



***Border Memories:  
Theatrical Space & Intentional Liminality***

***Teresa Marrero***  
**University of North Texas**  
**USA**

Through a reflection on the performances of the plays *Se Llama Cristina*<sup>1</sup> (Octavio Solis directed by Christie Vela, Kitchen Dog Theater, Dallas, TX) and *Dreamers: A Bloodline* (the first of a trilogy devised collectively by Cara Mía Theater Company, directed by David Lozano, Dallas Latino Cultural Center) –both staged May/ June 2013 and coincided with the Theater Communications Conference June 4, 5, 6, 2014)—I entertain the following questions: What does it mean to attempt to recreate a spatial memory related to specific places of experience, particularly the suffering of undocumented border crossings, within a theatrical space that is neither located in nor related to the referential ‘place memory’? There are three fundamental critical notions elaborated in this analysis: a reformulation of Lindsay’s (2010) notion of organization liminality into my own concept of intentional theatrical liminality; a reworking of Roach’s surrogation through effigy; and a questioning Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* and *milieu de mémoire* from distinct categories into ones that inhabit a grey area.

**Theoretical Framework 1: Re-conceptualizing Lindsay’s Organizational Liminality**

In an anthropological investigation of an influential and select group of Washington, D.C. *politicos* generally called ‘the Family,’ Lindsay (2010: 166) studies this closed organizational system and analyzes the functionality of the group’s insistence upon acting as if it were not an entity. Lindsay calls this desire to remain in the ‘betwixt and between,’ organizational liminality, one that posits the desirable (and politically useful) ambivalence of being fixed/not fixed

within a category of experience. And, since there is no organizational structure, its (non)constituents are not required to undergo any inscription into the (non)group, such as the modern-day rites of passage such as being formally instated or paying dues. This ambivalence becomes the only stable marker to which its (non)leaders will admit, thus giving rise to Lindsay's notion of permanent organizational liminality. While "the Family" refuses to be identified as an organization political in nature, thus distancing themselves from descriptors such as lobbyists, it nevertheless behaves as such, hosting influential monthly breakfasts with the attendance of a veritable who-is-who of Washington, D.C. politics, including present and past presidents, as well as key Washington political, social and business figures.

Borrowing yet re-conceptualizing Lindsay's organizational liminality, I propose the notion of intentional theatrical liminality, one which unhinges performance from the normative characteristics of anthropologically-defined liminal experience. This unhinging disrupts the focus from understanding liminality as a transitory experience to that of a permanently suspended state (understood both as a state of being '*estar*' and a locus '*estar en*'). With intentional theatrical liminality, the temporal characteristics of the liminal rite of passage that signal transitions (Van Gennep; Turner) become fixed as an end, actually as a place/state (*un estar en un lugar/un estado*), in itself. Here I call upon the Spanish *estar*, a verb that blurs the boundaries between psycho-emotional states and location. Furthermore, I suggest that intentional theatrical liminality eliminates the idea of theatrical space as sacredly ceremonial<sup>2</sup> —one that allows ritual actions, understood as repetitions devoid of numatic<sup>3</sup> nuances. In this sense of desacralizing the liminal, my strategy here echoes that of Ileana Diéguez Caballero when she insists upon "esta dimensión de la liminalidad, fuera de la esfera estrictamente sagrada, por el potencial que representa para reflexionar las situaciones escénicas y políticas insertas en la vida social, propiciadoras de tránsitos efímeros pero de alguna

manera también trascendentes” (Diéguez Caballero 39). Furthermore, this freed notion of liminality allows for further possibilities of new theoretical considerations, as well as links, networks and metaphoric associations (Diéguez Caballero 60).

*Se Llama Cristina* and *Dreamers* propose the staging of experiences through an intentional theatrical liminality, both as place and as being, which defy transcendence. In *Se Llama*, both Man and Woman cannot transcend their state of being Mexican, and, although locked within the circularity of beginning and ending in the same claustrophobic apartment, in the same psycho-physical state, thereby suggesting ritualized, repetitive action. On the other hand, *Dreamers* lock the border crossing action in a permanently liminal state through the workings of memory that turns out tragically for all but two survivors. In *Dreamers*, the ritualized action that suggests permanent liminality comes from the act of utterance and reenactment.

## **Theoretical Framework 2: Re-conceptualizing Roach’s Effigy and Surrogation**

While in *Cities of the Dead* Roach establishes the notion of the effigy’s (continuous) ability to stand in (but never fully replace) the absence of a prior, here I take his notion of surrogation not as a performative function of the effigy, but as a surrogate locus for a geo-physical place/space. Although very different from each other in content and style, both *Se Llama* and *Dreamers* share the need to convince the audience to see the theatrical space as surrogate for an actual conflicted geo-location. *Se Llama Cristina* deals with the personal trace memory of being Mexican and coming from (*ser/ venir de*) the conflicted area of the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez border.<sup>4</sup> *Dreamers: A Bloodline* deals with the repercussions of undocumented Guatemalan women traversing two violent borders, from Guatemala into Mexico then into the United States, thus dealing with geopolitical conflicts provoked by the specificity of a geopolitical *site/sitio* rather than that of an internal crisis of *being/ser*. *Se Llama*’s characters engage

in an internal conflict and process of self-awareness that calls to mind Heidegger's ontological notion of *Dasein*, a being presence/existence (*ser and estar*) in the world and one's awareness of becoming through experience in a specific time.<sup>5</sup> Both works offer interesting opportunities to examine liminality within a theatrical space which stands in effigy for its geophysical counterpart in the real world.

One could argue that this sort of surrogate dynamic takes place in every staged representation with a specific historical location referent, and indeed, it can. My argument here hopes to highlight a further dimension: the symbolic surrogate function of the stage understood in a specific city, state, country (here meaning the Kitchen Dog Theater in Dallas, TX in the case of *Se Llama* and the Dallas Latino Cultural Center, Dallas, Texas in the case of *Dreamers*) for that of another specific location (the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border in *Se Llama...* and the Guatemala/Mexico/US borders in *Dreamers*), all of which are not only geographically removed but psychically distanced from the referential places of the dramas. In both instances the performance of aspiration (both in the sense of taking in a breath and as in hoping) take place in a (safe) theatrical space, in a (safe) city with no sense of place memory related to border conflicts, and with little sense of historicity.<sup>6</sup> Dallas is a city that constantly aspires to reinvent itself in an increasing larger scale. The sense of urban erasure is a constant. Thus in both cases an ironic tension is established between plays whose core deal with (dis)placement related to geo-physical memory and a memory-less urban space.

### **Theoretical Framework 3: Nora: *Lieux vs. Milieu***

In his essay, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de mémoire*," French historian Pierre Nora problematizes the notion of locus by splitting it into two distinct ideas: *lieux de mémoire* (*lugares o sitios de la memoria*) which he describes as sites or institutionalized places, depositories of the repertoire of memory such as monuments, libraries etc., and the *milieu de mémoire*

(*ambientes o contextos de memoria colectiva*), the real-life environments of collective memory still being reenacted through spontaneous social habits. He posits that the *lieux de memorie*, *los lugares o sitios de la memoria* are static places in which institutionalized readings of the Nation, of the People, are deposited and invested with ideological meaning generated by modern historiographies (historical narratives about historical events). They are, like modern historicity itself, archival in nature.<sup>7</sup> He juxtaposes these to the *milieu de mémoire* (*ambientes o contextos de memoria colectiva*) which can be understood in a similar way as Norbert Elias' *habitus*, a collectivity of **embodied** social actions unmitigated by processed historical inscription. Thus a city such as Dallas, which prides itself in lacking institutional memory (there are very few historical landmarks of significance with the notable exception of the Kennedy Assassination Memorial in Dealy Plaza, downtown Dallas), that cannot even be an archival *lugar de memoria*, is cast as the place for the enactment of a collective history in the case of *Dreamer*. In the case of *Se Llama*, the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border suffers a double reification: a dangerous and economically depressed Texas border city is cast within an upwardly mobile one, Dallas, which is a safe 635 miles (or nine driving hours) away. I will argue that Nora's black and white categorical split between places and environments of memory become grey areas in both plays.

### **Re-Reading Liminality as Staged Statis: *Se Llama Cristina* and *Dreamers*, a *Bloodline***

In traditional anthropological terms, liminality is understood as an extraordinary situation outside the routinely quotidian (the 'betwixt and between') that creates the circumstances for extraordinary experience; this is also the case within an intentionally liminal theatrical context. However, whereas in classical anthropological terms liminality requires a psycho-physical transition from one state to another (a psychic transformation or transcendence of obstacles), my proposed intentional theatrical liminality actually beckons the

opposite: stasis. In both *Se Llama Cristina* and *Dreamers* characters find themselves in a closed circle of possibilities. In the former, a couple is trapped both spatially within the walls of an apartment and psychologically within their own identity-related amnesia; they cannot remember their Spanish origin names of Miguel and Vera, nor their Mexican origins. Throughout the play they transition from Man to Mike, Miguel, Miki and from Woman to Vesta, Vespa, Vera. In *Dreamers*, the naming of the undocumented Guatemalan women immigrants is rendered irrelevant. They cannot escape the brutality inflicted upon them due to their sexuality by the coyotes and drug-trafficking lords who don't care neither about their individual identities, their personal safety, nor about them reaching their destination.

In both plays, the characters' actions and concerns are not nihilistic because their sense of aspiration to transcend is constantly present (even in the darkest hour). Thus 'doing' –an existential plight— is framed within a hermeneutics of concentric circles: negative external socio-historical-political circumstances spark the initial actions, which then become repetitive and closed in an attempt of transcendence, which is itself blocked by the next chain of external negative events, etc. In this manner, a continuously liminal state is established. The distinctive quality of their ritualized actions, however, is that they are not senselessly repeated (as in the absurdist tradition) because the driving force is that of aspiration. Aspiration can be thought of as the initial action of breathing in, thus necessary to living. It certainly can be associated with hope, dreams and desires. Thus while a character may or may not entirely transcend conflicts (success is not important), the locus –*el lugar*—takes on a new significance, as it is prioritized in the system of signification because it provides the surrogate *place* for the performance of aspiration. The audience is required to see the plight of the perilous border crossings in *Dreamers* as if they were actually crossing geographic boundaries.

*Se Llama Cristina* establishes a closed circle of action, since “All the action takes place in a single bare room of a dingy apartment” (Solis,

unpublished script, 3). This definition of space could be construed as a circle, one in which a set of repeated –ritual-- actions occur. Because “This space becomes other past apartments” the closed circle constitutes not only a physical demarcation in the present but rather a magical one which subverts the common rules of chronological experience, which occurs through a surreal car trip to California (undertaken right inside the living room through upstage visual projections).

### **Ambiguous Identities, Unnamed Borders: *Se Llama Cristina***

*Se Llama* begins in ambiguity since Man and Woman cannot remember their names or how they got there, and no specific geographic location is mentioned. Yet by the middle of the play, it is obvious that this shabby apartment is located in Texas; in the Dallas Kitchen Dog Theater production, projected images against the upstage wall suggest El Paso/Ciudad Juárez. The longing for escape and freedom is set up by projecting (both literally as in projection of images and in the psychoanalytic sense) liberation from Texas to California. Thus in this context, Texas constitutes an undesirable place of restriction and decadence, while California signals much wanted freedom and new opportunities. Noteworthy is the fact that the negative, restrictive geophysical space of the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez border is not juxtaposed to any analogous California border region, such as that of San Diego/Tijuana, where pejorative conditions might be similar. The California imagined in Solis’ play is free of borderland nuisance. It is difficult not to infer an autobiographical reference to the playwright’s own exodus from his native Ciudad Juarez, later to Dallas, to his current residence in Northern California’s San Francisco Bay area, a place where his work has been produced with regularity.

### **Triangulations: *Se Llama Cristina***

The opportunities for the external and internal experiences in *Se Llama* are limited by a triangular formation of “A window upstage. A door on the left. And a doorway on the right.” While Abel/Shadow and Girl, both secondary characters or as I will argue shortly, tertiary characters, move in and out

through these opening, Man and Woman do not. Abel/Shadow is the threatening figure of a corpulent Anglo Texan, seemingly Woman's former abusive lover or husband, this is not clear. Girl appears at the end of the play as the grown-up child inferred at the beginning of the play by a baby crib. Man and Woman are locked in a decayed physical and psychological space. Furthermore, their decay is extreme, aided by what can be assumed to be a participation in their own demise by the use of both alcohol (indicated by empty bottles of hard liquor strewn on the floor of the opening scene) and intravenous ('hard') drugs.

While Octavio Solis has argued that Man and Woman shot up only once<sup>8</sup> recreationally, as a response to stress, I would counter that this explanation is inconsistent with any real life notion of recreational drug use. Clinical studies classify recreational drug use in the following categories: stimulants, sedatives, hallucinogens, organic solvents, and drugs used to enhance athletic performance.<sup>9</sup> One would have to assume that Man and Woman used a drug within the category of sedatives, since they lost consciousness. In this category, heroin, a highly addictive drug, is the most commonly used intravenously. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that the hypodermic needles and other injection paraphernalia in the opening scene make a fairly strong reference to heroin. While time is manipulated in a non-linear manner in this play, all other aspects point towards psychological realism; therefore, how reasonable is it to ask audiences to believe that *this* shooting up of intravenous drug is a casual, one time recreational activity? For me, this is an issue of credibility within the script.

The physical triangulation of the space is shadowed by two other possible triangulations: Man, Woman and Abel (described as Shadow and former abusive spouse), Woman, Abel and Girl (Girl seems to have had a sexual relationship with Abel, her mother's lover; and, Woman, Man and Girl (as mother, father and a thirteen year old girl, in other words, as grown





daughter in the future). The presence of a baby is suggested in the staging by an ever-present crib, from which a dead chicken, yes a chicken, is pulled in an absurdist opening scene twist, never to be repeated. In all cases the triangulation leads to primarily internal, psychological spaces inhabited within the confined inner space of the living room. The exception to this is one scene in which Man and Woman escape on the road trip to California, suggesting the kind of liberation that the U.S. film *Thelma and Louise* (1991) immortalized as the prototypical escapist, yet fatal, road movie. *Se Llama Cristina* situates its experiences within an infinite *mise-en-abîme* in which the self-referentiality of Man and Woman are refracted onto their discontinuous selves (each phase of self-awareness seems to come upon them as an externally induced surprise rather than emerge organically from within). In optics, refraction refers to the way in which a beam of light appears to deviate or to break away from its original course. These selves seem to face experiences in ways that refract them away from themselves. Nevertheless, they are bogged down by where they are (*donde están*) and where they come from (*de dónde son*) both psychologically and geo-physically.

### **Crossing Border Memories: *Dreamers, a Bloodline***

In *Dreamers*, the staging allows for the movement of the characters from Guatemala to Mexico and then to the United States. The physicality of the actors' performance and the Dallas Latino Cultural Center's set design of placing large, heavy structures on casters make constant movement possible. There is a huge cage and a train, all on wheels for movement by the cast. The violent circumstances of the undocumented border crossings put the lives of four women in spiraling perilous situations. The play opens with a scene in which the Old Woman and Young Boy about nine years old narrate directly to the audience. This scene is set in the future of the play's present. Thus the action that occurs during the play's hour and forty minutes' happened nine years ago, and it is suspended between the knowing of the present established in the opening scene, which through the re-enactment of memory becomes the

dramatic plot's present. The action closes back on itself in the end, returning to the present of the opening scene. This elaborate way of articulating what could easily be called a flashback clearly reinforces Nora's notion that "Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present" (Nora 8). This suspends the action in a liminal state with regards to the memory function assigned to the Old Woman and the Young Boy, as the only two out of a cast of a dozen who survive to tell, and retell, a story they did not experience first-hand, thus mythologizing it. The plot demarcates the moment in which the Old Woman and Young Boy are separated from the rest, who are eventually murdered at the hands of the Drug Lord. Therefore it can be deduced that, at least within the dramatic construction of plot, the story they live to tell cannot be an eye witness account, since their survival depends on this separation, and conversely, their participation would have meant certain death (thus unable to 'live to tell the story'). Time and time again, each of the three young women who are on the voyage of undocumented border crossing will be placed in spiraling circumstances of unsurpassable violence (hunger, thirst, fear, separation from family, rape) leading to their ultimate death. The spectator walks away with a sense of their suspended and truncated aspirations. At some point, one would have to ask, how do the survivors know what happened if nobody was left to tell? This question does not so much threaten the veracity of the historical events that real-life informants shared with Cara Mía in their efforts to create a collectively devised piece, but rather points to a script-related credibility factor that (possibly) only a scholar splitting hairs may have noticed. Both *Se Llama* and *Dreamers* share minor script credibility issues.

The structure of *The Dreamers* is indeed dream-like (and often nightmarish). I am not speaking of plot now but of structure. The plotline is simple: it is centered on the story of women who, for various reasons, are compelled to leave their native El Salvador by any means possible. On the other hand, the structure relies upon a complex number of elements: a narrative structure which obliterates the fourth wall, the telescoping of time and

space (the compressed, both diachronic and synchronic manner in which the story moves), the use of key symbolic figures (murdered Archbishop Oscar Romero, priests in general, the drug lord, the devoted mothers, the coyote, the child representative of future possibilities), projection of images, the manipulation of several movable structures, and not least of which, the music. The image of the murdered archbishop with outstretched arms as in Jesus Christ's crucifixion, the obvious reference to Argentina's Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, with a white scarfed woman holding up a photo of her missing daughter and poignantly asking audience members, have you seen my daughter are but two symbolic elements that point to referential historical moments in this production. The individual stories also echo the lives of Salvadorians actually living in the North Texas area today, since part of the work was based on local interviews. The structure of the play is circular, since it begins with a nine year old boy Javi, who we later find out was the three month old taken away from the young mother during the traverse. Thus not only does the circularity of the structure works perfectly within this piece, it also sets up possibilities to the sequel and a future of possible aspirations for those who reach the 'promised land'.

### **Psychological Borders: *Se Llama Cristina***

Whereas in *Dreamers* the displacement is correlated to geopolitical forces (paramilitary violence, lack of economic opportunities, sexual repression) that have historically driven the migration from South to North, in *Se Llama Cristina* displacement has a Freudian psychoanalytic connotation, understood as substituting something that 'in their original form [that was felt] to be dangerous or unacceptable' (Berne 399). The unacceptable that requires displacement in *Se Llama* is related to Man and Woman's identity: their Mexicanness is being substituted by the ambiguity first of not having a name, then having an Anglo name, then a Mexican one, followed by an ambiguous one. He goes from Man (Mike, Miguel, Miki) and she from Woman (Vespa,

Vesta, Vera). This occurs through the unveiling of identity within the physical surrogation of El Paso/Ciudad Juárez/apartment/road trip. In *Se Llama Cristina*, the identity of personhood according to a variety of names also holds true for a third character: Abel, Abe (Shadow). This is the only name/character which has a marked cultural specificity from the outset. He is the tall, mean, Anglo Texan telephone man. Taking a theoretical sidestep, this situation calls to mind Said's<sup>10</sup> Orientalist theory, which points out normative power and its ability to relegate to Otherness. Thus, Abel, Abe (Shadow) can be easily seen as the Anglo norm from which the disempowered/identity-less others of Mexican descent are constituted. In this sense the text relegates Mexicanness to otherness establishing an unwitting ontological hierarchy. While Man as Miguel finally recognizes his Mexicanness through poetry (he remembers that he is a poet) this does not pose transcendence, understood as an internalized psychological condition which provokes awareness capable of offering the subject the ability to implement beneficial knowledge in future circumstances. While the cycle of self-awareness offers the characters liberation from lack of identity, it is temporary because each and every time the play begins, Man and Woman will have lost their memory; they will have awakened after a drug-induced amnesia; he will eventually become Mike/Miguel/Miki and she Vespa/Vesta/Vera; they will regain and then lose, regain, lose, regain their sense of Self. This sets up a hermetic state (*un estado hermético*) of permanent theatrical liminality through a *mise-en-abîme* in which the self-referentiality of Man and Woman refracts discontinuously in a specific psycho-location (*un estar en*) in that apartment, in that border town (El Paso-Ciudad Juárez) provoked by where they are from (*de dónde son*).

### **Liminality, Loss of Memory, Perpetual Recollection and the Layering of History**

If both *Se Llama Cristina* and *Dreamers* begin by establishing the result of all actions as a *fait accompli*, in *Se Llama* the liminality remains permanent

through the continuous loss of memory while in *Dreamers* it occurs through the opposite, a perpetual recollection of memory. Thus both plays share the staging of memory as a crux, and this is done through the staging of a theatrical liminality that beckons the audience to participate in the reconstruction of memory **as if** (as close to a subjunctive state possible in English) it were taking place in the specific place or locus of memory (*un lugar de la memoria*). This subjunctivity contributes another layer of liminality.

Winding back to my original concerns: what does it mean to attempt to establish or recreate a spatial memory, related to specific places of experience, of suffering (the crossings) within a theatrical space which is clearly neither in any of the places traversed during the crossing, nor related in any way to a 'place memory'? If "A protest demonstration is first and foremost a spatial tactic because it externalizes resistance by removing it from the private sphere and placing it in the public arena" (Halevi and Blumen 286) what does it mean to reverse this process by staging a symbolic public protest of grueling migratory experiences within the safe, private, city-owned space, such as the Dallas Latino Cultural Center? *Dreamers* creates an interesting grey area between Nora's *lieux de mémoire* (sites or institutionalized places, depositories of the repertoire of memory such as monuments, libraries, etc.) and his *milieu de mémoire* --real-life environments of collective memory still being reenacted through non-institutional social habits (Nora 7). *Dreamers* does this through a process of sedimentation, which processes in the company's own act of devised creation through the incorporation of both the individual/collective memories of local Guatemalans and the inclusion of historical facts (the murder of Archbishop Romero, las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo). Thus not only do the characters speak of their own personal histories, but History is articulated through them, in layers. This reconstruction is a recalling of memories removed twice over and continuously refracted, thus moving away from or breaking from the original. As already established, the story is told as a memory reconstruction by two characters that never lived through the plight. This

dramatic trope, although flawed, provides the means through which the real-life stories of local informants were constructed, thus the further sedimentation of experience through layering of personal and dramatic narratives. This (re)construction falls in the interstices between memory and history. It does so in a theatrical space which stands in for the actual locus of both the emotional and physical memories, thus the theatre (meaning not only the stage but the entire building) becomes a stand-in, a surrogate in Roach's terms, thus politicizing a generally speaking apolitical space (the Latino Cultural Center). I would argue that the company's act of gathering information by tapping into the personal memory of the local survivors generates a *milieu de mémoire* (*ambientes o contextos de memoria colectiva*) within the more reified, institutional LCC (a *lieux de mémoire, lugar o sitio*).

### **Institutional Spaces: The Latino Cultural Center**

While one could argue that due to its very foundational logic the LCC would hold a privileged status as a Dallas *milieu de mémoire, un ambiente o contexto de memoria colectiva latina*, in fact it functions more like any other subsidiary of the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs (thus a *lieux de mémoire*). Due to its non-grassroots organizational structure, it functions as a top down bureaucratic institution and not as an organic place of embodied, collective action and community memory. For a fee to theater artists, it offers opportunities for staging Latino/a cultural artifacts and events. The LCC opens its doors to the production of plays, poetry readings, invited guest speaker series, art exhibitions and concerts. Thus the staging of the plight of undocumented North Texas Guatemalans plays out as politically nuanced entertainment at the LCC while for Cara Mía Theater Co., it makes an artistic as well as a political statement of solidarity.<sup>11</sup> Unwittingly, this production conflates and (momentarily) elevates the LCC both as of Nora's *lieu* and *milieu de mémoire*. The staging of this play coincided with the Theater Communications Group conference, present among whom was various



members of El Teatro Campesino (Luis Valdez, wife Lupe and son Kinan). Stylistically and ideologically, *Dreamers* pays homage to the early work of ETC. This play places Cara Mía's work in line with this tradition, which is not only Chicano, but Latin American. Collectively devised, community-based works are markers of the 1960s through the 1980s Teatro Chicano/a movement in the United States and of *El Nuevo Teatro Latinoamericano* movement in Latin America. In this sense, *Dreamers* generated a *convivencia* (borrowing Jorge Dubatti's term via Diégues Caballero, 41-42) in which the sharing of a performance becomes a multi-dimensional experience.

### **Institutional Spaces: The Kitchen Dog Theater**

*Se Llama Cristina* was produced at the Kitchen Dog Theater, <sup>12</sup> a progressive, non-profit independent theater in the center of affluent Dallas, which also ran during the Theater Communications Conference; this guaranteed it a national audience. It drew these sophisticated viewers to The Kitchen Dog Theater, whose programming sometimes includes works by Latino and African American playwrights. According to the date available in its website (<http://www.kitchendogtheater.org/about-prodhistory.html>) in its twenty-two (22) year history and 107 productions between 1991 and 2012, the Kitchen Dog Theater has produced ten (10) Latina/o plays, increasing in frequency over the past six years. This comes to 10.7% in 21 years. According to the Pew Research, Hispanics Trends Projects (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/census-2010/>) in 2010, 38% of the Dallas population was Hispanic, showing an increase of 7% from the previous census in 2000. Of course, the census does not take into consideration those who refuse or are afraid to participate in government-sponsored census projects. Therefore, in 2013 one could reasonably increase the percentage by two to 40%. Does 10.7% of a production history even come close to participating in 40% of the population's cultural background? Is it programming coincidence that one of those 10.7% coincided with the TCG conference, whose recent



goals have been increasing the diversification of 'American' theater? This brings to mind the important question of access: who benefits by this type of sporadic programming? The individual artist? The producing organization? The Latino/a community?

The Kitchen Dog Theater does not pretend to be anything other what it is: a liberal playhouse which aspires towards –but has yet to achieve—truly representative diverse programming. As such, it does not pretend to function neither as a place or environment of Latina/o cultural memory. Thus the staging of a Mexican who does not remember his fundamental identity and who finds the Texas landscape repressive can play out as entertainment and not as identity politics.<sup>13</sup> Locally, the play was well-accepted by mainstream, Anglo reviewers. As a critic for a local online North Texas arts journal, *Theater Jones* ([www.theaterjones.com](http://www.theaterjones.com)) I, too, agreed that the play was well directed, excellently acted and staged. As an art object, this play was successful. As identity politics my concern is with a deeper questioning of self-representational practices, a topic for further research.

### **Conclusion**

This essay hopes to make a significant contribution to contemporary critical discourse, grounded in contemporary Latino/a theater productions currently being staged in North Texas. My work is informed as a bilingual (Spanish/English) scholar, journalist and community arts activist member of TANTO, Teatro Alianza of North Texas Organizations ([www.tantoteatro.org](http://www.tantoteatro.org)).

© **Teresa Marrero**



## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup> Although the title is in Spanish, there is no Spanish in this play, and the title follows English language conventions.

<sup>2</sup> I draw from the *Diccionario filosófico, Proyecto Filosofía en Español*, 'Ceremonias-Ritos' [258], <http://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df258.htm>. Web. 8/31/13. While ritual is linked with the repetition of human or animal actions that may be devoid of transcendental significance (the analogy of elephants using sand as a libation in the absence of water parallels the Muslim use of sand for libation in the absence of water). The aspect that distinguishes between these two would be that in the case of the Muslim practice, as a religious practice it is dictated by Koran, while in the case of the elephants there is no higher category ruling the action. One is measured by the reduction of physical temperature while the other is measured in terms of spiritual cleaning. Thus, in my essay, I use the concept of ritual as the repetition of actions in a prescribed manner, devoid of what could be termed numatic. And while ceremonies can serve the ulterior purpose of transcendence, ritual actions may not.

<sup>3</sup> On the notion of the numen, numatic: "El *numen* es una categoría religiosa, pero no es necesariamente divino....*Numen, inis*, incluye, en los usos del latín clásico, referencia a un «centro de deseo eficaz (potente)», a alguna entidad dotada de algo así como intereses, proyectos, planes o decisiones eficaces que pueden tener a los hombres como objeto. Decisiones que el *numen* revela o expresa de algún modo a los hombres inspirándoles temor, confianza, veneración." *Diccionario filosófico, Proyecto Filosofía en Español*, 'Numen (definición fenomenológica)' [ 353 ], <http://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df258.htm>. Web. 8/31/13.

<sup>4</sup> McKinley (2009).

<sup>5</sup> "Dasein is revealed by projection into and engagement with a personal world that is both personal and historical" (Phillipse 212).

<sup>6</sup> In terms of cityscapes, Dallas is notorious for tearing down the old and continuously (re)building, reinventing itself.

<sup>7</sup> Common examples are, to name just a few: all National Libraries, the Smithsonian Institution, The Louvre, the Washington D.C. Mall, the Viet Nam War Veteran's Wall, the image of Ernesto Che Guevara in Havana's Plaza de la Revolución, el Angel de la Independencia and El Monumento a la Revolución in Mexico, D.F., la Plaza de Mayo en Buenos Aires, the Great Wall of China, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Marrero (May 21, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Enevoldson (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Said, *Orientalism* (1978).

11 This was quite evident on the evening when the Theater Communications Group invitees, which included the presence of Luis Valdez, Diane Rodriguez, and other Chicano theater veterans. Cara Mía's aesthetic is directly linked aesthetically and ideologically with early Teatro Campesino works. Personal observation.

12 Its mission is "to provide a place where questions of justice, morality, and human freedom can be explored. We choose plays that challenge our moral and social consciences, invite our audiences to be provoked, challenged, and amazed."  
<http://www.kitchendogtheater.org/about.html>. Web. 27 September 2013.

13 Maria Irene Fornes' *Mud* launched the Kitchen Dog Theater in 1991; in 1993-94 they produced Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, in 1999-2000 Caridad Svich's *Fugitive Pieces*, 2000-01 Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, 2002-03 Elaine Rivera's *Curanderas! Serpents of the Clouds*, 2005-06 Jose Rivera's *Cloud Tectonics*, 2010-11 Elaine Romero's *Ponzi*, 2011-12 Quiara Alegría Hudes' *26 Miles* and in 2012-13 Octavio Solis's *Se Llama Cristina*.

### Works Cited

Berne, Eric. *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Ballantine, 1976.

Cara Mía Theater Company. *Dreamers: A Bloodline*. Unpublished script. June 2013.

*Diccionario filosófico. Proyecto Filosofía en Español*, 'Ceremonias-Ritos' [258], <http://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df258.htm>. Web. 31 August 2013.

*Diccionario Filosófico. Proyecto Filosofía en Español*, 'Numen (definición fenomenológica)' [ 353 ], <http://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df258.htm>. Web. 31 August 2013.

Diéguez Caballero, Ileana. *Escenarios liminales: teatralidades, performances y política*. Buenos Aires: Atuel, 2007.

Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. I. *The History of Manners*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

Enevoldson, T.P. "Recreational drugs and their neurological consequences" in *J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry* 2004;75:iii9-iii15  
doi:10.1136/jnnp.2004.045732.  
[http://jnnp.bmj.com/content/75/suppl\\_3/iii9.full](http://jnnp.bmj.com/content/75/suppl_3/iii9.full). Web. February 2014.

Marrero, Teresa. Features: Profiles and Stories. "An Interview with Octavio Solis." *Theater Jones*.

- <http://www.theaterjones.com/features/20130521082921/2013-05-21/QA-Octavio-Solis>. Web. 21 May 2013.
- . Performance Review: "It's a tricky thing: *Se Llama Cristina* by Octavio Solis." *Theater Jones*. <http://www.theaterjones.com>. Web. 27 May 2013.
- . Features: Profiles and Stories. "An Interview with David Lozano." *Theater Jones*.  
<http://www.theaterjones.com/features/20130526090348/2013-05-26/QA-David-Lozano>. Web. 26 May 2013.
- . Performance Review: "Dreaming in Color: Dreamers, a Bloodline by Cara Mia Theater Co." *Theater Jones*.  
<http://www.theaterjones.com/reviews/20130604011900/2013-06-04/Cara-Mia-Theatre-Company/The-Dreamers-A-Bloodline>. Web. 4 June 2013.
- McKinley Jr., James C. "Two Sides of a Border: One Violent, One Peaceful" in *The New York Times*, January 22, 2009.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/23/us/23elpaso.html>. Web. 3 February 2014.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. *Representations* # 26. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux des Mémoires."  
<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/articles/89NoraLieuxIntroRepresentations.pdf>. Web. 1 September 2013.
- Halevi, Sharon and Orna Blumen, Orna. "What a Difference a Place Makes: The Reflexive (Mis) management of a City's Pasts," *Journal of Urban History*. Vol: 37, Issue: 3, May 2011:384-399. Web. 1 September 2013.
- Lindsay, Michael D. "Organizational Liminality and Interstitial Creativity: The Fellowship of Power." *Social Forces* Vol. 89, No. 1 (September 2010:163-184). Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40927558>. Web. 13 September 2013.
- Phillipse, Herman. *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead, Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Solis, Octavio. *Se Llama Cristina*. Unpublished script. June 2013.



Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure*. Chicago, Aldine  
Pub. Co., 1969.

Argus-a  
Artes & Humanidades

