¹ Triana left during this period, however not through the boatlift at the port of Mariel.

²² It should also be noticed that state presses in Cuba have since published criticism of the Grey Years, see Graziella Pogolotti, *Polemicas culturales de los 60* (La Habana: Editorial Culturales, 2006), Lillian Manzor, "Estorino en las tablas internacionales," *Tablas 2* (2005): 55-66. Beginning in 2007, the state led Struggle Against Homophobia demonstrates that the government has more recently adopted policies challenging heteronormativity. The campaign was created by a state agency called CENESEX (Center for Sexual Education) that has been created to lead the study of gender and sexuality and to address social disparities and discriminatory practices. CENESEX has institutionalized male to female and female to male sex changes. However, these static definitions of gender identification and sexuality run the risk of creating new disparities for transgender Cubans.

²³ The Special Period begins in Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, which ended aid to the island and plummeted Cuba into an economic crisis lasting throughout the 1990s. It was a period of major economic restructuring accompanied by concessions in stringent socialist policies, and, as Quiroga's study reveals, a serious back pedaling in ideology that sought to correct the failed course charted by the Revolution's teleological history of progress. In temporal terms, the Cuban Revolution was paddling in circles with no ability to predict how long it would

Arenas, one of Cuba's first literary "in-xiles," dates the palimpsest before the Special Period as a "queer approach."²⁴ I echo this point and emphasize that the palimpsest as a literary and artistic practice became a powerful expression of intellectual exiles and in-xiles during the 1970s, particularly in the case of Queer²⁵ authors and artists.

Throughout this dissertation, I will use "Queer," to describe an inclusive and ambiguous grouping of social outcasts. In this sense, Queer does not exclusively define itself vis-à-vis sexuality and rights of sexual minorities, while these remain central concerns and organizing principles.²⁶ I choose to use the term Queer because it emphasizes the state of being outcast or marginalized, which is an important aspect of the experience of the artists I discuss here, especially as it relates to the conditions of their art-making, as well as the content of their art. However, Queer is far from a perfect term especially considering the stigma, which it still carries regardless of efforts to reclaim the word to signal an inclusive consciousness that contests heteronormativity, homophobia, transphobia, etc. Another drawback to the term is that it subsums historically defined and fought for political identities like "Gay" and "Lesbian" under a single umbrella. At the same time, identities like Gay and Lesbian also become problematic and can be neocolonial when imposed upon transnational subjects or movements for sexual minority

be stuck in this "limbo," before it regained its sense of progression towards a destined future. Quiroga, *Palimpsests*, 4-8.

²⁴ Quiroga, *Palimpsests*, ix

²⁵ A note on Queer vs. queer: throughout my dissertation I use capital "Q" Queer when referring to the field of Queer Studies, Queer identity, or, in some cases, a person who has experienced marginalization because of their sexuality. All other instances of the term appear with a lowercase "q."

²⁶ This use harkens to the inclusive communities of belonging envisioned by radical manifestos of the Third World Gay Revolution or the mapping of the New York Correspondence School, as discussed by José Muñoz. José Esteban Muñoz, *Crusing Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, New York University Press, 2009).

rights in Latin America and the Caribbean.²⁷ Queer, with its broad inclusivity allows for more wiggle room when dealing with historical subjects that did not connect their sexuality so succinctly to a political identity, but at the same time were marginalized because of their sexuality. However, in places where subjects have chosen the terms Gay or Lesbian to describe their history, as is in the case of *Swallows*, I opt to use "Gay and Lesbian," rather than "Queer." Finally, I choose the term Queer in places throughout the study because the queer theory of José Quiroga, Jack Halberstam, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, and José Muñoz form the basis of this study's theorization of the Cuban stamp in avant-garde theatre as a way of performing difference and creating community through affect.²⁸

In the following case studies of Teatro Joven's 1965 production of *Los mangos de Caín* and its remembrance in INTAR's 1980 production of *Swallows*, Teatro Prometeo's 1948 premiere of *Electra Garrigó*, RAS's 1978 restaging of *Electra Garrigó*, and Dumé Teatro Estudio's 1971 production of *La faramalla*, we see that a large intersection of Cuban avant-garde theatre was LGBTQ theatre. Although the latter is not the central focus of this chapter, it is impossible and unproductive to distinguish the two categories of theatre as mutually separate. Teatro Joven's premiere of *Los mangos* and the dramatization of its censoring in the 1980 premiere of Manuel Martín Jr.'s *Swallows* demonstrate that Cuban avant-garde theatre has been

²⁷ For more discussion on the Neocoloniality or Hegemony of U.S. Gay and Lesbian culture in a global Latin@ Americas see José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); also see Manolo Guzmán, *Gay Hegemony/Latino Homosexualities* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁸ As Manolo Guzmán points out queer theory in the U.S. very much began with Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherie Moraga's edited volume of "Third World Feminism," *This Bridge Called My Back*. The volume brings to light the urgency to recognize the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and race, a critique that greatly informs the basis of my present study. It is this kind of inquiry that makes queer theory so important to understanding Cuban avant-garde practice in the U.S. Manolo Guzmán, *Gay Hegemony/Latino Homosexualities*, 3, 11-12, 23.

an important method of making Queer communities in Havana, atleast since the 1960s, and that Queer artists arriving in New York before the Stonewall Riots were a part of the creation of LGBTQ theatre in the U.S.

Los mangos de Caín and Swallows

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, poet, actor, and avant-garde theatre director Magaly Alabau left Cuba for exile in 1966 after her staging of *Los mangos de Caín* was censored because she and the other artists producing the show were Gay and Lesbian. After meeting Manuel Martín, Jr., who was not a political exile but left Cuba in the 1950s to study acting with Lee Strasburg in New York, the two formed El Teatro Dúo Theatre, which staged avant-garde theatre in two languages. In the late 1960s, Alabau and Martín staged avant-garde work by Cuban authors in small performance spaces in the lower east side. They organized with Max Ferrá and other members of ADAL (Agrupación de Arte Latinoamericano) to form INTAR (International Art Relations) in 1970. Martín wrote and directed INTAR's first show when it moved to theatre row, *Carmencita*, a Nuyorican take on Bizet's *Carmen*. *Swallows* is just one of many collaborations between Alabau and Martín. Manuel Martín, Jr. wrote dozens of plays with music that were produced Off-Broadway and directed even more. Most notably *Union City Thanksgiving*, a kitchen sink realism piece that reflects the Cuban-American experience, was praised along with *Swallows* by Ana María Simo as the only Latina/o theatre in New York in the early 1980s to address issues of sexuality, and exceptions to the rule regarding Latina/o theatre's overwhelmingly patriarchal slant.²⁹

²⁹ Ana María Simo, "Inside the Patriarchal Play," Manuel Martín, Jr. Papers, 1972-2000, Box 5, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

In *Swallows*, the character María remembers Teatro Joven's production of *Los mangos de Caín* as "the first Gay production to be done in Cuba."³⁰ *Swallows* does not restage scenes from the play *Los mangos*, but rather it presents the history surrounding the production and its censorship. The recovery of the context of the staging of *Los mangos* and its forced closure in *Swallows* gives an important insight into *Los mangos*' themes, and the meaning Teatro Joven's audience made of those themes during the 1965 national premiere in Havana.

The play *Los mangos de Caín* recasts the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis through avant-garde aesthetics and within a self-conscious and affective Cuban ethos. Set upon the abstract Art Nouveau metal and crystal forest, the play retells the biblical story by recasting Adán, Eva, Caín and Abel as a bourgeois Cuban family, estranging the typical behaviors and relationships found within a Cuban household. The play begins on a Sunday morning with Caín speaking to the serpent, which has been dissected and hangs as a modernist sculpture above the set. Caín asks the serpent to give him the knowledge to outwit Adán and those who force him to conform to the rule of law. Abel enters and teases Caín for wasting his breath on the serpent. As Adán and Eva enter, Caín runs off threatening Abel to say nothing to Adán of what he saw. Later finding Eva alone, Caín tells her that he wants to reclaim Eden. Eva tries to discourage him of this idea, but Caín is recalcitrant, complaining of the injustice of God's rejection of his mangos. Adán confronts Caín asking him why he failed to make his weekly offering. Caín tells Adán that he no longer has interest in making offerings to a God that does not value his work. Adán defends the Lord and chastises Caín for trying to consort with the serpent. When Adán leaves, Caín attacks Abel for betraying him to Adán. Abel placates Caín saying that he will help Caín to earn the Lord's favor. He lets Caín in on the secret to his acceptance by the Lord—to be obedient

³⁰ Manuel Martín, Jr., *Swallows*, Unpublished Manuscript, Manuel Martín, Jr. Papers, 1972-2000, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, 31-32.

in appearance only. Caín agrees to meet Abel by the mango tree to make another sacrifice under his guidance. Abel goes ahead while Caín gets his sickle. Eva enters, and Caín tells her that he is tired of being rejected, labeled as corrupt, and seeks an act of justice to right the wrong he has been subjected to. As he heads off to meet his brother, Caín condemns Abel for never contesting the inequity of the Lord's favor and being complicit with this injustice by silently accepting his advantage. Eva calls for Adán to help as she suspects Caín's course of action. Adán and Eva run off in search of Abel. Returning to the stage Adán looks for a word in the dictionary to name Caín's unprecedented, unspeakable act. He declares, in the final line of the play, "Caín ha cometido un crimen" (Caín has committed a crime).

Caín's offering of mangos is a symbol of the tropics that Cubanizes the story. In the context of the play, Caín's mangos are a re-tropicalization, or simultaneous embracing and critical performance of symbols often deployed in the United States to subjugate Latin Americans.³¹ God's rejection of Caín's sacrifices at the altar is ambiguous. The scene of the offering remains in the offstage world before the plot begins. Abel and Adán tell Caín that his offerings are not accepted because he is too rebellious and too proud, a standard reading of the biblical story that reinforces Adán and Abel's role as the voice of convention. Caín is proud of his mangos and finds injustice in God's rejection because his mangos are beautiful, succulent, and perfect. He wants God to speak to him, not merely answer his petition with ominous thunder. Yet Adán and Abel are content with the Lord's judgement because it grants them favor. The play dramatizes a struggle over worldview. From the first moment of the play, Estorino introduces

³¹ Frances Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman's theorization of "re-tropicalizing" is a contemporary way of understanding the tensions within the symbolism of the mangos in the play. Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, "Introduction," *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*, eds. Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 12.

this struggle from the perspective of Caín. He strives to break with Adán's rule and the Lord's law because they disparage Caín's mangos. If he continues to follow convention he must not only give up his pride, but also the feeling of difference he associates with his mangos.

In the opening sequence of *Los mangos de Caín*, Caín addresses the serpent, which has been dissected and whose tongue has been cut out. He asks the serpent to grant him the knowledge he gave to Eva and Adán. Caín tells the serpent:

A veces siento que tú eres mi verdadero padre... Mamá lo dice, que se erizó cuando le hablaste y le descubriste todo lo que podían hacer. Después ella se erizó otra vez cuando estuvo con papá y entonces nací yo. ¿No nací de esos escalofríos que tú provocaste y enseñaste a disfrutar?

At times I feel that you are my real father... Mom says that she felt chills when you spoke and showed her all that they could do. Later she felt chills again when she was with dad and so I was born. Was I not born of those shivers that you provoked and taught to enjoy?³²

Caín associates himself with the serpent, connecting his very being with subversion to the Lord's order and Adán's rule of law. Throughout the play, Caín's reasoning reorients the favor granted to Abel as unjust and points out the hypocrisy of Adán's law, which casts Caín as corrupted and criminal.

Los mangos plays with time through the use of a dictionary onstage that Adán continually references whenever the characters do or say something that has never been done before. Even though the play is set at the beginning of the twentieth century, just as in the bible story, the world is new and the dictionary functions as a temporal bridge where Adán negotiates the nascency of time in Genesis with the empirically based universal time of modernity. Adán's compulsory referencing of the dictionary introduces a convention where the characters comment on the temporal and cultural layers of their displacement. It is one of many ways the play

³² Abelardo Estorino, *Los mangos de Caín* in *El Tiempo en un Acto: 13 Obras de Teatro Cubano*, ed. José Triana (Jackson Heights, NY: Ollantay Press, 1999), 81

reflexively palimpsests the transcultural interplay between the mythical world of the bible and the quotidian world of the Cuban (bourgeois) family. For instance, when arguing about how Adán is too quick to involve the Lord when he has trouble with Caín, Eva tells Adán that he is very "guataca."

Adán: Guataca, guataca... (*Busca en el diccionario.*) Guataca, femenino, cubanismo, familiar: dícese de la oreja grande y fea. Especie de escardillo. No veo relación ninguna y no comprendo tu frase.

Eva: Pero yo sé muy bien lo que quiero decir. Puedo usar la lenguaje de una manera novedosa.

Adán: Guataca, guataca... (*Looking in the dictionary.*) Guataca, feminine, Cubanism, familiar: meaning of a large and ugly ear. A kind of garden hoe. I don't see any relation and I don't understand your statement.

Eva: But I know very well what I mean. I can use language in a new way.³³

Eva's consciousness of the new way she uses language to call Adán a guataca, a blind follower and an ass kisser, is an explicit and humorous acknowledgement of the cultural displacement of the biblical characters in the Cuban countryside. As an already existing reference that names "newness" as it "enters the world,"³⁴ the dictionary makes metatheatrical commentary on the temporal interaction between the beginning of time and the beginning of time in the modern nation state, the creation of the world and the creation of nation.³⁵

Adán also references the dictionary to name Caín's transgressive acts that introduce "newness" in the world of the play, in this case, a transgressive and shameful newness. In her analysis of the play, Lillian Manzor sees the dictionary as a repressive discourse that is used to

³³ Estorino, 85.

³⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁵ The world of the play is created through a multitemporal layering that suggests a turn of the twentieth century modernism, Arte Nouveau, as a means to organize the crossing of the beginning of biblical time with the turn of the twentieth century as the beginning of time for the modern nation-state of Cuba. Life on the farm—Caín's campesino world—shapes the cool modernity of steel and glass. The suggested abstract stage design is something like and yet different than Arte Nouveau's hyperbolic and creeping organic forms.

discipline Caín in a Foucauldian sense as it imposes the institutionalization of words as direct referents for a reality that reifies the Lord's law.³⁶ As the words Adán finds in the dictionary repeatedly fail to fully capture their referents, discourse repeatedly fails to assimilate Cain's truth as it marks him as abject. For example, when Adán asks Abel where Caín is, Abel responds, "Soy yo el guardián de mi hermano?" (Am I my brother's keeper?). To which Adam replies:

Eso son las palabras de tu hermano, que te mete en la cabeza ideas de desobediencia. (*Se detiene pensativo, se dirige al diccionario.*) Meter en la cabeza, meter... ¿Será correcta esa expresión? Deja ver... (*Hojea el diccionario.*) Meta, meta, metano, meteco, metemuertos, meter: de latín *mittere*, introducir. ¡Perfecto! (*Recapacita.*) ¡No! Es mejor inculcar... Inculcar ideas de desobediencia.

Those are your brother's words. He puts ideas of disobedience in your head. (*He remains pensive, he refers to the dictionary.*) To put in one's head, to put... Will that be the correct expression? Let's see... (*He pages the dictionary.*) Meta, meta, metano, meteco, metemuertos, meter: from the Latin: *mittere*, to introduce. Perfect! (*He reconsiders.*) No! To instill is better.... To instill ideas of disobedience.³⁷

Adán paints Caín as a dangerous presence within the "origin" family, a microcosm of Cuban society, because he instills ideas of disobedience in his brother. The dictionary represents dramatically the imposition and failure of the discourse of power. Manzor notes that there is a disconnect between Adán's labeling of Caín as an instiller of subversive thought and the action of the previous scenes that shows that Caín does not want anything to do with Abel, much less try to plant ideas in Abel's head. The disconnect between the reality represented by words and the reality represented by dramatic action pinpoints the ambiguity of meaning that words carry. As Manzor argues, the ambiguity of meaning and relativity of truths directly correlates to the play's

³⁶ Manzor, "Estorino en las tablas internacionales," 60.

³⁷ Estorino, 82.

heterodoxy and its critique of absolute power over representation.³⁸ What's more, Caín's resistance to the discourse of power represented by the dictionary is performative within the world of the play; he breaks with the discursive by manifesting his resistance in embodied practice, rites, and ritual.

In a moment of secret resistance shared between mother and son, Caín reenacts the original sin with Eva. She passes him an imagined fruit and they pantomime eating it. On one level, it is a fantasy that Eva abruptly ends; on another level it is a transmission of embodied knowledge that Caín, with his mother's complicity, has recovered from dreams, memories, whispers, the remains of the serpent, and a painting of Eva and Adán in the garden by Lucas Cranach that hangs over the stage. Caín searches to piece together the fragments of a past that at once denaturalizes Adán's dominant order and origin narrative, while reorienting the world so that Caín's own "iniquity" can be glimpsed as justice. In reenacting the hidden history of his parent's transgression, Caín uncovers the means to transcend his subjugation. In reenacting the loss of innocence with Eva, Caín celebrates the original sin and resuscitates it as a necessary act to subvert the very discourse that subjugates him and that he is expected to submit to.

Caín sees injustice in Abel's quiet acceptance of the favor granted to his sheep without defending the value of Caín's sacrifice. Abel reveals himself as disingenuous and ambitious to Caín. Abel's offerings are less authentic as he admittedly hates the sheep he cares for and sacrifices. With cognitive dissonance, Abel conforms to Adán's rule so that one day he will be able to inherit the farm and power over it. Abel proposes that Caín submit to Adán's law and the Lord's will by faking his repentance, saying, "Sólo tú sabes lo que piensas, dirán que tu mirada es tierna y tranquila... Vamos, decídete, es cuestión de decir una pequeña mentira. No lo pienses

³⁸ Although it is a critique that is not opposed to the Revolutionary process. Manzor, "Estorino en las tablas internacionales," 61, 64.

más" (Only you know what you think, they will say your look is tender and tranquil... Come on decide for yourself. It is a question of telling a small lie. Think no more of it).³⁹ Yet it is a lie Caín cannot bring himself to tell. He cannot live in hiding or conform to the behavior he is expected to embody.

Trying to draw Caín into the "straight and narrow," Abel asks Caín to meet him at the Mango tree where Abel can help Caín to prepare the sacrifice and false repentance that Abel suggests in this scene. In the play's climax, Caín meets Abel at the tree and murders him. By killing his brother in place of the mangos, Caín subverts the conventions of the ritual that continually inscribes his abjection—the act of blood sacrifice at the altar. Caín draws on both the rite of passage of the original sin and the ritual of the sacrificial offering as embodied practices in order to subvert the discursive power that circumscribes him as immoral, dubious, and threatening.

In the action leading up to the climax, Caín speaks to Eva alone clarifying his reasons. Caín connects defiance of the signs Adán assigns to him with the dictionary as necessary to his being. Meaning becomes the battleground upon which Caín contests the injustice Adán's discourse subjects him to.

Caín: Estoy envenenado, dicen. Lleno de iniquidad... Iniquidad. Esa es la nueva palabra que han descubierto, una palabra para señalarme. Parece que estoy condenado a llevar señales.

Eva: A palabras necias oídos sordos. ¡Si supieras las cosas que dijeron de mí cuando me comí la manzana! Impublicables.

Caín: Hablan mal de mí, los he oído. Comentan que me vuelvo dudoso, mañoso, rencoroso, peligroso, que no soy venturoso... No me interesan las palabras. Voy a hacer algo que no me enseñaron, no me importa qué nombre le pongan. Allá ellos con las palabras, ahí tienen el diccionario.

³⁹ Estorino, 96.

Caín: I am corrupted they say. I am full of iniquity... Iniquity. That is the new word they have discovered, a word to label me. It seems I am condemned to carry labels.

Eva: Foolish words for deaf ears. If you would have known the things they said about me when I ate the apple! Unpublishable.

Caín: They talk bad about me. I have heard them. They say I have become dubious, cunning, bitter, dangerous, and that I am unfortunate... Words don't interest me. I am going to do something that they did not teach me. I don't care what name they give it. Away with them and their words, they can have their dictionary.⁴⁰

Caín reclaims the signs of his abjection as a source of empowerment, claiming "iniquity" as the sign by which he should be known. Caín challenges Adán's use of the dictionary as a discourse of subjugation. Caín brings this "newness" into the world through a performative. Ultimately, Caín's manipulation of the ritual offering is a performative transcendence of Adán's discourse, which codifies Caín as iniquitous, corrupted, and dangerous.

In the 1965 national premiere of *Los mangos*, Caín's failure and refusal to acquiesce to his place in a world greatly limited by the Lord's dicta and the discourse of power spoke to the experience of artists who had been silenced. Manzor argues that the audience of mostly young people would have appreciated Caín's questioning of Adán, as a proxy for the questioning of unchecked authority.⁴¹ The controversial incident of the Communist Youth League closing Teatro Joven's production appeared in a report on artistic freedom in Cuba published in *The New York Times* later that year. The report documents the production's importance to the ongoing debate over the definition of revolutionary expression, as several of the authors interviewed for the report cited the incident as evidence that artistic freedom was being restricted.⁴² The infamy

⁴⁰ Estorino, 98-99.

⁴¹ Manzor, "Estorino en las tablas internacionales," 61.

⁴² Special to the *New York Times*, "Artistic Freedom Emerging in Cuba: But Intellectuals See Gain Still Limited by Party," *New York Times*, 09 Nov 1965, p. 17; also quoted in Manzor, "Estorino en las tablas internacionales," 61.

of the incidents surrounding the closing of *Los mangos* tells us that even in 1965 the production came to be an example of what was wrong with how the Revolution regulated cultural production and a bad omen of what was to come.

The dramatization of the incidents surrounding Teatro Joven's production and its closure in *Swallows* brings to light that the sexuality of the artists was central to several aspects of the production, including its reception and its closure. *Swallows* portrays that the production was a reaction to the expulsion of young theatre artists from the National Schools of the Arts on account of their sexuality. Judging by private fundraising and attendance, the community the production created in response to the witch-hunt and expulsion of Gay and Lesbian students was a public that was sympathetic to the plight of Gay and Lesbian artists, if not Gay and Lesbian themselves. I would add that the reception of the production was sensitive to the context in which it was presented, namely in reaction to the persecution of sexual minorities in the arts. *Swallows* portrays that the reason *Los mangos* was closed by the Communist Youth was directly related to the sexuality of the artists. With respect to Estorino's text, many of the words Adán uses to label Caín resonated with the Revolutionary authorities' codification of Gay and Lesbian artists. It is also no accident that Caín's situation was emblematic of the conditions of ignominy, persecution, and silencing that marginalized artists who staged the piece had been subjected to. INTAR's production of *Swallows* offers an important window for understanding how Caín's struggle in *Los mangos* was easily adopted as an expression for the struggle of Gay and Lesbian artists against a cultural policy which isolated them, censored them, institutionalized their existence on the margins, and labeled them as corrupt and immoral.

In *Swallows*, the President of the Communist Youth and the Director of The School of Theatre hold an investigation for student artists suspected of being homosexual. The

investigation is portrayed as a witch-hunt trial, where unsubstantiated hearsay serves as evidence. While María is questioned, the President interviews one of her classmates asking her if she noticed anything "out of the ordinary." The classmate is only able to respond, "I can't tell you exactly compañero, but the way they looked at each other, something in the atmosphere of that place when they were not talking, but you knew they were thinking."⁴³ Eventually, the President's questioning fades into a montage of gibberish, mocking the pointlessness of the proceedings. The President meaninglessly goes through the motions to prove a predetermined verdict. María compares the investigation to Kafka's *The Trial* and, mimicking the President, María proclaims, "Because we have to investigate, because we have to cut sickness at it's root."⁴⁴ Much like the labels Adán applies to Caín, the Communist Youth President, who is following the direction of the head of the National Council of Culture, uses the rhetoric of contagion and labels María and the other artists suspected of being homosexual as out of the ordinary, or as an offensive sickness that needs to be purged.

The characters in *Swallows* reenact the formation of Teatro Joven by expelled artists and the context surrounding their production of *Los mangos*.⁴⁵ In dramatizing how the Communist Youth League censored the premiere following the mandates of the National Council of Culture, *Swallows* reframed Teatro Joven's premiere of *Los mangos* as Gay and Lesbian theatre. María's reflection on the meaning of the play to the Teatro Joven artists and their audience at the end of the scene emphasizes that the production condemned the state's ideology of exclusion that targeted sexual minorities and demonstrated the survival of a Lesbian and Gay community of artists.

⁴³ Martín, 27-28.

⁴⁴ Martín, 29

⁴⁵ The events presented in *Swallows* are based on the experiences of Alabau and Teatro Joven.

Caín's thirst to recover what Adán has erased parallels the recovery of the controversial premiere of *Los mangos* within *Swallows*. Furthermore, Cain's search in the dramatic text is echoed by Alabau's search in 1965 and Martín's search in 1980 for theatrical performatives that provisionally transform the world around them. *Swallows* cites the production history of *Los mangos*, a play which cites the story of Cain and Abel. Both citations were hyperbolically reiterated to critique the marginalization of Gay and Lesbian artists in revolutionary Cuba. The performative dimension of these productions is more than simply a layering of the past within the present. Similar to how Caín's citation of the original sin becomes an illicit moment of self-making in the world of the play, the citation of speech acts that censored the 1965 production of *Los mangos* within the 1980 performances of *Swallows* recovered the Gay and Lesbian theatre history that Cuban authorities tried to erase.

Literary scholar José Quiroga theorizes how forces like cultural policy or economic crisis dismantle Cuba and send its fragments adrift to other shores, fragments that often later return to or reemerge on the island. Looking at this process through Cuban cultural production, Quiroga argues that dismantling and disappearance from the island is matched by reproduction and reinvention elsewhere.⁴⁶ In his book *Cuban Palimpsests*, Quiroga presents a model for understanding the recovery and temporal layering of *Los mangos* within *Swallows*. Quiroga describes the palimpsest as an approach to literature and literary criticism that is more than pastiche or postmodern intertextuality. The palimpsest not only layers one text on top of another, but actually by "combining different texts into one," layers time, creating temporal

⁴⁶ Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests*, x-xi.

inconsistencies and intersections through which the Cuba of the past and the present dismantle, repeat, recover, and reproduce one another, while migrating to new horizons beyond the island.⁴⁷

Palimpsests are, among many things, temporal layerings. The present writes on top of the past, or the surface of the present is dismantled to reveal layers of the past beneath. Multiple temporalities coexist side-by-side disrupting the objective time of modernity. Movement is also a key dimension of palimpsests, and that movement crosses time, culture, and space. In comparison with palimpsests, performatives co-opt the established conventions of human behavior and the authority enacted in the performance of those conventions. In repetition of said conventions, performatives augment, edit, and scribble on top of these co-opted and contextually defined human behaviors, transforming their reality-changing outcomes. Temporality is not necessarily an aspect of performatives, but is implied in the present innovation of an established behavior or ritual. I argue that in Cuban avant-garde theatre, however, the palimpsest becomes a performative. In this way, the palimpsest in Cuban avant-garde theatre is a verb—it palimpsests. As an historiographic act, palimpsesting recovers the fragmented and fugitive past for the present. As a translocal performative, palimpsesting reconstructs the affective spaces of community within the new environments of diasporic ethnoscares. These interlocking dimensions of palimpsesting—the cross-temporal and the translocal—perform the transculturation of Cuban avant-garde theatre in diasporic contexts.

The fact that the Gay and Lesbian history of *Los mangos* was dismantled in the way that Quiroga's palimpsest theory suggests tells us that the coded knowledge enacted in the play's 1965 performance faced persecution and marginalization, creating difficulties for the reproduction of a Gay and Lesbian space that was forced underground and on the move. The reiteration of this

⁴⁷ Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests*, 10.

history and space in *Swallows* is a variant dimension of palimpsesting that could be called a *fugitive performative*, as it recovers embodied knowledge that was silenced or marginalized, and, through the citation of this knowledge for the present, announces its fugitivity, that is to say makes it fugitive.⁴⁸ However, this announcement of fugitivity can also be performative, as in the case of Caín, the fugitive performative defies merely illocutionary or discursive ways of changing reality. To elaborate a bit more, recognizing the fugitivity of embodied knowledge and practice that create space and community can only happen at temporal, geographic, or coded remove from the power that makes it illicit. Fugitivity, in this sense, is not the mark of ignominy or criminality, but rather recognition of survival from erasure, containment, or suppression as a means to exonerate a persecuted community and reorient (as Caín does) justice in relation to the embodied knowledge and practices belonging to that community.

Diana Taylor defines cultural memory as: "among other things, a practice, an act of imagination and interconnection... There is a continuum between inner and outer, much as there is between the live present and the living past, or a notion (or act of imagination, perhaps) that individuals and groups share commonalities in both the here/now and then/there, made evident through embodied experience."⁴⁹ Fugitive performatives and their recovery of embodied knowledge from fragments enact the work of cultural memory. They work through translocal movement across a broken sign-chain of citation, functioning much like the non-cohesive layers of a palimpsest. Both necessary and painful for recovery and transmission, translocal movement

⁴⁸ Fugitive Performatives is informed by Alexandra Vazquez's concept of fugitive knowledge, a kind of flexible and context driven transmission of knowledge through "details" or phenomena, which make artistic production radically complex and elude "discovery," exotification, and possession by rigid colonial epistemologies. Her theorization is in part a retooling Fred Moten's concept of "the secret" or coded knowledges, something similar to James Scott's "hidden transcripts." Alexandra Vazquez *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 21-27.

⁴⁹ Taylor, 31-32.

traces colonial imperialism, conquest and slavery, as well as the continued geographic displacement of migration or exile. Within the genealogy of the Cuban avant-garde theatre, the work of cultural memory is theatre history in performance. In this light, it should not be surprising that the trace of one theatrical performance (Martín's manuscript *Swallows*) should hold the history of another theatrical performance (Estorino's *Los mangos de Caín* directed by Alabau) across diaspora, or across culture and time. Rather, as Quiroga suggests, migration imprints the layers of these works, and it is this movement that recovers what is lost and makes it knowable again.⁵⁰

The historiography presented in *Swallows* stages the reactionary culture, censorship, and persecution that Teatro Joven raised their voice against. The palimpsest of *Los mangos* within *Swallows* recovers Teatro Joven's queer reading of *Los mangos* through the portrayal of authoritative speech acts and the repressive atmosphere that isolated and silenced sexual minorities. Through palimpsesting in *Swallows*, we can glimpse Caín's transcendence of discourse in this past performance as a necessary and binding transgression of homophobia and repressive cultural policies of 1965 Havana. The repetition of speech acts of silencing and censorship in *Swallows* recovered this important Queer theatre history as a one of many traumas that Martín's 1980 play suggests kept Cubans on the island and Cuban exiles irreconcilably divided.

Thus far, I have presented *Los mangos de Caín* as a key example of Cuban avant-garde practice. The play text, its controversial Cuban premiere, and the recovery of its erasure 1,300 miles away and 15 years later in *Swallows* demonstrate that palimpsesting can recover silenced and marginalized histories of embodied knowledge and practice. Palimpsesting brings to light a

⁵⁰ Quiroga, 21.

metarepresentational practice common to many avant-garde theatre productions on Cuban routes during the mid-twentieth century. Theoretically, palimpsesting could be seen in conventional or mainstream productions. However, because palimpsesting highlights a metarepresentational dimension in the theatre I discuss below, I see its traction in describing avant-garde practice as indicative of the appropriate circumstances for palimpsesting's felicity as a performative and analytical lens. To evoke J.L. Austin's theory of performatives, felicitous palimpsesting consciously and transparently comments on its own process of multitemporal and translocal layering.⁵¹ In this way, palimpsesting remains reflexive in its performance of the movement necessary for the reiteration of fugitive performatives—or whatever else it recovers—across time, culture, and international borders. As palimpsesting brings Cuban theatrical practice into meaningful production with culturally different theatrical traditions in a new way, it commandeers transculturation for avant-garde means—to challenge the establishment of representational practices through their dismantling and deterritorialization.

I have defined palimpsesting through two interconnected productions *Los mangos de Caín* and *Swallows* that together outline the central topics of my entire project: translocal theatre production connecting cities across the diaspora, the exodus of avant-garde artists following the Grey Years, the ongoing transformation of Cuban avant-garde practice as Latina/o and LGBTQ theatre in the U.S. Now I would like to move to back in time to a production that is remembered in a number of accounts as a definitive moment in the history of Cuban avant-garde theatre: Grupo Prometeo's 1948 premiere of *Electra Garrigó* by Virgilio Piñera. Having established palimpsesting as an analytical lens, I would like to use it to illuminate something distinct about how Cuban artists have made their mark in avant-garde theatre.

⁵¹ J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances," *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 1292-3.

An Entrance into Avant-Garde Theatre: "¡Una tragedia cubana es un gran choteo!" (A Cuban Tragedy is a Great Choteo!)

With his "Cuban tragedy" *Electra Garrigó* (1941-1945), Virgilio Piñera layered the colonial architecture of Old Havana and performance forms from the vernacular theatre on top of Sophocles' tragedy. Virgilio Piñera is one of Cuba's most important authors of the twentieth century. He was a part of the intellectual circle Orígenes. He spent time in exile from Batista's government in Buenos Aires. Besides being one of the nation's most important playwrights and essayists, his novel *La carne de René* (1952) is one of the most highly regarded works of Cuban literature. After the Revolution, *Electra Garrigó* and his play *Aire Frío* (1962) enjoyed success. He wrote for *Lunes de Revolución* until the publication was dissolved in 1961.⁵² He was isolated from the Revolution during the Grey Years because of the political ambiguity of his works, as well as his sexuality. He died in Cuba in 1979, shortly before the opening of cultural policy that characterized the 1980s.

Electra Garrigó was not the first attempt to create avant-garde theater in a recognizably Cuban ethos, yet its legacy is that it was the first make large enough waves to disturb the status quo of Cuban theatre. *Electra* is Piñera's first staged dramatic work treaded onto the Havana scene with the world premiere of *Electra Garrigó* in October of 1948, sending a wake across the 1950s and into the early years of the Revolution. The currents and countercurrents produced in response to what Rine Leal calls Cuban theatre's "Battle of Hernani"⁵³ charted a new space for

⁵² See Virgilio Piñera, *Las palabras de El Escriba: artículos publicados en Revolución y Lunes de Revolución (1959-1961)*, Ernesto Fundora and Dainerys Machado, eds. (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2014).

⁵³ The Battle of Hernani erupted in Paris during the 23 February 1830 premiere of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, a romanticist epic that broke every neoclassical rule for the theatre. Hugo passed out tickets to Romanticists and Bohemian artists in order to pack the house with a mass of sympathizers that official censors would be fearful to challenge. At this time it was common for Neoclassicist cliques to purchase a large number of seats to avant-garde performances in order to

the avant-garde in Cuba. This space disordered neocolonial modernity, resisted and responded to the isolation and repression felt under political regimes and foreign imperialism, and staged, time and again, the emergence of a renewed will and reconfigured national character, one that was compatible with the avant-garde.⁵⁴

There are two important dimensions to legacy of this production in defining Cuban avant-garde theatre: the play's dramaturgical choices and the premiere's production choices. I will present an examination of each. Thus I argue that the Cuban avant-garde is a blend of dramaturgy and production aesthetics, and that any study of the Cuban avant-garde must take both into account. In order to approach a definition of Cuban avant-garde practice, not only scripts, but also production notes and reviews must be analyzed and placed in conversation with one another.

In the introductory essay to his volume *Teatro Completo* (1960), Piñera writes that during the 1940's his theatre anticipated parallel avant-garde movements taking place in Europe. In this context Piñera wrote the observation with which I began this dissertation.

[No] soy del todo existencialista y ni del todo absurdo. Lo digo porque escribí 'Electra' antes "Las Moscas del Sartre", apareciera en libro, y escribí "Falsa Alarma" antes que Ionesco publicara y representara su "Soprano Calva". Más bien pienso que todo eso estaba en el ambiente, y que aunque yo viviera en una isla desconectada con el continente cultural, con todo, era un hijo de mi época al que los problemas de dicha época no podían pasar desapercibidos. Además y a reserva de que Cuba cambie con el soplo vivificador de la Revolución, yo vivía en una Cuba existencialista por defecto y absurda por exceso. Por ahí corre un chiste que dice: "Ionesco se acercaba a las costas cubanas, y sólo de verlas, dijo: Aquí no tengo nada que hacer, esta gente es más absurda que mi teatro..." Entonces, si así es, yo soy absurdo y existencialista, pero a la cubana.

boo the show off of the stage. French romanticists turned out in droves to challenge them and the censors. Reportedly first fights and shouting matches broke out across the theatre all while the actors performed on stage.

⁵⁴ Leal, Rine. "Electra Garrigó, 13 años después..." published in the program for *Electra Garrigó*, Casa de Las Américas, 1961, Cuban Heritage Collection, Theatre Ephemera Collection, Box 1.

I am not completely existentialist, nor completely absurd. I say this because I wrote 'Electra' before 'The Flies of Sartre' appeared in print, and I wrote 'Falsa Alarma' before Ionesco published and premiered 'Bald Soprano.' Rather, I think all of that was in the air, and although I lived on an island disconnected from the cultured continent, from everything, I was a child of my era to which the problems of said era could not have passed by unnoticed. Furthermore and subject to [the fact] that Cuba is changing with the victorious blow of the Revolution, I was living in a Cuba existentialist by defect and absurd in excess. A joke is going around here, which goes like this: 'Ionesco was approaching the Cuban coasts, upon having merely seen them, he said, Here I have nothing to do, these people are already more absurd than my theatre...' If that's the way it is, then I am absurd and existentialist but in a Cuban way.⁵⁵

The intervention Piñera makes here as a critic in 1960 situates him as an innovator of Theatre of the Absurd, albeit an absurd theatre of Cuban character. The joke about Ionesco in Cuba breaks with the transatlantic historiography to which Piñera refers in the beginning of the passage.

Following the logic in the argument of the passage above, Piñera himself cannot be an existentialist because his *Electra* was written *before* Sartre's and he cannot be an absurdist because his *Falsa Alarma* (clearly an exemplary piece of absurd theatre, unlike *Electra*) was completed *before* Ionesco's theatre hit the Paris scene. It must also be noted that Piñera's definition of his characteristically Cuban absurdism was published *before* Esslin's infamous monograph. Taken literally, his theatre cannot follow the styles associated with those authors because his theatre *precedes* them.

However, one must exercise caution when taking Piñera's words literally. He begins this essay with the words, "No creo que el autor teatral pueda disponerse a comentar lo que él considera su teatro, sin 'hacer un poco de teatro.'" (I do not believe that a playwright could prepare himself to comment on what he considers his theatre to be, without doing a little bit of

⁵⁵Virgilio Piñera. "Piñera Teatral," in *Teatro Completo* (La Habana: Ediciones R, 1960), 15.

theatre.)⁵⁶ When reading Piñera, one must always keep this in mind. Recent archival research by Ernesto Fundora illuminates a great disparity between sources in the dating of *Electra Garrigó*. Piñera's essay dates the manuscript as being completed in 1941, but interviews, letters, and earlier versions of the script date the work not earlier than 1943 and no later than 1948. Fundora rightly asks, "¿1941 no será resultado de una de las tantas *boutades* de Piñera, otra de sus bromas colosales, o de sus infinitos juegos con el tiempo para adelantar su *Electra*... a *Les Mouches* sartreanas?" (Is 1941 the result of one of Piñera's many jests, another one of his colossal jokes, or of his infinite toying with time in order to put his *Electra* in front of Sartre's *Les Mouches*?)⁵⁷ Although Piñera's historiography may be creative, it does not discount him as an innovator of the absurd, as his work parallels that of Ionesco and others regardless of doubts in dating raised by Fundora's recent work. More importantly, neither does Piñera's historiography take away from his greater point that his theatre is autochthonous, not a Cuban derivative of European movements. In fact, this historiography makes his point all the more caustic with respect to Eurocentric histories of the avant-garde, as his next line in the passage emphasizes with irony.

Piñera plays ironically with the phrases "la isla desconectada" ("the disconnected island") and "el continente cultural" ("the cultured continent").⁵⁸ His use of irony here indicates a subversion of the assumption that all of civilization, all of modernity, all avant-garde arts and letters cross the Atlantic in one direction, from "el continente cultural" outward, yet never to arrive to "la isla desconectada." Piñera's joke about Ionesco in Cuba repositions Cuba as a more

⁵⁶ Piñera, "Piñera Teatral," 7.

⁵⁷ Ernesto Fundora, "Una cuestión sanitaria: mirada clínica y políticas del cuerpo en *Electra Garrigó*," *Tablas: La Revista Cubana de Artes Escénicas* 100.4 (2012): 49.

⁵⁸ During the reign of regimes associated with Batista, Piñera spent 14 years in Buenos Aires participating in literary circles with Jorge Luis Borges. Neither in Argentina, nor in Cuba was Piñera disconnected or isolated from European culture of the contemporary moment. Carlos Espinosa, *Virgilio Piñera en persona*, 128-148.

"authentic" origin of the absurd, or possibly a locality more disposed to existentialism and the absurd on account of the political condition of life under Batista's corrupt dictatorship, or on account of its colonial history and Caribbean nature. Piñera defines the absurd as Cuban and in doing so decenters its origin, making "the absurd" pertain to his own theatre, and not the reverse.

Electra Garrigó is a work of theatrical modernism that Piñera himself labeled, "la tragedia cubana." Spanning the action of the entire *Orestíada* (Oresteia), Piñera refashions the saga of the house of Atreus—the assassination of Agamenón, the vengeful killing of Clitemnestra by her children Orestes and Electra, and the confrontation of Orestes and Electra with the Erinnys/furies—into a single three-act play that refuses a linear narrative and that is set in a Cuban milieu, on the porch of a colonial-period casona in contemporary Havana.⁵⁹ In the program notes for the première production in 1948, Piñera begins by acknowledging that *Electra Garrigó* is an adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *The Orestia*, by Aeschylus is the only extant trilogy of the Ancient Athenian tragedies. *The Orestia* consists of the tragedies *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and the *Eumenides*. The first tragedy tells the story of Agamemnon's homecoming after the Trojan War and his assassination by his wife, Clytemnestra and her lover, the tyrannical Aegisthus. During the Trojan war, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Ifigenia in order to appease the goddess Diana, whom his troops had offended. Clytemnestra's assassination of Agamemnon is an act of revenge and justice. *The Libation Bearers*, takes place years later when Agamemnon's only surviving son, Orestes, returns to take revenge on his father's killers with the help of his loyal sister, Electra. Orestes takes up the plan following the consultation of the oracle of Apollo, who tells him that if he carries out the deed, he will be free of guilt, and if he does not, his fate will be much worse. Orestes kills his father's usurper and then his own mother. After publically presenting the corpses of those that sullied the House of Atreus, Orestes flees pursued by the Erinyes, female goddesses of vengeance summoned by Clytemnestra's screams. *The Eumenides*, sometimes called, *The Erinyes* or *The Furies*, continues from the end of *The Libation Bearers*. Orestes hides from the Erinyes at the temple of Apollo under the god's protection. The conflict is resolved in the court of Athena where Apollo defends Orestes from his persecutors. In the end, the law of the court replaces the law of revenge.

⁶⁰ On account of this allusion to Sophocles' dramaturgy, it is worth summarizing Sophocles' *Electra*, in order to better recognize some of the structural and symbolic variations created by Piñera, with respect to Sophocles' tragedy. Sophocles' *Electra* begins with Orestes' homecoming after exile, having grown up in the care of Paedagous, Orestes servant and tutor. Accompanied

Electra Garrigó sale, claro está, del drama de Sófocles. Ahora bien, no es, en modo alguno, "una versión más" de dicho drama, como por ocurre con la tragedia de O'Neill, *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Lo que se ha utilizado en *Electra Garrigó* de la citada tragedia es "personajes" y "atmósfera"; caricaturizados los primeros, parodiada la segunda. Es decir que *Electra Garrigó* no es un intento más de hacer neoclasicismo o poner en época actual los conflictos de una familia griega del siglo V antes de Cristo ..., sino la exposición y desarrollo de un típico drama de la familia cubana de ayer y de hoy.

Electra Garrigó comes, very clearly, from Sophocles' drama. However, it is not, in any way, "a new version" of said drama, as it so happens with the tragedy of O'Neill, *Mourning Becomes Electra*. What has been utilized in *Electra Garrigó* of the cited tragedy is "characters" and "atmosphere"; the former caricaturized, the later parodied. It is to say that *Electra Garrigó* is not another attempt to do neoclassicism or to put the conflicts of a Greek family of the fifth century B.C. into the current period..., but rather the exposition and development of a traditional drama of a Cuban family of yesterday and today.⁶¹

by Paedagous and Pylanes, a friend, Orestes tells his companions his plan to spread the news of his own death, and then, while their guard is down, to slaughter Agamemnon's killers: his mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. Later, Clytemnestra confronts Electra reminding her of her reasons for killing Agamemnon. Electra rebuts, questioning if her mother would truly live by the law of justice where killing answers for killing. Then Paedagous enters disguised as a messenger, telling Clytemnestra the fictitious story of Orestes' death. While still Electra believes her brother to be dead, Orestes enters disguised as the bearer of his own remains. She laments Orestes death and gives his eulogy before him. Once he recognizes Electra, he reveals his identity to her. Overjoyed, Electra nearly spoils Orestes plan by revealing his secrecy. Entering the palace freely under the pretense of bringing his remains to his mother, Orestes uses the opportunity to kill Clytemnestra with a .⁶⁰ Hearing the news of Orestes death, Aegisthus enters in search of the bearers of Orestes remains. Electra leads Aegisthus to believe that the bearers of the remains are inside the palace with Clytemnestra. Orestes and his ally Pylades, once again as the bearers of Orestes remains enter from the palace presenting Clytemnestra's shrouded corpse as Orestes' remains. Orestes unveils the identity of the corpse of Clytemnestra and his own and Orestes, Pylades, and Electra then take the vulnerable Aegisthus into the palace to cut him down. The tragedy ends with a short exodos. Sophocles, *Electra*, trans. by Anne Carson, *The Complete Sophocles Vol II: Electra and Other Plays*, ed. Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 230-294. In his reworking of Sophocles tragedy, Piñera gives particular attention to the scenes of anagnorisis in Sophocles' *Electra*, where Orestes, pretending to be the bearer of his own remains, unveils his true identity to Electra, and where Orestes unveils Clytemnestra's shrouded corpse before Aegisthus revealing her identity and his act of matricide.

⁶¹ Virgilio Piñera, "Notas al programa," in *Los años de la revista prometeo*, ed. Rosa Ileana Boudet (Santa Monica: Ediciones de la Flecha, 2011), 69.

In breaking with the traditional climactic structure of tragedy, Piñera breaks with the "universal," opening up a new line of dramatic discourse. Like many avant-garde theatre artists of the 1940s-1960s, Piñera experimented with vernacular sources as a means to Cubanize avant-garde trends emerging in Europe and emerging in other parts of the Americas, including New York.

One cultural source for Piñera was choteo, a humorous practice belonging to the vernacular theatre.⁶² Cultural critic Jorge Mañach's often quoted essay, *Indagación del choteo* (1928) is a good place to begin a definition of choteo, since his essay has had its own role in shaping how Cubans think about choteo, and it was first presented in 1928 relatively close to when Piñera was writing *Electra Garrigó*. Mañach argues choteo is a comic attitude that makes fun of all serious subjects. Nothing is off limits. As an attitude, choteo emerges from habitual practice. In this sense, it is a way of being and a performance of everyday life. Choteo is mischievous and expresses distaste for authority, which is often the butt of its jokes. Choteo uses low humor, meaning sexual and grotesque in nature. Often choteo manifests as a series of jokes that quickly accumulate until the object of the choteo is disfigured and made grotesque.⁶³ Mañach tells us that choteo is not only mischievous, disrespectful behavior, but can also become a vulgar, irreverent mental optic and/or moral sensibility. So choteo is not only a Cuban mode of performative behavior, but also a performative way of seeing the world.⁶⁴

⁶² Like the chicken and the simulacrum, no one can say if choteo is an invention of the vernacular theatre, or a behavior and way of being that was observed and adapted into theatrical practice. Certainly, the vernacular theatre played a strong role in defining how Cubans understand what choteo was and how it related to the Cuban national character. Jill Lane's book on nineteenth century vernacular theatre defines choteo in blackface performances of negrito roles, as an "irreverent attitude towards imposed order." Jill Lane, *Blackface Cuba: 1840-1895* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 120.

⁶³ Jorge Mañach, *Indagación del Choteo*, 2nd ed. (La Habana: La Verónica, 1940), 17-19, 27-29.

⁶⁴ Mañach, 21.

Contemporary understandings of choteo are greatly informed by Lillian Manzor, who was the first critic of 1990s to evoke choteo as a way to theorize how Cuban and U.S. Cuban artists destabilize homophobia, heteronormativity, and ethnically defined sexual and gendered stereotypes in performance.⁶⁵ In his criticism of the work of Latina lesbian performance artist Carmelita Tropicana, José Esteban Muñoz resituates choteo as a form of “disidentification.” He argues that Carmelita Tropicana’s performance of choteo deploys cultural hybridity to destabilize Latina/o stereotypes and the claims of the dominant culture towards the authenticity of those representations.⁶⁶ As Manzor and Muñoz show us how a definitive practice of Cuban culture has become an important part of LGBTQ theatre and performance, they remind us why it is so vital to understand the routes of choteo in Cuban theatre history.

I am often pressed to give an example of choteo, but as Mañach argues, like performance, choteo is tied up in space and time, in the moment of its delivery.⁶⁷ There is a you-had-to-be-there element that makes the humor hard to convey after the fact, even among Cubans. Also, the lowbrow nature of the humor is crass and those kinds of humorous sensibilities are hard to translate across linguistic and cultural distances. So I will cite a couple of the jokes of comedian Guillermo Álvarez Guedes (1927-2013), who has already done some of this difficult work of

⁶⁵ Lillian Manzor-Coates, “Performative Identities: Scenes Between Two Cubas,” in *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba*, Ruth Behar, ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 260-265; originally printed in *Michigan Quarterly Review* 33.4 (Fall 1994): 748-61.

⁶⁶ Muñoz retools Mañach’s theory to define choteo as a habitual practice of everyday life performance. It is also worth noting his definition of choteo as “colonial mimicry and menace.” In other words, it is a performance of the order that the colonial power expects its subaltern subjects to reproduce that runs awry when those subjects mischievously sabotage the reproduction of that order. Additionally, Carmelita Tropicana’s performance of the persona “Pingalito,” (Dicklet) in particular underscores that traditionally the choteador (the one who does choteo) is a performance of Cuban masculinity. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 119-120, 135-141.

⁶⁷ Mañach, 28.

translation. Álvarez Guedes emceed at Havana's famous Tropicana nightclub in the 1950s, and after being forced to exile to New York in 1960, took up his act in the 1970s to chotear (to choteo) the disgraces of Cuban-American life. One of Álvarez Guedes' famous bits was a class for U.S. Americans on how to speak the Cuban language. He delivered "the lessons" in English with the punch lines in Spanish, the punch lines being the Cuban profanities delivered with the metalinguistics of tone and body language that the audience is provoked to imagine his U.S. American "student" reproducing. On the track "Clases de Idoma Cubano" (Classes in Cuban Speech) of his 1976 recording, Álvarez Guedes says in English, "In this lesson I am going to teach you the proper use and pronunciation of the word coño."⁶⁸ Although he never translates the word in the joke, those who are in on it—the Spanish speakers in the audience—know that coño means cunt. In Cuban colloquial use, the word is more of an all-purpose expletive like the word "fuck" is in U.S. American English. Álvarez Guedes continues, "This is one of the most powerful words that we have, and I mean powerful. If you hit yourself with a hammer on the finger, in English you would say, 'ouch.' Ouch, to me, doesn't mean anything. Next time you hit yourself with the hammer on the finger say, 'Coñ-yoooooooooooooh.'" Every time Álvarez Guedes delivers the punch line "coño," the audience roars with laughter. He continues, "And you feel different, you feel different. If you have a corn, and someone steps on you, say 'COÑO!'" So why do Cubans find this so funny? First of all coño is the most obscene word in the Cuban language. In Álvares Guedes' performance, the utterance of "coño" is already mischievous, but to imagine a U.S. American having to learn how to replace "ouch" with "coño" is another level of mischievousness that disfigures the xenophobic and ethnocentric attitudes of mainstream U.S.A. that mandated Cubans and other immigrants to speak English and even feel U.S.

⁶⁸ Guillermo Álvarez Guedes. *Álvarez Guedes 3*. AG, 1991, compact disc.

American and white. The disfigurement of this cultural authority peaks not only when the U.S. American student is required to learn Cuban ways of speaking and feeling, but also when we imagine the comic possibility of them successfully reproducing this speech.⁶⁹

I want to take pause to point out that in the context of this dissertation, this “Cuban speech” also illuminates how attitudes of misogyny are embedded in Cuban culture, attitudes that rival the deeply embedded misogyny in U.S. American culture. As an example of choteo, this joke also exemplifies how choteo is like carnival, at once beautiful and horrifying, funny and painful, liberating and oppressive. It also telegraphs that this same misogyny is an issue that many of the productions I discuss this dissertation addressed and challenged.

Relying on his own formulation of choteo, Piñera's approach remains irreverent throughout, even in the more abstract sequences of a serious tone. Characters like Electra Garrigó, Agamenón Garrigó, and Clitemnestra Plá are archetypes choteados, meaning they are interpreted through choteo. At the same time, the Greek tragic characters estrange the cubanía they become subject to and perform. Cuban playwright and critic Matías Montes Huidobro asks “¿no forma una obra que hace juego a la tradicional interpretación de lo cubano?” (Doesn't this make for a play that toys with the traditional interpretation of what is Cuban?)⁷⁰ Piñera reorients *Electra's* universality, while expanding the reach of these figures of Greek tragedy to lampoon the performance of cubanía itself.

The first act consists of a meditation on these dynamics between the principal characters and their relationship to destiny. A male ensemble of black actors dressed as servants and a female ensemble of black actresses dressed as chambermaids parody in satirical pantomime the

⁶⁹ For a reading of some of Álvarez Guedes' jokes through Mañach's Indagación del choeto also see Gustavo Pérez Firmat, “Riddles of the Sphincter: Another Look at the Cuban Choteo,” *Diacritics* 14.4 (1984): 67-77.

⁷⁰ Montes Huidobro, *El teatro cubano durante la república*, 430.

deepest fears and desires of Clitemnestra and Agamenón, revealing their incestuous passions for Orestes and Electra respectively. The second act begins with a monologue by Electra where she invokes, with histrionic passion, the non-gods to help her overcome the rule of Agamenón and Clitemnestra. Soon Clitemnestra calls for her lover Egisto to kill her husband, coded as "el gallo viejo" (the old cock). The murder of Agamenón is symbolically represented as a cockfight. In act three, Electra overtakes the house of Atreus with her will represented metaphorically as electric light. Electra convinces Orestes to kill Clitemnestra with a poisoned fruta bomba (papaya). A Cuban vernacular term for vagina, the papaya symbolizes Clitemnestra's dominion turned against itself. After Clitemnestra dies, Electra makes Orestes leave through the door of his destiny. As she earlier invokes the non-gods in the beginning of act two, Electra now calls to the "inexistent Erinnys." Before leaving through a "door of no-departure," she says, "¡Considerad inexistentes Erinnias la poderosa realidad de esta puerta! No os alegréis inexistentes Erinnias, no sois vosotras ese rumor que yo sólo percibo. El rumor de Electra, el ruido de Electra, el trueno de Electra, el trueno de Electra..." (Consider inexistent Erinnys the powerful reality of this door! Don't you rejoice inexistent Erinnys, are you not yourselves that buzzing that I alone perceive. The buzz of Electra, the noise of Electra, the thunder of Electra, the thunder of Electra...)⁷¹ The "Cuban tragedy" draws on and covers over the matricide in the saga the House of Atreus. In Aeschylus and Sophocles, the act is a tragedy, an unavoidable turn in an endless cycle of revenge that necessitates the intervention of court justice. Without the retribution of the non-existent Erinnys in *Electra Garrigó*, the act of matricide is liberated from its fugitive status. The play recovers Electra's revenge and adapts it towards the ritual destruction of the Cuban family as a metaphor for revolution and social change.

⁷¹ Piñera, *Electra Garrigó*, 84.

The 1948 premiere of *Electra Garrigó* was highly anticipated as Piñera's self-proclaimed "Cuban tragedy." However the production was not well received. In fact, many critics did not engage with Piñera's approach, audiences were less enthusiastic, and the play ended after two performances, not to appear again on a Cuban stage for ten years. The controversy surrounding the premiere brought needed attention to the question of the Cuban avant-garde theatre, more so on account of criticism against the production, than on account of criticism in its favor.⁷² Many avant-garde artists, especially Piñera, took the critics' rejection of the piece as a challenge to the viability of the Cuban avant-garde and toiled to excavate a place for Cuban voices in avant-garde theatre.

From 1948 (the premiere of *Electra Garrigó*) through the 1960's theatre artists in Havana had their own understanding of the many links and relationships between late modernist approaches characteristic of Theatre of the Absurd, Theatre of Cruelty, and Brechtian/Piscatorian Epic Theatre. For some companies like Grupo Prometeo and Teatro Estudio, avant-garde methods were interconnected as part of a much wider notion of "teatro experimental" (experimental theatre).⁷³ It is curious that *Electra Garrigó*, with the historic importance of its premiere, also possesses attributes associated with multiple movements of theatrical modernism. The play demonstrates one possible assemblage of these distinct movements that impressed upon theatre artists how avant-garde theatre could become a Cuban expression through hybridity. Francisco Morín, the director Piñera chose to direct the premiere writes, "En la propia *Electra Garrigó* están reflejadas casi todas las tendencias que surgieron en el teatro en el segundo mitad

⁷² Boudet, *Los años de la revista Prometeo*, 69-102.

⁷³ For example, in this interview, avant-garde director Vicente Revuelta explains how his Brechtian perspective on spectatorship, his love of Albee and the Living Theatre, and his postmodern blending of popular and avant-garde forms all play a part in his definition of "teatro experimental." José M. Fernández and Vicente Revuelta, "Teatro experimental: entrevista con Vicente Revuelta," *Conjunto 2.4* (1967): 59-62.

del siglo [veinte]." (Almost all of the tendencies that emerged in theatre during the second half of the twentieth century are reflected in the very play, *Electra Garrigó*.)⁷⁴ It is not unfounded to say that the fusion of modernist aesthetics belonging to *Electra* became a model for avant-garde theatre that was pervasive among Havana's theater artists. The central components to *Electra*'s mixture were Cuban variations of Theatre of the Absurd, Theatre of Cruelty, and Epic Theatre.

Yet for *Electra Garrigó* to be understood in its own right, one must attenuate, historicize, and localize the imposition of theatrical criticism. This tension is also highlighted by Piñera's own response to his theatre being categorized as Theatre of the Absurd. Critics impose these frames on theatrical movements outside of the period in which they are happening. For example, Antonin Artaud envisioned and called for a "Theatre of Cruelty" ten years before *Electra Garrigó* was first staged and twenty-five years prior to when the most widely known experiments inspired by Artaud's writings took place.⁷⁵ With so many interpretive, cultural, linguistic, and historical variants, how can one possibly claim to delineate rigid criteria to categorize such global movements and styles? Of course labels like "Theatre of the Absurd" and

⁷⁴ Francisco Morín, *Por el amor al arte: Memorias de un teatrista cubano 1940-1970* (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1998), 87.

⁷⁵ Piñera tenía unas afinidades profundas con el pensamiento de Artaud. Era uno de los primeros traductores de Artaud en castellano y tradujo *El teatro y su doble*. "I do believe that the theatre, utilized in the highest and most difficult sense possible, has the power to influence the aspect and formation of things: and the encounter upon the stage of two passionate manifestations, two living centers, two nervous magnetisms is something entire, true, even decisive, as, in life the encounter of one epidermis with another in a timeless debauchery. That is why I propose a theatre of cruelty...The theatre is the only place in the world, the last general means we still possess of directly affecting the organism [of the spectator] and, in periods of neurosis and petty sensuality like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking this sensuality by physical means it cannot withstand..." Antonin Artaud, "No More Masterpieces," trans. Mary Caroline Richards, *Theatre in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology*. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 219-220.

"Epic Theatre" present similar difficulties for movements with no formal organization or manifesto that comingled and transculturated with a multiplicity of avant-garde tendencies.⁷⁶

Cuban director Francisco Morín (b. 1918) interpreted and incorporated Brechtian defamiliarization into his own aesthetic, which was instrumental in determining *Electra Garrigó*'s initial interpretation. Morín first studied theatre at the Academia de Artes Dramáticas in Havana. Morín was one of a number of Cuban avant-garde directors that studied with famed director (and originator of Epic Theatre) Erwin Piscator in the United States during the 1940's.⁷⁷ After returning to Cuba he formed Grupo Prometeo, which was an avant-garde theatre group that published a theatre magazine. His fame as an avant-garde director peaked in the 1950s and his production of *Electra Garrigó* from 1958 was restaged throughout the 1960s. Morín left Cuba in 1970 for exile in New York. He directed theatre in Miami in the 1970s. In his career he also directed the works of Carlos Felipe, August Strindberg, William Inge, and Egon Wolff, and Jean Genet.

Morín describes his time under the tutelage of Piscator as one of the experiences that defined him as a high concept director.⁷⁸ During rehearsals, Morín's knowledge of experimental approaches led him to see that *Electra Garrigó*'s most charged themes are dramatized through

⁷⁶ Loren Glass troubles the distinction between Theatre of Cruelty and Theatre of the Absurd in Pairs. Beckett's main director in Roger Blin was a disciple of Artaud. Loren Glass, "Absurd Imprint: Grove Press and the Canonization of the Theatrical Avant-Garde," *Modern Drama* 54.4 (2011): 535.

⁷⁷ Several Cuban directors that introduced modernist approaches to the stage, like Francisco Morín, Adolfo de Luis, and Andrés Castro all studied with Piscator at the New School during the early 1940s, as did actress Adela Escartín Ayala. These directors share an educational background with Judith Malina and Julian Beck. Roberto Gacio, interview by author, Havana, Cuba, 23 December 2015.

⁷⁸ Morín, 83; Morín also learned Stanislavski from Piscator, which reveals a dimension to Piscator's work that has become overshadowed by his legacy of epic theatre and troubles the narrative of autonomy among of avant-garde theatre movements and theatrical practices. Norma Niurka, "Francisco Morín: El director que busca lo intangible," *El Miami Herald* 24 March 1977: 12, Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 2.

satire. In his memoirs, Morín gives the example of a confrontation that broke out in rehearsal between Piñera and Violeta Casal, the actor who first played the title role, over the monologue that opens the second act. The monologue was not working, yet it is one of the most important moments of the play, especially in relation to the play's existentialist sentiment. Casal wanted Piñera to cut it. Piñera demanded that she perform the entire monologue in a serious tone. Morín's solution, which proved to be an enormous interpretative revelation for the staging of Piñera's work, was that Casal put all of the monologue's gravity in tension with a satiric attitude.⁷⁹

This tension is also evident in Act One's mime sequences that estrange and mock Clitemnestra and Agamenón's deepest fears and desires. In the first sequence, the script calls for the action of the play to be interrupted by the sound of voices calling to Electra and Orestes. The four principal characters turn directly upstage, as four black actresses enter carrying a bed. Three are dressed as servants and one is dressed in detailed imitation of Clitemnestra. Downstage with her back to the audience, Clitemnestra recites all of the voices in a small "farce" within the play, where the ensemble of black actresses convey Clitemnestra's fantasy of receiving news of Orestes' death in mockery and pantomime.

The sequence can be understood as something like what Martin Esslin has described as the definitive characteristic of theatre of the absurd, a "poetic image" arising from the play's staging, where the *mise-en-scène* and the characters' movement are in contradictory or transcendent tension with the verbal text.⁸⁰ The sequences might also be interpreted as Epic

⁷⁹ Morín, 87.

⁸⁰ [A] circular structure, ending exactly as they began; others progress merely by a growing intensification of the initial situation... the audience is confronted with actions that lack apparent motivation, characters that are in constant flux, and often happenings that are outside the realm of rational experience... The total action of the play, instead of proceeding from Point A to Point

Theatre, in which, following Brecht's description, the *mise-en-scène* adopts an attitude towards the action onstage. In the case of the mime sequences, the attitude is as irreverent as it is political—enacting *choteo*'s mimicry and menace.⁸¹ Whereas the play does not exclusively answer to either paradigm, it colludes with both. Just as in the example of his direction of Electra's monologue to the "Non-Gods" that begins Act Two, Morín interpreted these experimental approaches in the play through *choteo*. As he explained in a 1976 interview with playwright Matías Montes Huidobro, "La obra es muy pretenciosa, muy superficial, pero yo veía las posibilidades teatrales que tiene... A pesar de que Virgilio le quería dar una vuelta trágica, que no tiene... ¿Trágica? ¿Cómo es una tragedia cubana? ¿Comprendes? ¡La tragedia del *choteo* cubano! ¡Una tragedia cubana es un gran *choteo*!" (The play is very pretentious, very superficial, but I saw the theatrical possibilities that it possessed... Despite that Virgilio wanted to give it a tragic spin that it didn't have... Tragic? What is a Cuban tragedy? Understand? The tragedy of Cuban *choteo*! A Cuban tragedy is a great *choteo*!)⁸² *Choteo* was a way for Morín as a director to find a spine—a very Cuban spine—to the play's experimentation with multiple avant-garde styles.

B, as in other dramatic conventions, gradually builds up the complex pattern of the poetic image that the play expresses." Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 305.

⁸¹ The stage began to tell a story... Not only did the background adopt an attitude to the events on stage—by big screens recalling other simultaneous events elsewhere, by projecting documents which confirmed or contradicted what the characters said... by figures and sentences to support mimed transactions whose sense was unclear—but the actors too refrained from going over wholly into their role, remaining detached from the character they were playing and clearly inviting criticism of him. Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction," translated by John Willet, *Twentieth Century Reader: A Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Drain (New York, Routledge, 1995), 113.

⁸² Francisco Morín, Matías Montes Huidobro, and Alberto Guigou. "Entre bambalinas: para la historia dramático de *Electra Garrigó* de Virgilio Piñera: un conversatorio dramático con Francisco Morín escenificado por Matías Montes Huidobro," *Anales Literarios Dramaturgos* 1.1 (1995), 145.

Much of the gravity of *Electra Garrigó* as an originative production of Cuban avant-garde theatre exists in the realm of memory. The archive offers a host of documents that capture an event that forever changed Cuban theatre through its many lives in memory: Morín's memoirs, a film of the production by Julio Matas, a collection of essays and theatre reviews edited by Rosa Ileana Boudet, and a recompilation of letters and interviews collected by Cuban and Latin American theatre critic Carlos Espinosa. And memory is not always the most transparent source when the oral history shared among Cuban theatre artists confronts and filters the unforgiving reality that *Electra's* legendary "firsts" in 1948 were failures. The play entered the Havana theatre scene as an enigma whose mystery precipitated new experiments in the Cuban theatrical avant-garde. In remembering the premiere production, Luisa Piñera Llera recollects, "Lo que recuerdo es que representó una verdadera revolución." (What I remember is that it represented a true revolution.)⁸³ An astute reflection that explains why during the second staging ten years later, on the cusp of the Cuban revolution, audiences were cheering for Clitemnestra when she commanded Egisto Don to kill "el gallo viejo," a metaphor for Agamenón's repressive bourgeois patriarchy that resonated with sentiment against Fulgencio Batista.⁸⁴

As a foundational moment of Cuban theatrical modernism, *Electra Garrigó* represents a Cuban ontology for avant-garde theatre as the fusion of tendencies that are cross-pollinated with Cuban themes and performance traditions.⁸⁵ Piñera's hybrid approach and Morín's experimental

⁸³ Carlos Espinosa, *Virgilio Piñera en persona*, 153.

⁸⁴ Montes Huidobro, *El teatro cubano durante la república*, 455.

⁸⁵ Regarding Piñera's theatre and the absurd, Lillian Manzor writes, "La alienación, la incomunicación, y el absurdo de la vida humana, típicos del teatro del absurdo cobran un significado especial en el teatro de Piñera; éstos se ven transformados en la insularidad, el choteo, la desacralización de la familia y el parricidio." Manzor, "De homosexual marginado a ñángara," 29.

techniques played a major role in the form of Habana's heterogeneous avant-garde, which, I suggest, was more similar than dissimilar to other global avant-garde scenes for its fusion, eclecticism, and resistance to rigid criteria of genre.⁸⁶ Whether it is remembered as a success or failure, *Electra Garrigó* staged an entrance from which Cuban artists could shape avant-garde theatre as their own.

Here I have argued that Piñera and Morín made way for Cuban theatre's avant-garde to free itself from the stigma of simply mimicking continental and U.S. American art forms. These artists originated their own approaches to introducing a Cuban stamp to Theatre of the Absurd and other global trends. Their stamp exemplifies avant-garde resonances that only amplified with the following generations theatre artists. Because of the influence of this production their work led to a generation of practices that I identify as singular through palimpsesting.

Now I would like to present two case studies that serve as contrasting examples of felicitous and infelicitous palimpsesting: RAS's *Electra Garrigó* in Miami and Dumé Teatro Estudio's *La faramalla* in New York. These productions document the importance of the exodus of persecuted and marginalized experimental theatre artists to the continuation of Cuban avant-garde practice during the 1970s. They provide examples for interrogating the utility of palimpsesting in identifying Cuban avant-garde practice as a porous and protean phenomenon within U.S. Latina/o and LGBTQ theatre. Although RAS's *Electra Garrigó* was artistically challenging, its meticulous reproduction of Morín's successful 1958 production of the same play

⁸⁶ Cuban theatre artist often refer to this diversity of abstract, non-realist approaches as *expresionismo*. The abstract style of Francisco Morín is often termed as "expresionismo" by Cuban theatre artists. Distinct from expressionism, Cuban expresionismo is a catchall term for a diverse grouping of abstract non-realist experimental approaches. Director Alberto Sarraín defines Cuban *expresionismo* in this way. Alberto Sarraín, interview by author Miami, FL, 5 January 2015.

was an infelicitous palimpsesting of Cuban avant-garde practice. In its detailed duplication of *Electra Garrigó* 1958 as homage to Cuban theatre's avant-garde past, its staging was dislocated from the present audience in 1978 Miami. Regardless, the homage to the Cuban avant-garde and Piñera and Morín's legacy was a charged reenactment whose reception underscored the political wasteland Cuban avant-garde practice was subject to as illicit in Havana and suspect in Miami. Dumé Teatro Estudio's *La faramalla*, on the other hand, presents a vibrant example of palimpsesting, which layered Jean Giraudoux's continental theatre with Havana's avant-garde theatrical past and the experimental drag performance of New York's avant-garde art circles. Through its successful dialogue with the present, *La faramalla* presents an important instance of felicitous palimpsesting.

RAS's *Electra Garrigó*, 1978

The legacy of Havana's Grupo Prometeo, which produced the 1948 premiere of *Electra Garrigó*, was the inspiration for the U.S.'s first bilingual acting program, Teatro Prometeo, founded in 1972. Its founder, Teresa María Rojas (b.1938), acted with Grupo Prometeo in Havana under Morín's direction and became a television and film star in Latin America. Moving from the Dominican Republic to Miami in 1967, she began acting in productions directed by avant-garde director Miguel Ponce, as well as in the mainstream productions of María Julia Casanova. By the early 1970s, Rojas started the acting workshop that became incorporated at Miami Dade College as Teatro Prometeo. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Rojas trained Miami's best acting talent for television and theatre. As Lillian Manzor tell us, "Prometeo no sólo entrenó a los artistas que renuevan el panorama teatral miamense sino que también introdujo lo mejor del teatro cubano" (Prometeo not only trained the artists that renewed the Miami theatre scene, but it

also introduced the best of Cuban theatre).⁸⁷ The program's productions often integrated avant-garde works from international stages by Fernando Arrabal, Egon Wolff, José de Jesús Martínez, Carlos Solórzano, Arthur Kopit, José Triana, and Virgilio Piñera.

In 1978, a group of Prometeo alumni formed a professional company focused on preserving Hispanic culture through theatre. Their productions were artistically ambitious. The company, then called RAS community theatre (an acronym made of the names of its three founders Teresa María Rojas, Alina Interián, and Mario Ernesto Sánchez) soon reorganized as Teatro Avante. Aside from having staged some of Miami's most important "art theatre," Teatro Avante has hosted the annual International Hispanic Theatre Festival in Miami for the last 30 years.⁸⁸ When it was first founded as RAS in 1978, the newly formed group chose to stage *Electra Garrigó* as its first production. When asked why RAS would choose to produce a controversial play like *Electra Garrigó*, Rojas simply answered, "Porque es la obra más destacada del teatro cubano." (Because it is the most important play of Cuban theatre).⁸⁹ Following in the footsteps of director Miguel Ponce's work in Miami in the late 1960s, and the initial productions of the Dúo Theatre, INTAR, and Repertorio Español in the early 1970s, the 1978 production of *Electra Garrigó* was a palimpsest that recovered the avant-garde practice that the Grey Years and persecution of Queer artists in Cuba drove underground and into exile.⁹⁰

Remembered as the provocative font of Cuban avant-garde theatre, the historical importance of Grupo Prometeo's premiere of *Electra Garrigó* in 1948 loomed over RAS's 1978

⁸⁷ Lillian Manzor, "Más allá de las categorías nacionales: Ni norteamericano, ni cubano. Teatro transnacional en el E.E.U.U." *Theatre der Zeit*, September (2010): 41.

⁸⁸ Manzor, "Más allá de las categorías nacionales," 41.

⁸⁹ Dulzaides, Luis. "En el mundo de los espectáculos: una entrevista con Teresa Ma. Rojas," *La Nación*, Junio 7 1978, 17, Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 17, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁹⁰ Repertorio Español was the first group to stage *Electra Garrigó* in the U.S. in 1973. Manzor, "De homosexual marginado a ñángara," 38.

production. Even more so, the task of replicating Andrés and Morín's successful staging, created for the first time in 1958, stifled the artists' creativity in consciously connecting with the present 1978 miamense context. Lacking the presentness of avant-garde practice, RAS's 1978 production may be better understood as what Diana Taylor has called the museumification of re-performance. Yet since cultural authorities in Cuba had made experimental theatre illicit during the 1970s, the RAS production staged a fugitive performative. This was the case because even as a museum-ified reenactment, the production performed a charged homage to the "origins" of a marginalized practice. The movement of artists like Francisco Morín, Andrés García, and Teresa María Rojas and the practice they transported and created anew, by hook or by crook, laid the framework for the reproduction of performatives that transgressed the lines between the Revolution and "the enemy" in Cuba, and which consequently transgressed the lines drawn between Miami's "free Cuba" and its "communist enemies" in exile. Cuban avant-garde practice embodied a cultural memory through which the RAS artists imagined and enacted their connection with Havana's most ambitious theatrical heritage. The production realized this connection in a very literal manner. Nothing could speak more to the nature of the production as replication or reenactment than the fact that RAS's producers reunited the artistic talents of Morín and Andrés for their production, the very same director and designer whose successful collaboration in 1958 was continually restaged in Havana throughout the 1960s.

The play's ritual destruction of the Cuban family dramatized a great point of tension within the Cuban exile community of Miami in 1978. The first family visits to revolutionary Cuba began in 1979.⁹¹ *Electra Garrigó* opened on July 7, 1978, before visits began and when the policy was still frequently debated in Cuban exile media. The opportunity to see loved ones who

⁹¹ Susan Eckstein and Lorena Barberia. "Grounding Immigrant Generations in History: Cuban Americans and Their Transnational Ties," *International Migration Review* 36.3 (2002): 811.

stayed in Cuba and to return to see Cuba after life in exile was irresistible to many, yet, along with the Carter administration's dialogues with the Cuban government, the visits were a deplorable proposition to Castro's most stringent enemies in Miami. The visits offered in many cases the possibility of reconciliation for families divided by the Revolution. Anticipation over the visits posed many questions and created anxiety in the exile community, especially in Miami. When would the visits finally take place? If they did, what would exiles see upon their return? How would they find their family, familiar places, and homeland? In this atmosphere, choteo of the archetypal Cuban family was very serious business.

The production design estranged the façade of a colonial mansion in Havana that sets the backdrop for the play's action by rendering it as a Cubanization of the steps of the palace of Atreus. Andrés designed the façade with abstract geometric shapes and cast the world of the play in a striking black and white color design that represented the binaries of the play's multiple conflicts and power struggles: Agamenón and Clitemnestra, Egisto Don and Agamenón, Electra and Clitemnestra, Orestes and Electra. Andrés' design for the 1978 staging, in part, duplicates certain scenic elements from the 1958 and 1960 productions, like the front door to the mansion located upstage center and decorated with symmetrical light fixtures and a semicircle window above the arch, free standing columns disconnected from the façade, and a series of stepped platforms branching the width of the stage. The 1978 production similarly pronounced line, pattern, and shadow in its design. For example, like the 1958 and 1960 productions, the costumes of Orestes and Clitemnestra had corresponding color and line patterns that mirror the line and color patterns of Agamenón and Electra's costumes. Yet Andrés embellished his design with contemporary accents, like bell-bottom pants and integrated current trends popular in the Miami

theatre scene, including the black and white chessboard scheme that covered the stage floor.⁹²

Andrés' non-realist or "*expresionista*" design created a frame that estranged this dramatic portrait of the bourgeois Cuban family. By recreating his design in 1978 Miami, Andrés constructed a painstaking reproduction of his monumental contribution to Cuban avant-garde theatre history.

Morín's direction also held strong likenesses to his stagings of the piece in Havana. Comparing production photos of Elena Huerta's performance of Clitemnestra Plá from 1960 (images 3 and 4) and Natacha Amador's performance of the same character in 1978 (images 5 and 6), both actors used large melodramatic Delsartian gestures, indicating Morín's direction and interpretation of Clitemnestra as the largest and most histrionic of the characters. In her review of RAS's production, Miami Herald critic Norma Niurka applauded Amador's performance, while tearing into the other performances, including referring to Rafeal Mejido (Agamenón) and Juan Felipe Noroña (Orestes) as "tristes radiografías carentes de intención" (sad transparencies lacking intention).⁹³ As much as Niurka abhorred the performance, her comments suggest that Morín stuck to his unifying principle of "chotear la tragedia de la familia cubana" (to choteo the tragedy of the Cuban family).⁹⁴ For Niurka the choteo failed to engage the audience, and, when critiquing the satirical speeches of Clitemnestra and Electra, wrote, "El tono resulta una aburrida letanía y no se ve la burla por ninguna parte" (the tone resulted in a boring litany and did not seem like mockery in any way).⁹⁵

⁹² Norma Niurka, "Después de 37 años: La obra de un rebelde," *El Miami Herald*, 14 Jul 1978, 9.

⁹³ Niurka, "Después de 37 años," 9.

⁹⁴ I am taking liberties with what Morín expressed as "La tragedia cubana es un gran choteo" in the 1976 interview "Entre bambilinas."

⁹⁵ Niurka, "Después de 37 años," 9.



Image 1: Lilian Llerena as Electra Garrigó (left) and Helmo Hernández as Orestes (right) Scan from Virgilio Piñera *Teatro Completo* 1960

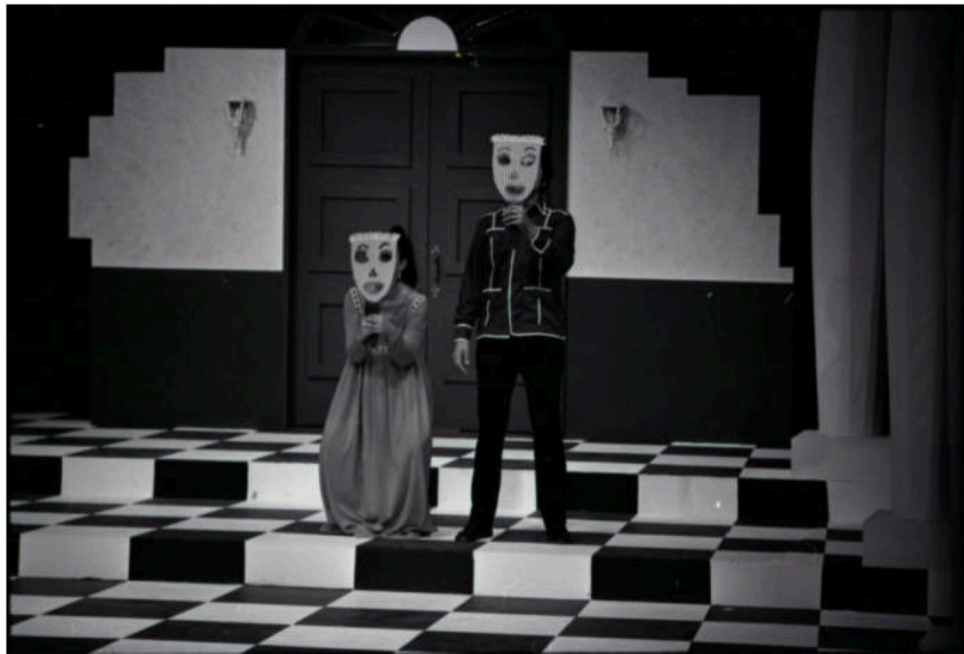


Image 2: Alina Interían as Electra Garrigó (left) and Juan Felipe Noroña as Orestes (right) in RAS production 1978. Photo by Asela Torres, Asela Torres Photography Collection, circa 1970s-2006, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, Univeristy of Miami.



Image 3: Lilian Llerena as Electra Garrigó (left center) and Elena Huerta as Clitemnestra Plá (right center) Scan from Virgilio Piñera *Teatro Completo* 1960.



Image 4: Elena Huerta as Clitemnestra Plá Scan from Virgilio Piñera *Teatro Completo* 1960.



Image 5: Photo of Alina Interián left as Electra Garrigó and Natacha Amador as Clitemnestra Plá
Photo by Alberto Cota printed in *El Miami Herald* July 14, 1978, photo by Alberto Coya.



Image 6: Negative by Asela Torres of Natacha Amador as Clitemnestra Plá (center), Juan Felipe Noroña as Orestes (left), and Alina Interián as Electra Garrigó (right). Asela Torres Photography Collection, circa 1970s-2006, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

Norma Niurka (1942-2009) was a theatre actress herself, who starred in Teatro 66 productions, perhaps the first Miami avant-garde theatre company, directed by Miguel Ponce.⁹⁶ After moving to New York in the 1970s she created theatre with Nuyorican community theatre groups. When she returned to Miami in the mid-1970s she began writing in Spanish for *El Miami Herald*. She was THE critic for the *El Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald* during my period of study, not only reviewing theatre, but also film, popular music, comedy, and dance. Her criticism has brought notoriety to Julio Iglesias and Gloria Estefan. Through her writing as a theatre critic and her knowledge as a practitioner she forms a major part of Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre.

The 1978 staging also featured the cockfight that Morín introduced in 1958 during Clitemnestra's monologue in Act Two when she calls for the death of the "gallo viejo" (old cock).⁹⁷ In Piñera's text, the cockfight is an off stage action and metaphor for Egisto Don's killing of Agamenón that is reported in the dramatic language. Morín's cockfight was a movement piece that symbolized the violent crime happening within.⁹⁸ Morín's 1978 staging of *Electra Garrigó* recreated many of the moments and choices of the successful stagings from 1958 onward within this 1978 production. With new actors and an old concept, Morín restaged his masterpiece of Cuban avant-garde theatre for RAS's production on the Teatro América stage.

The apparent problems in the reception of the piece point to the translocal nature of the production. Certainly the experimental theatre's off-putting challenge to conventions of representation, the young cast with a radically different set of experiences, and the sheer act of

⁹⁶ "Teatro 66: Mundo de Cristal" Program, Theater Ephemera Collection, Box 6, Teatro 66 folder, University of Miami, Cuban Heritage Collection.

⁹⁷ The casting of Gallo Blanco (Julio Ambros) and Gallo Negro (Adelfa Acosta) is documented in the article "Presentación de 'Electra Garrigó' hasta Julio 30 en el Teatro América," *Diario de las Américas* 7 July 1978, 7.

⁹⁸ Morín, Montes Huidobro, and Guigou, 145.

transferring across time, culture, and national borders from one context to another created problems for RAS's restaging of Andrés and Morín's infamous production. Above all arises the question of whether in trying to recover *Electra Garrigó* so succinctly in homage to its legacy, RAS failed to address its contemporary audience within its reiteration of Electra's performative of revolution. Perhaps, the artists could not see past the enormity of Morín's 1948 and 1958 stagings of *Electra Garrigó* within Cuban theatrical discourse to make it connect with their contemporary audience and historicity. In short, the production cited the performative's past iteration out of its historical context and without meaningfully layering the performative within their present miamense context. Morín and the other artists may have been too blinded by their faith in the play and production's "universality" and were betrayed when the audience and reviewers' disconnect proved that there is no such thing.

In a lecture delivered at LSU In 2013, Diana Taylor problematized UNESCO's efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage. She began the lecture discussing the MOMA retrospective of Marina Abramovic's performance art, "The Artist is Present." Taylor queried what was lost when trying to preserve a lively avant-garde performance art piece by "re-performing" it as a museum retrospective out of its historical context. Building from the work of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Taylor argued that such performance art as intangible culture is deeply compromised and altered by the practices of preservation and conventions of museum display. For Taylor, these "re-performances" were the deadly result of the museumification of some of Abramovic's most groundbreaking performance art.⁹⁹ I am interested in extending Taylor's use of the term museumification as a way to theorize one way in which a palimpsesting can fail as a performative.

⁹⁹ Diana Taylor, "Saving the 'Live': Reperformance and Intangible Cultural Heritage," March 6, 2013, Shaver Theatre, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA.

What I have tried to illuminate in my discussion of the RAS "re-performance" of Andrés and Morín's successful stagings of *Electra Garrigó* is that the meticulous imitation and reproduction of these artists' work in direction and design by the artists themselves limited their ability to connect with their present context in Miami and suffocated the liveness from their greatest creation. In this sense, museumification fails to produce a felicitous palimpsesting because it fails to recover the performance's most essential quality, its live interaction of meaning-making with the present moment.

All of this is not to say that the production had no meaning. All performances, even such re-performances, will always have some kind of meaning for their audience. Even though in RAS's *Electra Garrigó* the palimpsesting of the past was infelicitous in its meaning-making with the present, the conversation with history is always unavoidable, and in this case, it overwhelmed the present to the production's own detriment. A felicitous palimpsesting, on the other hand, consciously creates a conversation with time. The historiographic act is a part of the art-making that recovers the past and transforms the present through cross-temporal creativity. The failed palimpsesting lacks conscious collaboration with the present and so misses its chance to perform a meaningful change to reality. What the RAS production did stage was a taking up of an avant-garde lineage that was thrown out of Cuba, a lineage that would become the foundation of Teatro Avante. The politics of this gesture cannot be overlooked and attenuate with great value the production's importance to Cuban theatre history. Not only did the production signal a continuation of Havana's avant-garde heritage in Miami, but also, in presenting a close reproduction of *Electra Garrigó* 1958, the 1978 production disjointed Electra's revolution from the Revolution and presented the hypocrisy of cultural policy that ostracized Cuban theatre's greatest artists.

The criticism that the production presented created a much different reaction in the Miami media than one might expect. The production sparked controversy in the Miami. Any attempt by Piñera to leave Cuba was unknown to the exile community and so he was thought to support the Castro regime. Local journalists were apparently unaware that Piñera was persona non grata in Cuba and the RAS theatre artists were accused of fostering ideals of Communism within the Miami community.¹⁰⁰ The theatre received bomb threats, a not uncommon strategy of "unofficial censorship" in the Cuban exile community.¹⁰¹ Paradoxically, the recovery of a fugitive performative the Revolution marked as "suspect," "foreign," and "corrupt" met with threats of violence in the exile community. The reaction in the Miami media revealed the precarious condition of Cuban experimental theatre in Havana, where it was "bourgeois," and in Miami, where it was "Communist."

Palimpsesting is a critical lens that describes a tendency in Cuban avant-garde theatre to stay present and challenge the establishment through cross-temporal, translocal, and transcultural layering. As a lens, palimpsesting highlights these interconnected processes (cross-temporal, translocal, and transcultural) in Andrés and Morín's Havana productions of *Electra Garrigó* as a way of Cubanizing the universality of ancient Greek tragedy and universalizing the Cuban perspective through choteo. The meticulous reperformance of the piece in 1978 Miami was too limited in the way it consciously made meaning of its displacement. As a palimpsesting, the RAS production proved to be infelicitous because it failed to transculturate significantly with its present context in the name of the preservation of heritage. Whereas the debate over family visits

¹⁰⁰ "Al que no quiera comunismo 2 tazas," Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 22, Cuban Heritage Collection; Luis Dulzaides, "En el mundo de los espectáculos: una entrevista con Teresa María Rojas," *La Nación*, Junio 7 1978, 17 Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 17, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

¹⁰¹ Manzor, "Más allá de las categorías nacionales," 42.

made the play's treatment of the Cuban family serious business and the unofficial censorship and threats of violence in a very tense political climate surrounded the production in controversy, a thoughtful engagement with these charged issues could have recovered and translated for the present the live and dynamic meaning-making that made *Electra Garrigó* so historic in the first place.

New York-Cuban Avant-Garde Practice

After the Cuban Revolution transpired in 1959, Herberto Dumé (1939-2003) returned from tour with Andrés Castro's renowned Máscaras group to form the avant-garde company Grupo Guernica. During the early 1960's he staged key productions of Abelardo Estorino's plays *El robo del cochino* (1961), *El Mago de Oz* (1961), and *Las vacas gordas* (1963).¹⁰² Dumé was contracted to direct several major productions at the National Theatre. Yet after several prolific years of directing, Dumé left Cuba and the repressive environment in Havana. After leaving Cuba in 1965, Dumé first arrived in Spain, eventually making an artistic home for himself in exile in New York. Dumé began teaching acting workshops at the Provincetown Playhouse in 1967 and in 1969 founded The Dumé Grupo Estudio with exiled Cuban actor and playwright José Corrales (1937-2002) and photographer and lighting designer Edy Sánchez.¹⁰³ Throughout the 1970s, Dumé created theatre in Spanish for New York's Latino intelligentsia, producing

¹⁰² Leal, *En primera persona*, 135-138, 164-169. Estorino was Dumé's assistant on the 1960 Grupo Guernica for *Los fusiles de Madre Carrar*, The Program for Hughes' *Mulato* by Grupo Guernica 1963, has the 1963 season and plans for the 1964 season, *La loca de Chaillot* is listed. Cecillo Noble was an actor in *La taza de café* (1959) by Rolando Ferrer directed by Dumé that ran with a production of *How He Lied to Her Husband* (*Su esposo*) by George Bernard Shaw. Program *Su esposo/La taza de Café*, Herberto Dumé Papers, 1953-2000, Box 8, Folder 6, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

¹⁰³ The group sometimes called themselves Dumé Repertory Company or Dumé Spanish Theater. Today the company is known as Thalia Spanish Theatre and his located in Queens. Program *Fando y Lis* (1969), Herberto Dumé Papers, Box 4, Folder 10 and Program for *Requiem por Yarini*, 1972, Herberto Dumé Papers, 1953-2000, Box 7, Folder 3, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

continental and Cuban avant-garde theatre, including the works of Jean Genet, Fernando Arrabal, and Carlos Felipe, adding to a diverse and expanding Spanish language theatre scene.

In 1971, Dumé and Corrales adapted Jean Giraudoux's *La Folle de Chaillot* (*The Madwoman of Chaillot*) (1945) for their New York audiences of Spanish language theatre. Jean Giraudoux was one of France's most popular playwrights between the wars. *La Folle de Chaillot* was Giraudoux's first play after a five-year absence during Nazi occupation and World War II.¹⁰⁴ Giraudoux's play is an irreverent melodrama that experiments with a large cast of peculiar and depersonalized Cocteau-esc characters that comprise the denizens and vagabonds of Rue de Chaillot, like the Rag Picker, the Juggler, the Street Singer, the Deaf-Mute, and many others. Its tone is nostalgic for a bohemian Paris, which, in the play, becomes the antidote to the deadening and homogenizing forces of capitalist hegemony. Aurelia, the eccentric "Countess" of Chaillot, intervenes in a suicide attempt and talks the desperate Pierre out of killing himself. Aurelia is a creature clinging to a period in the past—the extravagant fin de siècle in Paris. She preserves for the present moment the glamor and charm, as well as the cosmopolitan humanism associated with a bohemian Parisian imaginary. Aurelia and the other characters discover that Pierre tries to commit suicide after he fails to plant a bomb as part of a conspiracy plot with the city's most powerful corporate president and oil prospector to turn Paris into an oil field. The countess leads a motley group of funky Parisians who save post-war Paris from its ultimate destruction at the hands of capitalist thugs.

Giraudoux's *La Folle de Chaillot* possesses many qualities that make it readily assimilable to Cuban avant-garde practice: the multitemporality of the text's palimpsestic structure, the fantastic-realism, and the band of bohemian denizens and vagabonds that make up

¹⁰⁴ Germaine Brée, "The Madwoman of Chaillot: A Modern Masque," *Tulane Drama Review* 3.4 (1959): 51.

the locality of Rue de Chaillot, which parallels the solar (common space of an Old Havana tenement house), which is perhaps the first scene of the Cuban vernacular theatre. In their adaptation titled *La faramalla* (The Sham), Dumé and Corrales take the plot and characters from Giraudoux's *La Folle de Chaillot* and cover over the Parisian specific context of Rue de Chaillot with layers of contemporary queer exile historicity. The production's palimpsesting appropriated and merged multiple theatrical worlds and through montaging, it indirectly represented and addressed the real world violence of censorship and homophobia experienced by many theatre artists in Cuba during the 1960s and 1970s, and created a space where that violence could be contested and queerness could prevail.

In the Dumé and Corrales version, Márgara, the Countess of Venus, works with her band of outcasts to protect the world against a conspiracy between La Curia (The Court), La Banca (Banking), and La Comuna (The Commonage) who attempt to homogenize human society into a uniform monotony, eliminating all of those who are free and unique. The grotesque allegorization of the trio of conspirators is a clear departure from Giraudoux's play, and it is through the conspiracy that Dumé and Corrales most saliently address the persecution of intellectuals and sexual minorities. In *La faramalla*, rather than blow up Rue de Chaillot with a bomb for the exploits of the conspirators, the young ingénue, in this play named Hugo, must collect the names and information of all those who are "different" and those who are not organized with "the approved institutions." Hugo attempts to jump from the bridge because he cannot go through with his task of surveillance, as all those who he reports on will be made the same as everyone else or eliminated. In contrast to *Madwoman*, *La faramalla* swaps a critique of capitalist exploitation and corruption for a critique of the homogenizing ideology and hegemonic

surveillance associated with the Soviet-style communism that Dumé and Corrales fled from in Cuba.

Dumé himself performed the role of Márgara in drag, queering the role of the eccentric matron. In performance, Dumé's transvestism was not lost in the illusion, but was integrated into the stage text. As I interpret the staging and design, Dumé's performance aesthetic borrowed from New York's Stonewall-era drag scene. In reading the script and production photography of *La faramalla*, I do not lose sight of the queer reading of Giraudoux's play that is the basis of Corrales and Dumé's layered script for performance. In this sense, drag performance is a practice that establishes a queer way of seeing that introduces into Giraudoux's theatrical world a way to address the persecution sexual minorities faced in Cuba. Furthermore, by estranging the experience of persecution through Cuban avant-garde practice, Dumé and Corrales spoke to the power queerness wields against homophobic, patriarchal, and heteronormative social institutions existing both inside and outside of Cuba, both in Havana and New York.

In analyzing the work of Carmelita Tropicana, José Muñoz establishes a strong relationship between choteo and camp as everyday practices and ways of seeing the world. As performatives, choteo and camp make visible the privilege, aggression, or inadequacy of mainstream or hegemonic authority exerted through "the majoritarian representational regime." Camp's way of affectively enunciating queer displacement and critique through "repetition with a difference" is comparable to choteo's way of enacting the mischievous anti-order of the solar and the marginal through "simultaneous mimicry and menace." Muñoz's work demonstrates how these similar performative qualities form the hinge for choteo and camp to create a

complementary aesthetic world from intersecting positions of difference in Queer Latina/o performance.¹⁰⁵

Yet there is more to this relationship between camp and choteo from a critical perspective. Both practices are stained by critical debate over the question of political efficacy. Camp's "elasticity," elusiveness, and ambiguity have caused much debate over its politics and ethics in representation.¹⁰⁶ Choteo has a similar protean quality, and, especially regarding political allegiances, has created similar discomfort among critics. Inés María Martiatu Terry, for example, argues that if the Cuban subject is portrayed as a racial or ethnic other and must always speak from a subaltern position on the margins, even if they speak critically towards power, the condition of being marginalized can only be reified through such a representation and never transcended.¹⁰⁷ But also much like camp, choteo makes its marginal position known through a way of looking at the world. Rather than Cubanizing through a superficial emphasis of tropes and symbols representing Cuba, choteo Cubanizes through performative means, scribbling on top of, vandalizing, and scandalizing established dramatic genres, characters, and other constitutive conventions in a signature that is legibly Cuban. Through choteo the eccentric behavior of the characters from Giraudoux's play becomes irreverent towards authority. Through camp the same behavior is enhanced with glamor, flamboyance, and Gay desire. The merging together of Giraudoux's sense of difference as eccentricity with choteo and camp produced a translocal affect created through layered feelings of queer, exile, and avant-garde experience. For instance, after the conspirators first confront Venus's weirdoes, they remain seated in the café

¹⁰⁵ Muñoz, *Crusing Utopia* 128, 135-136.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Muñoz summarizes the debate between Sue Ellen Case and Kate Davy over camp's efficacy in lesbian performance. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 128-130.

¹⁰⁷ Martiatu, Inés María. "Sin similitud posible. Una mirada otra al teatro bufo cubano." *Bufo y Nación, Ensayo, Interpelaciones Desde el Presente*. (La Habana, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2008), 13.

making their plans to institute total uniformity throughout the world. Satirizing the dogmatic rhetoric of cult of personality figure like Fidel Castro, Comuna makes an emphatic speech with repetitious dogma about the plight of the worker and the need for the true revolution to put an end to the contagious threat of exploitation, yet he is interrupted by Márgara's dramatic entrance.

Comuna: Por eso la clase obrera debe imponerse, debe triunfar. Y los trabajadores... pues para ellos está el trabajo. Para eso están: para trabajar y trabajar veinticuatro horas al día por su liberación... Fue entonces que se echaron los cimientos, los bases para la verdadera revolución. Fue como una explosión. Fue cuando los trabajadores del mundo comenzaron a darse cuenta de su posición, de su posición dentro de cada ciudad, dentro de cada pequeño pueblecito, es cuando la verdadera revolución...*(Al decir esas últimas palabras, entra como una explosión Márgara en seguida en procesión por el Sordomudo, el Florista, el Vendedor)*

Márgara: Laura, ¿están listos mis huesos? Laura.

Laura: Hoy no hay muchos Señora Condesa. Pero son de pollo tierno.

Márgara: Y mi molleja

Laura: Trataré de salvarla. Hoy el cliente lo está comiendo todo.

Márgara: Si se come mi molleja, guárdame el intestino. El gato de la Plaza de Tranquilidad lo prefiere, siempre que lo come se lame las patas. *(Reflexiona, se adelanta, pasa y se detiene frente a la mesa donde están los tres hombres.)*

Comuna: Therefore the working class must intervene; it must triumph. And the workers... well for them this is the work. For this they are here: to work and to work twenty-four hours per day for their liberation... That was how they poured the foundation, the base for the true revolution. It was like an explosion. It was when the workers of the world started to pay attention to their position, their position in every city, in every small town, that is when the true revolution... *(Upon saying these last words, Márgara enters like an explosion, followed in procession by the Deaf Mute, the Florist, and the Salesman)*

Márgara: Laura, are my bones ready Laura.

Laura: Today there are not very many Señora Condesa. But they are from tender chicken.

Márgara: And my gizzard

Laura: I will try to save it. Today the customer is eating everything.

Márgara: If he eats my gizzard, save me the intestine. The cat from Tranquility Square prefers it. Whenever he eats it he licks his paws. *(She reflects, moves forward, crosses, and stops in front of the table where the three men sit.)*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Herberto Dumé and José Corrales, *La faramalla*, 3-4, José Corrales Papers, 1950-2002, Box 2, Folder 13, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

Márgara takes charge of the space, interrupting Comuna's dogmatic speech and ridiculous vision of a world where workers labor 24 hours per day for their "liberation." Her explosive entrance juxtaposes Comuna's "real revolution" that is also described "like an explosion." She delivers her orders for bones and intestines with campy flamboyance. The costume design for the conspirators portrayed a sinister triad in black unitards connected by a weighty tubular sleeve. They appear as the three witches in Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy being consumed by a single malady, like a serpent-shaped tumor. This grotesque representation of the conspirators adds to the satire of what they represented. Márgara's entourage of outcasts emphasizes her raunchy majesty, which she leverages in irreverence of the conspirators as she crosses in front of their table in reflection of her alley cat, completely disregarding their authority. With this gesture she likens them to something less than table scraps.

Another example of choteo-camp comes in the second act. As in *Madwoman*, the Countess sets a trap for the conspirators in her basement, but before purging the world of this threat and killing the conspirators, she forms a counter-conspiracy to eliminate the conspirators by calling an emergency meeting of her fellow madwomen countesses. In *La faramalla*, the league of "locas" (Spanish Caribbean slang for transvestite) is comprised of drag characters. The trio of drag countesses was based on famous international divas of the theatre, Sara (for Sarah Bernhardt) and Eleonora (for Eleonora Duse). With the trio of divas locas united, it becomes clear that Dumé's persona Márgara, the Countess of Venus is based on Spanish siren Margarita Xirgu, whose performance in Seneca's *Medea* inspired García Lorca to write tragedy.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Lillian Manzor has noted the importance of divas like María Callas and Sarita Montiel to the theatre of Señal Paz and Elías Miguel Muñoz as emotional subjects that can create a space of gay male desire and affect through camp. See Lillian Manzor-Coates, "Performative Identities," 262-264.

The drag divas govern and protect the outcasts and undesirables who make up and create the queer translocality of Venus. During their meeting, the divas have a metatheatrical debate over the rules of representation and worldmaking in Venus. Márgara and Sara argue over the difference between false content and form—a polemic that was at the heart of the debates over how to define Revolutionary art and writing in Cuba. Sara is hesitant to take action against the conspirators without first consulting Father Agustín—who advises her, and, as she claims, kissed her in the street "one morning in September." Márgara asks Sara, who has told this story many times before, to finally admit if this ever really happened. Sara responds, "Decirme que eso no es verdad es como si te dijera que tus perlas son falsas" (To say to me that it is not true is the same as if I were to say to you that your pearls are false).¹¹⁰ Here the drag divas begin to "read" one another, daring to play out of bounds and gesturing to drag's theatrical veil. Both Sara's relationship with Father Agustín and Márgara's pearls are false, but both, as Sara argues, are essential to their respective personas. Sara calls foul, arguing that Márgara's question of authenticity is out of bounds in the drag performance—underhandedly gesturing to the pretense of Márgara's façade. But Márgara's read of Sara is a treatise on performance, giving insight to the production's conscious attention to something like Butler's critique of drag performatives within drag's conventions of representation. Márgara explains:

No vas a comparar perlas con aventuras. Esto bien lo sabes es un juego de los hombres. Es un problema de contenido y forma. Un hombre es un hombre, pero si se viste del soldado deja de ser un hombre, si se viste de mujer también deja de ser un hombre y hasta un Dios que si se viste como los hombres llega a pensar como ellos. Además, todo el mundo sabe que las perlas, sobre la piel de quien las lleva, devienen verdaderas. Pero nunca he oído decir que una aventura falsa devenga realidad, incluso un cerebro de una tonta como tú.

You are not going to compare pearls to adventures. This you know well is a man's game. It is a question of form and content. A man is a man, but if he dresses as a

¹¹⁰ Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 22.

solider, he ceases to be a man. If he dresses as a woman, he also ceases to be a man. Even a God, if it dresses as men do, it starts to think like them too. More than that, everyone knows that pearls, upon the skin of she who wears them, become real. But I have never heard it said that a false adventure may become reality, including in the brain of a dummy like you.¹¹¹

As Márgara reasons, content cannot be falsified, a false adventure cannot become true. However, form defines content, just as dressing as a solider or a woman transforms the man Márgara speaks of; and this kind of transformation is precisely the way performance makes truth. With this line, Dumé and Corrales directly reference the cultural debates on Revolutionary art that went on in Cuba during the 1960s, leading to the Grey Years. Some intellectuals claimed that Revolutionary art must be about the revolution in content and form. Others fought against what they saw as the dogmatization of art and letters, the demonization of abstract art, and the limitation of form.¹¹² With *La faramalla*, Dumé and Corrales not only make an intervention in the Revolution's cultural debate by creating a world where the form defines content. They also use the power of form, in this case performance, to recover memories of surveillance and censorship and contest a very specific act of violence. Paralleling Caín's struggle in *Los mangos*, the world of Venus is founded upon the questioning and manipulation of authoritative practices of representation. The performance layered the persecution of intellectuals and sexual minorities in Cuba within the conspiracy that the countess and her friends challenge, try, condemn, and purge from the world. The representational logic of performativity described by Márgara defines Venus as a subversive space that threatens the order the conspirators want to impose. In fact, the threat that such a space presents is what draws them to it.

¹¹¹ Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 22.

¹¹² See Jesús Díaz, "Literatura revolucionaria: respuesta de Jesús Díaz," in Pogolotti, 330-331. Also see the debate between Jesús Díaz and Ana María Simo over Ediciones El Puente in Pogolotti. Jesús Díaz, "Repuesta a 'encuesta sobre generaciones,'" 367-368, Ana María Simo, "Repuesta a Jesús Díaz," 368-382, and Jesús Díaz, "Respuesta a Ana María Simo," 383-390.

When the play begins, the trio of conspirators meets in the café where they are continuously interrupted by the strange characters they encounter there: the singing flower salesman who leads the café patrons in "The *Faramalla* Song" but forgets the lyrics; the Sordomudo (Deaf-Mute) who criticizes Curia, Banca and Comuna for "letting such a beautiful morning go to waste"; and finally Márgara who enters demanding soup bones and entrails for her alley cats. Comuna explains the magical rules of the world of the play when he warns Curia and Banca of the danger that Márgara, the other outcasts, and the space they create presents to the order they hope to impose:

Y de ellos precisamente quiero hablarles... Son ellos nuestros enemigos más terribles. Estos fantoches todos diferentes de color y aspecto... Es aquí en esta ciudad donde salen todos ellos o al menos donde salen muchas de sus ideas corruptoras. Estos espectros carne y hueso de la libertad que no saben las canciones que tienen que cantar, oradores sordomudos, flores que no son flores. Todo nuestro poder combinado va a expirar allí donde subsiste la pobreza feliz, la locura respetada y adulada.

It is precisely them that I want to discuss... They are our most fearsome enemies. It is these fools, all of them varying in color and aspect... It is here in this city where all of them come from or at least where many of their corrupt ideas come from. These specters of human freedom do not know the songs that they sing, have speaking deaf-mutes and flowers that are not flowers. All of our combined power will expire wherever a happy poverty exists, or where insanity is respected and praised.¹¹³

The encounter demonstrates how much Márgara's heterogeneous circle—a circle of outcasts marked by difference—threatens to subvert Comuna's vision of a truly modern and free world where everyone follows the cult of homogeneous uniformity. The threat that radical diversity carries in *La faramalla* speaks to its power and elevates the central theme of Giraudoux's play to the heart of the dramatic conflict. The potential of Márgara's band of misfits and *marginales* to do away with the conspirators' homogeneous order "corresponds" to the inclusive, ambiguous,

¹¹³ Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 4-5.

and queer communities of New York's avant-garde performance art world of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In this vein, Muñoz theorizes visual artist Ray Johnson's mapping of the avant-garde group the New York Correspondence School and their circulation of performance art pieces through the postal system as a temporal and spatial intervention. These performances rejected the "objective" reality of straight time and replaced it with a potential and inclusive queer "account of the world," through the alternative space they created through performative mapping.¹¹⁴ Andy Warhol's Factory is another experimental collective from the 1960s and 1970s that drew on the inclusive association of queers, weirdoes, freaks, and outcasts, and whose work challenged representation and its relationship to time, modernity, and the heteronormative bourgeois economy and social order. As José Esteban Muñoz has described it, avant-garde art circles of New York during the 1960s created a space where intellectuals, Queer folk, and outcasts who did not fit into the dominant social-sexual paradigms felt they could belong. The work of Dumé Teatro Estudio intersected with this movement.¹¹⁵

Reviews appearing in theatre sections of local periodicals do not corroborate my interpretation of the text as having coded allusions to the repressive climate of 1960s Havana. However they did praise *La faramalla* as a great work of modern theatre that raised the bar in New York's Spanish language theatre scene. As Enrique "Kiki" Fernández Giraudy wrote in the publication *Entreactos*, "significa una era revolucionaria de teatro moderno en Español en la ciudad de Nueva York" (it signals a revolutionary era of modern theatre in Spanish in the city of

¹¹⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Crusing Utopia*, 120-123.

¹¹⁵ Manuel Martín, Jr. cast Candy Darling in his production of *The White Whore and the Bit Player* by Tom Eyen.

New York).¹¹⁶ The overall reception of the reviews was that through its eccentric and original worldmaking in a twenty one-seat midtown basement theatre, *La faramalla* staged an escape from the alienation of the modern world and celebrated the strength of one's own humanity in the struggle against that alienation. Unpacking the meaning of the title, Alberto Alonso called the play "la fuga artificiosa por un derrotero de engaños" (the artful escape through a course of deception).¹¹⁷ This is yet another way to think about the importance of Márgara's treatise on performativity as it relates to the central arc of the play. In his review appearing in *El Tiempo*, Manolo García-Oliva singled out the performances of Dumé, Rosendo Galis, and Juan Granda in their portrayal of the trio of drag divas as the highlight of the production.¹¹⁸ As he writes of the drag divas, "se llevan 'el gato al agua' y arman el corre-corre en el elenco" (They rise to the occasion and ignite the energy in the cast). García-Oliva and Alonso's comments tell us that the drag divas were as central to the performance as they are to the performance text.

Soon after discovering the plot against Venus, Márgara assembles her high court of divas locas and the trio enlists the cast of characters to put the conspirators on trial. Carrying out their rule of justice, the divas eliminate the conspirators by means of deception. Once the divas are assembled, Sara insists they hold a trial as everyone who is accused has the right to be tried in innocence. Realizing they would not have the cooperation of the conspirators, they stage a mock trial and elect the Vendedor to represent the accused. During the trial the characters accuse the

¹¹⁶ Enrique Fernández Giraudy, Las Descargas de "Kiki," *Entreactos: El Periodico de Los Espectáculos*, Nov 1971, Herberto Dumé Papers, 1953-2000, Box 4, Folder 14, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

¹¹⁷ The production was staged in a theatre located at 437 W 46th Street, two blocks west of Times Square and the theatre district. Alberto Alonso, "Faramalla" Muestra Arrastre de Conciencias en Sala Dumé," *El Diario-La Prensa*. Herberto Dumé Papers, 1953-2000, Box 4, Folder 14, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

¹¹⁸ Manolo García-Oliva, "Faramalla," *El Tiempo* 31 Oct 1971, Herberto Dumé Papers, Box 4, Folder 14, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

conspirators of being responsible for historical crimes committed by totalitarian dictatorships. Hugo shouts, "Quemaron libros, quemaron judíos" (They burned books and burned Jews). The Guardia adds, "A los homosexuales los llevaron a campos de concentración, los quemaron, después los fusilaron" (They took the homosexuals to concentration camps, they burned them after they executed them). Through Laura's translation the Sordomudo asserts, "Asesinaron trabajadores que se fueron a la huelga" (They killed workers that went on strike).¹¹⁹ In the string of atrocities the accusers demand the Vendedor answer for, the cast includes the repressive tactics the Castro regime used against intellectuals and political opposition in the 1960's and 1970's.

Guardia: A una muchacha se le rompió la máquina de escribir y el Jefe del Partido la acusó de crimen contra el Estado

Hugo: Te hacen olvidar el amor y te conducen a la locura

Laura (*Interpreta al Sordomudo*): Han obligado a simple ciudadanos a huir de sus propios países.

Vendedor: [Como el abogado de los conspiradores] Molestaban, molestan, no les gusta el esfuerzo que hacemos por la recuperación del país.

Guardia: Simple gente está condenada a trabajo forzado

Laura (*Traduce al Sordomudo*): Y te obligan a trabajar voluntariamente.

Florista: Predicaron que la pobreza es una virtud.

Vendedor: (*Como el abogado de los conspiradores*) Para los pobres lo es.

Florista: Envenenaron.

Hugo: Fabricaron hornos para quemar seres humanos.

Guardia: Y campos de trabajo en los lugares más fríos y remotos del planeta.

Eleonora: Poetas y escritores se suicidaron por su culpa.

Guardia: They broke one girl's typewriter and the party leader accused her of committing a crime against the state.

Hugo: They make you forget love and drive you crazy.

Laura: (*Interpreting for the Deaf-Mute*) They have obligated ordinary citizens to flee from their own countries.

Vendedor: (*As the conspirator's defense lawyer*) They were a nuisance, they are a nuisance, they do not like the effort we are making to recuperate the country.

Guardia: Ordinary people are condemned to forced labor.

Laura: (*Translating for the Deaf-Mute*): And they make you work voluntarily.

Florista: They preach that poverty is a virtue.

¹¹⁹ Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 29.

Vendedor: (*As the conspirator's defense lawyer*) For the poor it is.
 Florista: They poisoned.
 Hugo: They made ovens to burn human beings
 Guardia: And work camps in the coldest and most remote places on the planet.
 Eleonora: Poets and writers have committed suicide because of them.¹²⁰

The grand confabulation is accused of crimes against humanity, attacking liberty, beauty, and heterogeneity.¹²¹ The trial is a ruse, almost an afterthought to the scheme Mágara has already set in motion. The outcome is known before the trial begins.¹²² In this way, the trial mimics the hypocrisy of the real world investigations, legal briefs, and tribunals that justified the historical traumas referenced in the accusations against the conspirators, including tribunals like the investigation of the theatre students dramatized in *Swallows*. The accusations of censorship, hearsay, work camps, exile and alienation reference the specific methods used by the revolutionary Cuban state to institute its cultural authority. These tactics also bring to mind the rule of violent dictatorships, some supported by the United States, from elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this light, Mágara's band of *marginales*, freaks, and outcasts marked by difference created a space where they could raise their voices in the case against the conspirators, and the violence, corruption, and injustice these allegorical figures stood in for. The trial scene where the rule of law is the rule of the drag diva loca made that space and its contestation of the persecution of difference especially meaningful to "sexiles" from Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹²⁰ Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 29-30.

¹²¹ They are even accused of fictional injustices. Act Two opens with Mágara explaining to Laura the loss of another love in her life, which is a monologue lifted from Blanche DuBois, "He was a boy...", about a repressed Queer youth that kills himself because of the homophobia in the world that surrounds him.

¹²² Mark Pilkinton's interpretation of the trials in Giraudoux play's informs this interpretation. Mark Pilkinton, "The Significance of the Trials Scenes in *Ondine* and *The Madwoman of Chaillot*," *Modern Drama* 22.2 (1979) 109.

Sexile is a term introduced by Manolo Guzmán and refers to sexual minorities who escape the repressive heteronormative cultures of their home countries by making their way abroad. He introduces the term in his essay on the Queer Latina/o club La Escuelita, which first opened in midtown Manhattan around 1970. Guzmán describes La Escuelita as an important venue where Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and a diverse group of Latina/o sexiles from other countries came together to create an alternative space that contested patriarchy and homophobia they similarly experienced in different parts of Latin America. Drag performance was an important pillar of the club and a key example of how members of La Escuelita contested patriarchy and homophobia within affective latinidad. During the 1970s, the success of the drag parody of the Cuban Zarzuela *Cecilia Valdés*, a tragic mulata tale and 19th century plantation romance, propelled the club's drag group, Las Tuti Fruti Revue, into international notoriety and into the forefront of club's image as a Queer Latina/o space.¹²³

Space holds a special significance in the narrative of *La faramalla*. Venus, the space created by the cast of rejects and weirdoes, proves to be the antithesis to the conspiracy, as Comuna explains to his co-conspirators in Act One, their combined power will expire in such a space where difference flourishes. In Act Two when the conspirators are lured to the subterranean space of the countess' basement, Márgara tricks them into descending into the abyss by promising them that below lies her laboratory and weapon of their dreams—a laser light that homogenizes all the colors in light into a single concentrated color.

[La luz] es generalmente blanca y parece un rayo homogéneo. Pero cuando pasa a través del prisma revela su verdadera naturaleza y se descompone en los colores

¹²³ Manuel Guzmán, “Pa’ La Escuelita con Mucho Cuida’o y por la Orillita’: A Journey through the Contested Terrains of the Nation and Sexual Orientation,” in *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism*, ed. Frances Negrón-Muntaner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 214.

del arco-iris. En cambio, la luz que sale de laser sólo tiene un color y ningún prisma puede descomponerla... Quien domina este rayo domina todo.

Light is generally white and appears as a homogeneous ray, but when it passes through a prism it reveals its true nature and is split into the colors of the rainbow. However, the light that comes from the laser only has one color and no prism can split it... Whoever controls this ray, controls everything.¹²⁴

The supposed "homogeneous" laser beam imitates in form the very power that the conspirators wish to possess. The power to erase the uncontainable and vast diversity of the human experience into a singular, dominant monotony. After the conspirators descend into the abyss, Mrgara shuts the door, trapping them inside. Mrgara's kin of misfits enter and she explains to them that she has "liquidated" the conspirators and their hundreds of thousands of associates. "Nuestra luz tiene ese poder" (Our light has that power). "Our light," the light belonging to Venus, "the last free city," is the heterogeneous light consisting of all of the colors of the rainbow. This light symbolizes the power of Venus, as an affective space that the band of outcast, "different," and queer characters co-create.¹²⁵

Dum and Corrales's Venus is a queer translocality that performs the traces of its composite localities. The funky outmoded Debordian locality of Rue de Chaillot, third space of the *solar*, the campy drag performances of the Stonewall era, and New York's queer avant-garde groups are all legible within Venus's walls.¹²⁶ The intersection of camp and choteo in *La faramalla* innovates a new way of abject reading that trespasses, border-crosses, and enables the crisscrossing of cultures, times and spaces to be productive, or rather, reproductive in a queer way.

¹²⁴ Dum and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 34.

¹²⁵ The use of the rainbow light in the play to represent the power of the queer world of Venus predates the adoption of the rainbow as the Gay liberation symbol.

¹²⁶ The suffocating heat of Williams' theatrical ethos is a locality, a layer of Venus performed as a space of remembering Mrgara's tragic past.

The best example of palimpsesting in *La faramalla* that produces queer space through the cross-temporal layering of theatrical worlds is the performance text's interpretation of the space of memory through the theatre of Tennessee Williams. Tennessee Williams's theatre was an important part of Havana's theatre scene during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1944 a new theatre group calling themselves ADAD formed out of the Academia de Artes Dramáticas (Academy of Dramatic Arts), the school where Morín and Dumé received their theatre training.¹²⁷ In 1947, ADAD produced *Mundo de Cristal* (*The Glass Menagerie*) just two years after it premiered on Broadway.¹²⁸ Dumé and Corrales were drawing from a repertoire of Williams's plays translated into Spanish that were an important part of Havana's theatre history. In both Giraudoux's play and Dumé and Corrales's adaptation, the Countess' new companion (Pierre/Hugo) stands in for her long lost lover (Adolf/Omar) during intimate moments when she recounts their passionate affair. In *La faramalla*, not only does Dumé's drag performance queer the Countess' flirtatious romance with the young ingénue, but also acts of remembering her past romances take place in the theatrical world of Tennessee Williams. In these moments, Dumé and Corrales's script elaborates the world of Márgara's memory through insertions of dialogue from *A Street Car Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke*, and *The Glass Menagerie*. After the trial and before Márgara does away with the conspirators, she lies down for a rest, saying that "es la hora de mis sueños" (it's the hour of my dreams). Hugo enters and takes her hands. Márgara asks, "Eres tú Omar?" (Is that you Omar?). Hugo identifies himself, but Márgara insists, "No mientas son tus manos" (Don't lie, they are your hands). It takes little encouragement for Márgara to convince

¹²⁷ Morín, 57.

¹²⁸ Modesto Centeno directed the play, and Marisabel Saenz translated the piece. Lillian Manzor, "Mundo de cristal," Last modified Fall 2015, <http://ctda.library.miami.edu/production/4638>. Cuban Theatre Digital Archive. Accessed 31 March 2016, also see Francisco Ichaso, "Teatro ADAD: Mundo de Cristal," *Diario de la Marina* 08 July 1947, p. 8.

Hugo to assume the role of Omar in her dream-fantasy. Leading Hugo through the motions as Omar, Márgara questions Omar why he abandoned her for María, an ugly, dull, and distant woman. Hugo/Omar has no answer. Finally, Márgara remembers the last time she saw him. She remembers how he called her "Rosa Azul" (Blue Rose). As Omar, Hugo remembers and explains why he once called Márgara his is "Rosa Azul," and why he must leave her. The Blue Rose is more than a reference to "Blue Roses" from Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. Hugo actually speaks an edited version of Jim's lines to Laura, which presented out of context explain the impossibility of Márgara and Omar's romance:

Uno no tiene porque avergonzarse de ser distinto. Los demás no son tan maravillosos. Son centenares de miles. Y usted es única. Ellos caminan por toda la tierra. Son vulgares. Y usted... bueno usted es una rosa azul... Ud. creará que lo digo porque me ha invitado a cenar y tengo que ser amable. Alguien debe tornarla orgullosa en ves de tímida, y evitar vuelva la espalda a cada momento y se sonroje. Alguien debiera... besarla, Márgara. (*La besa*) No debí hacer eso. Fue inoportuno...

One does not have to be ashamed of being different. The rest are not so marvelous. They are hundreds of thousands. You are unique. They walk all over the earth. They are vulgar. And you... well, you are a blue rose... You will think that I say it because you have invited me to diner and I have to be nice. Someone should make you be proud instead of timid, and to avoid turning away at every moment and blushing. Someone should... kiss you Márgara. (*He kisses her*). I shouldn't do that. It was unfortunate...¹²⁹

In remembering for Omar, Hugo creates something better than the truth. Both his lack of being the lost lover and his willingness to stand in for him give Hugo the potential to fill the absence that Omar never recognized, and works through a representational logic that is similar to the Vendedor standing in for the conspirators in a trial that would never have happened otherwise. That Hugo performs the memory of Jim from *The Glass Menagerie* in place of the gap in

¹²⁹ Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 32, from scene seven of Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* in The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama, ed W.B. Worthen, 4 ed. (Boston: Thompson Wadsworth, 2004), 1061.

Márgara's story creates a new intertextual palimpsest that casts Márgara's difference in a new light. Márgara is the very foil to Laura from *Menagerie*, who is disabled, introverted, and socially awkward. With Laura legible beneath surface, Márgara's difference is given a new kind of vulnerability. Dumé's performance as a drag Margarita Xirgu persona reveals a queer dimension to Laura's difference as a social reject. In borrowing Jim's rejection of Laura from Williams, Omar's rejection of Márgara expresses a kind of incompatibility with normative gender constructs and with what Butler calls "the heterosexual matrix." Williams's momentary interpolation into Dumé and Corrales's text dramatizes the tension between a felt desire (between Jim and Laura or Márgara and Omar), and an expectation that said desire can never be fulfilled because of dominant social conventions of gender and sexuality.¹³⁰

Once Márgara liquidates the conspirators, Omar returns now free from the fear of their dominion and cult of uniformity. Departing from Giraudoux's play, the long-lost lover is not represented by an allegorical chorus of three asking for the Countess' hand, rather, as in the previous encounter Omar is represented by Hugo. Also unlike in *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, the Countess does not immediately reject her long-lost lover shouting "Too late!" An interpolation from the penultimate scene of *Summer and Smoke* elaborates the moment of their final encounter. In Williams's play, Alma finally confronts John and confesses her love to him, but just as with Márgara and Omar, it is also "too late" for Alma and John. Once again, Dumé and Corrales layer dramatic text from another play, another theatrical universe in order to create a queer memory within the ambiguity of the Countess' past. Dumé's drag Márgara queered the sexual repression that makes Alma a prisoner in her own body and places Alma in conflict with

¹³⁰ I would like to note intersection of queer and crip differential consciousness enacted in this dream sequence where Márgara palimpsests Laura, as it is worth further exploration in my next version of this project.

John in a struggle of control over her body. Hugo as Omar no longer wants Márgara's body as he once did in the failed affair they remember together. Like John, Omar has come to adopt Márgara's (and Alma's) way of sublimating sexual desire into a connection with "something immaterial" and "faint like smoke" that transcends Márgara's body. "Sé que sus ojos y su voz son las dos cosas más bellas que he conocido; aunque no parecen pertenecer a su cuerpo" (I know that your eyes and your voice are the two most beautiful things that I have known, although they don't seem to belong to your body).¹³¹ Looking past the transgression of the normative correlation of sex and gender in Dumé's drag performance, Omar tells Márgara that he loves her *in spite of* her body. Márgara challenges Omar, making him face the corporeality of her body.

Lo que está aquí dentro ya no me interesa , lo que me importa ahora es mi cuerpo, su cuerpo. He venido a decirle que ya no me importa que Ud. siga siendo un caballero, pero Ud. me dice que debo seguir siendo una dama. O sea que en el momento que pude entregarme a Ud. no lo hice y ahora resulta que es demasiado tarde.

What is here inside no longer interests me. What matters to me now is my body, your body. I have come to tell you that it is no longer important to me that you continue being a gentleman, but you are telling me that I must continue being a lady. Or it may be that in the moment I was able to give myself to you, I didn't, and now it's too late.¹³²

Márgara rejects Omar's internalization of homosexual shame that she no longer suffers. Dumé and Corrales insert interpolations from Williams's theatre to solve some of the most abrupt moments of Giraudoux's script. In doing so, this palimpsesting develops Márgara's past, as a queer past, borrowing from the memories of Williams's "failed" women and gender outcasts to construct a new memory, a queer memory.

Above I have argued that *La faramalla* challenged the censorship and marginalization of artists and intellectuals through the palimpsest's recovery of memories of persecution within a

¹³¹ Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 36.

¹³² Dumé and Corrales, *La faramalla*, 36.

charged trial scene. The significance of contesting the surveillance, censorship, and marginalization of intellectuals in revolutionary Cuba through avant-garde theatre, a practice that was itself marginalized is also worth considering. In this sense, through an illicit form and practice recovered in exile, Dumé and Corrales drew on abstract metatheatricity to invert the power structure in a trial scene where they condemned their persecutors, as they announced the fugitivity of the avant-garde with irony. Much like the production history of *Los mangos* that is recovered in *Swallows*, *La faramalla* responds to a specific political context of censorship and alienation and is a clear example of the cross-temporal or historiographic dimension of palimpsesting. *La faramalla* is an extreme case that demonstrates the depth of the palimpsest to unite Giraudoux's world of Chaillot with theatre's greatest divas, the camp of New York's drag, the choteo of the solar, and Tennessee Williams's "failed" heroines. The production's metarepresentational comment on complex transcultural layering sets palimpsesting apart from a Butlerian model of performativity where cited performatives of a sign chain are collapsed into a monolithic sense of authority. As *La faramalla* shows us, palimpsesting keeps track of the diverse sources of performative utterances that it cites and transforms. *La faramalla* enacted Cuban theatre's intimate connection with U.S. American and European theatre as it layered these "foreign" worlds within its own to create something totally new. The resulting space of Venus created a differential consciousness that was organized through Cuban avant-garde practice. This queer space was created through meaningful production between multiple localities of outcasts from different cultural contexts and the production's present historicity of intersecting sexile and avant-garde communities in midtown Manhattan. The layering of affectively created space is a clear example of the translocal dimension of the palimpsest. Together the cross-temporal and translocal layering of *La faramalla* provide me an opportunity to point out that palimpsesting

performs the work of transculturation, as it adapts transculturation into theatrical practices and aesthetics.

Conclusion

What I hope to demonstrate with the production historiographies of *Los mangos*, *Swallows*, Grupo Prometeo's *Electra Garrigó*, RAS's *Electra Garrigó*, and *La faramalla* is how palimpsests of Cuban avant-garde practice are in motion, moving across cultures, temporalities, and geographic, national, and local spaces. And through movement, they can transgress discourse to recover knowledge and experience made fugitive. As a result of the Grey Years in Cuba, Cuban avant-garde practice was forced underground and to migrate to new cultural centers, only to reemerge in Havana in the 1980s as the *expresionista* style of the 1960s was recovered in a relaxed cultural environment. Following the increased movement of artists fleeing the Sovietization of culture in Cuba from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, Cuban avant-garde practice intersected with avant-garde theatre off the island. Making their way in theatre scenes on new shores, the diaspora of avant-garde artists introduced their practice to emerging theatre movements, especially LGBTQ theatre and U.S. Latina/o theatre. Palimpsesting is one way to theorize how artists made their mark in avant-garde theatre through conscious and meaningful worldmaking with a wide diversity of cultural sources that reflected their translocal experience. Whether viewed as palimpsesting or through another lens, performing the layering of diverse cultural sources is a shared approach in Cubanized avant-garde theatre that connects the work of artists discussed in this chapter from Piñera to Alabau to Dumé. Looking forward to the productions I present in the following chapters, performatives of transcultural layering map the reaches of Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre.

CHAPTER 3. "FEELING BROWN" LIKE YOU: EL NUEVO TEATRO, CREACIÓN COLECTIVA, AND TRANS-LATINO AFFECT

In the previous chapter, I approach a definition of Cuban avant-garde practice by focusing on a performative phenomenon that I note in each of the productions I discuss between 1948 and 1991. Palimpsesting is a hypothetical lens that identifies the Cuban stamp in global avant-garde theatre movements, and is a way to think about how Cuban avant-garde theatre transculturated in New York, Miami, and elsewhere outside of Cuba. I argue that the existence of palimpsesting is more visible in diasporic contexts, where avant-garde artists glanced towards Cuba as a way of making avant-garde theatre their own.

In this chapter, I present the glance towards Latin America from Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre. Theories and hypothetical lenses aside, *creación colectiva* (collective creation) was a transnational movement that connected theatre production across Latin America. *Creación colectiva*, which later becomes known as *Nuevo Teatro Latinoamericano* (The New Theatre movement of Latin America), is well documented and theorized, and its critical discourse during the 1970s-1980s redefined the way scholars thought about Latin American theatre. In this chapter, I historicize *creación colectiva* as an aesthetic movement of sophisticated postmodern cultural production that reconfigured communities of affect across the hemisphere. Having reframed *creación colectiva* in such a way, I draw on the movement as a comparative framework for the avant-garde theatre production of Miami, Havana, and New York, emphasizing exceptional histories of exchange between the three cities that some may find unintuitive, and hopefully, challenging to dominant narratives of Cuban-U.S. relations.

I will begin with the experience of Cuban theatre artist Norma Acevedo, who earlier in this dissertation was and later in her life became theatre critic Norma Niurka. Acevedo arrived in New York City in 1972 as a theatre artist in exile. Once she settled in the lower east side of

Manhattan, Acevedo felt as if she was the only Cuban in el barrio. However, it was not long before she found a theatrical home for herself among a Nuyorican theatre group called Teatro de Orilla.¹ Teatro de Orilla was a minority-based community theatre. Defined by the proto-multiculturalism politics of the post-civil rights era in late 1960s New York, minority community theatres followed the mandate of early twentieth-century thinker W.E.B. DuBois to create a theatre "About," "By," "For," and "Near" underrepresented communities.² Teatro de Orilla emerged in the 1970s with other New York-based Latin American and Latina/o theatre collectives, like Teatro 4, which formed in 1974,³ and Pregones Theatre in 1979. These groups shared a practice of creating original community-based performances through *creación colectiva*. Critic David Sears rightfully characterized the movement in New York as "Avant-Garde Political Theatre."⁴

¹ In early drafts for her talk in "Raquel's Latino Theatre class," Niurka talks about how she began working with a Cuban theatre group called New York Theater of the Americas, where she met a Puerto Rican who helped her to become better adjusted to life in NYC. Later she became integrated with the bilingual group at La Mama ETC that was directed by an Argentinian director, but consisted of "hispanoamericanos y estadounidenses" (Spanish Americans and U.S. Americans). It was at this point in her career when she first attended a performance by Teatro de Orilla, met the members of the collective, and eventually joined the group. She also reports that "de Orilla," meant to be humble and from a place of poverty and economic disparity. De Orilla described the character of a theatre from the barrio that was defiant towards the status quo, which was marginalizing its audience. Norma Niurka Acevedo, "Teatro Puertorriqueño Comunitario (en Nueva York): Una experiencia personal." Norma Niurka Papers, Box 9, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

² W.E.B. Du Bois, "'Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre': The Story of a Little Theatre Movement," in *Theatre in Theory: 1900-2000, an Anthology*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 165; Jon Rossini, *Contemporary U.S. Latina/o Theater: Wrighting Ethnicity*. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 11; Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 22.

³ Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "Teatro latinoamericano de Nueva York," *Conjunto* 44 (1980): 12

⁴ David Sears, "Rasputin Coriolanus," *Michael's Thing* 5.49, 8 Dec 1975, Manuel Martín Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, "Programs, Clippings, and Illustrations: Rasputín," Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

Teatro de Orilla's practice typified *creación colectiva*. Norma Niurka Acevedo later described how during the creation of a piece called *¿Este tren para en Delancy?* (Does this train stop on Delancy?), Teatro de Orilla drew from interviews with local residents and created a set of vignettes through improvisations with the ensemble that addressed the daily struggle of Latinas/os living in the lower east side. Inspiring dialogue about social issues and social change with their Nuyorican audience through theatre, the *creación colectiva* methods used by Teatro de Orilla are clear antecedents of the applied theatre methods defined as community-based theatre by contemporary theatre scholars.⁵ At the time, collective creation was avant-garde. Early on in the process of creating *¿Este tren para en Delancy?*, the group contracted Argentine director Rubén Correa, whose theatre group was temporarily in New York, to run a Grotowski method workshop with the actors. Eventually, Correa took over directing the piece as avant-garde theatre for Lower East Side Nuyorican audiences.

Niurka's experience of becoming Nuyorican through her daily life in el barrio and her work as an artist in a Nuyorican theatre collective was a transcendence of ethnicity and nationality across lines of *latinidad* (Latino-ness). This process of crossing-over is similar to how playwright Dolores Prida (1943-2013) describes her experience of coming of age in the Bronx. Prida called herself a "Cubarican" not because of mixed Puerto Rican and Cuban parentage, as

⁵ Latina/o and Latin American theatre's enormous contribution to community-based theatre through *creación colectiva* is often marginalized and omitted in histories of "American" community-based theatre. Part of the work that this current history project is trying to do is demonstrate, through the route of Cuban diaspora connecting Miami, Havana, and New York, that the impact of the Américas on theatre movements in "America" can no longer be ignored, and vice versa. Cohen-Cruz, 26, 163-4; Sonja Kuftinec includes El Teatro Campesino and the Chicano theatre movement in her history of community-based theatre, but stops her investigation of "those practices that inflect the definition and negotiation of American identity," at the border, when the Chicano theatre movement did not. Sonja Kuftinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-based Theater*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 24, 33-37.

she was born in Cuba to Cuban parents.⁶ Rather, Prida became Cubarican through a transcultural process of living in the Bronx and slipping into Nuyorican ways of being and feeling in the world. Through this "trans-Latino" process, Prida transcended lines of national and cultural difference. In this chapter, I argue that the creación colectiva techniques Niurka Acevedo and other artists used in this period created ephemeral spaces where becoming Cubarican in addition to other kinds of "trans-Latino" feeling and being were experienced.

The title of this chapter quotes José Esteban Muñoz essay "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*." In the essay, Muñoz draws on affect theory to explain Latina/o ways of being and ways of challenging the status quo through performance. Querying the enigma of Latina/o identity as an impossible marker that combines people across difference of nationality, race, gender, and sexuality beneath one umbrella, Muñoz finds the subversive political possibilities of the performance of latinidad as a way of humanizing and politicizing the "manifestation of consciousness" that is the performance of "'feeling brown' in a world painted white, organized by cultural mandates to 'feel white.'"⁷ In this light, public sphere performances of latinidad contest the hegemonic order that seeks to control, contain and diminish Latina/os as spicy, exotic, excessive, and foreign. By asserting the "ontological validity and affective difference" of ways of being that are shared among Latinas/os of diverse backgrounds, these performances denaturalize universal humanism from white affect.⁸ Muñoz's groundbreaking work *Disidentifications* is at the heart of "feeling brown," as the

⁶ Alberto Minero, "Para reafirmar el espíritu en la 'Botánica': Un nuevo estreno de Dolores Prida" *El Diario/La Prensa*, sec. Suplemento, Repertorio Español Records, Box 4, Folder 4, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*" *Theatre Journal* 52.1 (2000), 68.

⁸ What I am calling white affect or white feeling, in other words, the structures of feeling created by mandates to feel white, Muñoz calls "U.S. national affect." Muñoz, 72

ontology of Latina/o being is the editing, supplementing, and distortion of denigrating and exoticizing simulacra that dominant ideology produces.⁹ Thus, spaces of Latina/o affect are produced through the performance of difference to an invisible white center. “Feeling brown” is a theorization of disidentifications through affect theory and with an emphasis on how those performances make community in structures of feeling. Most importantly, “feeling brown” locates Latina/o becoming both in disidentifications and in the departure from disidentifications. What kinds of newness enter the world when a differential consciousness awakens in performance to the power of its difference?

In order to explain Prida’s and Niurka’s Cuban phenomena and its enactment in performance, I suggest retooling Muñoz’s theory of Latino affect to explain what ethnomusicologist Juan Flores describes as a “trans-Latino vision of ‘nuestra América’”[sic].¹⁰ Combining the two concepts, “trans-Latino affect” manifests in the case studies I present as the theatrical expression of and phenomenological encounters with different senses of *latinidad*. In other words, trans-Latino affect is feeling brown in another way across lines of difference. Of course, the exchange from Cuban to Puerto Rican, or Chicano to Cuban is never intact and always riddled with tensions and misunderstandings. I will discuss these tensions, while emphasizing the productive dimension of this exchange, namely the renegotiation of *latinidad*.

⁹ Disidentifications combines the theories of theorist/artist Marga Gomez, in performing the lesbian who is “known as me and not me,” García Canclini’s, “hybrid transformations generated by the horizontal coexistence of a number of symbolic systems,” Chela Sandoval’s Differential Consciousness and identity and difference, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s multiple processes of identification, and Kimberle William Crenshaw’s intersectionality. Disidentifications a process of refashioning simulacra, stereotypes, and misrepresentations propagated by the dominant culture in a way that gestures towards and interpreted through a minoritarian positionality, subjectivity, and spectatorship. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5-8.

¹⁰ Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 151, 159, 165, also see *Latino Imaginary* 197-9

Historically, past notions of *latinidad* preceded the formation of Latin American nation states. At the heart of the many nationalities that make up the impossible marker of Latinas/os lay translocal linkages rooted to similar kinds of postcolonial consciousness of conquest, colonialism and *mestizaje* (miscegenation). So it is not surprising that Latinas/os and Latin Americans retain cultural citizenship to *Nuestra América*. Speaking generally, by the mid-twentieth century, nationality was felt more strongly than *latinidad* among Latino(*americana/o*)s.¹¹ However, during the years preceding the period studied in this chapter, political figures like Che Guevara had begun to reinvent and incite a new version of Latin American consciousness. The late twentieth-century trans-Latino encounters of *creación colectiva* dramatized the reemergence of *latinidad* as a postcolonial consciousness. In these performances, trans-Latino affect is felt in the moments when national difference is transcended and *latinidad* takes precedence.

Latina/o studies scholar Alicia Arrizón defines *latinidad* as an amorphous global formation—a translocality that opposes the umbrella terms "Hispanic" or "Latino" that are passed from the top down and group a great diversity of U.S. Latinas/os, immigrants from across the Americas, and their descendants into a single racialized category. For Arrizón, *latinidad* is multiply bordered, heterogeneous, and created by the transcendence of the local in place of the global space of a *latinoamericano* (Latin American) consciousness reflected in works like José Martí's *Nuestra América* (Our America) or José Vasconcelos' *La raza cósmica* (The cosmic

¹¹ Latino(*americana/o*)s is an orthography that I propose to represent Latinas/os in the U.S. and Latin Americans together. Very similar to Diana Taylor's orthography Latin/o Americans, Latino signifies the concept of Latino ways of being, as theorized by Muñoz, within the Spanish word for Latin American, *latinoamericano*. I hope that by spelling "Latino" in English and "American" in Spanish represented by italics, my orthography will estrange both signifiers for an English reading audience.

race).¹² Juan Flores' definitive Latina/o studies volume, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, reveals a grassroots negotiation of identity in opposition to the top-down labels of "Hispanic" or "Latino." Flores' term "trans-Latino" describes the fluid process of identification by which Latinas/os can be Latina/o, at once different—Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Chicano, Mayan, negro, blanco, mestizo—and be affiliated with one another.¹³ Latinas/os negotiate latinidad itself through this fluidity. As a diverse and contiguous construct, latinidad necessitates some kind of movement across the gaps between experiences of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and class. "Feeling Brown" is an effective way of theorizing this movement under a paradigm of shared racial difference and minoritarian politics in a twenty-first century U.S. context. However, trans-Latino affect better describes this movement across difference in an international context spanning the Americas.

My definition of trans-Latino affect is also indebted to Lillian Manzor and Alicia Arrizón who define "Latina theater" as a heterogeneous and intersectional field analyzing the theatrical works of Latinas as artists of color in the U.S. Their work positions late twentieth century Latina theatre as feminist expression that transcended nationality-based identity movements, which reified heterosexual and patriarchal hierarchies.¹⁴ My work also builds from Ramon Rivera-Servera's recent theorization of Queer latinidad as intersectional collective experiences or communities of affect that are provisionally produced in performance. Rivera-Servera analyzes the tensions produced when Queer Latinas/os of different nationality, ethnicity, race, and class

¹² As Arrizón points out, within contemporary notions of latinidad lie residual nineteenth and early twentieth-century notions of being latinoamericano or belonging to Nuestra América. Alicia Arrizón, *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 21-27

¹³ Flores, 165

¹⁴ Alicia Arrizón and Lillian Manzor, "Introduction," *Latinas on Stage*, eds. Arrizón and Manzor (Berkley: Third Woman Press, 2000), 12-13.

rub up against one another through a shared, but contested sense of Queer latinidad.¹⁵ Similarly in my work, trans-Latino affect is an aesthetically produced feeling of belonging that provisionally facilitates, within the context of performance, the negotiation of latinidad across difference and through cross identification.

In various degrees, the theatrical works discussed in this chapter intersected with *Nuevo Teatro*, a twentieth century movement of experimental political theatre belonging to Latin America. Since being and becoming are not merely represented but experienced in performance,¹⁶ my thesis is that the ways of being Colombian, Cuban, Chicano or Nuyorican became recognized as something larger through performance of *creación colectiva*. In this sense, *creación colectiva* was leveraged as a performative apparatus that allowed ways of being defined by nationality to become felt as ways of being Latino(*americana/o*). Latinidad is not, as Muñoz points out, one monolithic whole. Diverse experiences relate to one another across difference to constitute it as a contiguous nexus of Latino(*americana/o*) being and experience. Yet, the space between specific experiences of nationality is the very space where latinidad is negotiated. As a movement of cultural production spanning the Americas during the late twentieth century, *creación colectiva* is a clear example of how diverse experiences were performatively refashioned in excess of national boundaries into Latino(*americana/o*) experiences.

As an historiographic project, the subject of *creación colectiva* presents many difficulties because a complete understanding of these works would include observations of the creative process. The records available to me as an historian (scripts, reviews, interviews, director's notes,

¹⁵ The "friction" produced in the rubbing can be productive towards the generation of a utopic performative, or regressive when participants tropicalize and exoticize one another across difference. Ramón Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 17-21, 172-177, 195-203.

¹⁶ Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 4, 11-12, 25-29, 46-47.

etc.) are mainly about the product, the performance. Although there are excellent secondary sources and even some primary sources on the creative process of certain productions, I lack the fly-on-the-wall insight of the rehearsals to critique the creative process of these works. Part of this dilemma is the same that is brought up by performance historiography: how does one write about a performance that one did not experience? My strategy is to write a history from the records that are available, treating each surviving record with critical historiography, and always being aware of and pointing to what is missing. In writing about these original sources, I focus primarily on the moment of performance, the end product of *creación colectiva* as a renewal and renegotiation of *latinidad*.

Going forward, I begin the discussion by defining *creación colectiva* as a method and a Latin Americanist movement, tracing the historiography of its role in the creation of the category of Nuevo Teatro. I begin the discussion here to provide context for the case studies and to historicize *latinidad* in this period in order to argue how it was negotiated through the *creación colectiva* movement. The first production I discuss is Teatro Escambray's *Ramona* (1975, 1982), which toured North America through collaboration with Teatro de la Esperanza from Santa Barbara, CA, and Teatro 4 from New York. Because the Cuban state played a central role in the definition of Nuevo Teatro as a Latin Americanist movement and Teatro Escambray became the flagship *creación colectiva* group supported by the Cuban state, beginning with this case study provides a solid example for the preceding discussion of *creación colectiva* and its role in the Nuevo Teatro movement. Having established the collaboration between U.S. Latina/o collectives and their role in the Nuevo Teatro movement in Cuba, I then discuss Teatro de la Esperanza's tour to Cuba and analyze their performance of *La víctima* (1976, 1983) in Havana. Trans-Latino affect in these first two case studies concerns the movement of particular experiences (Cuban

campesina/o and Chicana/o respectively) across borders and their recreation as experiences in/of latinidad. Although both Teatro Escambray and Teatro de la Esperanza had unique approaches to creación colectiva, they were more prototypical in their application of collective creation than the following two examples, which were experiments in creación colectiva by companies that did not usually produce collective-based work. In *Guaracha Rock* (1978), Teresa María Rojas directed her students in the staging of personal stories. The cast represented a pan-Latino community, made up of multiple Latin American Diasporas. The resulting performance was a portrait of contemporary hispano/Latino youth in Miami. I present this as the third example because the performance moved between modalities of playfulness and gravity, satire and tragedy, and this quality of the production demonstrates the paradox of emotion commonly encountered in trans-Latino affect. The final case study presented in this chapter is INTAR's production of *Cap-a-Pie* (1975) directed by María Irene Fornés. Fornés' experiment with creación colectiva dramatized the personal stories of transnational and U.S. born Latina/o actors and presented those stories in contiguous relationships which staged the negotiation of latinidad taking place in New York in 1975. I end with this chronologically earliest example because trans-Latino affect in *Cap-a-Pie* encompasses the painful separation and letting go of nationality and immigrant identity and the felicitous creation of a new Latina/o community.

Creación Colectiva and el Nuevo Teatro Latinoamericano

Creación colectiva is far from a uniform movement. Every theatre collective associated with this movement practiced a particular variation of this method and responded to a unique social, cultural, and political context.¹⁷ During the 1970s, scholars like Francisco Garzón

¹⁷ Francisco Garzón Céspedes, "Prólogo" in *El Teatro Latinoamericano de Creación Colectiva*. Ed. Francisco Garzón Céspedes (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1978), 7; For more information on creación colectiva see Beatriz Rizk, *Creación Colectiva: El legado de Enrique*

Céspedes began to label *creación colectiva* as the new Latin American theatre movement. These initial attempts to theorize *creación colectiva* as a movement defined it as an authentically Latin American expression that was responding to an intense period of neocolonial mimicry in Latin American theatre.¹⁸ Whereas I differ in my assessment of Latin American theatre of the 1950s and 1960s, I want to point out that artists and scholars felt that the movement represented a rerouting of Latin American theatre on its own terms as much as it represented a challenge to North-South geopolitical power structures and Eurocentric cultural paradigms. During the 1980s, artists like Colombian playwright and director Enrique Buenaventura and scholars like Beatriz Rizk labeled the movement as *el Nuevo Teatro Latinoamericano*. Contemporary Latin American theater scholarship published by the Cuban state and Casa de las Américas in particular aligned Nuevo Teatro with the Revolution, Marxist critique, and left wing social change movements taking place across the hemisphere. I argue that while these connections are well substantiated, politics in the historiography has come to overshadow the discourse of *latinidad* that the movement facilitated, not to mention the movement's many achievements of sophisticated artistic production. *Creación colectiva* was avant-garde for its time. In Cuba for example, the politically committed part of it—called *lo panfletario*—eventually subsumed the experimental as the movement was institutionalized as the new theatre of the Revolution.

Collective ensemble devised theatre is a part of many traditions from Renaissance Italy to Depression Era United States to Apartheid Era South Africa. In fact, the difference in creative

Buenaventura (Buenos Aires: Autel, 2008); Beatriz Rizk, *El nuevo teatro latinoamericano* (Minneapolis: Prisma, 1987); Rosa Ileana Boudet, *Nuevo teatro: Una respuesta* (Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1983); Gustavo Geirola, *Teatralidad y experiencia política en América Latina: 1957-1977* (Irvine, CA: Gestos: 2000), 242-249.

¹⁸ Garzón Céspedes, 8; Manuel Galich y Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "Entrevista con Manuel Galich. *Creación Colectiva: Un Teatro Necesario y Urgente*," in Garzón Céspedes, 25-26.

process between Latin American groups of the 1960s and contemporary U.S. American collectives using similar processes like the Living Theatre or the San Francisco Mime Troupe was not any greater than the large variation in process among Latin American groups.¹⁹ Speaking more generally, however, *creación colectiva* among Latin American theatre collectives often included experimental ensemble-based creation, appropriation of popular culture forms familiar to *campesino* (rural peasant or farmer) and proletariat audiences, a reinvention of or complete rupture with the Western theatrical canon, an avant-garde aesthetic relying on theatricality, and finally, a political critique of the status quo with the intent to engage the audience ideologically, and, as a result, change social reality through artistic practice. Collectives often used, but not always, conventions that involved the audience directly in participation during the performance. Rizk summarizes the methodology of *creación colectiva* more generally into five major stages: investigation, elaboration, improvisation, staging, and the relationship with the audience.²⁰ All in

¹⁹ It should also be noted that U.S. American groups like Bread and Puppet Theatre and the Mabou Mines also performed in Latin American theatre festivals, specifically the Latin American Popular Theatre Festival of New York. Thus there were considerable connections between U.S. American and Latin American collectives. Language barriers were often broken in such exchanges, but language barriers still kept North-South interaction somewhat limited.

²⁰ The first is "investigation," which includes research about a given issues affecting the material and social conditions of the audience, as well as sociological interviews and oral history with public, etc. In the second stage, "elaboration" the collective explores the text with regard to the critical perspective. Texts could be either canonical texts, an original piece by members of the group, or generated collectively by the group through improvisation. The elaboration stage includes table work, critical dramatization, and analysis of the text through smaller sequences made up of situations, situations made up of actions, and actions, the basic unit of conflict. The third stage is "improvisation." In this stage, alternative analogs to the action of the play are ensemble generated through improvisation, often adding to the perspective of marginalized and working class characters in the text. This stage is the "heart" of *creación colectiva*, as it is through improvisation that the ensemble creates alternative images dialectically opposed to the text's "virtuality," or discourse of ideas. Next is the "staging" or the "artificial" stage which focuses on the selection of material interpreted and created through the process and its ordering into a plot sequence. The final stage of *creación colectiva* refers to the audience's interaction with the performance. In this stage, the relationship with the public is the focus of audience

all, these methods for creative process and approaches to dramatic staging: 1) connected the artists with the social reality of their audience, 2) engaged the audience in an ideological debate through artistic expression that reflected the audience's cultural and socio-historic context, and 3) provisionally enacted a change to the audience's reality through "dramatic elaboration" and performance.²¹

Rizk explains that the collective creation of Enrique Buenaventura and Teatro Experimental de Cali marked the beginning of a theatrical style that was overwhelmingly antiestablishment and modeled after a socialist structure that it sought to implant.²² Situated in Latin America in a period following the success of the Cuban Revolution, *creación colectiva* has been associated with Marxism and social change since it was first recognized as a Latin American movement. In an interview from 1975, Guatemalan playwright Manuel Galich, then the director of Latin American theatre journal *Conjunto*, placed the *creación colectiva* movement within a wave of left wing social change movements in Latin America, stating that just as revolution was making the "foreign" America into "Nuestra América," *creación colectiva* was producing, perhaps for the first time, "nuestro teatro" in challenge to an established theatrical tradition that "mimicked" U.S. American and European forms.²³ Published by Casa de las Américas in Havana, *Conjunto* was the only Latin American theatre journal during this period and played a essential role as a central institution of criticism that furthered Nuevo Teatro's status as THE theatrical expression of Latin America during the 1960s through the 1980s. After the first "Teatro Nuevo" workshop in La Macagua, Cuba in 1977, artists and scholars writing from

participation and post show debates on themes and aesthetics presented in the performance. Rizk, *El nuevo teatro latinoamericano*, 73-79.

²¹ Boudet, 26-32.

²² Rizk, *Creación Colectiva*, 117.

²³ Galich y Espinosa Domínguez, "Entrevista con Manuel Galich," 26

revolutionary Cuba institutionalized *creación colectiva* as a Marxist movement under the moniker "Teatro Nuevo." I argue that the movement was first the result of mobile artists that connected experimental art scenes across the Americas and brought that artistic thought into intercultural production with urban and rural populations of the lower economic classes. A top-down political paradigm like Marxism overlooks the politics, ideology, and artistic innovation the audience contributed to this experimental art making. The intercultural cosmopolitanism proposed by these artists encountered in the masses an audience already adept at complex transcultural expression. The interaction with this public renewed the movement's sense of authenticity and propelled the movement much faster and further than ideology alone.²⁴

During this same period (1960s-1980s), Latin American theatre festivals became the front lines where a renewed sense of *latinidad* was negotiated through trans-Latino affect. The TENAZ Festival, The Theatre Festival of Havana, The Nuevo Teatro Workshop, The Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Artists, The Latin American Popular Theatre Festival of New York, the Iberian American Theatre Festival of Cadiz, The International Theatre Meeting of Peru, the International Theatre Festival of Caracas, the International Theatre Festival of Manizales in Colombia, and others facilitated hemispheric exchange between artists regarding approach, method and politics, and fostered the movement's Latin American consciousness.²⁵ Alongside Latin Americanist theatre scholarship, these festivals created a space to foster *creación colectiva*'s emergence as the dominant Latin American theatre style.

²⁴ My thinking is informed by Analola Santana, who points out that, while *creación colectiva* groups appropriated culture forms from campesino and proletariat publics, the groups sought to destabilize cultural hierarchies that devalued those forms and obscured their sophistication. Analola Santana, *Teatro y cultura de masas: encuentros y debates* (Mexico City: Escenología A.C., 2010), 61.

²⁵ *Conjunto 55*. One of the first was the Casa de las Américas festival from the 1960s Latin American Theatre Festival.

I want to underscore that the artists producing *creación colectiva* were not beholden to any singular political ideology. I would argue that the most powerful politics of *creación colectiva* were in its artistic experimentation with local and popular forms, an experimentation that challenged the social hierarchy of culture and intervened in the theatrical discourse of "universal" humanism. Experimentation with Latin America's creole or mestizo fabric and the cultural memory of conquest and colonialism imbedded in it connected the work of a diverse group of collectives across the hemisphere. The trans-Latino affect created by this experimentation produced a teatro that was recognizably felt as belonging to *Nuestra América*.

In sum, I figure *creación colectiva* as a hemispheric movement defined by process, with Nuevo Teatro as a Latin Americanist frame for that movement that emerged in criticism in the 1980s. I now turn to my first two case studies of *creación colectiva*: Teatro Escambray's 1982 production of *Ramona* and Teatro de la Esperanza's 1983 production of *La Víctima*. Performed for new audiences across borders, *latinidad* became an interpretative/communicative axis for the experiences presented in their plays, which were recreated in trans-Latino affect.

Teatro Escambray: el Teatro Nuevo de la Revolución

Post-revolutionary Cuba played a principle role in the history of *creación colectiva*, with the state supporting several groups from the late 1960s through the 1980s. Founded in 1968, el Grupo Teatro Escambray was a collective formed by thirteen artists seeking to revolutionize theatre as a communicative medium and create new works that dealt directly with the historic changes that were happening in Cuba following the Revolution.²⁶ Grupo Teatro Escambray

²⁶ Teatro Escambray first formed following a dispute among theatre artists that erupted during the 1967 Theatre Seminar, taking place December 14 through 20. During the seminar, many artists expressed dissatisfaction with the bureaucratized state of Cuban theatre because it was not significantly different from pre-revolutionary theatre of Havana. They felt a strong disconnect between their lives as artists and their lives as citizens in the early period of the Cuban

developed their own method of investigation that they used to create original dramas with the *campesinos* (rural peasants and farmers) of the Escambray Mountains.²⁷ Throughout the 1970s, Teatro Escambray's work inspired a flurry of companies to emerge, each creating theatre through *creación colectiva* methods.²⁸ The proliferation of *creación colectiva* culminated in two events held in the Escambray Mountains in Las Villas, Cuba that began a new chapter for the legitimacy

Revolution. As a result of the conference, two new theatre groups were created from the artists that formerly comprised Cuba's most prominent experimental theatre company, Grupo Teatro Estudio. The first was Los Doce, an avant-garde collective lead by Vicente Revuelta. The second was Grupo Teatro Escambray; its original members were Sergio Corrieri, Gilda Hernández, Concepción Ares, Orieta Medina, Adelaida Herrero, Herminia Sánchez, Helmo Hernández, Federico Eternod, Pedro Rentería, Albio Paz, Manolo Terraza, Elio Martín, and Miguel Navarro. Rine Leal, *La dramaturgia del Escambray*, (Habana: Editorial Letras Cubana, 1984): 38-40; Randy Martin, "Cuban Theatre Under Rectification," 34, no. 1 (1990): 42; Judith Rudakoff, "R/evolutionary Theatre in Contemporary Cuba: Grupo Teatro Escambray," *TDR* 40, no. 1 (1996): 78. Alma Villegas, *Origin, Development, and Processes of Teatro Escambray in Cuba from 1968 to 1985*. (Diss. New York University, 1995): 64.

²⁷ Humberto Arenal, "Crónica de una jornada: Teatro nuevo," *Conjunto* 39 (1979): 3-6

²⁸ Flora Lauten, a former member of Teatro Escambray, and a group of non-professional community actors from La Yaya, a rural housing development in the Escambray Region, formed Teatro la Yaya. They created plays designed for provoking charged ideological confrontation with audiences in the most isolated areas of the country. Another two former Teatro Escambray artists, Herminia Sánchez and Manolo Terraza, returned to Havana in 1974 to form Teatro de Participación Popular, which created community-based theatre with the port of Havana dock workers and their families. The workers themselves made up the cast and performed plays written by Sánchez based on their lives. A similar group called Grupo Teatro Cubana de Acero was formed in 1978 by a group of theatre artists to work with steel workers in Havana. The founders were inspired by interaction with Teatro Escambray during the 1970s. Grupo Teatrova, founded in the early 1970s, drew from the Cuban folk genre *Nueva Trova* (New Troubadour) and created lyric performances that, oscillating between mimetic and diegetic modalities, told personal stories that dealt with themes connected to the lives of their audience. Stories were taken from Cubans they interviewed or stories from the lives of the artists in the collective. Finally, Conjunto Dramático del Oriente, founded in 1961 (renamed Cabildo Teatral de Santiago in 1977), is most known for revitalizing a variety theatre tradition called teatro de relaciones. Relaciones originated in Santiago de Cuba and dates back to the colonial nineteenth century. It combines storytelling, parody of Spanish comedia, satire, melodramatic musical underscoring, and carnival aesthetics. The legacy of teatro de relaciones keeps the work of Cabildo Teatral de Santiago to a certain point in a separate conversation from Teatro Escambray. Their work began before Teatro Escambray's and they also participated in shaping the teatro nuevo movement in Cuba. However their impact on formation of other groups was less direct than Teatro Escambray's. Arenal, 5-9.

of this theatrical form in Cuba: the First Teatro Nuevo Workshop held in 1977, and the First Festival of Teatro Nuevo in December of 1978. Both events established teatro nuevo cubano as the new mainstream and the old vanguard in Cuban theatre.²⁹

In the late 1970s, the Revolution showcased Grupo Teatro Escambray as the premier revolutionary theatre group sending them on international tours. Their first international tour was to Angola where Cuba was just beginning a long military engagement against the South African army. In 1979 they toured to Nicaragua in support of the Sandinista movement.³⁰ Now institutionalized as part of the mainstream they performed the influential works of the early period abroad without their most essential component—the Cuban campesino public. Nothing could serve as a better example of the museum-ifying effects of institutionalization than the staging of much of Escambray's repertoire for the 1982 Havana Theatre Festival. Seven plays originally created by Teatro Escambray with their collaborating audience of campesinos

²⁹ I want to underline the distinction between teatro nuevo, the "new" theatre of the Cuban Revolution, and Nuevo Teatro, a historiographic label introduced in the early 1980s that named an already existing transnational movement, highly associated with *creación colectiva* and understood as a "Latin American" category of theatre. The two terms mark distinct moments in the development of a category in criticism. The term "teatro nuevo" becomes subsumed into "Nuevo Teatro" once the concept of "New Theatre" is adopted and echoed by theatre artists and critics outside of Cuba from across the hemisphere. Scholarship on *creación colectiva* published by Casa de las Américas in *Conjunto* and other publications like Garzón Céspedes' anthology quoted above stresses that the method belonged to a cultural phenomenon spanning the Americas, yet the name still referred to a creative process and not a product, creating difficulty for critics to delineate what belonged to the movement and what did not. I argue that this shift in terminology from process to product beginning in *Conjunto* in 1977 is worth noting because it marks an association between Nuevo Teatro and movements of social change, especially the Cuban Revolution. Rizk, *El Nuevo Teatro*, 17; Alberto Y. Sarraín, "Regresión y metateatralidad: lo lúdico en *La noche de los asesinos*." Unpublished essay, 1.

³⁰ Susell Gómez González, "El Teatro Escambray su impronta en la formación de un público diferente" <http://www.monografias.com/trabajos96/teatro-escambray-su-impronta-formacion-publico-diferente/teatro-escambray-su-impronta-formacion-publico-diferente.shtml>. Monografias.com. Web. 20 Jan 2016.

appeared on the 1982 festival program.³¹ However, that work was now presented outside the context where it was created, a context that no longer existed as the campesino population had been removed from the Escambray region and relocated to other municipalities on the island.³²

It was also at this moment in 1982 that Grupo Teatro Escambray was invited to tour the U.S. and Montreal by Chicano theatre collective Teatro de la Esperanza, New York-based theatre collective Teatro 4, and Carrefour Culturel del'Amitie Québec-Cuba. Teatro Escambray was the first theatre group to perform in the U.S. on tour from Cuba in over 20 years. The collective toured a small repertoire of their works that included a music concert called Panorama Musical, a children's theatre performance of short story adaptations by Cuban author Onelio Jorge Cardoso called *Los cuentos*, and *Ramona*, a collectively generated piece, written by Roberto Orihuela (born 1950), that tells the story of a female dairy worker who faces adversity in being recognized as an exemplary worker because of sexism and misogyny.³³ Teatro Escambray's repertoire told the story of a campesino in transition, a symbol of a society in the process of revolutionary transformation.³⁴ Cuban campesino culture was at the center of Teatro Escambray's representational and semiotic fabric, and thus, the repertoire foregrounded a part of Cuban culture that easily translated across other Latin American contexts, as was the case in California.

³¹ *Ramona*, *Nosotros los campesinos*, *Septemo de Escambray*, *Los cuentos*, *Los novios* (Extramuros), *La emboscada* (Conjunto Dramático Matanzas), *El paraíso recobrao* (Conjunto Dramático de Pinar del Río). Productions of teatro nuevo accounted for 14 out of 53 presentations in the entire program, which included lyric theatre, opera, ballet, children's theatre, puppet theatre, single-author drama, and creación colectiva. Program "Festival de Teatro de la Habana 1982" Archivo Fotográfico Tablas Alarcos, Habana, Cuba

³² Rafael González Rodríguez and Christopher Winks. "Teatro Escambray: Towards the Cuban's Inner Being," *TDR: The Drama Review* 40, no. 1 (1996): 102-104

³³ Blanca Acosta, "Un gira de fraternidad: Grupo Teatro Escambray en los Estados Unidos," *Conjunto* 53 (1982): 115

³⁴ Pogolotti, Graciela. "Prólogo," *Teatro y Revolución*. (La Habana, Ediciones UNEAC, 1980), 23; Acosta, 115

Situated in the center of the work of a Nuevo Teatro collective, the Cuban campesino in a post-UFW-movement California became an equivocal axis of trans-Latino affect.

Grupo Teatro Escambray's method of collective creation expanded the dialogue of theatre, or the communicative exchange that takes place between the performance and the audience, creating multiple avenues of enunciation, confrontation, and revision in the exchange between the two entities. In order to reflect the community and increase audience engagement the group created campesino characters based on their investigations. Escambray's appropriation and performance of campesino characters layered voice and authorship, creating heteroglossia as a double-voiced discourse within the performance. The final result was collaborative, nuanced, contradictory, polyphonic, and heteroglossic.³⁵ During the early period of their work (1960s-1970s), the collective would spend 10-12 days with a given community in the rural region of the Escambray Mountains, working alongside residents, attending community meetings, and having daily interaction with the people in their lives.³⁶ Meanwhile they would present children's theatre, give lectures and workshops, perform theatre for adults, and in between the presentations they would conduct interviews with community members to create new theatre about community members' concerns regarding the Revolution, as well as other issues they faced in their daily lives.³⁷

Omar Valiño looks at Teatro Escambray's investigation through Teatro Yuyachkani's concept of *acumulación sensible* (sensorial accumulation), an immersion that goes far beyond

³⁵ *Campesino* audience interventions in "debates" may also become triple-voiced, performing back to the Escambrayan artists a revision of their own campesino speech in artists' language (theatre) that they presented with the play. Mikail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," Translated by Michael Holoquist and Caryl Emerson in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Ed. Michael Holoquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 324-331.

³⁶ Anne Petit, "Teatro y sociedad en Cuba: el Grupo Teatro Escambray," *Latin American Theatre Review* 12, no .1 (1978): 74, Séjourné. *Teatro Escambray: una experiencia*, 19.

³⁷ Petit, 74.

building a character in a Stanislavskian sense. The collective used anthropological and sociological means of investigation, while approaching the collaborators they interviewed with the hearts and minds of artists. Investigations led to the accumulation of an archive of images and sensations to be later synthesized into the mise-en-scene through the process of collective creation. Through the investigative step in the process, the group staged an entry into the image of the campesina/o, embodying experiences of the campesinos' lives by sharing environment, work, language, and other aspects of everyday life and campesina/o being.³⁸

Additionally, the group lived together in a commune-like arrangement and generated theatre as a collective of artists, using interview transcripts, improvisation, and other techniques to create individual scenes. Once several scenes were created, the project was assigned to a particular playwright, who brought the sketches together into a performance script that was continually revised to stay current with the evolution of social and economic issues and the artists' understanding of the communities they were working with. This process created a unique connection with Escambray's audiences that informed the plays' subjects and dramaturgy, and augmented audience reception of performances. The resulting performances utilized the local architecture into the mise-en-scène, adapted traditional *música campesina* (rural music), including the *punto libre* and regional *tonadas* (genres) from the Escambray mountains as a narrative device that inspired critical thinking about the events presented to the audience, and integrated the audience members into the drama as characters.

As anthropologist Laurie Frederik reminds us, the early period of Teatro Escambray's work coincides precisely with the Grey Years, or a period from 1968-1976 of increased restriction of artistic expression that matured into a witch-hunt for counter-revolutionary artists

³⁸ Omar Valiño, *La aventura de Escambray* (Pinar del Rio, Cuba: Ediciones Almargen, 2004), 33-35.

and intellectuals.³⁹ During this period harsh measures of censorship were taken against artists, including the imprisonment of artists to work camps and complete alienation of certain artists and writers, many of whom chose exile afterwards.⁴⁰ Early instances of such censorship in theatre include the Communist Youth's closing of 1965 student production of *Los mangos de Caín* directed by Magaly Alabau discussed in Chapter Two.

Teatro Escambray's method was a marked departure from the didactic style of socialist realism, which dominated Cuban theatre of the 1970s,⁴¹ something symbolically echoed by their literal departure from the Havana scene in 1968. Writings by collective members Gilda Hernández and other members of the collective in the early 1970s indicate that the group sought to engage campesinos that felt threatened by and were suspicious of the state and the changes it set forth to create.⁴² The main strategy of their dramaturgy was not to make the campesino the villain that needed to change, but rather the protagonist. They took the counterrevolutionary and dramatized their difficult transformation into the New Man (and New Woman).⁴³

Whereas the collective chose the Escambray region because they felt it offered the most possibilities for the kind of theatre that they wanted to create, the local authorities in the Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP) (National Association of Small Farmers) welcomed the collective's presence. An armed conflict erupted in the region following the Second Agrarian reform in 1961, which sought to dispossess small farmers of the land given to them after the first Agrarian Reform of 1959. The Revolution labeled the struggle "La Lucha

³⁹ Laurie A. Frederik, *Trumpets in the Mountains: Theater and the Politics of National Culture in Cuba*, (Raleigh, N.C., Duke University Press, 2012), 67-70.

⁴⁰ Frederik, 70-72

⁴¹ Rudakoff, "R/evolutionary Theatre in Contemporary Cuba," 82

⁴² Grupo Teatro Escambray, "El Teatro, un arma eficaz al servicio de la Revolución," in Garzón Céspedes, 421-423; Gilda Hernández, "Participación, comunicación, y estructura dramática en el Teatro del Escambray," in Garzón Céspedes, 441.

⁴³ Sergio Corrieri quoted in Leal, *La dramaturgia del Escambray*, 39

Contra Bandidos” (The Struggle Against Bandits). The local campesinos, some of which supported the counterrevolution and some of which did not, unfairly carried the stigma of bandido. State forces engaged in armed conflict with the counter-revolutionaries and conducted forced evacuations of small towns thought to be supporting the counterrevolution with supplies. ANAP had been charged to politically reorient the campesinos during this campaign labeled the “Second and Definitive Cleansing of Escambray” from 1962-1965.⁴⁴

This was the backdrop for Escambray’s arrival in the region in 1968. The conflict had ended, but ideological division remained. ANAP saw Teatro Escambray as an opportunity to “heal” the political divide in the region and aid the conversion of radical campesinos into revolutionaries.⁴⁵ Yet Escambray neither approached their audience as enemies, nor as pupils. Where the state's policy dispossessed and demonized the campesinos, Teatro Escambray, through their distinct method of collective creation sought to give them a voice, sing their songs, and tell their story.

From its large repertoire, Teatro Escambray chose to perform *Ramona* as the dramatic piece for adult audiences on its tour through North America in 1982. Roberto Orihuela authored the piece in 1975, which was created to address sexism, gender prejudice, and the role of women in the new revolutionary society. In 1977, Teatro Escambray first presented the piece in La Lima, Cuba for campesino residents and the First Teatro Nuevo Workshop.⁴⁶

Ramona is one of the final plays in the first period of Teatro Escambray’s work, characterized by its deep engagement with campesino communities and unique communicative

⁴⁴ Joanna Swanger, *Rebel Lands of Cuba: The Campesino Struggles of Oriente and Escambray, 1934-1974* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 233-235.

⁴⁵ Swanger, 245.

⁴⁶ Until *Ramona* was completed, Teatro Escambray provoked debate over the question of the role of women in society gender through a repertoire of three classical French farces. Program "Festival de Teatro de la Habana 1982" Archivo Fotográfico Tablas Alarcos, Habana, Cuba.

conventions that adapt local performance forms like punto, controversia, and storytelling. Omar Valiño theorizes that these “formas teatralizables” (theatricalizable forms) are central to ideological engagement and processes of reception with Escambray’s audiences. First, they created ritual spaces of ludic engagement through campesino culture. Second, they formulated an image that audiences recognized as their own. This image was defamiliarized through collision with a transformative image, which presents a grotesque image of campesino life. Through juxtaposition with the image that campesinos identified with, the transformative image reveals a social ill in campesino life that needs to be remedied. Valiño theorizes that the collision triggers a collective anagnorsis in the audience, confronting them with an ideological polemic, which was later elaborated in an open debate with spectators that formed the final segment of the “obra abierta” (open play) structure.⁴⁷

The action of *Ramona* begins at a farm union worker's assembly, a context that integrates the audience as fellow dairy workers. At the meeting, Rosa, one of the workers, nominates Ramona to be recognized as an exemplary worker. Pancho, another worker, immediately contests the nomination saying that Ramona cannot be an exemplary worker because everyone knows that she had cheated on her husband with a government-housing worker. The dairy workers begin to bicker over what is known about Ramona's affairs and it becomes clear that everyone has played some part in tarnishing Ramona's reputation. Rosa suggests that Ramona be given the opportunity to tell her side of the story. Ramona takes the opportunity to defend herself with her life story. Flashing back and forth between the worker's assembly and moments of Ramona's life, Ramona links the traditional role of a woman as submissive to men's wishes and relegated to the domestic sphere to be characteristic of her life before the Revolution. Not able to

⁴⁷ Valiño, 36-38, 42-48.

go back to the way of life was before, Ramona sees the Revolution as a personal passage to her new life where she works in the public sphere and is not beholden to any man, even her husband.

In the last scene of the play, Ramona ends an extra-marital affair with Antonio, a housing construction worker who wants Ramona to stop working and stay home to take care of him and his children. Ramona refuses to leave her work. Antonio asks Ramona why she would be willing to leave her husband so easily, but not her work. Ramona answers, ""No es lo mismo, cuando lo dejo a él, dejo atrás to lo viejo de ante, to aquel mundo de ante de la Revolución, pero el trabajo es lo contrario, es la única manera de poder vivir feliz" (It's not the same. When I leave him, I leave behind all of the old baggage from before, all of that world from before the Revolution, but my work is the opposite. It is the only way to be able to live happily.)⁴⁸ Ramona connects Antonio's machismo and the patriarchal family structure that he demands Ramona to conform to with the way of life in Escambray before the Revolution. Ramona refuses to give up her work and ends the affair. In the final moments the action flashes back to the worker's assembly. Ramona asks the audience what they would have done in her place. This is a scripted invitation for the audience to propose, discuss, and debate solutions to the challenges and adversity that Ramona has faced in her life. Rine Leal sees the "debate" in Teatro Escambray's work as the most powerful communicative mechanism because it necessitated participation from the audience in order for the play to continue.⁴⁹ In a "debate" actors in character would confront audience members directly about the issues presented in the play. Within the frame of the worker's assembly, a spectator's response to Ramona's question, "what would you have done in my place?" was heard as the utterance of a dairy worker in Ramona's world. Escambray's *obra*

⁴⁸ Roberto Orihuela, *Ramona*, In *Un pelo en plena juventud/Ramona*, Ed. Nancy Morejón (Habana: Ediciones UNEAC, 1978), 139.

⁴⁹ Leal, *La dramaturgia del Escambray*, 46

abierta structure with its convention of the "debate" is a clear example of what political theatre scholar Baz Kershaw defines as an ideological transaction. For Kershaw, an ideological transaction is communal meaning-making where the aims and intentions of the artists connect with the responses and interpretations its audience.⁵⁰ In Cuba during the 1970s, performances of *Ramona* initiated ideological transactions with campesino audiences. Escambray's dramatization of audience intervention through the debate and obra abierta structure created what Kershaw defines as intertextuality, licensing spectators to be authors of the play's content and dramaturgy. In the space of performance, intertextuality allows the community to speak and ideologically experiment in its ludic role.

In this sense, the audience must be understood as a part of the collective. Teatro Escambray crafted their performances to incite and facilitate the audience's participation in collective creation. The often-used setting of the worker's meeting or assembly integrates the audience within the world of the play. The mise-en-scene and costumes from productions like *Los cuentos* (Stories) or *Ramona* suggest a collapse of the world of the performance into the world of the campesinos. Within the context of *escambrayano* communities, performances were co-created with the audience, full of tensions and congruence, sharing some sense of the struggle of being a part of a society in transformation. However, once the performance moved to Angola, Havana, the U.S., and elsewhere, the intertextuality that was carefully crafted for one audience becomes something quite different in outside contexts. It is in the extra-Escambray context of the North American tour that the escambrayano intertextuality became a vehicle for trans-Latino affect.

⁵⁰ Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16.

As the first theatre group that was supported by the Cuban Revolution to tour the U.S., Teatro Escambray received a lot of media attention, including a thirty-minute segment on CBS and an article in the *Los Angeles Times*. Through the press and local theatres, Teatro Escambray communicated the uniqueness of their style and the nuance of their politics. For example, in his interview with Dan Sullivan, Sergio Corrieri stated that the group avoids being didactic. The press releases sent out by Teatro de la Esperanza highlighted the fact that Escambray had developed a singular style of theatre and communication with their audience. However, most media coverage wedged anti-Embargo politics into their reading of the performance. Hank Tavera wrote in *El Tecolote* that it was important to continue to expand the relationship between Cuba and Latino-Chicano theatre groups, as well as between Cuba and progressive theatre groups and cultural institutions in the U.S., while articulating a political opposition to the isolation created by "The Cold War of the U.S. against Cuba." Even Senator Charles Percy spoke at a packed Chicago performance, stressing the importance to support the latest efforts in the federal government to create peaceful dialogue and move towards the normalization of relations. The vitality and complexity of Teatro Escambray's art itself was dwarfed by the fact that they were representatives of the Cuban Revolution.⁵¹

Audiences that attended performances were not exclusively Latina/o, although many performances took place in Latina/o spaces, like La Peña Cultural Center in Berkeley, the Chicano Studies Library at UC Santa Barbara, or The Hechscher Theatre in El Museo del Barrio,⁵² and certainly the audiences of Teatro de la Esperanza in Santa Barbara and Teatro 4 in New York contributed to the audience make-up of Teatro Escambray's U.S. performances. Most

⁵¹ Blanca Acosta, "Una gira de fraternidad," 115-119.

⁵² "Panorama Musical," April 6, 1982 8:00 PM UCSB Campus Hall, "Ramona" April 8, 1982, 8:00 PM Lobero Theater, Friday, April 23, 1982 7:30 and 9:30 PM at the Hechshcer Theatre, 1 E 104th St., Acosta, "Una gira de fraternidad," 116, 118.

likely, every audience Escambray performed for consisted of Latina/os, non-Latina/os, those who were fluent Spanish speakers, those who had some kind of language barrier (many U.S. Latinas/os would have been included in this group), those who were theatre artists, and those who were present to show political solidarity with socialist Cuba.⁵³ Certainly there were more dynamics to these performances than trans-Latino affect alone, but as the tour was organized through a collaboration between Cuban, Chicano, and Pan-Latino theatre collectives at the height of the Nuevo Teatro movement, trans-Latino affect was a central structure to these performances.

In such contexts, *latinidad* was an axis of interpretation and ideological transaction. On a thematic level, Ramona's struggle against the trappings of machismo can be seen as having Latino(*americana/o*) resonances. Patriarchy is by no means exclusive to Latin America and non-Latina/os in the audience could understand, on an intellectual level, the stigma cast upon Ramona, the double standard of male privilege, and the prison of the domestic sphere that Ramona rejects. However, the particular way the characters feel their gender construction in the world of the play is in conversation with *latinidad*. Ramona's loyalty to her father, her fear to tell Manolo or her father the identity of the rapist, or her duty as Antonio's wife to take care of him and his children (a role she only rejects because he will not accept that she also keep working) are all examples of the prominence of the Mediterranean honor-code in the characters' gender construction. Controversia, cockfighting, and machismo in the play are nodes that resonate with other Latino(*americana/o*) contexts and become a part of a larger continuum of masculinity and patriarchal order across Latin America. At the intersection of *latinidades*, the play's critique of gender and its construction also implicated the cultural and familial experience of Chicanas/os,

⁵³ Teatro Escambray's itinerary also included artistic exchange with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Bread and Puppet Theatre. Roney Davis had previously traveled to Cuba in 1981 as part of the First Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Artists.

Puertorriqueñas/os, and other Latinas/os as much as they shared similarities with the experiences presented on stage. When Ramona initiated the audience debate by asking the audience, "¿Qué hubieran hecho ustedes en mi caso?" (What would you have done in my place?), she invited spectators to speak from their own experience. Spectators who answered Ramona before the audience pierced the facade of the performance's authentic, foreign, socialist Cuban novelty and made Ramona's struggle their own. Such audience participation within U.S. Latina/o spaces like La Peña and El Museo del Barrio enacted and spoke through trans-Latino affect.⁵⁴

The U.S. tour breathed new life into Escambray's now static and museum-ified repertoire. Performed in U.S. Latina/o contexts, trans-Latino affect re-singularized performances of *Ramona*. Moved out of the context of a national discourse, *Ramona* added to the discourse of latinidad with its particular escambrayano voice. Performances in these contexts made Ramona's struggle into a Latino(*americana/o*) struggle. The U.S. tour of *Ramona* provides an important glimpse of how latinidad was experienced, negotiated, and remade through creación colectiva. The conversation forged by productions in festivals and in transnational contexts was not an inventory of common Latin American experiences, but rather, drawing from a similar creative process that transforms the vitality of cosmopolitan creolized cultures into a theatrical discourse, these productions each negotiated the meaning of latinidad from the radical specificity of the public they made theatre for and with. By participating in a theatrical movement that consciously defined itself as Latin American, performances transformed this specificity into new ways of being Latino(*americana/o*).

⁵⁴ One major hindrance to its successful reception was that the play presented a critique of gender close to Betty Friedan and second wave feminism that was twenty years behind the vanguard of feminist thought familiar to the audiences in the UC centers, New York, and Chicago. This is one place where interviews may help to document audience reception, whether participation was as Latino as the context, whether only Spanish speakers participated, or whether an audience-participant verbally related Ramona's situation to another Latino context.

Chicana/o Collectives in Havana

Chicana/o theatre collective Teatro de la Esperanza was also a part of the Nuevo Teatro movement, innovating their own method of creación colectiva in the 1970s and contributing to the movement's institutionalization in the 1980s. Teatro de la Esperanza contributed to the development of Nuevo Teatro particularly in Cuba, performing in Havana in 1983 and sending representatives to attend the First Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Artists in Havana in June of 1981, the East Coast-West Coast Theatre Brigade (Brigada Chicana-Latina) in August of 1981, and the Nuevo Teatro Workshop in La Macagua in 1983 and 1985.⁵⁵

Teatro de la Esperanza's history has great parallels to the history of Teatro Escambray. The group formed out of MEChA at UC Santa Barbara in 1970 and officially became Teatro de la Esperanza in 1971. The first director, Jorge Huerta, then a PhD student at UCSB, directed students through creación colectiva exercises that generated actos or sketches very much in the style of Teatro Campesino, but about the lives of the actors as Chicana/o students at UCSB. In 1974, the group was invited to a vigil in the town of Guadalupe for three local activists who had been arrested when protesting the treatment of students in the local school district. Teatro de la Esperanza decided to create a docudrama about the incident and the town's social affliction that was creating "a cycle of repression and defeat" for the Mexican and Chicana/o community. Inspired by the work of Enrique Buenaventura, the group expanded their creación colectiva process to include research and oral history interviews, and in four short months of improvisation, scripting, revising and rehearsing scenes, the group premiered *Guadalupe* on

⁵⁵ See Ana Olivarez-Levin's photo diary; "Documentos, Declaraciones, y Acuerdos: Primer Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe, Casa de las Américas, 1981" Archivo Fotográfico de la Casa Editorial Tablas-Alarcos; Nina Miller, "Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos (La Habana)" *LATR* 15.1 (1981) 85-88; Beatriz J. Rizk "I Taller Internacional del Nuevo Teatro (Cuba 1983)" *LATR* 17.1 (1983): 78; Blanca Acosta, "Un grupo esperanzador," *Conjunto* 56 (1983): 106-107.

cinco de mayo in 1974.⁵⁶ The process created the foundation for a Brechtian Epic Theatre aesthetic that "demystified" dominant ideology feeding racial oppression and internalized racism plaguing the Chicana/o community in central and southern California. This approach was also used for the next docudrama created by Teatro de la Esperanza, *La víctima* in 1976.

In the performance of these plays, the actors used a presentational style that continually reminded the audience that they were watching a play by exposing the means of production. The actors never left the stage, remaining in clear view of the audience even when their characters exited the scene. They changed character before the audience with a simple costume change taken from a trunk onstage. The actors continuously reminded the audience of the artifice of performance and kept their imaginations engaged as they created trains, factories, classrooms, strikes, and immigration raids through pantomime, physicality, voice, and acting ability. The collective employed a "demonstrator" style of acting, which inspires critical spectatorship by never allowing the audience to lose sight of the actor who projects an attitude towards the events presented onstage. Teatro de la Esperanza used an episodic structure of short scenes to continuously interrupt the dramatic action. A narrator, placards, or music gave needed exposition while shifting the mode of storytelling from a dramatic (mimetic) mode to a narrative (diegetic) mode. This interruption and shift was another attempt to draw attention to the artifice of presentation and awaken a critical perspective in the audience. Esperanza often incorporated traditional *corridos* (ballad) into their performances to provide musical narration and exposition for breaks in the episodic structure. Presenting the tunes of familiar corridos with the unfamiliar

⁵⁶ Jorge Huerta, "A Brief History of the Teatro de la Esperanza: The First Four Years," in *Necessary Theater: Six Plays About the Chicano Experience*. Ed. Jorge Huerta. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1989), 208-211.

lyrics of the story is one of many ways the performance created Brechtian defamiliarization.⁵⁷

Compared to other Chicana/o theatre groups in the 1970s, Teatro de la Esperanza challenged the patriarchal hierarchies of the Chicana/o movement's nationalism through its organization as a collective and the materialist analysis presented in its plays. As Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano points out, Teatro de la Esperanza gave both men and women administrative responsibility and creative roles as directors, writers, and actors. It is no wonder that their docudramas dramaturgically questioned the male center of Chicano theatre. Whereas many of the docudramas use a climatic cause and effect narrative, they feature strong female characters with agency and male characters plagued by internal conflict and contradiction.⁵⁸

The uncanny affinity and congruence in process, approach, and aesthetics shared by Teatro de la Esperanza and Teatro Escambray aided in the success of their long-term collaboration. Much like Teatro Escambray, during the development phase Teatro de la Esperanza used ethnographic research, improvisation, and a collective writing process. They integrated popular performance forms and music into their aesthetic. Most importantly, they shared a belief that didacticism was not efficacious to audience engagement and social change.⁵⁹ The common ground they shared before their collaboration began enabled them to define Nuevo Teatro as a grassroots transnational phenomenon. Through a productive and mutually beneficial exchange, the two groups shaped each other's practice. The collaboration between these two groups is one of the best of examples of the many cross border connections that propelled Nuevo

⁵⁷ Jorge Huerta, *Chicano Theatre: Themes and Forms* (Ypsilanti, MI: Bilingual Press, 1982), 71, 78, 146; Jorge Huerta, "La víctima," critical essay in *Necessary Theater*, 323; Jorge Huerta, "Guadalupe," critical essay in *Necessary Theater*, 214.

⁵⁸ Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano, "The Female Subject in Chicano Theatre: Sexuality, 'Race,' and Class," *Theatre Journal* 38.4, *Theatre of Color* (1986), 398-9.

⁵⁹ Jorge Huerta, "El Teatro de la Esperanza: 'Keeping in Touch with the People'" *The Drama Review: TDR* 21.1, *Theatre and Social Action Issue* (1977): 44.

Teatro. Transnational collaborations created a frame and a discourse that made creación colectiva not just a Cuban, Chicano, or Colombian practice, but a practice in latinidad.

The exchange between Teatro de la Esperanza and Teatro Escmbray began around 1981, when collective administrator Rodrigo Duarte Clark participated in the First Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Artists in Havana, along with artists from San Francisco (Adrián Vargas of Teatro de la Gente, Carlos Barón of Teatro Latino, and Roney Davis, founder of the San Francisco Mime Troupe), and artists from New York (Ntozake Shange, playwright of *for colored girls...*, Miriam Colón, director of Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, and Oscar Ciccone, director of Teatro 4). In a document called "Documentos, Declaraciones, y Acuerdos" (Documents, Declarations, and Agreements), the meeting members positioned Latina/o theatre in the U.S. as a necessary response to institutionalized systems of oppression and the alienation from U.S. nationalism that marginalized their identity and history. One strategy against white or "Anglo Saxon" cultural hegemony highlighted by the document is an internationalist, multicultural movement that links minority groups within the U.S. together. The document closes with the declaration that the struggle for liberation of U.S. minorities should be tied to the struggles for liberation of Latin American peoples and broadened into a continental (or hemispheric) movement.⁶⁰ In Carlos Espinosa's interviews with Rodrigo Duarte and Adrián Vargas published in *Conjunto* that same year, both Chicano artists reinforce the importance of transnational solidarity and exchange across the Americas to their art making.⁶¹

Perhaps the most compelling part of the archive of this cross-border exchange is Ana

⁶⁰ "Documentos, Declaraciones, y Acuerdos."

⁶¹ Adrián Vargas and Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "En el teatro chicano actual los enfoques estéticos e ideológicos son mucho más claros," *Conjunto* 50 (1981), 54; Rodrigo Duarte and Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "El pueblo chicano siente nuestro teatro como el único que realmente le pertenece," *Conjunto* 50 (1981), 58.

Olivarez-Levinson's photo collection. Ana Olivarez was an active member of Teatro de la Esperanza during the 1980s. As part of her actor training she took her multiple trips to Cuba from 1981-1985. The photos document how women artists were a part of this transnational movement. Many taken by Olivarez-Levinson herself, the photos capture the experiences of radical Chicana/o and Latina/o theatre artists in revolutionary Cuba: Teatro de la Esperanza rehearsing *La víctima* in 1983, the 1985 Nuevo Teatro Workshop, and performances by Teatro Escambray and Cubana de Acero. One photo taken during the East Coast-West Coast Theatre Brigade in 1981 depicts Ana Olivarez and Herbert Siguenza working on building reparations. Another photo taken during Teatro de la Esperanza's tour in 1983 shows José Luis Valenzuela and other members attending a speech by Fidel Castro in the Plaza of the Revolution. Walking in el Vedado, Olivarez-Levinson's camera documents the marquee of Teatro Mella and performances of *Molinos de Vientos* (Wind Mills) by Teatro Escambray and Teatro Irrumpe's production of *De los días de la guerra* (From the Days of War). The photos record Olivarez-Levinson's journeys across much of the island including Guanabacoa, Varadero, and Santiago de Cuba where she saw performances of traditional Conga, Trova, and Teatro de Relaciones. Photos also document Teatro Escambray's compound in La Macagua where she spent five months in theatre training between October 1984 and April 1985. Olivarez-Levinson gave massage workshops for actors, which captured in the photos demonstrates that artistic exchange went both ways. Teatro de la Esperanza had an impact on Cuban theatre as much as Chicana/o and Latina/o artists were changed by their experiences in Cuba. The photo collection shows the collective's participation in workshops, rehearsals, and performances as an integral part of the Nuevo Teatro movement in Cuba.

One of the highlights of Teatro de la Esperanza's extended history in Cuba was their

performance of *La víctima* at the Sótano theatre in Havana.⁶² *La víctima* is a fifteen-scene episodic docudrama that imparts twentieth-century Chicana/o history through the saga of a family that is torn apart by the U.S.-Mexico border and cycles of war and recession.⁶³ The play begins with Amparo's parents escaping the unrest of the Mexican Revolution to the United States in 1910. After Amparo meets her husband Julián and begins a family with him in Los Angeles, the family is forced to move to Mexico during the depression. Amparo tragically loses her son Samuel at the train station, and she is separated from him for life. Samuel grows up in the care of another family, enlists in the Korean War and becomes an INS agent. Samuel internalizes the ideology of a political and economic system that demonizes undocumented immigrants and makes them the scapegoats for its failures. Amparo returns to the U.S. when Julián dies, but she is arrested in a raid organized by Samuel on a group of striking workers. While Samuel interrogates his long lost mother he recognizes who she is, but he suppresses his intuition, denies Amparo as his mother, and deports her. The final scene of the play shows an inconsolable Samuel tortured by the truth that he deported his own mother, choosing to alienate and dehumanize her, only to have lost her once again.

The highly coincidental plot of *La víctima* sets up an Aristotelian climax of anagnorisis and peripeteia on the level of Greek tragedy. With respect to the Epic Theatre and creación colectiva techniques that influenced Teatro de la Esperanza, Samuel's recognition, which tragically, he can only suppress, is exactly the recognition that the Esperanza artists wanted to inspire in its audience. As actor José Saucedo told Jorge Huerta in an interview, "We're trying to

⁶² On this tour they also presented a concert of songs and poems at Casa de las Américas. Acosta, "Un grupo esperanzador," 106-107.

⁶³ Huerta, "El Teatro de la Esperanza: 'Keeping in Touch with the People,'" 44

show the Chicanos and Mexicans in this country that they are scapegoats for capitalism."⁶⁴ If Samuel stands in for Chicano history and identity as an archetype, then the play suggests that by blindly following the ideology of the white supremacist, politically dominant mainstream, Mexican-Americans were internalizing their own dehumanization, severing themselves from their cultural and national community, and denying their true identity.

To refer once again to Yarbrow-Bejarano's critique, *La víctima's* linear cause and effect narrative driven by heteronormative relationships is patriarchal, but the portrayal of women characters as agents shaping their reality is a feminist revision to the patriarchal form of the Aristotelian climactic structure. Paying attention to how the collective uses gender as a text is important to understanding the intervention that the play enacts. In the interrogation he refuses to recognize and denies his own mother because his job has conditioned him to lose sight of everything but the "illegality" of the immigrants that he deports. This dominates his perception of the situation, and he cowardly chooses the self-hatred he has internalized over the pain of facing the truth of his own dehumanization as an INS agent. Internalized racism and modern alienation thwart any chance for forgiveness and reunion. The scene shows that it is not Amparo who has betrayed Samuel, but rather, Samuel betrays himself by his own conviction and investment in the system that reduces the woman before him into an "illegal." Furthermore it is a man, Samuel, who betrays his people, reversing the gender hierarchy of the Malinche trope.⁶⁵

Teatro de la Esperanza's participation in the 1983 International Nuevo Teatro Workshop and concurrent performances of *La víctima* shook up Nuevo Teatro in Havana by introducing

⁶⁴ Huerta, "El Teatro de la Esperanza: 'Keeping in Touch with the People,'" 44

⁶⁵ The *Malinche* is a trope based on Malintzín Tenepal, the translator, mistress, and advisor of Cortés in his conquest of the Aztec Empire. Reduced to a gendered stereotype, the malinche represents Mexican women who are not self-sacrificing mothers as sexually promiscuous traitors to their people. Yarbrow-Bejarano, "The Female Subject," 392-3.

their unique and innovative approach to creación colectiva.⁶⁶ The group's aesthetics and the pathos of Samuel's denial moved audiences in Havana. The reception of *La víctima* is an instance of trans-Latino affect. Performed outside of its original context, but within a discourse of latinidad as Nuevo Teatro, Chicana/o struggle against neocolonial exploitation became a Latino(*americana/o*) cause. In her review in *Conjunto*, Blanca Acosta documents how the performance of *La víctima* affected audience members, especially a Mexican man who said he had suffered from experiences similar to those that were presented in the play, and a Nicaraguan who invited Teatro de la Esperanza to perform in Nicaragua, which they did the following year.⁶⁷ In her analysis, Acosta argues that the collective made use of the family saga narrative and melodramatic acting style of telenovelas in order to create a theatrical language that their audience, who were often more familiar with telenovelas than theatre, could be receptive to.⁶⁸ Acosta read their episodic plot and presentational acting as a telenovela pastiche that projected an emotional spectrum of Latino(*americana/o*) feeling.

Many additional elements and themes of the play would have been interpreted through latinidad and recreated as Latino(*americana/o*) experience. The use of corridos as a "demonstrator" narrative device providing the spine to the episodic action was easily recognizable as a convention of Nuevo Teatro. This campesino music genre from the U.S.— Mexican borderlands resonated with the new theatrical style of Nuestra América. Corridos in this

⁶⁶ Rizk "I Taller Internacional del Nuevo Teatro, 78.

⁶⁷ "Este grupo chicano se presentó en La Habana en el teatro El Sótano, logrando un bello diálogo con el público que acudió a presentar la obra (es de recordar el mexicano entrado en años de evidente procedencia obrera que emocionado relató cómo él mismo había sufrido aquello que se representaba, o la nicaragüense que expresó se deseo de que el grupo actuara en su país, en el que tendría una acogida tan cálida como la que le había brindado el público cubano)." Acosta, "Un grupo esperanzador," 106-107; Jorge Huerta, "Teatro de la Esperanza," in *Necessary Theater*, 318

⁶⁸ Acosta, "Un grupo esperanzador," 103.

context became more than Chicana/o or mexicana/o they became Latino(*americana/o*). This is an important reframing because in 1981 Havana authors like Acosta had to make an effort to distinguish Chicana/os and Nuyoricans from U.S. Americans. When publishing in a Cuban publication, Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano references Teatro de la Esperanza's incredible bilingualism as evidence that their public is Latina/o.⁶⁹ Latinidad proved to be one key paradigm to make U.S.-based minority artists recognizable as belonging to a Nuestra América opposed to U.S. hemispheric hegemony. Transmigration to and from Mexico obviously links the story of this archetypal Chicana/o family to Latin America. As Acosta's synopsis of the play emphasizes, family is the focus of every scene and its centrality to the cause and effect of the play's action reinforced the characters' Latin American ethos. Although, as Yarbrow-Bejarano points out, *La víctima* fails to call the gender oppression in the family structure into question,⁷⁰ the play draws on the gender-normative relationships to create taboo and pathos.

Another theme that may have struck a cord in Cuba and resonates across many Latin American contexts is how the family is divided by reoccurring economic and political crises. In the case of *La víctima*, a cycle of crisis resulting from U.S. policies divides the family and pits loved ones against each other. Teatro de la Esperanza performed *La víctima* in Havana only three years after the Mariel, when the Cuban state staged a campaign against political dissidents and other citizens considered to be antirevolutionary. State organized protests in Cuba staged masses in the streets demanding that the “*escoria*” (scum or trash) leave Cuba.⁷¹ Cuban audiences may have drawn parallels between Mariel and the scapegoating of “illegal” immigrants and forced deportations depicted in Teatro de la Esperanza’s performance.

⁶⁹ Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano, “El Teatro de la Esperanza: una experiencia del teatro chicano,” *Conjunto* 49 (1981): 14.

⁷⁰ Yarbrow-Bejarano, “The Female Subject,” 400.

⁷¹ José Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xiv.

In the previous discussion of the collaboration between Teatro de la Esperanza and Teatro Escambray, I show how trans-Latino affect renewed works of Nuevo Teatro as they were recreated in transnational Latino(*americana/o*) contexts. The following two case studies, *Guaracha Rock* and *Cap-a-Pie* are atypical examples in relation to the Nuevo Teatro movement. Trans-Latino affect in these productions is not about the translation of campesino or Chicana/o experience into Latino(*americana/o*) experience across lines of difference. Rather, trans-Latino affect in *Guaracha Rock* and *Cap-a-Pie* performatively refashions Latino being as it dramatizes the negotiation of latinidad that was taking place in the pan-Latino communities of Miami and New York during the 1970s.

Guaracha Rock, an Anomaly of Creación Colectiva Miamense

Miami's "art theatre" scene dates from shortly after the second wave of Cuban exiles reached the United States in the mid-1960s. Teatro 66, Teatro Prometeo, and Teatro Avante were some of the first groups to create a foundation and build an audience for Hispanic and Latina/o experimental theatre performed in Spanish.⁷² The work of actor, director, educator, and poet Teresa María Rojas is at the center of these foundational years in Miami's art theatre history. By the time Rojas arrived in Miami in 1967, she was already a well-known actor for her work in Cuban, Venezuelan, and Dominican film and television. While acting alongside legends such as Rita Montaner and Raquel Revuelta, Rojas garnered high praise in the Cuban national media. Reviews from 1956 touted, "Pequeñita de estatura y muy grande en talento artístico observamos en ella a la revelación teatral del año..." (Small in stature but large in artistic talent, we see in her the theatrical revelation of the year), and "nació para triunfar en el arte escénico" (She was born

⁷²Lillian Manzor, "Más allá de las categorías nacionales: Ni norteamericano, ni cubano: Teatro transnacional de los E.E.U.U.," *Theater der Zeit*, September (2010), 40-41.

to triumph in the dramatic arts).⁷³ Some of her fundamental acting experiences took place in Havana theatre in the 1950s working with avant-garde theatre director Francisco Morín and his Grupo Prometeo (Prometheus Group). After leaving Cuba when her acting career took her to Venezuela and then the Dominican Republic in the 1960s, Rojas ended up in Miami in 1967 where she began working with experimental director Miguel Ponce. In 1972, Teresa María Rojas founded Teatro Prometeo (naming it after the group that Morín directed) as an educational program and community theatre based out of Miami Dade Community College (MDCC).⁷⁴

At MDCC, Rojas taught a class to interested students that wanted to learn about acting focusing on the Stanislavski method.⁷⁵ From this class she recruited the best actors for theatre productions. As a bilingual theatre program, Prometeo recruited a majority pan-Latino student base. "Eso es algo muy lindo también de Prometeo es que reunía argentinos, bolivianos, guatemaltecos, mexicanos, venezolanos y hasta cubanos" (That is something very beautiful about Prometeo, that it brought together Argentinians, Bolivians, Guatemalans, Mexicans, Venezuelans, and even Cubans).⁷⁶ In just three years, Rojas had built up enough interest and resources to bring Francisco Morín, now in exile in New York, to Miami to direct *Flores de*

⁷³ "El teatro nunca muere" Clipping July 1956, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008, Box 10 Folder 10, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami; "Las dos son únicas" Clipping July 1956, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008, Box 10 Folder 2, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁷⁴ Teatro Prometeo first began in Miami as a community outreach program that met in the garage of actor Griselda Nogueras. Jorge Fiterre, Rachel Ewy, and Lillian Manzor, *Teresa: A Biography*, Documentary Film, Interview with Teresa María Rojas (2008; Miami: Cuban Theatre Digital Archive, 2008), Digital Video; also see Alexandra T. Vazquez, "Learning to Live in Miami," *American Quarterly* 66.3 (2014), 861-862.

⁷⁵ Teresa María Rojas, interview by author, Miami, FL 7 January 2015.

⁷⁶ "Eso es algo muy lindo también de Prometeo es que reunía argentinos, bolivianos, guatemaltecos, mexicanos, venezolanos y hasta cubanos," Teresa María Rojas, interview by author, Miami, FL 7 January 2015.

Papel by Egon Wolf in 1975.⁷⁷ While the creación colectiva movement was on the rise in the 1970s, Rojas was able to make major strides in building a key institution for producing experimental theatre. In its first eight years, Teatro Prometeo had staged experimental works by Fernando Arrabal, José Triana, Lydia Cabrera, and Miguel de Unamuno, while their repertoire also included comedies by Robert Lamoreaux (*La soupière*) and Noel Coward (*Hay Fever*), and classics by Calderón.

1978 was a pivotal year for Teatro Prometeo and Rojas' career as a director, teacher, and producer. Her production of Calderón's *El Gran Teatro del Mundo* won major accolades, including Best Director, Actor, and Actress at El Paso/Chamizal's Festival de Teatro del Siglo de Oro and Best Production in Houston's Festival de Teatro en Español.⁷⁸ Her student Mario Ernesto Sánchez's production of Arrabal's *El jardín de las delicias* (The Garden of Delights) made an impression at the American College Theater Festival in Gainesville, Florida when Colombian actor Rafael Cifuentes won the Irene Ryan acting award.⁷⁹ Also that same year, Rojas, Sánchez, and actress Alina Interián started RAS community theatre, the beginning of what would become Teatro Avante, "the most important player in Miami's and the United States' Spanish theatre scene."⁸⁰ As if that was not enough to undertake, Rojas decided that 1978 would be the year to introduce Miami theatre audiences to creación colectiva. Rojas directed her

⁷⁷ Armando Couto, "Teatro 100: Y... ¿A quien le interesa Morín?" *Noticias de Miami y Florida*, May 1977, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008 Box 9 Folder 7, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁷⁸ Josefina Rubio, "Mi concepto para todo" p 45, Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 19, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami; "Exito Teatral," *Diario de las Américas*, 16 June 1978, sec. B, Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 20, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁷⁹ Josefina Rubio, "Siguiendo las estrellas," *El Clarín*, 18 January 1979, p. 4, Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 26, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁸⁰ Lillian Manzor, "The Cuban Theatre Digital Archive: A Learning and Preservation Resource for Theater History in the Cuban Diaspora." *Caribe* 13.2 (2011): 78.

students in the dramatization of their personal experiences. The resulting production, *Guaracha Rock*, used original music and an ensemble driven process to create a montage of charged monologues about Miami's Latina/o youth.

To this day Rojas is cautious of the term *creación colectiva* because of its association with Marxist socio-political critique. The late 1970s and early 1980s was a dangerous time in Miami for anyone who was accused of being a communist. Reactionary anti-communists often called in bomb threats and used violence in order to censor certain opinions in the media. The magazine *La replica* (Replica) was shut down several times in the 1970s when its office was bombed. For merely condemning the use violence, radio news director Emilio Milián lost his legs in 1976 when he was attacked by a bomber who planted explosives in his car. Theatre productions were also subject to these threats stemming from the Miami-exile anti-communist witch-hunt. Teresa María Rojas was accused several times in local papers of being a communist because of the theatre she produced.⁸¹ She was not alone in receiving the attention of anti-communist reactionaries who objected to the plays for a variety of reasons not having to do with the plays themselves, including whether an author resided in Cuba (Virgilio Piñera), received a prize from the Cuban government (Egon Wolff), visited revolutionary Cuba (Graham Greene), or just openly criticized Franco, making one a communist by default (Fernando Arrabal).⁸² Current Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado invited Rojas on his radio show to celebrate her work with

⁸¹ "Al que no quiere comunismo, dos tazas." Clipping, 1978, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 20, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami; Luis Dulzaides, "En el mundo de los espectáculos, Una entrevista con Teresa Ma. Rojas," *La nación*, 7 June 1978, p. 15, Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 13, Folder 17, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁸² María Estorino, Lillian Manzor and Beatriz J. Rizk, "Controversy on Stage," *Cuban Theatre in Miami: 1960-1980*. Eds. María Estorino and Meiyolet Méndez, <http://scholar.library.miami.edu/miamitheater/section4.html>, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries Digital Collections. Web 29 Dec. 2015.

Teatro Prometeo. Some anticommunist reactionaries took the opportunity to call in to accuse Rojas of being a communist, attempting to publically humiliate her. It was an embarrassing moment for Rojas, as well as Regalado.⁸³ However, Rojas' production of *Guaracha Rock* shows that creación colectiva cannot be politically pigeonholed and that the density of its cultural discourse transcended Miami's binary political climate. Drawing from the translocal cultural fabric surrounding them and the personal experiences of a Miami-based pan-Latino cast, Prometeo's *Guaracha Rock* created trans-Latino affect through a unique form of creación colectiva.

Rojas built the performance out of personal work with the student artists. From 1973 until 2003, Teresa María Rojas taught a special class at the end of each semester where students would explore "*encuentros capitales*" ("key encounters" or "defining moments") from their personal lives through psychological exercises. Students would reveal these moments to each other in class with the goal of having the experience of total emotional vulnerability in performance. As Rojas described it,

El encuentro capital es narrar cual ha sido el encuentro capital de tu vida. Pidiéndote honestidad como un grupo de terapia pero bien dominado por mi, porque yo también participaba. Nunca pedí a mis estudiantes que hicieran algo, que yo no pudiera también hacer; prediqué con el ejemplo, es decir, yo, unida a la experiencia de ellos, contaba también la mía. Cada uno de nosotros era capaz de desnudarse emocionalmente. Eran clases muy fuertes de la que nunca salía igual.

The encuentro capital is to perform the defining encounter of your life. Asking you to be completely honest, as in group therapy, but very well controlled by myself, because I participated as well. I never asked my students to do something that I could not do as well; I preached by example, meaning, I, joining in the experience with them, also told my own encuentro capital. Each one of us was able to bare ourselves naked emotionally. They were very powerful classes from which I never left the same.⁸⁴

⁸³ Teresa María Rojas, interview by author, Miami, FL 7 January 2015.

⁸⁴ Terea María Rojas, interview by author, Miami, FL 7 January 2015.

With every group of students that Rojas worked with, she could not help but imagine creating a performance from the encuentros capitales. However, 1978 was the year that she decided to use this studio work as the basis for a performance that gave a snapshot into the psychology of Hispanic and Latina/o youth in Miami.

The title in itself expresses a very U.S. Latina/o kind of hybridity, merging a U.S. American popular music genre of youth and rebellion, rock 'n' roll, with *guaracha*, a fast-tempo popular Cuban music genre featuring sexual and comic lyrics. As Rojas explains, the title is an antithesis. Guaracha as a verb, "*guarachear*" means "to play with," or "to tease," whereas rock does not merely refer to the music, but also can be taken as a metaphor for something weighty. Norma Niurka echoed this interpretation in an article about the creation of the piece, writing, "El programa se llama *Guaracha Rock*—porque es como un disco de larga duración que tiene el ritmo de la guaracha y la dureza de la piedra" (The program is called *Guaracha Rock*—because it is like an LP album that has the rhythm of *guaracha* and the hardness of a rock).⁸⁵ *Guaracha Rock's* expression of Latina/o hybridity in antithetical terms does not produce a contradiction, but rather a paradox that illuminates a common oscillation in trans-Latino affect between "play" and "pain." The ludic and the painful regularly accompany and define the limits of one another. They are interdependent to one another, and as emotions correspond to the dynamic push and pull of transculturation on a psychological level. Across the Americas, transculturation came about as a response to the forced migration and acculturation of colonial conquest and slavery. The ludic relates to the subaltern agency and continuity that produces intercultural creativity, while the painful responds to the unequal power relations in the conditions of transcultural production and

⁸⁵ Norma Niurka, "Creación colectiva en 'Prometeo,'" *El Miami Herald*, 20 Septiembre 1978, p. 10. Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008 Box 13 Folder 20, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami

carries the memory of colonial and neocolonial forces of violence undergirding that cultural production. On a personal level, the colonial subject must find ways of creating "transculturation from below."⁸⁶ Within the context of the U.S., the fluidity associated with Latina/o subjectivity is a necessary form of adaptation in the face of cultural mandates of assimilation and erasure. The ludic and painful modalities of trans-Latino affect, provide a paradox of feeling encompassing the struggle to adapt and hold onto one's voice in the face of marginalization that silences and commodification that seeks to make Latinas/os "other," stereotypical scapegoats for the brutality of the dominant culture's desire for superiority.

In the opening sequence of *Guaracha Rock*, the actors entered from the audience using an old fashioned can and pump fumigator to blow smoke on the audience while singing a Rock song titled, "Mari y Juana" (A pun on marijuana). Each actor's encuentro capital was its own vignette that Rojas arranged like tracks on a hit album. The program itself looks like an LP album cover listing the different tracks in the first act as Side A/Cara A and the second act as Side B/Cara B. In some transitions the collective came together to sing music, like Franco's Latin rock hit "Todo la vida," and original guarachas by composer Jorge Morales titled "La Flor" (The Flower) and "¿Qué Somos?" (Who Are We?), which musically conveyed the play's theme of cultural conflict among first and second generation Latin American immigrant and exile youth.⁸⁷

The vignettes also alternated playful and caustic tones. For example, the performance included moments like Mario Ernesto Sánchez telling his traumatic experience as part of Operation Peter Pan, alongside sketches like "Special Bulletin" which was a parody of a U.S.

⁸⁶ Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, "Introduction," *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*, eds. Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 12.

⁸⁷ Fernando Alloza "Afirma el director musical de *Guaracha Rock* que esta obra es cubana-Americana" [sic] *Diario de las Américas*, 11 Nov 1978, sec. B, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008 Box 13 Folder 25, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

American infomercial host on Miami TV in the 1970s who spoke Spanish with a heavy North American accent. The most noted vignette in reviews was "Tengo Miedo" performed by Lídice Díaz-Rousselot. The actress started on the floor and relived a feeling of abandonment from her youth. As Rojas recalls the performance, Díaz-Rousselot built up from a quiet, timid whimper into a desperate cry for help in terror. "Daddy, daddy please... daddy I'm scared... please daddy!... I need to do pipi... daddy... daddy... daddy!" At the climax, Díaz-Rousselot urinated on herself before the audience.⁸⁸ The overwhelming response from the audience, evident by the performance being noted in several of the reviews, was that Díaz-Rousselot's vulnerability, authenticity and terror was theatrically captivating. The larger theme of abandonment and isolation in a foreign world evoked by the performance resonated with each and every spectator.

In her 2014 essay "Learning to Live in Miami," Alexandra T. Vazquez analyzes the photos and program of *Guaracha Rock*, bringing them into production with the present through performative and mangrovia reading practices. While I address the implications of her argument for performance historiography in my conclusion and its special resonance with Miami as a place that "insists on the partial, the fragment, the what's left," I will restrict my synopsis here to the part of her analysis that directly relates to the production's records.⁸⁹ In her treatment of the archive, Vazquez first analyzes the image of actor Dionasi Fernandez Trujillo shirtless with a rubber tube tied around his arm shooting up, no doubt a moment, or perhaps the moment of his encuentro capital. She argues that because there is no surviving script, the image opens up to many interpretative possibilities, among them she rightly asserts that the image, "reveals how the performers of El Teatro Prometeo dared to show the needle scratches on the pristine,

⁸⁸ Teresa María Rojas, interview by author, Miami, FL 7 January 2015.

⁸⁹ Vazquez, 864.

normative record of model minorityhood.”⁹⁰ In Vazquez’s analysis, the image performs an important dimension of the past performance, much like the doodling in Lydia Cabrera’s phonebooks that she presents in the beginning of the essay, Prometeo’s production scribbled on top of the high expectations for this group of first and second-generation immigrant youth through the revelation of the ““perpetual now that is ultimately, and deeply, personal.””⁹¹

A few photos in the Cuban Theatre Digital Archive are close-ups capturing the expressions of faces bearing the “deeply personal” truth of *encuentros capitales* by Efraín Martel and Ricardo Ferrán. But not all of the *encuentros capitales* show gritty trauma, like the image of Armando Sardina screaming as he stabs a knife into his stomach. For instance, one photo depicts of Demi Castellón smiling in a moment of contemplation. Only the top half of her body appears as if she floated on a sea of darkness, buoyant with a life vest of deeply personal fulfillment. Two contrasting images of singer and actor Rossie Uranga demonstrate the shifting modes of *guaracha* and rock. The first photo has a serious tone. She leans on the mic stand, grabbing the mic with both hands. The dramatic lighting casts a shadow across her face, partially illuminating the hands and guitar of the musician behind her. She appears to be listening as she is singing softly. In the second image she sings while *guaracheando* (teasing, playing). She wears 70s bug eye tinted sunglasses. Her head tilts to the right as she holds the mic in her right hand and tugs the cord playfully with the left.

Photos of Ana Teresa Montes let us in on the complex and coexisting emotions from two separate moments in her monologue. In one image she wears a print blouse and has a thin rope over her shoulders. A spot illuminates the front of her face; the rest of the stage behind her is

⁹⁰ Vazquez, 862

⁹¹ Vazquez quoting Karen Shimakawa on racial performativity as cultural memory-transmission and restored behavior that the body supplements and innovates through its radical uniqueness, 863.



Image 7: Rossie Uranga in *Guaracha Rock*, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008, Box 13 Folder 26, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.



Image 8: Ana Teresa Montes in *Guaracha Rock*, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008 Box 13 Folder 25, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

dark. She looks up, perhaps in prayer or stargazing, yet haunted by a feeling of dread. The second photo shows her sitting cross-legged on a box. She grips the rope with three fingers of her left hand. With her right she holds the rope against the box, drawing it somewhat taut between her hands. She leans forward eyes wide open with a slight frown.⁹² Her expression holds emotions of wonder and alacrity with tones of fear, exhaustion, and pain. Is she contemplating suicide? Perhaps, it is an elaborate game of cats' cradle that mimics the restraint, insecurities, and compromises of a young immigrant navigating the world of Miami in the 1970s.

Images of the production presented in the media tell a completely different story than the gritty, confessional *encuentros capitales* staged under a single fixed spotlight. Images in the press showed the entire cast onstage singing, dancing, waving, and laughing, depicting a huge party. Only one image of any of the *encuentro capitales* was printed in the media, showing Lídice Díaz-Rousselot wrapped in a blanket. But most of the images printed in local press focus on the play of *guaracha*, and not the gravity of rock. Sitting on the stage platforms, the cast laughs together. Someone gives a playful shove. They lean on and hold one another.⁹³

Guaracha Rock's premiere in October of 1978 was a part of Miami's sixth *Semana de la Hispanidad* (Hispanic Heritage Week), which touted over 100 events between October 4th and 11th.⁹⁴ Reviews of the production suggest that audiences may have been expecting something much more lighthearted or celebratory to mark Hispanic Heritage Week in Miami. Luis

⁹² Lillian Manzor, "Guaracha Rock," <http://ctda.library.miami.edu/production/3761> Cuban Theatre Digital Archive. Web. 22 Feb 2016. (Images chc5216000233, chc5216000234)

⁹³ Norma Niurka, "Celebrando la herencia hispánica: El humor y la gracia se hacen arte." *El Nuevo Herald* Oct 4 1978, p 9; Luis Dulzaides, "En el mundo de los espectáculos, De Guaracha Rock a Freud," *La nación*, 6 October 1978; Norma Niurka "Una experiencia interesante" *El Miami Herald*, 13 October 1978, sec. Galería p. 9, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008 Box 13 Folder 24, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁹⁴ Conchita Muñoz, "110 eventos: uno para cada gusto, La Septa Semana de la Hispanidad," *El Nuevo Herald*, 1 Octubre 1978 sec. Galería, p. 11; Norma Niurka, "Celebrando la herencia hispánica," p 9.

Dulzaides was surprised to find that the piece presented so much disillusionment among the local youth, complaining that the overall feeling was depressing and that the performance was too long. Although he found places where the actors excelled, Dulzaides wrote,

no fue un viaje de Travolta a 'Prometeo,' sino una catarsis mental, un desahogo de trauma, gritos de complejo, asesinos que prefieren asesinarse ellos mismos, drogadictos que se justifican con "Papi" y una actriz tan buena como Lídice Díaz-Rousselot metida en un mar de "pipi."

it was not a Prometeo version of John Travolta, rather it was a mental catharsis, a traumatic release, shouts of psychosis, murderers that prefer to kill themselves, drug addicts that justify themselves with 'Papi' and an actress as good as Lídice Díaz-Rousselot submerged in a sea of "pipi."⁹⁵

However negative the assessment of this reviewer with a conventional taste may seem, Dulzaides' perspective is valuable. In his severe criticism of the performance's blurring of fiction and reality in its reluctance to clearly mark its auto-biographical vignettes with the rhetorical conventions of illusionism, Dulzaides clearly points out that the play engaged in the aesthetics of *creación colectiva*.

Familiarity with *creación colectiva* seems to make all the difference from the reviewer's perspective, as Norma Niurka loved the piece. Her review documents that *Guaracha Rock* was a successful experiment in *creación colectiva*, while giving us another glimpse at how the performance broke down the division between the audience and actors, incited audience participation, and drew from the personal to stage *hispano* and Latina/o ways of being. Probably the most compelling evidence for my present study is that Niurka contextualizes *Guaracha Rock* by comparing it to the next case study I analyze—*Cap-a-Pie*. "La idea es la misma que tuvo, hace años en Nueva York, la cubana María Irene Fornés, con su obra *Cap-a-Pie*, donde trata el conflicto cultural, con experiencias propias contadas por actores latinoamericanos residentes en

⁹⁵ Dulzaides, "De Guaracha Rock a Freud."

los Estado Unidos, con música compuesta por la ocasión." (The idea is the same one that María Irene Fornés had years ago in New York, with her play *Cap-a-Pie*, where it deals with cultural conflict through personal experiences told by U.S. resident Latin American actors, with music composed for the occasion.)⁹⁶ In her review, Niurka encapsulates how the play's vignettes presented young Latin American immigrants and Cuban exiles as "desterrados (uprooted/exiled) between two cultures:"

vemos, entre otras escenas, a un chico que se inyecta droga y clama, entretanto, por el amor de su padre; una niña que llora de miedo en la noche, una actriz que quiere mostrar sus posibilidades (y nos hace vislumbrar lo buena actriz que es Celita Domuiño); un suramericano imitando ingenua y bellamente a un cubano. La pregunta que queda en el aire no es tanto ¿Qué Somos?, tonada que interpreta el combo, sino, ¿hasta que punto, los traumas y problemas presentados son provocados porque sus padres los arrancaron de su patria?

we see, along with other scenes, a kid who injects himself with drugs, all for the love of his father, a young girl who cries in fear in the night, an actress that wants to show her potential (and gives us a glimpse of what a good actress Celita DoMuiño is), a South American imitating a Cuban with naiveté and beauty. The question that hangs in the air is not ¿Qué Somos?, the tonada that is played by the combo, but rather, how much of the trauma and problems presented are brought about because their parents dragged them out of their homeland?⁹⁷

Although the cast was pan-Latino, some of the reviews articulated the performance's theme as pertaining specifically to Cuban American youth. For example, Niurka concludes her review by stating that even though several of the production's pieces portray an existential angst that could be experienced by anyone in any country, *Guaracha Rock* "toca el corazón y la mente de los exiliados cubanos de Miami" (touches the hearts and minds of Cuban exiles in Miami).⁹⁸ In this regard, student journalist Lázara Betancourt's analysis singles out the importance of affect to the understanding the central conflict presented in the production. "It is a major problem for these

⁹⁶ Niurka, "Una experiencia interesante."

⁹⁷ Niurka, "Una experiencia interesante."

⁹⁸ Niurka "Una experiencia interesante."

kids because they are neither Cubans nor Americans and at the same time they feel Cuban, and they feel American."⁹⁹ Betancourt's article underlines how *Guaracha Rock* not only performed the dilemma of "'feeling brown' in a world... organized by cultural mandates to 'feel white,'" but also at times, a conflict of feeling "American" in a world with cultural mandates to feel "cubano," "colombiano," "venezolano," "peruano," "guatemalteco"...and "latinoamericano."

Staging Latino(americana/o) Being in *Cap-a-Pie*

New York in the 1970s and 1980s flourished with works of *creación colectiva*, which continued to be a central branch of Latina/o theatre in New York well into the 1980s. New York's scene contributed to the institutionalization of *creación colectiva* as Nuevo Teatro in the 1980s. The Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano was a place where groups from across the Américas rejoined to develop the movement.¹⁰⁰ The final production of *creación colectiva* I analyze is a piece staged by INTAR (International Arts Relations) in 1975 called *Cap-a-Pie*, which was written and directed by María Irene Fornés (born in 1930). As an avant-garde artist, a Cuban-American, a Latina, a Feminist, and a Lesbian, Fornés's theatre spoke to all of these communities and yet she consciously chose to ambiguously abstain from claiming any of these labels. Muñoz writes of Fornés:

Her refusal or reluctance to embrace an uncritical model of Latina identity is a critical and theoretical act. Only a few of Fornés's plays actually feature Latino/a characters... Even so, I contend that all of her dramatic personages represent Latina/o affective reality. Their way of being, their modes of negotiating the interpersonal and the social, stand as thick descriptions of ethnic feeling within a hegemonic order.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Lázara Betancourt, "MDCC Presents 'Guaracha Rock'," *Youthworld*, 11 October 1978 p. 7, Teresa María Rojas Papers 1953-2008 Box 13 Folder 24, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

¹⁰⁰ Another example is in the itinerary of director Rubén Correa, formerly of Teatro de la Orilla, who returned to Buenos Aires to create Teatro Abierto with Adelina Lago in 1980. Adelina Lago, "Teatro Abierto," *Conjunto* 55 (1983): 16.

¹⁰¹ Muñoz, "Feeling Brown," 72-73.

Fornés's resistance to identity-based and essentialist categorization of the author and her work is well known and must be respected. Gender has been Fornés's most visible categorization as a playwright, especially concerning the feminist discourses within which her work was first applied to and critiqued. Fornés responded to being categorized as a woman playwright with strategic ambiguity. For example, responding to a narrow feminist critique of *Mud* in 1985 Fornés wrote,

Often there are misunderstandings about my work because it is expected that as a woman I must be putting women in traditional or nontraditional roles...the same thing happens if you have a non-white character or actor in a play. Immediately people assume the play is dealing with racial questions. One can almost hear people asking, "If you want to deal with a 'person' why don't you put a 'person' on stage?"¹⁰²

Her will to resist such ghettoizing perspectives broke new barriers for the kinds of theatre Latina and Latino artists could create, the kinds of issues they could speak to, and the multiple ways their voices could be heard.¹⁰³ In focusing on Fornés's work rather than her identity in my analysis and by acknowledging Fornés's conscious ambiguity in relation to identity politics, I hope to avoid overstepping my scholarly bounds by speaking for the author. My effort here is to point out the limitations of any single categorization of the work of the artists I discuss, Fornés above all in this regard, and to excavate from the dramatic discourse Fornés's *latinidad* as something that has been inassimilable and evaded by critics seeking to impose "universal" paradigms of experimental art. In addition to characters' ways of being and feeling in difference that Muñoz points out, I want to stress that Fornés's *latinidad* makes itself known through

¹⁰² María Irene Fornés, "Creative Danger" *American Theatre*, September (1985), 13.

¹⁰³ As a scholar, I have an ethical obligation to the playwright and the way that she framed herself to the theatre community of New York, the media, and publishers. Her resistance to identity politics was key towards the critical attention and recognition that she was able to receive. Knowing that she was a woman, a Cuban-American, a Latina, a member of New York's Caribbean diaspora, and a lesbian all may add insight to her writing, but at what expense to the author's wishes, efforts, and accomplishments?

thought, process, hybridity, and experimentation, rather than topical or thematic markers.

Fornés's latinidad evades critics working under a paradigm of Western universality because it is not announced through a single fixed identity category that can be comprehended or "possessed" as an object of sublimation, or as "Other."¹⁰⁴ Referring back to Fornés's resistance to the ghettoizing categories of identity politics, her insight in remaining ambiguous towards these camps actually gave more exposure to her work. This may indicate a desire on her part to see a more inclusive body of drama where her work alongside the work of other U.S. minority playwrights could be appreciated within theatre's claim to a universal human experience, while not compromising the expression of difference.

As a theatre company, INTAR has challenged the exclusion and ghettoization of Latina/o playwrights by making a space for their work. The history of INTAR begins with a company named ADAL (Agrupación de Arte Latinoamericano), which was founded in 1966 by a group of Cuban and Puerto Rican theatre artists, including Max Ferrá, Frank Robles, Gladys Ortiz, Oscar García, Antonio Gonzales-Jaén, y Benjamín López.¹⁰⁵ After several years of successful theatre making, ADAL was forced to leave their theatre on the Avenue of the Americas in 1970 and they incorporated themselves with the Dúo Theatre, founded by Manuel Martín, Jr. and Magaly Alabau to become INTAR. The Dúo Theatre Artists left INTAR in 1973 to become the Spanish-English Ensemble Theatre, the bilingual theatre company in residence at La Mama Experimental Theatre Club.¹⁰⁶ INTAR remained incorporated and continued to produce theatre at the venue on

¹⁰⁴ This analysis is highly informed by Édouard Glissant's theorization of the dialectics of "sameness," and "diversity" in Édouard Glissant, "Littératures nationales," in *La discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997; reprint, Paris: Gallimard, 2012), 327-330.

¹⁰⁵ Lillian Manzor, "ADAL" <http://ctda.library.miami.edu/creator/5016>. Cuban Theatre Digital Archive. Web. 20 Jan 2015.

¹⁰⁶ "Spanish-English Ensemble Theatre, Inc." Duo Theatre Folder. Theatre Ephemera Collection Box 2, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries.

508 W 53rd Street into the 21st century. It is from that space that INTAR produced the work of avant-garde playwright María Irene Fornés and enjoyed ample success, enough to become the first Latina/o theatre company on Broadway, opening a venue on Theatre Row in 1978. Through the Hispanic Playwright's Residence Laboratory from 1981-1992, Fornés mentored many of the U.S.'s leading playwrights, including Caridad Svich, Migdalia Cruz, Cherie Moraga, and Nilo Cruz. Supporting the development of Latina/o artists and their works is perhaps INTAR's greatest legacy, including the production of 70 world premieres of new works, and as a playwriting guru, Fornés contributed more to that legacy than any other figure.

Given its history with the work of Manuel Martín, Jr. and Magaly Alabau, INTAR was not unfamiliar with experimental theatre processes like *creación colectiva*. In 1975, Fornés was already an acclaimed dramatist with many accolades including recognition by Casa de las Américas in 1961 for her play *La viuda* and an Obie award for Distinguished Plays for her book and lyrics for the experimental musical *Promenade* (1965) and her play *The Successful Life of Three* (1965). *Cap-a-Pie* was Fornés's very first production with INTAR.¹⁰⁷ Scott Cummings sees the play as a key moment in the evolution of sentiment and intimacy in Fornés's dramatic writing.¹⁰⁸

Cap-a-Pie is a play with music made up of assembled vignettes that provide several intimate snapshots into the personal, familial, and cultural worlds of eight Latina/o actors in New York during the 1970s. The cast was made up of Colombian actor José Rafael Arango, Mexican-American actress Vera Colorado, Puerto Rican actors Vicenta Avilés, Doris Castellanos, Johnny Robles, and Cuban actors, Ruben Rebasa, Iris Díaz, and Ivan Acosta, author of *El Super* (1978). Fornés crafted *Cap-a-Pie* through her work as a director and facilitator of the *creación colectiva*

¹⁰⁷ Lillian Manzor, "The Cuban Theatre Digital Archive," 73.

¹⁰⁸ Scott T. Cummings, *Maria Irene Fornes* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59-60.

process.¹⁰⁹ She began the project as a workshop with the actors to generate material from their "memories, fantasies, confessions, and anecdotes."¹¹⁰ In his review in the *Village Voice*, Michael Feingold wrote, "Miss Fornés has assembled fragments from the memories, dreams, and aspirations of eight personable young Hispanic actors that make up her cast, turned some of said memories, etc. into lyrics of her own, and made the whole into a very well-directed and appealing little review, as leisurely as the painted clouds that drift across Robert Joyner's cunningly simple set." As Feingold documents, Fornés's work in crafting the piece lay in leading the cast through a unique process of *creación colectiva*. As with the work of Buenaventura, Fornés assembled the final script, editing, ordering, crafting structure, and writing lyrics for songs inspired by the actor's memories and emotional life. José Raúl Bernardo composed original music for the piece to accompany Fornés's lyrics.

In Fornés's dramaturgy, juxtaposition creates tension where the end of one Latina/o experience rubs against the beginning of another, and montage creates a crossroads between a diverse group of immigrant and U.S. Latina/o experiences that delves into the very fabric of *latinidad*. In this regard, the spine of *Cap-a-Pie* is an exploration and an exercise in trans-Latino affect. At the top of the play in the stage directions, the actors enter each carrying a chair. They place their chairs, four on each side of a large platform, from front to back all facing front, like a train of chairs. It is from these seats, set in plain view that the actors first enter. Throughout the play they never leave the stage. They act in scenes where they tell their personal stories, they act in scenes where they aid other actors telling their stories, or they return to their seats and watch from right off the platform, remaining in full view of the audience. With very little costume

¹⁰⁹ Fornés's directing is extremely important to understanding her playwriting but unfortunately this dimension of her work remains understudied.

¹¹⁰ Cummings, *Maria Irene Fornes*, 58.

changes and no set changes, the ensemble of actors tell each story as a collective, creating scenes by moving around furniture or simply using their own bodies to create the space of each scene. The title of the piece, meaning "head to foot" is a bodily metaphor that means comprehensive or complete. The title explicitly signifies the play's dramatic connection between the body, affect, and Latino(*americana/o*) ways of being and feeling in the world. It is being—not identity, nor performance thereof—that the title of the piece suggests.

In the first act of *Cap-a-Pie*, the cast shares childhood memories as monologues placed one after the other. Many of the actors are immigrants, and their acts of remembrance embodied sensations and emotions evoked by the social and environmental worlds in their countries of origin. However, the affective environments in the memories of U.S. born Latinas/os were not marked differently and many of the specific references to geography are omitted. Throughout the piece the emphasis is on the personal. Even where place or national difference is marked, juxtaposition of the vignettes suggests a contiguous likening of diverse experiences. The resulting chain of juxtaposed monologues weaves a web of *latinidad*, and through their linkages to one another, these particular memories emerge as ways of being Latina/o and *latinamericano*. For example Johnny Robles's monologue in the first act tells the story of how he worked for a man named Dominick selling bleach water in New York: "We started with the private houses and then we went in the projects. We'd knock on the door and go... (*In a street vendor's voice*) Bleach water... until someone would come out with an empty and we gave them a full. At that time bleach was 35 cents per gallon. And I liked going..., Bleach water... Bleach water..."¹¹¹ When Johnny Robles relived this story by *pregonando* (*calling out as a street vendor*) before the audience in the INTAR 53 theatre, he cited the remaking of the city, from the private houses to

¹¹¹ Fornés, *Cap-a-Pie*, 4-5.

the projects, as space that felt ethnically different than normative prescriptions of public sphere behavior. Within his memory, *pregonando* was a daily practice that Robles loved participating in, a practice that created a vibrant Nuyorican space out of the cold anonymous architecture of the projects. The omission of nationality from Robles's story in *Cap-a-Pie*, moved the Nuyorican affect of *pregonando* into a discourse of *latinidad*. In this context, the Puerto Rican affect of Robles's utterance became trans-Latino and enacted a Latino(*americana/o*) space.

In her direction of *Cap-a-Pie*, Fornés leveraged the ensemble collective to stage *latinidad*, using montage to place different experiences alongside one another. Montage conveys the trans-Latino affect of Vera Colorado's performance of Mexican film actress Lola Beltrán. The rest of the cast create the bar scene from a film as Vera embodies the stature of the voluptuous Beltrán and performs one of her famous love ballads, "Por un amor." Vera who performs the ranchera siren and the diverse cast of Latina/o actors who embody the space of the Mexican *cantina campesina*, recreate the appeal of Lola Beltrán as a Latino(*americana/o*) one.

Another example Fornés's use of montage is the musical number called "Divino Manjar/Sublime Supper" that stages the creation of a sublime Pan-Latino meal as a musical number. The meal is based on the cravings of the cast members for their favorite meals. The menu quickly becomes unwieldy as eight actors of four national cuisines list main courses, appetizers, desserts, etc. They share their favorite dishes and explain the delicacies of their national cuisines to one another across lines of difference. For example, at one point the cast breaks into a discussion about Caribbean fruit, before bursting back into song.

Doris: Y mangos, mamey, y guanabana.

Vicenta: Y corazon.

Ruben: Eso que es?

Vicenta: Like guanabana but smaller

Doris: Chirimoya

Ruben: Y el anon cual es?

Iris: El anon is like the chirimoya but smaller.

Ivan: Its very beautiful con escamitas.

Johnny: And apple pie.

(They all turn to him very slowly with a sense of indignation, look at him, then turn from slowly)

Johnny: I like apple pie.

(They all look front slowly, the Christmas lights turn on slowly)

All: [Divino Manjar song]

Panatela borracha,
Arroz con leche...¹¹²

In the dialogue, Rubén, who is of Cuban descent, asks Vicenta, who is Puerto Rican, to describe the corazón fruit, a variety of guanábana that is indigenous to Puerto Rico. Then Rubén asks about the difference between anón and chirimoya, something that fellow Cubans Iris and Iván are able to explain to him. Sequences of dialogue in the number repeat this share and explain pattern several times. Explanations come across lines of national difference, like when Doris, explains to Vera, a Mexican-American, the meaning of quimbombo, the Cuban word for okra or when Vicenta explains to Iris what a pastel de platano is, something much like a tamal and much different than a Cuban pastel which is like a pastry. Explanations also work through pan-Latino awareness, for example when Vera, Vicenta, Doris, and Iris explain to Ivan that a mabí is a Puerto Rican soft drink. Explanations also happen within nationalities, as no one is an expert of the cuisine of their own culture in the first place. Finally, Johnny's suggestion of apple pie as a tropical fruit annoys the rest of the cast members, who are riffing on "authentic" tropical fruits. However, it is a key moment in trans-Latino affect, as Johnny, a Nuyorican, makes apple pie, an iconic US American dessert, a Latino(*americana/o*) delicacy. Johnny compares creamy and fleshy fruits like guanábana, anón, and chirimoya with apple pie filling. His hybridity allows him to make such a radical comparison, and his re-casting of apple pie as a tropical fruit is a key moment in the play's exercise in trans-Latino affect, which must also account for the U.S.

¹¹² Fornés, *Cap-a-Pie*, 18-19.

American parts of Latino(*americana/o*) being. Johnny's pie can be seen as a bilingual homograph for the Spanish word for foot, "*pie*" in the play's title. The comprehensive Latino being that the title *Cap-a-Pie* refers to would not complete without the appropriation and refashioning of U.S. American icon. Cummings writes, "The short seemingly negligible shift from '*And apple pie*' to '*Y apple pie*' is precisely the gap of alienation that *Cap-a-Pie* sought to bridge."¹¹³ Johnny's pie challenges cultural mandates to feel "white" by making apple pie feel (and taste) "brown."

The tensions and confusions between Latina/os enacted in the dialogue are smoothed in the register of the musical number. Annoyed as they are at Johnny's apple pie, the cast slowly turns forward and sings "Divino Manjar" together.

Panatela borracha,
Arroz con leche...
Raspadura gigante,
Harina en dulce,
Boniatillo y tembleque,
Pudin de coco,
Guyaba con queso crema,
Natilla y flan.

Chicharrones de pollo
Con arroz blanco,
Asapao y tamales,
Lechon asado,
Picadillo con tacos
Y guacamole,
Pasteles de yuca y platano
y quimbombo,
Pasteles de yuca y platano
y quimbombo (sic).¹¹⁴

The song's lyrics evoke a truly trans-Latino amalgamation of diverse groupings of cuisine. The meal becomes divine because it is able to transcend national borders and perform the blissful abundance of placing all of the pan-Latino delicacies side by side. The song gives

¹¹³ Cummings, *Maria Irene Fornes*, 60.

¹¹⁴ Fornés, *Cap-a-Pie*, 19.

Latino(*americana/o*)s a chance to call out in song the craving for another nationality's cuisine— Cubans sing about guacamole, Mexicans sing about quimbombo, Colombians sing about pasteles de yuca y platano, and Nuyoricans sing about apple pie.

The final scene in *Cap-a-Pie* "Los Espejos/The Mirrors" answers a question posed by one of the first monologues in the show, "Etapas/Stages" where Iris Díaz explains that in moving from Cuba to Key West, Key West to Miami, and Miami to New York, with each move she left groups of loved ones behind in the past. "Y cada etapa son como bloques. And those blocks keep mounting. And there is no connection. The only connection is in the memory. And there's no connection. And then it's you here. Right now."¹¹⁵ For Iris, her life of mobility has meant having to let go of friends and love ones and create new relationships with those she shares a present immediacy with, like the audience in the theatre. Distance strains and breaks relationships and the breaking of a relationship is the breaking of self. In "El reflejo de las almas," Doris Castellanos posits that much of who we are is not only defined by how we remember ourselves, but how others remember us. She sings, "Es el reflejo que las almas tienen/Que como espejo nos muestra/Nuestra esencia./Que a través de los seres conocidos/Se aprende a conocer la propia esencia" [sic] (It is the reflection that souls hold/That like a mirror shows us/Our essence./It is through loved ones that/That one learns to know her own essence.)¹¹⁶ The mirror is a metaphor for the souls of loved ones and how they reflect an image of Doris allowing her to know who she is. The question posed is a philosophical one regarding human subjectivity and being. If humans, as social beings are defined by our relationships, then the experience of immigration is not only a cultural transformation, but a transformation of being. Doris explains in her dialogue:

¹¹⁵ Fornés, *Cap-a-Pie*, 2.

¹¹⁶ Fornés, *Cap-a-Pie*, 34.

And without realizing it, I had filled myself with mirrors. To attempt to remember who I was. But that did not do it. I was in a fog. And I had to struggle in that fog to find an identity. Which will not be the same.

[She sings] Que a través de los seres conocidos

Se aprende a conocer la propia esencia...

(José Rafael and Johnny go to Doris and hold her hand. Ivan and Vicenta follow. Ivan holds Jose Rafael's hand and Vicenta holds Johnny's hand. Vera and Ruben follow, then Iris. They bow.)¹¹⁷

The play ends with the cast doing a reprise of "Divino Manjar/Divine Supper," but the final moment of Doris' piece "Los Espejos/The Mirrors" emphasizes the fluid and translocal nature of Latino(*americana/o*) being. The new network of loved ones surrounding Doris has changed her identity, as well as her *esencia* (essence) into something "Which will not be the same." The ensemble cast coming together and holding hands in the end of the piece is the embodiment of what that change will be like, a new repertoire of ways of being created through trans-Latino affect. The amalgamation of Latin American cuisine in the song lyrics for "Divino Manjar" expresses the merging of personal cravings for national cuisine into the performative emergence of these cravings as Latino(*americana/o*) ways of being. In *Cap-a-Pie*, Fornés leverages the presence of the collective, as a diverse and unified, conflicted and congruent, present and processual maker of trans-Latino affect. Through juxtaposition and montage, the play dramatizes the transformation of personal memory and displaced affect for national ways of being into something beyond nationally defined fixed identity. Brought into dialogue with one another, displaced national ways of being became cultural capital in negotiation of the meaning and boundaries of *latinidad*. Perhaps more importantly for the generation of the 1970s, performances of *Cap-a-Pie* enacted the becoming of Latina/o ways of being in the world.

¹¹⁷ Fornés, *Cap-a-Pie*, 34.

Conclusion

With this chapter I have attempted to establish a connection between the experimental theatre scenes of New York, Miami, Havana, and multiple sites in California by comparing productions of *creación colectiva*. In each of the case studies, artists created new works of theatre from the experiences and sophisticated cultural fabric of their community through a creative process that was avant-garde. Each production was staged in a context that engaged with a renegotiation of *latinidad*. In the cases of *Cap-a-Pie* and *Guaracha Rock*, *latinidad* emerged as a central concern because they were created by, about, for, and near pan-Latino communities. Accordingly, trans-Latino affect in these case studies created instances of Latino(*americana/o*) being in the spaces in between and in excess of nationalities by debating what is shared, what is different, what is transferable, and negotiating what is Latina/o. Teatro Escambray and Teatro de la Esperanza, on the other hand, drew upon *latinidad* as an interpretative axis when performing within new Latino(*americana/o*) contexts—when Teatro de la Esperanza performed at Teatro el Sótano in Havana, when Teatro Escambray performed at La Peña Cultural Center or El Museo del Barrio, or when either performed in the context of an international Latin American theatre festival. In these cases, trans-Latino affect is the connection between groups and audiences that allowed these productions to work in new transnational Latin American contexts.

Reviewing past scholarship on Teatro Escambray and Teatro de la Esperanza's collaboration shows that the label Nuevo Teatro is a historiographic frame that emerged in the early 1980s which describes the theatre created by these collectives as a consciously Latin American theatre movement, and is often associated with Marxist critique and movements of social change. The discourse of teatro nuevo cubano during the Cuban Revolution, and state supported cultural institutions like *Conjunto* advanced the alignment of a diverse grouping of

theatre collectives and artistic practices via a socialist political impulse. Trans-Latino affect is an important optic that historiographically illuminates the discourse of latinidad taking place through the artistic production and exchange of creación colectiva in festivals, international tours, meetings, and criticism. In this chapter, I have emphasized that the move between nationally defined identities is where latinidad exists and is negotiated. As a community of affect, Latino(*americana/o*)s have no marked static space. Latinidad manifests in the spaces between contexts, borders, and national ways of being.

CHAPTER 4. UNDOING CUBANNESS AND HETEROSEXIST NATIONALISMS IN TEATRO DE LA CRUELDAD

If palimpsesting is the hypothetical glance towards Cuba in Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre, and if creación colectiva was the glance towards Latin America, then the glance towards continental and U.S. American theatre was teatro de la crueldad (Theatre of Cruelty). As creación colectiva was a renegotiation of latinidad as a feminist, intersectional, and transnational project in the face of U.S. American hemispheric hegemony, teatro de la crueldad enacted a parallel critique of patriarchal nationalism. The teatro de la crueldad productions that I analyze in this chapter renegotiated Cubaness, moving the borders of national being beyond heterosexual norms of gender and sexuality.

The Theatre of Cruelty was a transnational phenomenon with no formal organization or definitive interpretation of Artaud's manifesto.¹ In Havana, teatro de la crueldad had a singular manifestation. Teatro de la crueldad a la cubana combines Cuban vernacular performance with a host of experimental theatre approaches from continental movements.

¹ Artaud's writings on Theatre of Cruelty see Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958). For Artaud as suffering artist see, Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, trans. Helen Weaver, Ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud* (London: John Calder, 1976). For Artaud's theory and interpretation for contemporary American Theatre see Eric Sellin, *The Dramatic Concepts of Antonin Artaud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). For a new perspective on Artaud's theories as a totalitarian vision of control and domination see Kimberly Jannarone, *Artaud and His Doubles* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2012). For Artaud's theories in application of The Living Theatre's work, Judith Malina, "Directing The Brig," in *The Brig*, Ed. Kenneth H. Brown (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965). For Theatre of Cruelty as allegory see Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point* (London: Methuen, 1988). Artaud as mentally ill artist, Alain Virmaux and Odette Virmaux, *Artaud: Un bilan critique* (Paris: Belfond, 1979). Artaud and the radical left, Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, "Vérités de Tel Quel," in, *Artaud en revues*, Ed. Olivier Penot-Lacassagne (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme: 2005). For Artaud and Gnosticism see Jane Goodall, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). For Artaud as subversive to the symbolic order of language and logocentrism see Julia Kristeva, "The Subject in Process," *The Kristeva Reader* Ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Experimental theatre artists living in exile and inxile, many of whom were Gay, Lesbian, and Queer, turned to teatro de la crueldad as a way to undertake the “undoing” needed to open Cubanness to new horizons reaching beyond the limits of machismo and misogyny underpinning the definition of nation. For those whose cultural and national citizenship was marginalized on account of their sexuality, undoing traditional gendered and sexed conceptions of what it means to be a Cuban opened a needed avenue of becoming Cuban. In this chapter I focus on how certain productions of Cuban teatro de la crueldad staged a theatrical language that could be called sadomasochistic. Artists on Cuban routes of teatro de la crueldad drew on sadism and masochism as broad cultural phenomena to dramatize and subvert the violence in hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In this sense, I see sadism and masochism similarly to how David Savran has theorized masochism as a mode of cultural production that shapes white male U.S. American masculinity.² In some instances of teatro de la crueldad, artists drew on the sexual practices of sadomasochism to create a theatrical language. Current queer theory and queer culture (at least since the early 90s) have theorized a particular understanding of those practices as Bondage and Discipline, Domination and Submission, Sadism and Masochism (BDSM).³ I

² Comparing a diverse group of case studies from the writing of Norman Mailer to Timothy McVeigh to Kushner’s *Angels in America*, Savran critiques the dominant ideology within popular cultural production that prescribes toughness and sacrifice as central to white male masculinity in the United States. His study historicizes how these notions of masculinity were created through a discourse of masochism going back to the nineteenth century, and that masochistic fantasy creates a paradigm that constructs the white male subject as both victimized and virile, occupying the center and both roles of dominant/submissive, oppressor/oppressed in the discourse of power. This slippage conceals the homoeroticism that constructs white masculinity. David Savran, *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 29-34.

³ The larger study of BDSM in Queer Studies offers an insightful theorization of sexual practices as social theatre. Queer Studies scholars not only understand BDSM practices as performance, but also as practices that create community and identity. I draw from this discourse for the development of my understanding of when sexual practices are translated to theatrical mode, what meanings they carry over regarding the transformation of self, and how to read

use this Queer Studies theorization of BDSM as a means of reading the sadomasochistic practices dramatized and evoked in the productions of teatro de la crueldad that I study below.

I note that the theatricalized sadomasochism I discuss here was neither an accurate representation of actually practiced sadomasochism, nor of emergent proto-BDSM sexualities. Rather, it was a way to embody Cubanness and intersecting U.S. and Latino cultural nationalisms as Queer. BDSM queer theory is an illuminating analytical framework for this cultural production as it has many points of confluence with teatro de la crueldad. BDSM discourse explains that one of the aims of sadomasochism as a sexual practice is to emphasize the changeability of power through “play,” especially through role reversals of power dynamics. For example, Patricia Duncan describes lesbian s/m as a site of conflict where shifting parameters of identity and power through changeable, consensual, and clearly marked

theatricalized sadomasochism as a coded language for LGBTQ spectatorship and artistic expression. Particularly I draw on Lynda Hart’s Lacanian read of s/m play and gender transgression. See Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). I also rely on Amber Jamilla Musser’s conception of the reinscription of racial and gendered hierarchies. See Amber Jamilla Musser *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014). My thinking is informed by Robin Bauer’s subcultural skills for reading the transformation of self. See Robin Bauer, “Transgressive and Transformative Gendered Sexual Practices and White Privileges: The Case of Dyke/Trans BDSM communities,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36.3 & 4 (2008): 233-253. For more on Sadomasochism, S/M, and BDSM, interested readers should start by consulting the following anthologies: Peggy J. Kleinplatz and Charles Moser, eds., *Sadomasochism: Powerful Pleasures* (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2006); Darren Langdridge and Meg Barker, eds., *Safe, Sane, and Consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadomasochism* (New York: Palgrave, 2007). Mark Thompson, *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, (Los Angeles: Alyson, 1991). For s/m and critical race theory see Cain Berlinger, *Black Men in Leather* (Tempe, AZ: Third Millennium, 2006). For s/m and sexual persecution see Gayle Rubin, “The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M,” *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). For a theoretical perspective on Sadomasochism and the creation of Queer temporalities through bodily sensations that dislocate modernity to approach trauma, slavery, and hierarchies of race, see Elizabeth Freeman, “Turn the Beat Around: Sadomasochism, Temporality, History,” *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

boundaries create an imagined “scene” that leverages dom and sub relationships to renegotiate culturally defined and constructed hierarchies of race, class, and gender through the eroticization of difference.⁴ There is a similar relationship between the audience and the performance purposed by Artaud in *The Theatre and Its Double*. I do not suggest that Artaud’s theories or Theatre of Cruelty necessarily concern sadomasochism. I only suggest that the Theatre of Cruelty shares resonances with sadomasochism. By calling for a theatre based on the sensual and affective responses of the body, Artaud theorizes a method that can be innovated to theatricalize the kinds of transformations of power and eroticizations of difference that are theorized by BDSM discourse. Teatro de la crueldad on Cuban routes singularized itself in the resonances between Artaud and sadomasochism.

Artaud called for the theatre to shock the audience out of its conviction in the illusion of social “reality,” but as Kimberly Jannarone argues, Artaud was not shocking his audience as a means to inspire liberation or creativity. Artaud’s aim was instead to control the audience’s evolution into “organized anarchy.” In her analysis, Jannarone notes that Artaud repeatedly refers to shocking the senses and the body in a way that “is more punishing than provocative.” According to Jannarone, Artaud theorizes the audience as “a mass of organisms” and the spectator as “a collection of organs to be acted upon.” Artaud’s conception of cruelty places the audience in the middle of the action where it is submersed within the artistic vision, which overwhelms it “through a ceaseless onslaught of sensory stimuli,” redirecting, reinstructing, or taking hold of the audience’s subjectivity through the body in their experience of spectatorship.⁵

⁴ Patricia L. Duncan, “Identity, Power, and Difference: Negotiating Conflict in an S/M Dyke Community,” in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*, eds. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 87-88, 101, 105-7.

⁵ Jannarone, 87-89.

The connection between sadomasochism and teatro de la crueldad was not lost on Cuban artists either. One of the first Cuban playwrights associated with teatro de la crueldad, Matias Montes Huidobro, argues that cruelty in Cuban theatre makes the audience complicit in a grotesque disfigurement that reflects their own hidden or repressed sadistic impulses. Just as *choteo* satisfies Cubans' desire to "reirse de sus propias desgracias" (laugh at their own disgraces), Montes Huidobro posits that the pleasure of cruelty emerges through grotesque representations that satirize "the bodily decomposition that is life."⁶ Whether the audience is made to feel pain, as in Jannarone's reading of Artaud, or feel pleasure from witnessing pain, as in Montes Huidobro's reading of cruelty on Cuban stages, the audience relinquishes control to the performance in order to engage in a play of pain and pleasure.

Among its many qualities, the ritual play of power between characters onstage, or spectators and performers highlights something distinct about teatro de la crueldad on Cuban routes. I am particularly interested in the way teatro de la crueldad embodies tropes of sadomasochism that dramatize role reversals of power, the changeability of the body, and bodies revealing their truth. Through its focus on the body and an affective exchange of pleasure and pain between the audience and the performance, teatro de la crueldad theatricalized sadomasochism as a way to deterritorialize gendered and sexual hierarchies of power in heterosexist constructions of nation—Cuban, U.S. American, or intersecting Latino cultural nationalisms. As a branch of queer theory, BDSM Studies is a lens that brings into sharp relief the distinction between a trope of sexual abuse and a "scene"⁷ of the transformation of self

⁶ Matías Montes Huidobro, "El Teatro de la Crueldad: Una Pateadura Histórica," in *Oscura Total* (Miami: Plaza Editorial, 2014), 9-10.

⁷ I am borrowing this term directly from BDSM discourse. A scene or scenario in BDSM practice is the agreed upon roles, boundaries, and conflict to be acted out in sexual practice.

through the negotiation of power dynamics of nation, gender, and sexuality. Most importantly, BDSM discourse provides the vocabulary to interpret how artists theatricalized sadomasochism to play with power and renegotiate gender and sexuality in national belonging, and, in some cases to provisionally embody Queer Cuban and Queer Latina/o becoming.

In what follows, I first present how Cuban artists and scholars have innovated and theorized teatro de la crueldad as a Cuban avant-garde practice. After giving a brief introduction to the Cuban discourse surrounding teatro de la crueldad through archival sources, I summarize several concepts from intersectional feminism and queer theory that form a theoretical and interpretative framework for theatricalized sadomasochism. I begin with two productions from Miami because they are part of the same resurgence of teatro de la crueldad during the mid-1980s. The two productions give a grounded example of each of the two tendencies in theatricalizing sadomasochism. Teatro Prometeo's production of *Persecución* (1985) by Reinaldo Arenas drew on sadism and masochism as a broader cultural phenomenon structuring social relationships, while Teatro Avante's 1987 production of Virgilio Piñera's *Una caja de zapatos vacía* (1968) adopted the sexual practice of sadomasochism into a theatrical language in order to dramatize the subduing of machismo. Next I discuss teatro de la crueldad in New York with Teatro Dúo Theatre's bilingual production *Francesco: The Life and Times of the Cenci/Francesco: Vida y milagros de los Cenci* (1973). The production staged theatricalized sadomasochism through detours of eroticism that subverted archetypal misogyny, while embodying queer sexuality. Finally, I analyze Teatro Obstáculo's *Ópera ciega* (1991) staged in Havana at the onset of the economic crisis of the Special Period. Theatricalized sadomasochism

Through scenes, practitioners play with power and reinscribe hierarchies of power through the eroticization of difference. See Duncan, 87-88.

in the performance exposed misogyny within the New Man as a bankrupt ideological construct and cultural institution that ordered Cuban national subjects through gender and sexuality.

***La noche de los asesinos* and Crueldad a la Cubana**

Before I delve into a critique of the aforementioned productions building my argument that teatro de la crueldad concerns undoing Cubanness, I want to contextualize the history of teatro de la crueldad in Havana and some of the ways the Cuban-style has been conceived by Cuban theatre artists and scholars, which by many accounts begins with José Triana's *La noche de los asesinos* (*Night of the Assassins*) (1965).⁸ The publication and initial productions of *La noche* was a watershed moment for Cuban theatre. The play was the first Cuban play awarded the Casa de las Américas prize for theatre and was quickly honored with multiple productions across the Americas and in Europe. *La noche de los asesinos* was the greatest international success of Cuban Theatre of the first decade of the Revolution and became a touchstone of what the new Cuban Theatre was. It was translated into various languages and staged continuously in

⁸ The literary criticism of *La noche de los asesinos* is extensive. Although early criticism of the play on international stages celebrated it as “universal,” a destruction of petit bourgeois values, a critique of the “repressive paternalisms” of the era, or as a critique of modern alienation, see Enrique Sordo, “Acuciante Alegoría,” *El Ciervo* 19.193 (1970): 17. Anne C. Murch, “Genet—Triana—Kopit: Ritual as ‘Danse Macabre,’” *Modern Drama* 15.4 (1972): 369-371; However, in Cuba the ambiguity of the piece eventually led to a controversy that questioned whether the play was revolutionary or not, eventually leading to Triana’s alienation from the state, see Román V. de la Campa, *José Triana: ritualización de la sociedad cubana* (Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1979). Since the 1970s much has focused on how the play was in some way critical of the Revolution, for example see José A. Escarpanter, “Introducción,” *Teatro: Medea en el espejo, La noche de los asesinos, Palabras communes* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 1991), 11. *La noche* as a criticism of el panfletario or cultural dogmatism see Jesús Barranco, “Artaud y La noche de los asesinos” *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana* 4/5 (1997): 51-52. Diana Taylor argues that the play necessarily concerns the Cuban revolution, and defending that the play is revolutionary, utopic, because the play’s repetitions dramatize the creation of the new “Real.” Diana Taylor, “La noche de los asesinos: La política de la ambigüedad,” in *Palabras más que comunes*, ed. Kristen F. Nigro (Boulder, CO: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1994), 59, 63.

Europe and the Americas throughout the 1970s.⁹ Due to the importance of the play and the production in Cuban theatrical memory, this production history situates teatro de la crueldad in Havana as a continuation of avant-garde theatre reaching back to the nineteenth century, while providing a basis for theorizing theatre of cruelty from a Cuban center.

The play begins with Lalo, the oldest of three siblings, entering the attic where his two sisters, Beba and Cuca, wait for him. Lalo tells them that he just murdered their parents. The siblings plot out the next steps in their plan to get rid of mom and dad. Their scheming quickly digresses into a struggle for power, as each exploits the dire and passionate circumstances to probe each other's inner weaknesses. First, they fantasize about their neighbors Margarita and Pantaleón coming over and asking too many questions. The three siblings act out this scene with Lalo mimicking Pantaleón and Beba mimicking Margarita. Throughout the second act, the siblings continue to act out metatheatrical fantasies. The police (Beba and Cuca) go through the house and discover the crime scene. Shortly after, Lalo takes the stand in a fantasy trial. The siblings conjure their parents as witnesses in the trial of their own murder and all the family's sordid business is aired out before the judge and jury. In the climax, Lalo as the father and Cuca as the mother carry on in a row that has no resolution, when Beba, who sits as the Judge, mimics Lalo hollering out, "¡Hay que tumbar esta casa!" (This house must be demolished!) Lalo is crushed, and, dropping his portrayal of their father, falls to his knees and tells his sisters to open the door. "Abre esa puerta" (Open that door) is the safe word that their ritual parricide has come to an end. Cuca opens the door and laughs at the crushed Lalo, "Así quería verte" (That's how I

⁹ Escarpanter, 10.

was wanting to see you). Beba asks Cuca ¿Estás dispuesta, otra vez?” (Are you ready for another round?), and announces to her siblings, “Ahora, me toca a mi” (Now it’s my turn).¹⁰

La noche de los asesinos breaks with *Electra* Garrigó, and dramatizes the impossibility of true revolution. The threats and excesses of the old regime are imbedded in the consciousness and ideology of the new, whose naiveté is paralleled to children playing house. Triana translates the metaphor of parricide to a stage space that looks and feels like domestic realism, but the bodies encountered there behave in a manner that is anything but realism. Genet’s theatre, particularly *The Maids* was an important model for Triana in sculpting his play,¹¹ which I see as a grotesque game of sadomasochistic role-play between siblings. In a recent essay, director Alberto Sarraín argues that Genet-inspired metatheatricality in *La noche de los asesinos* forges an empathetic connection with the audience as it reveals the vulnerability of the thirty-something sibling characters regressing into childhood ritual role-play, and that empathy is maintained even as the characters present grotesque images of society and enact ritual parricide through ludic play.¹²

Playwright and critic Raquel Carrió points to *La noche de los asesinos* (1966), as well as *María Antonia* (1967) by Eugenio Hernández Espinosa as the culmination of Cuban modernism during the mid-twentieth century. In her essay on Cuban modernist theatre, Carrió theorizes that teatro de la crueldad in Cuba has been subsumed into a sustained history of experimental theatre,

¹⁰ José Triana, *Teatro: Medea en el espejo, La noche de los asesinos, Palabras communes* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 1991), 116.

¹¹ “Sobre la obra,” Program for *La noche de los asesinos*, VI Festival de Teatro Latinoamericano, Casa de las Américas, 1966, Theatre Ephemera Collection, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

¹² Alberto Y. Sarraín, “Regresión y metateatralidad: lo lúdico en *La noche de los asesinos*.” Unpublished essay, 9-12.

which has integrated vernacular forms as a way of Cubanizing theatrical modernisms.¹³ Carrió's historiography of Cuban modernism establishes the importance of vernacular forms in working towards a definition of Cuban cruelty. Teatro de la crueldad a la cubana blends a wealth of experimental approaches, metatheatricality, estrangement, symbolism, naturalism, surrealism, and performance art with vernacular forms like Cuban *choteo* and grotesque humor ala Jarry. Nothing could be a better testament to this definition than archival remains of the première of *La noche*.

Vicente Revuelta, the director that staged the Teatro Estudio première for the Casa de las Américas Latin American Theatre Festival in 1966, used teatro de la crueldad as an approach to the text. Revuelta's staging was a flashpoint for teatro de la crueldad, defined Triana's text as an Artaud inspired work, and became exemplary for how to translate Artaudian theatre to Cuban sensibilities. The program for the production includes a section of notes on Revuelta's staging, which begins with a definition of teatro de la crueldad. The notes place teatro de la crueldad as the new phase in a theatrical revolution started in the 1890s by Jarry with *Ubu Roi* and claims that the thought of Artaud is present in the work of Adamov, Pinter, Genet, Beckett, Albee, Ionesco. The notes go on to describe five points of the production's approach: (1) The production was composed of small independent kernels, each presenting a different perspective, creating a multiplicity of meanings that challenged common sense notions of reality and confronted the audience on an ideological level. (2) The production broke with the three unities and abandoned a cause and effect through line in its dramaturgy. This approach aimed at leaving the audience with a feeling of dissatisfaction, which reflected the state of mind of the characters that

¹³ Raquel Carrió, "Teatro y modernidad: 30 años después," in *De las dos orillas teatro cubano*, eds. Heidurn Adler and Adrián Herr (Madrid/Vervuert: Iberoamericana, 1999), 29-31.

compulsively enact and resolve small crises in a cyclical fashion. (3) The acting was decidedly presentational as a way of confronting the audience with the characters' atavistic tendencies and repressed instincts on a conceptual level that addressed "universal" questions of "man and civilization." (4) The ensemble created moments that were not fixed and depended upon audience reaction. (5) The director employed mixed avant-garde styles interpreting different moments as expressionist, surrealist, naturalist, and symbolist to create unexpected juxtaposition in modes of conveyance. On this last point the notes refer to the production as a "Happening." Clearly these notes present a unique vision of teatro de la crueldad that included experimentation with a range of modernist approaches. However, these five points all aim at creating a comprehensive theatrical experience for the audience geared to shock them on intellectual, emotional, ideological, and psychological levels.¹⁴

Interestingly enough, in an interview about the 1966 production with Revuelta and Triana appearing the following year in *Conjunto*, the director and playwright make no mention of Artaud or Theatre of Cruelty. Instead they elaborate upon two Cuban vernacular concepts that they drew upon in the play's staging, which illuminated in retrospect Revuelta and Triana's particular take on Theatre of Cruelty. The first concept, *lipidia* (public row) is a term from Bayamo, Cuba that describes an interminable and vicious argument where the people insult and disabuse one another by bringing up old dirt from the past. *La noche* is very much a sequence of interlocking *lipidia* where the siblings take turns vituperating one another. The three siblings torture one another with the past as they reenact their infantilization and arouse their repressed impulses to kill their parents.¹⁵ In the interview, Revuelta introduces the second concept that is

¹⁴ "Sobre la puesta en escena." Program for *La noche de los asesinos*.

¹⁵ *Lipidia* is also mentioned in the program notes for the 1966 Teatro Estudio production, where it is defined as, "una discusión interminable y feroz en que los participantes se insultan, se sacan

closely related to the first. He sees the play as a ritual sublimation of the children's Oedipal complex into blasphemy and the desacralization of the Cuban family, and making the family profane is a definitive example of choteo. He explains that in the play choteo mixes with moments of *lipidia* and vituperation among the siblings. He gives the example of a moment in the 1966 staging when Lalo dresses in his mother's wedding gown, and, in this profane depiction of his mother, the performance brought to the surface, in a kind of satiric purgation, the deep psychological trauma that affects Lalo at his core. Revuelta theorizes that choteo mixes with *lipidia* and auto-flagellation to produce a new kind of theatrical phenomenon where the sadistic destruction of the Cuban bourgeois family is met with laughter.¹⁶ According to the artists' comments, the production decidedly emphasized these vernacular forms used to shock the audience and portray the stripping of social masks. *Lipidia* and choteo created the kind of visceral experience associated with Artaud-inspired theatre, but one that was created in a Cuban way.

BDSM and Queer Theory

In the previous section I presented teatro de la crueldad as it was theorized in Havana's experimental theatre circles in the 1960s, as well as how Cuban theatre artists and scholars of Cuban theatre have theorized teatro de la crueldad. In this section, I draw from queer theory and Performance Studies to theorize how theatricalized sadomasochism in teatro de la crueldad during the 1970s-1980s enacted the undoing of Cubanness. In this section I depart from the way that Triana and Revuelta have thought of teatro de la crueldad a la cubana. I propose that

hechos de sus vidas pasadas secretos, viejos resentimientos," "Sobre la obra." Program for *La noche de los asesinos*.

¹⁶ Abelardo, Estorino, José Triana and Vicente Revuelta, "Destruir los fantasmas, los mitos de las relaciones familiares: Entrevista a José Triana y Vicente Revuelta," *Conjunto* 2.4 (1967): 12-13.

repeated instances of theatricalized sadomasochism create a comparative bridge to analyze teatro de la crueldad across Havana, Miami, and New York. Not only does theatricalized sadomasochism productively unite the way Carrió, Sarraín, and Montes Huidobro have defined teatro de la crueldad, but more specifically, staged acts of sadomasochism illuminate a performance form that embodied a queer critique of Cubanness and intersecting patriarchal nationalisms. Just the same, the evocation of queer theory and BDSM discourse is my interpretative lens as a critic. As a branch of queer theory, BDSM Studies provides a lens that can distinguish between a trope of sexual abuse and a transformative scene of self-making. Most importantly they allow us to see how artists staged sexual acts to “play” with power.

Although I do not suggest that sadomasochism meant the same for the artists involved as it has for BDSM practitioners in the leather and s/m communities in the U.S. since the 1980s, I do mean to suggest that the artists understood its potential to play with power and renegotiate hierarchies of gender and sexuality. And they brought sadomasochism into their theatrical discourse, despite the fact that it carried a stigma of perversion comparable to pedophilia during the 1960s and 1970s in U.S. and Cuban contexts.¹⁷ Whether or not sadomasochism was a sexuality the artists themselves practiced is not a question I am interested in. Their works, however, drew on sadomasochism as a way to put power into “play” and dramatize the undoing of Cubanness. Acts of sadomasochism profaned historically defined institutions that order Cuban subjectivity, including the petit bourgeois family, machismo, and the New Man of the

¹⁷ The artists would have understood sadomasochism has holding a charged stigma of perversion. Duncan quotes Pat Califia and “Dossie” one of the collaborators in Duncan’s ethnography on the stigma that sadomasochism carried, especially among activists in the women’s movement that marginalized Lesbians and s/m practitioners. Duncan, 92.

Revolution. The ritual destruction of these ideological institutions¹⁸ and the national subjects they prescribe created new kinds of subjectivities. Provisionally embodied in performance, these experimental subjectivities expressed the fluidity of Cuban being and its transformation through revolution, persecution, exile, inxile, and crisis. The repeated instantiation of theatricalized sadomasochism in production after production ties undoing Cubanness in teatro de la crueldad to the profanation of nationalistic forms of patriarchy (machismo and misogyny) that repress, order, and dominate through sexuality.

Race, class, gender and sexuality are constructed differently in Cuba than in the United States, and these differences matter greatly to the theatre I analyze and the artists that produced it. Hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality from the U.S. and Cuba both shape the transnational Latina/o contexts discussed in this chapter. Teatro de la crueldad is part of a larger dramatic tradition in U.S. Cuban and Latina/o theatre from 1970s through the 1990s that directly challenged the patriarchal construction of Latin American nationalisms in diaspora. Many plays questioned machismo, homophobia, and the role of women in the family and society. For example, Lillian Manzor analyzes how Elías Miguel Muñoz's *L.A. Scene* (1990) challenged Cuban gendered stereotypes. As she explains, his writing captures how Cuban masculinity is normatively represented in the excessive performance of male dominance and misogyny. Cuban femininity is stereotypically represented in one of two extremes; either as the silenced other, or in unruly excess, as whore or overbearing "panicky, hysteric female." In analyzing Julian, the central character of the play *L.A. Scene*, Manzor posits that Julian's bisexuality creates an alternative experience that transgresses the violence of two extreme poles of gender strictly "pre-

¹⁸ My thinking here is informed by Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 95-100.

scribed” according to biological sex, and his bilingualism rejects the cultural and linguistic violence that “in-scribes” gendered stereotypes of hyper-heterosexuality, erasing Julian’s bisexual existence.¹⁹ Manzor’s analysis of *L.A. Scene* brings to light how the work of Muñoz *undoes* Cubanness.

Judith Lorber has suggested that people cannot help themselves from constantly “*doing*” gender, meaning, by following normative gender practices, in behavior and reading behavior, people recreate patriarchy’s structural inequality.²⁰ Thinking through their specific embodied experiences as Queer women of color, the work of intersectional feminists like Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa brings light to how race, class, and sexuality all play roles in the construction and performance of gender.²¹ Doing gender, sexuality and race also concerns doing nationality. As Anzaldúa argues, existing in the borderlands between two patriarchal national cultures is an experience of difference that duplicates the marginalization, the silencing, and the dangers lesbians of color face.²² Intersecting patriarchies duplicated obstacles for Cuban and Latina/o theatre artists in New York and Miami as well. Disjointed from the normative machismo of Cuban nationality on the island and in the diaspora, experimental theatre artists

¹⁹ In this same essay Manzor also theorizes how race, class, and gender are demystified by contrasting racism and sexism in Cuba and the U.S. in Manuel Martín, Jr.’s *Rita and Bessie*. Lillian Manzor-Coates, “‘Who are you, anyways?’: Gender, Racial and Linguistic Politics in U.S. Cuban Theatre,” originally published in *Gestos* 6.11 (1991), 163-174. Reprinted in *Lo que no se ha dicho*. Eds. Pedro Monge-Rafuls (Jackson Heights, NY: Ollantay, Press, 1994), 13-15.

²⁰ Judith Lorber has defined the social construction of gender as having three aspects: gender as a process (how gendered is learned and performed), gender as stratification (how gender creates social hierarchies privileging men and oppressing women), and gender as structure (how social structures like the family or workplace normalize and reproduce gender and gender hierarchies). Judith Lorber, “‘Night to His Day’: The Social Construction of Gender,” *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 22-31.

²¹ Presenting “theories in the flesh,” these philosophers forge a queer theory through difference, not in spite of difference. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, “Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh.” *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Fourth Ed. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 19.

²² Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Prieta,” in Moraga and Anzaldúa, 199-200, 205-208.

drew on difference in sexuality, gender, and race to embody a provisional dismantling of Cuban patriarchy that was necessary for their inclusion in *cubanidad* (Cubanness). The white supremacist heterosexist hegemony confronted by artists in New York and Miami during the 1960s-1980s compounded difference in relation to a normative center that exoticized Cuban and Latina/o artists as racial others. These artists theorized from the flesh reframing the disjointed and contradictory differences they embodied and reflecting the world as they experienced it as LGBTQ people and people of color.

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler clarifies that subversions are paradoxically defined by the norms they refute. At the same time, “There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human.”²³ First Butler establishes that any subversion to dominant paradigms of gender and sexuality must be made through those norms, or in negotiation with those norms. Yet, she argues the struggle to redefine categories that constitute who is recognizably human necessitates moving beyond the constraints of normative gender and sexuality. Therefore, “undoing” gender and sexuality concerns both how these categories undo LGBTQ subjectivity, at the same time that LGBTQ subjects must undo categories of gender and sexuality to become recognizable as fully human.

In this chapter, I retool Butler’s notion of “undoing gender” to address the undoing of nationality, and more specifically Cubanness through transgressions of gender and sexuality. As David Savaran has argued, gender is understood through race, class, and sexuality.²⁴ I would add that the same can said of nationality, which is understood, made recognizable, performed, and embodied through race, class, gender, and sexuality.

²³ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3-4.

²⁴ Savaran defines the function of masochism as “a mode of cultural reproduction that simultaneously reveals and conceals... the homoeroticism that undergirds patriarchy and male homosocial relations.” Savaran, 32.

In theorizing the relationship between sexuality and nationality, Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics has been influential and persuasive. In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Foucault focuses on the control of the modern state over populations through the exercise of biopower—technologies institutionalized to modify and control the living bodies of the populace through their biological functions.²⁵ In this sense, sexuality is one way by which biopower governs processes of subjectification through the body. Much of the emphasis of this last point is on the nineteenth century and Foucault's many examples of medical discourse pathologizing sexuality and in doing so creating an epistemic shift in how sexuality was conceived in regards to human subjectivity.²⁶ Departing from Foucault, I argue that social institutions like the bourgeois family, or the New Man also govern processes of subjectification through the body. These social institutions are biopolitical as they put ideology into bodies and construct national subjects through gender and sexuality.

Writing an ethnography on twenty-first century BDSM scenes in Europe and the U.S., Robin Bauer looks at how the role-play and sexual practices form a way for Queer and Trans people to both transgress norms and transform identity through the changeable corporeality of the body. Bauer draws on the work of Donna Haraway to theorize bodies and sexual acts as “material-semiotic generative nodes.” Bauer proposes that through such an understanding of the body, BDSM participants can transform themselves through sex acts that reinscribe the body in relation to gender, sexuality, race, and class. Bauer theorizes BDSM performatives through three “subcultural skills... significant in the process of queering gender: *renaming/reassigning*,

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 88-90; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79*, PDF e-book, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2008), 19-22, 35

²⁶ Foucault, *History*, 40-48.

recognition, and integration.”²⁷ Bauer’s concept of transformative acts provides a way of understanding how acts of BDSM make bodies speak with the authority of discursive performatives and offer practitioners a way to permanently integrate transformative acts into their quotidian being.²⁸

I propose a retooling of Bauer’s subcultural skills of renaming/reassigning, recognition, and integration by reformulating them into a flexible ritual performance structure, where some outcomes can lead to permanent transformation and self-making. Applied to the analysis of teatro de la crueldad, Bauer’s subcultural skills provide a theoretical vocabulary for thinking through how Cuban and Latina/o artists theatricalized sadomasochism.

In this section, I have drawn upon queer theory and performance theory to create a framework to analyze theatricalized sadomasochism in teatro de la crueldad, and its importance to undoing machismo, misogyny, and other forms of gender and sexuality that biopower prescribes in national discourses of human subjects. In the next section, I begin my analysis of works of teatro de la crueldad in Miami. The first example, *Persecución*, clearly demonstrates theatricalized sadism and masochism as modes of cultural production that structure social relationships. The second, *Una caja de zapatos vacía*, clearly theatricalizes sadomasochism as sexual practice.

Teatro de la Crueldad in Miami

Many of the experimental theatre artists that left Cuba at the onset of the Grey Years, like Miguel Ponce, Herberto Dumé, and Magaly Alabau, made their way to New York to help usher in a new era of experimental Spanish language theatre in and near the café theatre scene during the late 1960s and 1970s. As explored in the next section, these exile artists helped shape teatro de la

²⁷ Bauer, 241.

²⁸ Bauer, 242-244.

crueldad in New York. In Miami, teatro de la crueldad did not coalesce until the mid-1980s, when it became a resource to illuminate the state of inxile and biopolitics.

The large inflow of writers and artists, like Reinaldo Arenas, during the Mariel boatlift of 1980 fueled this resurgence of teatro de la crueldad in Miami. The boatlift resulted from an act of dissidence that began on April 1 of 1980 when a group of five men drove a bus through a fence at the Peruvian embassy in Havana, asking for asylum. In response Fidel Castro withdrew the guards at the gate, and announced that anyone who wished to leave Cuba would be allowed to leave through the Peruvian embassy. After one day, the grounds of the embassy were crowded with over 10,000 people.²⁹ After two weeks of living in the crowded embassy with no food, the refugees were finally permitted to leave Cuba through an airlift, which was then expanded into a larger boatlift.³⁰

In order to spin the incident in their favor the Castro regime created a campaign against the refugees. They emptied Cuban prisons and asylums and mixed the populations together in the refugee camp at the port of Mariel. Castro and his supporters abjectly labeled the refugees as, "escoria" (scum or trash) of society that the Revolution needed to purge.³¹ Since homosexuality was understood to be antithetical to the official revolutionary character, sexual minorities were also labeled as escoria, along with political dissidents, convicted criminals, and mentally ill patients all of whom were encouraged or forced to leave Cuba in 1980.³² Arenas himself

²⁹ Julio Capó Jr., "Queering Mariel: Mediating Cold War Foreign Policy and U.S. Citizenship among Cuba's Homosexual Exile Community, 1978–1994." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29.4 (2010): 82.

³⁰ Mariel harbor was open to chartered boats that transported over 124,000 Cuban refugees to the United States between April and October of 1980, Capó, 82; Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls*, Trans by Dolores M. Koch. (New York: Viking, Penguin Books, 1993), 280-1.

³¹ Iván de la Nuez, "Mariel en el extremo de la cultura." *Revista Encuentro* 8/9 (1998): 106.

³² Lillian Guerra and others document that homosexuals were labeled as 'anti-social' in the mid-1960s by the revolutionary government, and interned for terms of three years in work camps

obtained permission to leave the island in the Mariel exodus by providing evidence that he had been arrested for sexual misconduct and accused of being a passive homosexual, one of the official reasons someone could be labeled as "undesirable" by the state and allowed to leave the country through the boatlift.³³

The stigma that Castro cast on the refugees was replicated in Miami, where a majority of Cuban exiles from earlier migratory generations favored to see themselves as superior to the new group Cuban refugees, rather than organizing with and legitimizing the refugees as political dissidents. In Miami, the refugees were labeled as "Marielitos," a term that became synonymous with the image of lumpen or trash that the Castro regime wanted to bestow on this generation of exiles.

At the time of his arrival in the U.S. that same year, Reinaldo Arenas was already one of the most well known Cuban authors. Arenas was a revolutionary who was later ostracized because he presented critical perspectives on the culture and politics of the Revolution in his writing. His work frequently uses eroticism and sexuality to address political themes, like in the chapter *El viejo bugarrón* (the old butt fucker) in his postmodern novel *El color del verano* (*The Color of Summer*), which was finally published in 1982, but the original manuscript was confiscated from Arenas when he was in Cuba. The narrator emasculates other men by having

called Unidades Militares de Ayuda de la Produccion (Military Units to Aid Production) (UMAP), along with other 'anti-socials' like Protestant and Catholic leaders, campesino farmers resisting collectivization, as well as certain artists and intellectuals. Lillian Guerra, "Gender policing, homosexuality and the new patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965-70," *Social History* 35.3 (2010): 268-289, 268-271.

³³ As Capó explains, in the eyes of the Castro regime, homosexuality represented an expressive and subversive culture that coincided with the excesses of bourgeois capitalism. Effeminate homosexual men represented the antithesis to the revolutionary New Man, who was hyper-masculine and *machista*, Capó, 84. Arenas had been charged and imprisoned for having sex with men, as a public disturbance, this criminal record served as the documentation that the state required to provide Arenas with his exit permit. Arenas, *Before Night Falls*, 280-281.

anal sex with them, changing them from machos to effeminate cross dressing bottoms. Yet, he only likes to have sex with tops like himself that go around turning men into bottoms. Some important notches on the bugarrón's belt include Batista and Fifo (coded name for Fidel). Now at the end of his life, the bugarrón cannot find any more machos on the island left to emasculate. The veiled homoerotism of Cuban machismo undoes itself, but not before the novel queers the entire male population of the island and implicates Fidel Castro as a top that screws over all of the Revolutionary heroes in a long anal sex chain.³⁴

During the 1970s, Arenas was ostracized from the writer's union and his work was banned. He was persecuted for his sexuality and politics, and was imprisoned for several years. Even after being isolated from state presses, Arenas managed to publish much of his work abroad by smuggling it off of the island. Fleeing Cuba through Mariel in 1980, he eventually settled in New York. There he managed to rewrite and publish many of the manuscripts that Cuban authorities confiscated from him when he was imprisoned. His experimental theatre pieces, published in 1985 as a collection titled *Persecución*, were part of the body of work that Arenas rewrote in exile.

In *Persecución*, Arenas dramatizes the biopolitics of producing "escoria" by translating into theatre, a literary eroticism seen elsewhere in his writing.³⁵ *Persecución* creates a world where imagination, will, and spirituality are continually persecuted, tried, and contained inside the island as a metaphorical prison. Political power is presented as a force operating freely with no perceivable purpose, warping human behavior to the point where the most decorated militant

³⁴ Reinaldo Arenas, *El color del verano* (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1991).

³⁵ In his short story *Termina el desfile* (*The Parade Ends*), the narrator is a political dissident in Havana's Peruvian embassy in 1980, who sees his longtime confidant standing outside the gate dressed as a cop. Their duplicitous relationship is a metaphor for the relationship between the state and the subject. Reinaldo Arenas, *Termina el desfile* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1981).

is the worst traitor at heart. Escape and the impossibility of its fruition continuously haunt the characters onstage.

The third piece in the collection, *Ella y yo*, is a dialogue between two abstract characters Yo (the “I”, the self) and Ella an allegorical character personifying persecution. Ella gradually eats away at Yo. She haunts and demoralizes Yo, and is the source of Yo’s disillusionment. Yet Ella is kind and affectionate, she also reflects upon the larger context of Yo’s struggle. Both of these characters are echoed, mocked, and hounded by a chorus of characters who represent distinct and specific faces from Cuban society—a journalist, a marshal, a soldier, a child dressed in school uniform, etc. The dialogue begins with Yo’s pursuit of refrescos de tamarindo (tamarind soft drink) on a hot summer day. The onstage world is a dream-like interior space, structured by a surrealist-like associative logic. Time in the play is disorganized. The ringing of a bell tower prompts Ella and Yo to mark the passing of the hours with certain actions that are carried out with compulsion and urgency. In this frenzy, the hours come to exceed the 12 hours of the clock, and counting hours gets confused with the Revolution’s tally of Cuban bodies mobilized to the cane fields. Disordered and accelerated, the sense of time in the play dislocates and estranges the political and social behavior presented out of context.

The chorus is the most direct representation of this behavior as it acts as a human megaphone for the voice of the state, repeating slogans and political jargon at random. One of the actions from the piece that drives at the heart of the play’s central themes is the mannequin sequence. With mechanical gestures and violent movements, the chorus begins this moment shouting a long strand of propaganda to send the masses to pick tamarind pods, a politicization of the Yo’s thirst for refresco. Ella emerges from the chorus of robots and asks, “¿Qué será de la gente a quinientos kilómetros del mar?” (What will happen to people at 500 kilometers from the

sea?) Yo answers, “En esta Isla no hay mar. En la prisión...” (On this Island there is no sea. In the prison...) The chorus makes mechanical gestures of shock as Ella finishes Yo’s thought:

En la prisión ningún gesto es auténtico. Todo obedece a un reglamento. Aun la violencia, el deliro, la remota esperanza y la muerte... En la prisión toda intención es anulada. Si alguien habla es el carcelero... Si un preso habla, no es el preso el que habla, sino el carcelero a través del preso.

In the prison no gesture is authentic. Everything obeys a command. Even violence, delirium, remote hope, and death... In the prison, all desire is withdrawn. If someone speaks, it is the jailer... If a prisoner speaks, it is not the prisoner who speaks, but the jailer through the prisoner.³⁶

In the sequence of mannequins we see biopolitical dominion enacted through the bodies of the chorus. The state’s will possesses their bodies through their mechanical and frenzied gestures. Yo and Ella are not vacant automatons, and they posit a more complex relationship with biopower. Although Yo is also imprisoned on the island, entrapment affects his body in a different way as he accounts, “Flotando en la penumbra, de espaldas, frente a un muro, y detrás otro, y más allá” (Floating in the penumbra, on my back, facing a wall, and behind another, and more beyond)³⁷ His body floats in the penumbra, slightly shaded from the light beyond the walls that surround him. Walls seem to continue to infinity, a maze with no end. This metaphor is at the heart of Arrabal’s *El laberinto*, the other play Prometeo staged with *Persecución*. The poetry expresses a transitory and liminal moment that is experienced through sensations, his body floats in water, perhaps in the sea, a reflection of one of Arenas’ failed attempts to leave Cuba by raft.

Throughout the play similar poetic insights into Ella and Yo are revealed in moments when they remove and read from their only costuming, a taparrabos (loincloth) of paper-handwritten manuscript. The script on the loin coverings are not a scripting of the body by the

³⁶ Reinaldo Arenas. *Persecución: Cinco piezas de teatro experimental* (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1985), 35.

³⁷ Arenas, *Persecución*, 35.

biopolitical regime, rather they cover over the body, touching it, but not a part of it. This autonomous, authentic, and intimate knowledge must somehow remain outside the body albeit existing contiguously in contact with it. In this scene, Arenas dramatizes a strategy to persevere against the relentless persecution of the state and its dehumanizing use of biopower: escape from the body. Arenas proposes the act of writing as an experience that transcends the body and gives the author a space of refuge and reconnection with their authentically felt subjectivity and consciousness. In geographic exile, the biopolitics of one state are traded for another, something reflected in the image of a continued maze of walls presented in the verse. But escape from the politicized body in Arenas' writing is a liminality free of the subjugation of biopolitical control of any state, whether Cuba or the U.S., where Arenas experienced others kinds of isolation, persecution, and disillusionment. Arenas' acts of writing must be understood as a kind of ecstasy, something like the paroxysm that Artaud repeatedly calls for in *Theatre and Its Double*.³⁸

From October 4 through October 6, 1985, Teatro Prometeo performed a production in conjunction with La Semana de la Hispanidad in Miami called Teatro de la Crueldad. The program included two plays: *El laberinto* (*The Labyrinth*) by Fernando Arrabal directed by Teresa María Rojas and *Persecución* by Reinaldo Arenas directed by twenty-four year old Nilo Cruz (born in 1960).³⁹ Cruz unlocked and emphasized the biopolitical dimension of the piece through teatro de la crueldad.

Images of rehearsals reprinted in local papers show a chorus dressed in conventional clothing, white dress shirts and black or dark colored skirts and pants shouting from upstage

³⁸ Jannarone, 3; see Piñera, *Una caja de zapatos vacía* in the next section.

³⁹ Of five short pieces of experimental theatre, Cruz staged the piece *Ella y yo*, but the Prometeo program refers to the play simply as *Persecución*.

while Yo (Larry Villanueva) and Ella (Heidi Rivera) cower and comfort one another in the foreground. Yo and Ella's costuming were distinct from the chorus, Yo was dressed in off white colored dance tights and a dark, tight-fitting top that he removed during the performance. Ella wore a dark, loose-fitting one piece with half sleeves and short pant legs. Both costumes allowed for movement; production images show how Villanueva and Rivera used dance, large gestures, and physical action in their performance. One image shows Villanueva and Rivera squaring off and crouching low to the ground as in a wrestling match, but with their arms outstretched in a dance.⁴⁰ Contrasting the chorus in costume, movement, and behavior, Ella and Yo embody the escape from the biopoliticized body. Paradoxically, Cruz's interpretation of the characters drew greatly on the bodies of the actors, using dance and physical action to dramatize the Yo's struggle against biopolitics. In performance, the play enacted an escape from biopolitics, but not an escape from the body. Rather, in artful dissonance with the author's work, Cruz's staging enacted a reclaiming of the body through teatro de la crueldad. In an article appearing in *Diario de las Américas*, printed on Oct 3, María Elena Saavedra echoes this point as a through line between the two plays. She writes, "Ellos (el reparto) en sus respectivas faenas técnicas—nos describirán dos panoramas reales del teatro de la crueldad o... de la crueldad que hace esclava a la vida" (The cast, each in their respective artistic works, will create two impressive panoramas of theatre of cruelty or... of the cruelty that enslaves life).⁴¹ In this sense, cruelty is a manner of undoing biopolitics and its dominion over the body.

⁴⁰ Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008, Box 8, Folder 1, Folder 4 (Scrapbook 1, Page 1, 4), Box 12 folder 4 (Scrapbook 4, Page 4), Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁴¹ María Elena Saavedra, "Nilo Cruz dirige la obra *Persecución* de Reynaldo Arenas para Prometeo," *Diario de las Américas*, 3 October 1985, 8-C, Teresa María Rojas Papers, 1953-2008 Box 8, Folder 4, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

Two years after Teatro Prometeo's production of *Persecución* and *El laberinto*, Teatro Avante staged the world premiere of *Una caja de zapatos vacía* (1968) by Virgilio Piñera for the second International Hispanic Theatre festival in 1987. The inedited manuscript was never produced in Cuba. Piñera became persona non-grata on state-run stages during the Gray Years. Revolutionary cultural dogma stigmatized Piñera on account of his status as a leading figure of the Cuban avant-garde, his international notoriety as an intellectual, and his sexuality. However, Piñera kept writing, sending some manuscripts abroad where they were published. In the late 1960s, Piñera sent several of his manuscripts to Cuban exile and literary critic Luis F. González-Cruz, who was then a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh and later a Professor of Spanish at Penn State University. González-Cruz first published the unedited manuscript of *Una caja de zapatos vacía* in the 1974 volume of *Mester*, a literary journal for Spanish and Portuguese letters published out of UCLA. In 1986, he published an edited version of Piñera's manuscript in Miami.⁴²

The play begins with Carlos alone onstage, kicking an empty shoebox. He first kicks it hard, speaking to the box, asking it if the kick pleased it. Carlos bends down putting his ear to the box as if it spoke to him in a soft voice, and says:

¿Cómo dices? ¿Que no te gustó?... Pues a mí sí. Y oye: me seguirá gustando... Esta vez te pateo suavecito... suavecito (Le da una patada suave.) Así, así... No me digas que te duele. Casi ni te toco... Te estoy pegando suave, sedoso, acolchado... (Le patea un poco más fuerte). Perdona, se me fue la pata.

What did you say? That you did not like it? Well it pleased me. And listen: it will continue to please me... This time I kick you soft... very soft (He gives it a soft kick.) Just like this... Don't tell me that it hurt... I am hitting you soft, silky, fluffy... (Hits kicks it a little bit harder). Forgive me, I got carried away.⁴³

⁴² Luis F. González-Cruz, "Origen de *Una caja de zapatos vacía*," in Virgilio Piñera, *Una caja de zapatos vacía*, ed. González-Cruz (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1986), 5.

⁴³ Virgilio Piñera, *Una caja de zapatos vacía*, ed. Luis F. González-Cruz (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1986), 25-26.

Berta enters and watches Carlos, engaged in sadomasochistic play with the empty shoebox. After making her presence known, Carlos quickly convinces Berta to participate in a *misa* (mass). The “*misa*” is made up of three phases. First they perform sadistic acts on the shoebox, berating it verbally and kicking it violently as a sub and as a vessel of their frustrations. In the second phase, they perform a ritual sacrifice on the box and in the third phase Carlos interrogates Berta, asking her questions about his own body parts. The interrogation evolves into a game of reinscription, similar to Bauer’s theorization of renaming/reassigning as a BDSM subcultural skill. Repeatedly stretching out his leg, Carlos asks Berta, “What is this?” At first she acknowledges that it is his leg. He repeatedly asks her until she begins to rename all of his body parts as shit. Finally, grabbing his head Carlos announces, “¿Y esto? Ni hablar... Esto es la mierda más grande de todas las mierdas. *Se toca al sexo* Y esto es una reverenda mierda.” (And this? Not to mention... this shit is the biggest of all shits. *He touches himself*. And this is a shit put on a pedestal.)⁴⁴ Through the *misa*, Carlos, a thin awkward man who does not fit the macho model of Cuban masculinity, renames his body as abject. In a sense, reassigning is not a subversion, but rather a revelation of how society has marginalized him.

The *misa* of Act One is a rehearsal of what is to come in Act Two when Carlos and Berta bring Angelito, a macho and overbearing top into their sadomasochistic play. Act One ends with Carlos bent over, imagining that another person holds his arms behind his back. Act Two begins the next day with Carlos in the same position and Angelito actually holding him down. From its onset, Act Two focuses on Carlos’s struggle with Angelito, as struggle between the dominant and the submissive. Berta becomes more passive, following Angelito, the stronger of the two men. Carlos begins to challenge Angelito, who disregards Carlos at first. Then Angelito starts to

⁴⁴ Piñera, 47.

tutor Carlos in behaving as “el Jefe” (the boss/the dom). Through role-play, they rehearse a scene where Carlos acts tough to another man on the street, insulting his woman and pulling an imaginary gun on him. Angelito tells Carlos to repeat the following insult, “¿Se puede saber quién es la putica que te acompaña?” (May I know who is the little bitch accompanying you?). When Carlos delivers the line in a macho manner, pulling out the imaginary gun, Angelito surprises Carlos from behind, saying:

La putica soy yo y te voy a romper el culito. (*Lo pateo en el trasero. Carlos cae de bruces sobre el sofá. Lloro.*) ¡Te lo creíste, corbardón! (*Se sienta y pone los pies de Carlos sobre sus rodillas.*) Vamos, no es para tanto, eso pasa hasta en las mejoras familias. Siempre hay un rana.

The little bitch is me, and I am going to break your little ass. (*He kicks him in the rear. Carlos falls flat on the couch. He cries.*) You believed it, you weakling! (*He sits and puts Carlos’ feet across his knees.*) Come on, it’s not so bad, it happens to the best families. There’s always a sissy.⁴⁵

Angelito attacks Carlos’ masculinity verbally, and physically dominates him by literally kicking him in the ass. This sadistic act mirrors Carlos’ domination of the shoebox in the opening sequence. Carlos and Angelito’s homoerotic sadomasochistic role-play dramatizes the dilemma surrounding Carlos’ masculinity. Can a man like Carlos, a rana and a weakling, ever be allowed to occupy the center and order the world that surrounds him? Must Carlos submit to Angelito and be drowned out by the bombastic and violent machisimo that Angelito embodies?

Carlos is offered the chance to take control of the sadomasochism scenario when Angelito suggests that they trade roles. Carlos becomes him and he becomes Carlos. They trade shirts and pants. The literal trading of tops and bottoms symbolizes the two characters trading places in the dom/sub hierarchy. Angelito underscores the dichotomy between the two roles saying, “Yo soy lo que tú no eres y tú eres lo que yo no soy” (I am what you are not, you are

⁴⁵ Piñera, 59-60.

what I am not).⁴⁶ Once introduced, this dichotomy extends into a debate over Hamlet, whether he is a man of action, or merely a man of “words, words, words,” a *bárbaro* (tough guy) or a *rana* (sissy). Carlos and Angelito exchange lines of the “To be or not to be” speech, in this case “Matar o que te maten: he ahí el dilema” (Kill or they kill you: that is the question). At the end of the speech, Carlos declares that rather than have a Horacio that tells him, “Adiós amado príncipe, Coros de ángeles arrullen con sus cantos tu sueño eterno,” (Good night sweet prince, Flights of angles sing thee to thy rest), he would prefer a Horacio that would tell him, “tú eres el Jefe, pide por esa boca” (You are the boss, order [me] through that mouth).⁴⁷ The line sets up another dichotomy—between the *boca* (mouth), which belongs to the *dom*, and *culo* (ass), which belongs to the *sub*. La *boca* commands and orders the world of the role-play through words and language, paradoxically the opposite of action. The *culo* then is associated with the passive role in sadomasochism, and, in this case, the cowardly *rana*, yet becomes the location of action that reaches beyond language and the discourse of power. As Hamlet warns, action is what is forgotten when conscience and thought compromise pith and resolution. In making the abject *culo* the source of the usurper’s uncompromised response to the Jefe’s discourse, Piñera sets up a second paradox that undoes *machismo*, as it endows the *rana* with subversive potency. Hamlet is a philosophical detour that reassigns the passive as active and the active as passive.

After the detour ends, Angelito returns to his obsession with absolute authority, but forgetting that he has forfeited his role as the *dom*. A chorus of voices, referencing Hamlet’s chorus of angles, calls from offstage, “pantalón” (pants), reminding Angelito that he must take back his pants if he wants to assume the role of the *dom*. In a struggle, Angelito pushes Carlos to the ground with his foot to Carlos’ face. Angelito takes off the pants he has on (Carlos’ pants),

⁴⁶ Piñera, 63.

⁴⁷ Piñera, 65.

and orders Berta to take of the pants Carlos is wearing (Angelito's pants). Angelito puts on his pants, and then, tying Carlos' pants around Carlos' throat like a noose, Angelito and Berta each pull a pant leg tight strangling Carlos. In the sequence that follows, Carlos sticks out his tongue while the chorus calls out. This is followed by a blackout, when a voice over declares, "¡Adiós cobarde Príncipe!" (Farewell cowardly Prince!).⁴⁸ The moment enacts a ritual killing of the rana, as an abject masculinity. The rana is asphyxiated with his own pants.

When the lights come up, Carlos lies dead on the couch, "boca arriba" (face up) and Angelito triumphantly wears Carlos' pants around his neck as a trophy. Berta says, "Murió como un rana. De nada le servirá la lengua en lo adelante. Pedirá por esa boca y todo se quedará en, "Palabras, palabras, palabras" (He died like a sissy. His tongue will not serve him in any way in what is to come. He ordered through that mouth and everything remained in, "words, words, words.)"⁴⁹ But then, Carlos gets up and speaks to Angelito, pleading to give him another chance. Carlos begs Berta to help him somehow. Angelito and Berta speak to Carlos as if he is no longer human, telling him they can do nothing for him because he is dead. In death, Carlos remains isolated in abjection, but soon takes action into his own hands and works himself up into a frenzy, pounding, sucking, biting, and scratching his body, bringing life back into his flesh. The chorus begins to chant, "¡Ñampéalo!" (Go crazy!) Carlos looks under Berta's dress and grabs her sex, sending her into convulsions. He lies her on a red carpet at Angelito's feet, and straddling her continues to suck, bite, and scratch his flesh to the rhythm of her convulsions. There is a blackout of ten seconds where the sound of a vibrator is heard. When the lights come up again, the chorus of ten members is onstage dressed as Carlos, in their underwear. Berta is also in her underwear, and still convulsing. Two of the chorus members pick her up and Carlos emerges

⁴⁸ Piñera, 69.

⁴⁹ Piñera, 70.

from between Berta's legs as if reborn into the world of the living. Carlos immediately strangles Angelito with the very pants he adorns around his neck as a trophy, the pants of the rana. Angelito sticks out his tongue and falls to his knees. The chorus members take off their black t-shirts and cover the body of Angelito like a shroud. In the final moment the chorus chants, "Carlous Rex," as Carlos triumphantly waves his red T-shirt like a flag before the audience. Just as Angelito's domination of Carlos mirrors Carlos' treatment of the shoebox, the execution of Angelito mirrors the execution of Carlos. Carlos' strangling of Angelito is the ritual killing of the macho, which for the first time, at very end of the play stages a subversive act. Bottom subdues top, rana dominates macho, and "action," is taken from Angelito's reign of sadistic misogyny and reassigned as queer within the realm of the culo. In this respect, action dispels "word" as phallus and master signifier of the patriarchal order that reproduces Angelito's dominance and Carlos' abjection. Even though in this moment the shifting of power is clearly theatricalized, the struggle is between two men. Carlos preserves misogyny in his rebirth because he uses Berta's body as a vessel. Berta, who through Act 1 was a participant in the flow of power, is subsumed into "the Real" of Carlos' paroxysm only to have her body used as a bridge between the Real and the Symbolic where Carlos' phantasies can be concretized and create new possibilities.⁵⁰

The climax completes the shift of power between the two masculinities and underscores its changeability, alongside the changeability of the body in a theatrical language. Piñera's theatricalization of sadomasochism is not a literal depiction of s/m practitioners in consensual play, as much as it draws on the conventions of sadomasochism to dramatize its larger meaning,

⁵⁰ Lynda Hart describes phallogentric sexuality as "desire for desire," a repetitive model where "Woman" constructed in the discourse of power as the object of desire is placed outside the sexual formula. Her body holds the promise of the flesh as the Real of a prediscursive sexuality. In Hart's theorization only lesbian s/m has the ability to create an alternative to the phallogentric model of sex, an alternative created between the social construction of the body, and "the Real" of the flesh. Hart, 72-76.

namely, the renegotiation of power through sexual practice, and in this case in particular, the renegotiation of power regarding masculinity. Carlos' struggle with Angelito is not a literal depiction of a dom/sub scenario; rather the constant shifting of power that comes with clear and agreed upon boundaries in a sadomasochist practice is theatricalized through Aristotelian tragic structure and a sudden reversal of fortune.

Carlos' transformation from abject rana to "Carlous Rex" is dramatized through paroxysm that spreads from Carlos in the frenzied biting and sucking of his own flesh to Berta's body as her rhythmic convulsions consume the whole stage. Paroxysm enacts the classical peripeteia by which the fortunes of macho and rana, dominant and abject, boca and culo are reversed. Riffing off of the Aristotelian structure, paroxysm also enacts an anagnorisis. The undoing of Angelito's violent patriarchy stages an act of recognition (in Bauer's sense)—machismo as a cult of masculinity reveals itself to be nothing more than "words, words, words."

Director Alberto Sarraín (b. 1949) studied both psychology and theatre in Cuba between the late 1960s through the 1970s. In 1970, he studied theatre as an actor among experimental artists in Havana, including Humberto Arenal, David Champs, Raquel Revuelta and Virgilio Piñera. Sarraín left Cuba in 1979 for Miami, where he tried to find a theatre group in memory of Piñera who died that same year, but the project failed to come together. He moved to Puerto Rico, and eventually ended up in New York where he became a director out of lack of acting work.⁵¹ He directed for Mario Peña's group Latin American Theatre Ensemble, Thalia Spanish Theatre, HOLA, and others. Sarraín won the ACE (Association de Cronistas de Espectáculos/Entertainment Critics Association) award for best director in 1981 for his

⁵¹ Omar Valiño, *Viajo simepre con la isla en peso: Un diálogo con Alberto Sarraín*, ed. Alpidio Alonso Grau, (Santa Clara, Cuba: Sed de Belleza Editores, 1999), 6-20.

production of *Las pericas* by Nicolás Dorr.⁵² When he returned to Miami he was sought after as a director for the most ambitious projects. Between September 1986 and October 1987, he directed three plays by Virgilio Piñera, *Falsa alarma*, *Electra Garrigó*, and the world premiere of *Una caja de zapatos vacía*, the latter of which to this date remains one of the most controversial productions of Miami theatre history.

By this point in his career Sarraín, had developed his signature approach as a director. In an interview, Sarraín explained to me, “Yo siempre pienso que el teatro tiene que decir cosas a la actualidad” (I have always thought that theatre must speak to the current moment). As he explains, if a director wants to interpret a play for the stage that was written 20 years ago in Cuba, then that play must be interpreted with a “*nivel de empatía*” (level of empathy) for the time and space in which it is being interpreted.⁵³ For Sarraín’s productions this has often meant creating a world onstage from a pastiche of symbols, icons, popular culture, architecture, music, behaviors, and social institutions familiar to his audience. For example, his successful staging of Piñera’s *False Alarm* with Teatro Avante in 1986 used an imaginative and highly stylized staging concept that departed from the script in costuming and casting. For instance, Sarraín added melodramatic film noire underscoring, a Bergmanian chorus of vagabonds a la *The Seventh Seal*, and the central character appeared in a loincloth throughout the action of the play.⁵⁴ Sarraín’s highly stylized approach quickly became his calling card.

Sarraín’s concept for the World Premiere of *Una caja de zapatos vacía* was far from the non-descript apartment of Carlos, or the simple costumes of blue jeans, black jeans, Bermuda

⁵² Alberto Sarraín, interview by author, Miami, FL 5 January 2015.

⁵³ Alberto Sarraín, interview by author, Miami, FL 5 January 2015.

⁵⁴ Virgilio Piñera, *False Alarm*. Video. Directed by Alberto Sarraín. Trans. René Alejandro Pérez. Cuban Theater Digital Archive. Accessed January 28, 2016.
<http://ctda.library.miami.edu/digitalobject/585>.

shorts, and black and red T-shirts. The production featured design by Rolando Moreno that represented the chorus as eroticized and estranged images of revolutionary Cuban society. Moreno's drawings show a typical *solider* alongside another *solider* wearing a mask with his shirt buttoned down, open to the waist. Another costume design for a chorus member shows a woman with a head cover, holding a sword in the air and wearing a flag that says CDR over her shoulder. Another shows a bare chested *guajiro* with a Zorro-style mask. Another sketch presents a man and a woman dressed in rags full of tears and gaping holes.

In a review that was highly critical of Sarraín's concept, Norma Niurka praises Moreno's scenic and costume design, which, as she describes it, when lit by Rafael Mirabal's lighting design created a dark and dreadful ambiance on stage. She also praises the director for the rhythm of the production, and the strikingly felt apocalyptic images he created onstage, calling Sarraín the most interesting director of the Miami theatre scene. On the other hand, Niurka critiqued Sarraín for taking too many liberties with his staging concept that greatly changed the play and did not represent Piñera's work fairly.

Sarraín's "nivel de empatía," for the Miami audience created a world for the play that estranged and eroticized contemporary Cuba. Niurka argued that Sarraín's *mise-en-scene* betrayed the complex ambiguity of Piñera's abstraction and the playwright's signature style. Niurka describes many of the sequences that Sarraín created in his staging, which depart from the script. In addition to changing the scripted costume design, Sarraín created his own movement sequences with the chorus, adding an opening sequence with the chorus at the top of the play.⁵⁵ According to Niurka, shortly after entering the theatre the audience was confronted

⁵⁵ To this day, Sarraín is critical of the script because it introduces the chorus so late in the second act. He also did not like the play after the first reading of the script, but came to

with soldiers and militants shouting insults like “gusanos” (worms, as in parasites) and “escoria” (trash), as well as political slogans like, “viva la revolución” (long live the Revolution). The actor who played Carlos, Teatro Avante founder Mario Ernesto Sánchez, embellished his portrayal of Carlos with an exaggerated impersonation of Fidel Castro. This is significant as it makes Carlos an antihero for Miami audiences, while implicating the audience (many of whom were anti-Castro) within Angelito’s *machista* rule. The changes Sarraín made to the final movement sequence, the paroxysm and rebirth of Carlos, seem to have been the most drastic. Rather than the sequence with the sound of a vibrator, nudity and erotic convulsions, the rebirth sequence was more of a carnival procession. Niurka writes:

El recinto se convierte en una contienda carnavalesca, semejante a las mojigangas antioqueñas (que se utilizaban en el proselitismo religioso); y cuando pensamos que ya no es posible mas rebuscamiento (que no pidió jamás el autor), aparece Berta en lo alto disfrazada nada menos que de Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. Con música religiosa culmina la apoteosis del final grandioso y efectista coronado de los consabidos.

The space was transformed into a contained carnivalesque, similar to the Antioquian Masquerades that are utilized for religious proselytism, and when we think that any further digression (which the author never asked for) is no longer possible, Berta appears at the top dressed as no less than Our Lady of Charity. The final grandiose and sensational apotheosis culminates with religious music and crowned with cliché.⁵⁶

Whereas Niurka’s tone is highly critical, the review documents how Sarraín used postmodern pastiche to unite disparate images from popular culture through a carnival procession that coded the sexuality of Piñera’s ecstatic orgy birthing ritual in a cultural form that audience members would find familiar and reflective of their immediate social world. The use of a carnival procession was certainly less of an attempt to soften the shock-level of the play, and more of a

appreciate more through the creative process of staging the world premiere. Alberto Sarraín, interview by author, Miami, FL 5 January 2015.

⁵⁶ Norma Niurka, “Un Virgilio Tergiversado,” *El Miami Herald*, 3 May 1987, p. 17.

symptom of Sarraín's aesthetic,. In this case, the production implicated the audience's heterosexist perceptions of masculinity, not to mention their paranoia about revolutionary Cuba into the scope of the play's ritualization of reassigning and recognition.

Regardless, Niurka critiqued the production for pandering to an audience that was only too happy not to be faced with Piñera's play for what it was. In addition to being presented within a familiar set of political and cultural tropes, Niurka critiques the production team for censoring Piñera. She writes, "Aun cuando las 'malas palabras' se escuchan de principio a fin en el teatro, se han omitido intercambios fuertes de esas palabras y otras, además de un desnudo de Bertha, como si el destino del pobre Virgilio Piñera fuera a ser censurado, tergiversado, reprimido" (Even when 'bad words,' are heard in the theatre from the beginning to the end, the harshest exchanges of those words have been omitted, in addition to a nude scene with Bertha, as if poor Virgilio Piñera had been censored, distorted, and repressed). This was a devastating critique because the political stakes of Teatro Avante's production was that they were producing a script that the Revolution censored, refused to stage, and that had to be smuggled out of Cuba.

At the same time, the production operated on a level of postmodern pastiche. Sarraín recognizes that his approach mirrored the theatrical postmodernism popular on stages across the globe during the 1980s.⁵⁷ While each reference to revolutionary Cuba gestured to a concrete reality, each image was presented in an estranged manner and removed from its context. The overall style of the production was not theatrical realism. Rather the production was highly theatrical, expanding the role of the chorus and mixing diverse social types and images of revolutionary Cuba within the same onstage world. Sarraín's creation of an apocalyptic, exaggerated, and eroticized representation of revolutionary Cuba confronted the audience with

⁵⁷ Alberto Sarraín, interview by author, Miami, FL 5 January 2015.

their greatest fears and desires. Sarraín's concept drew on existing political anxiety with revolutionary Cuba to create a nivel de empatía, engaging Miami audiences and their bodies in Carlos' struggle against Angelito's machismo.

Teatro Dúo Theatre

Manuel Martín, Jr. had left Cuba in the 1950s to study acting with Lee Strasburg in the Actor's Studio. New York-based artists like The Living Theatre, or the many artists passing through La Mama ETC shaped his understanding of Theatre of Cruelty. Martín also remained artistically connected to theatre on the island, in part, thanks to the most important influence in his life as a director and playwright, Teatro Dúo cofounder Magaly Alabau, who directed Teatro Joven's controversial production of *Los mangos de Caín* discussed in Chapter Two. They met in New York in 1969 at an acting workshop given by Antonia Rey and Andrés Castro, who studied with Piscator in the 1940s at the New School. Alabau credits Martín not only with becoming her long time artistic collaborator, but also helping her to get her first office job and her first rent controlled apartment when she was new to New York City.⁵⁸

Martín and Alabau founded Teatro Dúo in 1969 in a café on 12th street between A and B in the Lower East Side. Some of their first productions in 1969 and 1970 were *Los mangos de Caín* directed by Alabau, Virgilio Piñera's *Falsa Alarma* directed by John Strasberg, the son of Lee Strasburg, and *La noche de los asesinos* directed by Martín.⁵⁹ Teatro Dúo joined with Max Ferra and ADAL in 1971 to form INTAR. Dúo broke away from INTAR just two years later when they were invited to join La Mama. Alabau and Martín caught the attention of Ellen

⁵⁸ Magali Alabau, "Recordando a Manuel Martín: Teatro Dúo," in *Celebrando a Virgilio Piñera, Tomo I*, eds. Matías Montes Huidobro and Yara González (Miami: Plaza Editorial, 2013), 131-133.

⁵⁹ Alabau, 134-135; Jack Agueros, "Spanish Theatre" *The Village Voice*, 18 May 1972. Manuel Martín Jr. Papers 1972-2000, Box 4, Folder "*La estrella y la monja*, Clippings," Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

Stewart when they produced a Spanish Language version of Tom Eyen's *The White Whore and the Bit Player*, titled *La estrella and la monja* with INTAR in 1972. In vogue with Teatro de la Crueldad, Martín added an ensemble cast to the two-person play about the final moment in the life of a woman committed to an asylum. She is split into two personas, a nun and a blonde bombshell a la Marilyn Monroe. The confrontation dramatizes her decision to commit suicide. Eyen's play became popular in New York after it premiered at La Mama in 1964.⁶⁰ Martín Jr.'s version starring Alabau as the Starlet and Graciela Más as the nun, featured an ensemble cast of fellow asylum patients. Martín's aesthetic merged the ensemble of creación colectiva with teatro de la crueldad.⁶¹

In creating an original take on the Cenci family saga, Teatro Dúo associated their work with Artaud.⁶² The manuscript titled *Francesco: The Life and Times of the Cencis* was written in English by Martín, Jr. and translated into Spanish by playwright and critic Ana María Simo as *Francesco: Vida y milagros de los Cenci* (from here forward *Los Cenci*). The script uses a narrator and episodic structure to move quickly through the brutal saga of the Cenci, a wealthy family whose infamous scandals created outrage in Renaissance Italy. The play begins with the birth of Count Francesco Cenci, the central character who embodies a grotesque and profane amalgamation of patriarchy. His lust for sex and gratification of bodily desires is insatiable. The birth sequence is a violent ritual that conjures Cenci as an archetype of misogyny:

⁶⁰ Howard Thompson, "Stage: Last Outcry of a Sequined Soul," *New York Times* 15 May 1972, Manuel Martín Jr. Papers 1972-2000, Box 4, Folder "*La estrella y la monja*, Clippings," Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁶¹ Candy Darling from Warhol's Factory played the Starlet in the English version. , " John Oiseau, "Candy: An Actress Born," *Michael's Thing* 3.9, 26 Feb 1973, p. 11, Manuel Martín Jr. Papers 1972-2000, Box 4, Folder "*La estrella y la monja*, Clippings," Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

⁶² In 1935, Artaud adapted Percy Shelley's tragedy called *The Cenci* (1819). The production was Artaud's only attempt at putting his theory from *The Theatre and Its Double* into practice.

One actress stands on a platform, center stage and the rest of the actors bend over forming a circle around her and grabbing her by the waist. Since the actors are wearing long capes with hoods, the circle will give the appearance of a large skirt. The actress standing in the center will begin to breathe heavily and appear to have increasing birth pains. The actors forming the large skirt and belly should start moving up and down slowly as if they were overgrown lungs. The rhythm of the breathing and sound should be increased until one of the actor's head appears underneath the skirt. As the breathing and screaming continues, the actor who is naked and wrapped in a piece of plastic, will tear the plastic and will crawl out of the skirt screaming while he does so... One of the actors will get some ointment, insects, snakes and spiders from his bundle and will start rubbing them on the baby who by now has developed a violent disposition... The scene now takes on the quality of a Witches' Sabbath or grotesque nativity. One of the WITCHES tries to pacify the BABY and puts one of the snakes in his mouth. The baby fights back but slowly starts sucking the snake and peacefully goes to sleep on his MOTHER's lap.⁶³

The birth of Cenci exemplifies Martín's ensemble-based style that mixed experimental approaches to the stage. The cloaks of the ensemble forming a giant skirt and the convulsions of the actress representing Cenci's mother show a merging of Piscatorian epic theatre with the theory of Artaud. The plastic sheet and the ointment of spiders, etc. are eccentric details reminiscent in a tongue-in-cheek tone of the continental Surrealists and Expressionists. This unique kind of storytelling uses associative logic, like the sympathetic magic the witches use to make Cenci a violent being by rubbing him with a medley of venomous snakes and insects. His eventual suckling of the snake, rather than his mother's breast associates Cenci with poison, evil, and the loss of innocence.

The following scenes show Francesco Cenci grown up, sexually exploiting women and young men under his power as a noble. Soon, his servants turn against him and accuse him of sexual misconduct. Cenci is tried, convicted, and imprisoned for sodomy. Before his sentence is over, Cenci bribes the Pope to set him free. When released from prison, Francesco drives his

⁶³ Manuel Martín, Jr., *Francesco: Life and Times of the Cencis*, Manuel Martín Jr. Papers, 1972-2000, Box 1, Folder "Francesco: Life and Times of the Cencis (English)," Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami, 4-5.

family to a remote castle. He locks up his wife and daughter Beatrice because he spent Beatrice's dowry money to pay the Pope. Cenci leaves the women stranded in the castle. When he returns he catches Beatrice secretly meeting her lover, the Castle's steward, who she has seduced to gain her freedom while Cenci is away. Rather than stopping their rendezvous, Cenci lures the steward away from Beatrice and forces him to give up his cloak. Cenci disguises himself as the steward and rapes his daughter. Beatrice then conspires with her lover and siblings to murder her monstrous father. When the church catches the conspirators, they are tried for the murder of Francesco and tortured into confessing what crimes each of their family members committed while executing Beatrice's revenge.

In a fast-paced inquisition sequence, Beatrice takes the stand in a trial, while alternating scenes of torture break up her testimony. Characters stretched on the rack contradict Beatrice's statements as she tries to cover her tracks and protect her co-conspirators. In the play's conclusion, the Church's brutality far overreaches Francesco's malice. The Pope orders the execution of the Cencis and the Church assumes the family's fortune. The Narrator concludes, "As soon as Beatrice was executed, her head was placed on a silver tray and crowned with a wreath of wild flowers. From that moment on, she became a martyr. As the old saying goes: cruelty breeds cruelty. Good night."⁶⁴

Martín's ensemble-based stagings were often compared to the work of Brook and Grotowski, and his original script and staging of the Cenci family saga was no exception.⁶⁵

Michael Smith's review of *Los Cenci* describes the performance as poor theatre:

⁶⁴ Martín, 72.

⁶⁵ Mario Peña mentions these directors as a point of reference in his review of *Los Cenci*. Mario Peña, "Crítica, Francesco: Vida y Milagros de los Cenci," *El Tiempo* 2 December 1973, Manuel Martín Jr. Papers 1972-2000, Box 1, Folder "Programs, Clippings, and Photographs: Francesco: Vida y Milagros de los Cenci," Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

Their work is violently physical, passionate, vital, and the performance has a complex, convincing momentum. The ensemble of 11 actors perform on a basically bare stage, a stair case at one side. They wear long white simple gowns, sometimes undressing, sometimes adding more elaborate costumes to identify specific characters and enrich the movement. Props and objects seem to materialize easily when needed. During much of the first act the role of Francesco is constantly traded among actors, the character materializing out of the collectivity.⁶⁶

As mentioned in the review, Martín used collective ensemble casting for the piece, having each of the male actors play Francesco Cenci at one time or another in the performance, while each of the female actors traded the role of Beatrice. This created a defamiliarization effect, which complemented the episodic structure, narrator, and music as key conventions of Brechtian/Piscatorian epic theatre. The convention of ensemble-based storytelling offered several possibilities for undoing the violence that Cenci embodied and represented. Both men and women in the cast embodied Cenci and his usurper, and in doing so, they undid his power as the very image of patriarchy and misogyny. Having every actor play the role, unhinges character from actor, but also locates the character in a set of gestures, behaviors and costume pieces (a fur cloak) that can be exchanged and transferred, critiqued and subverted, distorted and satirized, denaturalized and uprooted. Having every actress play the usurper does much the same with Beatrice. As every female actor embodied Beatrice's gestures and behaviors, they dislodged the character from a particular physical form and elevated Beatrice to the level of archetype. In one instance, the script calls for different characters to become Beatrice during the interrogation.

Beatrice is taken away from the witness stand and conducted to the torture chamber. While the executioners are strapping her to the rack, Lucrezia will take the stand. She is now playing the part of Beatrice.

LUCREZIA: (*As Beatrice*) Yes I planned it all, and if my father was alive I would do it again.

⁶⁶ Michael Smith, "Theatre Journal, Francesco: Vida y Milagros de los Cenci," *The Village Voice* 6 December 1973, Manuel Martín Jr. Papers 1972-2000, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

VOICES: (*Very small and weak*) This poor creature was driven by her father to commit this horrible crime. Before you deliberate you must take in consideration...

Voices become weaker until they disappear

LUCREZIA: (*As Beatrice*) He was a beast and destroyed my chances for happiness. He abused me and raped me. Would the jury blame me for what I have done? Wouldn't you have done the same?

Lucrezia steps down from the witness stand. Maria di Spoleto takes the stand now. SHE is now playing Beatrice's part.

MARIA: (*As Beatrice*) It is ironic that this same jury who let my father free many times when he was guilty, denies me the freedom when I am innocent in the eyes of God.⁶⁷

Maria, Francesco Cenci's servant, and Lucrezia, Francesco's wife, speak for Beatrice as she is being tortured. What she refuses to admit in the trial is revealed in this sequence. Yet these words are not spoken by a regretful Beatrice under the pain of torture, rather the tone of Maria and Lucrezia's lines as Beatrice remains spiteful, resilient, and heroic. When Lucrezia and Maria stand in for Beatrice, they connect Beatrice's actions against her father with their own experience as women in his household. The voices that condemned Beatrice earlier, now sympathize with her. Beatrice speaks truth to power and critiques the hypocrisy of the church that protected her father when he was guilty, but now condemns her for defending herself and her honor.

The collective approach also made it possible for the performance to explore sexuality and shift into modes of eroticism even as the story presented horrifying images of male privilege and its unchecked access over the bodies of women and boys, or scenes of torture during the inquisition-like investigation and trial. For example, early in Act One, three boys come to the Count Cenci's residence looking for work in the stables. Cenci interviews them one by one. Each time he takes advantage of his power in the situation and tries to molest the boy being interviewed. The third boy is more developed than the previous two and really impresses Cenci, who asks Boy #3 to show him how he would ride a wild horse.

⁶⁷ Martín, 68-69.

The boy bends over, picks up the imaginary reins and jumps up and down on top of the imaginary horse.

Francesco: Nice, very nice... Now suppose it's a very slow horse and a pleasant ride.

The boy moves slowly almost sensually

Francesco: Oh, that's much better...

Francesco gets close to the boy, embraces him and pretends HE is riding with him.

MARIA who is still scrubbing the floor crawls next to her master and starts caressing the boy's legs. FRANCESCO keeps riding and realizing that MARIA is participating, HE picks up his whip and hands it to the boy.

Francesco: Beat her! Beat her! I'll give you twenty scudi if you beat her!

The boy considers the offer for a second, grabs the whip and starts beating her.

*MARIA screams out but apparently likes it. The three of them are tangled together. Maria is caressing the BOY's thighs and FRANCESCO is kissing his neck...*⁶⁸

The scene in the script is the perfect example of how the play took detours from the story in moments to explore sexuality, particularly sadomasochism. As reviewer and director Mario Peña put it, “Hay una marcada recreación en las aberraciones que hacen caer por momentos a la obra dentro de la clasificación del erotismo.” (There is a marked enjoyment in the perversions that make the production fall suddenly into the genre of eroticism.) The embodiment of sexuality in these moments was not superfluous to the performance's undoing of patriarchy and misogyny, but rather its central approach to subverting it. The adult actor playing Boy #3 in a production using *Verfremdungseffekt* was visibly an adult actor engaged in sadomasochistic role-play as a sixteen-year-old boy. Through its duration, this detour into eroticism, changed the valance of the performance, staging an act of recognition. The act revealed the plurality of sexuality that heteronormative patriarchy actively obscures. The work of the collective of actors subverted Francesco and the misogynist patriarchy he represents by embodying him through the practice of homoerotic sadomasochism.

The photography of the work-in-progress production shows that the inquisition and torture sequence in that earlier production featured detours of eroticism. One particular photo by

⁶⁸ Martín, 10-11.



Image 9: Tony Davito and Orestes Matacena in *Francesco: Vida y milagro de los Cenci/Francesco: Life and Times of the Cenci*, Photo by Amnon Ben Nomis, Manuel Martin Jr. Papers, 1972-2000, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

Amnon Ben Nomis shows Orestes Maticena playing the executioner who tortures Giacomo Cenci, one of Francesco's sons played by Tony Davito. Davito is nude and his back faces the perspective of the camera. His hands and shoulder blades wrench as Maticena holds a baton against his back. The baton casts a shadow across Davito's buttocks, while Davito twists his spine and stands on his tippy toes presenting the butt plug he appears to be wearing. Whether Davito is expressing pleasure or pain, the photo presents Davito's body as a faceless sexual object within the context of homoerotic sadomasochism. The use of line in Nomis's photograph draws the viewer's eye down the shaft of the baton past Maticena's hand to arrive at Davito's buttocks and butt plug he is wearing. The butt plug's appearance is a sign of eroticism and pleasure experienced by Davito in the role of Giacomo, which doubles as the role of the sub in this scenario. The photo might not be representative of every audience member's reading of this moment in the final production presented later that same year. Mario Peña, for one, also noted that the torture sequence was depicted with realism. However, as a record of the work-in-progress production, the photo is an important fragment of the archive for *Los Cenci*, as it provides a window into what Peña describes as momentary eroticism in the production. Martín's play tells how torture was the church's method of making justice for Beatrice's revenge, while hypocritically turning a blind eye to the cruelty and abuse that Count Cenci inflicted on his household, to say nothing of the Church's hypocrisy in killing the members of the Cenci household for its own financial gain. In the *Dúo* production, sadomasochism as a sexual practice was theatricalized and mobilized towards the exploration of sexuality and the subversion of the patriarchal power represented by Count Cenci and the Church. In the inquisition sequence, the church's use of violence towards the revelation of truth was co-opted and subverted through the performance of bodies that found pleasure in sadomasochism as a queer sexuality. Suspending

the action of the play, detours in eroticism testified to the existence of queer sexualities. These staged acts of recognition took place in the face of the violence threatening to silence, erase, and emasculate women and LGBTQ people of color. In this sense, the performance went beyond challenging patriarchy, misogyny, and their intersecting forms stemming from Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and U.S. contexts. Understood as embodied testimony, eroticism and theatricalized sadomasochism paralleled Beatrice in speaking truth to power. In undoing patriarchy and misogyny, *Los Cenci* forged a space for sexual plurality and LGBTQ subjectivities.

Teatro Obstáculo

As discussed in Chapter Two, experimental theatre was forced underground in the late 1960's and 1970s when cultural policy underwent an extreme Sovietization that dogmatized revolutionary cultural production within the constraints of socialist realism. Raquel Carrió sees this crack down as the first break in the continuity of the Cuban avant-garde going back to the nineteenth century and credits the return of the Casa de las Américas festival, the Festival de Teatro de la Havana in 1980 with experimental theatre's resurgence between 1980 and 1984.⁶⁹ Teatro Obstáculo was one of many experimental theatre collectives to emerge in the mid-1980s following the restructuring of the National Council of Scenic Performing Arts. The name of the group refers to the rupture with convention that avant-garde aesthetics present as a kind of obstacle or difficulty for the audience.⁷⁰ Auteur director and founder of the company Victor Varela (born in 1961) and his main collaborator actor Bárbara María Barrientos began their work by setting up a small theatre in the living room of a Havana residence that sat eight audience

⁶⁹ Carrió, "Teatro y modernidad: 30 años después," 37.

⁷⁰ Jaime Gómez Triana, *Victor Varela: Teatro y Obstáculo* (San Antonio de los Baños, La Havana: Ediciones Unicornio, 2003), 76; Programa Monodrama Cuarta Pared II. Cuban Heritage Collection, Theatre Ephemera Collection, Box 7.

members. Their first production in that space was *La cuarta pared* (1988). Rosa Ileana Boudet calls *La cuarta pared* “un grito de una promoción que reclama su presencia en el teatro cubano y para muchos críticos retoma experiencias trucas en la década de la sesenta.” (a battle cry that claimed its presence in Cuban theatre and for many critics it resumed the experiences abbreviated in the decade of the sixties.)⁷¹ Taking up fragments from the experimental theatre of the 1960s, Varela and Barrientos crafted an aesthetic that was in conversation with Revuelta, The Living Theatre, and Grotowski. Teatro Obstáculo, along with Teatro Buendía, and other experimental collectives marked a culmination of the revival of avant-garde theatre in Havana as a forum of political and social critique.

Staged in Havana, Teatro Obstáculo's 1991 production *Ópera ciega* (Blind Opera) addressed the dehumanization, extreme hardship, and isolation experienced during the economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a situation greatly exacerbated by U.S. aggression and the tightening of trade embargo. In her review, Magaly Muguercia called the piece holy theatre, in Peter Brook's sense, that is in visceral engagement with the historicity of the Special Period (1989-2000) in Havana.⁷² Bridging a complex intertextual web between the onset of the Special Period in Cuba, Witkacy's *The Madman and the Nun*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Triana's *La noche de los asesinos*, and a wealth of other sources, Varela's performance text

⁷¹ Boudet credits Laura Fernández Jubrías with the term “grito” which characterized Cuban theatre of the mid-1980s. Rosa Ileana Boudet, “Prólogo,” in *Morir del texto: Diez obras teatrales*, ed. Miriam Ocaña Santiesteban, selection and introduction by Rosa Ileana Boudet (La Habana: Ediciones UNION, 1995), XXVI.

⁷² Magaly Muguercia, “El alma rota,” *Tablas 2* (1996), 6, 13. “El periodo especial en los tiempos de paz” (The special period in times of peace) was a name given to the years of the Cuban Revolution following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the sudden end of economic aid to the island. The tightening of the trade embargo in 1992 and 1994 penalized foreign companies for trading with Cuba. This only exacerbated a dire situation. The Castro regime liberalized the economy to help matters, but contradicted their former policies and ideology in a number of ways.

connects to an expansive cultural framework and diverse theatrical discourse of Artaud inspired works. Jaime Gómez Triana, who was an actor in the cast of subsequent stagings of the piece, keeps track of these sources and tells us that every line alludes to another text.⁷³

Varela has called *Ópera ciega*, a staging of his own mind. The text is structured much like one of The Living Theatre's performance texts as a non-linear series of rituals. In the opening sequence, "Obertura" (Overture), a voice offstage introduces the setting: the time space of the mind. The audience is soon introduced to several characters, or "allegories of a madman" that represent the unnamed and immaterial drives of the psyche as hallucinations and hauntings from theatrical discourse and Cuban cultural memory. The first character to enter is Walpurg, the inspired artist/poet that Witkacy imagined as the hero of his theory of pure art and the central character of his play *The Madman and the Nun*. In *Ópera ciega*, whether or not Walpurg occupies the center of Varela's *mente roto* (broken mind) is left ambiguous.

The dramatic action in *Ópera ciega* begins when Walpurg calls forth the other characters, "Verdugos, ustedes no pueden dejar de curarme" (Executioners, you cannot give up on curing me). Walpurg's central interlocutor, Ana, is the first to respond. Sister Anna is Walpurg's confidant and lover in *The Madman and the Nun*. In *Ópera ciega*, Ana is more of an active character and takes on multiple identities. She first appears as a hallucination that Walpurg doubts to be real. She orders him to move in a surrealist military drill. Walpurg tries to defy Ana's order with simple inflection, "Yo..." But Ana interrupts and imposes her order by saying, "Silencio NO-SO-TROS. ¿Que cosa es yo?" (Silence. WE. What kind of a thing is I?) However, Walpurg does not succumb fully to Ana's orders and creates a diversion through an estranged display of affection. Ana's resolve falters and they switch roles. Ana becomes the nihilist and

⁷³ Gómez Triana, 81-83.

Walpurg assumes the role of the *comandante*. Ana follows Walpurg's orders, but pleads with him about the emptiness of their existence in the commander/peon dichotomy, which as she recalls Walpurg has previously termed "víctima y verdugo" (victim and executioner). Defeated, she says, "Con el pretexto de que LO QUE VA A SER SERÁ, DEJEMOS QUE LA VIDA NOS HAGA... UNA MUECA, WALPURG. ¿Qué otra cosa se puede hacer?" (With the pretext of WHAT IS GOING TO BE WILL BE, WE ALLOW FOR LIFE TO MAKE US... GRIMACE, WALPURG. What else can one do?)⁷⁴ Their encounter is the first of many exchanges between theatrical figures that inhabit the auteur's (Varela) fragmented mind.

The archetypal characters of the Héroe (Hero) and Esposa (Wife) soon interrupt Walpurg and Ana. These archetypes turn out to be the parents of Lalo, Cuca, and Beba from *La noche de los asesinos*. Beba also appears as a character in *Ópera ciega*, but alongside Panteleón and Margarita, the nosey neighbors that Beba and Lalo portray in Triana's play. After the prologue a series of rituals begin. In a ritual titled, "Ceremonia del alma," Walpurg is born from the Esposa, and as the son of the Héroe. Walpurg becomes an Oedipus figure, who Beba calls upon to do the deed that Lalo failed to carry out. The arc of the action points to the assassination of the Héroe at the hands of Walpurg, but in the end it is Beba who actually kills the Héroe. In the penultimate ritual-episode, "Revolución de los muertos," Walpurg hangs himself and Ana, as the Monja is crucified. Throughout the scene many of the characters reappear as their dead selves. Panteleón and Margarita sacrifice Ana as Monja Muerta, Vía Crucis (Dead Nun, Way of the Cross) and Walpurg Muerto (Dead Walpurg) removes himself from the gallows and declares that elsewhere his other self is writing over his eyes. In the final sequence, "Noche contemporánea de

⁷⁴ Varela, *Ópera ciega*, in Ocaña Santiesteban and Boudet, 257.

Walpurgis,”⁷⁵ Varela, who has been conducting the piece the entire time behind a mini-music stand, moves towards the portrait of a boy (himself?), and tears the eyes out.⁷⁶

Through the struggle of the archetypal figure of the Héroe to retain his power and the indifferent apathetic challenge of his shadowy counterpart Walpurg, Varela introduces the theme of the New Man. Because of this I argue that the arc of *Ópera ciega* enacts the ritual destruction of the New Man as an ideological institution that one must blind one’s self to follow in the midst of dire economic collapse. At the threshold of economic crisis in 1991, Teatro Obstáculo anticipated the fractured teleology and schizophrenic ideology of a Revolution soon to be stuck in the limbo of the Special Period with no destined future in sight. Building upon *La noche de los asesinos* and its theatrical discourse of desacralizing the family as social and ideological institution, Varela dramatized the dilemma of the New Man at the end of the Cold War.

The script appears in Rosa Ileana Boudet’s 1995 anthology *Morir Del Texto*. I will refer to the script going forward as a performance text because it is a record of what the company created through collective creation, a process that Varela guided, directed, and edited. Of course, as Muguercia writes in her review, the verbal is only one dimension of a complicated piece of theatre. A mere reading of the text would not catch the musical quality in which the actor’s sung the lines. Jaime Gómez Triana writes that the actors experimented with the sonic quality of opera trying to give each part of the text a certain feeling that they conferred into a specific melody.⁷⁷ Muguercia adds that the frequent use of irony, humor, commentary critical to the text, and the

⁷⁵ Walpurg’s name is associated with St. Walpurga, an eighth century nun and English missionary sent to the Frankish Empire, whose feast day, Walpurgisnacht (La noche de Walpurgis), is associated with pagan rites because it falls on the eve of May Day. Not coincidentally, May 1 is also the international day of the worker in Cuba. In this light, Walpurg is the darker side of the New Man of the Cuban Revolution.

⁷⁶ My description of this last moment is based on Muguercia’s description in her review. Muguercia, 11.

⁷⁷ Gómez Triana, 90.

defamiliarization of the director-officiant intervening in the action a la Tadeusz Kantor create a mise-en-scène that is often in tension with the verbal text.⁷⁸ The scenic design by sculptor David Placeres that looked like a worn down circus consisted of moving pieces that were built from quotidian objects and manipulated by the actors.⁷⁹ Boudet describes Varela's behavior in the role of the auteur and the multidimensionality of the score that he conducted. Throughout the performance he actively directed dialogue, movements of the actors, and the cadence of the ritual. She writes:

Para los que vimos la puesta, el texto es una provocación—un elemento más en el concierto de imágenes—desde la relación con los objetos, el funcionamiento de la “maquinaria,” hasta la pasión y fuerza de los actores capaces de fracturar las palabras, emitirla como los cantantes de ópera, mientras la escenografía funciona con la precisión de un mecanismo.

For those of us that saw the performance, the text is a provocation—only one element in concert of images—from the connection with the objects, the operation of the machinery, to the passion and force of the actors capable of fracturing words, emitting like opera singers, while the set functioned with the precision of a machine.⁸⁰

I will interpret the text as an important primary source that tells us many things about the performance, while keeping in mind that the text is but one dimension of a very complicated mise-en-scène, a text that was mostly sung, often with qualities of humor and irony. It is hard to interpret Varela's performance text without understanding a little about its three major intertextual sources. I do not wish take up space summarizing Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* here, and I have already provided a synopsis of *La noche de los asesinos*, which I will refer to below. I will however, briefly explain the importance of *The Madman and the Nun* by Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz (A.K.A. Witkacy, 1885-1939) to the characters, setting and premise of *Ópera ciega*.

⁷⁸ Muguercia, 7-8.

⁷⁹ Gómez Triana, 90, 96.

⁸⁰ Boudet, XXVII-XXVIII.

Both Ana and Walpurg are adapted from Witkacy's play, but the setting of *Ópera ciega* itself comes from Witkacy's 1920 treatise *Theatre: An Introduction to the Pure Form*. In it he defines his concept of the pure form, which called for theatre to divorce itself from realism and the imitation of human behavior as observed in "reality," and to uncover, through experimentation, a way to truly bring formalism to the art of theatre and the body of the actor.⁸¹ Witkacy compares the pure form to both an asylum and a madman's brain, perhaps because of their exclusion from society and social norms.⁸² Daniel Gerould interprets the madhouse in *The Madman and the Nun* as a metaphor for life and existence, which as Gerould informs us, is an expression of one of Witkacy's most important themes—confinement. Gerould sees Walpurg's breaking free from this confinement as representative of "breaking out of the limits imposed on man by society no less than by existence itself." Gerould writes, "Walpurg's breakout is first from his straightjacket, then ultimately from all repression of the human mind—in other words, from the confinement of life altogether."⁸³ Gerould's analysis of the metaphor of the asylum in Witkacy's work points out two layers of confinement that correspond to Giorgio Agamben's concepts of *bios* (political life) and *zoe* (bare life) respectively. By defining its constituency as being native to the state, the modern nation state blurs the distinction between human birth, as the origin of bare life, with the foundation of the state's sovereignty and its power to create the political life of citizens. Differing from Foucault, Agamben argues that this conflation in political

⁸¹ Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, "Appendix I: On a New Type of Play," In *The Madman and the Nun and Other Plays*. Eds. & Trans. Daniel C. Gerould and C.S. Durer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 292-293.

⁸² Daniel Gerould, *Witkacy: Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 216.

⁸³ Gerould, *Witkacy*, 214-215.

philosophy leads to the creation of biopolitics.⁸⁴ Gerould's analysis and its coorespdence with Agamben's theory can be extended to the confinement dramatized in the work of Varela, who does away with the metaphor of the madhouse altogether, setting *Ópera ciega* within the brain of a schizophrenic.⁸⁵

Much like Arenas' dramatization of the state's domination of the body through its functions, *Ópera ciega* closely examines how socializing forces are embodied, and warp human behavior. As an experiment in Witkacy's theory of pure form, behaviors, impulses, ideas, and characters are removed from their usual contexts to represent bodily confinement. At the beginning of the play, the sadomasochistic dichotomy of verdugo/víctima dramatizes the submission of one's body to the ideological institution of the New Man, who has become schizophrenic after Glasnost and in the shadow of the Special Period. But because the New Man is a gendered ideological institution, submission to its biopower is also defined by gender. For Ana, the sadomasochism of the New Man's biopolitics translates into misogyny. At the end of the play's opening scene, Ana disrobes and dresses herself as a nun. This transformation further complicates the theme of social and bodily confinement. Bodily confinement for Ana concerns sexual repression under the biopolitics of a patriarchal order. As she changes into the nun's habit she says,

⁸⁴ For Giorgio Agamben, biopolitics deals with the exercise of power of nation states over human subjects via institutions that preserve, maintain, monitor, and regulate human life through the body. Biopolitics results from a conflation between the political and biological models of the citizen or subject. This conflation resides in the dual inscription of subjects defined once within a political discourse (as "bios") and a second time within a biological-ontological discourse (as "zoe"). Agamben, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, eds. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8. Also see Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Trans. Timothy Campbell, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 14-15.

⁸⁵ Throughout *Ópera ciega*, Walpurg's brain is constantly referred to as "*roto*" (broken), which a footnote in the script defines as "Etimológicamente, esquizofrenia" (etymologically schizophrenia), Varela, 259.

Habla el pecado de la que no se liberó. Pecado de mujer dudosamente pura.
 Miento mi vida privándola de otro. LA ANTINATURALEZA DE MIS AÑOS
 MODERNOS AL MURO DE MI CORAZÓN LOS HOMBRES INTENTARÁN
 VIOLAR MIS PESADILLAS POR ENVIDIA DE MI ÚTERO Y ME
 CASTIGARÁN A LA HISTERIA PERPETUA, pero me castigaré. Ningún
 músculo dormirá en mi hueco. Mi soledad peor que la horca, igual que la tortura
 es peor que la muerte. EL MONTE DE MI VENUS TIEMBLA SU ORGASMO
 COMO UNA MARIPOSA SIN LUZ. ODIO A LOS HOMBRES AMO A UN
 MUERTO... clavo mi sed sobre la rosa seca y me voy cargada de dulzura.
 MUNDO MANCHADO DE MÍSTICOS HORRORES ESPERO POR TU
 PUTREFACCIÓN.

The sin of she who never liberated herself speaks. Sin of woman doubtfully pure.
 I live a lie wanting another life. THE ANTINATURE OF MY MODERN YEARS
 AT THE WALL OF MY HEART MEN WILL TRY TO RAPE MY
 NIGHTMARES OUT OF ENVY FOR MY UTERUS AND THEY WILL
 PUNISH ME TO PERPETUAL HYSTERIA, but I will punish myself. No muscle
 will sleep in my hole. MY MOUND OF VENUS TREMBLES IN ITS ORGASM
 LIKE A BUTTERFLY WITHOUT LIGHT... I nail my thirst on the dry rose and I
 go on weighed with sweetness. WORLD STAINED WITH MYSTIC HORRORS
 I HOPE FOR YOUR ROTTING.⁸⁶

The male/female dualism represented by Walpurg and Ana explores the relationship between gender and biopolitics, and, in this case, dramatizes how it confines sexuality within the body according to gender norms. On the one hand, Ana laments how patriarchy confines her sexuality, giving up on love with a man and resigning herself to a convent. Her words echo misogynist values as she casts herself in abjection for being a woman who is past her prime, and especially for having suffered a trauma of some sort. Perhaps, her love for a muerto is a reference to the death of her lover.⁸⁷ On the other hand, Ana describes the erotic jouissance her mound of Venus will experience from her misogynistic self-punishment. As she declares a few lines earlier, she is unwilling to repent her “habit” of masturbating for God. The dissonance created by these defiant declarations expresses agency. This is especially the case because, as a woman, she is subject to

⁸⁶ Varela, 263.

⁸⁷ In Witkacy’s play where Sister Anna has entered a convent because her unfaithful lover killed himself.

sexual persecution and bodily mutilation, which is conveyed in the text as men with uterus envy that want to punish her to perpetual hysteria. This is no doubt a reference to coerced hysterectomies, a practice of sexist oppression that sheds light on Victorian biopolitics. In Ana's monologue, hysterectomy serves as a metaphor for the sexual repression of women in patriarchy. Ana's call for the putrefaction of the world is disobedient and morbid, like her desire for the muerto, yet her submission into the role of the nun is an acceptance of her abjection according to the misogynist attitudes that she conveys. Conversely, in finding power in abjection, her defiance is about worldmaking. She wants the world to rot, not to curse it, but to create a world in the image of her abjection.⁸⁸

In creating this world, Ana Monja begins by leading the cast of characters through a profane *misa* (mass), in the following scene. Beginning with the *misa*, the performance text maps out a non-linear arc through a series of rituals that enact a coup, ending in the assassination of the Héroe in a ritual-scene titled "Allegro." Whereas the text's arc concerns the destruction of the Héroe, the scene that portrays the aftermath of his assassination, "Revolución de los Muertos" (Revolution of the Dead) is where we see Ana Monja's abject worldmaking come to fruition. The assassination and the revolution of the dead are exactly the putrefaction that Ana calls forth at the end of the overture.

After departing from the plot of *The Madman and the Nun* for most of the arc, it is in this penultimate ritual-scene where Varela's performance text returns to intertextual production with Witkacy's play. Much like in Arenas's *Persecución*, escape from biopolitics is escape from the body. However, *Ópera ciega* follows Witkacy's cue by staging death as a way to create new

⁸⁸ My thinking is informed by Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection as a third space alternative to the phallogocentric order of patriarchy. Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 14-17.

possibilities. According to Gerould the meaning of death in Witkacy's theatre is a breaking down of boundaries. Death is not opposed to life; rather it suspends the constraints of the material world.⁸⁹ In Varela's text as well, death is a gateway of transformation and worldmaking.

"Revolución de los Muertos" begins with Walpurg's hanged corpse appearing on stage, as in Witkacy's play. Yet in *Ópera ciega* the hanged corpse speaks/sings. Walpurg first announces that he is the threshold, the entryway to an abject world. Ana enters as Monja Muerta, Vía Crucis (Dead Nun, Way of the Cross). The cross she bears is metaphor for misogyny, and her crucifixion is a grotesque image of its violence, an image that is transgressive for making hidden gender oppression visible. In describing the cross, she says, "en el cuerpo de mi sexo que es todo mi cuerpo/Oídos para fornicar/boca para lubricar/hombros para besar/caderas para sacudir el esperma" (in the body of my sex that is all of my body/ears for fornicating/mouth for lubricating/shoulders for kissing/hips for shaking out sperm).⁹⁰ She has been reduced to body parts, legs, ears, mouth, shoulders, and hips that should not think and should not speak. At the end of the poem/line she comes to the following conclusion, "No quiero ser una mujer/Quiero dar un salto alto con la pértiga de mi cruz" (I don't want to be a woman/I want to take a giant leap with the pole of my cross.)⁹¹ Death for Monja Muerta, Vía Crucis is a way to escape the confinement of the body, and in escaping the body, she can escape misogyny, but she also wants that escape to mean she will no longer be a woman.

As "The Revolution of the Dead" unfolds, the other characters appear as their dead selves. Héroe Muerto, Esposa Muerta, and Beba Muerta, overwhelm Margarita and Pantaleón, who remain alive as bureaucrats of the old regime, and, much like Witkacy's two asylum

⁸⁹ Gerould, *Witkacy*, 214.

⁹⁰ Varela, 273-4.

⁹¹ Varela, 274.

attendants, try to suppress the situation of the dead from escalating. Héroe Muerto (Dead Hero) and Esposa Muerta (Dead Wife) plead:

HÉROE MUERTO: Ha llegado la hora de legalizar la muerte...
ESPOSA MUERTA: ...como esperanza de la civilización.

HÉROE MUERTO: The time has come to legalize death...
ESPOSA MUERTA: ...as the hope of civilization.⁹²

The irony is searing in the demands of Esposa Muerta and Héroe Muerto (the New Man himself). Death is revolution, and revolution is death. But death throughout the play has meant so many things. Death, following Witkacy's thinking, is liberation from biopolitics and a doorway to something greater. The dead returning is Cuba's past returning as past, present, and future collapse in the Special Period. And the death that threatens Margarita and Pantaleón the most is not a passing, but an awakening. The mobilization of the dead is a metaphor for a population waking up out of a trance, out of a blind operation in mimicry of the New Man, who has led them down a dead end. All in all, death is change and transformation.

When hung on the cross, Monja En La Cruz marks her transformation into a phallus. "Me voy/y dejo el trapo sucia de mi forma/Estoy erecta en la cruz como un hombre/apuntando en busca de la vagina cósmica" (I am going/and I leave the dirty rag of my form behind/I am erect on the cross like a man/pointed in search of the cosmic vagina).⁹³ Like a space rocket pointed to the cosmic vagina or a nuclear missile that brings death to the world, she speaks of her body as if it is transforming into a weapon of violence. "Yo el rayo/la máquina destructora cargada de horror./Mi venganza está pronosticada/Cuando el peso de mi cuerpo metálico se hunda/desde el cielo/y las águilas de mis pechos/se llevan al mundo. Aprenderán el verdadero horror." (I am the laser/the destructive machine loaded with horror./My revenge is foreseen/When the weight of my

⁹² Varela, 275.

⁹³ Varela, 276.

metal body sinks/from the sky/and the eagles of my breasts/take the world. They will learn the true horror.)⁹⁴ Whereas the promise of embodying such destructive power is that Ana will bring the world death, and in death abjection, her desire to abandon being a woman and her embodiment of phallic forms is a reification of misogyny, rather than a destruction of it. In this moment, the performance unmasks the sexist violence and politics of gender exclusion inscribed in the institution of the New Man.

As the play ends, Pantaleón and Margarita sacrifice Monja En La Cruz, as Walpurg speaks of the tendency of human kind to create self-delusion in place of facing the truth. He compares this tendency to a mob of madmen wanting to lift up a boat on top of a cathedral. Something they accomplish by means of taking pills and hallucinating. After the sacrifice, Margarita asks the Monja, “what’s inside of you?” The Monja answers, “La noche contemporánea de Walpurgis.” This is the title of the final ritual-scene that consequently transpires. Varela now enters the scene and stabs the eyes out of his own portrait hanging on the wall. Like a metatheatrical Oedipus, Varela’s blinding of himself represents the self-delusion that must take place in order be a part of a Revolution that is forced to contradict itself in a moment of change. In her final transformation, Ana has taken off her habit and robes, exposing the straps of an elaborate chastity belt that she has been wearing beneath her habit. The auteur leads the half-naked Ana Prostitua (Ana Prostitute) before the audience. He covers her in a red cloth.⁹⁵ With only her face peaking through Ana declares, “Habla el presente. No quiero volver a la mueca/A la puerta cerrada de la vida/en mi dormitorio está la verdad” (The present speaks. I don’t want to return to the grimace/To the door shut from life/in my bedroom resides the truth).⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Varela, 276.

⁹⁵ Muguercia, 11.

⁹⁶ Varela, 277.

The true believer has become a whore. As a prostitute she is an image of Cuba's past. She lives in the present and does not want to return to the "mueca" of the New Man. The truth in her bedroom is that the Revolution has sold out. The death of the New Man has not brought an end to misogyny. Once again, it has merely changed its costume.

In her essay about the performance, critic Magaly Muguercia writes that she was shocked that at the end of the performance there was no applause. She explains that the performance put audience members into a reflective, self-absorbed trance. Muguercia describes how the audience of mostly Cuban youth packed into a non-traditional space where they sat on makeshift risers of bare wood planks for three hours. During the duration of the performance, she never heard a sound. She remarks that you could hear the actors' breath. That deafening silence of an engaged audience is unmistakable. The audience was completely engrossed and their behavior after the show was as unconventional for Cubans as the performance itself. Muguercia describes how after the performance ended, audience members quietly and slowly left the theatre, reflecting on what they had witnessed.⁹⁷ If we take Muguercia's experience as emblematic of the performance, then it shook audiences to their core. The performance's multiple acts of recognition no doubt unsettled Havana audiences, putting them in a new relationship with their quotidian life. Although the performance created an affect of dissent, Muguercia defended *Ópera ciega* as

⁹⁷ Muguercia, 6. Ileana Diéguez Caballero also remarks about how the performance drew her into an intellectual "hunt" for the meaning (and sources) of the fragments that make up the heterogeneous collectivity of Varela's mind. She writes, "Yo deseo estar a la caza de todos los fragmentos porque pueden ser también los pedazos de mi espejo interior fracturado y es el discurso de la urgencia contenida en ese caos el que prefiero seguir... Allí, en aquel espacio, lo que me incita es el impulso desordenador de imágenes y conceptos que estimulan al pensamiento por la diversidad." (I wish to be in the hunt for all of the fragments because they can be the pieces of my fractured interior mirror as well. And it is the discourse of restrained urgency in that chaos that I prefer to follow... There, in that space, what incites me is the chaotic momentum of concepts and images that stimulate thought through their diversity.) Ileana Diéguez Caballero, *La noche contemporánea de Walpurgis*, *La escena latinoamericana* 1 (1993): 47.

being defined by a rebellious and transgressive Cubanness with the vocation of transforming the world, or at least, with the courage “de soñarlo mejor” (to dream of something better).⁹⁸

Conclusion

As I have argued, teatro de la crueldad did the work of undoing Cubanness and intersecting patriarchal nationalisms by embodying the subversion of ideological institutions and biopolitics through theatricalized sadomasochism. Through processes of ritual renaming and recognition, teatro de la crueldad expanded the borders of what it meant to Cuban. The choice to use sexuality as a comparative framework for these performances is my own. Admittedly, there are many ways to bridge the theatre of Miami, New York, and Havana in an analysis of these four key Cuban and Latina/o works of teatro de la crueldad. Numerous motifs connect these productions and could be used to configure other definitions of teatro de la crueldad:

birth/rebirth, top/bottom role reversals, choruses and collectives enacting profane acts, to name a few. But I contend that sadomasochism is the most fitting lens for comparative analysis because it makes this history pressing and insightful for contemporary theatre and performance studies scholars, while presenting the material in a manner that is congruent with the way teatro de la crueldad has been defined by Cuban theater scholars and artists. For example, *lipidia*, as Triana and Revuelta describe it, is a sadistic public sphere performance of abjection. Sadomasochism, as it is understood through BDSM discourse, corresponds to the role-play and metatheatricality that set Cuban teatro de la crueldad apart. Most importantly, the authors and auteurs presented theatricalized sadomasochism as a way to push back against biopolitics through the body in performance. Arenas drew on sadism and masochism as a way to dramatize the power relationships and cruelty of producing social escoria. Nilo Cruz staged Arenas’ ecstatic escape

⁹⁸ Muguercia, 13.

from the body by reclaiming the body from biopolitics and allowing it to speak its own truth in dance and physical action. In *Ópera ciega*, sadism and masochism dramatized the gendered biopolitics of the New Man. Teatro Obstáculo's performance staged a space where marginalized voices and bodies spoke their truth through multiple acts recognition, including the unveiling of misogyny within residual, dominant, and emergent regimes of Cuban nationality intersecting during a moment of crisis and change. In adopting sadomasochistic sexual practices, Virgilio Piñera created a metatheatrical language to undo hierarchies of gender and male sexuality through a drama of top/bottom role reversals. Sarraín's staging translated the play's reassigning of passive homosexuality and masculinity into a subversion of the gendered biopolitics of Miami Cuban nationalism. The Teatro Dúo Theatre adopted theatricalized sadomasochism to enact the subversion of an archetypal image of patriarchy through a form of eroticism that embodied the present. In residence at La Mama, this Latina/o theatre collective addressed a diverse public in two languages. Accordingly, their performance did not undo Cubanness directly. Rather the performance addressed multiple intersecting patriarchies through the figure of Count Cenci and the image of the church. Thematic content aside, the artists' work embodied this subversion through teatro de la crueldad on Cuban routes. In staging theatricalized sadomasochism, the Dúo created a larger act of recognition that teatro de crueldad made possible. Provisionally in performance these artists embodied Queer ways of being that challenged dominant heterosexist models of Cubanness, Latino nationalisms, and intersecting patriarchies.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

No record of a performance is the performance itself. Scripts, design sketches, programs, photos, and even videos are removed from the live moment and the feeling that can only be experienced by performers and an audience coming together engrossed in an act of co-creation. These records certainly capture aspects of the experience, but, in the end, you had to be there. The performance historiographies I present here are an attempt to bridge the distance between the record and the performance. By synthesizing sources from a number of mediums and perspectives, I approach the way that performances spoke to their historical context and co-created with their audiences through structures of feeling, which convey new knowledge about the past through dense synchronic morsels of historicity. In pursuit of these affective spaces, the historiographies I present here also create wholly new meanings for the present that were neither intended by artists nor received by audiences. However, my interpretations speak urgently to some of the most important questions in Theatre and Performance Studies and intersecting fields.

In this way, I argue that avant-garde theatre was made and continues to be made by movements, connections, and exchanges between Havana, Miami, and New York. Organizing the case studies as the cultural production of three cities rather than two countries is a conscious attempt to avoid reducing this theatre into simplistic Cold War-era politics. I thus resist limiting Cuban cultural production to a monolithic experience of Revolution and resist limiting U.S. Cuban diaspora cultural production beyond a monolithic experience of exile. Cultural connections and exchanges in such a Cuba-U.S. scheme will always be defined by tensions around the antagonism that is supposed to divide them. In refuting the validity of this bifurcation, I have taken cues from scholars like Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Lillian Manzor, José Quiroga, Rafael Rojas, Solimar Otero, Alex Vazquez, and others who have found alternative ways to define

Cuban studies that include Cuba's many diasporas. Two of the three cities are within the geographic limits of the same country, which also helps to break down monolithic notions of American-ness or U.S. Hispanic or Latina/o identity. Similarly, a study of New York, Havana, and Santa Clara, Cuba would break down monolithic notions of Cubanness.

I have decided to retool James Clifford's routes/roots, homophones that he employs to define culture and the cultural heritage of a given geographical location through the movement of its residents to other places, and the contributions of visitors and immigrants in the ongoing transformation of the location's culture.¹ In my study, routes bring to light how the ongoing movement and exchange that defines the avant-garde theatre of Miami, Havana, and New York was translocal. More importantly, the notion of routes creates flexible parameters that bring to light how Cuban avant-garde practice defied the limits of geography, national borders, and identities based on race, gender, nationality, and sexuality. Through this translocal perspective we see how Chicana/o artists were not merely collaborators but also a part of Cuban avant-garde theatre, and we see how New York was a place where one could become a Cuban avant-garde artist.

In Chapter Two, I present some of the material effects of El Decenio Gris (The Grey Years), when avant-garde artists fled the anti-intellectual and homophobic environment in Havana. Many artists ended up in New York and Miami. In order to understand the impact of these artists in New York and Miami I approach a definition of Cuban avant-garde practice by retooling José Quiroga's cultural theory of Cuban palimpsests² as a performative. Palimpsesting

¹ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); for a theoretical discussion of translocality see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 178-192.

² José Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 10-11.

is a way of performing transculturation through a layering of diverse cultural sources. I hypothesize that this performative describes the Cuban stamp in avant-garde theatre. I begin with palimpsesting because it orients my study's entry point from a Cuban center and identifies a signature that can be recognized in new artistic movements and new contexts where the Cuban avant-garde continued to reinvent itself. For example, palimpsesting is a way to identify the Cuban avant-garde in New York, Miami, and other diasporic contexts through practice. Discussing Cuban avant-garde theatre as a practice frees this translocal cultural production from the very categories of nation, place, and fixed identity that it questions. By comparing two examples of palimpsesting in New York and Miami, I argue that felicitous palimpsesting necessitates meaningful and conscious transculturation with the current time and cultural context of a said performance. In this way, palimpsesting is one way to trace how Cuban avant-garde theatre played a role in creating and shaping American avant-garde theatre, especially Latina/o and LGBTQ theatre.

Chapter Three takes up where Chapter Two leaves off, providing the necessary historiography that explains how through the movement of *creación colectiva*, Cuban avant-garde theatre became Latino(*americana/o*) and how Cuban avant-garde artists, especially in the U.S. drew on *creación colectiva* to negotiate becoming Latina/o. The exchange between Teatro Escambray and Teatro de la Esperanza that brought Cuban artists to California and Chicana/o artists to Cuba, as well as examples of productions by INTAR and Teatro Prometeo provide important case studies that establish *creación colectiva* as a performative practice through which *latinidad* was renegotiated. As a transnational artistic movement, *creación colectiva* painted with the many colors of *latinidad*, creating spaces of trans-Latino affect. Trans-Latino affect refers to the phenomenon in performance wherein Latin American national affect is transmitted and

experienced across difference in nationality within a unifying feeling of *latinidad*. This unifying feeling is constituted by shared responses to U.S. American hegemony, shared histories of conquest and colonialism, and shared ways of remembering what has come after the colonial period, which favor transculturation to acculturation, *mestizaje* to racial purity, or integration to exclusion and dominance. In the context of the pan-Latino communities of Miami and New York, *creación colectiva* and its trans-Latino affect created important spaces where U.S. Latina/o becoming was enacted and imbibed. In the case of Teatro de la Esperanza and Teatro Escambray, trans-Latino affect created a connection between collectives and foreign audiences in Latino(*americana/o*) spaces and contexts. Through these transnational currents of exchange Cuban avant-garde practice shaped U.S. Latina/o theatre and avant-garde Latina/o artists shaped Cuban theatre.

In Chapter Four, my focus shifts from *latinidad* to sexuality, and from ways of becoming Latino(*americana/o*) to playing with power to undo hierarchies of gender and sexuality that construct Cubanness and intersecting patriarchal cultural nationalisms. By comparing four key productions of teatro de la crueldad, I argue that theatricalized sadomasochism embodied a subversion of biopolitics that construct Cuban national and cultural being through gender and sexuality. Theatricalized sadomasochism enacted performatives of renaming and recognition that played with power in relation to gendered and sexual hierarchies. By renegotiating those hierarchies, artists expanded what it meant to be Cuban. Unlike the case studies in Chapter 3 that present different takes on shared Latino(*americana/o*) being and becoming, the case studies in Chapter 4 present different kinds of feminist, Gay, Lesbian, and Queer ways of being Cuban that artists embodied. Through all of these productions we see either a feminist or queer deconstruction of patriarchy performed through theatricalized sadomasochism. In Teatro Dúo's

production of *Los Cenci*, Martín's use of defamiliarization as a playwright and a director transformed Count Cenci and Beatrice into archetypes that dramatized the subversion of patriarchy. Rather than universalizing through the flattening sameness an invisible Eurocentrism, the archetype of Count Cenci was embodied through difference by a pan-Latino cast of men. This made the patriarchy Cenci represented speak to multiple experiences, not a single one. The other three productions directly address Cuban contexts. Nilo Cruz's staging of *Persecución* escaped biopolitics by reclaiming the body and its truth through dance and physical action. In Teatro Obstáculo's *Ópera ciega*, bodies marginalized by gendered and sexual constructions of Cubanness spoke their truth through repeated acts recognition to reveal contradicting layers of misogyny in Cuban cultural memory. Sarraín's *Una caja de zapatos vacía* translated Piñera's play of power that reassigns rana masculinity from sub to dom for his 1987 Miami audience. By attaching Cuban cultural markers to that play of power, Sarraín tapped into the paranoia embedded in exile politics and eroticized that community's fear of communist Cuba. All the performances subverted heterosexism in dominant constructions of Cubanness, Latino cultural nationalisms, and intersecting patriarchies through an affect of sadomasochistic erotics.

None of the trends that I analyze in these three chapters are mutually exclusive. In fact, just the opposite is true. Every production exemplifies characteristics of each of the three trends outlined. For example, *Guaracha Rock* could easily be critiqued as an example of teatro de la crueldad and *Ópera ciega* clearly palimpsests. I have referred to the artists' way of discussing their own work to guide my categorization. For example, placing Teatro Dúo's work in teatro de la crueldad, rather than creación colectiva, all the while keeping in mind that Alabau and Martín's ensemble approach is also a version of creación colectiva. Most Theatre of Cruelty in New York shared strong connections with creación colectiva, including the fact that many of the

Artaud inspired groups, like The Living Theatre also worked as collectives to generate work, but the end result produced a much different aesthetic. Above all, affect and aesthetics have determined categorization. That being said, of the three trends, I exclude palimpsesting from any given aesthetic because it is not a movement, like *creación colectiva* or *teatro de la crueldad*, but rather a critical lens I have refashioned to identify the Cuban stamp in those movements and others. Palimpsesting is a performative practice that crops up in all of the productions and may be a way to work towards a definition of what sets Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre apart from other genealogies of the avant-garde that they intersect with. The case studies presented in Chapter Two, traffic in multiple aesthetic modernisms, including Theatre of the Absurd and Theatre of the Ridiculous, with the exception of INTAR's *Swallows*, which utilized the aesthetics of *creación colectiva* and a bit of Broadway gloss.³

Regarding the aesthetics of *teatro de la crueldad* and theatricalized sadomasochism, sexuality may have been only a minor consideration or stake for the artists involved. Admittedly, for the sake of argument and historical significance, I have chosen to highlight theatricalized sadomasochism as a comparative framework for these productions. By focusing on sexuality, my aim is to bring historical weight to the work of these artists, following current interests in Queer Studies. In addition, I have come to the conclusion that queer theory is particularly appropriate for all of the productions in this study because my analyses tend to focus on performing the deterritorialization of nation. Deterritorialization of nation is one kind of connective tissue holding my project together. The embodiment of a Queer Cuban becoming, staking a claim in

³ Even though that performance appeared as a work of *creación colectiva*, it was not created through the same kind of collective process. Martín conducted all of the research himself and he alone crafted the script and composed the lyrics from his interview transcripts. The ensemble cast played a small role, if any, in creating dramaturgy from the interviews. However, if pressed I would categorize it as *creación colectiva* because of its aesthetics.

the renegotiation of *latinidad*, crossing over to Nuyorican affect in excess of Cuban national belonging, and intervening in “universal” discourse with a Cuban beat are all investigations into the many ways that the deterritorialization of nation was performed. And whereas this “deterritorializing thrust” crosses all of the productions I analyze and feeds the goals of my translocal study, it is curious how as I have consciously tried to avoid flattening notions of Cuban, American, and Latino cultural nationalisms, the idea of nation takes on an even stronger prominence, like a shadow cast over my entire study. Of course after having thoroughly questioned nation in this dissertation, I hope I have presented national boundaries as complicated, fluid, and overlapping. I never mean to imply that nation no longer persists as an ideological construct, which creates undeniable realities in the lives of citizens and non-citizens. In fact, even as it is deterritorialized in the performances I analyze, it is only recreated in a new way. For instance, trans-Latino affect is an exchange in national affect, and theatricalized sadomasochism is a way of renegotiating national belonging through sexuality. As much as these movements question nation, the deeper the questioning goes, the more nation strengthens its hold. Perhaps this is what makes “Cuban” such an operative term in defining these routes of avant-garde theatre.

One of the central contributions of this dissertation is to provide archival evidence from Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre during the late twentieth century to bolster Hemispheric Performance Studies and Diana Taylor’s theory of hemispheric cultural production. By retracing the movements of art and artists across the Atlantic corridor of the Cuban diaspora through documentation in theatre archives, the history I present here calls into question the project of separating Theatre and Performance Studies into national traditions, geographic regions, or political and ethnic identities. This step is urgently needed in avant-garde theatre discourse, for

example, where the division created by area studies and ethnic studies has worked to exclude Latin American and Latina/o artists and to reify the Eurocentrism of avant-garde theatre historiography. But this oversight is a problem of criticism and historiography. It is how art is remembered, not how it was made as avant-garde theatre since the early twentieth century has been a transnational and global phenomenon between artists.⁴ If that is the case, what anyone knows about theatre in a given area of study defined by geography, nationality, or ethnicity needs to expand beyond current parameters in order to take into consideration the many crossing routes that, in part, comprise said area. What are area studies and ethnic studies after all? Are they the study of a region, nation, or identity, or the study of dominant themes and concepts that construct that region, nation, or identity in academic discourse? I believe it is the latter, and that discourse is slower and more reluctant to change than the actual sites of study. Not that these frames do not also have their critical value, but it is necessary never to lose sight of the fact that these frames and subfields are fictions of criticism.

Another contribution my work makes is to deepen understanding of some of the touchstones of Latina/o theatre in the U.S. by providing archival research during the period of its emergence from cultural nationalism in identity movements that reinforced gender and sexual hierarchies. As Manzor and Arrizón explain, the move away from Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban theatre beginning in the 1970s to Latina by the 1990s was a feminist endeavor. Groups like WIT (Women in Theatre) that broke away from TENAZ (Teatros Nacionales de Aztlán) created a larger role for women playwrights and directors. This led to the formation of a pan-Latina theatre movement that prioritized the feminist reclaiming of Latina/o cultural traditions

⁴ James M. Harding and John Rouse, eds. *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

and symbols, and addressed homophobia and the AIDS crisis. I hope that the feminist and queer critiques made by the productions I analyze only deepens the historical understanding of this backdrop that led to the emergence of Latina theatre.

Manzor and Arrizón also frame their study of Latina performance and theatre in terms of aesthetics. They theorize that the Latina performance artist draws on performance's metarepresentational capacity to "utilize her gendered and racialized body as a metaphor to intervene in the system of representation," challenging and reinscribing gendered, sexual, racial, and class hierarchies through their intersection.⁵ Manzor and Arrizón align Latina performance with a powerful tradition of feminist performance art that was generated from spaces like At the Foot of the Mountain and the W.O.W. Cafe. The "theorizing in the flesh"⁶ that I present in productions like *Cap-a-Pie*, *Guaracha Rock*, and *Francesco: The Life and Times of the Cencis*, or the defamiliarization in productions like *La víctima*, *Los mangos de Caín*, and *Swallows* establish that this tradition of feminist theatre and performance art shares many intersections with Cuban routes of avant-garde theatre. Productions like *La faramalla* add background to Carmelita Tropicana and Ela Troyano's transculturation of choteo and camp that Muñoz theorizes in *Disidentifications*.⁷ I do not mean to suggest that Ela Troyano or Carmelita Tropicana had any direct experience or collaboration with Dumé and Corrales' theatre, nor do I suggest that Ela Troyano and Carmelita Tropicana's innovations of these aesthetic and critical performance practices were not original and created with respect to their moment in history, as

⁵ Alicia Arrizón and Lillian Manzor, "Introduction," *Latinas on Stage*, eds. Arrizón and Manzor (Berkley: Third Woman Press, 2000), 15-16.

⁶ Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. "Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh." This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Fourth Ed. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 19.

⁷ José Esteban Muñoz. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 119-120.

they were indeed all of these things. If fact, it would have been hard to interpret *La faramalla* or recognize its palimpsesting of camp and choteo without knowledge of the work of the Troyano sisters. What I do mean to suggest is that this specific translocal maneuver has a longer history than once thought in New York's LGBTQ and Latina/o theatre scenes, and that history intersects with Cubans routes of avant-garde theatre.

In reflecting on the history that the case studies I present here bolster and establish, I am excited to anticipate where this project is going and what new sources and analyses now seem most urgent to add. First, I think it is easy for me to see how the history I have presented leads towards Latina/o theatre and performance of the 1990s and early twenty-first century because I know that subfield well. I need to add a deeper awareness of U.S. American experimental theatre and LGBTQ performance outside of Latina/o circles in order to better understand my project's significance to U.S. American theatre beyond Latina/o theatre. Aside from the instance of Chicana/o theatre collective Teatro de la Esperanza in Havana in the 1980's, I cover no other instances of U.S. Cuban or Latina/o theatre artists performing in Havana, or having long term artistic exchange in Cuba.⁸ There are three reasons for this omission. First and foremost, this study does not look at cultural production in purely materialist terms. When Cuban avant-garde theatre was reinvented in New York, Miami, and elsewhere it necessarily transformed Cuban theatre because, as its reach expanded, the reception of signature works and approaches led to further innovations. A change to a part, even in diaspora, is a change to the whole. Second, the

⁸ There is one instance of Teatro Avante performing *Desconcierto* by Diana Raznovich in the Havana in 1983, but there are few records of this performance and tour. The flyer for the production *Ciclo de Teatro Experimental* directed by Tony Wagner appears in the Teatro Avante Collection. The program included three experimental pieces *Yo prefiero a Caballero* by Christina Sánchez, *Desconcierto* by Diana Raznovich, and an adaptation of *Josefina, atiende a los señores* by Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Teatro Avante Collection, Box 1, Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami.

tradition of avant-garde practice that began circulating outside of Cuba following the onset of Grey Years does not return from the U.S. until shortly after the end of the historical parameters of this study. The tour of artists like Carmelita Tropicana or Repertorio Español to Cuba in the 1990s is the beginning of paths of theatrical exchange between New York and Havana, and, later Miami and Havana that were carved in part by Lillian Manzor as a scholar, critic, advocate, and activist. Third, as Chicano playwright Carlos Morton recently reminded me, there is much more work to be done regarding the work of other U.S. Latinas/os in Cuba. I have covered Teatro de la Esperanza, but what about Morton, who was also apart of the East Coast-West Cost Brigades, or the tour of Teatro 4 from New York, or even the impact of non-Latino American experimental groups in revolutionary Cuba, like Ntozake Shange or the San Francisco Mime Troupe?

The work of performance studies scholar and music critic Alex Vazquez, literary theorist Paula Moya, and others has recently inspired me to rethink my research methodologies. In her recent essay, “Learning to Live in Miami,” Vazquez creates a poetic game, a performance, through her personal interaction with the program for *Guaracha Rock*, which she thinks of as an “experimental” script in place of the missing one. She mixes and matches the program’s scene titles, which are listed like songs on an LP with Side A/Cara A for Act 1 and Side B/Cara B for Act 2. In her interaction with the remnants of this avant-garde theatre performance as a music scholar she imagines the many possible remixed versions of *Guaracha Rock*’s “tracks,” creating new mixed-tape performances through her imagination. This game is characteristic of the kind of research practices she suggests in *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music*, as well as the habitual practice she suggests in the essay as directives for learning to live in Miami as a

suffocating place that the Cuban exile imagination has compulsively created and recreated through an obsession with “the partial, the fragment, the what’s left.”⁹

Now whereas I appreciate Vazquez’s position and ability to write performance scholarship in such a daring way, I do not propose that I imitate her innovative and radical performance research methods, as much as I see the need to take pause to reflect upon some of the ways I already have used my imagination to create present performances out of the remnants of past ones. For example, different kinds of associative poetic logic organize the scripts of *La faramalla*, *Cap-a-Pie*, and *Ópera ciega*. These scripts are dense with allusions and references to other performances. Simply reading and describing them would not lead to any kind of decipherable academic prose. Reading, in the case of those scripts especially, is interpreting and envisioning much like a director preparing a staging. Other examples, of course, are the places where I have conjectured trans-Latino affect in the reception of Teatro Escambray in La Peña Cultural Center or El Museo del Barrio. My application of contemporary lesbian BDSM theory to identify something distinct about Cuban teatro de la crueldad is indeed imaginative, but it also illuminates something glaring about teatro de la crueldad, and Theatre of Cruelty generally that has been missed by scholars—namely a metatheatrical language speaking in sexual acts of renaming and recognition.

When describing the cross-temporal dimension of performative palimpsests in Chapter Two, I evoked historiography as the recovery the past for the present. So what does reading the archive now do to the history, and what does that history do to the present? Ultimately, this is the crux of historiography of performance, and I embrace it. I want to explicitly dispel the notion that archival research is some kind of time machine. I have not attempted, nor do I claim to be

⁹ Alexandra T. Vazquez, “Learning to Live in Miami,” *American Quarterly* 66.3 (2014), 864.

able to restore what these productions meant to participants or naively convey the feelings they produced as they were felt in their moment. That moment is almost completely closed off from us. I humbly propose that the glimpses the archive give us of those meanings and feelings are incomplete, and can only become meaningful or felt again through a co-production with the most pressing questions of our present moment. If I did not do this, these performances would neither translate, nor matter to a twenty-first century audience of scholars. That being said as Hayden White has suggested, we need to face and embrace the narrative as the fictional structure of history.¹⁰ In writing my dissertation, I have focused on the systematic comparative investigation of key examples of three theatre trends in three different cities. Now that this is accomplished I see that in order to adapt the scholarship presented in this dissertation into a book, I will need to take time to “listen in detail.” If for no other reason, I must make more transparent the places where my imagination works through narrativity and performativity to make new meaning with the past.

I also see a pressing need to answer Paula Moya’s call to pay close attention to the geopolitics of knowledge in my own scholarship. Moya’s concept is about recognizing the privilege given to critical theories developed by scholars in academic institutions in Europe and the U.S., theories that ignore and displace theories of knowledge from Latin America, but at the same time use Latin American contexts as sites for their application and continued dominance.¹¹ Geopolitics of knowledge provides a way to address a disparity that I have struggled with throughout this dissertation. In comparison to the theatre of Havana, and especially Miami, the theatre production of New York, even when produced by transnational artists, has been more

¹⁰ Hayden White. “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality.” *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 18, 27.

¹¹ Paula M.L. Moya, “Who We Are and From Where We Speak,” *Transmodernity* 1.2 (2011): 83-84.

easily assimilable by the theoretical frameworks that I apply to analyze and interpret these past performances of theatre. The work of Duménil and Corrales, Fornés, and Martín and Alabau easily resonates with the queer theory and performance theory I utilize, making it more exciting, challenging, and important within my discussion of avant-garde theatre history. And as much as I believe their achievements were outstanding, I am suspicious that their privilege in my discussion results from blind spots created by own geopolitical privilege and the geopolitical privilege of the many theorists from the U.S. American academy whose work I draw on. Furthermore, even though Havana is a global center of culture, it remains marginalized by judgments in criticism that deem it less important, or influential, judgments that parallel the Eurocentric historiography of the avant-garde that my whole project has been designed to contest. But, most notably, I see Miami as even more marginalized regarding the geopolitics of knowledge. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that Havana has generated its own critical center through the Revolution and institutions like Casa de las Américas, so that Havana has been able to form academic alliances across the Americas, with some in the U.S. academy. Another explanation is offered by Beatriz Rizk who tells us that Miami theatre is dually marginalized because it is too right for mainstream academic critics, and too left for local conservatives.¹² I can attest as a researcher that Miami theatre productions create the most tension with the moral authority accompanying the theoretical paradigms that I have used. These productions also seem the most distant from definitions of the avant-garde in North American theatre discourse. What I am trying to suggest is that this deficiency does not reside in Miami, but rather in the theory and academic discourse of theatre and performance. So what is it about the geopolitics of knowledge

¹² Beatriz Rizk, ATHE Latina/o Focus Group Pre-conference Round Table Discussion, "Divisions and Intersections: Rethinking Latina/o and Latin American Theatre," The Davis Center, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1 August 2012.

that makes Miami less significant or less “universal”? I hypothesize that the resistance of critical theory to Miami stems from the fact that Miami is the most Latina/o city of the three. In Havana, for instance, *latinidad* does not play as strong a role in constituting the social fabric as it does in Miami. Of course, New York may have more Latinas/os, but the city is so large that Latinas/os remain more marginalized than they are in Miami, where they are as much a part of the mainstream, as they are apart of the margins. And for this reason the sense of *latinidad* in Miami is much different than the *latinidad* of New York. There are many ways to discuss this, but I think one way that seems important to point out is that the struggle of NYC Latinos has been translated into the politics of multiculturalism. Whether that reflects the structures of feeling organizing Latina/o becoming in New York or not, those experiences have been translated into the multicultural struggle for space, resources, and control over representation. *Latinidad* in Miami has not been defined through this liberal humanist paradigm, which I suspect is part of the reason why it is not favored by the geopolitics of knowledge. The comparison between Miami and New York shows that even within sites in the U.S., the New York brand of *latinidad* is more palatable to the judgments of U.S. academic theories, like the queer theory that I have used regarding the subject’s renegotiation of power in hierarchies of gender and sexuality. Certain kinds of struggles are recognizable under those paradigms, and others seem misguided, less virtuous, or less productive. The geopolitics of knowledge describes a neocolonial application of critical theory. Miami’s brand of *latinidad* does not fit into the dialectics of minoritarian communities vs. the mainstream. For better or worse, it breaks the liberal humanist mold of multiculturalism. So with respect to these geopolitical relationships of power, Miami’s Latina/o Otherness is less familiar, more distant from the politics of liberal humanism in the U.S. academy, and therefore, more threatening to its privilege.

With the problems presented to critical theory by Miami's uncompromising *latinitdad* in mind, I am equally motivated to further investigate how affective spaces of Califas (California) and Escambray have transformed the translocal parameters of this study. Whereas Teatro de la Esperanza's performances as a Chicana/o theater collective in Havana do fit perfectly with this three-city study, Teatro Escambray's 1982 tour only peripherally fits because they stopped in New York. However I am left troubled by their multiple stops in California where they spent most of their time. I think for this reason, either California must become a more integrated site of the translocal comparative framework of *Cuban Routes* or the case study should be made into its own smaller project on trans-Latino affect.

Looking forward, I am also interested in expanding the sources, archives, and oral histories to continue to add knowledge in needed areas, like the work of other Latina/o artists in Cuba, and the impact of Cuban Routes on LGBTQ and experimental theatre in New York and Miami. Some of the archival research that I have begun already in Havana has deepened and corroborated the transnational theatre history that the Cuban Heritage Collection documents. The Photographic Archive of the Tablas-Alarcos Press is a small collection that holds materials from Havana-based companies, regional groups outside of Havana, and international theatre groups from abroad. The archive's ephemera of experimental theatre by Afro-Cuban artists are significant considering the collection's relatively small size. Doing research there recently, I realized that an important trend in experimental theatre that is currently missing from my study is Oricha and Santería-themed theatre. I am excited to include this important dimension of avant-garde theatre in my work. The Tablas-Alarcos archive documents the work of playwright and director Eugenio Hernández Espinosa very well. He has written and directed theatre for four major experimental Havana-based companies, Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, Teatro de Arte

Popular, Teatro Irrumpe, and Teatro Caribeño. It is notable that at the end of the Grey Years in 1980 when restrictions on cultural production relaxed, Hernández began to write Oricha drama. The Orichas are deities with origins in the Yoruba culture in Nigeria. Both slaves forced to work on sugar plantations and emancipated merchants recreated religious practices associated with Oricha worship in Cuba during the nineteenth century.¹³ Hernández's first successful drama, *María Antonia* (1964) draws on the social and racial type characters of the mulata, the negrito, and the gallego from the vernacular theatre as Cuban archetypes that Hernández's dramaturgy humanizes through the performance of Santería rites and the intervention of the Orichas as supernatural forces in the characters' lives. From the 1960s through the early 1980s, Hernández's Afro-Cuban themed theatre was labeled as "folkloric" even when he experimented with avant-garde approaches. During the 1970s, Hernández wrote socialist realism that did not deal with religious themes, but with the relaxing of cultural restriction, Hernández focused his playwriting and directing on Oricha ritual theatre dramatizing the Lucumí patikines (traditional myths of the Orichas and Santería). Spirituality and components of African Diaspora religions revolutionized conventions of the theatre and created new kinds of theatrical temporality that broke with Western modernity and dominant ideologies. Edouard Glissant's concept of transphysical poetics configures creativity through creolization in Caribbean cultures as a postcolonial discourse.¹⁴ Transphysical poetics provides one lens to advance the inclusion of Oricha ritual theatre in Cuban avant-garde theatre on a level of aesthetics. An additional chapter on Oricha ritual theatre and Santería knowledge systems as a way of creating avant-garde theatre through transphysical poetics would add a needed dimension to this project and give me an opportunity to include the

¹³ Solimar Otero, *Afro-Cuban Diasporas in the Atlantic World* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2010), 30-35, 111-113.

¹⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans and ed. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 142.

work of artists presently missing like, avant-garde theatre group Teatro Buendía, playwright and director, Tomás Gonzalez, playwright Dolores Prida, playwright and puppeteer Pepe Carril, and playwright Manuel Pereiras.

Whereas these gaps in knowledge and methodology seem very pressing to me at the moment, in reflecting on the entirety of my dissertation, I have been successful in achieving a number of my goals. First, I have made an intervention in Theatre and Performance Studies discourse that allows avant-garde theatre on Cuban routes to be understood in its own regard. Second, I have pieced together a theoretical framework that foregrounds the hemispheric nature of avant-garde theatre, which was shaped through transnational exchange and translocal production stemming from Havana and elsewhere. Third, I have applied queer theory to bring the affective spaces and structures of feeling of these performances closer to the surface, so we begin to sense how this avant-garde theatre created spaces where *latinidad* was renegotiated, gendered and sexual hierarchies were challenged, cultural nationalisms were deterritorialized, and where Latino(*americana/o*) and LGBTQ becoming was provisionally embodied.

Eurocentrism in avant-garde scholarship is not only a question of how history is remembered, but also a question of which histories are made invisible or erased through the geopolitics of knowledge, and hierarchies of race, gender, class, and sexuality in academic practice. By palimpsesting, avant-garde artists on Cuban routes made the transcultural layering that is already happening in every performance a conscious part of their productions. Their metarepresentational practice of performing transculturation asks us something vital about performance. How do we reconcile the translocality of hemispheric human movement, of global human movement for that matter, with the widely accepted notions that performances are always signaling other performances from within, or that performances are recombinations of previous

ones?¹⁵ All performances in global contexts necessarily transculturate. Therefore, recognizing transculturation relies on how a performance's routes/roots are remembered. In this sense, *Cuban Routes* is a call to scholars of theatre and performance to recognize the role of human movement in the performances they study and that their writing remembers. *Cuban Routes* is a challenge to historians of the avant-garde to recognize that Eurocentricism is a problem of discourse, not artistic production. Whether this hierarchy of knowledge is dispelled or whether it persists relies not only on scholars' recognition of this blind spot, but their ability to move the center and address the epistemic racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in their research practices.¹⁶ *Cuban Routes* is a map retracing the movement of artists whose innovations of avant-garde theatre provide directions for where to begin this journey.

¹⁵ I am referring to Eleanor Fuchs' concept of theatrical mirrors, see Eleanor Fuchs, "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," *Theater* 34.2 (2004), 8; and Turner and Schechner's concept of performance, "the restoration of behavior," see Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, "Restoration of Behavior," in *Between Anthropology and Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35-36.

¹⁶ Martha Herrera-Lasso provides an insightful and in depth discussion of the coloniality of power and epistemic racism in performance studies research practices in her forthcoming work. Martha Herrera-Lasso González, "International Literacies, Performance Studies and the Decolonial Turn," ASTR working session, "Theorizing from the South." Portland, OR, November 6, 2015.

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VITA

Eric Mayer-García is a Latino theatre artist and scholar. Eric grew up in New Mexico and later attended the University of Washington where he received his BA in Comparative History of Ideas in 2005. He has been in the LSU School of Theatre PhD Program since 2010.

In 2014, Eric was awarded a three-month in residence research fellowship from the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami. He was also awarded an LSU Dissertation Fellowship in 2015. This dissertation project was chosen as an alternate for the Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship for the 2015-2016 academic year. Most recently, Eric received the American Society for Theatre Research, Targeted Areas Research Grant for his next project concerning theatre archives in Havana, Cuba.

Eric Mayer-García's service, teaching, and research are dedicated to the criticism and promotion of Latina/o theatre and Cuban Theatre. He has been a member of ATHE's Latina/o Focus Group since 2011. Eric co-curated the 2014 NoPassport Theatre Conference with Caridad Svich, featuring performances by Signdance Collective International, José Torres-Tama, Teatro Luna, and Omni Zona Franca. In conjunction with the NoPassport Conference on "The Diasporic Imagination," Mayer-García also coordinated a special one-day conference on intercultural theatre, art, and literature. The event focused on the several works by Femi Euba, including the premiere of a new play, *Dionysius of the Holocaust*. The conference also featured presentations by Wole Soyinka, Biodun Jeyifo, Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, Iyunolu Osagie, and John Lowe. In 2012, Eric directed LSU students in the plays of Dolores Prida and Pedro Monge-Rafuls. Mayer-García has published on Cuban *costumbristas* in nineteenth-century New Orleans, Caridad Svich's stage adaptation of Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*, the creación colectiva of Houston-based director Carlos Jesús García Rojas, and the plays of Oliver Mayer. His research,

which has been presented at national and regional academic conferences, also includes new historiography for productions by Teatro Prometeo, Teatro Avante and Dumé Grupo Estudio, as well as José Torres-Tama's reimagining of a Latino New Orleans through his docudrama and portraiture. His essay, “El Teatro Vernáculo of La Unión Martí-Maceo: Reconfiguring Race and Citizenship in Tampa’s Transnational Public Spheres, 1930 – 1940,” will appear as Chapter Three in the forthcoming *Experiments in Democracy: Inter-racial and Cross-cultural Exchange in American Theatre and Performance during the Pre-Civil Rights Era*, edited by Cheryl Black and Jonathan Shandell.