

Book Reviews

Nascimento, Cláudia Tatinge. *After the Long Silence: The Theater of Brazil's Post-Dictatorship Generation.* Abingdon, Oxon: New York, Routledge, 2020. 268 pp.

This well-researched monograph is a rich cultural studies resource not only for Brazilian theatre but also in Brazilian cultural and political history during the dictatorship of 1964-1985. One of the richest features of the book is that it includes cultural articles well beyond the plays themselves, incorporating primary and secondary sources, such as playbills, program notes, seminal writings, and interviews or testimonies with actors, directors, playwrights, scholars, and critics. Comparatively, with some notable exceptions, such as the brilliant scholarship of Severino J. Albuquerque and Margo Milleret, very few studies on Latin American theatre include Brazil in their pages. As the author notes in the first chapter, this absence resonates directly with curricula in academic departments throughout the U.S., where Luso-Brazilian studies are often relegated to secondary importance or altogether marginalized.

The extensive historical preface is much more than it promises to be. As a comprehensive periodization of the sociopolitical and cultural antecedents to the post-dictatorship playwrights and artists the author meticulously studies throughout her work, it provides an excellent overview of twentieth-century dictatorships in Brazil and also draws careful parallels with Chile and Argentina. The section on “The stage under the dictatorship” is particularly useful for understanding and teaching Brazilian modern theatre, introducing the reader to various theatre companies that pre-existed and, in some cases, survived or thrived during (post)dictatorship. Nascimento later traces continuities and transformations of these various companies. Examples include Teatro de Arena, which lasted from 1953 to 1972, Oficina, which began in 1958 and is still operational today, and Opinião, whose existence from 1964-82 spanned nearly the entire dictatorship. Not only does the author successfully analyze the genesis and development, but the accessibility of the language throughout the text makes it of interest to both scholars and students of contemporary Brazilian theatre. Particularly helpful are the author’s considerations of the foreign and domestic influences that

shaped the Brazilian theatre of the last century, while never losing sight of what Nascimento deems “the corrupt relationship between the South American bourgeoisie and North American imperialism” (17).

This well-written monograph deserves praise and a prominent place in university library collections and in the personal archives of scholars of Brazilian studies and Latin American theatre. My criticism involves the use of language rather than the excellent content of the book itself. The early readings on Brazilian anthropophagy (chapter 2) tend to minimize the inherent violence implied in the selective digestion and subsequent expulsion process of our performative cannibal. Nascimento would have our *antropófago* digest “only the **nutritious** parts and spit out everything else [...] to **redirect** the country’s subaltern dependency on European culture [...] to once and for all **upset** passive acquiescence to European models.” There is a violently transgressive side of literary cannibalism that does not only seek good nutrition but also decadence and even destruction as postcolonial resistance to imposed imperialism, one of (r)ejection but also reassertion of (in)dependence from the act of forced feeding. Therefore, instead of “eat,” I would have preferred the use of terms like “transgress,” “subvert” and “devour,” which more accurately reflect the decadent banquet in the process of *deglutição* rather than a “nutritious meal” and which might satisfy the middle-class rather than *épater le bourgeois*, which Oswald de Andrade had hoped to do, despite his own privileges.

The author does an admirable job of bringing both queer studies and representations of HIV/AIDS center stage in the final chapters of her book. Unfortunately, however, Nascimento denies attention to female playwrights, excluding even canonical or mainstream dramaturgs such as Leilah Assumpção or Consuelo de Castro, thus avoiding the question of gender representation and inequality among playwrights and directors. There are occasional spelling or typographical errors, especially in the longer quotes and within the author’s meticulous endnotes. Also missing from the monograph is a bibliography or list of works cited, which would have been a useful guide to readers.

Beyond her comprehensive study of Brazilian theatre, Nascimento makes significant theoretical interventions in critical cultural studies debates about the limits of “interculturalism,” “interweaving,” and “intersectionality,” which also bespeaks the polemic of using “multiculturalism” as a buzz word while paradoxically reinforcing hegemonic structures that perpetuate marginalization. One of Nascimento’s most compelling arguments is the equation of post-dictatorship = post-trauma, recalling a large body of scholarship on trauma and memory theory, revisiting political and artistic sites of “collective memory” that Brazilian artists employed to defeat or at least question historical amnesia in reaction to a brutal dictatorship as the nation transitioned to democratic institutions without facing the recent past. One of the significant contributions of Brazilian theatre, as Nascimento discusses, was (and arguably still is) the central role of nation rebuilding with “an in-progress collective

memory” rather than subscribing to the positivistic and nationalistic discourse of “order and progress.” To that end, as Nascimento convincingly argues throughout her book, the staged performances more often than not centralized the importance of “rehearsals” (curiously, rehearsal translates to Portuguese as *ensaio*, which of course also means work, essay, study) over finished productions, creating space to *ensaiar* precisely within transitional spaces where the unfinished “product” maintains itself in flux, enacting a strategy in which collaborative interactions between directors, playwrights, and spectators were not only permitted but rather a prerequisite for self-referential and self-reflexive nation-building while resisting prefabricated prescriptions for(getting) through trauma of oppression and violence.

Steven F. Butterman
University of Miami

García Barrientos, José-Luis. *Drama y narración. Teatro clásico y actual en español*. Madrid: Ediciones Complutense, Serie Investigación, 2017. 246 pp.

A principios de la década del 2000, en la literatura dramática apareció un recurso que pronto trascendió y empezó a impactar en todos los elementos del texto para la escena y la escena misma. Se trata de la inclusión de narración en la acción dramática en la que voces narrativas se insertan en el tejido dramático. Entre el corpus crítico que inauguró el análisis de esta tendencia y que la inscribió en un contexto general de crisis del drama y lo dramático, las aportaciones de José Luis García Barrientos se convirtieron en un fundamento para el pensamiento teórico del teatro contemporáneo. A partir de 1991, cuando este autor desarrolló la *dramatología* como la “teoría del modo de representación teatral que estudia la estructura mimética determinada por el modo de imitación que se sitúa por tanto en el plano en que el drama se opone a la narración” (2001, 67), el autor ha estado considerando la idea misma de teatro narrativo como un oxímoron. A pesar de ello, el crítico acepta que el modo narrativo y el modo dramático pueden funcionar en una misma obra. Dedicó parte considerable de sus estudios y libros publicados a este fenómeno, al que ha denominado “impermeabilidad entre los modos.” En el libro que es el motivo de esta reseña, García Barrientos argumenta acerca de la dicotomía drama-narración y el conflicto modal narrativo-dramático, el contagio narrativo del drama, la distinción entre narrador y personaje y entre las actividades como contar y hablar. Todos estos son planteamientos indispensables para la escena actual. El autor apoya su análisis con ejemplos de obras dramáticas y narrativas de diferentes épocas y latitudes que van desde *El Quijote* hasta la obra de Sergio Blanco, pasando por la de Heiner Müller y la dramaturgia mexicana contemporánea con emblemáticos textos y autores como Moncada, Chías, Legom

y Chabaud. Según García Barrientos, el contagio narrativo del drama se puede presentar en tres niveles: temático, estructural y discursivo. El autor aclara que en la narratividad temática es el “yo épico” el que realiza la mediación entre los modos, mientras que compara la narratividad estructural con la construcción abierta y define la narratividad discursiva como la narración sobre el escenario. En los doce capítulos del libro, se establecen los conceptos de los modos narrativo y dramático como pilares de la teoría modal. En un constante diálogo con el creador de la narratología, Gerard Genette, el teórico español reflexiona sobre la diferencia entre la perspectiva narrativa y la perspectiva dramática, sobre el teatro épico en la actualidad y sobre el drama autobiográfico—un “género imposible”—, según el autor. A este diálogo añade abundantes referencias artísticas y culturales que hacen que el análisis fluya y envuelva al lector. Junto a la narratividad dramática como híbrido modal, el estudioso dedica espacio a la exploración de otra realidad del teatro actual inherentemente relacionada con la narratividad: la autoficción. El punto de convergencia que encuentra el autor es precisamente la hibridación y el mestizaje que plantean ambos conceptos. Al hablar de autoficción escénica y relacionarla con el teatro autorreferencial, García Barrientos esboza otra problemática del teatro actual, cuyo planteamiento clave apunta al “interés [que] puede tener para el espectador asistir al teatro para que un actor [...] le muestre parte de su propia vida” (200). ¿Cuál sería el filtro para que lo autobiográfico de la vida de alguien se transforme en hecho escénico con valor estético/artístico? ¿Dónde se ubican los límites de la autobiografía escénica nutrida por el autodrama, el autoteatro y la autoficción? Sostiene el autor que el teatro puede ser autoficción y no autobiográfico y dedica páginas al análisis minucioso de varios textos del dramaturgo Sergio Blanco como emanación de la autoficción dramática. Todo esto hace de *Drama y narración* un libro con impecable estructuración y peculiar estilo en el que el autor logra que los planteamientos teóricos más serios se lean con deleite.

Elvira Popova

Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León

Muñoz, José Esteban. *The Sense of Brown*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. 224 pp.

Consisting of essays composed over the span of a decade and a half, *The Sense of Brown* posthumously gathers José Esteban Muñoz’s writings on *latinidad*. Each essay included in the collection reads a queer Latinx performance by artists such as Tania Bruguera, Nao Bustamante, and Alina Troyano, among others, to sustain Muñoz’s theorization of brownness as a structure of feeling. With its earliest pieces

dating from the late 1990s, and bookended by Muñoz's death in 2013, *The Sense of Brown* sustains a dialogue with his earlier books: *Disidentifications* (1999) and *Cruising Utopia* (2009). Framed in this moment, *The Sense of Brown* thinks against the grain of the then official panethnic term for Latin American diasporas, "hispanic," to arrive at an understanding of minoritarian belongingness rooted in queer forms of feeling and remembrance. Braiding it with *latinidad*, one of the organizing concepts of what would eventually become Latinx studies, Muñoz defines brownness as an "anti-identitarian concept that nonetheless permits us to talk about Latinas/os as having a group identity that is coherent without being exclusionary" (63). Through a hermeneutics of performativity and affect, *The Sense of Brown* conceptualizes Latinx minority conditions as lessons in solidarity, refusal, and resistance.

Developing the sense of brown across different registers, Muñoz lets the concept manifest as a point of intersecting qualities, perspectives, and feelings. While a sociohistorical facet of brownness seeks, at its most basic and pragmatic, to articulate a collectivity, Muñoz eschews any semblance to the structures of national citizenship and instead relies on the loose yet tangible binds of peoplehood: "first and foremost, I mean 'brown' as in brown people in a very immediate way, [...] people who are rendered brown by their personal and familial participations in South-to-North migration patterns" (3). By stressing cohesion through linguistic and migratory practices—as he does when thinking about a Greater Cuba expanding beyond the island—Muñoz proposes a mode of sociality through transgression (of borders, of citizenship). Brown people come together through "everyday styles of living that connote a sense of illegitimacy" (3).

Such transgression affirms the genealogies that inform *latinidad*. Brownness pays homage to the Brown Power and Black Power movements and shares their political aspirations. Via Du Bois's famous question, "How does it feel to be a problem?," Muñoz posits, "feeling like a problem [as] a mode of minoritarian recognition" (37) that is attentive to experiences that produce a sense of "apartness together." Exemplifying such a mode, and in this same genealogy, Muñoz turns to the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, as evincing how "craziness was a powerful way of being in the world, a mode of being that those in power needed to call crazy because it challenged the very tenets of their existence" (23). Feeling like a problem and being read as crazy instantiate the affective orientation of brown feelings as a cohering group identification.

The lessons taught by these genealogies reveal another facet of brownness, its immanence: "Turning to the past in this particular fashion makes the point that the world is not becoming brown; rather, it has been brown" (3). Unlike the utopianism with which Muñoz defined queerness in *Cruising Utopia* as not yet here, the sense of brown exists as a sociality here and now: "The task at hand is not to enact a commons, but to touch an actually existing commons" (6). Muñoz's project thus

departs from the multiplicity of queer Latinx experience, yet projects outward to learn from other minoritized collectivities, conceiving a far more encompassing mode of belonging-in-difference.

Gerónimo Sarmiento Cruz
University of Chicago

Hernández, Paola S. *Staging Lives in Latin American Theater: Bodies, Objects, Archives*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021. 219 pp.

In this meticulously researched study of documentary theater practices in Latin America, Hernández explores the innovative uses of space, stage props, and actors' bodies to show how the stories these impart on stage integrate and manipulate fact and fiction to solidify connections to the present and engage spectators in captivating ways. Her book offers case studies by four of the most pioneering playwrights and directors of the twenty-first century: Vivi Tellas and Lola Arias (Argentina); Guillermo Calderón (Chile); and the collective group Teatro Línea de Sombra (Mexico). She analyzes objects as archives of the past to show how their meaning is "expanded and reinterpreted onstage; and how onstage interpretations of physical objects help to generate an affective relationship between actor and audience" (3). Hernández argues that, through their associations with what is real and the interpreters' stories about them, the staged objects and performed stories take on new life, reshaping and reconstructing the archives to "establish specific links between memory, community, and historical context" (4). In her painstaking analyses, Hernández showcases the aesthetic and sociopolitical contributions of these Latin American artists and frames their work within theories on documentary performance, autobiography, post-dramatic theater, affect studies, and audience reception.

The book begins with an informative analysis of Tellas's foundational work with *biodramas*, emphasizing her *Proyecto archivos*. Highlighting the artist's use of non-professional "interpreters," her continuous search for the "Umbral Mínimo de Ficción," and her openness to risk and failure on stage, Hernández argues that Tellas's style reconfigures "the hierarchies of power" and establishes "clear and direct relational links to how affects make us, in a sense, more in touch with our humanity through the theater" (35). Chapter II examines Arias's manipulation of objects, genres, multimedia, and storytelling through detailed analyses of two of her most famous trilogies: *Mi vida después* / *El año en que nació* / *Melancolía y manifestaciones* and *Veterans* / *Campo minado* / *Theatre of War*. Grounding her work in Hirsch's theory on post-memory and Barthes's notion of "affective intentionality," the author showcases Arias's "construction of an ambiguous space, that gray zone of memory that we cannot completely grasp" (69). Hernández's own childhood memories of

the Malvinas war and her admission that “many of us, including myself, fell for the farce” drive home her and Arias’s points about the blurry line between fact and fiction and the unreliable, incomplete nature of memory. Chapter III examines the productive boundary between art and activism in Mexico’s Teatro Línea de Sombra’s work. By engaging in “participatory research” and “progression,” a practice of trial and error that “manifests in collective creation—a process that relies on what each interpreter or actor brings with them” — the group immerses itself in its spaces and themes, using “the experience of ‘being together’ as an affective tool that attracts the audience to other modes of thinking and feeling” (96). Chapter IV features four plays by Chile’s Calderón to show how these works creatively maneuver space, character construction, metatheatricality, intertextuality, and “the real” to document human rights abuses, expose the gaps in memory surrounding the Pinochet dictatorship, and criticize unjust and corrupt social and political systems.

Framed with a solid theoretical base, a plethora of informative endnotes, and extensive contextual details, *Staging Lives* is a must-read for Latin American and world theater and performance scholars. The book details the wide variety of techniques used in Latin American documentary theater today and shows how these artists successfully straddle the boundaries between the fictional and the real, embracing risk and precarity on stage as ways to “push the value of political theater” (162). Hernández’s book paints a compelling picture of these artists’ aesthetic and social contributions and creates a rich, insightful portrait of the value, power, and uniqueness of contemporary Latin American documentary performance.

Gail A. Bulman
Syracuse University