CONVERSATIONS ACROSS THE FIELD OF DANCE STUDIES

Latin@ Dance

Cover Photo: Promotional still for Merián Soto's "I Wish You Were Here" (1987)
Photo Credit: Merian Soto/Pepon Osorio

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Dear Reader,

This issue of *Conversations across the Field of Dance Studies* brings into focus Latin@ Dance. But what exactly is Latin@ Dance? Are we talking about popular social dances such as salsa, merengue, and bachata? What about modern or postmodern dance - as long as Latin@s are dancing? In a nightclub, on a stage, or on a screen? And what exactly are we supposed to wear to the Latin@ Dance? Though these parameters may be fuzzy, the essays on Latin@ Dance in this collection all demonstrate the vitality of latinidad -- the performative repertoires and practices through which Latin@ expressive culture coheres as meeting points for Latin American-descent communities.

Latinidad brings under its realm an incredibly diverse population with varied histories and routes of migration to or forceful annexation into the United States. Latinidad also comprises contemporary living conditions across a range of politico-economic factors such as race, gender, class, and sexuality. In short, we've got a lot going on -- including tensions. To think of the choreographies of latinidad, we acknowledge the myriad music and dance practices that have circulated throughout the Americas -- indigenous American, Afro-diasporic, Arabic, Asian, European, and American -- as well as their confluences in the formation of Latin@ American culture. This entails approaching latinidad as both a sociological fact in which inter-Latin@ relations and pan-Latino imaginaries are on the rise in the United States, and an analytic in which latinidad is a theoretical framework for interpreting Latin@ expressive culture.

Rewind 23 years to the 1991 Society of Dance History Scholars annual meeting held in Miami that focused on Dance in Hispanic Cultures. At the conference, Sally Banes announced "la onda próxima" or "next wave" of a U.S. Latin@ postmodern dance scene in New York City during the 1980s and 1990s. Notably, Banes' presentation advanced the notion that Latin@ choreographers embraced Latina/o, rather than Hispanic, as a banner for the "new" directions of a dance practice. Such a practice was born from within Latin@ communities invested in exploring their experiences living in the United States. The postmodern approaches Banes identified, privileged the experimental formalisms of the booming downtown New York dance scene at the time but also connected to the long history of social, folkloric, and concert dance among Latin@ communities in the U.S.

Since the late 1990s, scholars have turned to the archives, stages, screens, and social settings of Latin@ dance in the United States. They have produced groundbreaking scholarship on contemporary and historical U.S. Latin@ dance practices and their continuing influence not only within local Latin@ communities but in the national and international dance circuits as well. Here we showcase the work of scholars who approach Latin@ dance as both a growing field of inquiry within contemporary dance studies and a significant object of study for the project of Latin@ Studies. What Banes announced as a new wave, is now a maturing community of practice that, as documented in the short essays and conversations that comprise this issue, has gained presence in curated programs at venues across the United States and has most recently begun to manifest in scholarship, with a number of monographs, critical anthologies, and articles recently published or forthcoming.

Latin@s now constitute the largest minority population within the United States and Latin@ dance practices form a truly hybrid and hemispheric repertoire that has influenced dance scenes around the world from the concert stage to the popular screen and from the nightclub to the athletic club. It is our hope that this issue's engagement with an expansive archive and contemporary network of practices offers *un pasaje* to some of the most exciting conversations in Latin@ Dance Studies.

Cindy García and Ramón H. Rivera-Servera

A word from the Guest Editors

Unsettling Latinidad:

José Limón in "*Lament* for Ignacio Sanchez Mejías"

James Moreno

Mexican-born modern dance choreographer, José Limón (1908-1972), formed The José Limón Dance Company in 1946 and placed his mentor, Doris Humphrey as Artistic Director, a role she performed for the next twelve years. During this association, Humphrey choreographed dances for Limón in which he performed as both a culturally marked and culturally unmarked figure. This article examines the first of Humphrey and Limón's collaborations, *Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejías (1946)* based on Federico García Lorca's poem of the same name. In it, Limón portrayed the renowned Andalusian bullfighter Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, who was gored and killed in the ring.

My title, "Unsettling Latinidad", refers to the ways that Limón's performance in *Lament* unsettled latinidad from a fixed geo-political location. Limón's recognition as both a culturally marked and unmarked figure showed that latinidad was not a fixed or static cultural identity, but a fluid concept that could be connected to, or disconnected from bodies. By *culturally marked body* I mean a body that is marked as different from dominant and normative cultures (Manning 2006, xv). For example, in the postwar period explored in this paper, the male European-American, or white male body, embodied the dominant normative culture in the United States. This made the white male body culturally unmarked and Limón, culturally marked. However, since Limón was also recognized as culturally unmarked, he unsettled perceptions that tied race to blood and land and revealed flux as a constant rather than anomalous attribute of cultural identity.

The Dance

By the early 1940s, an arthritic hip had stopped Humphrey from dancing and *Lament* was the first dance she composed without physically demonstrating the choreography. Through their long working association (Limón had previously danced with the Humphrey/Weidman Dance Company for ten years) Humphrey and Limón had cultivated a shared movement sensibility that allowed them to construct choreography through images and descriptions of emotions and moods. For example, in rehearsal, Humphrey guided Limón with verbal cues: "[n]ow you are listening, now you hear the bull bellow, now you hear the trumpet, now you have a feeling of strangulation. What does it mean when you pull up your shoulder? How does it make you feel?" (Humphrey quoted in Cohen 1972,187)

Limón replied through a movement vocabulary blending abstract and mimetic gestures. His movements were taught and bound throughout the dance, using tense bodily relationships to dramatize the already theatricalized ritual between man and bull. He often moved through space in a hobbled way, beating the ground with one foot while hopping on the other. His arms and hands regularly moved up and down the central axis of his body, sometimes miming the stabbing motions of a torero. For his costume, Limón went bear-chested and wore ballet slippers and pants. His pants were reminiscent of a *torero's taleguilla*, the bullfighter's tight fitting pants that go to just below the knee.

José Limón in Doris Humphrey's *Lament* for Ignacio Sanchez Mejías at Jacob's Pillow. John Lindquist photograph © The Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library.

While there are films of Limón performing *Lament*, most are in poor condition and many are short excerpts. Although some have a musical score, they are often scores that were added later. And while there are recordings of Limón performing *Lament* as a solo, the original version included two female Limón Company dancers who performed minimal movement, worked with props, and recited select lines from García Lorca's poem; one as the Woman of Destiny and the other as the Woman of Compassion.

Norman Lloyd, a longtime colleague and collaborator of Humphrey and Limón's composed the original score for *Lament*. Lloyd recounts the inception of the piece, "Doris [Humphrey] said José [Limón] is in the army, but he is going to be getting out, why don't we give him a dance as a present, and that is what *Lament* became" (Lloyd 1971). Lloyd goes on to recount the many iterations of the score. There were versions scored for solo piano; piano and drums; a moderate orchestra; and a large symphony. The original score, written for six instruments, was lost.

The Everyman

Humphrey presented Limón as an Everyman, a figure able to embody "universal" themes of humanity. She writes that Limón's performance was meant to "signify the struggle of all men of courage who contend in the ring of Life and who meet a tragic end, to which they are bound by destiny" (Cohen 1972). The practice of staging dancers as universal figures was a common performance convention in mid-century modern dance and a regular practice for Limón throughout his career. However, since the universal body was assumed to be the "white" Euro-American body, Limón's Latino Everyman complicated these conventions.

Dance critic Doris Hering wrote, "Humphrey's finest dance for José Limón combines both of her favorite images—the Everyman and the Spaniard. It also presents Limón at his most ennobled" (Hering 1973, 47). And dance writer Margaret Lloyd wrote, "Miss Humphrey lifts the subject into the realm of exalted tragedy, purifying and ennobling the personal theme into a thing of universal implications" (Cohen 1972,188). Lloyd also proposed, "with his [Limón's] Aztec-Hispanic features, his dark eyes and straight black hair, the virile strength of his broad shoulders, he is virtually typecast in the role of Ignacio Sánchez Mejías" (Lloyd 1949, 198). Similarly, Jill Johnston observed, "Humphrey combined her craft at its best with an inspiration from the García Lorca poem and a style especially suited to Limón's great weight and refined Spanish arrogance and Mexican-Indian brutality" (Johnston 1971, 107). And for Selma Jeanne Cohen, Limón's portrayal of Sánchez Mejías came "instinctively…without the probing for motivation that the creation of such a character required" (Cohen 1972,187).

Rather than explore Limón's privilege to move between marked and unmarked bodies, or examine how cultural codes were exchanged between Euro-American and Latino identities, reviewers used essentializing narratives and ideas of cultural identity as fixed and stable. Limón is typecast as Latino and essentialized as indigenous while also being recognized as a universal Everyman. However, his recognition as a universal body was made after the "personal theme" of the dance is "purified and ennobled," which is to say Limón is recognized as a universal body only after culturally marked themes are de-racinated.

Unsettling Gender

Limón's movement between culturally marked and unmarked bodies not only unsettled notions of race, but those of gender as well. Like his male choreographic predecessors, Ted Shawn and Lester Horton, Limón was able to draw on alleged connections between culturally marked bodies and notions such as "nature" and "primitivity" to attain a masculinity that countered the feminization of a career in dance. However, unlike his predecessors, Limón's performance of Sanchez Mejías included his own personal and culturally marked histories that directly related to and impacted his performance. In his unfinished memoirs, Limón recalled his experience as an audience member at a *corrida de toros,* or bullfight:

> The dance I found so fascinating was the bullfight. No sarabande, chaconne, or passacaglia surpasses the *corrida de toros* in its grave formality, solemnity, sober elegance, grace, and ritual…Costumed in great splendor and breathtaking colors, the bullfighters evoke an age that knew how to enhance the appearance of a man…I did not know, as I watched spellbound, that I was watching an art whose gesture and movement would influence me profoundly when I became a dancer. In composing dances, I would look back to this formative experience for guidance and inspiration (Limón 1998, 5, italics in original).

Drawing on his "formative experience" of the bullfight, Limón performed a masculinity that was elegant and graceful yet not read as effeminate. The grave solemnity and violence of the ritual provided a heteronormative framework that allowed Limón to elide a hyper-masculine performance and present male bodies in a more nuanced way. For example, he was able to craft a male presence inspired by "breathtaking colors" worn by bullfighters that "evoke an age that knew how to enhance the appearance of a man." By drawing on his non-normative gender position and culturally marked history, but performing

as a universal Everyman, Limón created the unsettling choreographic spectacle that was *Lament*.

Limón once commented that he hoped his audiences would meet him halfway, that audiences might be open to seemingly odd or daunting ideas (Limón 1999). His unsettling of latinidad and gender in *Lament* was not only difficult for mid-century audiences to articulate because it was a novel staging of a Latino man, but also because it produced anxiety. His performance as Sanchez Mejías did not settle questions or resolve anxieties about the stability or fluidity of latinidad, but asked audiences to confront the socially constructed boundaries of cultural identity and reflect on the accompanying feelings of loss and unsettled-ness. By telling stories from his particular position as a Latino man, while also portraying the universal Everyman, Limón unsettled dominant racial and gender categorizations and revealed the irrelevance of a compulsory contextualization of his brown body within white heteronormativity.

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Decelerating Movement:

The Identity Politics of Time and Space in Rudy Perez's *Countdown*

Victoria Fortuna

In Rudy Perez's minimalist concert dance work *Countdown*, the solo male dancer never moves his feet. Dressed in a solid black tee shirt and slacks, the dancer sits on a stool as the piece opens, slowly turning his head from side to side. His decelerated head rotation continues for one minute in silence as one hand holds a lit cigarette, while the other hand conceals it from the audience's view. As curls of smoke circle the performer's face, the cigarette's lifespan marks the work's seven-minute duration. Vertical stripes of green grease paint streak one of his cheeks. Two selections from Madeline Gray's collection of French folk songs, *Songs of the Auvergne*, comprise the musical score; their oozing sentimentality sharply contrasts with the restrained intensity of *Countdown's* movement. When the music begins, the dancer deliberately raises the cigarette to his mouth. He takes a draw and bends to the floor to place it on a waiting ashtray. This action lasts the duration of the first piece of music. As the second song begins, the dancer stands, looks from side to side, and lifts one hand to his mouth and blows a kiss into the distance. He then fully extends the opposite arm forward with a flexed hand, as if to halt a threat to the previous gesture. Bringing both hands to cover his face, the dancer draws his fingertips down his cheeks, tracing streaks of grease paint onto both cheeks. The dancer then reaches both arms forward and screams silently, as if he has been struck in the stomach. He recovers and purposefully reaches to pick up the cigarette from the ashtray. As he looks side to side once again, lights and music fade out (*Countdown*).[1]

After training at the Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham studios, Perez affiliated with the amorphous group of dancers performing at the Judson Memorial Church in Manhattan in the 1960s. In Judson's avant-garde space, Perez flourished as a minimalist choreographer formally experimenting with pedestrian movements, time, and space—choreographic explorations exemplified by *Countdown.* Born in Spanish Harlem to working class Puerto Rican parents, Perez is reluctant to discuss his ethnic identity in the context of his artistic work. In both a personal interview and Severo Perez's (no relation) documentary, *Countdown: Reflections on a Life in Dance,* the choreographer emphasizes his early independence from his family, a distance that he feels minimized his connection to Latino identity. In my discussion with the artist about possible articulations of Latino identity in his work broadly and *Countdown* specifically, Perez expressed that when an artist attains success, heritage is "not as important" (personal interview). Articulating the familiar notion that arriving at the point at which one can pass as unmarked allows the freedom to pursue formal "intellectual" themes in your work, Perez equates "success" with the unburdening of the racially marked body.

The *Countdown* documentary, however, captures an uncharacteristic articulation of latinidad in rehearsal footage as Perez coaches former student Victor Quijada's performance of the work. They are discussing the moment when the dancer streaks grease paint down his second cheek. Earlier in the documentary, Perez refers to the streaks as "tears." Yet, following Quijada's first run of the piece and as if referring to a previous conversation, Quijada says, "It is that Indian thing…" to which Perez responds, "Because, after all, we are Hispanics, and whatever, so there is that in there but you know its not something that's intentional. Whether it's Aztec or Incas or whatever…" (*Countdown*). Los Angeles born, Quijada is of Mexican descent.

Perez's vague gesture toward a politics of latinidad (however unintentional) serves here as a point of departure to read the racialized body in *Countdown*, a work which otherwise has been historicized within the white/unmarked formalist and avant-garde space of US postmodern dance.[2] While ostensibly at odds with one another, I suggest that Perez's "official" discourse of unmarked formalism and his veiled appeal to pan-Latino identification in fact work together. Describing the work as a meditation on survival and perseverance, Perez explains to Quijada that in performing *Countdown*, "your whole life happens in these seven and a half minutes that you're doing this piece, your whole life comes to you like a big rush. The good, the bad, mainly that you have survived and you're still there on your two feet nice and strong" (*Countdown*). I take this notion of the performer experiencing his entire life in seven minutes literally and concur that the movement of the piece achieves the temporal expansion Perez identifies, but I also propose that *Countdown's* temporal experimentation and Perez's understanding of the dance as an assertion of survival—"you're still there on your two feet nice and strong"—are in fact contingent on narratives activated by the male Latino body.

Marcia Siegel's reading of *Countdown* in her text *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* focuses on the work's formal elements, mainly deceleration and defamiliarized pedestrian gesture, rather than any identity based interpretation (274). For Siegel, *Countdown's* deconstruction of movement gives the impression of slowing down time. However, *Countdown's* slow motion—on the border between calm melancholic reflection and violent rage—does not so much slow time as it actually unhinges it from its neat delineation into past, present, and future. By breaking down the conventions and protocols of dance technique in the extreme minimalism of the movement, *Countdown* might be read as what Judith Hamera calls a "corporeal chronotope." She draws on Bahktin's understanding of the chronotope (literally time-space) as the narrative matrix that makes representation and meaning making possible within literary spaces. Hamera argues that chronotopes are, "corporeal as well as textual" and that through codified movement participants enter a "'both-and' relationship to here and now, [and] there and then" (73-4). Dance techniques—and in the case of *Countdown* distilled pedestrian movement—thicken time because ways of moving always already bear the traces of gestures past.

The decelerated choreography of smoking that opens and closes the piece interrupts both the expectations of motion attached to the dance stage and any purely formal reading of the piece. The suspension of the dancer's arm arching to and from his mouth enacts a smoke break in the unfolding of his life as well as a break in time's continual flow. When the dancer stands and silently screams as he reaches forward with both arms, the elongated quotidian motions function as corporeal chronotopes that establish a time-space in which the embodied memories bound to those movements palpably unfold in the present. In *Countdown*, embodied experience—"your whole life comes to you in a big rush"—is not remembered as a point in the past danced in the present. The body does not simply stand as "evidence" or the "remains" of past struggles. Rather, *Countdown's* decelerated motion exposes the always already of the past's presence in every gesture.

At the same time that these movements expand the present, they also chronotopically invoke a narrative of loss and hardship that is made legible through the male Latino body. In *Countdown*, this particularly raced, gendered, and classed body in (slow) motion is the corporeal matrix that activates the narrative of over-coming odds and survival—"you're still there on your two feet nice and strong"—cited by Perez in rehearsal sessions with Quijada. Notably, Perez handpicked the few dancers on which he has set *Countdown*.[3] For Perez, Mexican American Quijada is the dancer whose performance of the piece most closely resembles the intent he himself brought to the work (personal interview). In the documentary and our interview, Perez highlights Quijada's Latino identity in connection to his successful—perhaps "authentic"—performance. *Countdown's* unmarked formalist experiment with time and space, then, in fact relies on the chronotopic currency of an "Othered" body to make present a narrative of loss and hardship—most powerfully rendered in the restrained intensity of the melancholic kiss and silent scream—historically coded onto brown and black skins.

The green grease paint streaks (and application of additional streaks immediately before the scream) are the most complex invocation of race in *Countdown*. Prefiguring Quijada's comment regarding the streaks as "that Indian thing" and building on Perez's identification of the streaks as "tears," Siegel has read the streaks as "ritual tears" (276). Both Siegel and Quijada's statements point to the streaks' association with indigenous body markings, specifically war paint. If the dancer in *Countdown* is indeed a warrior of sorts who makes present in each movement the struggles of survival, the application of the grease paint makes explicit how his racially marked body, in decelerated motion, is the chronotope that makes this narrative possible. Taken as "that Indian thing," the streaks are an over-determined symbol that code a generalized "origin" of Latino difference, verbally captured in Perez and Quijada's dehistoricized conflation between "Indian," "Hispanic," "Aztec" and "Inca." In *Countdown*, the streaks invoke an indigenous presence on the Latino male body that chronotopically evokes a particular yet generic raced, classed, and gendered experience. This corporeal indigenous presence establishes the racialized temporal and spatial groundwork that makes possible the work's narrative of overcoming odds.

The indigenous presence rendered by the streaks in *Countdown* also haunts Perez's understanding of "artistic success" within the context of US postmodern dance as the unburdening of the racialized body and subsequent freedom to explore "intellectual" themes. However, when understood as the organizing corporeal chronotope of the work, the racialized body in *Countdown* disrupts the erasure of racial and ethnic identity by the work's historical designation as "formalist" dance. In this exercise of counting down, of beholding a cigarette's steady process of self-erasure and a body exposing all that insists to keep happening, one witnesses the rush of a whole life whose identity politics matter.

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Notes

1. Originated by Perez, the work premiered at the Mary Anthony Studio in New York in 1966.
2. See Siegel and McDonagh 1970 & 1976.
3. Clive Thompson of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performed the work.

Minerva Tapia's *Ellas Danzan Solas/Illegal Border* (2005) *Photo credit: Juan Cedeño*

Danzas fronterizas:

Contemporary dance experiences in the Tijuana-San Diego region

Minerva Tapia

While I wait to cross the border from Tijuana, Mexico to San Diego California, I have ample time to think about my day, hear music and observe immigration agents guiding contraband-sniffing dogs around crossing cars, in stark contrast to the stray dogs that weave in and out among the vehicles. I see pharmacies and huge billboards illuminated twenty-four hours a day announcing *quinceañera*[1] dresses, Mexican and American phone services, and even plastic surgeons. I smell and see emissions escaping through exhaust pipes of cars, Mexican vendors of magazines, bottled water, and blankets; old and new regulations in English and Spanish; plaster figurines of Disney characters; children, women and older men selling chewing gum and asking for handouts.

In this space, while surveillance cameras seem to multiply every day, I hear a globalization of sounds: construction, a multiplicity of voices, and music of diverse tastes. But most of all I see the people who, like me, sit in their cars waiting to cross the border to "*el otro lado*."[2] Although the complexity of this border space makes it difficult to describe, my waits to cross have allowed me to observe the regular activities and physical transformations and ongoing changes at this

site. In this space, purportedly an area of safety, many people have had jolting experiences, such as hearing gunshots or seeing U.S. officials suddenly take unsuspecting passengers from their cars in handcuffs. To this paradox of safety could be added the paradox of mobility: the border implies a stop of flow, a stop of movement, yet at the same time it is where people and things are in constant movement, moving slowly but always forward to cross the border. Here, thousands of us are present together; we undergo different experiences that leave a ghostly trail.

As someone who grew up in the borderlands, and as a choreographer who regularly crosses the border to work with other border-crossing dancers, I use biographic and ethnographic approaches to examine how our borderland experiences shape our work as dance-makers. I write from and about the border, as an artist/scholar haunted by border-crossing occurrences and who reflects on the impact of our *vivencias fronterizas* (border experiences) in the making of concert contemporary dance.[3]

In the 1990s, choreographers started to create, what I call *Danzas fronterizas* (border dances), testimonies and reflections of the experiences of those affected by the borderland, whether allowed to cross the border or not. These choreographies addressed the social, economic, and political problems affecting the area, such as racism, immigration, narco-trafficking, and smuggling. Border activities and conflicts are thematized in choreographic works that I understand as *border dance culture/cultura de la danza fronteriza.*

As long as I can remember, I have been a regular border crosser. At a very early age, I learned to take note of the time spent, wasted, endured, and lost at the San Ysidro Port of Entry. Every decision I make must also consider the time it takes to cross the border. I am curious about what people do during the long waits, the portions of our lives spent waiting at the border, how each of us practices this journey, the imprints that border crossings leave on our bodies, our perceptions of this border. As I cross through the expedited lanes, I reflect on the disparity, painful contrast and inequality of this space. Inequality here is founded historically in the building of a fence between the two countries. In signing the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848,[4] the United States gained a huge portion of Mexican territory and a new borderline was drawn. Populations along the redrawn border perceive the resulting inequalities in various ways.

The most dramatic inequalities begin with the rules governing those allowed and those unfit to cross. Border scholars have stressed that the meaning of the border fence is tightly linked to these various forms of inequality. In Gloria Anzaldúa's words, borders "are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*." (25) Ramón H. Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young add that depending on where one resides, "it is to be domestic or foreign, home or abroad, insider or outsider, citizen or immigrant, at rest or on the move." (1) And José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, writing from the Southern side of the border, states that "to speak from the border is to place oneself within a context that denies centrality, given that border equates with periphery. A border line is the beginning and the end, rupture and continuity" (278).[5] As a choreographer, living on both sides of the border, I am motivated to uncover these current-day inequalities and turn them into movement—something that the process of choreography allows me to do.

I started to work in *Danzas fronterizas* in 1995 with a group of dancers from both sides of the border, who have been gathering in Tijuana for rehearsals and events for eighteen years. In this essay, I examine two *Danzas fronterizas*: *Danza indocumentada* (undocumented dance, 2005) and *Globótica* (2010). Prior to beginning to choreograph *Danza indocumentada*, the images of people on the Mexican-side looking toward the North as they waited for a chance to cross, resonated in my imagination as I myself was crossing the border. Waiting safely in my car I imagined these people who risked their lives in order to cross. I looked at my passport and drew a connection between this document and the deaths of thousands of people who did not have one. This led me to contemplate how documents encapsulated power and how I could transport and translate this reflection about opportunity and death into choreography.

Danza indocumentada is my attempt to re-humanize border-crossers robbed of their very personhood by economic, political, and/ or racist forces. The dance starts with two women, and three men, who are in front of a painting by Roberto Rosique.[6] The painting shows two individuals sitting beside the border fence, a third is in the process of climbing the fence, while the fourth sits with his back to the viewer. On the U.S.-side (the North side), we see the Statue of Liberty and a sign that warns "Don't Cross." The dancers' first movements are derived from images I routinely witnessed along the border. On one occasion, I spoke with one of the would-be crossers and asked him why he placed his hand on his forehead while laying down to rest. He responded that he did so to block the sun, but also to hide the fact that he was asleep. By pretending to be awake, he could "keep watch" for anyone trying to steal his belongings. The dancers emerge from the poses and through a combination of contemporary dance movements and steps drawn from folk dances of Northern Mexico, tell a story about the stresses

born out of fear and desire, the perceptions and dreams that hold every migrant. I wish to show the corporeal positions, hunting gazes, gestures denoting furtive conditions, fears, and vulnerabilities, while at the same time addressing border crossers' hopefulness—the thrust that leads them to cross the border.

In *Globótica* I wanted to make reference to aspects of globalization and to disturbing, yet humorous, situations along the border. This piece references the effects of the influenza A virus (H1N1) in Mexico in 2009. My inspiration came when the Mexican government declared that all Mexicans should wear masks to control the spread of the epidemic, so people in Tijuana had to wear masks, but not those in San Diego. While most public activities were canceled in Tijuana because of health concerns, this was not true in San Diego, and many people crossed the border to attend shows and events in the United States. The situation at the border was bizarre: people wearing masks in Tijuana shed them as soon as they crossed the border. This experience highlights the incongruity of border politics, where a region is cut in two.

For this piece I asked Mexican border poet Estela Alicia López Lomas to create a text for the movement, which a solo dancer delivers on stage. Standing up center right, the dancer reads the following: "…I e-mail the world, and the cold-bug answers: I am the future of dreams… (Sneezes) –Excuse me. Come, dream a dream with me! I am a Maquila Girl, Tijuana Girl, dreaming…." The dancer moves to center stage and looks directly at the audience with a wry face, almost a smile. Silently, she begins to move her body in an undulating motion, challenging the audience with an expression that could be read as projecting security, sarcasm, and authority.

The music begins as she extends her body and limbs, in various directions while glancing over the space. The contemporary music accompaniment shows the influence of the tango, a globalized music and dance,[7] which serves as a background for conveying "globalization" as border experience. The dancer returns to center stage, where her movements evoke the fusion of Asian and American dances. She shifts abruptly from side to side, where a light now divides the stage. She appears to enter into conversation with someone, but is actually in conversation with herself. Her stooped body and hand moves suggest money counting. She moves from one side of the stage to the other several times, as if to see the wake she creates. Sitting down, she extends her arms like tentacles, collecting fruit from various points. She devours a piece in hungry bites. She switches into dancing a Northern Mexican step that is associated with pride, character and determination, and is traditionally used to mark the end of the dance. The piece finishes when the dancer's eyes attempt to lock onto the audience.

In *Danza indocumentada* and *Globótica* I attempt to capture slices of what is shaping border dance culture. These *Danzas fronterizas* focus on my personal experiences involved with crossing the border and with the loss of thousands of lives as they attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexican border. In dance, I use movement analysis to allow a different part of the border story to emerge. For example, when I asked the migrant "why he placed his hand on his forehead" I learned about how he survives in this place.

As a dance-maker and recently as an academic, border studies have also influenced my choreographic process. I reflect on the multiple views about the border from other scholars. Now both dance and border studies intertwine and complement my approach to create *Danzas fronterizas*. Before entering academia, what I did came directly from what I saw at the border and my own perspective of the problem. The tools of dance and border studies allow me to see not only "my border" but also others'.

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Notes

1. Fifteenth birthday "coming of age" celebration for young women.
2. People in Tijuana refer to the crossing as "ir al otro lado"—to go to the other side of the border.
3. Other contemporary choreographers who have created at least one *Danza fronteriza*: Nancy McCaleb, Patricia Rincon, Jean Isaacs, Allyson Green, Jaciel Neri, Henry Torres and Ángel Arámbura.
4. Rachel St. John. *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011, 14.
5. My translation.
6. Roberto Rosique is a border artist that lives and works in Tijuana.
7. See Marta E. Savigliano. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion: Structures of Feeling.* Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

Cruel Exuberance:

Choreographers Rosie Herrera and Octavio Campos Challenge the Imperatives of Latin Popular Performance

Celeste Fraser Delgado

To open his solo performance, *The Pig Show*, at the 2011 Melbourne Fringe Festival, Octavio Campos invited the audience to join him in a "salsa party" to "traditional Cuban music." Then the Cuban American performer hit play on a recording of Olga Tañon singing "Mentiroso." The pretense of cultural exchange was a big joke. Olga Tañon is not Cuban, but Puerto Rican. "Mentiroso" is not a salsa song, but merengue, a genre of dance music that originated in the Dominican Republic. The title of the song means "liar."

Continuing with his prank, Campos encouraged the audience to leave their bags on their seats, so they could dance freely. Then he cut the lights and plunged the theater into darkness. He raced down the aisles, pilfering wallets, while announcing in a sinister voice: "I lied. I told you I was going to tell you the true story of the Bay of Pigs, but I'm not going to tell you the true story."

Campos' detour from dance party to the theater of cruelty was all the more cruel because he betrayed the exuberance promised by much commercial Latin entertainment. This exuberance has been reproduced in mainstream English-language media and exported to the world at least since the 1940s when Hollywood produced "South-of-the-Border" films featuring spectacular song-and-dance numbers and has persisted in more recent times through the exuberant presentation of Latin crossover acts such as Ricky Martin and Sofia Vergara.

This exuberance also circulated throughout the hemisphere via Spanish-language media from the musical spectacles of the mid-20th-century Mexican film industry distributed to contemporary transnational media. One notable example is *Sábado Gigante* (Giant Saturday), a long-running variety show produced in Miami and broadcast across the hemisphere. *Sábado Gigante* promotes a pan-Latin/o American culture that subsumes national, racial, and class differences among Latin/o Americans and offers "an escape from real material conditions and necessary political engagements" through a manic celebration of consumerism (Chew Sánchez, et.al.,146).

Elsewhere, the late performance studies scholar José Muñoz and I have argued for the potential of exuberant performances of Latin popular music and dance in "everynight life" to oppose oppressive social conditions from slavery and colonialism through neo-liberalism and anti-immigrant policies.[1] That potential remains in force, as noted by Ramón H. Rivera-Servera in his survey of queer performance in dance clubs across the United States at the turn of the 21st Century.[2] However, when pressed into the service of a commercialized, homogenized latinidad, the same performance practices can produce what I will call the cruel exuberance of Latin popular music and dance.

Cruel exuberance departs directly from Lauren Berlant's formulation of "cruel optimism," which refers to persistent attachments to "conventional good life fantasies" even as the potential for realizing those fantasies recedes with the "retraction, during the last three decades, of the social democratic promise of the post-Second World War period in the United States and Europe" (3) .

The promises made and broken with the advent of modernity and globalization across Latin America vary from country to country, and are extended quite unevenly to Latino/as within the United States as well, depending on factors such as nationality, race, class, and immigration status. Certainly the precarity that occasioned Berlant's theory has been always and everywhere present. Cruel exuberance, then, is not a state of desiring that to which one feels entitled, but can no longer can longer have. Rather the exuberance of everynight life turns cruel when it becomes yet another demand.

In Miami, the cruel exuberance of Latin popular performance is made more acute by the demands of the tourist economy and the city's status as a center for transnational Latin entertainment. Latin exuberance is overlaid on the eternal happy face of hospitality, which is an imperative for low-wage workers from the hotel industry to the sex industry to the entertainment industry and the arts. Miami's nascent dance theater movement both revels in and reveals the cruel exuberance of Latin popular culture with an approach inspired by Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Pina Bausch, and Ohad Naharin.

Camposition Hybrid Theater Works -- the company Octavio Campos founded after a 12-year career in dance theater in Germany -- has been traumatizing audiences in his hometown for more than a decade: strapping time bombs to their chests (*Penguin Moon*); shaking them down for cash (*IPO*); dropping stuffed monkeys on their heads (*Kitchen Monkey*); and immersing them in a world where young men deliberately contract HIV (*Bugchasers*).

The cruelty of the Miami dance theater critique is not always aimed at the audience, however. In Campos's *TRPL Quince*, which premiered at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in January 2014, the dancer claims for himself the Latin tradition of the Sweet 15 party, usually reserved for girls. At age 45, Campos divides his life into three 15-year periods, inviting the audience to dance and sing with him as he relives each milestone.

The most poignant scene is when his homophobic father takes him to a tawdry hotel to have sex with a prostitute on his fifteenth birthday. In a collage structure typical of dance theater, Campos juxtaposes this event with his performance later that year of Martha Graham's "Acts of Light" at the Metropolitan Opera House. He recalls how an older man in the dressing room violently shaved his chest hair minutes before he went on stage.

Campos links the two events by scraping the microphone against his cheek. On a video screen behind him, a plus-sized woman in lingerie and bright red lipstick beckons with obscene gestures. He repeats the scraping motion along with a series of phrases, accumulating the details of each traumatic event. Finally, he reveals that he fled the cheap hotel and that blood seeped through his white unitard at the Met. The young gay man escaped the conventional demands of Cuban manhood, only to find the queer space of concert dance equally violent.

Choreographer Rosie Herrera, a frequent collaborator of Campos, began her career as a Little Havana showgirl at age 15. She has labored in Miami's tourism complex ever since, appearing as a dancer in Latin and hip-hop music videos and choreographing and performing for clients from nightclubs to arts institutions to corporate branding events. Not yet 30 years old, Herrera already has had three major works presented by the American Dance Festival and has also presented at the Baryshnikov Arts Center and Jacob's Pillow.

Her company, the Rosie Herrera Dance Theater, unveils the pain behind the glittering smiles of drag queens, divas, and showgirls. Herrera returns compulsively to the scene of the Latin dance party, exposing the "coerced consent" -- to borrow a phrase from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick -- of "the empathetically and sexually hyperavailable female figure" (whether that figure is biologically female or otherwise). (81)

Coerced consent is exposed in *Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret* (2010), where Cuban-American dancer Ana Mendez is an adorable vedette in a puffy pink dress dipped by tuxedoed male dancers into a series of birthday cakes with pink frosting set on stools across the stage. At first, she giggles and coos, but as the men dip her into cake after cake, despite her growing protests, she grows distraught and sobs.

The cake-rape scenario is repeated with the same tuxedoed dancers struggling to carry a hefty drag queen through the same routine. Her size and masculine features undermine the illusion of femininity, to the dismay of the men who lift her. Now it is the men who must be coerced into continuing the act, as the drag queen hurls herself into their arms.

In an iconic moment in Herrera's *Pity Party* (2011), Cuban-born dancer Liony Garcia collapses with his head down on a table, his eyes brimming with tears. He is taunted by the song "Cheer Up, Charlie," from the soundtrack to *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Standing behind him in an elegant suit, Octavio Campos pulls a roll of Scotch tape from his jacket pocket, yanks Garcia up by the hair, then tapes the sobbing man's eyelid and eye brow into a raised position. *Don't you know your smile/has always been my sunshine*, the song asks, while Campos sticks a finger in Garcia's mouth, then applies another strip of tape from the corner of his mouth, across his ear, to his opposite cheek. Soon Garcia's face is a grotesque smiley face wracked in pain.

The critique of cruel exuberance inherent in so much Miami-based dance theater work should not be considered an outright rejection of dominant Latin popular aesthetics.

Both Campos' and Herrera's works regularly erupt into a dance party, reveling in the very exuberance they challenge elsewhere. Audiences respond to the same frenetic rhythms, expansive emotions, and fluid undulations of the body that are celebrated as much in their work as in both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking popular culture spheres. In the critique of cruel exuberance, the pendulum swing from party to pathos never stops.

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Notes

1. Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz, "Rebellions of Everynight Life." *In Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
2. Ramón H. Rivera-Servera. *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

Braceros and Blackness: Disrupting Racialized Disciplinary Legacies with Joel Valentín-Martínez's *Polvo*

Cindy García

Javier Marchán Ramos as the bracero in Valentín-Martínez's *Polvo* (2012) Photo credit: Justin *Barbin*

In a performance of choreographer Joel Valentín-Martínez's *Polvo,* dancer Javier Marchán Ramos as Mexican migrant worker stands still as the black and white documentary on the Bracero Program moves upon his body. This performance of a Mexican subject dancing Afro-Cuban rumba, the seemingly dissonant combination of Chicano history, an Afro-Cuban dance practice, and modern dance, points to a significant disruption in audience expectations and marks a choreographic intervention into disciplinary legacies.[1] In *Polvo*, Valentín-Martínez stages the Mexican body working in the Bracero Program (1942-1964), a program created between the U.S. and Mexico that sought to regulate Mexican bodies seeking work in the U.S. Valentín-Martínez's choreography creates unexpected intersectionalities that call into question the legacy of black bodies and aesthetics in disciplinary understandings of Mexicanness, migration, and dance.

The flicker of the documentary fades and the lights gently illuminate the bracero, one who works with arms, as he carefully massages his hands. His straw hat protects his face from the brightening sun as his arms gradually strengthen: they stretch up to the diagonal and reach down on the alternate side, each time pulling in the harvest. The repetitious motions of Cuban *rumba* carry his weight from one side to the other, a repetition that embodies U.S. capitalism's unceasing reliance on Mexican laborers.[2] On stage, the bracero's movements slow, he again rubs his hands, but continues to work until the lights begin to lower. He bends forward, legs opening side-center, side-center in rumba, as Celia Cruz, Queen of Salsa, sings her son *guaracha*, "Bemba Colora."[3]

In staging the bracero body at the University of Minnesota in 2012, Valentín-Martínez draws movement from the everyday life cultural and economic experiences that mark latinidad between World War II and 1962. The choreography disrupts the most legible cultural legacies of the fields of Dance and Chicano Studies, and of Mexican and Mexican American dance rather than reproducing static understandings of culture, identity, and migration by reinforcing disciplinary boundaries. The aesthetic representation of the bracero body with this particular interdisciplinary audience created a productive friction that called attention to discordant racialized understandings of danced latinidad.

After Marchán Ramos' moving performance, I overheard the question, "Why did you use Celia Cruz's music for a dance about braceros?" The question was directed at the choreographer, and seemed to be a challenge, coming from a scholar in the field of Chicano Studies. Why *would* Valentín-Matínez mix two seemingly distinct historical

music and dance legacies – that of Cubans and that of Mexicans – in a piece about the exploitation of Mexican workers in the U.S. Bracero Program? I think I understand the concern of this question. As Black Caribbean-based Latina/os become legible in the U.S. as eroticized bodies, they frequently get consumed for their music and dance practices. Chicanos and Mexicans in the U.S. are continuously made legible either as laboring bodies or as oppressed bodies in resistance often symbolized by the figure of César Chávez. The use of Celia Cruz's music as well as the movement associated with Cuban rumba would seem to reify this polarized understanding of latinidad as well as erase expressive culture more commonly associated with Mexicans and Chicanos. If the bracero in the choreography is Mexican, why use Celia Cruz and Afro-Cuban *rumba* instead of Mexican music and dance traditions?

Polvo was performed in the spring of 2012, as the Chicano Studies Department at the University of Minnesota celebrated its 40th anniversary. Department Chair Louis Mendoza, in planning the symposium, encouraged me to consider making dance performance part of the event. With dance performance as an option, I knew instantly that I wanted to invite Valentín-Martínez who had just presented his work at the Congress on Research in Dance's Queer Dance conference in February 2012. While the other faculty invited scholars, who are comparatively low tech, one plane ticket, one hotel room people, I went way over my allotted budget to invite both Valentín-Martínez and dancer Javier Marchán Ramos. Valentín-Martínez and Marchán Ramos brought with them a lighting plan, extra baggage for costumes, and the need for a technical rehearsal. The Dance Program provided the space and the time, squeezing *Polvo* through the back door and into a production schedule that had already been set for several months. I found myself in the middle of a negotiation between two departments located on either side of the Mississippi River that had never previously come together for a dance production or a Chicano Studies symposium. I also found myself running back and forth across the river, incredibly driven to make this happen. The support of Dr. Mendoza and Dance Director Ananya Chatterjea was crucial because they were both willing to bend and extend the disciplinary practices, budgets, imaginations, and legacies that would have prevented this from happening.

Dance is not typically part of Chicano Studies Department offerings. In a Chicano Studies context, dance as cultural legacy most often means *ballet folklorico*, Aztec dance, or social dances such as the *polka ranchera* and *quebradita*. One of the most legible cultural legacies of dance in Mexico is that *ballet folklorico* unites the nation under the banner of *mestizaje* – a mixing of the Spanish and the indigenous. The ideological blending of colonizer with colonized served to whiten notions of the nation. As the indigenous gained both visibility and invisibility through their incorporation into the Mexican nation, Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas (2004) writes that the invention of *mestizaje* elided both the black and Asian presences in Mexico. Thus, Afro-Mexican dance traditions as documented by scholar Anita González (2010) have been historically disavowed as part of a Mexican cultural legacy.

While there are exceptions, the cultural legacy of Modern and Postmodern Dance that many Dance Programs in higher education have upheld have often not included choreographers identified as Chicano. From the point of view of Chicano Studies, Dance's concern with Modern and Postmodern Dance can be seen as a reproduction of a white, elitist dance field to which one can only gain access through an upper middle class standing. From outside the field of Dance, and possibly even from within, the black bodies and dance practices that undergird modern dance are not necessarily evident. Valentín-Martínez, however, grew to identify strongly with the black cultural legacy and foundations of modern dance while attending an arts high school in Berkeley where modern dance was made available to students of all social classes.

The performance of *Polvo* had a profound effect on many of the Chicano Studies attendees. Some wept as *Polvo* acknowledged a traumatic history that many U.S. Latinos share. Some wept because the legacy of the Bracero Program supports current legislative, educational, and cultural attacks on Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Moved by the dancer's vulnerability, viewers were also struck by the sheer beauty and strength of Marchán Ramos' dancing body. Chicana colleague Yolanda Padilla, clearly affected by the performance, commented that she never even imagined that modern dance would tell this history, could make so palpable the pain, desires, and vulnerability of the working Mexican body.

And yet, there was the question, "Why did you use Celia Cruz?" As an immigrant from Mexico to Berkeley at age 7, Valentín-Martínez's cultural influences and experiences make clear the difficulty of pinning down the elusive categories of Mexican music and dance. "I grew up in a family that knew that Mexicanness was identifiable with ranchera music, and with cumbia, even though many of us knew that cumbia was originally from Colombia. These sounds helped create my identity as a Chicano/Mexicano. I have an attachment to them emotionally and artisitically." When he came to the US, he was attracted to salsa. In the

San Francisco Bay Area in the 70s, he says, “Ruben Blades was on the radio. *Fania All Stars* and Celia Cruz were huge!” Valentín-Martínez eventually learned that salsa had roots, not just in the Caribbean and the US, but in Mexico in the 30s, 40s and 50s, and that Celia Cruz had performed in the salons of Mexico City. “She left her mark,” he told me. For Valentín-Martínez, salsa was a contemporary aesthetic that followed him from Mexico to California. He embraced salsa’s syncopation and the polyrhythms – the presence of the African Diaspora. He says, “My mother’s father is part black. It took us a long time to know or even talk about this in the family. Our family was always attracted to music of the African Diaspora, but I didn’t know why. I now think that my love for samba, hip hop, and African dance, all the forms I studied in high school, is an inheritance that has been denied within Mexican culture.” Valentín-Martínez also trained in modern dance where he learned that Graham and Dunham technique were based in movements of the African Diaspora. He studied with Dimensions Dance Theatre at the Alice Art Center (now Malong Casquelourd Center for the Arts) in Oakland, California, and performed for 12 years with Garth Fagan. His work, he says, honors the cultural legacies of his teachers, and his own shifting cultural path as an immigrant to the Bay Area from Mexico.

I want to mark the ways that the performance of *Polvo* can be seen to blur multiple legacies at once. *Polvo* brought an entirely new audience to a dance performance in the Barker Dance building at the University of Minnesota. *Polvo* transformed imaginations of dance at the Chicano Studies Symposium by representing the bracero program through modern dance and by choreographically acknowledging his multiple cultural influences that were part of everyday life in both Mexico and the U.S. *Polvo* produces a latinidad in which Cuban music and dance are historically relevant to the Mexican and U.S. Latino experience, yet is also critically conceived in relation to the conditions of the braceros. And for the last time, why not use music that would register as Mexican – a kind of Mexicanness that elides blackness? *Polvo* was just a ten-minute part of an evening-length’s performance entitled *Sombras*. In order to attend the symposium on budget, Valentín-Martínez brought only one of two dancers, eliminating two segments of the piece that included the second dancer, Liz Zastrow. In Zastrow’s solo, she dances as the lonely wife of the bracero to the banda music of *Banda Sinaloense el Recodo* – to music possibly more legible as Mexican. Perhaps if institutional structures existed that allowed for more communication between Chicano Studies and Dance, we could have allocated enough resources with enough time to produce the entire show and to thinking through the ways that each could deepen the ways we understand racialized histories and motion.

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Notes

1. Dance anthropologist Yvonne Daniel writes of Cuban rumba as a historically Afro-Cuban music and dance practice. See Daniel 1995.
2. As Alicia Schmidt Camacho writes, “[with the Bracero Program] state officials and labor contractors… colluded to produce the ideal migrant, the temporary worker stripped of labor rights and the entitlements of citizenship (Camacho 2008: 2).
3. “Bemba Colora” is from the album *Celia Cruz & Friends: A Night of Salsa*, RMM Records (1999). The song’s title, “Bemba Colora,” meaning thick red lips, is a reference to blackness in a Cuban context, but in the dance, bemba colora references the racialized bodies of the working class Mexican workers. Valentín-Martínez says, “The song has the memory of skin color, the racial bias of both Mexican and U.S. society. The Mexican politicians said that this kind of work was the destiny of the working class men, most of whom were brown and black people. Celia Cruz’s song brings a feeling of suffering, a desire to escape.”

Arthur Avilés & Elizabeth Marrero as Arturo and Maéva 1991
Photo by Johan Elbers, curtesy of Arthur Avilés archives Scan

Dancing the Latino Postmodern:

A Conversation with Merián Soto (MS), Viveca Vazquez (VV), and Arthur Avilés (AA), moderated and edited by Ramón H. Rivera-Servera (RRS)

RRS: When and how did you enter the New York City dance scene?

MS: New York in the 70s was a lively place, so many ideas. I found there a very vibrant community of Puerto Rican artists including Roy Brown, Awilda Sterling, Dhara Rivera, Marisol Villamil, Wilfredo Chiesa, Zoraida Santiago and Betty García. García was very influential in the 70s when she founded a collaborative political dance company called Barrunto Dancers. Barrunto Dancers presented mixed bills of work of various choreographers in theaters and non-traditional venues. These included García, Wilson Pico who presented his *Crónicas Danzadas*, Myrna Renaud, and Maria Mitchell who staged an *African Boot Dance* with all female cast. One of García's signature works was a movement portrait of Luisa Capetillo, the well-known labor organizer and early Puerto Rican feminist. I had the fortune to perform the piece in the mid 80s at Taller Latinoamericano in Chelsea.

I also worked with artists from the Judson era. At NYU, I studied and performed with Meredith Monk and Linda Tarnay. In 1978, I met Elaine Summers through a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) pot and entered an apprentice-like relationship that lasted seven years. Through the study and practice of Kinetic Awareness I found an entry into the process of transformation of my dancing body.

I had a loft on Canal Street where I produced some of my first performances, including *Hasta Ahora*, an evening of short works (1989) and *Escalio* (1983), the very first Pepatian collaboration with Pepón Osorio and Patti Bradshaw. I had presented my first evening-length solo concert, *El Agua Viva*, at El Museo del Barrio, in 1979. Pepón Osorio created the set and costume. It was the beginning of a collaboration that would last sixteen years.

In 1985 Pepón and I received our first commission from PS1. Using the metaphor of the *rescatadores de terrenos* in Puerto Rico, a social movement where landless persons occupied unused agricultural land, we appropriated the large auditorium space of PS1, completely transforming it. *Cocinando* began with the sound of waves and a young girl running around the large empty hall trailing a kite. Soon the hall was filled with dancers, drumming, movers, a kitchen, a bicycle, and a wooden "casita" with a colorful print fabric roof, complete with live chickens. The choreography used popular dances (*salsa, plena*) in various stages of (de)construction. The themes of rescuing and re-appropriation of cultural traditions, popular forms, and places became central to the work we did in the next ten years.

Another theme in our work was confronting sterotypes. In 1987 we created *Puerto Rican Trivia*, a send-off of popular trivia quiz shows. My solo, *¿Cómo Nos Ven? ¿Vemos?*, was a response to one of the things that I experienced as soon as I came to NY; I was *other*. This was immediate and confusing. Because I am light skinned, I might pass in everyday situations, but in the dance world, my movement

didn't pass, I was different. One choreographer would make fun of my Spanish: "*takatakataka".* My solo is a playful response to all those people who would say to me "Oh, you don't look Puerto Rican!" It layers movement with text, shifting fluidly through energetic states and stylistic forms including ballet, *salsa*, and my modal practice.

VV: I went to New York City in the early 80s. In Puerto Rico, working with the experimental group PISOTON, I had recently started a process of recognition of my own body using its raw capabilities as a tool to construct dances. In graduate school at New York University, but mostly in the streets and ambience of the downtown Manhattan dance scene, I began to think seriously about my limited vocabulary in movement and theory. I decided I was more interested in theoretical, anatomical, alternative training than perhaps in modern dance technique classes. I was already making dances that were addressing strong political issues from the perspectives of movement and theme but I needed to develop my own becoming of what I now could call: "a Puerto Rican something else movement artist." I discovered beauty in my own body and in other bodies that either danced or "no-danced." I began to discover knowledge in the experience and examination of movement as an event in itself. My second group piece (a quintet) *Mascando Inglés*, which I translated as *Chewing English*, gave me an entry in the dance production world of downtown NYC. Commissioned by the visual arts space PS1 under the curators Wendy Perron and the late Barry Laine, I was included in the prestigious series Dance and Social Commentary in 1984. *Chewing English* deals with language and geographical displacement in the early Puerto Rican migration to New York in the 1940s. Sometimes I danced this piece as a soloist as a strategy to tour with a very limited budget.

In 1997-1998 I constructed a solo I called *Miss Puerto Rico or The Isle that Repeats Itself*. I took the title from Antonio Benitez Rojo's text "La isla que se repite," an extremely important cultural Caribbean studies text that explores the performance of inner rhythms as a language that addresses the taste and savory-ness of our culture, inviting political conflict. The piece uses the map of Puerto Rico as a headdress/ metaphor for inner conflict poured out as movement. I make a bodily geographical appropriation of our colonial status emphasizing our ambivalent cultural/political relationship with the USA. As in *Chewing English* I eventually did this solo in a group format with feminine and masculine bodies as islands in a beauty pageant stumbling in their isolation.

AA: I was born in New York City in 1963 and grew up in Queens, Long Island and the Bronx. I attended Bard College and met Aileen Passloff, Judson's Church pioneer. She taught me dance and told me that everyone can be a dancer. I joined the Bill T. Jones/ Arnie Zane's Dance Company after I graduated and she helped me get in touch with my political and my sexual identity.

Merián and Viveca's project, *Rompeforma*, was instrumental in helping me to acknowledge a culture that I was estranged from but that I grew up in. So, just to be clear, as Viveca said, I am a child from, not a student of, *Rompeforma*, which is a festival that they both put together convening Latino artists from all over the world in Puerto Rico. Merián never said to me right out that she wanted my dance to have any Latino themes in it, but she invited me to be a part of this festival with all these Latinos. I was estranged from my culture, and never had any overt themes in my work before that. The Judson was in a sense helping me strip myself of my culture, of everything that I grew up in, and considered me this other person. I think he was called the Everyman. Merián, on the other hand, never denied her culture, she's never denied where she grew up. It was Merián and Viveca who invited me to go to Puerto Rico for the first time.

My work came a generation after the 80s movement in Latino dance and it came after the experiments of Merián Soto and Viveca. My dance company, Typical Theatre, formed in 1996.

In one of my pieces I worked on the issue of appropriation, which is one of the favorite things that postmodernists like to do. I used Martha Graham's video of *Seraphic Dialogue* (1955), featuring Mary Hinkson. I took the theme of it, of St. John, and I put it on my own body. I played the maiden, the warrior, and the murderer. And my cousin Elizabeth Marrero played Maeva, our ghetto matriarch. She also played *mi madrina* (godmother), and *mi titi* (auntie). We turned it into a Puerto Rican family story. We just changed the paradigm, but we didn't change any of the choreography, although no one on the stage had ever learned any Graham technique, much less choreography. The original piece is so beautiful and it really spoke to me. I wanted to make it mine, to embrace it. So, this piece was done in 1994, two years before Richard Move's *Martha Graham*.

RRS: One of the things that we must contend with is the way critics were attending to the postmodern scene in New York, especially the 1980s work, in ways that presumed whiteness. Merián spoke about this often, that the deconstruction of a Latin@ dance convention like the *son montuno* is not in any way recognizable to the Anglo critic because of a lack of familiarity with the traditions engaged in a Latin@ postmodern approach. In the context of a 1980s multiculturalism, the expectation was that you needed to do a dance such as *salsa* or *son montuno* in a way that was recognizable. Because a postmodern rendition of a *son* was not recognizable, the critique could not address its deconstruction.

AA: It was the way the work got looked at by people who might not really have a reference point to see what it was about.

VV: In my case, I see dance as a very difficult art because it always struggles with expectations of what artistic dance should be. If your dance is about movement, not dance steps, or you are trying to express

something of a different kind, defying translation, you will have to learn to "dance" with conviction and determination to invite other forms of being looked at to eventually develop. You have to learn the difficult task to accept or ignore rejection. I can share with you the difficulties I experienced with some audiences and critics that would not tolerate my "strangeness." For example, not understanding my preference for movement in complete silence when they were expecting that because I was Puerto Rican, music would be indispensable in my pieces.

AA: Well, that is precisely the distinction between inside the culture and outside the culture.

VV: Yes, and in New York I wasn't white enough; I didn't come from Holland so my choice of silence was not understandable. In Puerto Rico I was too much like an American postmodern dancer. It was a very interesting but difficult border to inhabit in relation to all these contexts and scenes.

Rompeforma, the experimental festival that Merián and I produced at home, changed the way that a lot of people in San Juan experienced live performance. Some people remember a very strong energy igniting at that venue. We brought a diversity of works and artists, ranging from Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Coco Fusco, Arthur Avilés, and others. People were seeing other Latinos venturing into "this thing" that maybe we didn't know what it was exactly but we knew there was power in the project and there were serious political thoughts of all sorts going on. We were creating or adding textures to a school of art criticism and theory that was being formulated and written but was not including us.

RRS: You were also breaking traditional expectations of form in Puerto Rican dance and moving towards a more explicit inter-media approach.

VV: Yes, because we had the back up of visual artists like Pepón Osorio. We invited visual artists to get involved in this *maratón*. We had master classes, workshops, conferences, poetry readings, theoretical discussions, and panels. We had this enormous amount of educational and artistic activities that…they don't happen at home that often.

AA: Absolutely, especially with certain groups of artists who were experimenting with their culture. So this is not just a folklore group of dancers, although there might have been one or two. It was actually mainly experimental. It was Latino and it was experimental. It was in New York and it was in San Juan.

MA: Pepón and I were always fighting to get space and resources. So we started to create structures to support Latino artists, to create opportunities for creating and presenting our work. It wasn't just the critics who did not understand what we were doing, it was the funders, it was everything, even "our" people. We were the vanguard, we had new voices, new ideas. So, one of the things that we did was create structures for artists like us to come together and talk about this, connect with each other, and develop together the resources to be able to get the work into another level; to facilitate making the fabulous work that we wanted to create.

RRS: Merián often told the story of how *Rompeforma*, although framed from the perspective of the performing arts in Puerto Rico, used mostly visual art spaces to nurture the same work in New York. Pepón Osorio, for example, would come in with an installation project and invite the dancers and the live performance component.

MS: Pepón and I were able to make our work in part with the support of visual arts spaces and funders. We were funded by the NYSCA (New York State Council on the Arts) Visual Arts Program, which had an initiative in performance. We were also supported by El Museo del Barrio, PS1, the Longwood Arts Gallery, and the Whitney Museum at Philip Morris. I feel that my work was better understood through a visual arts lens than through dance. I believe it was problematic as dance because I was deconstructing popular forms: the *salsa*, "on two" dancers, were up in arms; the downtown dance critics would say "she's *just* dancing *salsa*", and the uppity Ricans disdained its populist nature. They couldn't recognize the rigor in the work. I always felt at the margins. It feels good that that's all behind me now because it was very painful and lonely for many years.

VV: It becomes very political because there is solidarity with other artists' work. We emphasized the opening of space and time to learn, to talk about the work, to cultivate the rigor to really examine what it is that the artists want to work on, and to commit errors without being ostracized by critics. We also had to motivate critics and scholars in disciplines other than dance to start writing about our work.

Thirty years later, my work is now more accepted or at least there is more curiosity and respect. Colleagues from comparative literature, philosophy, Latin American and Caribbean literature, sociology, and women's studies have become interesting voices, more than those that come from the dance community. It is interesting how it also becomes political in the borders of academic fields.

AA: The work is still on the margins. It is still really hard to get the work that we do, Latino and experimental, produced. We feel that it is not supported by producers and critics in the way it could and should, in ways that understand cultural specificities and the ways we break form.

VV: I want to say to Arthur that when he says he's the son of *Rompeforma* I am proud of having played that matriarchal part. But I like more the aspect of educational legacy. We want younger people to have the strength to follow their own voice. In dance, that is not necessarily encouraged. In dance, you have to become a specific type of dancer, become a virtuoso in that style and not too many become creators. In the ambiance we created for *Rompeforma* and in my own practice we were (are) motivators for people to follow their own voice or path.

Latin@ Dance on Screen:

A conversation between Melissa Blanco Borelli (MB) and Priscilla Peña Ovalle (PP) Moderated and edited by Ramón H. Rivera-Servera (RRS).

RRS: Why is a turn to screen cultures such an important move for dance scholars researching US Latin@ dance? What do your particular archives evidence about the relationship between dance, screen, and latinidad?

MB: The screen provides a different, if not more vibrant, archive for moving Latin@ bodies. The types of dances often associated with Latinos/as and latinidad fall within the category of popular, vernacular or social dance. Already those type of dances require a different archive whether it be an embodied one (e.g., from teacher to student, friend to friend, elder to younger) or one that must be collected via ethnographic, everyday interactions. I know in my research on the *academias de baile* in Cuba during the 1920s through the 1940s I had to speak with musicians who used to play there in order to get a sense of what it was like to inhabit such a space. Also, these spaces have been fictionalized and glamorized (and even vilified in certain official Cuban history accounts) on screen, particularly in some Mexican *cabaretera* films. So despite being a part of a cultural imaginary, the screen provides and produces a useful archive to examine how latinidad operates/constructs itself/gets constructed. For me, the screen becomes the avenue through which I can imagine everyday histories that do not materialize in 'official' archives, and I can then establish value for these dances and dancing bodies irrespective of where they are taking place and how they are recorded and maintained.

PP: As someone trained in media studies and focusing on dance in U.S. popular culture, I find mainstream screen interpretations of Latin@ dance culture to be a fascinating archive of the ways that non-Latinos/as have perceived Latin@ bodies. Because media products like Hollywood musicals tend to mask the labor and mentorship that facilitate Latin@ dance (even in backstage musicals, where the trajectory from practice to performance is front and center, dance tends to be an innate Latin@ ability), such films/television programs/music videos/etc. can provide scholars with a sense of how US audiences have trained to see dance as a natural and often untutored Latin@ talent. Beyond analyzing how specific frames and narratives capture the dancing Latin@ in US culture, the screen archive can illuminate the mythologies, methodologies, and technique behind such portrayals—as well as how Latin@ performers manipulated those audience expectations. Like the *cabaretera* films that Melissa explores in her work, the Latin@ dances and dancers captured on US screens show amazing talents; because US media has tended to "other" the dancing Latin@ body so readily, unpacking the many layers of construction—self-imposed/produced by the performer or determined by the constraints of Hollywood tastes—is a rich and productive source for dance scholarship.

RRS: How do you understand the relationship between the choreography of latinidad on the commercial screen (film, television) and Latin@ social and concert dance?

MB: I think that the commercial screen, because of its connections to the Hollywood ideological apparatus, creates a specific brand of latinidad that has currency and quick circulation. Clearly it is a limited representation (here I think of the change that Shakira went through in both appearance and music style when she crossed over from the Latin American market to the US one in late 90s). It is a limited representation than can be both enacted and challenged in social and concert dance. Neo-liberal capitalism and its dependence on the manufacture of commodities and desire affects the choreography of latinidad. Even though a turn to the appearance of a more inclusive or multi-cultural America in pop culture (Selena Gomez on covers of fashion magazines, Eva Mendez peddling Jean Paul Gaultier perfume, Sofia Vergara and Jennifer López endorsing multiple retailers and products) I still think that female latinidad tends to exist primarily within a space of exotic sexuality. It sells and it is easily packaged. Latino social dance is often used to sell products. Priscilla, I know you have written about this, which again I think attests to how the commercial screen, in providing a site to show/introduce its audience to Latino social dance, is both useful in its ubiquity yet insidious in its representational strategies.

PP: Most recently, I am most surprised that latinidad—or female latinidad, as Melissa rightly notes—has become increasingly conflated with Arabic and/or Indian dance traditions in mainstream commercial media. Here I am thinking of Shakira and Selena Gomez's performances

on the 2002 and 2013 MTV Music Video Award shows, respectively. At a moment when Zumba and Dancing with the Stars propagate Latin@ dance styles in mainstream culture, it is as if the exoticized/sexualized movement typically associated with Latin@ dance on the commercial screen has inched towards a more ambiguous amalgamation of sensualized brown movement (Latina Arabic-esque, perhaps) As a media scholar, I am less capable of deciphering how or why these choreographic vocabularies are being conflated (they are not that similar), but it seems to happen. I understand the ways that Shakira's Lebanese heritage blurs the line of her bodily performance…but what about Selena Gomez? How and why might a "new" exotic movement be choreographed into mainstream US culture through the Latina body at this point and time?

RRS: How are new screen/media technologies transforming the archive of Latin@ dance?

MB: I know I have kept myself entertained and busy on YouTube researching Latin@ dance performances. Recently, I spent some time watching Puerto Rican vedette Iris Chacón. I help curate a Facebook Page called Cine de Rumberas where we upload clips from Mexican and Cuban rumbera films. I think screen/media technologies enable the setting up of an archive of the popular in relation to Latin@ dance. Both practitioners and fans can become curators/archivists allowing for communities to emerge, or at least communities to become more visible since these communities of fans and practitioners of Latin@ dance have always existed. In a way, screen/media technologies allow anyone with access to them to be producers of knowledge.

PO: I am especially excited about the ways that screen and new media technologies can potentially facilitate a new kind of interactive scholarship with Latin@ dance archives. In the early days of digital video, it often proved too stuttered to properly illustrate dance movement; as it improved, the Internet transmitted these recordings across the globe and increased the chances of immediate scholarly discussion or archiving/sharing information (as Melissa's work with Cine de Rumberas highlights with YouTube and Facebook). I am hopeful that new scholar platforms like Scalar will facilitate a way to encode information about the movements depicted within the videos themselves so as to provide a better mode of analysis for archives of Latin@ movement. Multimodal exhibits like the recent *American Sabor: Latinos in US Popular Music,* which has travelled extensively across the U.S., exemplify how archives can be made more accessible to nonacademic publics. It is my hope that we can continue to use screen and new media technologies to engage a dancing Latin@ public into its scholarship.

Contributors

Arthur Avilés is a New York City-based choreographer. He performed with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company from 1987-1995. Since 1996, he has directed his own company, Arthur Aviles Typical Theatre (AATT) and in 1998 he co-foinded the BAAD! – The Bronx Academy of Arts and dance. He is a Bessie Award winner and has received numerous recognitions including awards from Bard College, the Bronx Council on the Arts, and the Puerto Rican Initiative to Develop Empowerment.

Melissa Blanco Borelli is a Senior Lecturer in the Drama and Theatre Department at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen* and the forthcoming *She Is Cuba: A Genealogy of the Mulata Body,* both with Oxford University Press. She has also written for *The Feminist Wire* and the *Huffington Post*.

Victoria Fortuna is Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor of Dance at Oberlin College. She has received grants and awards from Fulbright, the Society of Dance History Scholars, the American Society for Theatre Research, and the Latin American Studies Association. Her writings have appeared in *Performance Research, Theatre Journal*, and *e-misférica*. She is currently preparing a book manuscript on the relationship between Buenos Aires, Argentina based contemporary dance practices and histories of political and economic violence from the 1960s to the present.

Celeste Fraser Delgado is Associate Professor of English, Academic Coordinator of Arts and Humanities statewide, and Academic Coordinator of English in central and north Florida at Barry University. She is an award-winning arts critic and editor, she is currently a contributor to the Knight Arts Blog (www.knightarts.org), and formerly music editor and Latin music critic for the *Miami New Times*. She is co-editor, with José Esteban Muñoz, of *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America* (Duke University Press, 1997).

Cindy García is Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Salsa Crossings: Dancing Latinidad in Los Angeles* (Duke University Press, 2013) and numerous articles on Latina dance. She was awarded the Gertrude Lippincott Award for the best English-language article published in *Dance Studies* in 2008 by the Society of Dance History Scholars and Selma Jean Cohen Award in 2009 by The American Society for Theatre Research.

James Moreno is Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of Kansas. Moreno is a Fulbright Scholar where he was appointed as Visiting Professor of Dance at the University of Panamá in Panamá City, Panamá and Visiting Guest Artist at the National Dance of Panamá. Moreno is published in *Dance Chronicle: Studies in Dance and the Related Arts* and *Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies*.

Priscilla Peña Ovalle is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies in the English Department at the University of Oregon. She is author of *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex, and Stardom* (Rutgers University Press) and essays on Latina popular culture in *American Quarterly, Women & Performance*, and other journals in the field.

Ramón H. Rivera-Servera is Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. He is author of *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (University of Michigan Press, 2012) which won book awards from the Lambda Literary Foundation, the Congress on Research in Dance, the Latino Studies Section of the Latin American Studies Association, the Society of Dance History Scholars, and the Association of Latina and Latino Anthropologists of the American Anthropological Association.

Merián Soto is Professor of Dance at Temple University. Active as a choreographer since the mid-seventies, she has collaborated extensively with MacArthur award-winning visual artist Pepón Osorio on full-evening works created with communities. She is co-founder and former Artistic Director of the Bronx-based Latino arts organization, Pepatián. Soto is the recipient of six Choreographers Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, an Artist Fellowship by New York Foundation for the Arts and numerous project grants from institutions such as Dance Advance, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Lila Wallace Arts Partners Program, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the New England Foundation for the Arts, the Harkness Foundation for Dance, and NALAC Fund for the Arts. Her writings on dance have been published in *Heresies Magazine* and *Movement Research Journal*. In 2000, Soto received a New York Dance and Performance Award "BESSIE" for sustained choreographic achievement, and in 2008, a Greater Philadelphia Dance and Physical Theater Award "ROCKY" for her One-Year Wissahickon Park Project.

Minerva Tapia is a Mexican-American choreographer, educator and company director of the Minerva Tapia Dance Group. She is currently a

Ph.D. Candidate in Critical Dance Studies at the University of California, Riverside. She has honed her art at dance studios in Mexico, New York, Los Angeles, Brazil, Canada, Turkey, and in Cuba, where she studied for seven years. Her work has been performed in Argentina, Spain, Panama, Mexico, and the United States.

Viveca Vázquez is Associate Professor of Humanities and Dance at the University of Puerto Rico. As dancer and choreographer, her work has been internationally produced and presented including venues in the United States, Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina. She is co-founder of Pisotón and Taller de Otra Cosa, both experimental dance and performance ensembles. With Merían Soto, she co-founded and co-produced a major experimental performance festival, *Rompeforma*. Her more than 30-year career in dance was recently showcased in a retrospective exhibition and performance series at the Puerto Rican Museum of Contemporary Art.

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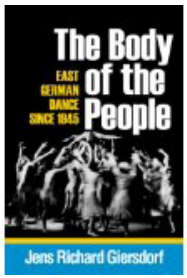

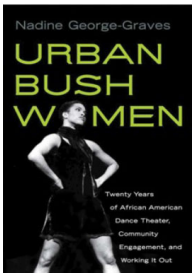

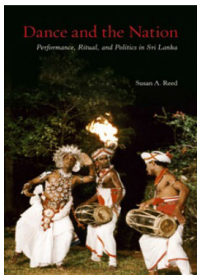

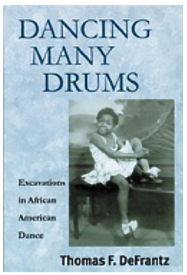

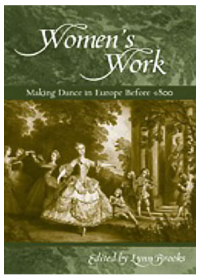

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