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VOLUME

I

Introductory Essays

Chicano and Chicana Authors



**Latino and Latina Writers, Vol. 1**

Alan West-Durán, Editor in Chief

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# Performance Art and Theater



ALICIA ARRIZÓN

**N**O ATTEMPT AT mapping U.S. Latino and Latina theater and performance art should define it in absolute terms because it ties together the histories of various ethnic groups: Mexican Americans/Chicanos, Puerto Ricans/Nuyoricans, Cuban Americans/Cuban exiles, and Dominicans, to mention only a few. While some of the origins of Latino theatrical productions can be located in mid-nineteenth century California (San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego)—with the contributions of itinerant performers touring from Mexico to the coastal cities that had been founded by the Franciscan missionaries—the contemporary foundations of U.S. Latino theater can be located in the Chicano theater movement initiated by El Teatro Campesino (The Farmworkers Theater) during the 1960s.

## TEATRO CAMPESINO

If one has to trace a genealogy of U.S. Latino and Latina performance art and theater, the influence of El Teatro Campesino is of great significance. Luis Valdez, the founder of Teatro Campesino, used theater to broadcast the call for unity and social change. El Teatro Campesino was oriented toward the cultural affirmation of working-class Mexicans. In conjunction with the political Chicano movement, the theater movement began with El Te-

atro Campesino's improvised performances in the fields of the Salinas Valley to support the striking farmworkers in California. The theater company, which included members of the National Farm Workers Association (later the United Farm Workers), created satirical social skits, called *actos*, that focused on issues related to the strikes and to Chicanos in general.

The development of an active Chicano theater movement, along with the emergence of other cultural practices such as poetry and art, heightened the cultural awareness embedded in the Chicano movement at large. The following excerpt from Luis Valdez's introduction to his *Early Works*, which was published in 1990, underscores *Chicanismo*, or Chicano nationalism, as the *grito* (cry, shout) that aroused Mexican Americans in the 1960s to assert control over their own cultural survival and determination.

The nature of Chicanismo calls for a revolutionary turn in the arts as well as in society. Chicano theater must be revolutionary in technique as well as content. It must be popular, subject to no other critics except the pueblo [people] itself; but it must also educate the pueblo toward an appreciation of *social change*, on and off the stage.

(pp. 7-8)

Valdez's contributions to the development of Chicano theater are paramount; however, it is

important to acknowledge that his leadership involved serious limitations for women in El Teatro Campesino and more generally for female representation in Chicano theater. Significant critical evaluation of El Teatro Campesino's evolution has reinterpreted the company's history and analyzes the gender relation at work in its productions. Yolanda Broyles-González, in the 1994 *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*, argues that the combined effects of male domination and Chicano nationalism shaped the company's productions and even affected the documentation of its history. "The history of the company," she observes, "has been constructed as the history of the life and times of Luis Valdez. As such El Teatro Campesino history has been shaped into a male-dominated hierarchical structure that replicates oppressive dominant tendencies within society" (p. xiii). Broyles-González examines the effects of that male-centeredness, beginning with El Teatro Campesino's early *actos*. A feminist who situates her work in contemporary cultural studies, Broyles-González draws attention to the gender politics that infused El Teatro Campesino's collective system of production. While Broyles-González's gender politics presents a serious critique, it also recognizes the great contributions Luis Valdez has made, particularly in the trajectory and development of the company and more generally in the Chicano/Latino theater movement.

Valdez's contributions as director, playwright, and producer are many. His first major critical and popular victory is the Broadway production of *Zoot Suit*, which was originally created for the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and funded through a 1977 Rockefeller Foundation Artist-in-Residence grant. *Zoot Suit* is a historical play that dramatizes the 1942 Sleepy Lagoon case, in which twenty-two young pachucos were unfairly convicted of criminal conspiracy in connection with the death of a Chicano named José Díaz. Valdez created El Pachuco as an archetype and the alter ego of the main protagonist, Henry

Reyna, the leader of the 38th Street Gang. The historical event of the Sleepy Lagoon case becomes the driving force for the narrative, which Valdez underlines clearly: race and class discrimination against Chicanos in 1940s Los Angeles, as manifested in the dominant Anglo system of justice, the press, and law enforcement.

In addition to his contribution as a theater director and playwright, Luis Valdez became interested in film. In 1981 he directed the film version of *Zoot Suit*, which became the first Chicano feature-length Hollywood film. The film received a Golden Globe Award nomination for the Best Musical Picture. Valdez also directed *La Bamba* (1987), the story of the Mexican American rock and roll singer Ritchie Valens, who died in a plane crash with Buddy Holly in 1959. Other projects that marked Valdez's success include the adaptation of his 1983 play *Corridos: Tales of Passion and Revolution* for PBS, starring Linda Ronstadt and the ballerina Evelyn Cisneros. This production received the George Foster Peabody Award for Excellence in Television Broadcasting in 1987.

While the Chicano theater movement was mainly influenced by the farmworkers' struggles in the 1960s and by the creativeness of Luis Valdez, it was instrumental in organizing a forum for the development of Latino and Latina theater. By 1970, El Teatro Campesino had established what would come to be known as Chicano theater: a type of agitprop theater, which integrated an aestheticism reproducing some elements of the Italian Renaissance *commedia dell'arte*. It combined humor, satire, folklore, music, dance, and popular Mexican culture, representing a performance culture greatly influenced by the tent theaters and vaudeville companies that had toured the Southwest early in the twentieth century. The performance culture introduced by the early touring companies influenced the creation of *La gran carpa de los Rasquachi* (The big tent of the underdogs) in the early 1970s. When the play reached its best moment in 1976, the company

launched an eight-country European tour. For many years the company has produced an evolving series of plays during the Christmas season. Among these are the miracle play classics of *La Virgen del Tepeyac* (The virgin of Tepeyac) and the traditional shepherds' play, *La Pastorela*, staged in the Old Mission of San Juan Bautista. Since 1975 El Teatro Campesino produces the *Pastorela* with the desire to preserve the folk theater tradition brought to Mexico by the Franciscan Missionaries in the sixteenth century. The *Pastorela*, as most Christmas medieval dramas, represents morality as the central symbolic concern. In 1991, a film version of *La Pastorela* was adapted and directed by Luis Valdez for the PBS *Great Performances* series, starring Linda Ronstadt and Paul Rodriguez. As a professional theater arts organization, El Teatro Campesino continues to evolve in the twenty-first century.

#### TENAZ

TENAZ (Teatro Nacional de Aztlán, or National Theater of Aztlán) is the umbrella organization of the Chicano theater movement. Aztlán is the mythical place of origin of the Aztecs and is often linked with the Mexican lost territories taken by the United States after the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848. It is the belief that this geographical space represents the point of parting of Aztec migration. Following Teatro Campesino's aesthetics of collectivity, cultural affirmation, and resistance, the emergence of community-based Latino theaters such as El Teatro de La Esperanza, Centro Su Teatro, Pregones, Puerto Rican Traveling Company, Teatro Avante, and Prometeo, just to mention a few, provided an alternative to mainstream theatrical institutions. In the 1980s, TENAZ was instrumental in the Latinization of the stage. Theater practitioners, or *teatristas*, who began their careers with El Teatro Campesino became increasingly aware of a world beyond *Chicanismo*.

TENAZ festivals contributed enormously to these changes, incorporating representative

groups and individuals from Latin America as well as other U.S. Latino *teatristas*. TENAZ festivals started a tradition of including personalities or representative groups from Latin America, who offered symposiums, group theatrical presentations, and workshops. The Brazilian director and playwright Augusto Boal (author of *Theater of the Oppressed*) and the well-known Colombian director and playwright Enrique Buenaventura (director of TEC: Teatro Experimental de Cali, or Experimental Theater of Cali) were two of the most influential *teatristas* who often participated. By the 1990s the TENAZ festivals were attended by theater companies which had been influenced by Teatro Campesino and which had been together for fifteen years or more. Groups and organizations such as El Teatro de la Esperanza (Santa Barbara and San Francisco, California), the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center (San Antonio, Texas) and the Chicago Latino Theatre Company, for example, had well-established play-development programs. According to the critic Jorge Huerta, author of the 2000 *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society and Myth*, the plays that these groups were producing during the 1990s marked changes in the groups' attempt "to reach higher levels of professionalism, even if they were not yet able to pay living wages of their artist" (p. 8).

#### PROFESSIONALIZATION

A significant phase in the professionalization in Latino theater was in part nourished by the Latino Theater Company in Los Angeles. Since 1985 this company has been dedicated to developing and staging award-winning productions in mainstream theaters such as the Los Angeles Theater Center (LATC) and the Mark Taper Forum. Jose Luis Valenzuela, who started as an actor and director with El Teatro de La Esperanza and is currently a professor of drama at the University of California, Los Angeles, assumed the direction of the LATC's Latino Theater Lab (LTL). In 1988, the LTL received a

grant from the Ford Foundation to fund the growth of the LTL ensemble component and the production of works by commissioned playwrights as part of the LATC's regular season. In 1994 the production of *Bandido! The American Melodrama of Tiburcio Vásquez, Notorious California Bandit*, directed by Valenzuela, became one of the highest grossing productions of the year. The dramatization of Tiburcio Vásquez as a Mexican American who took the law into his own hands was perhaps a big hit because it not only presents an alternative version of this historical/mythical life and death, but it significantly targets an audience that had witnessed Chicano theater evolved from the rural scene to the urban stage. The LTL changed its name to the Latino Theater Company that year in an effort to create a venue in which to develop the work of Latino *teatristas*. In 1996 the LTC became the only professional Latino group to work under an Actor's Equity Theater contract.

Also in 1996, the company produced Evelina Fernández's one-act play *How Else Am I Supposed to Know I'm Still Alive*. This play was first produced at the Plaza de la Raza in East Los Angeles as the winner of Nuevo Chicano L.A. Theaterworks contest in the summer of 1989. It deals with the experience of being female, of searching for love, of being middle aged, of wanting sex, and of women supporting each other. The author, who started her acting career in Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit*, has commented that she wrote the play out of frustration over the absence of roles for Latinas in mainstream theater and television. She specifically wrote the play for the actresses Lupe Ontiveros and Angela Moya, "Two extremely gifted actors who are rarely given the opportunity to play leading roles" (p. 159), she writes in the introductory notes to her play in the 1996 *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color: An Anthology*. Since its first production, the play has been produced by El Centro Su Teatro in Denver, Colorado, Teatro Visión in San Jose, California, and toured nationally with El Teatro

Campesino. The play was adapted into an award-winning film through the Hispanic Film Project at Universal, starring the original cast members (Lupe Ontiveros and Angela Moya) and directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela.

The premiere of *Luminarias*, also written by Evelina Fernández and directed by Valenzuela, proved to be a major development for the LTC. In 1998, following the success of *Luminarias*, the company experimented with motion pictures by forming Sleeping Giant Productions and making *Luminarias* into a feature film. The movie was produced by Valenzuela and by company co-founder Sal Lopez and received national distribution through New Latin Pictures. The LTC has returned to its place of origin at the LATC and continues its mission of enhancing the Latino experience in the United States through dramatic literature.

Two other projects have made important contributions to the professionalization of the Latino theater: the Costa Mesa California South Coast Repertory's Hispanic Playwrights Project and the New York INTAR (International Arts Relations) Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residency Laboratory. Director and playwright José Cruz González headed the directorship of the South Coast Repertory from 1986 through 1997. Since its inception, this project was responsible for fostering and developing new plays by Latino and Latina playwrights for the American stage. The South Coast Repertory has extended its efforts to disseminate Latino theater with the publication of an anthology of seven plays by Latino and Latina writers, *Latino Plays from South Coast Repertory: Hispanic Playwrights Project Anthology* (2000). This anthology is part of its fifteenth annual Hispanic Playwrights Project and includes the work of American writers of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Bolivian heritage. Four of the writers are renowned (Luis Alfaro, Cherríe Moraga, José Rivera, and Octavio Solís) and three of the contributors are emerging artists (Cusi Cram, JoAnn Fariás, and Rogelio Martínez). In the preface of this groundbreaking anthology, Eduardo Machado writes:



I remember fondly one night at Jerry Patch's office when he told me that South Coast Rep was beginning their Hispanic Playwrights Project and my play, *ONCE REMOVED*, had been chosen for that year. It was an odd occurrence in the middle of all that pristine Anglo-Saxon Americana—where Latinos could be seen lurking in the shadows of hallways, picking up dishes in restaurants or handing out tickets in parking lots. In the middle of all this clean and polish Gringoism, the “other” was about to take center stage.

(p. iv)

Machado correctly marks with irony the entrance of the Latino, or as he calls it, the “other,” to a mainstream theater institution. He places the Latino and Latina artist as the “other,” who historically has been on the margins, not recognized by the dominant professionals on the American stage. The question of the otherness is relevant to the mapping of Latino theater and performance art within Anglo-American theatrical spaces. The visibility of the Latino marginal other marks the relationship between “us” and “them” in relation to a system of representation inscribed in the institutionalization of culture. For Latino and Latina playwrights, directors, and performers, the process of entering certain dominant systems involves situating the self between certain relations of power and the fluidity of identity.

### IDENTITY FORMATION

The whole issue of the Latino subject in theater gets more complicated when one looks at the notion of identification or identity formations and its complexities. While some may accept the notion of the Latino, others may prefer the term “Hispanic,” and others may use specific, ideologically charged descriptions such as Chicano or Nuyorican. The term was appropriated by Mexican American activists who took part in the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. Southwest and has come into widespread usage. While the term Chicano mainly refers to people of Mexican heritage

(other Latino groups such as Central Americans may use it too), the term Nuyorican refers to Puerto Ricans living in New York. In some cases some writers prefer to be considered just American, reducing the identification with any nationalistic, ethnic, or ideological terms. In Machado's own words, “I think my work is American. It's in English, it's about being here, it's not about being in Havana” (“What's a Hispanic Play?” p. 39). Machado speaks clearly about the struggles of being an “American” ethnic artist and trying to be recognized as such, in and out of the mainstream. Recognized as one of the most gifted Latino playwrights, he is the author of many plays and is well known as a director, actor, and filmmaker. His works include: *The Floating Island Plays* (a four-play collection that follows four generations of a Cuban American family), *Cuba and the Night*, and *Don Juan in New York City*, as well as the film *Exiles in New York*, which opened the 1999 Santa Barbara Film Festival. His plays have been produced in London and New York, and at regional theaters all around the country. In the fall of 1999, his play *Broken Eggs* was performed by Roberto Español in Havana. The production was a significant cultural exchange between the United States and Cuba. His most recent play, *Havana is Waiting*, which received its world premiere in 2001 (under the title *When the Sea Drowns in Sand*), blends autobiography with identity politics. Inspired by his return to Cuba, Machado uses humor and drama to explore the notion of home. The play dramatizes the need to find the roots and origins of self in order to understand its complexities.

The complexity of being caught in between national borders of being both in the United States and in some ways elsewhere constitutes the struggle for cultural survival. In Latino and Latina theater, issues of cultural survival are a unifying concept in the struggle for recognition and the effort to project a public voice. In a brilliant piece, “The Show Does Go On,” published in the 1989 *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings*, the Cuban dramatist Do-

lores Prida captures this sense as she describes her experiences as a struggling *teatrística*.

In the theater, we have that saying—you know the one: “The show must go on.” As I said before, soon Hispanics will be the largest minority in the U.S. Our presence here promises to be a long-running engagement—despite the bad reviews we get most of the time, despite problems we may have with the lights, and the curtain and the costumes, and the enter and exit cues. Despite all that, this show will go on, and you might as well get your tickets now.

(pp. 187–188)

Prida affirms the political economy implicit in Latino and Latina theater and also directly attests to the ongoing development of that theatrical tradition. She is confident that the presence of Latinos as a future demographic majority will necessarily make them more visible as minority artists. She envisions a positive future; despite all the obstacles, “the show must go on,” and the Latino and Latina stage, even if it is not fully recognized now, will soon be widely acclaimed.

In addition to her numerous plays, collected in her 1991 *Beautiful Señoritas and Other Plays*, she has also written two books of poetry, *Treinta y un poemas* (Thirty-one poems) and *Women of the Hour*. She is ranked among the most important playwrights of contemporary U.S. Latino and Latina theater. She is also one of the few artists of Latin American descent to have been awarded an honorary degree from Mount Holyoke College. Considering herself a “theater worker,” she stresses that her work is part of a collaborative process.

Theater is people. Theater is teamwork. We need each other: playwright, director, designers, actors, choreographers, technicians, carpenters, composers, ticket takers, audience. We don't exist without each other.

(“The Show,” p. 183)

Prida conceives of her theater practice as a social forum where collaboration among directors, actors, and playwrights makes the performance a collective medium of expression.

Her experience bears out her commitment to collaboration. When Prida began working with Teatro Orilla (a collective theater group on New York's Lower East Side), she swept floors and collected tickets. Then she progressed to running the sound equipment, designing the stage lighting, and “fill[ing] out endless forms for grant money.” Only after she had done all of that did Prida begin “to think [she] could write a play that would appeal to that particular audience: people who had never been to a theatre before” (“The Show,” p. 183). The specific audience she has in mind is Latinos. Prida believes that theater that addresses the needs and everyday realities of Latinos will draw this community in. Theater is far more engrossing when audience members can readily relate to and identify with what they see on stage. She advocates an increased cultural awareness in the Latino community.

It is precisely this cultural awareness that characterizes the work of Latino and Latina dramatists and *teatristas* in general. In addition, this cultural awareness has contributed to locating the Latino and Latina subject in and out of the mainstream American theater. As a cause and an effect of a necessary cultural awareness, Latino theater has become, in the twenty-first century, as diverse as the multifaceted audience it targets. Dramatists such as Matías Montes Huidobro, Carlos Morton, Nilo Cruz, Pedro Monge Rafuls, Miguel Piñero, Milcha Sánchez-Scott, and Josefina López, to mention a distinctive and multigenerational group, have contributed enormously to the development of contemporary U.S. Latino and Latina theater.

While Matías Montes Huidobro is considered one of the most distinguished dramatists in the generation of Cuban playwrights who were torn apart by the impact of the Cuban Revolution, Morton belongs to a generation of Chicano writers who take their inspiration from Luis Valdez. In fact, both Valdez and Morton began their artistic careers as members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Whereas Huidobro is the author of approximately thirty plays, among them *Las*

*cuatro brujas* (The four witches) and *La sal de los muertos* (The salt of the dead), Morton's work has had numerous productions, both in the United States and abroad. He is the author of *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales and Other Plays*, *Johnny Tenorio and Other Plays*, and *Rancho Hollywood y otras obras del teatro Chicano* (Hollywood Ranch and other works of the Chicano theater). In 2003, Morton's libretto *Esperanza* (Hope), a musical drama that was adapted from the 1954 film *Salt of the Earth*, had its West Coast premiere in San Bernardino, California. The musical is based on a true story of Mexican American miners and their families in New Mexico.

While Morton's work deals directly with the Mexican American/Chicano experience, other writers, such as Cuban-born Nilo Cruz, deal with material that is heavily symbolic and lyrical. This is the case with *Anna in the Tropics*, which won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize in drama. It is set in Florida in 1930 and deals with a family of cigar makers whose lives are played out against the backdrop of the Depression. Cruz's other plays includes *Night Train to Bolina*, *A Park in Our Home*, *Dancing on Her Knees*, *Graffiti*, and *Two Sisters and a Piano*.

Cruz's compatriot, Pedro Monge Rafuls (editor of *Ollantay Theater Magazine*), represents the Latino experience in distinctive ways. In his *Noche de ronda* (Cruising at night), Monge Rafuls creates a spectrum of queer identities intertwined with different ethnicities. The subject of AIDS is represented in humorous and didactic ways. While Monge Rafuls (like Huidobro) usually writes for a Spanish-speaking audience, his monologue *Trash*, which premiered in 1995, represents the struggles of a *marielito* (anyone who departed the harbor of Mariel in Cuba to travel to the U.S. in the 1980s) who is presumed to be gay and is victimized by socio-political circumstances. At the end of the monologue, it is revealed that the protagonist, Jesús, is talking from inside a prison.

For other Latino dramatists, the subject of incarceration becomes a harsh reality that shapes

their creativity. This was the case for Miguel Piñero, who in 1972 was serving a jail sentence for second-degree robbery. Two years later he became famous with the production of his first play, *Short Eyes*, a realistic portrayal of life, love, and death among prison inmates. Piñero was a remarkable poet and performer and one of the founders of the Nuyorican Poets Café. He died in 1988. Although he wrote many plays, which were often produced, *Short Eyes* remains his best. It won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best American play of 1973 and 1974. In 2001 the film *Piñero* (played by Benjamin Bratt) was written and directed by Leon Ichasco. It represented the chaotic true story of the author's life and works.

Since the 1980s, Latina playwright Milcha Sánchez-Scott has authored remarkable theater works. In 1980 she wrote her first play, *Latina*, commissioned by Susan Lowenberg of LA Theater Works. With humor and innovation Sánchez-Scott explores the struggles of women coming to terms with their identity (Chicana, Cubana, Guatemalan, Colombian, and so forth) as they recognize the common context of their struggle for survival in the U.S. Other plays written by Sánchez-Scott include *Dog Lady*, *El Dorado*, *Stone Wedding*, *The Old Matador*, and *Roosters*. *Roosters*, which is one of her most produced plays, was adapted into a 1995 movie starring Edward James Olmos, Sonia Braga, and María Conchita Alonso. In 2002, the work of dramatist Josefina López was also adapted into a film directed by Patricia Cordoso. Her best-known play, *Real Women Have Curves*, made it to the big screen. While the play had been produced numerous times since the late 1980s with great success, the movie received astounding accolades, including being honored at the Sundance Film Festival with the Audience Award. López, who is a self-described all-around *chingona* (a tough independent woman), has also written *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*, *Simply María*; or, *The American Dream*, and *Unconquered Spirits*. Overall, Sánchez-Scott and López have created protagonists who

offer positive and realistic models for negotiating identity inside and outside of the theater.

### THE HISPANIC PLAYWRIGHTS PROJECT

Projects such as the Hispanic Playwrights Project have contributed enormously to increasing the visibility of Latino and Latina *teatristas*. In such projects, professional directors, dramaturges, and actors are given the opportunity, over several weeks, to rewrite, experiment, and ultimately have their work read or performed before a general audience. Many Latino and Latina playwrights developed their early works through the Hispanic Playwrights Project and have established a special reputation in the field. Playwrights such as Edith Villarreal, Octavio Solís, Edwin Sánchez, Oliver Mayer, and Lisa Loomer are among the writers who got their first mainstream professional experience through the project and became recognized contributors of the Latino stage in the United States. Playwrights such as Cherríe Moraga, Eduardo Machado, and José Rivera, who had already established positions in the field, were given national visibility through their involvement in the project. Both the Hispanic Playwrights Project in California and, in New York, INTAR's Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residency Laboratory served as examples of programs that helped the dissemination of Latino and Latina theater. The Hispanic Playwrights Project at South Coast Repertory and INTAR's Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residency Laboratory have as their main purpose to stimulate and develop the writing abilities and foster the visibility of Latino and Latina playwrights at the national level.

Latino and Latina theater would be unthinkable without the contributions of María Irene Fornes, who served as director of INTAR's Laboratory from 1981 to 1992. Despite her abundant productivity (she has written more than forty plays), many critics noted that she has

never moved onto Broadway, staying behind in the fringe playhouses that gave her a start in the 1960s. However, one of her greatest achievements may be managing to make a living on Off-Broadway. In fact, she has earned a Playwrights USA award, Guggenheim and NEA fellowships, and eight Obies. In honor of her many contributions, New York's Signature Theater hosted a retrospective of three of her plays in 1999. This event had an awkward effect on Fornes, who acknowledged in an interview with the Art and Culture Network, "[it] makes me feel I am now on the border of mainstream—not quite in it. To be mainstream frightens me. Then people put claims on you and expect things of you. I've always liked being on the border." Being on the border for her does not necessarily mean writing about identity politics (as a Cuban and/or as a lesbian) but evoking the intricate social relationships involved in being a woman. Having been the first Latina to write a feminist play, the 1977 *Fefu and her Friends*, Fornes's dramatic works and valuable contributions have influenced other Latino and Latina playwrights.

Cherríe Moraga, for example, who studied with Fornes in 1983 and 1984, benefited tremendously from her generosity and wisdom. Moraga, who began writing *Shadow of a Man* in Fornes's workshop, ended up sending the final product to Fornes without any expectations. Fornes not only liked the play, but also offered to direct it herself at San Francisco's Eureka Theatre in 1990. In *Shadow of a Man*, Moraga depicts a family struggling under the shadow of machismo in 1960s Los Angeles. The bilingual play offered Fornes an opportunity to explore the complexities of Latino culture, which include the bicultural and bilingual techniques and sensibilities of her own cultural experience. In an interview, Fornes said that Moraga's play interested her because of its passionate characters:

Because it deals with the relationship between men and women, in this case, passionate Chicano men and women, from the perspective of the family. It's

hard to explain. I think that all family plays, of course, are different, yet this play, to me, makes all other family plays seem the same. The play doesn't follow traditional patterns, and yet it's a classical story.

(*San Francisco Independent*, p. 2)

The presence of both Fornes and Moraga can be felt in the development of contemporary Latino and Latina theater. Their impact is by now legendary. While Fornes directs most of her own plays as well as plays by others (including classics by Calderón, Ibsen, and Chekhov, and new work by contemporary authors), Moraga's impact on Latino and Latina theater is mainly as a dramatist and taboo breaker in Chicano culture. Moraga's premiere collection of theater pieces, *Heroes and Saints and Other Plays*, brought together *Shadow of a Man*, *Heroes and Saints*, and her first produced play, *Giving Up the Ghost*. The collection covers ten years of work and showcases Moraga's priorities as a writer and producer of Latino and Latina theater—lesbian desire, AIDS, religion, pesticide poisoning, family, and community. Her protagonists, real or surreal, move in and out of the instability of border spaces. From the butch-in-the-raw to the head with no body, Moraga's border-crossers represent the many possibilities of hybrid cultures.

Since the production of *Giving Up the Ghost* in the mid-1980s, Moraga's gendered subjectivities in theater and in the discursive configurations of her writing as a whole demonstrate that the construction of nation, authority, history, and tradition are deeply sexualized and therefore depend upon a particular appropriation of space. Her recognition of this structure of everyday reality and her understanding of its implications are perhaps best illustrated in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. This Medea embodies the power and resistance of the native woman who feels a profound connection with the lost territory of Aztlán, which in her play has been recovered by the Chicano people. Nevertheless, as a Chicana lesbian, Medea is evicted, a homeless exile, because Aztlán has become a place

where queer identities are perceived as decadent and harmful to the sense of group collectivity.

Since its inception in 1966, INTAR has been committed to producing Latino theatrical works. It both creates and produces original works as well as hosting plays by notable playwrights from around the country. In 2001, INTAR celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary with a trilogy of plays collectively titled *Nuyorican Voices*. These plays were specially selected and directed by INTAR's founding artistic director, Max Ferra. They include: *Miriam's Flowers*, by Migdalia Cruz; *Giants Have Us in Their Books*, by José Rivera; and *Unmerciful Good Fortune*, by Edwin Sánchez.

The first play takes place in the South Bronx in 1975 and tells the story of a family grieving the loss of its youngest child, who was violently killed in a car accident. The second play is made up of six imaginative stories that range from the fantastic to the sobering. The third is an intriguing drama that focuses on three female characters (the defendant in a murder trial, an assistant district attorney, and her dying mother).

Migdalia Cruz, who is from the South Bronx and studied under Irene Fornes at INTAR, is best known for *Miriam's Flowers* but she has written over thirty plays, operas, and musicals, which have been produced in Canada, Mexico, Australia, and the United States in venues as diverse as the Houston Grand Opera, the Latino Chicago Theatre, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. She has received numerous awards and commissions, including two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, and has twice been a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn prize for playwrighting. Two of her plays, *The Have-Little* and *Lucy Loves Mew* were included in *The Best Women's Stage Monologues of 1991*. Her *Another Part of the House* is inspired by Federico García Lorca's classic *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

On the other hand, Rivera, who is best known for *Cloud Tectonics* and *Marisol*, has an amazing grasp of magic realism. *Adoration of the Old*

*Woman*, which premiered in 2002 at La Jolla Playhouse, is about a Puerto Rican family struggling with its own generational changes and the status of its country as a U.S. territory. In this play, Rivera uses politics to represent Puerto Rico's statehood debate with a romantic subplot. In an interview, Rivera acknowledged that the play's message might not resonate as much in southern California as it would in New York. Nevertheless, he suggested that the play is universal enough to appeal to everyone.

This belief in the universality of the Latino experience is also central in the dramatic works of Rivera's contemporary Edwin Sánchez, who in 1988 participated in the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference with his remarkable play *Barefoot Boy with Shoes On*. This play was also selected to represent the National Playwrights Conference at the Schelykovo Playwrights Seminar in Schelykovo, Russia, in June 1999 and was produced by Primary Stages in New York as part of its 1999–2000 season. In it, Sánchez brings to the stage the struggles of three generations of Latino men living in a one-room New York apartment. The play demonstrates how dreams and nightmares collide on the margins of their lives. Sánchez's other notable productions include: *Icarus*, *Trafficking in Broken Hearts*, *Unmerciful Good Fortune*, and *Doña Flor and her Trained Dog*.

Any attempt to synthesize Latino and Latina theater and performance art into a single definition is reductionist and naïve because it is important to recognize the complexity, diversity, and historical specificity of subject formation in order to bring into sharper focus the contributions of Latino and Latina *teatristas*. In symbolic terms, in his 1999 book *José, Can You See?: Latinos on and off Broadway*, Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez describes the image of Latino and Latina theater as an "octopus with many legs." This multi-legged "creature," he suggests, rejects any homogenization of the subject. He adds:

Latino theater always locates itself within the domain of difference, of hybridity, of monstrosity.

We can imagine this gigantic animal, "Hispanic theater," with a huge head, sitting over the U.S., moving its tentacles on a multiplicity of stages and suctioning audiences. It is this image of monstrosity that accurately captures the nature of a U.S. Latino theater that denies all categorization based on superficial resemblances such as labeling and the imposition of rigidly defined and dominant dramatic structures. This theater reveals in problematizing and destabilizing the essentialist notion of monolithic Latino experiences, identities, and ways of seeing.

(pp. 108–109)

As a native Puerto Rican now living and teaching in the United States, Sandoval-Sánchez is well aware that Latino and Latina theater takes place within the context of revision and deconstruction of dominant structures. The title of his book *José, Can You See?*, is a conflation of "no way, José" and the first line of the U.S. national anthem. As the author suggests in his introduction, the imposition of this "implied command" on a non-Anglo other (José, who embodies Latino culture in various ways) asks him to see and embrace America's dominant culture. Within this context, Sandoval-Sánchez makes clear that his exploration of Latino and Latina theater takes place within the context of a revision of Broadway's and Hollywood's negative stereotyping of the Latino body. He defines Latino and Latina theater and performance art as a phenomenon deeply rooted within cultural values and traditions that critique the repressive elements of that tradition. Latino and Latina theater practitioners take inventory of their history as a neocolonial community in the United States. Within this context, questions of identity and subject formation have been fundamental in defining Latino and Latina theater and performance art.

## PERFORMANCE ART

In particular, performance art, with its focus on identity formation, enhances the cultural and political specificity of categories such as ethnic-

ity, race, class, and sexuality. While performance art can be defined in opposition to theater convention, dismantling the textual authority of directors and playwrights, theater practice is more subjected to institutional structures. To study theater requires the involvement of the dramatic text and its stage production. Many consider performance art itself a contested cultural practice, where meaning is embedded in multiple levels of representation. This definition moves identity formation into the realm of indefinite processes unfolding in the bodily acts of the performer, the agency of production, and the spectator. It is this identity-forming and affirming aspect that has defined Latino and Latina performance art in the last fifteen years. Performance art is a hybrid form, insofar as it borrows not only from the fields of visual culture, such as theater, painting, and video art, but also from dance and music. Moreover, performance art is considered an alternative cultural practice in that it resists a representational system in which Latino and Latina identity is made a spectacle. "The term performance, and specifically the verb performing," Diana Taylor writes in "Opening Remarks," published in the 1994 *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America*, "allow for agency, which opens the way for resistance and oppositional spectacle." It is precisely within such oppositional spectacles that Latino/a performance artists "expose themselves" in order to subvert the enactment of power and representation.

The term performance not only stands for spectacles beyond traditional theater, it also looks at theater practice itself more critically. In its most general use, performance suggests not only conventional theater but also any number of cultural events and social processes that involve ritual, movement, and the various roles that an individual may embody in society. Furthermore, the boundless definitions of performance not only actualize the potential of human behavior, but its object embodies a reflec-

tion on culture and difference as terms that develop new critical spaces in theater and art history.

Expressed in this way, the process may sound rigorous, but when humor is used as an aesthetic form of resistance, the potential for transformation can be exposed in particular ways. For the members of Culture Clash (Rick Salinas, Herbert Siguenza, and Richard Montoya), the complexities of race relations in America are without a doubt a performative system that allows them to envision certain kinds of change. In their book, *Culture Clash: Life, Death, and Revolutionary Comedy*, they insist on the blending of Latino political consciousness with sardonic representation. The book brings together three of their most memorable performances: *The Mission* (1988), *A Bowl of Beings* (1991), and *Radio Mambo: Culture Clash Invades Miami* (1994). The book also includes a short interview with the group in which they discuss their origins, and an introduction to the plays, which was written by one of the members. While *The Mission* is about a comedy group and the kidnapping of the greatest Latino entertainer, Julio Iglesias, *Bowl of Beings* is a collection of sketches including *The Returns of Ché Guevara* and *Chicano on the Storm*, among others. *Radio Mambo* (which was commissioned by the city of Miami) is a series of sketches done in interview form, examining the social complexities of the black, Jewish, Cuban, Haitian, and white communities of Miami. In this work, as in *Radio: Bordertown* (an ethnographic performance about San Diego), the group moves beyond its members' own identities to perform multiple subjects marked by gender, race, class, and region.

It is not by chance that artists such as Luis Alfaro, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Nao Bustamante, Laura Esparza, Coco Fusco, Josefina Baez, Marga Gómez, Carmelita Tropicana, Monica Palacios, and Elia Arce, and comedy groups such as Culture Clash (just to mention a few) have chosen to work in performance art. While Gómez-Peña has become well known for

his performances of border subjects inhabiting different cultural landscapes since the creation of *Border Brujo*, Luis Alfaro's solo performances explore in poetic terms issues of sexuality and class oppression in Los Angeles. Alfaro writes plays, poetry, and short stories, and is currently one of the best Latino performance artists. A Chicano born and raised in downtown Los Angeles, he is the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation fellowship. He has been a resident artist at the Mark Taper Forum, where he co-directs (with Diane Rodriguez) the Latino Theatre Initiative. In his most acclaimed performance, *Downtown* (also in a compact disc, released in 1993), Alfaro insists on centering the queer self, criticizing and reinventing the notion of Latino/Chicano family. In addition to centering his gay identity in this piece, Alfaro narrates his working-class upbringing in the Pico-Union district, a Latino community in downtown Los Angeles. In the introduction to *Downtown*, published in a 1998 anthology of queer performances, *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance*, Alfaro speaks of his work:

I call myself a gay Chicano. I create work that asks questions about identity and social power and addresses the intersections of nationality and sexuality. More than all of that, I am trying to tell the story of my people, of what it means to live in a city like Los Angeles, to give a voice to the stories that have not been heard.

(p. 316)

For him, performance art is an investigation of the everyday life. His community becomes embodied in his art. Alfaro performs his body not in isolation but in connection to others who have had an impact on his life. In his 1996 *Cuerpo politizado* (Politicized body), Alfaro looks at the American consumption game as performed through his body, which feels the need to justify it.

Alfaro's work is amazing because of the way it gets disseminated in live performances, compact discs, and written form. His performances have been produced in regional

theater houses such as the Mark Taper in Los Angeles, the South Coast Repertory, the Midwest Play Lab in Minneapolis, the Chicago Latino Theater, and Center for the Arts in Boston. In addition, his appearances in alternative spaces such as Highways Performance Space and Self-Help Graphics in Los Angeles, as well as in many cultural centers and universities across the United States, have contributed to the diversification of his audience to include Latino and non-Latino and gay, lesbian, and heterosexual audiences.

Like Alfaro, Gómez-Peña is also the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation fellowship. Since his arrival from Mexico City in 1978, he has investigated border culture and the impact of interculturalism and transculturation. Through performance, radio, video, poetry, and installations, he has explored the relationship between Latinos and the United States. From 1984 to 1990 he founded and participated in the Border Arts Workshop in San Diego, California. He is one of the editors of *High Performance* magazine and of the *Drama Review: The Journal of Performance Studies*. He is the author of the 1993 *Warrior for Gringostroika* and the 1996 *The New World Border*, which received the American Book Award. In his 1992 collaboration with Coco Fusco, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit*, the performers put themselves on display for a few days in a large cage as "authentic" indigenous people. The project premiered in September 1992 at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The performance artists took their installation to Madrid, London, Washington D.C., and Irvine, California. Dressed in a hybrid "exotic" Amerindian style, Gómez-Peña and Fusco impersonated fictional islanders from the Gulf of Mexico. The installation was an experiment that interpreted the history of the so-called discovery of the Americas. The cage performance within the installation became an important component of the project, which presented the protagonists as "undiscovered Amerindians." More recent Gómez-Peña's collaborative performances or



installations with Roberto Sifuentes, James Luna, Michelle Ceballos, and others, have dealt with processes of transformation and the impact of globalization and technology. Collaborative performances such as *The Temple of Confessions*, *El Naftazteca: Cyber-Azteca TV for 2000 AD*, and *The Dangerous Border Game* are sophisticated experiments combining visual art, music, poetry, sound, and computer technology. Gómez-Peña's 2003 collaborative project, *Ex-Centris (A Living Diorama of Fetish-ized Others)*, was part of the Living Art Development Agency's Live Culture sponsored by the Arts Council of England's Visual Arts Department and London Arts. In it, Gómez-Peña collaborated with Juan Ibarra and Michelle Ceballos (of La Pocha Nostra) and British-based artists Kazuko Hohki and Ansuman Biswas, creating an interactive museum of experimental ethnography. With sardonic humor, it explores colonial practices and representation.

#### FEMINIST PERFORMANCE ARTISTS

The celebration, in the early 1990s, of the so-called discovery of the Americas—which was promoted in many mainstream cultural events and public institutions—influenced the work of many performance artists, who responded sardonically to the call for celebration. For example, *Indigurrito* was Nao Bustamante's response. In this piece, the performative subject exposes herself in a provocative game of parodic exaggeration and inversion. Even the title is a transgressive referential. A blend of two common Spanish words, "Indian" and "burrito," *Indigurrito* manages to allude directly to the subject of colonization and decolonization and, amusingly, to a traditional Mexican dish. In it, Bustamante plays with words and with her body. Sometimes her improvised vocabulary makes no sense. Nevertheless, these absurd linguistic games produce suspense and hilarious repercussions as the audience reacts to and sometimes participates in her performance. At one point, Bustamante touches her crotch, where a

provocative-looking device hangs from a harness attached to her pelvis. This appendage appears to be either a dildo or a vibrator; its phallic resemblance is paramount. However, when Bustamante finally reveals the hidden device, she shows the audience that it is a burrito, wrapped in aluminum foil. At one point in the performance, Bustamante holds it with one hand while she eats chips, which she pulls out from between her breasts. Suddenly she pulls out a small container of salsa. At this point, her performance becomes a comic event. Laughter (the audience's and her own) and the carnivalesque mood become part of the transgression and subversion.

While *Indigurrito* is a one-woman show, Bustamante has collaborated with Coco Fusco in a performance, *Stuff* (commissioned by London's Institute of Contemporary Art), which deals with the complexities of the female body, food, and sex. She has toured internationally with her piece *America the Beautiful*, and with the experimental dance group Osseus Labyrinth in Taiwan and Hong Kong, performing *The Frigid Bride*. Her performances are characterized by the use of the body, which becomes a source of narrative and emotion. As she explains in a statement for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, her "performances communicate on the level of subconscious language, taking the spectator on a bizarre journey, cracking stereotypes by embodying them. [She disarms] the audience with a sense of vulnerability only to confront them with a startling wake up call." Some of her stories are highly provocative. For example, in one, she describes an experience in which she masturbated while playing guitar. Bustamante's expressive language generates an amusing spectacle where meaning is subverted and, of course, multiply interpreted.

The contradictions embedded in colonialism and neocolonialism have influenced the creative contributions of Latino and Latina theater practitioners and performance artists. For Bustamante's performance, it is precisely the monolithic space of the white male

heterosexual—the dominant subject in power—that she subverts with innovation and wild humor. In *Indiguritto*, the process of decolonization, rendered suggestive and comic, again represents a metaphor inherent in the body's endless utterance. Sometimes the use of autobiography in performance art contributes to the process of decolonization. In general the one-woman show is aimed at bringing about just such a rupture with patriarchy and other dominant systems.

Bustamante and other Latina performance artists conceive of their performances as a means of enacting the world(s) of difference. But even more importantly, they see performance art as a feminist vehicle for liberating the inner self from what feminists call the patriarchal text. This is also an important feature in Laura Esparza's work. In addition to being a solo performance artist and director, Esparza has worked extensively in community theaters. In the early 1990s, she became the artistic director of San Francisco's community-based Teatro Misión (Mission Theater) and then became involved with San Jose's Teatro Visión (Vision Theater). In 1997, she was appointed program director for the Mexican Heritage Plaza in San Jose.

In *I DisMember the Alamo* (which also responded to the so-called discovery of the Americas and was published in the 2000 *Latinas on Stage: Practice and Theory*), Esparza departs from the official history of the 1836 confrontation at the Alamo to trace her family lineage. She makes her individual and collective identity the subject of the performance. The construction of Esparza's identity is based upon a collective whole, which transcends the limitations of dominant discourses that have declared history homogenous. She insists that the personal is the real history, and that the story of the Alamo is "herstory." She claims, "My body is the battlefield of the colonized self. The land where conquests of Spanish, and Mexican, and American have occupied my cells" (*Latinas on Stage*, pp. 87–88). Esparza invents a history as a way of performing her identity. In her version,

only "herstory" is the real story. With a *rebozo* (shawl) around her waist, Esparza ends her performance drawing diagrams with lipstick on her naked chest. She tells the audience:

I am this:  
 an india  
 inside a mestiza  
 inside a gringa  
 inside a Chicana  
 I am all of these  
 and my psyche is like a road map of Texas  
 traversed by borders  
 with never any peace at these borders.

(p. 88)

Esparza enacts the reality of her multiple selves, acknowledging the many "borders" that crisscross her identity and give it its distinctive shape. Esparza's use of transgression within transgression allows the "I" to evolve in a continuous, multidimensional process of identity (de)formation. Her body—that of the performative subject present on stage—represents the ongoing exchange between colonization and decolonization. If decolonization holds out the capability of transformation in the realms of the subjected, for Esparza—and other Latina performance artists who affirm a neocolonized position—this negotiation remains a discursive strategy of representation and self-representation.

In the works of performance artists such as Monica Palacios, Marga Gómez, and Carmelita Tropicana, self-representation is a powerful act of queer performativity because it evokes a sense of being located historically and socially. This positioning provides the basis for a sense of belonging and participating in the creative processes of a particular culture. Latinas and other women of color act upon the racialized subordination and discrimination that has been designed to silence them. When the performance artist functions as the representer of "her-self," she is simultaneously placed in a position of power as she articulates her identities through a process of self-definition. The technology of

self-representation allows the artist to create and sustain a metaphorical resonance of reality. This approach involves a total rethinking of the gendered self as an autobiographical subject. The performative subject cannot be constructed separately from her sexuality, race, and ethnicity.

In one of the best performances of Monica Palacios, the 1990 *Latin Lesbo Comic: A Performance about Happiness, Challenges, and Tacos*, the artist represents herself growing up as a lesbian. Her acceptance becomes crucial in her coming-out story, presenting the act of self-representation as a metaphor for visibility and empowerment. As in many other performances by Latina lesbians, the examination of sexuality deliberately constructs a space for evaluating the oppression of women in the heterosexual order. In most performances dealing with issues of sexuality, ethnic identity and racialization are equally important in the process of self-definition. Palacios refuses to accept one facet of her identity without the other. Both are equally important in her process of self-definition. Her racialized sexuality is a distinctive part of her coming-out story. She puts it this way:

You see, I figure artists are going to save this planet. So I must continue with my plan. Weaving the lesbian side of me with the Mexican side of me. And writing about it. And talking about it. And pushing for and demanding change! BECAUSE, HEY FOLKS, IT'S TIME!

(*Latinas on Stage*, p. 115)

Her performance of assumed ethnic and sexual identities transgresses patriarchal and heterosexual privileges and indicates that it is not an accident that lesbians and Latinas are often marginalized. Defiantly, *Latin Lesbo* couples the politics of identity with those of visibility.

Humor and parody are characteristic of Palacios' work. In her later performances, the 1995 *Greetings from a Queer Señorita*, the 2000 *Confessions: A Sexplosion of Tantalizing Tales*, and the 2001 *Queer Soul*, Palacios uses comedy

as a tool to construct new ways of displaying and making visible the queer self in opposition to the marked heteronormativity of our society.

The same politics of representation are implicit in Marga Gomez's work. In her 1991 *Marga Gomez is Pretty, Witty, and Gay*, her 1993 *Memory Tricks*, her 1994 *Half Cuban/Half Lesbian*, and her 1995 *A Line around the Block*, Gomez deals with issues of self-representation and assimilation, as well as racism, misogyny, and homophobia as they affect her life. While in *Memory Tricks* the artist makes the subject of her performance her mother's story (she was a Puerto Rican dancer in the 1950s), in *A Line around the Block*, Gomez centers on the story of her father (a Cuban vaudeville impresario). Gomez brings the story of her parents to the stage as a way to investigate the individual and collective identity.

The reenactment of individual and collective identity is also a powerful ingredient in Carmelita Tropicana's work. In addition to being an outstanding performer, Tropicana is an excellent writer. She has brought together her performances in *I, Carmelita Tropicana: Performing between Cultures* (2000). In particular, her 1994 *Milk of Amnesia/Leche de amnesia* is a performance of resistance to a forced assimilation into Americanness. The performance brings together Alina Troyano, the Cuban writer/artist, and Carmelita Tropicana, the scandalous queer performance artist. Carmelita Tropicana is the staged identity of Alina Troyano. She began her artistic career in New York. She has become well known in the East Village performance scene, mainly in queer and feminist spaces, such as the Club Chandelier and the WOW Cafe. Tropicana is a wholly invented identity; she is a cultural icon of discursive oppositions forged through the interstices of two American nationalities, each distinct from the other, culturally and geographically. Carmelita Tropicana and Alina Troyano engage in a tête-à-tête where memory, humor, and autobiography become integrated. The narrative base is about

Tropicana's loss of memory, an amnesia she attributes to the process of acculturation.

Most critics and theorists of performance art rightfully underscore a performance's foregrounding of the personal as well as of the role of the body as text. Given this double emphasis, it is not surprising that feminist critics have overlooked the work of Latina performance artists as well as the work of other women of color in performance art.

It is precisely the interdisciplinary possibilities performance art offers that allow Josefina Baez to validate her gendered and racialized body as a trope for representation. Baez is a black performer, born in the Dominican Republic and raised in New York. She has been teaching theater and creative writing in New York's public schools since 1984 and is the founder and director of the Latinarte Theatre Troupe. Her writing has been published in *Forward Motion* magazine, *Brujula/Compass*, *Ventana Abierta*, *Vetas*, *Caribbean Connections: Moving North*, and elsewhere. Since 1996, Baez has been touring houses and apartments with her *Apartarte/Casarte* (split up/to get married) performance dialogue project. The performances are organized as social events and take place in living rooms, bathrooms, and kitchens all over New York City, in particular around Dominican immigrant communities. She explores themes of migration, marginality, identity, and the body. In another performance, *Dominicanish*, Baez employs poetry, soul music, and *kuchipudi* (a type of yoga) in an exploration of what it means to be Dominican in New York.

Baez's contemporary, Elia Arce, uses a similarly multidisciplinary approach in her work. Since 1986, she has been creating, directing, and performing solo theater works, as well as collaborations. A dual citizen of Costa Rica and the United States, Arce is based in the California desert. Her performance *First Woman on the Moon* was featured at the Los Angeles International Theatre Festival in November 2002 and was staged at the 2003 Perfo Puerto,

the first Latin American performance art festival in Chile. Arce became famous in the early 1990s with her solo performance *Stretching My Skin Until It Rips Whole*, in which she combines autobiography with the politics of representation. An excerpt of this performance has been published in *Latinas on Stage* under the title "My Grandmother Never Past Away: A Stream of Consciousness and Unconsciousness." In a biographical note on the National Performance Network Website Arce asserted that she believes that performance art as an interdisciplinary system of representation—including music, dance and puppetry—"challenges our minds, spirits, and bodies towards social justice and community self-empowerment."

Latina performance artists enter the scene of representation not as the otherwise absent or objectified other but as speaking subject, transgressive and dynamic. Their work is, and always has been, the result of a cultural *mestizaje* (the blending of the indigenous and the Hispanic worlds or other European cultures) representing the ongoing conflict inherent in different processes of transculturation. Recent publications in the field of Latina and Latino theater and performance art pay tribute to the great contributions of Latina *teatristas* in the contemporary era. Publications such as *Latinas on Stage* (2000); *Latina Performance* (1999); *Stages of Life: Transcultural Performance and Identity in U.S. Latina Theater* (2001), and *Puro teatro: A Latina Anthology* (2000) are evidence of the scholarly discussion currently taking place, providing material for research and teaching. All these publications recognize the maturity of Latinas in the American stage today.

## CONCLUSION

If one looks at the success of John Leguizamo (Off-Broadway, *Mambo Mouth* and *Spic-O-Rama*, and on Broadway, *Freak*); the MacArthur Foundation fellowships awarded to the performance artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña and

Luis Alfaro; the Obie winners María Irene Fornes, José Rivera, Luis Delgado, and Le-guizamo; Nilo Cruz's Pulitzer Prize; Josefina Lopez's film *Real Women Have Curves*; and the success of performance artists such as Marga

Gomez, who has appeared on HBO's *Comic Relief*, Showtime's *Latino Laugh Festival*, and Comedy Central's *Out There Special*, one can conclude that the Latino and Latina artists are visible at last.

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