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# Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism



Patricia A. Ybarra



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## PREFACE

*Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism* emerges from a combination of frustration in the rehearsal room and the throes of political rage. Its first inkling came when I was directing a production of Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* in 2006 in the midst of a national debate on immigration policy which resulted in marches and activism throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> The play tells the story of a queer Medea in the midst of a transnational custody dispute on the Mexican border in a post-NAFTA apocalyptic world. Riffing on the classic Medea myth, *The Hungry Woman* is a meditation on geopolitical violence on the border. A dramatic iteration of her famous 1992 "Queer Aztlán" essay, the play confronts the economic violence of the 1980s and 1990s in North America as its characters come to terms with the failures of cultural nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Moraga's critique of the neoliberal project in hemispheric iteration was at the center of my concerns, although I am (at least) a generation removed from the historic Chicano cultural nationalism that frames the play. Staging *The Hungry Woman* made me confront the near impossibility of representing the lived material experience of the neoliberal condition onstage. How exactly does one stage the destruction and denigration caused by savage capitalism in the wake of the demise of the U.S. social welfare state and the move to free-market economies throughout the hemisphere? How can one adequately represent the structural inequality created therein or the spaces it most frequently inhabits? To literally represent the U.S.-Mexico border on stage is to risk reifying its violence in a too localized manner. Alternately, to be allusive (or elusive) is to stage a metaphor devoid of material reality. Four years later, I faced the problem again when I directed *En Las Manos de la Muerte*, a play written by a student about narcotraffic and the enigmatic Mexican popular saint Santa Muerte (Saint Death).<sup>3</sup> Representing the insatiable violence of transnational business risked the play being made into something like a stock blockbuster action movie: a parade of young men making bad choices down there rather than being soldiers of commerce for us up here. I asked myself: How does one render economic violence as viscerally as the physical violence that propels the action of narcorealistic representations? How does one make the connection between these forms of violence palpable? How does one represent transnational consumerism on stage? How and when does one step out of realism so as to avoid reifying violence as spectacle, allowing it to do the political work Tiffany Ana López claims of the violence in Migdalia Cruz's plays?<sup>4</sup> Or, alternately, when

does one employ theatrical realism to avoid metaphor? The problem of how to render economic violence and its “real” embodied iterations theatrically without resorting to simplistic metaphors, cheap equivalency, universalism, or over-literalism haunts me years later. Although I have no fail-safe theatrical or dramaturgical solution to these conundrums, the plays and performances I write about in this book sketch out contours of possibility. I adamantly believe that the very problem of representing geopolitical economic violence onstage has consequences for thinking about these problems offstage. It is for this reason that I am dedicated to close reading theatrical performance as a mode of political thinking under neoliberal capitalism.

I define *neoliberalism* as a political and economic philosophy whose proponents espouse free markets and privatization of state enterprises as the mode by which prosperity and democracy are best reached. These policies, which include IMF interventions, NAFTA, shifts in immigration policy, the escalation of border industrialization initiatives, and varied austerity programs have also created the conditions for many of the most tumultuous events in the Americas in the last forty years. These phenomena include the support of dictatorships in the Southern Cone, the 1994 Cuban Rafter Crisis, contemporary femicide in Juárez, Mexico, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, and the rise of narcotrafficking as a violent and vigorous global business throughout the Americas. In *Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism*, I explore how Latinx artists’ concerns with these conditions in the Americas have encouraged them to develop innovative theatrical modes of representation to address this violence. I use the term *Latinx* to signal a gender neutral cultural signifier, so as to be truly inclusive of all genders of persons of Latin American cultural identity without resorting to a gender binary.<sup>5</sup> This book differs from critical works in Latinx studies that only rarely address theater and performance as a key mode of cultural production; it also stands apart from theater and performance studies texts that primarily consider Latinx theater as a mode of articulating ethnic identity as/or difference. Instead this book concentrates on how Latinx playwrights critique contemporary geopolitics by making theater that reveals neoliberal violence as a systemic condition that is visibly, audibly, and tangibly comprehensible in its variations. There are two questions that I anticipate here: Why U.S. Latinx writers, and why theater? The first question gestures toward the fact that Latin American artists and intellectuals should be privileged as cultural workers and witnesses describing the situation in which they live, especially since U.S. citizens so rarely read and consider their voices. Yet, I would argue that the point of view of U.S. Latinx persons who have affective and familial ties to Latin American sites, histories, and politics are sometimes the most agile at underscoring the particular transnational intricacies of neoliberal politics. On a formal level, the U.S. Latinx writers I consider in this book purposefully and consciously navigate many of the U.S.-based tropes and narratives that are so corrosive in dismissing neoliberal violence:

blaming its victims, naturalizing its effects as inevitable, or suggesting individualistic achievement as the only way out of impoverishment. For many minoritarian subjects, neoliberal discourses rhyme with longer-standing racist U.S. discourses used to explain away inequality as a result of laziness, lack of ambition, or failure to assimilate to mainstream U.S. (capitalist) culture. This makes them particularly sensitive to these mobilizations on a transnational scale. These playwrights are modeling a mode of concern that breaks with earlier models of solidarity, attempting instead to self-consciously use their roles as “halfies”—whose “national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education or parentage”—to think rigorously about transnational conditions.<sup>6</sup> Within anthropology, halfie researchers are acknowledged to have some privileged insight into and access to the cultures that they write about, while not being fully immersed members of that culture. Like reflexive anthropologists the Latinx artists I consider use their roles as insiders/outsideers strategically. In fact, many of the artists actually stage their distance from the experience of those they write about, performing a new mode of solidarity based on the differences in experience and identity between author, character, and persona.<sup>7</sup> And even when they are ambivalent about this difference, as in the case of Cherríe Moraga, their use of formal theatrical devices within their works warn against simplistic ideas of authenticity that have derailed many theoretical discussions about identity in neoliberal times.

My answer as to why theater also begins with a qualification. I recognize that many other forms of media may in fact be more influential because larger portions of the population have access to them. Theater targets a smaller and often exclusive audience, making its critique less widely available than other forms. Yet there is some potential in this lesser scope. While there is often pressure in commercial theater to make bankable work, there are independent and university theaters that can afford to flout the desire for capitalist, individualistic heroic narratives. Mass-produced media have a harder time doing this, especially considering the emphasis on test marketing to create the largest possible audience to render greater potential profit. In addition, in the theater, relations between the United States and Mexico in particular, and between the United States and Latin America more generally, are not primarily embedded in a film industry dominated by crime dramas and espionage tropes, meaning that theater does not have to participate in a filmic industrial complex aimed at allaying or escalating U.S. fears about security and criminality in relationship to the permeability of national borders. Certainly, the theater often likes its heroes as much as film does, as the marketing of Matthew Paul Olmos, *so go the ghosts of méxico, part 1*, which I discuss in chapter 3, will make clear. Yet the entrepreneurial ideal is less naturalized because of how we make theater—often in communities of cooperation rather than as primarily solo pursuits. Quite simply, I believe that theater’s smallness and its lack of mainstream relevance allow us to tell different stories. (Lin-Manuel

Miranda's hit musical *Hamilton*, about the eponymous figure imagined as a man of color, is an exception, of course, it notably being a tale of entrepreneurship.) In a similar vein, the locality of theater at the site of production can privilege ideas, concepts, narratives, and subject matters that do meet national and international standards of popular interest, expanding the possibilities for representing local, global, and glocal concerns for divergent communities.

Attention to what theater can't do is equally important. The very limitations of the stage—of what can be represented and not—illuminates the (im)mobilities, violence, erasures, temporalities, and cramped sites of neoliberal life in the Americas. For example, theater is largely incapable of depicting the large-scale violence found in feature films and documentaries on narcotraffic or the epic scope of mainstream narco-narratives; theater's alignment of bodies in bounded space points to the limitations of movement across borders and through territory; theater's simultaneous materiality and abstraction—namely, its inability to seamlessly represent reality with real things—articulates how objects transform under transnational capitalism; and, in some cases, the retention of the theatrical frame, rather than its erasure, serves as a reminder of our position as spectators of neoliberal capital as a (dis)organized performance. My claims about theater, here, if universalized, are not new. Herbert Blau, Spencer Golub, Bert States, and Alice Rayner, among others, have made persuasive arguments for the power of theatricality in the theater.<sup>8</sup> What is new about this book is my emphasis on how theatrical strategies reveal the way economic structures displace, discipline, and disintegrate bodies and souls under neoliberal global capitalism in the Americas.

The book's introduction is followed by four chapters, each of which explores a different political, social, and historical phenomenon created by neoliberal economic practices in the Americas. The introduction provides a brief history of neoliberalism, then moves on to explain why Latinx theater is a crucial nexus of political critique. The first chapter considers how Latinx playwrights in the United States engaged with NAFTA, privatization, and economic liberalization by mobilizing indigenous culture, cosmology, and identity within their plays. The works I examine include Cherríe Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* (1986/1994), *The Hungry Woman* (2001/2005), *Heart of the Earth: A Popul Vuh Story* (1994), and *New Fire: To Make Things Right Again* (2012); Michael John Garcés's *points of departure* (2005); and Luis Valdez's *Mummified Deer* (2000) and *Earthquake Sun* (2004). This chapter explores the fate of pan-indigenous movements as a ground of social change in the Americas, revisiting the possibilities and failures of cultural nationalism along the way. Rather than dismissing these plays as co-opting indigenous practice, I argue that they reveal long-standing and complicated engagements with theatricality as well as the history of indigenous practice in the Americas over the last forty years. The historical focus of this chapter illuminates the shifting representational practices from the 1970s to present. It is also

here that I think critically about post-revolutionary eschatology as a mode of undoing the exoticization of indigenous practices in U.S. Latino theater. The second half of the chapter, which features Michael John Garcés's *points of departure*, reveals how his rethinking of classical dramaturgy in the Americas ultimately leads to the end of the tragic liberal subject as hero. Chapter 2 explores plays about the 1994 Balseros Crisis, during which thousands of rafters left Cuba because of the horrendous economic conditions there. Plays I examine include Eduardo Machado's *Kissing Fidel* (2005) and *Havana Is Waiting* (2001), Jorge Cortiñas's *Sleepwalkers* (1999), Caridad Svich's *Prodigal Kiss* (1999), Nilo Cruz's *A Bicycle Country* (1999), and María Irene Fornés's *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* (1996) and *Balseros (Rafters)*, an opera based on that script (1997). In particular, this chapter considers how theatrical renderings of temporality and motion make shifts in the definition of exile and migrant visible. They also articulate how national narratives of progress—Marxian and capitalist—are upended by the realities of Special Period Cuba. Nested within queer affect, these critiques of "straight" time and history reveal how queer time functions in everyday neoliberal life.

Chapter 3 considers representations of femicide in the Americas, with special emphasis on the killings in Juárez, Mexico, from 1993 to the present. Plays I consider in this chapter include Victor Cazares's *The Dead Women of Juárez-Town & Smiley* (2008), Coco Fusco's *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* (2003), Caridad Svich's *Iphigenia Crash Lands Falls on the Neon Shell That Was Once Her Heart (A Rave Fable)* (2004), and Marisela Orta's *Braided Sorrow* (2008). I also consider two plays by Mexican playwrights, translated and presented in the United States by Latinx artists Christina Marín and Jimmy Noriega, respectively: *Mujeres de Arena* by Humberto López (2004) and Cristina Michaus's *Women of Ciudad Juárez* (2011). My analysis explores the limits of dramaturgical and narrative modes that attempt to display, investigate, or authenticate these acts of violence as crimes that can be solved. At the same time, I consider how the frequent production of documentary plays may be a form of seriality in itself that underscores that in the times of neoliberalism, necropolitical violence is a constant. I move on to consider how many playwrights embrace nonrealistic modes of representing violence as an ethical mode that illuminates the seriality and theatricality of the crimes themselves. While some playwrights redefine the tragic and the obscene (*obscena*, the literal offstage), others concentrate on the impossibility of becoming other.

Chapter 4 examines plays about narcotraffic that instantiate the relationship between physical and economic violence in the United States and Mexico. I explore how many Latinx playwrights' choices to stray from filmic narco-realism make their plays more effective at revealing the connections between economic opportunity, performances of masculinity, and excruciating violence. I also consider how the emergence of the narcoentrepreneur in the Americas links Foucault's concept of homo economicus to the long history

of drug trafficking. Because most of the works I consider were written during and depict the period of Mexico's narcoguerra under former president Felipe Calderón (2006–2012), they also examine how the Mexican state staged violence to its own ends. Plays considered include Victor Cazares's *Religiones Gringas* (2011) and *Ramses contra los monstruos* (2013), Tanya Saracho's *El Nogalar* (2011), Octavio Solís's *Santos y Santos* (1993) and *Dreamlandia* (2000), and Matthew Paul Olmos's *so go the ghosts of méxico, part 1* (2013). My conclusion will illuminate the stakes of thinking theatrically about hemispheric neoliberalism at the cultural moment in which this book was written.

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Portions of chapter 2 appeared in "Havana Isn't Waiting: Staging Travel during Cuba's Special Period," in *Performance in the Borderlands*, edited by Ramón H. Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young (Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

A very different version of a portion of chapter 4 was published as "Latino/a Dramaturgy as Historiography," in *Theatre/Performance Historiography*:

the Americas exactly because of how *Iphigenia Crash Land Falls* eschews realism. The wounds left on the bodies of the *fresa* girls echo Violeta's, linking torture by the military police and the extinction of women's bodies at the Mexico border.

The preponderance of drug consumption in Svich's play links pleasure, subjectivity, and capital in uncomfortable ways. Iphigenia's escape, after all, is a journey into the pleasures of Ecstasy and chemical self-loss; she is a '90s club kid reminiscent of Michael Alig and his crew, a crew that emerged with the intensification of Mexican drug trafficking. The play makes the relationship between narcotrafficking and governance explicit. When Svich creates a standoff between corporations, the Zero gang drug traffickers, and the government, she links governmental and nongovernmental actors throughout the hemisphere. When she introduces Camila's and Orestes's drug-induced hazes, she articulates the connective corridor of narcotics from the site in which coca is grown (presumed to be Colombia, South America) and where it often ends up, in the narcotrafficked border of Mexico on its way to the United States. Today, after six years of the Calderón's narcoguerra and two years of Enrique Peña Nieto's war on the left, we could push harder on these representations, revealing that the government and the traffickers are complicit with each other rather than in an adversarial relationship. In the next chapter, I will explore these entanglements in the work of Octavio Solis, Tanya Saracho, Victor Cazares, and Matthew Olmos. Each of these playwrights confronts the complex economic and social history of narcotrafficking throughout the hemisphere while gesturing toward different modes of thinking about how the dead might rise among us.

## Chapter 4



### Swallowing the '80s (W)Hole: Millennial Drama of the Narcoguerra

Narcotrafficking is a primary contributor to the transnational American imaginary, in part because of the role of U.S. and Mexican films. In the United States, the most famous of these films are *Scarface*, whose poster graces the walls of many a narcotrafficker's home, and *Traffic*, a film that collated a series of famous rumors about 1980s and '90s narcotraffic into a moralistic parable aimed at preserving the heteronormative family—as nation—as the defense against drug consumption.<sup>1</sup> An inadvertent, more recent meditation is also relevant here: *Dallas Buyers Club*, which clumsily and unintentionally reveals the deep relationship between U.S. neoliberalism and transnational drug commerce.<sup>2</sup>

For most viewers, *Dallas Buyers Club* is not a movie about narcotraffic; it is a movie about AIDS, the inefficiency of the federal government, and the bravery of an HIV-infected man who figures out how to use alternative drug regimes, often in addition to azidothymidine (AZT) to make a cocktail, and how to get these non-FDA-approved drugs into the United States. Based on the life of Ron Woodroof, *Dallas Buyers Club* was wildly successful. To the consternation of many viewers, myself included, this film effectively erased the collective forms of DIY medical research and distribution enacted by queer persons and their allies that characterized most buyers' clubs and advocacy organizations. Critics such as A. O. Scott, who praised the acting in the film, juxtaposed *Dallas Buyers Club* with *How to Survive a Plague*—an award-winning documentary that follows ACT UP's activism in the 1980s. *How to Survive a Plague* convincingly argues that this activism led to legal dispensation of the cocktail and the effective end of an HIV-positive diagnosis as death sentence.<sup>3</sup> Scott and others also rightfully criticized the film's portrayal of trans characters and its stubborn insistence on employing a straight white male protagonist with homophobic tendencies as a hero in the AIDS struggle.<sup>4</sup>

What was virtually unremarked upon was the way in which *Dallas Buyers Club* valorized entrepreneurship as an individualistic mode of activism,

encased within this white male body as an ideal conduit. While Woodroof certainly has a staff that helps him, including a trans friend and a butch black woman, most of the research about the disease and trips to fetch the drugs are solo treks by Woodroof, who works with doctors around the world to obtain portions of the cocktail. Nothing in any review I have found mentioned the political implications of his trips to Mexico—the primary place he purchased drugs—or the role of Latinx persons in the film. But they are everywhere, hidden in plain sight. The first appearance by a Latino is when Woodroof ends up being diagnosed with AIDS after a workplace accident. After indulging in the requisite racialized insults, Woodroof tries to help this undocumented (and never named) Latino worker to escape from an oil drill by cutting the power. This solution is the only possible one as the supervisor in charge is unwilling to call for medical help because of the worker's immigration status. When the surge he tries to stymie knocks Woodroof out, he ends up in the hospital, linking an act of supposed generosity toward a Latino subject to his own self-discovery. The first person to get Woodroof the contraband AZT is a nameless Latino orderly, who dumps pills for him behind the hospital for pay. And finally, there are Woodroof's trips to Mexico to obtain many of the drugs he needs for the club. The footage in Mexico is nondescript, featuring a fairly standard border crossing by car into the desert, tapping into standard dramaturgies of crossing. Yet the doctor from whom he is obtaining drugs is supposedly in Mexico City, a megalopolis in the mountains never seen on film. This elision reveals a certain U.S. imaginary of Mexico which erases Mexican modernity and cosmopolitanism in its desire to preserve an idea of Mexico as less civilized or advanced than the United States; not surprisingly, this trope underscores the lack of regulation in Mexico, allowing Woodroof his entrepreneurial virtuosity.

*Dallas Buyers Club* betrays a racial unconscious in which the business of narcotraffic is a Latino affair. Brown bodies are everywhere in the background of the film, reminding us of the traffic in bodies and goods between Mexico and the United States, and particularly Mexico and Texas in the neoliberal '90s. The twist is that the Mexican bodies are not associated with the copious cocaine Woodroof snorts in the early scenes of the movie but with the antiviral drugs usually considered to be part of the licit economy of medical institutions. The film, despite its nationalist essentialism and casual state-o-phobia, exposes a more complex relationship between the biomedical industry, narcotraffic, and the emergence of the antistatist entrepreneur as hero. The film backwardly admits that the 1980s inaugurates a form of entrepreneurship deeply embedded in the business of drugs—the period critic Hermann Herlinghaus calls the pharmacological era.<sup>5</sup> Viewers of *Breaking Bad* will also be familiar with these figures. They lurk within our romance of the (straight) white male entrepreneur, who stands out in a sea of lesser Latino luminaries.<sup>6</sup>

This detour into film to introduce a series of Chicano/a plays on narcotraffic highlights their dramaturgical and political difference from mainstream,

even critical mainstream, representations of drug trafficking. In contrast to their filmic companions, the plays by Cazares, Saracho, Olmos, and Solis consciously take on the idea of the entrepreneur and the specters of the narcoguerra as a state-sponsored war. Rather than remaining in an apolitical present, these plays track the current moment in a much longer history of Mexico and the United States. In doing so, they show the trenchant links between the dominance of drug trafficking and the deep history of neoliberalism, including its inducement of everyday performances of self. It is often the theatricality of these works—the impossibility of representing horrors within the frame of narco-realism—that harbors their most trenchant critiques. This issue becomes most crucial when thinking about the visibility of violence under the current narcoguerra.

I learned this lesson firsthand when I directed a student play about drug trafficking and Santa Muerte titled *En las Manos de la Muerte*, by Alexandra Bernson.<sup>7</sup> Bernson, a student of Latino/a descent, became interested in the recent history of drug trafficking and its relationship to Santa Muerte while taking a playwriting class. Muerte is a folk saint, associated with both death and the Virgin, who is known as a patron saint of those outside of cultural norms, including drug dealers, prisoners, and queers.<sup>8</sup> Bernson's play followed the lives of two young men, Benecio and Incenio, who decide to dedicate their lives to the business and to Santa Muerte to escape the very limited opportunities of their northern Mexican pueblo. The play plays at the edge of narco-realism. As in many movies, successful and unsuccessful performances of masculinity function as harbingers of possibility in the narco world. The moral centers of the play, not surprisingly, are women: Benecio's girlfriend and Incenio's mother, neither of whom convinces their male loved ones to leave the business. Santa Muerte's seduction is too great.

Although the play largely replicates many of the genre expectations of narco-realistic films and their gender politics, there were openings in the script to show the queer everyday worship of Santa Muerte and to depict the real violence of narcotraffic without sensationalism. The violence was not made metaphorical; I staged the scenes somewhat realistically so as to avoid aestheticization of violence. At the same time, I underscore the playwright's attempts to avoid abjecting or heroizing narcotraffickers or their victims. The importance of reproducing images of these killings within the media was staged by showing the murderers taking pictures without actually reproducing the images of the dead themselves. In addition, a great deal of context was provided to the audience to underscore the geopolitical realities of narcotraffic, which were not in the script itself: U.S. complicity with the regime, the increased brutality of Calderón's narcoguerra, and the post-NAFTA economic situation in rural communities.

This context is also the backdrop for the plays I consider here. The passage of drugs on land through Central America and Mexico escalated after the crackdown on water transport to Miami, whose heyday is chronicled in

*Miami Vice* and other forms of early '80s narco-realism. In the older regime, Colombian cocaine was transported by boat to the United States. After this pathway was blocked in the 1990s cocaine began to be transported through Mexican intermediaries who were not producing or controlling product but being paid as employees to carry it for the Colombian cartels. Soon, however, the Mexicans created cartels of their own, with their own regional differences and rivalries, which were often managed rather than eradicated by the police, military, and politicians from the United States and Mexico. The Mexican cartels also began growing heroin and marijuana in much larger quantities, while also displacing many of the Colombian cartels as controllers of cocaine. Refusing to be complicit with the system, at least ostensibly, was Felipe Calderón, the Mexican president from 2006 to 2012, who called for a war on drugs at the beginning of his term. His desire to attack narco-traffickers directly has led not to their eradication or loss in profits but to an ever more violent Mexico with more entrenched acephalous networks. For many in Mexico, Calderón is as much of an assassin as the drug lords. In fact, he might have simply favored certain traffickers rather than others instead of eradicating them. There is, of course, a much longer history of drug trafficking and production between the United States and Mexico that goes back to the Porfiriato—an issue I will address later in the chapter in relation to Cazares's work. At this point, however, I wish to trace the history of narcotraffic as depicted in work by Latinx playwrights, beginning with Octavio Solís. Solís's *Santos y Santos* (1993) and *Dreamlandia* (2000), which take on the business of narcotraffic before the narcoguerra, suggest the dramaturgical innovations necessitated by the changing practice of drug trafficking and the performative gestures embedded within narco-entrepreneurship. Together with plays by Saracho, Cazares, and Olmos, Solís's works articulate a neoliberal pharmacological economy in the Americas, the emergence of an entrepreneurial form of selfhood necessitated by economic conditions, and a particular form of movement between the United States and Mexico which undoes the unidirectional northward migration narrative. In exploring these playwrights works together, I explore how Latinx dramaturgical thinking can complicate the historiographical geography of neoliberalism.

### Solís's *Santos y Santos*: Past as Prologue

One could argue that the genealogy of narco-dramas on the U.S. Latinx stage emerges with Octavio Solís's *Santos y Santos*, a play that interrogates the boundary between licit and illicit transnational business in a pre-NAFTA era of neoliberalism.<sup>9</sup> First produced at the Dallas Theater Center in 1994, this play, set in "the heady mid-eighties," revolves around two Chicano brothers, Fernie and Mike Santos, who supplement their law firm earnings with

drug trafficking.<sup>10</sup> The entrance of a third brother, Tomás, who disapproves of this practice and rats on them to the police, sets off a series of events that violently ends the brothers' business as well as many lives, including that of a federal judge. Written around the time of NAFTA was being passed (1994), and with acute hindsight regarding labor practices, the play hearkens to the era in which Mexican and U.S. traffickers were intermediaries for the Colombian cartels, when conspicuous consumption of cocaine was at its height in the United States.

From this temporal distance, Solís underscores shifts in labor made more striking in the later neoliberal period—the move from material to immaterial labor among the Latinx middle classes. The Santos brothers are the sons of a furniture maker. Although their role as lawyers registers a standard narrative of upward mobility in which manual labor is replaced by brain work or immaterial labor for subsequent generations, the play also documents the move away from making one's living from the production of material objects for consumption to the transport (but not production) of consumable pharmacological products. I believe that this contrast is more important than the juxtaposition of licit and illicit activity that the morality of the play ostensibly hinges upon: the conundrum created by the fact that Latinx lawyers who do good in the community also use and sell drugs.

Like many of Solís's plays, *Santos* is haunted by white men's abjected love for Mexican culture, particularly Mexican women, underscoring the erotic relationship underneath transnational transits. This attraction/repulsion threatens his Anglo characters' clean ties to belonging exclusively to a white U.S. nation, exposing a more complicated history. Judge Benton, whom the Santos men eventually kill, is a case in point. Early in the play, Benton approaches Tomás at a banquet to convince him to work for him, tapping into Tomás's discomfort with his brothers' "dirty work" (which may or may not tap into some form of Chicano self-hatred). Tommy, as he is often called in the play, rejects the offer, but the judge admits that he has a child with a prostitute in Juárez whose eyes remind him of Tommy's, which makes Tommy a sort of a son to the judge. The judge's ode to Tommy, while framed within an act of heterosexual sex, nonetheless resounds with a certain homoeroticism. The judge confesses the following in his encounter with the prostitute: "but this santos runt, this beautiful boy, he pierces my soul, with a message deep, dark."<sup>11</sup> Crossing the border, for the judge, is an intimate and eroticized act as is his paternity of Tommy, queering what seems to be a very orthodox paternal relation. Tomás's relationship to Judge Benton is the background against which other forms of legacy, futurity, and family appear. In the most literal sense, Tommy survives by killing Benton, after Tommy has already betrayed his own family. Yet Tommy has no legacy because his progeny does not survive. His child with his brother's wife, Vicki, dies when she miscarries after her husband beats her up. In relation to the other plays I consider in this volume, however, Tommy's form of "no future" (in terms of reproductivity)



feels more dystopic than liberating. Constant references are made to characters' anxiety about providing for their family as a form of futurity and the bleak world that does not allow for the survival of the Latinx family within the rubric of the American dream.

Solis, however, avoids individualizing this plight, that is, making the Santos family's foibles the cause of their failures, by carefully undoing the idea of the American dream in rapturous dystopian speeches. These ecstatic dialogues and speeches ironize both U.S. exceptionalist rhetorics of justice and self-congratulatory paeans to cultural hybridity endemic to the era. Consider, for example, the prose poem, for which I use the term *reverie*, delivered by the judge and Tomás:

TOMÁS: LA VIRGIN DE JUSTICIA

JUDGE: appointed by the people for a drug-free America

TOMÁS: our *sierra madre oriental*

TOMÁS: ROPA PARA TODA LA FAMILIA

...

JUDGE: MOLE WITH YOUR METHADONE

TOMÁS: DUTY-FREE GOODS

JUDGE: FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

TOMÁS: AND ALL THE REHAB PROGRAMS, CITIZEN PATROLS,  
THE INTERDICTION AND STIFF SENTENCING, THE DEATH  
PENALTIES WILL BE OBSOLETE

JUDGE: DRUG-TURF CRIME WILL VANISH ACROSS THE  
COUNTRY

TOMÁS: AND THE RACE OF MOCTEZUMA WILL AT LAST  
ACHIEVE FULL CITIZENSHIP

JUDGE: YES YES YESSSSSS

TOMÁS: DON'T GET ME WRONG, I LOVE MY PEOPLE

JUDGE: IT SHOWS IN EVERY FIBER OF YOUR BEING.<sup>12</sup>

The near orgasmic rhythm of their exchange, resolves into equivocation about and recrimination of Mexican people ("DON'T GET ME WRONG I LOVE MY PEOPLE"), undoing the possibility of liberation through U.S. judicial paradigms. Tomás's line, in fact, is repeated after appearing earlier in the conversation when he tries to explain that Mexicans are in "a cycle" they can't get out of and thus "it is not our fault," echoing the desultory discourse of the Moynihan Report. The elision between the men's voices allows rhetoric to perform outside of an agonistic relationship between characters with opposing points of view. In this regard, Solis's use of the *reverie* formally undoes the autonomy of individual subjectivity and dialogic debate by blurring the voices of seemingly disparate characters. By disrespecting these borders, Solis undoes the very bedrock of U.S. American Aristotelian dramaturgy and liberal democracy—the autonomous subject—as he denaturalizes

the rhetoric that holds this form of subjectivity in place. This formal innovation begs us to rethink the dramaturgy of liberal democracy itself. Here, as in *Dreamlandia*, the reverie also undoes the self in a productive way, even when the content of the speeches is ironic.

While the play remains within U.S. borders, Solis's critique of the coming transnational pharmacological regime is eerily prescient, forming a precursor for other works I consider in this chapter. Written on the eve of the passage of NAFTA, their riff on the false hope of free trade is scathing. In retrospect, of course, this passage is even more barbed: rather than building the Mexican economy, NAFTA debilitated it, except, of course, for a few northern businesses, including narcotrafficking, which it greatly bolstered. Judge Benson and Tommy's reverie encapsulates Solis's larger critique of the transnational drug industry throughout the play. Everyday dealers are portrayed as victims of the larger system. The overarching critique comes from Fernie, who says of the judge: "He's just a little *moco* in the bigger conspiracy! I'm talking ongoing colonial imperialism for our *pinchi* souls, man. Drugs are the twenty-first century conquistadores. Mikey is a victim of the International Narcotics Trade! A huge motherfucking enterprise that cannot be done without the CIA, the FBI the DEA, the INS, and even the Holy Church who has realized that the opiate of the people is OPIUM."<sup>13</sup> The indictment of the system here does not play into the phobia of the state espoused by many U.S. movies about narcotraffic. Instead, Solis's play reveals how drug trafficking exploits and extends earlier historical modes of domination.

Solis's invocation of the border is equally revisionist. Rather than fetishize the border as a site of crime, he thinks of El Paso-Juárez as a node in a larger geographical network that implicitly gestures to the history of commerce throughout greater Mexico. The Santos brothers' father's origin in Concordia, Sinaloa, is worth noting. Concordia, as the play tells us, is an area known for furniture production: a famous licit business. Yet, for most readers today and perhaps even in the '90s, Sinaloa brings to mind the Sinaloa cartel. Although this cartel was ascendant around the time *Santos y Santos* was written, there is a longer history of trafficking in the area. Sinaloa harbored some of the first attempts at mass production of marijuana and its distribution from the '60s onward.<sup>14</sup> The areas where the furniture and drug enterprises originate are at opposite ends of the state, yet their juxtaposition gestures to narcotraffic as a form of transnational commerce, rather than just being a crime. Like furniture building, narcotraffic is intimately related to the upward mobility of Mexicans on both sides of the border. Rather than remaining an amorphous evil sited at an abjected location, as in U.S. filmic dramaturgy, in *Santos*, narcotraffic is a ruthless business, but a business nonetheless. Solis's evocation of narco-masculinity, the performance of masculinity so key to this genre, is less stringently critiqued as performance than it will be in *Dreamlandia*. Nonetheless, he clearly sees how the desire for cultural nationalist belonging, masculinity, violence, and consumption work

together: one only needs to watch the Santos brothers bond over a cocaine-laden painting of Pancho Villa while verbally undressing the secretary to see the full majesty of this complex. That the brothers are forced to murder soon after this scene presages the new mode of violence Sayak Valencia describes as “capitalismo gore.” As Valencia explains,

We propose that the term *capitalismo gore* as reinterpretation of an hegemonic and global economy in geographical border spaces and those that are economically precarious. We take the term *gore* from the cinematic genre that describes extreme, “slasher” violence. With *capitalismo gore*, then, we refer to the explicit and unnecessary spilling of blood (the price the Third World pays to hold onto the logic of capitalism, which is always becoming more extreme), the high percentage of dismemberments and disembowelments frequently involved with organized crime, the binary division of gender and the predatory use of bodies, all within the medium of a most explicit violence as a tool of narco-empowerment.<sup>15</sup>

The post-NAFTA version of this violent complex of capitalism is more clearly delineated in *Dreamlandia*, which I will consider next.

### Solis's Switch-Up: Revising the Border, Undoing the Organism

*Dreamlandia* updates and retells Pedro Calderón de la Barca's Golden Age play *La vida es sueño* (*Life Is a Dream*) on the U.S. Mexico border at El Paso/Juárez.<sup>16</sup> Produced in 2000, the play concentrates on the struggle between a narco-trafficker and maquila boss, Celestino, and his son, Lazaro, whom he banished to an island in the Rio Grande between the United States and Mexico to prevent being usurped by him in his drug business. As in Calderón's play, a son forgives his father for his sins, which include not taking his mother to a hospital when he was born so as to prevent his relationship with the drug-addicted Vivian and his larger participation in the drug trade from being exposed. The curse that Lazaro carries in this play comes from the midwife, Dolores, who saved him by pulling him out of his mother's stomach. Blanca, the midwife's child with Frank, unravels the mystery of her U.S. bicultural identity of the course of the play. Along the way to these revelations and resolutions, the play allows audiences to see a panorama of scenes in maquilas, roadside hotels, and border patrol stakeouts at the Juárez-El Paso border. By linking exploitive labor in the maquilas, the 1990s drug trade, femicides, and the militarized borderlands, *Dreamlandia* registers the effects of the decade of history after *Santos y Santos*.

When Celestino is educating Lazaro into his new role in the business, he explains his transnational empire:

SONIA: Crown your head with knowledge. Everything a worldly man needs to know.

(*Lazaro is fed data via headphones and reading material.*)

FRANK/CARL/SETH: Texas History, Texas Monthly, Austin City Limits, Dallas Cowboys, price of oil per barrel, EDS, Bill Moyers, Wall Street Journal, Beemer 500 series.

SONIA: This is El Paso, gateway to the North, city on the cusp of Time.

FRANK: And this Juarez, back door to the Third World, to all parts Mexican.

CELESTINO: This is Rio Bravo, Rio Grande, Rio Polluted . . .

SONIA: The river that separates and binds cities to el Organismo.

CELESTINO: And this is my grand enterprise, the NexMex Maquiladora. Our fine addition to the two-plant system of the U.S. and Mexicanomies.

SONIA: One factory in El Paso for assembling parts by robotics. One factory in Juarez for assembling parts by hand. Together these plants collaborate to bring to America its finest contribution.

CELESTINO: Television.

FRANK: This is the US Border Patrol, an arm of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, sovereign protector of America's boundaries, watching out for illicit goods and persons. This agency stems the flood of narcotics threatening the Great Organism.

CELESTINO: But to keep pace with *traficantes*, we bargain with the Devil. A number of select cartels find safe passage north for a special toll and secret information on rival groups.

SONIA: This fee is funneled through the NexMex account where it is recycled as clean money.<sup>17</sup>

This passage reveals the interweaving of licit and illicit businesses as well as the selective discipline of border policing. Celestino not only launders his money from his drug smuggling scheme through the maquiladora's accounts but, as we learn later, sends the drugs over the border packed in TV boxes. Unlike the business in *Santos*, however, drug running is not a side business to a legitimate one. The maquila and the drugs are one business. Celestino's tactics imitate forms of trafficking that NAFTA facilitated by deregulating inspections on Mexican business vehicles, which allows the cartels to transport drugs through legitimate vehicles. The heightened militarization of the border is to no avail; they may stop laborers from moving, but they allow as many narcotics to come in as they stop, often by design. In *Dreamlandia*, Frank and Celestino's business relationship represents this collusion. Interestingly, Celestino's new wife, Sonia, basically runs the company, doing the feminized work of supervising staff while Celestino's everyday existence is

taken up with manipulating officials, drug smugglers, and the like. Like many Juárez businessmen who run maquilas, he lives in El Paso. His house, with its twenty-two rooms, resembles a narco-mansion.

Celestino is not what he seems. What we do not know until the end of the play is that Celestino's performance as patriarch and boss is also a performance of United States identity. Celestino is also "illegal," having had the same hardscrabble life as Pepín. His double performance—made explicit during a scene where he performs as the street clown he once was in manic fashion—deepens a theme that runs through Solis's plays: that the erasure of one's history as a poor Mexican is necessary to assimilate into U.S. culture. In a sense, then, the assimilation to U.S. culture is assimilation into capitalist success. This allegiance to U.S. capitalism often occurs as much through consumption of U.S. products as through acceptance of U.S. ideology. Yet, unlike its depiction in Solis's earlier plays, in *Dreamlandia*, Mexico ceases to become a marker of a more ethical past heritage for its Chicano characters. The characters in *Dreamlandia* cross over and back across the border regularly and are deeply mired in Mexico's present violence. Sonia, in an interesting twist, grew up poor in the United States before ascending to power by running a Mexican maquiladora. Sonia's upward mobility by consumption, aided and abetted by her learned poise in selling and using high-end cosmetics in a U.S. mall, lands her in Juárez rather than in the United States, delineating new modes of transnational upward mobility. The discomfort Frank feels in going to Juárez parallels Judge Benton's, as does his sexual activity, but he does eventually go there rather than staying away.

Celestino's aversion to Mexico is not that he has to confront his past but that he no longer has control of his business in the present, which is a time of escalating complexity and violence in narcoentrepreneurship. Bustamante, the female drug lord, bothers him, as does the everyday business of the maquila. He is getting tired and wants to start thinking about an heir, gesturing to the need for an ever-regenerating set of young men to replace those destroyed by the business—a form of *capitalismo gore*, of disposable selves. Celestino's training of his son, Lazaro, for this role radically transforms the conflicts caused by rules of royal succession in the seventeenth-century play into a battle to discipline a young man to thrive in a world ruled by transnational capitalism at the verge of the twenty-first century.

Celestino hopes to make Lazaro a modern narcoentrepreneur in his own image, channeling Lazaro's violent nature strategically. Blanca, dressed as a male named Alfonso, is hired as his tutor. Rather than doing Celestino's bidding, however, she urges Lazaro to see the truth about the narco life and follow a more ethical path. Solis concludes his play with logical actions that come of this journey. Following a self-consciously theatrical reconciliation where Lazaro forgives his father, the play ends with Lazaro's turn away from his inheritance. After Celestino jails himself in his son's former hovel out of shame, Lazaro rejects becoming the new kingpin of his father's drug and

maquila empire. He wades into the water with Blanca, leaving the narco life behind. Lazaro links himself with Blanca as family (they are cousins through Vivian, Frank's sister and Lazaro's mother), abandoning capital accumulation, consumerism, and patrilineal kinship and inheritance. Lazaro's choice stops him from becoming the organism his father wanted him to become. As individuated a choice as it is, Lazaro's decision to not become a monster, a "junior" (son of the powerful) who can combine his propensity for violence with the impunity given to Mexicano/Chicano upper-class sons of prominent statesmen and business owners, opens the possibility of ending the perpetuation of the narco system.

A historiographical reading of the play might cast the organism not just as Lazaro but as neoliberalism itself. This doubleness is embedded within the play. Celestino's first mention of the organism is in reference to how the stars determine the fate of the earth. He says "everything moves for the food of the organism. There, the great bear, the Bull and Dow Jones arrow between them and over here Sun Microsystems. This is your Mundo Comerciante." Soon after, he claims that the Rio Grande "separates and binds the system to El Organismo."<sup>18</sup> Later, he states: "We tolerate some parasites and some we don't. Some lies valued highly as truth, some truths dismissed as idle dreams, all for the sake of the Organism."<sup>19</sup> Finally, after he calls for fire, Lazaro asks, "Who is the organism?" to which Celestino replies, "You" (*ibid.*, 46). This sequence suggests that the organism is both a system and a person: a mode of violence that will stabilize the transnational commercial world and that mode of violence personified. Given the period of the play and the character's age, it makes sense that Lazaro would have been born in the '80s, making his transformation into adulthood the maturation of neoliberalism into the organism at the cusp of the twenty-first century. Given the term's first definition as "a living system that can reproduce itself" and its second definition as a single living thing, the organism can be both Lazaro and the neoliberal. Only death can stop the system from reproducing, which Lazaro's ethical act instantiates, effectively ending the neoliberal regeneration of violence in the play.

Solis stages Lazaro's failure to become the organism as an increasingly self-conscious performance of narco-masculinity—the very performance of the gender binary Valencia sees as so important to *capitalismo gore*. At the beginning of the play, Blanca/Alfonso, notably as an undocumented laborer from Mexico, is hired to teach Lazaro basic comportment. Her job is to transition him to the social world, while taking the brunt of his early missteps. Celestino, after imparting the historical and contextual information about border politics he needs to survive, has to help Lazaro do something harder: learn to order rival smugglers killed and to classify undocumented migrants as inhuman. At first Lazaro balks at this violence, but ultimately yells "Fuego!" spurring the death of so-called smugglers. He later claims that he did not want to kill those men but understands that "it's what men do.

They Kill.”<sup>20</sup> Blanca/Alfonso, after handing him his new documentation, convinces him of two truths. One, that his memory of being imprisoned was not a dream: he really was chained up on an island by his father. Two, that the land across the border is full of real people whose lives matter. Lazaro, because of his affection and attraction to Alfonso/Blanca, hears her, and his response is first to kiss her tenderly and then to knock her on the ground and try to kiss her again. Celestino intervenes but not for the purpose of quelling Lazaro’s violence. Instead, he wants to prevent his son from kissing another man. Blanca/Alfonso is promptly deported at this moment, linking the desire to banish queerness with the desire to deport undocumented labor.

This scene also reveals how being a *maricón* (gay male) is conflated with failing to perform narco-masculinity. Although Celestino does not connect the two, the audience does, because it is precisely at the moment when Lazaro second-guesses his father’s ideology that he acts on his romantic and sexual feelings for Alfonso/Blanca. However much his exile with fashion magazines and TV guides has inhibited his social abilities, his lack of socialization in heterosexual normativity allows him to explore attractions not based on a traditional alignment of gender and sex. After Alfonso/Blanca is deported, however, he hurls himself into a performance of hypermasculinity out of confusion and spite toward his father. Ultimately, Lazaro needlessly injures Pepín because he is an illegal alien, regaining his father’s trust. Thus, Lazaro’s performance of masculinity, enacted vis-à-vis violence against the undocumented, erases his status as a *maricón*. After he injures Pepín, he enacts a more exaggerated performance of heterosexuality by sleeping with his father’s lover, Sonia, and flirting through a drug deal with Bustamante, displacing his queer past. Solis’s revision of Calderón’s play contrasts the relationship of violence to narco-rule with the role of violence to royal sovereignty. In monarchical seventeenth-century Spain, physical violence and domination was to be sublimated or transformed into benevolent, nonviolent rule. Violence against the king’s employees was not tolerated. This is why Sigismundo has to be sent back to the tower. At the turn of the twenty-first century at the U.S.-Mexico border, physical violence is only to be directed against people categorized as inhuman. Lazaro’s frightening embodiment of masculinity is self-consciously theatricalized. On one hand, Lazaro is consciously performing his violence as the transference of his rage toward his father. On the other, Lazaro is quite frankly putting on a show for his father that the audience should recognize as performance. This heightened doubleness denaturalizes the performance of narco-masculinity so key to many media representations, showing its horror and its ridiculousness.

Yet, this self-conscious performance does not make his behavior any less threatening. For those versed in the development of narcotrafficking, Lazaro’s performance is a reality that comes into play just a few years later. At the end of the play, one realizes how close one lives to the fantastical monster Lazaro almost becomes. How many Lazaros are at the heart of the continuing

femicides? How many have found their way into the Knights Templar or are performing beheadings and dumping bodies in mass graves? Notably, by concentrating on a child of privilege, Solis reveals that the complex of violence and misogyny is fueled not only by economic desperation but also by a culture of impunity for the elite. As Valencia explains in *Capitalismo Gore*, this form of masculinity was deeply embedded in the Mexican nation-state’s creation, revealing a longer history between state building, machismo, and violence. Although it is hard to argue that narco-violence is getting worse, the escalation that came with Felipe Calderón’s narcoguerra constituted an intensification of the violent tactics that Solis gestures toward. In the last decade, there has been a shift away from a world in which the Celestinos hire others to do their violence, holding onto a certain gentlemanly distance from sheer brutality, toward one where there is no such concern. Celestino begins this transition himself when, rather than simply letting his employees meet their fate in the desert, he actually drives Sonia there and leaves her after he learns of her cocaine use and affair with his son. Sonia is closed in on by “shadowy presences” and found “half-buried in the desert” just like the early femicides.<sup>21</sup> In the Thick Description Theatre Company’s production of the play, directed by Solis himself, Sonia literally disappeared as the light focused on her tightened and dimmed into darkness.<sup>22</sup>

The way Celestino killed Sonia strips of her not only of her class status but of her subjectivity: she is converted from character to corpse. Solis does not use the desecration of Sonia’s body as a form of language as killers do in the subsequent narcoguerra; instead he stages her death purely as evidence of the brute misogyny of the culture in which his characters are living. The murdering shadowy presences detect Sonia by her smell, the smell of woman, rather than by the scent of the beauty products she consumes to cover it up. No performance of class or privilege can save her from her fate as a brown woman at the U.S.-Mexico border. However oedipal the framing of her killing, her demise is clearly a social commentary on the femicides in Juárez and the misogyny that allows them to thrive. Solis, as he confided to me, included this killing even if that meant “putting too much” in the play.<sup>23</sup> Solis was indeed accused of putting too much into the play—as have been other playwrights and television writers who include depiction of multiple forms of border violence within one work.

Instead of seeing this as a fault, however, I argue that *Dreamlandia*’s inclusion of commentary on NAFTA, femicides, and drug cartels in the midst of a deeply theatricalized depiction of a father-son conflict imbued by fate is an explicit strategy to show the deep interconnectedness of all forms of neoliberal violence. By having the same characters or the same actors show up in different places (we see Blanca in the maquila as a worker and in El Paso; the actress who plays Sonia also plays Vivian) and be subjected to parallel but not identical violent acts, Solis undergirds the networks of gendered harm in greater Mexico. His appropriation of the trope of mistaken

identity in Calderón's play is crucial. For example, when Lazaro sees Blanca in the maquila and recognizes her, he accords her a particular subjectivity that the conditions in his father's factories erase. Seeing his former lover in everyday Mexican women, meanwhile, forces Frank to quit thinking about Dolores as different from the other Mexican people who he harms as a border patrol sector chief. The moment where he deports his own daughter, Blanca, before recognizing her consciously, revises a trope within Chicano/a drama where family members deport their own relatives, such as in his subsequent work *Lydia*. The messiness of *Dreamlandia*'s ending, however, curtails narrative resolution via such moral recognition, leaving a murkier mess for its audience to swim in.

*Life Is a Dream*'s final allegiances uphold the rightful rule of the Hapsburg monarchy. In *Dreamlandia*, the characters' lack of clear allegiances combines ethical hope with a somber acknowledgment of the impossibility of revolution in the current age of neoliberal capital. Bustamante and Lazaro's reverie during his first and final drug deal describes the new order of the transnational narco world, whose rulers are "Los CEOS de multinational corpse and Citibank executives on Telemundo, a silicon breast in each hand" who work with "cops moonlighting as narcobodyguards . . . laughing at the drug war, the legislation, the just say nos" and the "Founding Fathers of the DEA."<sup>24</sup> After making it clear that Lazaro is Bustamante's bitch and not the other way around, Bustamante and Lazaro spell out the dystopian present, inverting the possibilities of Cherríe Moraga's indigenous eschatology. Their exchange is worth quoting at length.

BUSTAMANTE: We are the best export, the true ambassadors.

LAZARO: The real Zapatistas of these twisted times.

BUSTAMANTE: 'Cause the real narcotic is hope, smuggled in body cavities they will NEVER reach muthafukkah.

LAZARO: And one awesome apoca-lipstick day

BUSTAMANTE: All the cell phones, yours and mine

LAZARO: Gonna wail on the very same line.

BUSTAMANTE: Solidarity.<sup>25</sup>

The new regime, then, promises the culmination of "these twisted times" in an ironic mode, which twists many of the keywords of the left into a monstrosity which is the present. The story this reverie tells is that of the decline in possibility for mass action from 1994 to the play's present. For Solis and many others, 2000 marked a moment when hopes for the Zapatista rebellion as national insurgence, as opposed to a model of localized democratic practice, were dashed. That Lazaro hears this insurgence and its demise over a Mexican cell phone is an ironic comment on how monopolistic capitalism owned all means of communication under Mexico's so-called democracy under neoliberal rule. Carlos Slim, the third-richest man in Mexico, owns a



*Dreamlandia*. Directed by Monica Sanchez. Lazaro played by Elijah Bradford. Photo courtesy of Working Classroom.

monopoly on Mexican cell phones, part of the *New York Times*, as well as having undue influence in the Mexican state apparatus.<sup>26</sup> Instead of having his characters start, join, or reanimate such an insurgency, as *The Hungry Woman*'s characters do, Solis has Lazaro simply decline the allures of narco-entrepreneurship. And this perhaps is the conservative move in Solis's dramaturgy: the reaching for the possibility of individual change rather than revolution.

It should be noted, however, that neoliberal conditions forced Solis to dispense with the "Mexico as past" dramaturgy he inherited from the Chicano/a canon. In *Santos*, Tommy opposed his brothers' trafficking because his imagination of his father's unidirectional migration to the United States as an act of social betterment rejects drug trafficking as an appropriate mode of wealth accumulation and self-making. In contrast, in *Dreamlandia*, Celestino's crossing provides no moral object lesson for his son, either positive or negative. After learning who he truly is, Lazaro ends the play by stepping into the flux of the river with another character, Blanca, ultimately "let[ting] the water decide" where they will end up.<sup>27</sup> I do not read this scene as a return to Mexico, which would secure his identity, but as a refusal of his father's form of the transnational world. Lazaro's walk into the river has no sure outcome. Thus, this scene upends the standard dramaturgy of male Chicano subjectivity that depends upon the violent unidirectional traversal of the border into the United States (his, his parents, or even his grandparents) as the primarily

subjectifying force that articulates cultural identity ready to be cannibalized by liberal humanism. Although he has not eliminated the liberal subject, Solís has destabilized the ground on which the liberal subject walks.

### *El Nogalar* and the Affective Labor of Narcoentrepreneurship

*Dreamlandia* and *Santos y Santos* stand alongside the works of Saracho, Cazares, and Olmos, which articulate a later phase of narcotrafficking: Felipe Calderón's post-2006 narcoguerra as manifest in northern Mexico. I begin my exploration of these plays with Tanya Saracho's *El Nogalar* (2011). A riff on Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, the 1903 Russian play that staged the decline of the Russian aristocracy at the beginning of the twentieth century, *El Nogalar* chronicles the Galvan family's loss of their hacienda and pecan orchard in Nuevo León. Saracho cut the cast to just five characters, which parallel Chekhov's: Maité, the matriarch (Ranevskaya); her daughters Anita (Anya), who lives with her in the United States, and Valeria (Varya), who has been trying to hold on to Maité's crumbling estate in Mexico; Dunia (Dunia), their housekeeper; and López (Lopahkin), the son of the groundskeeper who becomes the owner of the estate. The plot of the play tracks their journey from Anita and Maité's return to Mexico to López's purchase of the orchard and subsequent celebration. At the end of the play, however, Saracho adds a twist. Once López buys the orchard, he hooks up with Dunia, suggesting a new order where, with allusion to Chekhov, the trees fall "along with the upper class."<sup>28</sup>

The backdrop for the end of the upper class in northern Mexico is the ascension of narcotrafficking cartel activity in this formerly pastoral paradise. In the play's view, those who ascend are people of the lower classes, such as López, who become kingpins and middlemen for the *maña*. Saracho describes the state of impunity in Mexico by pointing both to the impotence of the state—one can now sit in open air and criticize the government—and to the violence in formerly peaceful areas of Mexico. Her characters refer to their current conditions as "an occupation," describing narco-rule with the terminology of encampment by military force.<sup>29</sup> The loss of the estate to country houses for the middle class is Chekhov's characters' horror; for the Galvans it is the loss of their estate to this new regime—the "nacos," rich young men of a lower class, and the "good boys" alike who plan to convert their secluded rural paradise into a landing strip or a growing site for marijuana or heroin. This is a new occupation in a doubled sense of the term.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it is not so much who occupies the house that is at issue here—in fact, López is able to strike a deal with his *maña* superiors to let the Galvans stay in the house—but how the land around it is used. If the Galvans were to stay, they would probably be trapped inside because the world around them is no longer safe. Saracho's decision to focus on the women in this world, her

avored entry into adapting Chekhov's work, makes the gendered terror of narco-rule all the clearer. In the offstage world of Saracho's play, as opposed to the play itself, most of the women are gone. The Galvans are a very visible exception. As Maité remarks when she tries to throw a party and only men, notably all offstage, arrive: "What, don't we know any women?"<sup>31</sup> Of course, for those who know the usual politics of rural migration this is a reversal of the often remarked upon situation in which females remain alone or with nonlaboring loved ones in rural towns while loved ones migrate to the United States to find work. Here, the scarcity of women seems to escalate the possibility of terror for the Galvans. The only people left are the (mostly male) narcos. Constant references are made to the danger posed by their vacations at the cascade, where Pedro tries to get them out of the visual field of narcotraffickers.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps more dangerous, as Marci McMahon eloquently points out, is the culture of "narco silence" created by a culture of fear and threats of death that cause witnesses to constantly see violence but not saying anything, "walking around moving their mouths like a TV on mute."<sup>33</sup> As McMahon suggests, protesters have strategically used the silent protest as critique to underscore silence's role in impunity; she also convincingly argues that Saracho draws attention to narco silence for the purpose of denaturalizing it through her and her production team's innovative use of sound design. Within the text itself, Dunia threatens her livelihood by refusing this silence—even within closed doors—when she mentions the *maña* and describes their killings. López explains this to Dunia, who he assumes does not understand:

LÓPEZ: This is not a game.

DUNIA: I know this is not a game! Why do you always think I am so stupid? I know it's not a game. But people have to do something.

LÓPEZ: Dunia!

DUNIA: I am not trying to be a hero. I don't mean something like that!

Believe me I'm not trying to end up dismembered by a landfill. All I'm trying to do is learn to swim in it like you. Without drowning.

LÓPEZ: Understand that in all of *this*, there is no way for girls like you to "figure it out." Women are zeros, you understand me, zeros to the left. I don't want to have to start worrying about you, you hear me Dunia? I already got these fucking women coming in today. I'm going to have enough with making them get that they can't just come in here and parade about the way they used to. I'm going to have a hard time making them understand that we are under an occupation.<sup>34</sup>

López's suggestion that women are zeros to the left suggests that women like her, women without great social and class privilege, are as insignificant as zeros to the left of a number. Yet given the number of femicides in Mexico,

the zeros to the left also recall the zeros to the right, the great number of women whose deaths have become numerical statistics. Dunia, although she considered going to work in the maquilas before the play, is now trying to come up with another plan to escape the present and become something else. This is why her pairing with López is so essential.

In *El Nogalar*, Dunia and López both emerge as a new class of entrepreneurs. Dunia strives to learn how to get online so that she can be in touch with the world and place herself in that world. She sees this act as an extension of telling her story, of narrating herself. As Saracho herself points out, Dunia's whitening of herself with cosmetics undergirds her desire's racial unconsciousness, which equates whiteness with class and social mobility. Dunia's racially charged refraction of Sonia's use of cosmetics in *Dreamlandia* directly links entrepreneurial selfhood and consumption. Dunia's actions are the beginning of her transformation into an entrepreneur of the self, a subject who produces her own satisfaction and subjectivity through consumption.<sup>35</sup> It is notable that the example López comes up with when imagining her as "too dangerous for the Internet" is her selling herself as a mail-order bride.<sup>36</sup> Dunia's power on the Internet (as López imagines it at least) is her staging herself as human capital rather than marketing her skills as a laborer for hire (although admittedly this form of existence, like sex work, confounds traditional definitions of labor). Spatially, this articulation of self in the media world substitutes for migrating north to work in a maquila, indicating a spatial shift in labor practices and self-making possibilities. Engaging the power of "Facebook money" she attempts to opt out of her material constrictions.<sup>37</sup> Yet, as a woman of her class and skin tone in Mexico, this form of entrepreneurship comes to a rather mundane end at the end of the play. Despite her attempts to get out of town, or into the world, her hope seems to ride on her liaison with López, whom she seduces after he acquires the orchard. If one imagines her future in terms of narco-culture, this will make her his girlfriend, a result wholly unsatisfying for Dunia. Her reading of the moment as an opening up of the possibility of true class mobilization in Mexico may be a form of cruel optimism. If she fights against such a limiting role, which she might, the consequences could be fatal.

López's upward mobility is equally fraught. Buying the orchard may hold promise for him becoming a capitalist stakeholder, but it seems unlikely he will gain any independence from the *maña*, indicating that he too will remain an affective laborer for someone else rather than being autonomous. When the play begins, his primary job in the cartel seems to be managing his narco superiors' emotions through consumption and care (buying them iPads, calming them down). López's job is affective—he does not produce anything. In his own words, using a pointedly performative metaphor, he claims that he is just "the court fool trying to keep the balls up in the air."<sup>38</sup> López is never seen transporting or selling drugs or enacting physical violence, though he packs a gun for protection. Instead he manages people endlessly much like

Sonia does in the maquila. His role as a self-conscious performer alludes to narco-masculinity as performance, while also being a clever joke about the gun on the wall that must, but never, goes off.

In contrast with other media representations of narcotrafficking, Saracho's play is notable for refusing to show violence; rather we hear its threat just offstage. What we see instead is a world where affective laborers work hard to stave off that violence from the "nacos" who run the place. This type of labor has replaced taking care of the aristocracy as well as the creation of and care for their material goods. López's tinkering with the bookcase in *El Nogalar* is a clever displacement of Gaev's "useless" attachment to a hundred-year-old object. López's craft work is now an avocation rather than a vocation. His manual labor, his skill at it, is linked to nostalgia for a past era of Mexico, which he does to appease the Galvans emotionally rather than to earn his keep. It is no accident that López gets interrupted from his tinkering to "teach" Dunia "the Internet."<sup>39</sup> The substitution of one form of labor by another forms a major tension at the heart of the play, which parallels its anxiety about class politics. Maité points to this tension when she expresses disgust at the new economic order filled with "new money," "Facebook money."<sup>40</sup> On one level, one can read this as another instance of Maité's denial of the reality of narcotraffic as the new wealth generator in the area. On another level, however, the juxtaposition aligns Facebook money and new money because they separate capital accumulation from the accumulation of property, in contrast with land wealth or rustic crafts (such as the pecan candies coveted by Dunia), which combine the two. The Goodman Theatre in Chicago's production of *El Nogalar* openly linked the Galvans' nostalgia with the practice of manual labor by having López repairing a huge dollhouse over the course of the play.<sup>41</sup> That said, it should be noted that repurposing the Galvan estate for drug cultivation is an act of mass manual labor and agricultural toil and that drug cultivation is an act dependent on conceptions of property and turf, as narco disputes over plazas suggest. As Sayak Valencia points out, the move to cultivating rather than simply moving drugs is an ironic re-vindication of agricultural production, albeit one that impoverishes small farmers rather than sustaining them.<sup>42</sup> Yet, for women of Maité's generation, Facebook money is a kind of unrecognizable virtual entrepreneurship, which sells experience in the same way that narcotics do. For Maité, at least, this is a form of capitalism she imagines herself as being both above and outside of because of her (soon to disappear) land wealth.

Maité's denial of her complicity in narcotrafficking is a more willful ignorance, which is ironized in how she consumes drugs to cope with the affective reality of neoliberalism. Neither she nor anyone else in this play is outside of the pharmacological regime. López consumes cocaine, alcohol, and antacids to manage his anxiety so he can manage others' needs. He and Pedro's off-stage negotiations with Maité are, after all, done over a bottle of tequila. Even before she arrived, Maité drugged herself with a "little pill" at the airport on

her way back to Mexico to calm herself down. When she touches down, she demands caffeine, an often unacknowledged participant in effectuating colonial and industrial work regimes.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, drug consumption is key to the world Saracho created; as she remarks in an interview, although she cut the character of Yasha, Ranevskaya's ne'er-do-well servant, he "could have been a cokehead."<sup>44</sup> Saracho's sinister adaptation of Chekhov's vodka- and champagne-drinking camaraderie reveals how recreational intoxication and the necropolitical world are intertwined in the affective experience of everyday life.

Ultimately, her upper-class characters have to try to escape the scene and enter the new economic and social regime with mixed results. Chekhov's characters return to Moscow; Saracho's go to Monterrey. Known for its technical schools and business climate, Monterrey is a commercial capital. Going there is a decision to enter contemporary capitalist culture. In direct contrast to expectations, Valeria does not get married but adopts the tactics of her economic inferiors by migrating to the city for work, just as her Russian counterpart went to the city to be a governess. Valeria decides to use her knowledge of four languages and accounting skills to get an office job, an opportunity in Mexico usually reserved for the middle class, not the upper class or, notably, the truly impoverished. For the less-privileged Mexicans in the play, the sale of the orchard also opens up a future within rather than outside of the bounds of the Mexican nation-state. As Dunia says after López buys the estate, "Memo, maybe the idea right now is not to leave up north anymore. We keep looking up, in hope of miracles, but maybe the miracles are right here beneath our feet. No one ever thought you would be the owner of Los Nogales, not in a million years!"<sup>45</sup> Despite the somewhat fantastical nature of Dunia's musings in relation to reality, her thought experiment dislodges crossing into the United States or heading to the border as the primary mode of subject making for her characters. Unlike many of the other plays in this chapter, *El Nogalar* plots migration *back* to Mexico as a possible solution to the family's ills. This decision is no doubt exacerbated by the poor health of the U.S. financial markets as much as any squandering of resources by the Galvans. (As I write this, immigration to Mexico has exceeded immigration from Mexico for the first time in years. This may soon be more extreme, given President Trump's proposed policy changes.) Whether or not these characters' reinvestment in Mexico will reanimate a reproductive nationalism is open to interpretation, but López and Dunia's making love in the open field, a known fertility ritual to bring about good crops, suggests a link between the fruits of the union and the fruits of their fields, and perhaps of the future of the nation as well. Given that both characters are mestizo or indigenous identified, their copulation restages *mestizaje* in its post-neoliberal mode.

The play's ending contrasts with Chekhov's, engaging with Mexican national narratives in surprising ways, which underscores extreme modes

of dispossession in contemporary neoliberal capitalism. *El Nogalar's* complete absencing of the event that was supposed to free López and Dunia from oppression a hundred years earlier—the Mexican Revolution—is notable, especially given the historical synchrony between it and the Russian Revolution. Chekhov's play was written on the eve of this event, which overthrew an old order to create a socialist nation. *The Cherry Orchard* looks to that future, marking a major shift in social, cultural, and economic structures. Saracho's play, if taken as a true adaptation of Chekhov's, anticipates not revolution but a realignment of class relations based on an emergent form of capitalism. Setting the play exactly one hundred years after the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, the absence of even a mention of the event is striking. Has *El Nogalar* given up on the idea of revolution? Is the play a commentary of the failings of the revolution in line with standard Mexican national dramaturgy? Or does the absence of the revolution in *El Nogalar* simply reveal the event's lack of traction in the rural north where powerful families retained huge swaths of land even after the revolution? I suspect all of these may be true.

But what looms larger than the lack of revolution in this play is the presence of the Porfiriato, the era of Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship (1876–1911) that preceded the revolution, which is scarcely engaged in Chicano/Mexicano dramaturgy. This presence opens up the possibility that the current narco-regime reenacts the Porfiriato's social and economic relationships, which relied upon repressive actions against poor laborers and farmers by a strong-arm leader (and his cronies) so as to pacify the nation and thus accelerate foreign investment. The Porfiriato is visible from the first moments of the play when Saracho introduces the most talked-about set piece in the show, an old bed that Díaz may or may not have slept on. Certainly, the Galvans' possession of the bed registers their class position as haves rather than have-nots. However, its prominence as an onstage set piece in a theatrical production underscores its historiographical importance. That the bed induces sleep and forgetting for López in particular suggests the bed's role in causing the new class of entrepreneurs to forget where they are and thus refuse to understand one's history. The bed is not simply a piece of obsolescent period furniture that signifies the Galvans' romantic nostalgia for the past. Instead, López's physical link to the bed for a significant portion of the play suggests that the new regime of narcotraffickers may be an extension of the elite concentration of power under the Porfiriato rather than a break with its reign. López will now help run a system that depends upon large swaths of agricultural land controlled by a few and worked by the many. Today's peasants can harvest marijuana for wages but do not get to grow sustainable crops for their own *milpas* (Nahuatl for "maize field"), making López a future hacienda owner. In this sense, the fall of the Galvans may be a reformist gesture rather than a revolutionary one. It is for this reason that I put special pressure on Saracho's final stage direction:



An interpretive sound of trees falling. Now don't go cueing chainsaws because it's not literal. Just make me feel trees are falling. Along with the upper class. Ting. Ting. TONG. Good-bye to the bed of Porfirio Díaz. Good-bye to the bed of Porfirio Díaz.<sup>46</sup>

The play as a whole attests that we might instead be saying hello to a new Porfiriato, even if the traditional landowners are displaced. Saracho's play also opens up a conundrum in terms of temporality. On one hand her dramaturgy gestures toward progress for Dunia and López, who look to Mexico's future as a chance to escape from past failures. The falling tree signals the transition. At the same time, the playwright's seemingly critical attitude toward teleological progress and her erasure of the Mexican Revolution from the play charts a course that breaks as radically with Mexican historiography as it does with U.S.-centric Latinx dramaturgy. Her choice suggests a strange complicity with Chekhov. Maybe it won't get better, after all. This conscious historiographical meditation is more overt in Cazares's plays on transnational drug trafficking, which spend less time with the Mexican upper classes and more with *los de abajo*.

### Queer Historiography, Recursive Time

Two of Victor Cazares's plays deal explicitly with narcotraffic—*Religiones Gringas*, a comedy that follows the travails of a family split by geopolitical borders and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and *Ramses contra los monstruos*, an epic play about a liaison between a cartel employee hired to dissolve bodies and a young grad school dropout from the other side of the border. Both, however, play with time and borders in a more radically queer way than Cazares's predecessors. *Religiones Gringas*, which I will consider only briefly, takes place in El Paso and northern Mexico, before and after the death of the family's matriarch, an important figure in the town of San Lorenzo, Chihuahua. Her grandson Epi, although a college-educated U.S. citizen, is working for the cartel, a fact that his family is slower to catch on to than the fact that he is gay. His cousin Nene, who is undocumented, is also gay and works in a porn store as a clerk and custodian, but without Epi's privileges. In *Religiones Gringas*, we learn about Epi's profession largely because it allows him to transport his grandmother's corpse across the border to his sisters, who cannot cross back into Mexico because of their immigration status. The violence he suffers from is placed within a comic frame, even though the business is deadly serious. The signifiers of narcotraffic lurk in the shadows—in Epi's SUV, in the pickup trucks that park and disappear, and from the gunshots that come out of nowhere.

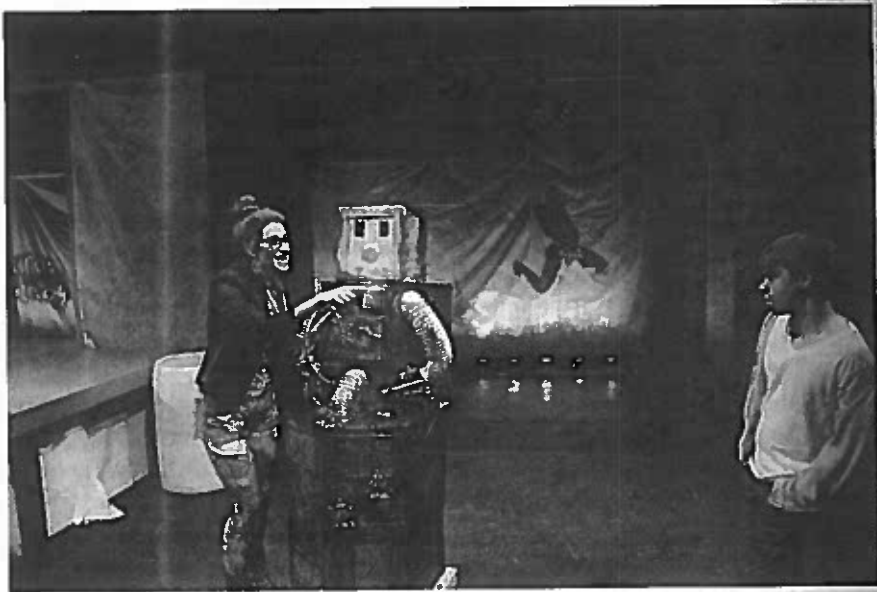
In *Religiones Gringas*, Cazares, like Saracho, invokes the Porfiriato rather than the Mexican Revolution when addressing his characters in northern

Mexico. Güe Güe, Nene's aunt and his mother Chayo's sister and lover, comes back over the border from her mother's funeral with a collection of gravestones from the San Lorenzo cemetery. Extracted from a recently disemboweled plaza, the metaphorical power of these gravestones is that they came from the section of the cemetery reserved for souls in limbo, namely, babies and children who were not yet baptized. Like these babies, Cazares metaphorically argues, all of his border-crossing characters live suspended, betwixt and between recognizable states. All of the gravestones Güe Güe steals are from the Porfiriato, a period often left un-exhumed in Mexican national history because it is at odds with the idea of the modern revolutionary state upon which Mexican nationalism depends. The Porfiriato's appearance here is less a critique of the Mexican Revolution's failure than a temporal disjuncture that makes us aware of the failure of teleological time to explain northern Mexican history. It is worth noting that one of the gravestones is from October 22, 1844, the Great Disappointment, which created the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Cazares has Epi retell their grandmother's version:

EPI: Yeya used to tell us this story. "All the way up there in the land of the gringos—a group of people believed Christ would come on October 22, 1844. And they sold all their belongings, said goodbye to everybody. And waited the whole day. But He didn't come. But they kept on waiting. We keep waiting."<sup>47</sup>

By evoking the history of the Seventh-day Adventists, which has a small set of adherents in northern Mexico and Texas, Cazares engages not only his own family history (he was raised as a Seventh-day Adventist) but an eschatological mindset in which waiting for the Messiah forms the affective everyday of his character's lives. This liminal state is parallel to the one experienced by people with undocumented status or whose residence in one country or another is deemed to be temporary, as is the liminal state of Chayo and Güe Güe's cohabitation. That Nene's Anglo lover, Taylor, is Branch Davidian, a form of Adventism, only underscores the strange coexistence of the U.S. eschatological view of salvation with the affective state of transnational migration. Underneath the play's utilization of traditional comic structure—it starts with a funeral and ends with a marriage, with plenty of Plautine slamming doors in between—is a depiction of the affective experience of neoliberalism as a suspended and confounding hope for a future that will not come.

Although darkly humorous, Cazares's *Ramses contra los monstruos* departs from *Religiones Gringas*'s comic structure. Instead, it runs with the eschatological present to make a more pointed political critique about the transnational pharmacological industry under neoliberalism. The presence of corpses is also key to this play, revealing not only how neoliberalism "re-makes death" but how reanimating death can speak the truth about the



*Ramses contra los monstruos*. Directed by Ryan Purcell. Amanda Dolan as Chema, Rudy as Rudy. Photo by Mark Turek.

regime's violence. Cazares has written two significant versions of *Ramses*, in 2011 and in 2013. Elsewhere, I have read the first version of the play as a mode of queer eschatology, largely concentrating on its dramaturgical articulation of historiographical principles.<sup>48</sup> Here, I engage Cazares's eschatology but primarily concentrate on the significantly revised 2013 version, staged at Brown University's New Plays festival, as a mode of rethinking the pharmacological era.<sup>49</sup> Briefly summarized, *Ramses* centers on the eponymous character, a *pozolero* who has been cursed by an avenging migrant, Lidia. Kidnapped by the cartels and made their laundress, Lidia gets her revenge by thwarting Ramses's recipe for dissolving human flesh. Consequently, the bodies that Ramses disappears for the cartels are no longer dissolving, threatening his job security and his life. This story is intercut with the story of Amelia, whose daughter, Chema, has been killed in an act of narco-violence. Amelia, who seeks to avenge her daughter's death by not letting her body rest, ultimately decides to kill Felipe Calderón, the Mexican president from 2006 to 2012, who designed the recent drug war in Mexico. The linchpin of these two stories is Tito/ Titus, a lover of Ramses and good friend of Chema's. Acting as the audience's Virgil, he guides us through the inferno, bringing his characters together at a crossroads: a long-shuttered movie theater in Juárez named El Egipcio.<sup>50</sup> Over the course of the play, we meet a series of narco-villains, including a misguided priest, Padre Alonso, the brutal La Barbie,

and a Robomascota art project remade from the very real Rudy the Border Patrol Robot.

Unlike *El Nogalar*, which tracks the very recent escalation of the drug war, *Ramses* contains scenes from the 1980s to the present. Also unlike Saracho's play, *Ramses* is transnational, moving fluidly between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. Cazares's dramaturgical choices argue that the period between the 1980s and the present is a continuous transnational cultural moment. *Ramses* helps its audiences rethink the implicitly nationalist histories that separate U.S. and Mexican histories of neoliberalism and their attendant violence, forcing them to confront the transnational nature of contemporary necropolitics and its representational practices.<sup>51</sup> Cazares centers on queer relations as the primary lens through which to view the time period. He depicts time queerly in Elizabeth Freeman's sense.<sup>52</sup> As Freeman writes: "Queer temporalities . . . are points of resistance to this temporal order, that in turn propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically."<sup>53</sup> For her, this movement is a departure from nationalist time that depends not only on "empty homogenous time" but also the proper temporality of movements such as "coming out, consummation, development, domesticity, family, foreplay, genealogy, identity, liberation, modernity, the progress of movements," which all "contribute to a vision of time as seamless, unified and forward moving."<sup>54</sup> *Ramses*'s particular location and its open engagement with U.S.-Mexican neoliberalism particularizes Freeman's queer temporality in the borderlands. By eschewing the chrononormativity and heteronormativity of border discourse and migration narratives, he, like many other playwrights in this chapter, undoes the particular unidirectionality that still haunts Latino/a American dramaturgy and U.S. narratives of belonging. This queering of the border is in part necessitated by the particularities of the El Paso-Juárez region and its long history.

As Lara Nielsen, Claire Fox, and others have pointed out, in terms of the U.S.-Mexico region, the neoliberal process begins in 1964–65 with the border industrialization program that commenced the creation of maquiladoras (factories) in northern Mexico.<sup>55</sup> The escalation of maquilas continued throughout the 1970s, through the Mexican oil boom and bust and the beginning of Mexico's economic debt difficulties in the 1980s. As a result, Ciudad Juárez became a boomtown: from 1970 to 2000 the population quadrupled without requisite expansion of infrastructure.<sup>56</sup> The emergence of Juárez as megacity did not come with NAFTA, but much earlier. Thus one might think of the neoliberal period as a fifty-year-long trajectory with an intensification that occurred some thirty years ago.

*Ramses* (2013) marks the high points of the neoliberal calendar—1982, 1988, 1994, and 2006—by employing a Mexican *sexenio* history (referring to the six-year term the Mexican president serves) rather than a decadal one, so as to unhinge neoliberal historiography from a strictly U.S. timeline. In the play, these dates mark life cycles and crossings—Chema was born in 1988

along with election fraud; she and her mother cross and are deported in 1994, the year of NAFTA; the first maquiladora nights she shares with her friend Alex are close upon the 1982 debt crisis; and the contemporary action of the play is in the narcoguerra *sexenio* (2006–2012) led by Felipe Calderón. Cazares's use of Mexican periods transnationalizes history. Pointedly, the neoliberal period brackets Tito/Titus's entire life and Ramses's life cycle as "Ramses." An orphan, Ramses is named by a lover, not a parent. His new life begins when Alex, Amelia's friend, meets him on the road one night. After an act of sex in public and more at Alex's place, Alex christens his lover with his new name:

RAMSES: Never do heroin.

ALEX: Why?

RAMSES: It's more dangerous.

ALEX: Really?

RAMSES: Yes. Only do coke.

ALEX: In this house, only coke-a-cola. Like in all of Mexico.

RAMSES: I'm serious.

ALEX: Do you sell it?

RAMSES: Not yet. But soon.

ALEX: What's your name?

RAMSES: If I tell you, I'll have to kill you.

ALEX: Don't tell me then. Better I tell you. Your name is Ramses.<sup>57</sup>

I quote this scene at length because it manifests Cazares's linkages between the AIDS crisis and narcotraffic while also sketching out the contours of his historiography of neoliberalism more broadly. The name Ramses recalls both the Egyptian pharaoh and the condom brand, linking procreation, violence, and latex protection in the era of AIDS. Note that the title of this scene is "The First Dose"—which seemingly refers to Tito/Titus's ingestion of anti-retrovirals earlier in the scene as well as to Alex's first dose of Ramses and of cocaine. The era in which the scene occurs might also be said to be the one that contained the first dose of the effects of neoliberal economic shock therapy in Mexico. The title is prescient given that this first dose becomes the "dose without end" by the end of the play, a state one might refer to as a chronic neoliberal project.

Cazares stages this neoliberal penetration as a set of cross-temporal and queer intergenerational encounters. It is notable that Tito/Titus has sexual and romantic relationships with lovers (Ramses, Profesora Alonso) who were young adults when he was born. It is through these relationships that the fold between the 1980s and the present coexists. This eroticization of the relationship between past and present veers away from straight time as well as straight sex. Untethered to a progressive teleological history with clear demarcations between past and present, the scenes between Alex and Ramses and

Alex and Amelia and Tito/Titus and Ramses coexist rather than follow each other. There are no flashbacks. Many of the scenes change times within their courses. For example, the aforementioned scene between Alex and Ramses follows a scene between Ramses and Tito/Titus where Tito/Titus in the present asks his lover about his past: "What were you doing in the 80s?" Ramses responds with the comment, "I was just a kid, Tito. I was just a kid, Tito. Trying to survive in Juaritos. I don't want to talk about it."<sup>58</sup> The structure of the scene militates against the idea that the movement between the scenes is the result of any one character's memory. The scene with Alex happens when Ramses is sleeping and Tito/Titus is awake, so that the prompt for the scene does not come from the person whose past it documents. Dramaturgically, these conjugal connections represent a shared history of the Americas that joins what has happened and what is happening. The swallowing of the pill lets Tito/Titus ingest the entire history of the era as well as facilitating our consumption of the same period. This scene is emblematic of many others in the play: relationships coexist in the present and past worlds and between the living and the dead. To this end, many of the early scenes of the play were described in an earlier draft as "hauntings"—a word that describes the copresence of spectral visitation.<sup>59</sup> The implication, however, is not that the past haunts the present, although it is clear that the play is invested in exposing how actions in the 1980s impact contemporary narcopolitics in Mexico.

Instead, Cazares reminds us that the neoliberal era is a continuous present, whose crises are variations on a theme. Ramses's dissolving of narco-victims is juxtaposed with the disappearances of the maquila workers with whom Amelia and Alex work. In a sequence of 1994 scenes in the middle of the play, we find out that the bodies that Ramses dissolved in the '90s were maquila bodies that he was forced to disappear after he did too much of the cocaine he was supposed to be selling; that Amelia is about to escape a Juárez she foresees will become a ghost town just as the femicides start to escalate; and that Ramses has begun to question why Alex gave him his name. Ramses leaves Alex in the desert, presaging the vulnerability of the bodies that will soon be found there. While the two do not discuss HIV transmission, their conversation is haunted with its possibility.

Through the journeys of his character, Cazares theorizes the neoliberal era as chronic and recursive, mimicking both the daily regime of antivirals and the seriality of sexual encounters. Just as Mexican and U.S. financial crises repeat themselves (1982 and 1994, 1987 and 2008), scenes repeat themselves or nearly do with only the slightest of revisions. Ramses and Alex's scene in the car echoes the scene where Ramses is named, recursively reminding us of Ramses's origin story. And the scene that brings Ramses and Tito/Titus together after what is supposed to be their last encounter occurs twice. In that scene, Padrecito Alonso picks Tito/Titus up in a car, offering him money and cocaine to have sex with La Barbie. Alonso chloroforms Tito/Titus, masks him, and gets him into the car. The first time, the scene occurs

at a normal speed and dissolves into a consensual sex scene between Ramses and Tito/Titus; the second time, the action is accelerated and dissolves into a scene where La Barbie rapes Tito/Titus and asks Padre Alonso to dispose of the body of his victim, which Alonso refuses to do. (The actor who plays Padre Alonso also plays Profesor(a) Alonso and Doctor Alonso, linking them together.) The cyclical nature of the violence reveals the recursive nature of sex and violence in the narco world, placing temporally disjunctive moments together on the same plane. Tito/Titus and Ramses register these temporal confusions when they meet for breakfast at McDonald's soon after Chema's death.

RAMSES: I feel like I have been here before.

TITO/TITUS: You have, they are all the same.

RAMSES: No. Here. With you.

TITO/TITUS: Devil dreams, I'm sure.

RAMSES: What do you want?

TITO/TITUS: Nothing. I do not eat at McDonald's.

RAMSES: Fine. What happened to you there?

(He points to a scrape on Tito/Titus' face.)

TITO/TITUS: The scrape that saved my life. I hit the ground hard when I was caught in between a narco shootout a couple of weeks ago while I was waiting for a hamburger last night.<sup>60</sup>

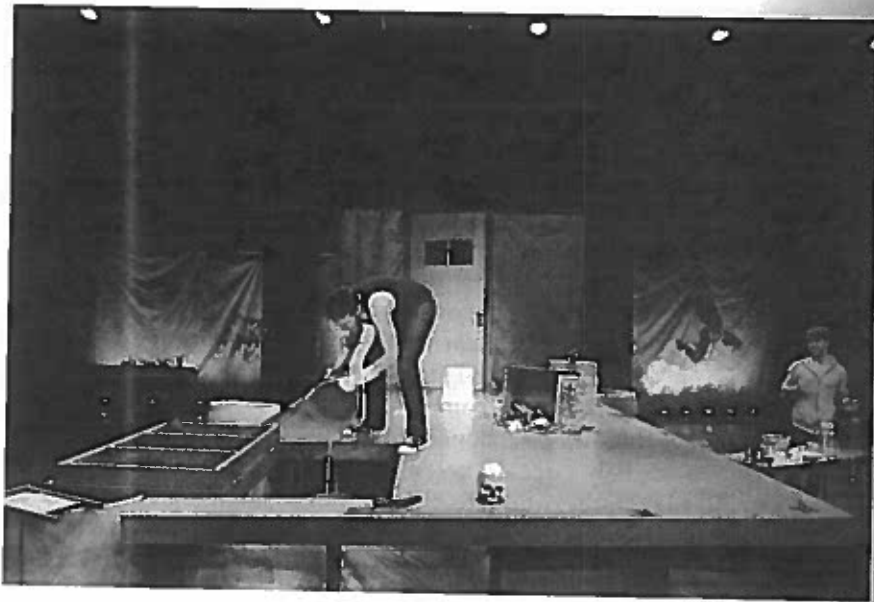
The actor playing Tito/Titus registers his confusion, but the play never tries to rectify or resolve his conclusion, dramaturgically or theatrically. The disjuncture remains unexplained. This lack of resolution allows the neoliberal era to live on uncannily throughout the play, giving untimeliness to the play as a whole. To this end, the play ends not with its chronological end, the scene that documents Tito/Titus's death and the beginning of Amelia's crusade for justice, but with the repetition of a sex scene between Tito/Titus and Ramses in one of the many houses he uses for his liaisons.

Space can be just as liminal in *Ramses* as time, making space durational. The movements of Cazares's characters make the border not just contiguous but continuous, by moving between spaces without scene changes. The link between these scenes is associative, all linked to moving in and out of El Paso, but we do not see Chema actually move across the border at all. The fluidity between the scenes suggests that these places are on the same plane despite the very different living conditions opposite sides of the border. The depiction of the crossing of borders in the play also works against the idea of unidirectional (and seemingly chrononormative) movement over them as an end goal for labor or love. The actual border is never depicted on stage; that is not where the trauma lies in this play. And no one crosses in order never

to return. In contrast, we see lovers and friends crossing into Juárez and El Paso in a quotidian manner. Ramses crosses into the United States to see Tito/Titus, only to show up late at McDonald's and miss breakfast. Tito crosses into Juárez to see him as well. Chema goes to school in El Paso during the day but goes home to her mother in Juárez at night.

Cazares's lack of investment in the border as a threshold space defetishizes it as an epistemological and geopolitical boundary that demarcates self-contained experiences (a binary Solis, however ambivalently, still maintains.) Instead, Juárez and El Paso are deterritorialized sites on the same plane differentially affected by transnational commerce. Who crosses and when is still of importance, of course, as it is clear that some people simply can't cross, such as Amelia and Lidia. But by and large the characters' movements argue that circulations of transnational commerce articulate the lived experience of the space, rather than unidirectional migration. As such, the historiography of the area is equally circulatory—moving back and forth and folding inward. Yet, this play harbors no late '90s era inflected utopian discourse of the hybrid or the nomad. The complex vectors of movement in this play not only depict a transnational reality, but also revise the temporal conception of the borderlands—a conception that often still sometimes functions on a teleological timeline even when rejecting spatial bifurcation.

The conjunction of cospatiality and cotemporality is best exemplified in *El Egipcio*, the grand 1920s era theater that closed in the '80s, where many of the play's scenes take place. The theater's obsolescence marks the dashed dreams of Mexico's nationalist period that began with the centralization of the socialist nation state under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) and ended somewhere between the peso crash of 1982 and the Mexico City earthquake that exposed the country's lack of infrastructure in 1985. Inside the theater, movies from the golden age are projected on the walls as Rudy the Border Patrol robot is being re-created as a sort of monstrosity. Reoccupied and transformed into Chema's studio, *El Egipcio* harbors the nationalist past, the post-nationalist past (the 1980s), and Titus's present (now). By collapsing past, present, and future, Cazares creates a space illuminated by the spectral light of 1940s celluloid and the surveillance lights of the '80s and '90s, retrofitted into a contemporary border patrol Frankenstein. So, even if the theater is a "tomb for a Mexico that never came," it is also a safe house, a respite that suspends the progressive time of the plot and a place where one can temporarily imagine a future even if it never happens.<sup>61</sup> Cazares's depiction of the theater both engages and undoes the drug safe house of filmic dramaturgy whose utopian promise is read as dystopia by a knowing, sober audience. This safe house is a transformation of the theater as cruising site—a purpose referenced when Tito/Titus is introduced in the play. An indelible pre-AIDS queer space, popular in gay literature of the '60s and '70s, the darkened movie theater looms large in the sexual imaginary. Cazares's theater was specifically inspired by a Gil Cuadros poem, "Conquering Immortality,"



*Ramses contra los monstruos*. Directed by Ryan Purcell. Drew Ledbetter as Ramses, Brandon Vukovic as Tito/Titus. Photo by Mark Turek.

which describes a shuttered but glorious theater in downtown LA becoming a double for a still majestic body ravaged by AIDS. The transformation of the movie theater from pre-epidemic cruising zone to post-nationalist safe house marks it as both a refuge and a ruin. The palimpsest nature of the space combines Mexican national and U.S. queer memories, joining past, present, and imagined future in one space.

In the 2013 production, the entire stage becomes El Egipcio for the second half of the play—transforming before our eyes right before the intermission. This is the only major scene change in the play, and it is consciously staged in front of the audience, making us keenly aware of the space itself. All further action in the play, then, happens “in the theater.” Cazares’s stage directions ask actors to do what cannot be staged, such as sleeping on a row of red theater seats, and designers to do the near impossible—making a shower of rain and sand. These impossibilities underscore El Egipcio’s biggest failure—its refusal to resolve into a stable domestic space for the characters who inhabit it. Chema, who uses it as a studio, is adamant that she does not live there. When Ramses and Tito/Titus try to make themselves comfortable, the theater fails to be a home sweet home. Ramses vomits up the hot chocolate that Tito/Titus makes him, undoing any hope the audience may have of their liaison resolving into monogamous cohabitation. This safe house ultimately becomes an unsafe house violated by the very violence that it tries to keep at

bay. It is where Rudy kills Tito/Titus in a freak accident and where La Barbie is killed. Because the movie house becomes the entire set for the second half of the play, the theater ceases to be a discrete place, preventing it from becoming a place set apart from the world of the play. This scenic decision necessitates that the rest of the play occur there, making the entire world an (un)safe house. History is no refuge in this regard; it is no time or space apart. *Ramses*’s set also incorporated the coexistence of hell, heaven, and purgatory in a way inspired by and departing from Reza Abdoh’s formulation in *The Law of Remains*.<sup>62</sup>

Because of the limits of *Ramses*’s stage space, heaven, hell, and purgatory are not stacked vertically but remain on a largely lateral stage plane. The exception is a hollow created by a shallow trapdoor downstage center. Used as a cauldron, the site of some of Ramses and Tito/Titus’s best sex and of his subsequent rape by La Barbie, the bowels of the El Egipcio as trapdoor literalizes the rectum as grave and glory.<sup>63</sup> Leo Bersani’s return is through the floorboards. This space harbors the incomplete dissolution of self and other during the sexual act and the incomplete dissolution of personhood under extreme neoliberal violence—be it rape or Ramses’ stew making from the bodies of the dead. This shallow grave extends to envelop Chema when she throws herself into the pot some time after her death, prompting her mother to move on to vengeance. The underground of *Ramses*’s stage space is also a literalization of the catacombs Padre Alonso mentions as the space underneath the church that is ideal for a clandestine lab. Yet, unlike many catacombs, everything that disappears in the underspace in *Ramses* reappears, much like the secret histories of neoliberalism that the play exposes.

### Theatrical Obsolescence as Critique

The appearance and reappearance of bodies, of course, engages with the theatricality of the theater, notably, the recognition that dead and dying characters always return to live again as actors taking their bows at curtain call. This uncanniness, explored so fully by Herbert Blau, haunts the play.<sup>64</sup> Yet, unlike a more generic formulation of the actor as dead and undead, in Cazares’s play these bodies reference the materiality of the narco-dead specifically. The play theatricalizes and depicts a refusal to be disappeared. The premise that drives the plot, after all, is Ramses’s inability to dissolve the bodies and souls of those killed in the narcoguerra.

Cazares’s disappearances are the latest in a long (neoliberal) series of disappearances emergent in the 1970s in the Southern Cone, where bodies of those who opposed military dictatorships (and the economic shock doctrines that came with them) were thrown from planes and absented from view by the state. In the 1990s in Juárez, assassins first disappeared women, then buried or dissolved them. Later, they placed their corpses in the open air for

display as they do male cadavers, writing a violence that expresses absolute power over territory and consciousness. As Rosanna Reguillo argues, these killings are a language that replaces utilitarian violence with expressive violence.<sup>65</sup> They were meant to be *seen* and apprehended by spectators. In some ways, then, Cazares's choice to have the erasure of narco-violence be the play's spectatorial index is anachronistic given the events of the most recent narcoguerra. On another level, however, this erasure more accurately indexes the procedures of death under Mexican-U.S. neoliberalism (and, it should be noted, El Pozolero, the inspiration for Ramses, worked throughout the narcoguerra, suggesting that there are multiple modes of dealing with the fallen).

Chema's treatment in *Ramses* best exemplifies Cazares's mode of making death material. Her long-limbed body remains onstage after she is killed, first spilling awkwardly out of a makeshift refrigerator, then in subsequent scenes being led around the stage clumsily by her mother, whom she towers over. The uncanny appearance of the very tall, living actress who plays Chema being awkwardly dragged around the stage refuses her character's erasure or naturalization as a corpse. Chema remains, not by standing and exiting the stage as actor after the performance but by remaining on stage as a character, sutured to her mother's side. Her mother's mourning is not of her daughter's absence but her very (un)real undead presence. Amelia's act is political. As she explains to a friend who tries to help her comes to terms with Chema's death:

I'm not burying her! She's mine. I won't let her leave my house. Chemita, don't worry. I won't let anybody take you, bury you underneath. Don't you understand, comadre? Our fucking son of a bitch president wants us to feed our dead to the earth so they're forgotten. So it's easier to not have justice. So that her death is *normal*.<sup>66</sup>

The embodied presence of the character also refuses the spectrality of the deceased, in a way echoed by Olmos in *so go the ghosts of México, part 1*. Chema's presence is joined by the corpses that emerge from the body bags Ramses brings into the Egyptian safe house; for example, La Barbie sits up after Tito/Titus opens the body bag to look at him. The corpses of La Barbie and Lidia cease to be docile bodies or even corpses, forcing Tito/Titus to mourn Chema's death openly for the first time in the play.

While these reappearances recall the Mexican monster movies whose undead border on camp, Cazares's undead remain monstrous, rather than zombielike. This distinction is important to make in the age of zombie capitalism. In Haitian culture zombies are beings raised from the dead by an external force; in contemporary culture they stand in for dead labor, or mindless adherence to capitalistic norms. The performative zombies we often see in protests, movies, and flash mobs remind us of dead labor by taking over public space in the First World, even when speaking against the mobilization



*Ramses contra los monstruos*. Directed by Ryan Purcell. Sophie Netanel as Lidia, Alston Brown as La Barbie. Photo by Mark Turek.

of finance capital elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> Cazares's monsters neither participate in so-called legitimate operations of finance capital nor do they make mass public appearances in finance capitals. Instead Cazares's monsters are from the Global South, enacting the violence in their own backyards. This cannibalism is necessary to accumulation by dispossession throughout the Global South. The everyday destruction of human beings is anything but dead labor; it is the labor of remaking death. These monsters represent the deformation of the world in the flesh. The monsters we see on stage take over: Ramses consumes them, they consume Ramses, they both consume Tito/Titus. And, I think it is fair to say, they also consume us.

An early version of the play suggests that Cazares imagined an army of the dead as zombies (a voodoo resurrection) that would fight a war against narcotraffic. In the final draft of the play, however, this large-scale war has become a very human strategic strike, not against the narcos, but against Felipe Calderón. With the help of Lidia's curse, Amelia, one of the few characters left alive, vows to assassinate the former president. So while the play is ostensibly about Ramses and the monsters, the true avenging angel is Chema's mother, who remains unconsumed—a situation reversed in Olmos's play, whose female hero is ambivalently replaced by a mass protagonist.

This is not to position Amelia as a neoliberal hero, however, or Calderón as a singular melodrama villain. The biopolitical machinations of the

narcomachine are not simply the work of one man, but of an entire economic system, as Cazares well knows. His dramaturgy underscores his point. An early lecture by Profesora Alonso states it plainly, cheekily revising Charles Bowden's famous dictum: "El Paso/Ciudad Juárez is neoliberalism's patient zero. But this is not a laboratory. This is a battleground. And the drug war raging on the other side of the border right now is a crisis of neoliberalism, of accelerated economic stratification."<sup>68</sup> This professor, who teaches at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), is no mere innocent bystander or moral guardian. S/he is complicit in the regime as a consumer. As S/he claims near the end of the play: "By now, as I am sure you all know your classmate Chema Carrasco was gunned down in Ciudad Juárez the night after our last class. I asked my dealer if it was somehow my fault. If I somehow, by consuming illicit drugs, was complicit in her death. If I was a narco too."<sup>69</sup> The look on the actor's face when delivering the monologue tells us the answer is yes.

The final scene of the play, where Tito/Titus tries to offer Ramses some mushrooms in exchange for the coke Ramses usually provides him, literalizes this violence:

TITO/TITUS: There's a note inside.

RAMSES: Ramses, the next time we fuck, we'll eat these, teononancatl, flesh of God, the divine mushroom.

TITO/TITUS: No wonder the Aztecs were fucked up and sacrificed people. Their gods were hallucinogens.

RAMSES: It's no different now, m'ijo.

TITO/TITUS: Right. From now on, every time I snort some coke or take a pill, it'll be an offering to you, all those souls going into my bloodstream.

RAMSES: I'd rather not think about you as I do my job. It's been too sweet. Get dressed. We need to leave before anybody gets here. We're fucked if we get caught.

*(Tito/Titus gets dressed. As he does, a bottle of pills falls out of his pocket. Tito/Titus scrambles to pick it up.)*

RAMSES: What's that?

TITO/TITUS: . . . Pills. Meds.

RAMSES: Are you sick?

TITO/TITUS: . . .

RAMSES: Are you sick?

TITO/TITUS: What if I were?

*(Ramses kisses Tito/Titus.)*<sup>70</sup>

The marked relationship between consumption and death literalizes Profesora Alonso's concerns. Ultimately, however, this scene goes beyond making a claim about complicity and consumption to making a more complex claim about the false distinction between licit and illicit drugs. By bringing antiretrovirals, mushrooms, and cocaine into the same scene, and into the same body, Cazares reminds audiences that legal prescription drugs and illegal drugs are both part of the contemporary pharmacological regime that defines the experience of everyday life. Although there is a pill bottle in this scene, in others, Tito/Titus carries his HIV meds in a baggie much like the one the mushrooms are in and like those in which cocaine is usually sold. The presence of the baggies as props onstage is a constant signifier of drug consumption and purchase as a quotidian habit, much like carrying just enough meds with you for a short trip. La Barbie mistakes Tito/Titus's meds for Tylenol carried by a nobody, misunderstanding Tito/Titus's identity as Ramses's lover and an HIV-positive individual. This juxtaposition, aided by a prop, reveals a more intimate link between identity and consumption. Additionally, Ramses's intimate relations with Tito/Titus and Alex make it clear that the intensification of neoliberal practices in the United States and Mexico—such as the rise of the maquila, the emergence of narcotraffick, and the onslaught of the AIDS crisis—share the same cultural time and space. The AIDS crisis is not usually thought to be a symptom of the neoliberal; certainly, I do not posit causality here. Yet, as Cazares notes, that crisis and its pharmacological supplement, antiretrovirals, are not isolated from capitalistic networks of violence throughout the hemisphere. It is no coincidence that during Alex and Ramses's first night together, when Ramses outs himself as a narcotrafficker, Coca-Cola is mentioned. This is not only a joke about U.S. market saturation of Mexico but also a crucial part of the play's genealogy of a transnational pharmacological regime. After all, Coca-Cola did actually begin its life as a drug (it contained cocaine).<sup>71</sup> Thus, this scene inaugurates and theorizes an era of pharmacological violence that has existed from the 1980s to the present, but whose roots span the entirety of the twentieth century.

The play marks an extended biopolitical moment, when the creation, sale, and distribution of pharmacological products becomes the capitalist venture par excellence, licit and illicit, in the United States and Mexico. In the '80s, the cost of HIV medications kept them out of the hands of all but the most affluent users. Those who could not afford the drugs were left to die, connecting capitalism and physical violence at the most basic level. Today, Gilead Sciences, the company that owns most of the patents on single-dose HIV regimens (and Truvada) is one of the most profitable businesses in the world.<sup>72</sup> In this way, the Sinaloa cartel and Gilead Sciences are not so different: they are organizations that control the distribution, sale, and price point of pharmacological products. By exposing this connection, however obliquely, *Ramses* performs as the anti-*Dallas Buyers Club*. Instead of romancing the straight

white male entrepreneur as savior racing toward a more democratic distribution of drugs leading to a clear teleological end to the AIDS crisis, Cazares's queer lovers reveal how the experience of antiretroviral therapy and quotidian work for the cartels in and across the U.S. border underscore a chronic and recursive state of being within transnational capitalism from which there is no escape even in (or around) death.

In a more extreme way than Saracho, Cazares shows how neoliberal affective experience is deeply pharmacological. López and Maité medicate themselves to stave off their apprehension of neoliberal precarity. Tito/Titus takes his antiretroviral drugs to stay alive. Ironically, like the Aztecs' *teonanācatl* (Nahuatl for "sacred mushroom"), the antivirals also evince a mode of experience filled with hallucinations and devil dreams—a radical reordering of the world that structures the entire play. The jumps in time and space, the move between nightmares and reality so crucial to Cazares's dramaturgy, mimic the effects of antiretroviral drugs, so painstakingly detailed by Doctor Alonso in a darkly comic scene where Tito/Titus first learns of his HIV status. His and others' recreational drug use may or may not exacerbate or enhance these experiences.

The greatest moral hazard in this play, however, is not consuming drugs or performing low-level labor in narco networks. After all, Ramses and Tito/Titus are not described as monsters in the prologue to the play. The moral hazard is remaining actively ignorant of the history and present reality of neoliberal violence. Consider Tito/Titus's confession, which ends the play:

TITO/TITUS: When I take the pill,  
I feel that I'm swallowing the 80s.  
I learned love from Enrique Iglesias songs.  
The ones that played at the beginning of telenovelas—  
telenovelas made in a Mexico made for export.  
Clear images of love.  
Clean images of blood.  
Never real.  
Never ending without resolution.  
When I take the pill,  
I'm swallowing the 80s whole hole.  
The 80s never happened.  
It's a decade we only dreamt of.  
Goodbye Ramses, I love you.  
RAMSES: I love you too, Chiquito.<sup>73</sup>

The play, unlike *Tito/Titus*, does not even try to forget. And it does not even try to resolve. Resolution here, it should be noted, is paired with forgetting.

This final scene upends the idea of national progress as well as the possibility of escape from the violence of neoliberal narcoentrepreneurship. In

the wake of these failures, Cazares offers eschatology. Although he theorizes the play as the end of the world, the play actually does not end, indicating that Cazares's investment is in thinking about the future as a present event. He shows how the end of one era and the emergence of the next coexist and also meld with empires past. That Cazares references both the Egyptian era and the Aztec past suggests a palimpsestic relationship to cosmology as well. Ghema's painting references the ritual of the new fire, the same ceremony of renewal Moraga does. Here, however, the cycle of destruction and renewal seems more chronic than revelatory. Ramses's failure, particularly his failure to dissolve bodies, can bring about the end of the world. But we don't know if he has yet, and we still won't by the end of the play. If Tito/Titus feels that he is being reinfected "with the 80s" every time he and Ramses fuck, then we, as audience members are reinfected as well, with a sort of antiretroviral historiography that reveals how time binds.

Following Elizabeth Freeman's imperative, Cazares unbinds the future from reproductivity, effectively rejecting both U.S. and Mexican investments in progressive teleology and the child as future. The avenging angel of this play, Amelia, is effectively un-mothered in this play. It is her child's death and her refusal to nurture the living that allows her to imagine the violent act that will create a radical break with the present order: killing the former Mexican president. Amelia, given her age, cannot have another child. Her relationships in the future will be allegiances with young male queers and outlaws with whom she will not procreate. The future then, is queer kind of regeneration.

This queer regeneration, however, rejects a hallmark of mainstream gay dramaturgy: monogamous heteronormative coupling as post-revelation resolution. Cazares's play refuses to hinge on the double confession of Ramses's relationship to the cartels and Tito/Titus's HIV status—an important revision to the 2011 version of the play. Ramses's and Tito/Titus's confessions are beside the point. Given the intimate relationship between reproductive futurity and nationalism in the United States and Mexico and the importance of gay marriage to the domestication of queer threats to said nationalisms, Cazares's dramaturgical choices represent a radical critique of neoliberalism at the level of dramatic structure, suggesting the importance of form as a mode of political critique in contemporary Latinx drama.

#### Enter the Mass Protagonist: *so go the ghosts of méxico, part 1*

Matthew Paul Olmos shares Cazares's resistance to easy resolution, despite *so go the ghosts of méxico, part 1*'s more orthodox structure. Partly biographical, the play tells the story of Marisol Valles García, a Mexican woman, who at age twenty, became the police chief of Práxedes G. Guerrero, Chihuahua, a small town besieged by cartel violence. Sick of the violence she was seeing, the criminology student and mother of a small child took office in November



2010, when no one else applied.<sup>74</sup> Their reluctance was not surprising, as her predecessor was killed and beheaded by the cartels. In her short time in office, Valles García hired a number of female officers, who were mostly unarmed, and implemented a number of social reforms aimed at making life livable in Juárez. These included getting kids back to school, creating neighborhood watch communities, and going door to door offering support to communities. She also instituted a free lunch program, which she took particular pride in.<sup>75</sup> Despite the nonviolent tactics she used to discourage young people from getting involved in the cartels, Valles García began receiving death threats a few months into the job. She fled over the U.S. border in March 2011 with her family and sought asylum.

In *so go the ghosts of México, part 1*, Valles García is called “a brave woman in Mexico,” a sobriquet that echoes the one given to her by the Spanish newspaper *El País*, which was quickly disseminated by the U.S. press: the bravest woman in Mexico.<sup>76</sup> The Valles García character, Mari, is the sole woman onstage in *so go the ghosts of México, part 1*, surrounded by four men and no one else, which is notable considering that Valles García expressly hired many women to be on her police force. Mari’s orders are given to invisible coworkers, who by default largely leave her alone onstage to defend herself against visible and invisible forces. The chilling reality of abandonment is made clear by Mari’s work in the police station, where she hands off tasks to imaginary employees. Their absence is noted by El Morete when he jokes that a busy police station should be, well, busy—not empty and quiet as it stands. That this emptiness is acknowledged theatrically suggests that these invisible workers were consciously used to render absence rather than simply being a production exigency (that is, absent to avoid the cost of casting actors to play such small roles).

Mari’s primary psychological conflict is with her husband, who badgers her for taking the job, pointing to the damage that it will cause a not yet-conceived daughter, who becomes another absent presence onstage. The attention to procreation is present from the play’s inception. It opens with Mari and her husband having sex in their car; they are arguing about having a child when they are interrupted by static, which puts an end to their intercourse and any possibility of impregnation. This failed reproductivity, an issue to which I will return, culminates with the emergence of a different presence, a mass mobilization, which brings with it a detour away from psychological realism and from representational mimesis. This transformation occurs when Mari’s husband checks out the car, which is not running, to see where the noise is coming from. When he does this Mari turns the dial on the radio, only to have “sounds of music burst from the static.”<sup>77</sup> Eventually, the music takes over, harassing El Morete, the minor cartel lieutenant, with a song he refers to as “my sister’s ass.”<sup>78</sup> Over the course of the play, the music functions as Mari’s tool and companion in idealism. She is the only one who can hear its siren song. Eventually she uses it to save her life, summoning the dead police

chief with it at a crucial moment. The 2013 production used music much as Marci McMahon describes Saracho’s sound design for *El Nogalar*, as a mode to break the narco silence created by fear in many Mexican communities. El Morete’s and Güero’s reaction to the music as a threat argues that this sonic presence endangers their domination of the world. Güero, the white U.S. interloper—who also is part of the business in a way we don’t quite understand—claims late in the play that he can’t do his work with “all . . . this noise.”<sup>79</sup> As the last stage direction tells us, within a cacophony of confusion after Mari disappears, “music goes in strength over the voices, silencing them. Deafening in beauty before spilling over the sort of serenity that just does not exist anymore.”<sup>80</sup> The music, then, is a sonic imagining of the world as it should be but is not. Olmos couples this aural utopia with the threat of a rising army of ghosts just outside the play’s doors, mixing beauty and terror, horror genre and dreamscape, so as to render the possibilities of the true ends of the drug war theatrically. This combination materializes Olmos’s thesis that it is a collective of souls and voices that can change the situation in Mexico rather than recourse to individual agency and the protection of the nuclear family. (Here, Olmos departs from Valles García’s own public discourse, where she often refers to the nuclear family, albeit strategically).<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps ironically, this claim is embedded in a play that ostensibly hinges upon the idea of a singular hero: the so-called bravest woman in Mexico. The complexity of this bait and switch is challenging, as is Olmos’s tone which moves between eerie, lyrical, and darkly comic. Both the 2013 production directed by Meilyn Wang and the 2014 Spanish-language production at Repertorio Español attempted to navigate these dramaturgical challenges while rendering Olmos’s vision into theatrical language, revealing the conundrums of staging neoliberal violence.<sup>82</sup> For most of the play, the dead police chief, who returns to help Mari, represents the ghosts of Mexico. In the 2013 production at New York City’s La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, this figure was a stagy undead creature complete with stage blood, whitened face, and a removable head. His first entrance is through a door made of plastic strips, much like those popular in butcher shops, a site allusively rendered when seeing the bloody corpse enter the stage. Until Mari’s husband dies, this door is the portal between the ghosts and the living. Mari’s husband, in contrast, resurrects himself onstage, reminiscent of *Ramses’s* Chema.<sup>83</sup> In the 2014 production at Repertorio, the dead police chief was similarly attired but emerged from within the set itself, not from an offstage exit, making his ability to appear consistent with the dead husband. The Mexican production, perhaps because of lack of resources, costumed the dead police chief less forcefully, using white makeup and tattered clothing—a choice that Olmos himself found quite affecting in its minimalism.

Yet Olmos clearly has a theatrical and self-referential imagining of how the dead are resurrected onstage. In the scene in which Mari’s husband rises from the dead after being killed by El Morete, Güero admits he is freaked out

by the dead husband's presence. He references the theatrical conceit by which the actor rises from the ground in the dialogue:

GÜERO: Alright, alright.

DEAD HUSBAND: Is it, alright? You don't look alright.

GÜERO: I'll give you that. The fact that you're standing there talking, but at the same time you're sort of lying on the floor over there . . . bleeding—<sup>84</sup>

Güero's sarcastic demeanor masks his horror and lets the audience in on the absurdity of his rise. Referencing both the actor's movement onstage and the separation of the ghost and corpse of Mari's dead husband's, Güero's comment uncannily forces audiences not to make invisible the victims of narco-violence. Notably, this maneuver echoes Chema's rise from the dead in *Ramses*. Wang and her design team's costuming and makeup choices for these two figures, however, made the characters legible as zombies rather than ghosts to audience members such as the *New York Times* critic who reviewed the production.<sup>85</sup> While the critic only noted the "cheesiness" of this aspect of the production, reading the ghosts as zombies has another potential effect: encouraging one to read the end of the play as a zombie apocalypse. Within U.S. cinema, this apocalypse often symbolizes a large-scale dystopia run by invisible forces, spreading contagion.<sup>86</sup> That event is quite different from Olmos's rising up of the ghosts, even if it is also dependent on the power of the collective. Olmos's ghosts' Lazarus-like resurrection is meant to remind audiences of those killed in the narco wars and to materialize the permeability of national borders by said ghosts, literalizing transnational complicity and the possibility of recognition. The spectral other of undocumented laborers who populate the paranoid U.S. mind, these ghosts are both material and not, made invisible by U.S. failure to recognize them. They are not trying to eat or infect the living so much as to open up the possibility of a new tomorrow. An exchange between the dead police chief and Güero, the American interloper, lays out the stakes of the situation, soon after dead husband rises from the stage:

DEAD POLICE CHIEF: You Americanos, you see ghosts on all your days, but you never look at them. (*Güero has to hold his hand up as it is so bright.*) There is nothing little about it, Americano.

DEAD POLICE CHIEF: On the streets, in your home. But pretty soon, there will be no more homes, there will only be ghosts. And tell me Americano, what will you look at then? (*Güero moves away from the window.*)

GÜERO: That's uh . . . quite a view. (*El Morete quietly dials his phone.*)

DEAD POLICE CHIEF: Don't worry Güero, soon you will be surrounded by so many of us, that my heart cannot even understand it how

surrounded. But maybe tha's okay, huh. It's not my heart that needs to understand it.<sup>87</sup>

In both New York productions, at Repertorio Español and at La Mama, this scene asked the actors and audience to do the work of imagining the masses that are not represented onstage, either by sitting behind Güero and the dead police chief and imagining them behind the plastic door (as at La Mama) or by occupying the space of the ghosts as the dead police chief and Güero look out at the audience (at Repertorio).

By the end of the play, Olmos abandons any attempt to have the actors embody the ghosts materially onstage. Olmos concedes that he had no particular image in mind for the last stage direction of the play and has questioned whether or not this stage direction adds one too many endings to the play. In the 2013 La Mama production, when "several hundred ghosts appear" we are confronted with a blackout and the rustle of the narcos looking for the missing Mari—a simplification of the play's ending.<sup>88</sup> Without the burden of having to represent the ghosts' invasion of the world Olmos and Wang can abandon the woefully inadequate door that the dead police chief enters through at the beginning of the play, opening up borders through aural means instead. Certainly, the permeation of the soundscape modeled this form of expansion. In the Repertorio production, the last scene was handled differently: the ghosts were represented by a handful of sets of empty clothing raised on tie line which appear to float upward to the sky. El Morete shoots at these ghosts as the play ends. This interpretation of the ghosts more clearly marked the present absence of the narco-dead, alluding to the femicides throughout Mexico—which are often represented in performance art and theater by empty and discarded clothing, performing a certain memorial function, as in Cristina Michaus's *Women of Ciudad Juárez*.

In Olmos's play, I argue, we are to think about the ghosts as a collective, rather than as evidence of individual casualties—and it is here that the impossible stage direction becomes most productive for rethinking the problem of the transnational drug trade. The impossibility of staging Olmos's hundreds of ghosts underscores the near impossibility of staging collectives and transnational forces irreducible to emblematic characters within a theatrical frame. This conundrum is not confined to the stage but penetrates the political imaginary as well. We struggle to imagine mass mobilization against neoliberalism in ways that acknowledge the necropolitical world without being unduly cynical. In *so go the ghosts of México, part 1*, Olmos's ghosts suggest that they might return as a spectral yet fleshy mob becoming a multitude. A curious version of Hardt and Negri's utopian imagining of democracy after (E)mpire, this "multitude" is less a new form of democracy in the secular political tradition than an eschatological return, echoing with Moraga's and Cazares's understanding of end times with its presence of past, present, and future at once.<sup>89</sup>

More mundanely, the conflicted legacy of ghosts as absence or presence is shot through the process of developing the play. As Olmos claims in an interview, his early conception of the play was fueled by his interest in the idea of ghost towns at the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>90</sup> It is notable that the town where Valles García was sheriff is one of these towns. Prádexis de Guerrero's 2010 census showed a population of under 5,000, about 60 percent of its population in 2000.<sup>91</sup> This absence corresponds with one of the initial influences for the play—the idea that if everyone left towns that were riddled with narco-violence, the violence would necessarily stop, marking the unsustainability of the current situation. Of course, in reality, the abandonment of these towns has had dire effects on nonurban economies and the survival of the current residents. As a theatrical allegory, however, we are asked to remember who is not present at every step of the play. Thus, these ghosts, those who are not there, are as much Olmos's protagonists as Mari is. That the ghosts will almost inevitably dominate Güero and other U.S. citizens is the play's threat and hope.

Fascinatingly, the hope and threat of these ghosts is untethered from Mari's singular success or failure at stopping violence in her town. Mari brings the music—the sonic presence of that same staged absence—that symbolizes a different way forward, but her personal crusade does not matter so much in the end. She ultimately fails to stop the violence and comes to the United States instead. Consider the penultimate scene of the play (the last one with text), when Güero tries to convince Mari to come to the United States:

MARI: Es a simple question, Americano, what happens to la música if I go with you.

DEAD HUSBAND: And imagine what can happen to la música if you doesn't go with him.

(Güero pulls out his mobile.)

GÜERO: Look I've made my offer. It's your life to take or let go of. Just say the word. And if you don't say the word . . . well . . . then good luck to you, you best be on your way and me on mine.

(They stare. A moment. He dials, lights darken over him. Music bursts through, it crosses countries and expands borders. Mari and husband look at each other as they listen in awe at the vibrations of the music. White out.)<sup>92</sup>

Given that the music ultimately prevails and ends the play, rather than an individual act of heroism, *so go the ghosts* proffers the possibility of a new order that depends more on the power of the collective, the surround sound of the dead, rather than Mari's heroism. This ending is at odds with the agonistic demands of the dead husband and Güero—the former of which tries to

convince her she needs to stay to change things, and the latter of which urges her to save herself. In addition, Mari's exchange with Güero about crossing the border lays out the problem with heroism.

GÜERO: . . . You'll be in the papers: online and off. News anchors will want to interview you about you. About what happened to your husband. How did this twenty-two year old with a family of her own decide to . . . well, we know the story.

MARI: And I'll get to go with you across . . .

GÜERO: Look, I've got no shot of quieting whatever all this is in this country, but I've got a pretty good chance of making you famous in mine. And well, my country is, if nothing else, somewhat louder than yours.

DEAD HUSBAND: Did you hear him, he can't quiet you, Mari. Nobody can. Not him, not los narcos, not los soldados, not—

MARI: And what do you get?

GÜERO: Mari, your "husband"'s right. I can't have all this . . . noise.

In the business sense of it. And while I know the business is the opposite of what you care about, if you don't come with me, your entire family, will be . . . just like him. Which, I am sorry might sound like music to you now, but we're talking Grottesquely. Fucking Torturously.<sup>93</sup>

Meaning that the music does not need a hero. In addition, the play claims that being a hero is, in some sense, being complicit with the neoliberal machine. Güero effectively silences Mari in Mexico by making her a hero in the United States. Güero's comments make visible the reality that the staging of the liberal subject/hero within the media foments the continuance of cartel activity rather than representing a way out of its procedures. His U.S. identity drives the point home that his nation houses both powerful pharmaceutical and media industries, exhuming the link between the valorization of the maverick liberal hero and the furtherance of neoliberal capital. Equally political is Olmos's critical self-awareness about his own desire, as a U.S. citizen, to make Mari a hero. In this sense, his labeling her "the bravest woman in Mexico" is not without irony, a point largely ignored in critical reception of the play. Olmos himself does see the real Mari as heroic for standing up against violence, but he does not reproduce a hero narrative uncritically. While Olmos's dramaturgy may also have been an attempt to wrestle with the rather ambivalent ending of the Valles García's story, his maneuvering undoes the audience's ability to valorize Mari as a singular heroine. In doing so, he frustrates the conventional desire to valorize the individual crusader as the best potential agent for ending the violence of the narco war. That said, the hero narrative was exactly what drew the press to the show—including many non-arts journalists who would not usually attend an off-Broadway show.

Olmos's critique of the singular protagonist, and by extension the liberal subject, is met by critique of the rhetoric of family so important to rhetorical defense of the Mexican nation and to many neoliberal mobilizations throughout the Americas. Mari attempts to widen the scope of care, pointing out that all Mexican citizens are her family, even when she links her concerns to her own future childbearing. Notably, Olmos's fictional Mari is a mother even though the real Marisol Valles García already had a child—notably a son—at the time she took office. Mari's husband's shortsightedness in understanding her motivations to help Mexico is critiqued throughout the play; his rants about Mari's maternity read as deeply sexist and ridiculous on the page and on the stage. Yet the amount of stage time given to this discourse and the reference to Mari's potential maternity in the United States as a motivating factor for her crossing reveal the persistence of heteronormative futurity, even as it is being rejected. For Mari, in life and onstage, the extinction of narcotraffic comes in stopping future generations from participating. Her success could be tied to a lack of procreation that would prevent a future generation of narcotraffickers. This is a project to which the ghosts, as well as Mari's social reforms, are essential.

### On Rejecting Narco-Masculinity, Narco-Realism

Olmos links his critique of U.S. imperialism to a critique of masculinity. U.S.-born Güero is also the one who is most clearly threatened by the dead police chief, who blames the United States for much of the problem. The police chief points out to Güero that his own death was “one of your conquests,” and he goes on to think through the consequences of these conquests. He says:

How do you think the world will look at you when back outside there we all are, in the thousands upon thousands, with our un'dead hands all pointing straight at you. My guess: you'll shit yourself worse than he just pissed himself, Americano. And maybe one day you'll be an empty too. Just like when bullets cross La Linea. Oh, Los Estados Unidos will de' flate. Do you hear me what I'm tellin' to you, you fuckin' memory.<sup>94</sup>

The ex-police chief's emasculation of Güero is similar to Güero's own humiliation of El Morete, who is easily disarmed, literally and figuratively. When they first meet, Güero accuses El Morete (in English: the bruise) of cruising him—as a queer and a bottom. It is clear that Olmos is depicting Güero, the white U.S. citizen, as a potential top who tries to subordinate his Mexican counterpart. Their homophobic banter underscores the ridiculousness of narco-masculinity, echoing *Dreamlandia's* critical appraisal of the easy conflation of queerness and failure to dominate. Yet one does wonder if

the naturalness with which we encounter these forms of machismo makes the critique less legible than it could be, despite Olmos's intentions. According to Olmos, in the Mexican production in San Miguel de Allende, El Morete was scary rather than bumbling and the critique of narco-masculinity did not read.<sup>95</sup> While his scariness may have been largely attributable to the reality of narcotrafficking in Mexico, the banter between El Morete and Güero may not have been as much a part of a cultural self-critique in Mexico as it was in urban New York theater circles. In the La Mama production, the actor playing Güero was over the top, and it was not always clear whether the audience was laughing with Güero or at him. In the Repertorio production, the link between the ridiculousness of narco-masculinity and imperialist history was borne out with a more self-conscious performance in the first scene where they meet. These production choices included the scene's accompaniment by spaghetti western music, red lights, and allusions to the trappings of the western genre, features that are often associated with duels between macho men for popular audiences. That Olmos's sequel to this play is described as exploring “the ridiculous machismo of narco culture as shown through a cast of all women” suggests he might be conscious of the difficulty in portraying this critique with male bodies onstage.<sup>96</sup> That said, the fact that Mari is the sole woman onstage surrounded by archetypal male characters in *so go the ghosts* underscores the fact that she is constantly fighting a masculinist mode of being as much as she is trying to hold off the traffickers. Olmos's escalation of the personal manifestations of patriarchy calls attention to the feminist, and arguably feminine, way Valles García herself chose to fight narcotraffic: through hiring unarmed women to go door to door, doing social work with area youth to prevent them from entering the cartel industry in the first place. This form of attack on *narcomenudeo* (the everyday effects of narcotraffic not related to the trade) is a hopeful one, but one not often represented in traditional media about narcotrafficking and transnational capitalism, perhaps because of its antidramatic and feminine nature.

In my interview with Olmos, he made it explicit that he links femininity with compassion and the hope for changing the dominance of narcotraffic in the future. He views the music in the play as a feminine force that battles openly with more masculine forces throughout the play. This music is deeply incorporated in the rest of the trilogy, including the third play, which is inspired by the story of Javier Sicilia, the Mexican poet turned activist whose son was killed in a club in 2010. As a leader of peaceful protest, he has become a lightning rod figure in Mexican protests against the current drug war. Interestingly, at this point, the second play also centers on female characters, namely, a mother who loses her daughter in narco-violence. Although Olmos admits that he struggles with showing the rather epic reality of transnational complicity in his plays, his attempt to think through the gendered aspects of the drug trade and focus on *narcomenudeo* in *so go the ghosts, part 1* distinguishes his work from Hollywood narratives that valorize law

enforcement solutions to the end of transnational narcotrafficking. His sound design works to the same end. Consider the sound design embedded in the play's last stage direction:

EL MORETE looks up at the sky as it brightens, as the music soars. Several hundred ghosts appear. He pulls his gun and aims it in all directions. Lights drown over him. Inside the home is messed; drawers are opened, clothes strewn about. It is vacated and looks exactly like the sort of house you would see a decapitated man laying in a pool of blood. From outside, the sounds of tires crushing onto gravel are heard. Headlights flash the window. Several car doors open and shut. The music swells, drowning out the sounds of footsteps on gravel moving closer and the clocking of automatic weapons. When the stage has hit to black, we hear men's voices entering the home, shouting through it. Fragments of phrases such as: "¿Dónde están?!" "¿No están aquí?" can be heard. The music grows in strength over the voices, silencing them. Deafening in beauty before spilling over into the sort of serenity that just does not exist anymore[.] Curtain.

END OF PLAY.<sup>97</sup>

The sound of cars driving up and engaging in gunfire is replaced by music displacing sound as a document of individualized forms of violence. This literally performs the death of the sound effects linked to filmic narco-realism, a form that reifies violence as entertainment. The choral, undifferentiated mode of music that ends the play instead offers up what bodies onstage cannot do themselves: render palpable the hundreds of ghosts Olmos asks to enter the stage. A literal reading of this direction would simply drown out what is going on stage. A more careful reading would suggest a more choral collaboration, upending the narco-realistic solution—a crime solved (or not) ending in heroic capture, assassination, and or redemptive death for a singular hero.

This chapter has revealed how the performance of entrepreneurship, violence, and heroism are best critiqued through overt theatricality and innovative dramaturgy rather than narco-realism. These plays' successes (and constructive failures) suggest that the theater may be the likeliest unlikely place to think through the necropolitical performances of hemispheric neoliberalism. In the conclusion, I will review and advocate for the efficacy of theatricality and dramaturgical revision as important tools to rethink politics in the neoliberal Americas.

## NOTES

### Preface

1. Gherrie L. Moraga, *The Hungry Woman* (Albuquerque, N.Mex.: West End Press, 2001). I refer here to the 2006 immigration reform protests.
2. Cherrie L. Moraga, *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry by Cherrie Moraga* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 145–74.
3. Alexandra Bernson, *En Las Manos de la Muerte*, produced at the Rites and Reason Theatre, Brown University, Providence, R.I., October 27–November 1, 2010.
4. Tiffany Ana López, “Violent Inscriptions: Writing the Body and Making Community in Four Plays by Migdalia Cruz,” *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 1 (2000): 51–66.
5. When this term proves unwieldy, I defer to Latino/a to deemphasize the naturalization of the male pronoun as a neutral as it is often used in the Spanish language.
6. Lila Abu-Lughod uses the term *halfie* in her essay “Writing against Culture,” in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard Fox (Santa Fe, N.Mex.: School of American Research Press, 1991). Abu-Lughod attributes the term to Kiran Narayan.
7. See Lindsay Goss, “Tactical Acting Jane Fonda, GI Resistance, and the FTA” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2014), for an excellent theorization of solidarity. Dr. Goss was my advisee.
8. See, for example, Spencer Golub, *Infinity (Stage)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

### Critical Introduction

1. Jon D. Rossini and Patricia Ybarra, “Neoliberalism, Historiography, Identity Politics, Toward a New Historiography of Latino Theatre,” *Radical History Review*, 112 (Winter 2012): 163.
2. For a debate about these terms, and in particular how we might think of the post-neoliberal coming after neoliberalism, see Laura MacDonald and Arne Ruckert, eds., *Post-Neoliberalization in the Americas* (Houndmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); John Burdick, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts, eds., *Beyond Neoliberalism in Latin America? Society and Politics at the Crossroads* (Houndmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Richard Snyder, *Mexican Politics after Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

133. Alan Sommerstein, *The Tangled Ways of Zeus and Other Studies in and around Greek Tragedy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30–46.
134. Svich, interview with the author.
135. Reguillo, “The Narco-Machine.”
136. Svich, *Iphigenia Crash Land Falls*, 341.
137. The one full academic article on a production of the play, Lance Gharavi’s “Of Both Worlds,” does not deal with this issue but instead concentrates on technology.

## Chapter 4

1. *Scarface*, directed by Brian de Palma (Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 1983); and Stephen Gaghan, *Traffic*, directed by Steven Soderbergh (New York: U.S.A. Films, 2000). Also see Kane Race, *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009).
2. Craig Borten and Melisa Wallack, *Dallas Buyers Club*, directed by Jean-Marc Vallée (Universal City, Calif.: Focus Features, 2013); screenplay (2012), [http://focusguilds2013.com/workspace/media/dbc\\_final-script\\_-12.02.12-.pdf](http://focusguilds2013.com/workspace/media/dbc_final-script_-12.02.12-.pdf).
3. For example, see A. O. Scott, “Taking on Broncos and a Plague,” *New York Times* (November 1, 2013).
4. Ibid. See also Stephen Freiss, “Don’t Applaud Jared Leto’s Transgender Mammy,” *Time* (February 28, 2014), <http://time.com/10650/dont-applaud-jared-letos-transgender-mammy/>.
5. This is Hermann Herlinghaus’s formulation. See Hermann Herlinghaus, “Placebo Intellectuals in the Wake of Cosmopolitanism: A ‘Pharmacological’ Approach to Roberto Bolaño’s novel 2666,” *The Global South* 5, no. 1 (2011): 101–19.
6. See Malcolm Harris, “Walter White Supremacy,” *The New Inquiry* (September 27, 2013), <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/walter-white-supremacy/>; and Chris Prioleau, “Walter White and Bleeding Brown: On *Breaking Bad*’s Race Problem,” *Apogee* (October 3, 2013), <http://www.apogeejournal.org/walter-white-bleeding-brown-on-breaking-bads-race-problem/>.
7. Alexandra Bernson, *En Las Manos de la Muerte* (unpublished play script, 2010). I directed the production at the Rites and Reason Theatre, Brown University, Providence, R.I., October 28 to November 1, 2010.
8. Ginger Thompson, “On Mexico’s Mean Streets, the Sinners Have a Saint,” *New York Times* (March 26, 2004); Claudio Lomnitz Adler, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York: Zone, 2005), 486–96; Cymene Howe, Susanna Zarasky, and Lois Ann Lorentzen, “Devotional Crossings, Transgender Sex Workers, Santísima Muerte and Spiritual Solidarity in Guadalajara and San Francisco,” in *Religion at the Corner of Bliss and Nirvana: Politics, Identity and Faith in New Migrant Communities*, ed. Lois Ann Lorentzen, Joaquin Jay Gonzales III, Kevin M. Chun, and Hien Duc Do (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), 3–38.
9. Octavio Solis, *Santos y Santos*, in *Plays by Octavio Solis* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 2006), 1–82.
10. Ibid., 4.
11. Ibid., 13.
12. Ibid., 19.
13. Ibid., 52.

14. For accounts of this history, see Diego Enrique Osorno, *El cartel de Sinaloa: Una historia del uso político del narco* (Mexico City, Mexico: Grijalbo, 2010); Andreas, *Border Games*; and Astorga, *El Siglo de las Drogas*.
15. Valencia, *Capitalismo Gore*, 15. Translation is my own.
16. In *Life Is a Dream* by Calderón de la Barca, Vasily decides to test whether or not his son—whom he has exiled to a tower because astrological signs pointed to his future as a tyrant—is civilized enough to take over the kingdom as his male heir. If not, his nephew, Aistalf, who has decided to marry Stella rather than fight against her as rival for the throne, will take over. Sigismundo is so violent he is sent back to the tower. A group of rebel soldiers, however, wants him to be king, leading to a civil war after which Sigismundo is made king. After admonishing his father for making him a monster, rather than preventing him from being one, Sigismundo forgives his father and stands at his service; he then orders Aistalf to marry Rosuara, who he abandoned, after which he offers himself to Stella as a husband. In the end, blood birthright to the throne is retained and the rebel soldier is exiled.
17. Solis, *Dreamlandia*, 44–45.
18. Ibid., 44.
19. Ibid., 45.
20. Ibid., 47.
21. Ibid., 78–79.
22. Octavio Solis, personal interview with the author, July 14, 2014.
23. Ibid.
24. Solis, *Dreamlandia*, 72.
25. Ibid., 73.
26. According to *Forbes* magazine, Carlos Slim was the world’s richest man again as of July 15, 2014, with a personal net worth of \$79.6 billion. He owns América Movil, which powers 70 percent of mobile phones and 80 percent of landlines in Mexico, and is also a minority owner of the *New York Times*. See Dolia Estevez, “Mexico’s Carlos Slim Reclaims World’s Richest Man Title from Bill Gates,” *Forbes* (July 15, 2014), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2014/07/15/mexicos-carlos-slim-reclaims-worlds-richest-man-title-from-bill-gates/> Retrieved August 15, 2014.
27. Solis, *Dreamlandia*, 86.
28. Saracho, *El Nogalar*, 87.
29. Ibid., 74, 87.
30. Ibid., 78.
31. Ibid., 85.
32. For an alternate reading of the gender dynamics of this play, see Alvarez, “Transcultural Dramaturgies, Latina Theatre’s Third Wave,” 89–90.
33. Marci R. McMahon, “Soundscapes of Narco Silence,” *Sounding Out* (Blog), August 19, 2013, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2013/08/19/soundscapes-of-narco-silence/>. She is referring to the production of *El Nogalar* at South Texas College Theatre (STC) directed by Joel Jason Rodriguez in McAllen, Texas, June 2013. The internal quote from *El Nogalar* is quoted in this blog.
34. Saracho, *El Nogalar*, 74.
35. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.
36. Saracho, *El Nogalar*, 82.
37. Ibid., 80.

38. Ibid., 72.  
 39. Ibid., 82.  
 40. Ibid., 80.  
 41. The dollhouse was used in the production of Tanya Saracho's *El Nogalar*, directed by Cecile Keenan, at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, March 26–April 24, 2011. Many reviews mention the dollhouse, but they do not understand what López is doing with it.  
 42. Valencia, *Capitalismo Gore*, 72.  
 43. See Courtwright, *Forces of Habit*.  
 44. She mentions her interest in the female characters in an interview at the Fountain Theatre, January 10, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dqIVyyIIPU>.  
 45. Saracho, *El Nogalar*, 87.  
 46. Ibid., 87.  
 47. Victor I. Cazares, *Religiones Gringas* (unpublished play script, 2011d), 78.  
 48. Patricia Ybarra, "Latino/a Dramaturgy as Historiography," in *Theatre/Performance Historiography: Time, Space, Matter*, ed. Rosemarie Bank and Michal Kobialka (Houndmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2015), 75–91.  
 49. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, Writing Is Live Festival, February 2013, Providence, R.I.  
 50. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, 10.  
 51. Mbembe, "Necropolitics."  
 52. Freeman, *Time Binds*.  
 53. Freeman, xxii.  
 54. Ibid.  
 55. Nielsen, "Introduction," 6; Claire Fox, *The Fence and the River: Cultural Politics at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). In brief, this program allows for the duty-free importation of goods into Mexico if made into products within Mexican factories for export. These factories, however exploitative their labor practices were, benefited both countries in that they allowed U.S. manufacturers to use cheaper labor to make products and eased the mass unemployment in Mexico that came with the end of the Bracero Program, which allowed Mexicans to do agricultural work in the United States without legal issue.  
 56. González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, 19.  
 57. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos* (2013), 118–119.  
 58. Ibid., 113.  
 59. I refer here to the 2011 version of the script.  
 60. Here I return to the 2013 version of the script. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, 67.  
 61. Ibid., 94.  
 62. Reza Abdoh, *The Law of Remains*, in *Plays for the End of the Century*, ed. Bonnie Marranca (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 9–94.  
 63. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, production, 2013.  
 64. See, for example, Blau, *Take Up the Bodies*.  
 65. Reguillo, "The Narco-Machine."  
 66. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, 129.  
 67. See Nyong'o, "The Scene of Occupation." 146–47.

68. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, 20.  
 69. Ibid., 169.  
 70. Ibid., 172–73.  
 71. Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 62.  
 72. See Kerry A. Dolan and Zina Moukheiber, "The Golden Age of Antiviral drugs," *Forbes*, October 27, 2003, <http://www.forbes.com/global/2003/1027/090.html>. The Gilead corporate history timeline is available at <http://www.gilead.com/about/corporate-history-timeline>.  
 73. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, 174–75.  
 74. See, for example, Michael Sheridan and Tracy Connor, "20-year-old Student, Marisol Valles García, Made Police Chief of One of Mexico's Most Violent Towns," *Daily News*, October 20, 2010, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/20-year-old-student-marisol-valles-garcia-made-police-chief-mexico-violent-towns-article-1.190569>.  
 75. Interview with Matthew Paul Olmos, September 4, 2014.  
 76. Matthew Paul Olmos, *so go the ghosts of méxico, part 1* (unpublished play script, 2013). The first reference to this work is in Pablo Ordaz, "La mujer más valiente de México," *El País*, October 20, 2010, [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/10/20/actualidad/1287525605\\_850215.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/10/20/actualidad/1287525605_850215.html).  
 77. Olmos, *so go the ghosts*, 4. This play is now available in a published version by Samuel French publishers.  
 78. Ibid., 5.  
 79. Ibid., 79.  
 80. Ibid., 81.  
 81. Valles García often talked to the press about making a Mexico that was better for her son; see, for example, Ginger Adams Otis, "Marisol Valles García, 20-something Mexican Police Chief, Comes to New York for Play," *New York Daily News*, April 8, 2013.  
 82. Matthew Paul Olmos, *so go the ghosts of méxico, part 1* directed by Meiyin Wang, La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, New York City, April 28, 2013; *Así van los fantasmas en México*, Repertorio Español, August 30, 2014.  
 83. Olmos admitted that he and Wang struggled with staging this moment, particularly deciding where and how the dead husband resurrected himself after he died, in his interview with me. Interview with the author, September 4, 2014.  
 84. Olmos, *so go the ghosts*, 75.  
 85. Catherine Rampell, "Facing a War Zone Rife with Cartels and Zombies: So Go the Ghosts of Mexico," *New York Times*, April 22, 2013.  
 86. For an excellent history, see Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, eds., *Generation Zombie: Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 2011).  
 87. Olmos, *so go the ghosts*, 75.  
 88. Ibid., 81.  
 89. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2014).  
 90. Adam Szymkowicz, "I Interview Playwrights Part 320: Matthew Paul Olmos," February 25, 2011, <http://aszym.blogspot.com/2011/02/i-interview-playwrights-part-320.html>. In this interview, the play takes place in Tijuana. He obviously changed that when he began to incorporate Valles García's story.



91. Wikipedia cites a change in the population of the municipality (not just Práxedes proper) from 8,514 in 2005 to 4,799 in 2010; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pr%C3%A1xedes\\_G.\\_Guerrero\\_Municipality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pr%C3%A1xedes_G._Guerrero_Municipality). Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) 2010 population statistics corroborate the 2010 population count. See also Christopher Loofe, "Drugs, Paramilitary Violence Create Ghost Towns in Mexico," *InSight Crime*, February 2, 2012; <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/drug-paramilitary-violence-creates-ghost-towns-in-mexico>.

92. Olmos, *so go the ghosts*, 80.

93. *Ibid.*, 79.

94. *Ibid.*, 72.

95. Matthew Olmos, interview with the author, September 4, 2014. The Mexican production took place at the Bellas Artes Theatre in San Miguel de Allende in November 2013.

96. The synopsis of the play is taken from Olmos's website: <http://matthew-paulolmos.com/the-scripts/>.

97. Olmos, *so go the ghosts*, 81.

### Conclusion

1. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, 21.

2. Rebecca Schneider, "It Seems as If I Am Dead: Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor," *TDR* 56, no. 4 (2012): 153.

3. I refer here to two conference papers given at ATHE 2016 in Chicago: Donatella Galella, "I Want to Be in the Room Where It Happens: Neoliberal Multicultural Inclusion in Hamilton," and Patricia Herrera, "Sonic Hauntings of Blackness and Latinidad in Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton."

4. Cazares, *Ramses contra los monstruos*, 175.

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