

Performing Beyond the Human in the Latinx Americas

by

Carlos A. Ortiz

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Paola S. Hernández, Professor, Spanish

Katarzyna O. Beilin, Professor, Spanish

Laurie Beth Clark, Professor, Art

Jill H. Casid, Professor, Art History and Gender and Women's Studies

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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University of Wisconsin-Madison

This project analyzes performance as a site and mode to challenge a specific notion of the human in the Latinx Americas. From a hemispheric perspective, I examine different performative exercises in Chile, Puerto Rico, and the United States that defy what I call the Western colonial idea of the human. As an exclusionary category, the human dictates systems of oppression, enabling sexism, racism, classism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia, among others, targeting, controlling, and excluding those who stand outside of its epitome—a white, able-bodied heterosexual man. The same category produces taxonomical distinctions and binary oppositions such as human/nonhuman and subject/object, limiting our views to understand and experience the world.

In disrupting this specific notion of the human, which has been carried via colonialism and sustained through an epistemic regime, these performances present aesthetic encounters that dislocate the structure through the body. By emphasizing the body as a container of knowledge and communication, the theater productions, the digital performances, and the photography I

study present ludic aesthetic encounters that focus on haptic, visual, and affective features as the primary modes of communication and meaning-making.

Last, in challenging a notion of the human that was imposed into the region by means of colonial power, the performances I analyze here can also be understood as decolonial gestures that present ways of vindication, (un)doing and resistance from those who have directly suffered under coloniality in the present. Although projects in decolonial studies are extensive, this specific project offers an initial cartography of mostly understudied performances in the Latinx Americas that are seen from a hemispheric perspective and that are gathered at the intersection of decolonial studies, visual studies, and performance and theater studies.

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Introduction: Thinking Beyond the Human Through Performance

In the summer of 2014, I was first confronted with the question of what it meant to be human. I had been recently granted DACA under the discretion of USCIS, and while this did not provide me with permanent legal status in the United States, it opened the doors to social mobility, allowing me to pursue a graduate degree. That summer, while I was arranging my move to Madison, WI, the university contacted me since they were having trouble determining my specific immigration status. With the DACA program being only 24 months old, the university lacked the protocols and guidance from governmental entities to label me correctly. As a DACA person, was I still being considered an undocumented immigrant? Was I a domestic or foreign resident for tax purposes? Was I going to be allowed to work for a state institution and be able to receive state/federal funding to pursue research? These questions surrounded me for weeks while being forced to label myself as “unknown” or “other,” making me feel like a faceless individual. This experience was a clear reminder that, to the eyes of institutional powers, I did not quite exist. In attempting to navigate a public institution, I was reminded that I did not belong, or at least, I did not have the same rights and privileges as a citizen or permanent resident. For the first time in my adulthood, I felt less than human, which had a lasting effect.

This specific experience began to gradually shape my academic interests toward how the ‘other’ exists and seeks forms to be (in)visible, endure, resist, and survive. While I might have felt constricted during that time, I persevered and unapologetically occupied the space of the university where I was accepted to pursue a graduate degree and believed I belong. This act of insistence, grounded in rooting oneself flagrantly regardless of its consequences, has followed me ever since. This personal act has also been feeding my academic interests, directing me to observe how others who—just like me—have endured a position of being less than human. In

other words, the project that I present stems from a personal experience of feeling less than a human, the desire to find the root of what made me feel as such and to ponder on ways to resist and undo it. Although this is not a project to map the realities of those living under DACA, I begin with this anecdote to demonstrate that the project focuses, first and foremost, on embodiments, or materializations of lived experiences as forms of knowledge production. My point of departure arises from what performance theorist Diana Taylor, calls “an act of *acuerpamiento*, learning of a situation by living it on the flesh” (*¡Presente!* 2). In being conscious of my own experience as a Latino under DACA, I intend to create links with other forms of being and find commonality in resistance and endurance by those who have been oppressed as colonized entities.

Just like DACA people, various other communities in the world exist and endure from a marginalized position, seeking ways to survive a precarious present. BIPOC, the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, women, disabled people, etc., also often find themselves in sites of ostracization. Interlinking systems of oppression deem them less than human, since they fall out of the Western epitome of the human—a white, able-bodied heterosexual man—as I later explain. In truth, there is not only one form of oppression that an individual might experience. As Kimberlé Crenshaw reminds us, “power comes and collides, where interlocks and intersects” so an individual—a single body—can experience multiple forms of oppression in an intersectional manner (“Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality”). Such would be the case of a gay DACA man who is not only subject to discrimination and violence based on his sexual orientation but also due to lacking a permanent immigration status in the United States. He would be deemed less than human from two intersecting identities that position him outside of the Western model of the human. For some, experiencing multiple forms of discrimination, systemic violence, and

overall oppression have a common base. In the context of this project, and in what I name the Latinx Americas, feeling and being deemed less than human finds ground in the colonial reality of the Americas, a topic I explain in the next section.

In sum, this project traces how certain individuals—from a site of marginalization and being oppressed—embark on aesthetic projects that resist the Western idea of the human in the present, cognizant that this category actively defines their oppressed reality. In doing so, they (un)do the Western category of the human as a way not only to resist it, but also to dismantle it, and perhaps exhibit ways of existing otherwise. The project that I present looks at specific localities of the Latinx Americas understood as different performative manifestations: I begin with the theatre of Manuela Infante in Chile who, with *Realismo* (2016) and *Estado vegetal* (2017), presents us a reconsideration of the human via a very thoughtful theatrical praxis. By questioning the very grounds of Western theatre and how stories are told by humans and for humans, the playwright-director refuses the Western idea of the human by experimenting with embodiments that put at the center the somatic intersections of human bodies and nonhuman entities/matter on stage. In the second chapter, I specifically observe two distinct cases of puppetry and object theatre, Silencio Blanco's *Chiflón, el silencio del carbón* (2013) in Chile and Agua, Sol y Sereno's *Corazón de papel* (2018) in Puerto Rico, respectively. While geographically distinct, both theatre groups make use of puppetry to tell stories of colonized communities, stories that would otherwise go untold and even suppressed. The object in these productions unfolds performances that open up to non-Western epistemologies where affective transmission from disposed communities to the stage occurs at the complex interaction between material embodiments among human actors and objects, coupled with sounds and movements. In the final chapter, I observe the work of two queer artists that I frame as engaging in a praxis that

exceeds their biological body as a way of being and doing. I begin with the work of Josecarlo Henríquez in Chile who puts in tension the limits of his body as he enacts activism for sexual dissidence and sex work in the digital space and television. I end this last chapter with the self-portraiture of Chicana Laura Aguilar who performs to the camera a haptic erasure between her naked body and the material manifestations—organic and inorganic—of arid landscapes in the United States.

These case studies are pinpoints on the map of the Latinx Americas that are localized as much as they are totalizing or global. For each case study, I show how each artist's work functions as performative exercises or aesthetics modulations that speak to specific realities of the region but that find their articulation and execution in their movements across geographies and/or embodiments that challenge not only what we understand as the human, but also conceptions of gender, nationality, time, space, all dictated by a hegemonic Western epistemic regime. The amalgamation that I present here specifically looks at performances that envision life beyond a Western human—not only a heterosexual, independent being but one that is a “White man north of the Pyrenees mountains” who embodies rationality par excellence, as the theorist of decoloniality Ramón Grosfoguel affirms (“The Structure of Knowledge” 87). As a thinking being with rational capacity, a Western conception of the human follows Cartesian dualism, making itself stand in a superior manner from other organisms and inanimate matter, advocating for binaries such as body and mind, and nature and culture. In observing the experiences of queer subjects, brown, and colonized peoples, and in conjunction and dialogue with nonhuman entities such as household objects, plants and puppets, this project follows how different undertakings of resistance are molded from a site of relegation and differentiation that articulate forms of being otherwise in the doing and as embodied experiences.

The lived experiences of queer, brown, colonized peoples, among other marginalized groups in the Latin Americas speaks to a commonality, one that José Esteban Muñoz calls the “brown commons,” an affinity or sense of unity of many entities emerging from their marginalized experiences and the potentials those present (*The Sense of Brown* 2). People and things are brown as they stand at the limits of the legitimate, vulnerable to be rejected, controlled, and subordinated (Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* 3). This is a commonality between humans and nonhuman, organic, and inorganic entities, that find camaraderie “in the way in which they suffer and strive together but also... [in] their ability to flourish under duress and pressure” (Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* 2). As I exhibit through these chapters, the brown commons come together in their performativity, since they enact “a movement, a flow and an impulse to move beyond the singular subjectivity and the individualized subjectivities” (Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* 2). It is a commons in its movement, which I identify as performances that directly challenge the Western category of the human, finding force and potential in “the moment of contact” of multiple entities and what this can produce (2).

(Un)doing the Human as a Decolonial Performative Exercise

This study takes a hemispheric approach, covering the Latinx Americas, which is understood here as those territories in the Americas that contain Spanish and Portuguese-speaking communities from the Southern Cone to the United States. The ‘x’ in Latinx makes a move toward inclusivity, considering the immense diversity of the artists and entities covered that self-identify or are considered as—but not limited to—brown, indigenous, mestizo, white, Afro-latina/o/e/x, hispana/o/e, Chilean, Boricua, Latina/o/e/x, Chicana/x, man, woman, queer/cuir, gay, lesbian, monolingual, and/or bilingual, as well as to encompass nonhuman agents such as inanimate matter, objects, plants, or puppets. Yet, the ‘x’ can be exclusionary as it might not

provide a comfortable and appropriate identity category for many Latin American and Latinx people. As such, I use the ‘x’ to acknowledge the pan-ethnic and the crossings of identities in the project as a whole. Moreover, in the plural of Americas, I shed light on the importance of the act of crossings hemispheres in a multidirectional manner, South-North, literally, and symbolically. Many of these artists and works navigate grounded to a specific local community as much as they navigate globally, across nations, reaching and engaging with different audiences. As Paola Hernández and Analola Santana accurately argue, when we speak of the Latinx Americas, we “foment hemispheric dialogues, enhance cultural exchanges, as well as expand our understanding of the historical and political past, present, and future” of Latin American and Latinx peoples (1).

The mapping I began here continues the scholarly projects of others, such as Jimmy A. Noriega y Analola Santana’s *Theater and Cartographies of Power: Repositioning the Latina/o Americas*. By rethinking the historiography of theatre and performance in the region, they seek to undo the restrictive and hierarchical cartographies that have been the result of an exclusive and imbalanced system of power (10). By including the voices of the very practitioners of theatre and performance, they make evident that to reposition how academia in the United States thinks of theatre and performance in the Latinx Americas, it must turn its gaze to the localized practices and the voices of those who engage in the work of performing and not just academics.

Along the same line, my project is also a remapping that steers to localized subjectivities to observe how performative practices redefine the human through embodiments that are presented as an epistemology. In the act of observing how the Western category of the human is approached, viewed, interrogated, and dismantled through various performances, I subscribe to

Noriega and Santana's invitation to rethink the universal markers that constitute how we think of, around, and about performances in the Latinx Americas.

Since the second half of the 20th century, continental philosophy has taken hold as a primary mode of thought used to question the Western idea of the human via philosophical currents such as post-structuralism. Refuting existentialism and affirmations of universal truths, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, among others, have helped to deconstruct ideas of power, the body, and subjectivity, paving the way to show that the Western notion of the human is not only constructed but is also at the base of different systems of oppression. Thus, it is necessary to confront this dominant notion of the human. However, most of these philosophical projects are not grounded in the Latinx Americas, and applying their frameworks precipitately to the region can be an over-simplifying approach that forces European thought into a local and already colonized territory. Doing so perpetuates colonial power by giving space to contemporary philosophies that emerge from the same latitudes that have historically sustained imperial power: the Global North. Aware of this, Walter Mignolo discerns that decolonial thought and projects must break away from "the Eurocentered project of post-modernity and a project of post-coloniality heavily dependent on post-structuralism" ("Delinking" 452).¹ Hence, in questioning the human, we reach the question: How do we move away from Eurocentric thinking in the Americas and what would this decolonial project entail? Looking at what has been at work in the Americas against the epistemic regime brought in by coloniality, Mignolo points to an existing praxis of moving away from Western

¹ Walter Mignolo makes a distinction between postcolonial criticism/theory and the decolonial turn. The former "is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy" primarily seen with Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha that remains Eurocentered. While the latter is a praxis, "a project of de-linking" from Western epistemology that brings to the forefront other subaltern epistemologies ("Delinking" 452).

epistemology and one that continues to do so in the present (“Delinking” 452).² The theorist asserts that it involves a displacement from a “universality” of body politics that conceives Europe as its origin, taking into account other (suppressed) epistemologies that open up from the space of the colonial difference (“Delinking” 453). Mignolo states that a decolonial project is “a project of de-linking” from Western epistemology, which in return, brings to the forefront other suppressed forms of being and knowing that—while historically and currently present in the Latinx Americas—have been overlooked and silenced by Eurocentrism (“Delinking” 453).³

As such, I begin with this decolonial spirit of de-linking in mind, remaining true to the realities of the communities of this territory. Along with that, across this project, I remain cognizant of how the conception of the modern human has been tightly linked to colonial power, which traces back to the Old World and that imposed its way into the Americas in the Encounter in the 15th century⁴. Decolonial thinking has made us aware of how the colonial project, or the historical process of expansion and imperialism of European powers to the Americas and other continents such as Asia and Africa, had multiple and lasting effects in the Latinx Americas. In acknowledging this, decolonial thought understands the Western idea of the human as a valuable site to understand the dynamics of colonialism. Colonialism in the Americas is a matter of

² Mignolo traces this decolonial praxis in the works and doings of Waman Puma de Ayala, José Carlos Mariátegui, Rigoberta Menchú, and Gloria Anzaldúa (“Delinking” 452).

³ I distance myself from a discussion about biopolitics since, as Gabriel Giorgi has pointed out, there are deficiencies in this Eurocentric theoretical framework when thought along the lived experience of those in the Americas. The Foucauldian concept is limited “to the *human* body and population” (287). It has an incised anthropocentric viewpoint as “the *bio* in biopolitics, seemed to return... to the human, the social, and the anthropomorphic,” leaving out the nonhuman which directly challenges the very notion of life and bios in this region (Giorgi 288). Giorgi reminds that in light of discussion around (neo)extractivism in the Latinx Americas and how this is tied to colonial power, the Earth, “soil, minerals, the inanimate, the subterranean—as a domain of conceptualization, activism, and imagination reveals the insufficiency of bios,” forcing us to reconsider notions of living, bio, identity, and subjectivity (290).

⁴ Following the work of Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter, Mignolo argues that we can trace the unfolding of an idea of the ‘man’ in the Renaissance, as portrayed in Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing *The Vitruvian Man*, which excludes both African-descents and indigenous peoples. The arrival of Europeans to the Americas marks “the moment in which the concepts of Man and of Human became one and the same and, at the same time, came to be understood in relation to race and racism” (“Sylvia Wynter” 108-109).

epistemological imperialism since this was the seed that allowed for the colonial project to flourish. Anibal Quijano affirms that in imposing global dominance, Europe crafted a comprehensive world system creating “new geocultural identities” for all those that were being colonized (“Coloniality of Power” 540). A world controlled by imperial Europe “signified a cultural and intellectual intersubjective configuration” where “the experiences, histories, resources, and cultural products ended in a global cultural order... around... Western hegemony” (Quijano “Coloniality of Power” 540). A world order was imposed on a region with already-established social, economic, political, and religious systems of their own, engaging in a genocide of not only human lives but of long-term epistemological characteristics. This is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called the “epistemicide” or the ways in which colonizers unleashed a “murder of knowledge” (24). To Walter Mignolo, as with an array of other decolonial thinkers, the Latinx Americas remain a colonial experience. For as much as territories gained political independence, the world order that emerged from the contact between the Old World and the New World exceeded that initial period of colonization, and imperial power continues to emanate from Europe and other geographies in the Global North. Through mutations, which is the colonial difference, coloniality continues to live with us and in us.

In that sense, modernity and coloniality are inseparable, “two sides of the same coin” (Mignolo, *Local Histories* 50). Modernity, a worldview from the Western world that was advanced through the Enlightenment and gave rise to capitalism, intersects with coloniality—or how the world continues to be transformed through epistemic frameworks and hierarchical dichotomies brought in by colonialism. Understanding this parallelism helps us observe our epistemological present and the one these performances seek to undo: the accounts we follow of world history, the way we produce knowledge, the languages we employ, the narratives that are

allowed to circulate, the gender system imposed on us, among other forms of oppression that intertwined and trace back to the European colonial project. Most importantly, and tying together all of these different facets, our idea of the human which dictates what constitutes a human and who gets excluded by means of a system of difference, emerges from this axis.

In their introduction to *Latin American Culture and the Limits of the Human*, Lucy Bollington and Paul Merchant are aware that to (re)think the idea of the human from a Latin American context requires challenging the “established narratives of history” (4). Mignolo would agree since, to him, understanding the Western idea of the human is to acknowledge how it is “narratively constructed,” and dissecting it would entail studying its “narrativization that has been produced with the very instruments (or categories) that we study with” (“Sylvia Wynter” 107). Disengaging from Western epistemology requires undoing from various perspectives, including how we form history. My contribution to the discussion of the human in Latinx Americas is an expansion. It presents an initial cartography of contemporary performances that I introduce, in part, as decolonial praxes that undo or oppose the narrativization of a universalizing human that is reified with every articulation of being a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, man, standing as an independent rational being and disengaged from the nonhuman beings that inhabit the Earth.

Feminist decolonial theorist María Lugones is categorical when it comes to describing the role of “the human” in the colonial project, writing “the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human [is] the central dichotomy of colonial modernity” (743). This dichotomy intersects with another distinction brought by colonialism, one that separated men from women (Lugones 743). Indigenous peoples and those enslaved of African descent were treated outside of not only the category of the human but also of man or woman; they were

created as the exception (Lugones 743-744). In that treatment, they were cast into what Frantz Fanon asserts as a “zone of nonbeing” (10). Only the male colonizer, the European man “became subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason,” while European women stood as those in service for reproduction to expand their kind and capital utilizing their “sexual purity and passivity” (Lugones 743). From all that was brought in, Lugones observes that an imposed gender system as that which justified European men as “civilized” and, thus “fully human,” creating a dualism that serves as the “mark of the human” to (mis)treat non-Europeans (743).⁵ In thinking of the coloniality of gender and its perpetuity to the present, Lugones formulates decolonial feminism shaping a thought system toward liberation and resistance. A feminist decolonial resistance expands the force “of communities of the oppressed in constituting resistant meaning and each other against the constitution of meaning and social organization by power” (Lugones 746). The feminist project she articulates has a “strong emphasis on ground, on a historicized, incarnate intersubjectivity,” a practice with an emphasis on relationality instead of individuation (746).

In my reading, the decolonial feminist praxis Lugones presents is of the body. It is embodied awareness, that instead of articulating an individual subjectivity, it seeks to become with others, in movements. To me, decolonial feminism emanates and intersects with what Muñoz understands as the brown commons. Thus, the characters that surface from the theatrical productions, the performative appearances on television and social media, and the photography I cover in the project, embody brownness as much as they are also decolonial feminist positionalities. This is not the enactment of an individualization, but “being with, being alongside” and always “being-in-common,” in tactile engagement with the body as much as it is

⁵ Race and sexuality have been the axes to understand the rise of modern states in Latin America and the “political control of the state” over all bodies (Giorgi 287).

“feelings, sounds... environments alongside humans, and the inorganic presences that life is very often so attached to” (Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* 2-3).

In a way, decolonial feminism pertains to the brown commons, and engages in the praxis of de-linking—and here I return to what I previously stated—or shifting away from Western epistemology. Decolonial feminism departs from challenging gender oppression by those who have been colonized. This meets what Mignolo has called a process of de-linking in the act of challenging the continuance of intersecting systems of oppression. Decolonial feminism not only vindicates women that might identify as BIPOC—which have been historically excluded from mainstream (white) feminism—but also set in motion a praxis to reconsider how we account for our lived experiences, conceive history, tell stories, and develop a conception of the world and what it means to be a human, away from the constrictions that emerge from Western epistemic imperialism.

What I have explained above supports me to assert that the project I present is also a mapping of decolonial performative exercises. If coloniality is constitutive of the human in the Latinx Americas, any exercise or attempt to deconstruct or challenge this figure is a decolonial move. The performances I present embody a decolonial feminist praxis in the manner these are exercises by “different concrete people whose bodies, selves in relation, and relations to the spirit world do not follow the logic of capital” (Lugones 754). In resisting dichotomies and individualization, the praxes grouped here are assumed as communal assertions of thinking and doing with the other. They are instances, performances of “affirmation of life over profit, communalism over individualism, ‘estar’ over enterprise, beings in relation rather than dichotomously split over and over in hierarchically and violently ordered fragments” (Lugones 754). In sum, the performances that I include here follow the logic proposed by Lugones and

Muñoz and engage, meaningfully, in avowals of life otherwise, always attuned to the body; a decolonial embodiment that thinks and shapes a reformed and redefined human.

Decolonizing with the Nonhuman

If the central dichotomy of colonial modernity is “the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the nonhuman,” then a decolonial praxis should have at its center how epistemological liberation practices a shift away from differentiating between the human and the nonhuman (Lugones 743). Bruno Latour has famously declared that “we have never been modern” while arguing that our objectives as modern humans have never been met due to this dichotomous trap. Modernity, as it arose in the Americas through colonialism, meant the erasure of other non-European cosmologies. In that process, it implanted a distinction between human and nonhuman. The mark of the man/human not only served and continues to serve for the benefit of the Western (male) colonizer but presents the land and all the inanimate matter as well as other living organisms as resources to be exploited in favor of European/Global North capital. Modernity shattered nature away from society, reinforcing the binary object/subject in the name of progress, and creating a false dichotomy for the advancement of supposedly modern humans. As an effect of this colonial experience, this false opposition erased all the possible entanglements that we humans have with the nonhuman. To be truly modern then, as Latour suggests, would attest to the “relations” and “groupings” of both humans and nonhumans that stand against this division (*We Have Never Been* 15). This is what, in part, a decolonial praxis also does. It is what Taylor calls the search for “alternative epistemic practices” (*jPresente!* 24). In exhibiting other epistemologies, decoloniality thinks of the entanglements that have always existed between humans and everything else that stands outside of it. The performative exercises I discuss in these chapters make these entanglements visible as aesthetic provocations. These are

attestations of empirical knowledges that are realized, attained, visualized, and transmitted via (aesthetic) sensory experiences in, and from, the body.

Furthermore, as an effect of colonialism, this imposed dichotomy of human vs. nonhuman silenced (but did not erase) the cosmovision of those indigenous peoples who were already inhabiting the land and that we now know were already existing in communion with the natural world. A decolonial project then would not only stand as the vindication of the cosmologies of indigenous and other non-European communities but also involve actively undoing the opposition in the name of a more just and sustainable world, instituting new gazes to see the other equally and in a co-constitutive way.

It would be reasonable to direct this project to performances that engage directly with those indigenous communities that continue to resist through active decolonial praxes. However, my project engages with performances that stand outside of these communities. My selection of works was based on their transnational characteristic of circulation—theatrical productions that while originated in a specific locality, they circulate outside of national confinements reaching multiple audiences. To me, indigenous practices exceed the works selected here and deserve their own space and a proper application of their epistemologies and theories. The concluding remarks that end my project present the work of Mapuche visual artist Sebastián Calfuqueo. This is a glimpse of what I envision as the continuation of my research where I will delve precisely into indigenous performances that challenge the Western idea of the human.

The performances I present here are decolonial in the manner they epistemologically oppose the Western tradition and, most importantly, the Cartesian duality that separates body and mind. When we think of the body as that which not only represents but also carries and transmits knowledge, we assert other possibilities for communication and of being in the world. The

linguistic sign, as it might be present through dialogue or text in most of the works in these chapters, is not central to the processes of meaning-making that each work unfolds. As Hispanist Mary Louis Pratt asserts in *Planetary Longings*, when thinking of interactions beyond the human body, engaging without language is important (133). If language is present, it stands complementing the haptic which is central to each work. Opposing the Enlightenment-era current that fed most of Western thought, these performances also put Kantian logic in tension by shifting away from the preponderance of a firm individual subject. They present performances that oppose this outdated logic, giving way to understanding the human in collective engagement and from a heterogenous perspective which involves what surrounds them taking part in practices of contact, co-constitution, correspondence, and collaboration.

Feminist Alliances

What could Manuela Infante, Chilean and Puerto Rican puppetry, and queer performance and photography have in common? How do all, perhaps, inhabit and put in motion a (decolonial) feminist project? As geographical and temporal distinct of each of their praxis might be, these practitioners all come together in an ontological locus, a territory of contact and of existing otherwise. I momentarily digress to contextualize these practitioners and their performative exercises in the present mainstream global feminist moment. Rosi Braidotti has called the posthuman convergence, or the historical condition of human beings in the present, as traversed by, (1) an increment in “structural injustices” that translates to unequal access to resources, (2) within the current geological period, a time of species are dying out “in a decaying planet struck by climate crisis and new epidemics,” and (3), how “the status and condition of the human is being redefined by... [new] technologies and the digital interconnections they afford us” (*Posthuman Feminism* 2-3). This present condition has sparked great discussion around what it

means to be a human from a feminist perspective, considering that the Western gender regime stems from the conception of the human with the figure of the cisheterosexual man as its central and regulatory character. Historically, feminism has entailed “subversive politics” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 3). In the posthuman convergence that is our present, this means that those that have historically occupied the space of being less than human can generate subversive enactments and create “alternative visions of ‘the human’” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 3). The performances that I present here share this feminist spirit of living in this convergence, of finding an alternative to ‘the human’ from the work of those who have been historically colonized and that have been deemed less than human, living in an age of technological acceleration and extinction. This is not to say all these performances unfold under the same plane. No, as decolonial projects, they intersect in the present posthuman condition in different geographies of the Americas. While each work is set to specific temporal and historical specificities, having “materially embedded differences,” they all come together in a “shared intimacy with the world” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 8). By putting them together in this project I exercise a cartography that sheds light on the fact that “‘we’ are not One or the same,” in Chile, Puerto Rico, or the United States (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 7). However, there is camaraderie in the existence of we, as in “who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-together” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 8). That is, the decolonial feminist spirit of Lugones, and the project of de-linking by Mignolo meet—in a coalitional manner—posthuman feminism in our historical present.

Rethinking the Contact Zone

As I have expressed, these performative exercises share the characteristic of executing the act of coming into contact, inhabiting a common space and interacting. In the early 1990s,

Mary Louis Pratt coined the term contact zone to move away from a Eurocentric perspective to understand “imperial power” by observing the “places where exploration, invasion, and colonization” occurred in the Americas (126). Three decades later, Pratt revisited the term to acknowledge its mutations within academia and brings it to the present to understand sites of interaction or contact among different entities in a precarious present where life, amid ecological collapse, is no longer an option. Similarly, Donnay Haraway has theorized what it might mean to live in the present, not fully negating the complexities we face, but to practice “staying in the trouble,” creatively, as a way of “getting on together” (10). To do so, one must be attuned to everything that exists, human and nonhuman, erasing monumental and dominant narratives that accentuate systems of oppression and that perpetuate inequalities. It is an act of telling “speculative fabulations” to “redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing” among all that exists (10). As an act of speculation, creativity is central to “staying with the trouble” and living in the present. These are reciprocal acts of “giving and receiving... [of] failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful” (10). In a similar line, Pratt is cognizant of these speculative fabulations in reconsidering her term the contact zone. The theorist states that we must think actively about how to live the end of carbon-based life and “how to organize life around it,” and critically think about how we can encounter other forms of life that also share this same experience (124).

Across this project, I argue the plethora of artists, covering the last decade of the twenty century and the first two decades of the twenty-first, signal specific manifestations of present-day world-making that challenge the Western notion of the human. However, they can also be read as speculative fabulations in the Latinx Americas that are observant of the lived experiences of multiple overpowered subjectivities, human and nonhumans, and their crossings. They make

visible what Pratt formulates as interspecies contact zones, where the agential impact and capacity of both human and nonhuman actants are equally acknowledged in the act of inhabiting a common space and in coming into contact. That is, these performances are contact zones. These performative encounters, which are also interactions, emanate from the body—always—and come to fruition as affective, visual, and even sonic entanglements of multiple entities. With an ontological flatness as perspective, Pratt's reformed contact zone envisages various and simultaneous forms of existence horizontally that in their crossings form networks, avoiding hierarchizations that perpetuate systems of difference. Visualizing this contact zone takes the audience to sense life in the world in a more equitable way. It is a rehearsal of life otherwise. In this redefined contact zone, these performances enact what Jacques Rancière understands as the “distribution of the sensible” or how what we perceive and experience within a given socio-political context is always regulated (12-13). Systems of power control what we can sense and experience. If Western epistemology has regulated and silenced certain forms of knowing and sensing, the performances presented here strive to undo this matrix of power. These performances reveal, then, a different experience in the world as they delink from Western epistemologies that are grounded in binarism and dualities, and in opposition, remind us how the body/matter is capable of knowledge production.

Contact zones emerge from the “act of reimagining” which also inform each work covered here (Pratt 126). Most importantly, the contact zone has a “performativity and improvisation” nature in the manner that an encounter takes place as “an embodied event” and where “new relationships [are] made up out of what is there in the embodied moment” (Pratt 129). With a reformed conception of the contact zone “what gets decentered is the human,” moving the focus of observation “to the sites of engagement, interaction, and entanglement

between human and nonhuman entities” (Pratt 131). A television appearance, becoming a trending topic on Twitter, a theatre production, or a photograph, can all be a locus to not only glimpse interspecies encounters but to envision—creatively—a redefinition of the human.

Methodology

The array of different practices that speak to one another and intersect throughout these chapters surfaced organically, materializing what Mignolo understands as pluri-versality, or how local histories of colonization in the Americas are envisioned as unique as much as they are common in that “they all have to deal with the unavoidable presence of modern/colonial world and its power differentials” (“Delinking” 497). My act of connecting them under their shared experience, which exhibits a challenge to the category of the human, leads to “border thinking” (499). These are political and ethical ventures that engage in “revealing the imperial collusion between the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality,” or the ways in which a Western epistemic regime is at the core of systems of oppression in the present (Mignolo, “Delinking” 499). The mapping I present here also works in executing “critical border thinking,” a method of decolonial praxis that seeks to find other worlds, other possibilities, away from “modern rationality” by connecting a diversity of epistemologies and histories of colonized peoples (Mignolo, “Delinking” 499).

In de-linking away from a uni-versal to a pluri-versal vision, a decolonial praxis seeks to undo a single, imperial Western epistemology. Yet, this does not mean we must negate all that emerges from what has been historically the stronghold of power, the Global North. Mignolo states that “emancipating projects” from the Global North can be maintained if they are self-aware and do not hold the torch in ‘guiding’ others (“Delinking” 499). Hence, the performative exercises presented here sprout from the brown commons, as decolonial gestures from those who

directly suffer coloniality and, in my reading, are accompanied by mostly feminist (new materialist) theoretical frameworks as allies.

As a cartography of performances, my contribution to this area of study presents an intricate mapping of the different ways in which performances by those in the Latinx Americas have challenged this category. With a hemispheric view, I acknowledge the itinerant nature of some of these works that are localized as much as they are global. Each challenges geographical delimitations in their performative execution and if we consider the extension of the audiences. As mentioned, I identify all these works using performance as their medium. Part of their commonality is their performative nature. As Richard Schechner explains, performing can be understood in relation to being and doing. Being entails “existence itself” and doing is the activity that arises from existing (Schechner 28). Cognizant of this foundation to performance, “‘showing doing’ is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing” (Schechner 28). Thus, the following works are a recollection of ‘showing doings’ or framed performances that fall in the categories of theatre, appearances on television and other digital platforms, as well as photography. These are all manifestations of ‘doing’ in the world but with their independent codes of execution. In this project I understand performance broadly, but first and foremost as material and affective ways of doing. I also subscribe to performance theorist Marcela Fuentes’ definition of performance as the manifestation of a potential—a “transformational tactic that [can] expand across platforms, media, temporalities, territories, and historical contexts to reclaim liveness for those whose lives are in question, devalued, colonized” (*Performance Constellations* 22). Performance is then embodied insistence, an act of perseverance, of encountering possibility amid collapse. In its deployment, it disputes the fixed idea of the human, the (im)possibility of life in facing an environmental crisis, a gender regime, the ongoing

(forced) migration of human bodies, and the rise of neo-fascist powers that fuel the existing system of oppression in the Americas. Considering this, the chapters that follow ask: How do we perform against the Western idea of the human, ending that which stands at the base of our colonial present in the Latinx Americas, and visualize a possibility beyond?

As mentioned, these performances “offer a way to transmit knowledge by means of the body,” as Diana Taylor defines at the heart of a performance (*Performance* 36). The body is the site of inquiry for these works. In different degrees, each assumes the body as locus, a site of knowledge production, and from that conception, (re)think what it means to be a human. With a centripetal approach, I have arranged my case studies by beginning with works that challenge human hubris in performances that displace the human body and its agency, and I finish with works that return to the human body as the site of doing. Thus, the reconsiderations of the Western idea of the human in this project are organized, in part, in the manner each performative exercise approaches the body and to the degrees in which each displaces it from being a visible and acting agent: (1) In the first chapter, I show how theatrical productions challenge the human body in the stage as that which is the center of doing and agency. Besides, presenting the interdependence and interconnection of human beings with all the material presence that surrounds them, these productions propose a confrontation of the human body with objects and nonhuman entities that exhibit their independent agential capacities on stage. (2) The second chapter sheds light on puppet performances, exhibiting the uncanny experience of the performing inanimate matter, activated by human actors that are partially present on stage. Objects here, I argue, also put the supremacy of the human body in tension by performing in a prosthetic manner as extensions of the body of human actors to transmit affects. (3) In the last chapter, I return to the human body at the hands of queer performers. The body of a Chilean sex worker,

Josecarlo Henríquez, and the self-portraiture of Chicana photographer Laura Aguilar differently present somatic, visual, and affective flows between their bodies and external nonhuman entities. In what I call performances of trans-corporeality, borrowing the latter term from Stacy Alaimo, this chapter contends that both Henríquez and Aguilar exhibit vigorous visual continuities that exceed their biological bodies and find communion with external entities, encountering reciprocity, continuousness, and correspondence. In their localization, which is always rooted in their bodies, they expand outwards, centrifugally. Their bodies are always visually present. However, in their act of being trans-corporeal, they transgress or trespass the limits of their skin.

I approached the works covered in these chapters considering their mediums of production and my access to an archive. All the theatrical productions analyzed were performances that I was able to see in person, live, which assisted me in the process of work selection for chapters 1 and 2. For the same works involving theatrical productions, my process of analysis consisted of personal interviews with the theatremakers, close analysis of primary sources as well as the study of secondary sources such as photographs and audiovisual archives. The development of chapter 3 involved archival research and the analysis of both primary and secondary sources both in textual and audiovisual forms. Many of these sources were available on the internet, as in the case of archived television shows, and digitized photographic series.⁶

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1. Manuela Infante's Inhuman Theatre

I begin my study by considering theatre as the site par excellence of performance. From its conception, Western theatre has been anthropocentric, standing as a forum to represent the human experience. Athenian tragedy is, in its most basic definition, the representation of human

⁶ I am thankful to the Department of Special Collections at Stanford University for granting me access to the Laura Aguilar Papers during the early stages of my research for chapter 3.

relationships and their conflicts. Renowned theatre scholar Peter Brook once famously affirmed that all that was needed for theatre to exist was a stage, a single human ‘doing’, and a person observing: “A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (7). It might seem impossible to leave this matrix since theatre always functions with the mediation of humans. Even with the substantial fissure to Aristotelian drama that Brecht’s epic theatre meant in the first half of the 20th century, theatrical practice has remained as by and for human beings. Yet, to Chilean theatremaker Manuela Infante, this does not mean it cannot be explored beyond its anthropocentrism. To Infante, theatre is a thinking machine. It is not only a space that limits itself to represent the human experience, but it is also an enunciator, an utterance of reality, a worlding device. In observing all the elements of a performance—the *mise-en-scène*—she recognizes that what we have on stage is more than mere humans interacting, but instead, a series of material manifestations that engage haptically and affectively, suggesting that humans exist in the manner they engage with everything that surrounds them.

Infante reconsiders the nonhuman on stage and proposes theatre as a space to materially and affectively engage with the agential powers of all matter that exceed the biological human body. In other words, she proposes the Western epistemological regime be decolonized, and makes this position through her revision of theatre-making by bringing matter, and most importantly, the nonhuman, to the forefront.

In 2003, Andrew Sofer took seriously the question of the life of props on stage, highlighting how literary criticism often overlooks their material dimension, dismissing both their “*spatial* dimension” and their “*temporal* dimension” as they are “treated as textual rather than as a theatrical phenomenon” (2). If objects can have “a life of their own in performance,”

perhaps, we can begin to question the human hubris that stands at the basis of theatrical practice (Sofer 2). This is exactly what Infante attempts to accomplish with her latest theatrical endeavors. The end of her former theatre group Teatro de Chile in 2016 meant the opportunity to expand her project of exhibiting reality as a construction and embark on what has become a long-term exploration of a nonhuman theatre, one that I identify as an *inhuman theatre*. This chapter observes the beginning of her new period, looking specifically at *Realismo* (2016) and *Estado vegetal* (2017). By following the postulates of Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen regarding the ‘inhuman,’ I formulate the idea of an inhuman practice that underlines the violence of the Western idea of the human: An inhuman practice opens the door, with its prefix in-, to the idea of a process and practice of undoing against constriction, and of performing a dismantling of Western epistemology (196). In challenging the Western regime that separates mind/body and nature/culture, both productions are also decolonial moves. Both give space to embodiments of human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic interactions, together with sounds and movement, as forms of knowledge production and transmission.

In both productions, Muñoz's brown commons is envisioned in the aesthetic explorations with the nonhuman whether that is with household items in *Realismo* or plants in *Estado vegetal*. It is at the hands of the elderly, a peasant, people with mental disabilities, and women, that the human body meets the nonhuman on stage to destabilize Western binaries and processes of hierarchization.

As anthro-decentric productions, challenging the human by means of a theatrical spectacle means finding ways that are conventional, discernable, and digestible by the audience. In both productions, humor is key to finding amicable ways to perform in a way that is not only

entertaining but that guides the audience, in a reflexive manner, to think about what is generating their laughter.

If there is one outstanding lasting characteristic of Infante's productions, this is the feeling of bewilderment that audience members are left with after attending these performances. Perhaps this is the goal of Infante's inhuman theatre. If we have never been truly modern, as Latour suggested, the experience of leaving the theatre with more questions than answers when experiencing a 'different reality' in communion with the nonhuman positions the aesthetic experience as a necessary ethical exercise for a reconsideration of the human.

Chapter 2: Affective Vindications and Coalitions Through the Performing Object

In this chapter, I continue my discussion within the confines of the theatre but expand to the particular, and often under-studied practice of puppetry. Though ancient, puppetry continues to be situated in the margins, often infantilized, and misunderstood in part because it situates itself challenging Western epistemology. It reminds us of pre-modern animism, a suppressed epistemology in the Americas after the arrival of colonization and its Western epistemicide.

In this chapter, I delve into the lived experiences of those colonized in modernity. By situating in two distinct geographies of the Americas—Chile, and Puerto Rico—I argue the performing object has a vindicating capacity to uplift dispossessed lives disregarding the text/dialogue as the main source of communication in performance. These two cases of puppetry and object theatre return us to a peculiar non-Western gaze and the possibility of embodied knowledge. Puppetry theorist John Bell affirms that the uncanny experience that is often associated with puppetry in the present is “part of our collective cultural history” (48). The ascend of rationalism at the height of the Enlightenment marks the suppression of other epistemologies and the beginning of modernity (Bell 48-49). In theatre, this meant the

“dominance of realism” over other dramatical manifestations, including the performing object (Bell 49). The arrival of a unifying, imperial epistemology from Europe in the Americas follows the same directive, silencing other existing non-modern and pre-Columbian epistemologies that also embraced animism.

These present-day examples of puppetry oppose this historic suppression. Considering our epoch with its technological advancements and their effect on human life, the performing object can be seen taking innovative directions. As puppet theorist Dassia Posner suggests, inanimate matter on stage is part of “material performance,” exceeding mere representation and having “agency” to “shape or create” (5). Considering this formulation, I contend both theatre groups Silencio Blanco and Agua, Sol y Sereno consider the performing object as a device, and puppetry, as a method, to shape and execute affective transmission from dispossessed communities to different audiences in the theatre.

In the productions *Chiflón, el silencio del carbón* by Chilean group Silencio Blanco, and *Corazón de papel*, by Puerto Rican group Agua, Sol y Sereno, paper performs as the catalyst of affective transmission that is coupled with a sonic universe as well as human actors that—while actively present on stage—remain displaced as inanimate matter takes center-stage.

In the case of *Chiflón*, puppets made of recycled newspaper tell the story of a former mining town in South-Central, Chile, inviting the audience to experience a story being told otherwise. By working with recycled and inexpensive materials, the theatre group introduces an aesthetics of precarity that vindicates the vulnerable lives of a former mining town that has succumbed to poverty and socioeconomic stagnation due to a failed transition plan by the state to sustainable forms of production.

Agua, Sol y Sereno's *Corazón de papel* brings to the forefront the lived experience of colonized Puerto Ricans in the present. Emerging as a reaction to the precarity of living on the island post-Hurricane María in 2017, the theatre group relies on kraft paper and the Afro-Puerto Rican dance-sounding practice of bomba to vindicate the lives of a colonized community. In the interaction of kraft paper figures and bomba, the group finds a way to narrate their continuum around loss and dispossession as Puerto Ricans. The sound of bomba and the dancing body on stage stand in for what Quijano once thought about Puerto Rico, a site to understand what embodiment means in its true potential as a locus of knowledge, away from Western and Eurocentric perspectives ("Fiesta y Poder" 34). By restricting themselves to performing this production in the continental United States for several years, the production shed light not only on those who perished and survived the hurricane on the island but also on those who lived this catastrophe in the diaspora broadening the boundaries to what it means to be Puerto Rican in the present.

When theatre gives the performing object the power for social vindication, a decolonial gesture begins to take shape. That repression of animism—which signals the beginning of modernity in the Americas—gets obliterated by the aesthetic experiences these two groups present. The agential power of the object, in communion with the human body on stage, returns dignity to colonized peoples as stories worthy of being told on stage.

Chapter 3: Queer Posthuman Modulations

What do we do when we realize the dangers to which our bodies are exposed? What do we do when we comprehend how our current precarious present is a direct threat to our well-being? To feminist theorist of new materialisms Stacy Alaimo, sensing the loss and thus exposure of being subjected to multiple forms of oppression of our "sovereign individual

subject” is “an invitation to intersubjectivity or trans-subjectivity and even... to a posthumanist or counter-humanist sense of the self as opening out unto the larger material world and being penetrated by all sorts of... material agencies that may or may not be captured” (*Exposed* 4). This is to say that, when violent power structures remind subjected bodies (colonized, queer, among many other marginalized bodies) of their vulnerability as individuals, it is crucial to find community and resistance in realizing that our being is beyond that of a limited individuating idea, always situated at the crossing with other material manifestations that exceed the biological body to enact coalitions and/or to find refuge.

This is the case of both Chilean sex worker Josecarlo Henríquez and Chicana photographer Laura Aguilar who—in facing the hardships of being queer subjects to a world that does not accept them or negate their space and visibility—find a way to resist, survive, and flourish in the act of trespassing. By borrowing the term trans-corporeality, coined by Alaimo, and the spirit of the prefix trans•, as discussed by Jack Halberstam, I articulate an idea of a performance of transcendence, of excess, that takes the body and puts in direct contact with that which stands beyond—material manifestations that human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic. As a performance, an act of trans-corporeality assists me to articulate how Henríquez and Aguilar conceive their bodies haptically and visually, located in the constant tension of being with and beyond their bodies and the crossings of those entities that traverse them.

I begin with a study of Josecarlo Henríquez, an outspoken writer, queer sex worker, and sexual dissident who actively performs in appearances on television and social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) to continuously expand his lines and mediums for his sexual activism. Henríquez is cognizant of his material self. He lives off his sex work in intimate interaction with others and has reiteratively executed his activism in the public space. However, the neoliberal

cisheteropatriarchal city remains a threat to his well-being. I argue his displacement from his biological body to execute his sex work online and his activism on television and social media is posthuman resistance. While his act of trespassing is trans-corporeal, I read his entanglements between the body and technology in what Rosi Braidotti would understand as a techno-body or the ways in which technologies of the present are shaping new conceptions of the self and extending our idea of the body beyond our current biological notion.

I end this study with the self-portraiture of Laura Aguilar. A Chicana photographer that navigated the arid landscapes of California and the southwest United States, Aguilar also performs trans-corporeality when posing naked to the camera. As a brown, queer, Chicana, and auditory dyslexic body, Aguilar constantly battled to gain space and to be able to communicate her ideas with words. Yet, retrospectively, we now understand these were not necessary. With a daring self-portraiture, Aguilar communicates visually a notion of being beyond essentialist ideas of the body, gender, and subjectivity. By often facing away from the lens and posing naked, her body melts into the landscape finding commonalities with the textures, colors, shades, and dimensions of the material world that surrounds her: boulders, rocks, branches, bodies of water, etc.

Lastly, I situate performing trans-corporeality, as I show with Henríquez and Aguilar, parallelly to “brown worlding,” as Muñoz theorizes (*The Sense of Brown* 118). As queer subjects, cognizant of the material and affective worlds that surround them, both pertain to what Muñoz understands as the brown commons and perform brown worlding. Considering their queerness, their “vulnerability to... contempt and scorn,” their peripheral status, disability, and/or unacceptance, I argue they embody and navigate a brownness or a sense of “living that connote[s] a sense of illegitimacy” (Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* 3). In their lived experience,

they continuously practice “being with and in the world” (Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* 118-119). In trespassing beyond their biological bodies as queer and brown entities in the Latinx Americas, Henríquez and Aguilar present us with visual and affective modes of being in the world that are non-modern and non-Western, performing a decolonial gesture.

Chapter 1: Manuela Infante's Inhuman Theatre.

A dimmed space, candle lights flickering and progressively revealing the setup of a living room in late 19th century Chile. A chair rocks on its own, producing a peculiar sound of wood cracking. Orchestra music accompanies the scenic arrangement, charging the space with tension and suspense. This instance is followed by a momentary blackout while the music continues. Immediately after, a new scene starts on the same setup, but this time with a family group occupying the space. Objects and humans are now together, coexisting. These are the first moments of *Realismo* (2016), Manuela Infante's last production under her former theatre group Teatro de Chile, and one that initiates a new period of theatrical research and production for her.

Manuela Infante, playwright, director, scriptwriter, and musician is a prominent figure on the contemporary Chilean stage. Since her play *Prat* (2001),⁷ Infante has gained national and international recognition with bold theatrical productions in which performative exercises explore debates such as the representation of history, the problematization of the real, theatricality, and redefinitions of mimesis.⁸ With the establishment of Teatro de Chile, her practice became known for the group's creative process—the constructedness of their theatrical projects. This trait raised the group to the category of a lab, a place for theatrical experimentation where, as Andrea Jeftanovic states, the creative processes are registered “y se exhiben en el escenario a modo de ensayo, de fragmento y residuo” towards an end result (234).

⁷ Infante's fame came early in her theatrical career. In 2001, critics considered *Prat* to be a radical work, and sometimes not even a theatrical work. The work received attacks and censorship even before it premiered. These made it evident that the powers that sustained the dictatorship years before were still active and were controlling the cultural production in Chile. For an extensive study of this case see Cristián Opazo's study “El Abordaje de una Huérfana.”

⁸ Some of her most famous productions are *Juana* (2004), *Narciso* (2005), *Rey planta* (2006), and *Cristo* (2005). She has been in series of awards throughout her career: *Premio Alzazor* (2006), *Círculo de Críticos de Artes de Chile* (2017), *Stükemarkt* 2019 in Theatertreffen Berlin.

In this chapter, I explore Infante's latest productions, which are understood here as part of a new period of theatrical research that began during her last years with Teatro de Chile and that she continues in the present as an independent theatre-maker.⁹ *Realismo* is the last production that Manuela Infante directed under Teatro de Chile. *Estado vegetal* (2017) followed it, which she created along with Marcela Salinas once the former group separated. As I analyze in this chapter, these two plays are her first attempts at making what she identifies as a non-anthropocentric theatre; a practice that I later identify as an inhuman theatre.¹⁰ That is, a theatre where the human character does not occupy a centrality in both its form—plays centered in human actors—and its content—scenic explorations solely about human beings. From my perspective as a scholar, attempting to describe her non-anthropocentric theatre is a difficult task if we consider the paradox of theatre's historical definition as an artistic expression by and for human beings. Moreover, it is challenging to reach a consensus when trying to define an ongoing and evolving practice. Indications of this ongoing characteristic reside in the numerous ways Infante refers to her current practice: nonhuman theatre, posthuman theatre, inhuman theatre, non-anthropocentric theatre, and feminist theatre, which she uses according to the perspective from where she is approaching it. I begin my task here to begin shaping a definition that not only

⁹ This theatrical cycle refers specifically to *Realismo* and later on, to *Estado vegetal*. Since the conclusion of this text, she had premiered *Cómo convertirse en Piedra* (2021) and *Fuego, fuego* (2022) that are part of the same exploratory cycle. She has been also active in other projects as a playwright (*El corazón del gigante egoísta* and *Ayudándole a sentir*, both in 2017) and is constantly directing the restaging of other plays such as Luis Barrales' *Xuárez* (2015) and premiering new works such as Roland Schimmelpfennig's *Idomeneo* (2019). She explicitly framed the overall mission of her latest work to me as operating in two different directions: A local/national practice that circulates nationally, and a second one, that travels and is in part fueled by the internationalization of her practice through residencies. While these two dimensions intersect at many points and cannot be completely disassociated, only the latter practice informs this chapter since this cycle rises from a transnational dynamic.

¹⁰ Since 2016, Infante has been constantly rearticulating the definition of a non-anthropocentric theatre. My references are drawn from a personal interview she gave me in May 2019 and from a master class she presented as part of the Santiago a Mil Theatre Festival in Santiago, Chile in January 2019.

reaffirms her intentions and what she has concluded so far, but one that expands from those, evidencing a rich and sometimes misunderstood theatrical practice.

Infante's latest theatre resists human exceptionalism. In other words, her latest works can be understood as anthro-decentric theatrical undertakings or performative exercises that question, challenge, and deconstruct the centrality of human beings—specifically able-bodied men—as the regulating species above everything else that exists.¹¹ Furthermore, she describes her non-anthropocentric practice as diverting from and criticizing a problematic inclination in a local spectatorship, “[una] tendencia a valorar el acontecimiento teatral solo en tanto pueda ofrecernos algo . . . Acudimos a la sala cual extractivista de sentido, a minar contenidos, entender mejor el mundo y tomar partido ante ese mundo ya comprendido” (“Teatro por Streaming”). She calls this propensity “*el humanismo del teatro crítico*” which I interpret as a theatrical spectatorship in response to the demands of a neoliberal capitalist society that constantly commodifies the planet and all aspects of our human experience: natural resources, educational and health system, and among others, cultural production (“Teatro”). She continues to explain that this tendency of commodifying theatre, “[está] orientada principalmente a los contenidos” and that “se satisface con dar a consumir historia, crítica, sentido y política, olvidando sin cuidado el derecho a la opacidad de todas las cosas que habitan, transitan y se repliegan en una obra” (“Teatro”).

In view of the above, her non-anthropocentric theatre is not only one that displaces the human as central to its content, but one that questions the spectatorship created under neoliberal proclivities that create unrestrained consumerism. I agree with her stance, considering the fact that an entire theatrical movement nowadays circulates occupying the major stages of the world.

¹¹ According to Oxford Reference, the paradigm of human exceptionalism follows three standpoints: “. . . humans are different from all other organisms, all human behavior is controlled by culture and free will, and all problems can be solved by human ingenuity and technology.” See “human exceptionalism paradigm.”

Furthermore, I understand the tendency she criticizes as linked to a theatre phenomenon not only occurring in Chile, but also in the United States—a country that, in fact, she also tours—where lavish productions costing thousands of dollars, often musicals, circulate from city to city filling stages with simplistic and consumable stories that captivate and feed the masses as part of the culture industry.¹² In other words, this is a commercial theatre that includes superficial productions with simplistic and cliché plots that, as entertaining as they are, do not often encourage critical thinking from their audiences. Needless to say, this is not the case of all theatre. In fact, there is nothing wrong with a performance that only entertains. However, if these productions overshadow other minoritarian practices and deprive them of spaces of production, then they become an issue. To Infante, the foundations of her latest practice oppose this widespread process of commodification and make space not only for a product that refuses to be fully comprehensible, but that it also authorizes the unknown as part of the theatrical experience. That is, her non-anthropocentric theatre is, to a certain extent, a task to explore the incongruent spaces that a theatrical event generates; a theatre that purposely resists being intelligible:

un teatro in-humano, o no antropocéntrico . . . se sostiene en todo lo contrario: ¿Cómo reestablecer un teatro que mistifique, que oscurezca; que tenga en alto aquello que no

¹²Infante's call for a necessary space dedicated to complex, thought-provoking and critical productions reflect an encompassing theatrical movement that strictly adheres to neoliberal outlines. This is reflected in what the Encyclopedia Britannica identifies as a specific phenomenon when it comes to contemporary audiences: "on one side, a small, enthusiastic, and vocal minority clamours for art galleries, symphony concerts, and drama; on the other side, the majority is apathetic with regard to these cultural pastimes and institutions. The apathy—or even hostility—felt by the majority was evident in the 1980s and 90s in controversies over state support for the arts, centered especially on the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States and the Arts Council of Great Britain" (Chaillet et al.). Considering the above, I believe the dispiritedness towards a more critical theatre has two explanations. On one end, in the advent of a cultural industry, as stated by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, where the basis of cultural production is nothing more than "the achievement of standardization and mass production" for the sake of consumerism, a critical theatre gets relegated as a product because it stands outside this frame of consumerism by the masses (80). On the other side, there is a problematic relationship between contemporary States and how they understand the arts and their role in society. Not only the United States and Great Britain have had funding allocation issues in the past when it comes to the arts. Currently, in Chile, the art production has to go through an annual process of "competitions" where only a selected group of artists receives governmental funding. Deeming cultural production as part of a competition not only evidences the lack of compromise and cooperation by contemporary States towards the arts, but it also explains that a cultural lethargy, which includes the lack in desiring and producing a critical theatre, is in part provoked by the State as well. Infante's criticism emerges from the two issues I mention.

sabe, que no ha visto y que no comprenderá jamás ¿Y cómo recuperar, al hacerlo, una dimensión no consumible, no metabolizante de la obra teatral? (“Teatro”)

While I find her reflections effective, considering she is attempting to define her ongoing and evolving practice, in the following, I expand on her words to explain other characteristics and to generate an all-encompassing definition of her latest theatre. As I have mentioned, she consistently uses the terms nonhuman, non-anthropocentric, and inhuman, but I would like to focus on the latter one as I find it the most productive concept to define the main traits that emerge from her practice.¹³ While the idea of a *nonhuman practice* can be a useful one, this is unproductive in a theatre where human beings interact with other species. As a concept that names a practice, defining it ‘nonhuman’ disregards that which constitutes humanness, risking a shift of focus entirely to those species and inorganic matter beyond homo sapiens, and overlooking the reasons that often constrain and relegate them. Moreover, while her theatre can also be seen as a non-anthropocentric practice, if we take a closer look, the concept itself immediately eliminates the category of the human as it displaces the Western human hubris that centers human reason and ability above all other forms of life. I agree that in identifying a practice as non-anthropocentric we are thinking of an opposition to the idea of human existence as that which stands above everything else that exists, yet the concept risks preventing an opportunity to redefine a Western idea of the human. Identifying a practice as non-anthropocentric is risky, in that it can easily lead us toward misanthropy or a general dislike of humankind. Even more, perhaps identifying a practice as non-anthropocentric or nonhuman is ontologically incomplete, because it does not provide a prospect to rethink the human.

¹³ An inhuman theatre is a way of narrating that is also feminist and non-anthropocentric one. Infante’s self-identifies her theatre as feminist following Ursula K. Le Guin’s theorization of a Life Story as portrayed in “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction”. This is a way of narrating that opposes a “*narrativa cazadora*” which centers around a chronological story of an often-male hero involved in a conflict (Infante, “Clase Magistral” 00:11:00-00:12:00).

Instead, in a more fecund or fruitful way, I make the case for the use of ‘inhuman’ in order to name a practice that has at its core, acknowledged the harm contained within the Western idea of the human, and subsequently, challenges it. It does not discard the human as a category, but invites humankind, or those who often identify themselves as humans, to a process of introspection, and in doing so, welcoming a possible redefinition. I want to insist that when I refer to the inhuman, I specifically indicate the way I perceive Infante’s *practice*. Thus, you will see the words ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ circulate throughout this chapter, but they do so with respect to what she often (de)constructs with her inhuman practice.

In delving into an inhuman theatre, I call on scholarship that has understood the importance of challenging human exceptionalism in the task of disrupting oppressive forces that segregate communities and species. Those who approach the inhuman are feminist, decolonizing perspectives, and dissident voices that understand the intricacies the term ‘human’ carries within when used in the Western world. The questions that bring about an interrogation of the human are numerous; hence my approach focuses on questioning that centers the materiality of bodies and how these bodies are understood through art, and more specifically on stage. How and what contributes to an inhuman theatre? How is the methodology of an inhuman practice intertwined with a response to a capitalist-saturated world? And, finally, what makes an inhuman theatre an appealing and prolific methodology nowadays?

My contribution unfolds from four main perspectives throughout this chapter: first, I observe Infante’s inhuman theatre having, at its base, a (de)construction of the concept of the human. In other words, it analyzes its basis, the binary human vs. nonhuman, observing the creases that destabilize these categories. Second, Infante’s theatre gives space to the unknown. As an aesthetic experience, it allows the audience to confront the indefinite, that which often

escapes language. Ironically, in accepting the unknown, her theatre is also a meaning-making platform. An inhuman theatre creates a space for counter-discourses based on marginal modes of being that are habitually erased by normative discourses. Her inhuman theatre can also be understood as a decolonial gesture considering that to challenge the category of the human in the Americas is to acknowledge at how this is the result of a colonial history.

Modes of being otherwise unfold in her often-indecipherable theatre. That is, her scenic practice is also a platform for contesting and thought-provoking embodiments of what I identify later on as crip performances. Last, her theater is political in the ways in which she adheres to a tendency that disregards the content to focus primarily on the form— a radical process of rethinking theater, and how it is produced. In other words, the ludic methodology she presents, her awareness of the spectacles she is capable of creating, and the exploration of new ways of communication and meaning making reveal the political in her theater. While I do not present these analytical undertakings in order, they manifest throughout the chapter intersecting with other arguments, revealing the complexity of her current theatrical practice.

An Inhuman Theatre

As I explain later in my description of *Realismo*, in the play, human actors confront home appliances that appear to have their own agency. This is Infante's attempt to dislocate human exceptionalism as that which is able to control the course of events in mundane situations. Through this and other methods, the theatremaker manages to critically take on the category of the human and dissect it, pointing towards a necessary reconceptualization of humanness. That is, the playwright critically ponders on our contemporary idea of human, a term that structuralist and post-structuralist thought trace to the Enlightenment era. Considering the above, Dana

Luciano and Mel Y. Chen remember Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, and they state that the idea of the human points to the:

[Man that is] rational, bounded, integral, sovereign, and self-aware. This is the figure to whom rights and citizenship are granted; this is the default figure that grounds and personifies norms of behavior, ability, and health; this is the figure around which we ordinarily construct notions of political and social agency. (190)

This notion of the human is, to my understanding, a regulating figure of a structure of power where a white-centered, androcentric, and often ableist idea of the human controls the hierarchization of our world. This figure plays a role in the processes of division and exclusion, as well as domination and control. This is the archetype that stands in opposition to everything else with whom it does not share characteristics—the otherness, the nonhuman. To me, everything that exists outside this regulating figure has been subjected to be regulated and controlled. Since this standard figure has been racialized (Caucasian) and gendered (male), the suppression that might emerge from this figure does not only occur towards everything beyond homo sapiens, but also against the diversity outside those two categories that constitute it: people of color, women, non-heterosexuals, and disabled people. In view of this, Infante's *Realismo* and *Estado vegetal* presents the spectators with an alternative perspective where this regulating figure does not take center stage in relation to the theatrical event. Instead, Infante rethinks how humans and those deemed nonhumans (plants, objects, as well as certain people) relate and interact. Infante uses the theatrical event as an opportunity to deconstruct the processes that create hierarchies and taxonomies, compelling us to think of other power dynamics with respect to race, gender, and class.

With the advent of posthumanism, cultural theorists have examined the human/nonhuman dichotomy from various perspectives.¹⁴ In searching for a term to explain the undoing of the human vs. nonhuman distinction, Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird point towards a *queering of the non/human*. Understanding the queer as a process of wondering, they place a slash between the prefix and the noun to highlight the *with* and *against*. That is, the slash indicates that whether an entity or a body can be seen as human and/or nonhuman is contingent on the context and the standards that evaluate them. Considering other options, they ponder on the prefix non-, as opposed to the alternatives such as in- or sub-. To them, ‘non-’ “illustrates . . . how norms operate through, while necessitating, a relation fabricated on negation, denial, resistance, and rejection” (3). Perhaps the most important aspect to remember from Giffney and Hird’s undertaking of the human is the demarcating potential of the slash. The “positioning [of the slash] marks out the impossibility of applying a hermetic seal to the distinction between—however temporary and shifting—what gets to count as Human and nonhuman” (3). I retrieve from this affirmation the impossibility when it comes to establishing fixed categories to the human existence, something that I will come to back later on.

In the task of dissecting the dichotomy of human/nonhuman, Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen advocate for inhumanisms. “Resonating against ‘inhumane,’ inhuman points to the violence that the category of the human contains within itself” (196). However, the theorists add that the term inhuman should not be simply understood “as [a] category, as a spatial designator or the name of a “kind” of being, but as a process, an unfolding” (196). Hence considering the prefix in-, I understand the inhuman as the process of not only unfolding or undoing the dichotomy of human and nonhuman, but most importantly, as an opportunity to redefine that

¹⁴ For additional studies that take on the human/nonhuman divide and its intricacies, see Butler, Fuss, Haraway (*The Companion Species*) and Pepperell.

which it is understood as the human in the Western world. In the context of Chile, a nation in the Latinx Americas, this is also a decolonial gesture that opposes the Western epistemic regime that created divisions among various forms of life. To me, the inhuman is a process or a step towards imagining a possible different ‘human’ that understands itself in coexistence with everything else that exists—a perspective in the name of a less violent and more integrating world. This unfolding is a line of flight, along Guattarian/Deleuzian terms; a process of deterritorialization—“a disruption . . . of consistencies” from the territorialization or stabilization and symmetries that the power of the norm enforces (Fournier 121). In the case of Infante’s theatre, this escape is articulated from multiple perspectives in the theatrical event, creating a visual and affective experience that gives us a glimpse into planetary existence beyond restrictive and static categorizations.

To further fathom this, I draw from Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* where she questions what constitutes a human as she analyzes the lives that are treated as livable and grievable as opposed to those that are not treated as such. In discerning how the body is the one that reveals sexuality and gender to others, the theorist writes: “to be a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, ‘one’s own,’ that over which we must claim rights of autonomy” (20). In other words, “although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine” (Butler 21). This is directly connected to the conception of the human as a regulating category. To Butler, there is a regulating figure which constitutes what is livable and viable in the sphere of politics, and that establishes the norms that control notions of reality (Butler 28-29). To be and stand in opposition to this figure is “to be called unreal and to have that call . . . is to become the other

against whom (or against which) the human is made. It is the inhuman, the beyond the human, the less than human, the border that secures the human in its ostensible reality” (Butler 30). Considering this assertion, I believe the opposing stance of the inhuman not only makes possible the human, but it also invokes a critical action to become something other than or beyond the traditional and recognizable figure of the human. To Butler, there is potential in this opposition to the prescriptive figure of the human, because to rethink the normative concept of the human is to change “in the name of a more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take. It means we must open to its permutations” (Butler 35). But she warns that contemplating the inhuman is not a task of accepting all permutations, but “to avow that one’s own position is not sufficient to elaborate the spectrum of the human, that one must enter into a collective work in which one’s own status as a subject must, for democratic reasons, become disoriented, exposed to what it does not know” (Butler 36).

It is with this in mind that I place Infante’s inhuman theatre as a Luciano-Chen-Butler permutating practice: an escaping, deterritorialized theatrical practice that embraces those unknown permutations or nuances in the category of the human. But this unfolding, the inhuman, is not free of complications. In the prefix and the act of *in-* exists a degree of disproportion. To critique and to think beyond the human, according to José Esteban Muñoz, is to engage with the incommensurate. Muñoz explains: “Thinking outside the regime of the human . . . is a ceaseless endeavor, a continuous straining to make sense of something else that is never fully knowable. To think of the inhuman, is the necessary queer labor of the incommensurate” (“The Sense of Brownness” 209). In addition, the inhuman resides in the act of “casting a picture of the arduous modes of relationality that persist in the world despite stratifying demarcations and taxonomies

of being” (Muñoz, “The Sense of Brownness” 210). In other words, inhuman thinking is the act of identifying the different ways of relating among entities in the world—modes that are usually ignored in the act of classification and categorization of said entities. Considering this idea, I define an inhuman theatre: This practice navigates in the territory of the incommensurate, which can be understood as a queer practice, or queer thought-made theatre. Like queerness, an inhuman practice is perchance to name an ideality, beyond the present, and towards a different world.¹⁵ An inhuman theatre allows for permutations to the category of the human in the act of confronting the human body with that which it is not. In doing so, it not only exhibits the possibilities of a different definition for the Western human, but it exposes the implicit violence behind our current conception of it. Most importantly, an inhuman theatre attempts to crystallize the endless modes of relationality in the world via the theatrical event. Perhaps Infante’s inhuman theatre grasps Muñoz’s *brown commons*, “a movement, a flow, and impulse to move beyond the singular subjectivity . . . the swerve of matter, organic and otherwise, about the moment of contact, and the encounter and all that it can generate (*The Sense of Brown 2*). Above all, and to reiterate, Infante’s theatre produces an incommensurable experience. Ultimately, in the act of thinking outside the paradigm of the human, an inhuman theatre remains in limbo, in that fluid space the theatrical event creates when it highlights diverse modes of relationality in spite of the taxonomies that attempt to control our experience in the world. That is, in an inhuman theatrical practice, labels and categorizations of entities and species (human beings and beyond) are contested, stressing the variability, fluidity, and mutability of being in the world.

¹⁵ Unlike queerness that according to Muñoz “is in the horizon, forward dawning and not-yet-here,” an inhuman practice runs parallel to what Muñoz understand as a sense of brownness in the world. Brownness is “already here... vast, present, and vital” (*The Sense of Brown 121-122*). The inhuman theatre Infante puts forward is also a desire and the attempt to uncover that which is already present but that it has been silenced by the Western epistemicide.

Inhuman Theatre and Objects

On stage, everything matters. Since its origins, all entities beyond the human body have been at play in theatre. Undoubtedly, objects,¹⁶ whether they have been props or elements of costuming, have accompanied and shaped theatre since its beginnings. Considering that humans have coexisted with nonhuman entities as part of our experience in the world, theatre has historically mirrored this symbiotic relationship and taken on theatrical objects or props to assist in articulating the complexity of planetary existence. Objects have assisted human actors on stage in telling stories and displaying the human experience in everything from masks in ancient rituals and *commedia dell'arte*, or puppetry and its variants, passing by naturalist approaches to theatre in the 19th century followed by the European avant-garde, or the complex development of documentary theatre during the 20th century, as well as endless other forms in the advent of new technologies in the 21ST century. Objects are multifaceted, they can trigger processes, they add complexity to performances, they create texture, and often escape the limiting capacity of language. Yet, traditionally, objects—as creations by and for humans—have remained subjectivized in assisting human beings. As stage elements, objects stand in space serving humans, a disposition that exhibits the never-ending dichotomy of object/subject. Innovatively, contemporary approaches to theatre have begun acknowledging this subjectification and are ludically engaging in plays that go beyond this dynamic. To Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy, there is “recent work [that] (possibly) departs from its historical predecessors . . . in the willingness of human artists and audiences to . . . rethink their relationship with nonhuman

¹⁶ I'm conscious of my use of the concept. Considering how 'objects' have been theorized in theatre's historiography, I will remain using the word as it has been. I acknowledge that in the processes of deconstruction, language is central. In this sense, the concept of 'thing' should replace 'object' to have a more ethical approach to everything beyond the human body. For further analysis on the importance of language when referring to the nonhuman, see Bennett, "System and Things."

entities” (3). In the second chapter of my dissertation, I analyze in-depth what stands as a contemporary theatre that includes objects, focusing on a redefined puppetry practice. For now, and with *Realismo*, I place Infante’s theatre as one that defies the ethical and moral implications of an anthropocentric approach to theatre—an inhuman theatre. Such theatre not only questions how objects have been historically treated on stage, but how there is potential to challenge the idea of the Western human as a regulating figure in the act of reconsidering the role of objects. In *Realismo*, Infante considers the idea of props as other actors alongside human characters, surpassing their utilitarian notion as they have been historically used in a realist theatrical approach.

Realismo is a risky and audacious play that experiments directly with inorganic matter and can be seen as the prototype of an inhuman theatre. As such, this play joins an ongoing theatrical trend that “understand[s] physical materials not as inert human possessions but instead as actants, with particular frequencies, energies, and potentials to affect human and nonhuman worlds” (Schweitzer and Zerdy 2). Through her practice, Infante radically rethinks the foundations of theatre and criticizes its historical notions as a space that limits itself to exhibit human interactions. To this effect, she creates a space that allows for alternative modes of relating between human and inorganic matter. In interrogating how we treat and relate to objects, Infante is able to dismantle our concepts of human and nonhuman exposing the falsehood of the binary. I make my task here to explain her inhuman theatre not only promoting a different understanding of non-homo sapiens entities, but also revealing that the same power structures that establish taxonomical divisions—where homo sapiens are positioned above those entities that are not—work hand in hand with androcentric and heteropatriarchal structures that position Western men above other communities of people deemed sub-human or nonhuman.

One must not forget that Infante's theatre is one of research. Her intellectual drive interrelates her interests in music and philosophy, creating complex performances with epistemological potential. That is, in her treatment of the stage she creates spatiotemporalities where the audience can explore new ways of understanding our objective reality. In her text *Reclaiming Artistic Research*, cultural critic Lucy Cotter reminds us that if we consider the "radical potential of art's epistemologies," one could come to understand how "artistic research suggests the limits of traditional 'knowledge production'" (17). That is, art has the capacity to reach the limits of the knowable and touches the unintelligible—the unknown. Existing in that task, of contemplating, gripping, and embracing the indecipherable is the potential to glimpse alternative forms of living and relating. In light of this, I argue and seek to demonstrate how Infante's artistry in both these plays acts as a locus where a Western idea of the human and androcentric gaze is confronted through perceptual challenges bearing in mind the spectatorship in the theatrical event. These perceptual confrontations occur within certain moments of the performance where the audience's perceptual process is challenged as the anthropocentric paradigm breaks, forcing the spectators to examine their selfhood, and how they perceive themselves in relation to others. Furthermore, these perceptual challenges are dislocating acts that allow the audience to experience the fragile dividing line between the human and nonhuman. The perceptual challenges this theatre proposes can also be seen as micro alterations in the way we look, so that we can begin thinking of social, racial, and multispecies justice.¹⁷ This is central as it places the genre of theatre as a form of artistic production that paves the way to live in an

¹⁷ Historically, we have thought that justice was reserved for human beings only. But the extractive powers of capitalism often have negative impacts that do not differentiate among species. In order to move towards a more just and sustainable world, we must think of a multispecies justice respecting not only human rights but also the rights of those species that are not human. While this is a complex undertaking, I believe that artworks that challenge and deconstruct the division between human and nonhuman can highlight a symbiotic relationship among species. Art, then, can offer preambles to a new paradigm, moving toward multispecies justice.

age where a radical shift is crucial in order to advance sustainably on Earth. Additionally, these perceptual challenges direct the spectator's attention to the somatic and place the human body and nonhuman matter (objects) in direct contact, displacing the dualism of subject/object. Art here—represented under theatre—becomes the medium to rehearse a new way of looking and relating that breaks conventions and challenges the norm.

Realismo (2016)

The interest of Infante in this new type of theatre can be traced to *Zoo* (2013), a play that precedes *Realismo*. When referring to her methodology, she emphasizes the idea of *ciclos de trabajo* or working cycles to understand the organization of her creative process: “Pienso mucho que el trabajo de un artista es algo que ocurre en ciclos grandes, más grandes que las obras, o así ha sido mi experiencia por lo menos. Me gusta hablar de ciclos y me gusta también que la gente vea los ciclos completos . . . Cuando pienso en [este ciclo] no puedo dejar de incluir *Zoo*” (Infante, “Clase Magistral” 00:05:00-00:12:11).

In *Zoo*, a play that can be seen as a postcolonial commentary to the 19th human zoos that were popular in Europe, Infante develops her idea of mimesis. The play unfolds around the sense of what it means to be the other and what that process entails. In one of the meaningful moments of the play, one of the characters states: “Imitar es querer tocar lo otro con el cuerpo, no mirarlo, no entenderlo, no extraer nada de él . . . Simplemente tocarlo con el cuerpo en la medida de querer encarnarlo. Mimesis no como la ciencia de comprender lo otro sino como la ciencia de especular con cómo es ser lo otro” (Infante, “Clase Magistral” 00:23:50-00:24:09). Through this character, Infante elucidates what corresponds to an efficient way to confront the other, a concept that she expands in *Realismo*, and that I analyze in depth with *Estado vegetal*.

Realismo is where she intensifies her curiosity for the other and what it means to interact and coexist with the other. This theatrical work is the result of an exhaustive period of research accomplished through artist residencies in Chile and one at the Watermill Center in New York.¹⁸ The final product premiered at the Teatro de CorpArtes in July 2016 in a rich visual spectacle that was later part of the 2017 Santiago a Mil International Festival. The play reran as part of the Biennale Teatro 2019: the 47th International Theatre Festival in Venice.¹⁹ The cast includes five actors: Cristián Carvajal, Ariel Hermosilla, Héctor Morales, Rodrigo Pérez, and Marcela Salinas, all epitomizing a four-generation Chilean family—the Montes—as it moves through the twentieth century. The work narrates instances that cover four specific years, which are considerably significant for the Chilean nation and the rest of the world: 1910, 1945, 1988, and the present, 2015. Costumes and the language employed by the actors correlate to each decade, as well as specific cultural references.

The play mocks the realist theatrical style of the 19th century in Chile. In the first scene, beginning in 1910, one can witness a typical aristocratic family living at the turn of the 20th century amazed and overwhelmed by all the cultural and industrial innovations and transformations that the world was undergoing. We quickly learn that Alfonso, the patriarchal head of the house, has to deal with a troubled child, Mauricio, who seems to possess the psychic ability of telekinesis. Alfonso's older son, Andrés, and his wife Elisa have offered to return to Paris with Mauricio so he can receive proper medical treatment. Alfonso agrees in exchange he asks to stay with his grandson Darío as a bargaining chip to make sure that Andrés comes back. As the play moves chronologically, the first scene abruptly breaks after a blackout transporting

¹⁸ Besides their residency in New York, Teatro de Chile underwent an extensive creative process supported by other residencies in Valparaiso, Santiago, Buenos Aires, and having their rehearsal process at the Espacio Checoslovaquia in Santiago, Chile.

¹⁹ My analysis is drawn from the July 2016 season at the CorpArtes which I was able to attend on July 23rd, 2016.

the action to 1945. A lamp descends from the air, along with a kite and a chair. Life has continued, and a new generation emerges. Now, the spectator assists with the end of a wedding party. This time, an older Darío living in Chile reveals that his parents never came back and that Mauricio never returned to his father. Though they just had a wedding, the family is suffering an economic crisis and they are forced to sell their land and dispossess their servant. In their drunkenness, Darío's children arrange a solution to their crisis and resolve to establish a kite factory since it is the only skill they all have.

Another leap in time occurs and a new generation emerges, this time in 1988. In one of the most comical instances of the play, the family now manages a company that makes advertising kites, proving the plan of Darío's children became a reality. A mother, Cecilia, and her children, Rodrigo and Juan are flooded with kite orders displaying both support for the continuation of Pinochet's dictatorial regime under the slogan 'Sí' and the opposition, under the slogan 'No'.²⁰ If in the first scene, the play mocks to realist treatment of the scenery, here it continues. Chaos is the norm as both actors interact exaggeratedly with objects that cease to work, proving to be obstacles to their ordinary actions and routines. Such is the case of a broken fax machine, or a fan that keeps 'poking' Aura. After Rodrigo finds a hidden collection of newspaper cutouts under the flooring of the house, the scene ends abruptly, and, like the previous one, introduces a final leap, this time to contemporary Chile in 2015. Here, an elder Rodrigo is alone in a place surrounded by objects strategically positioned on stage. The spectator witnesses the attempt of his family to save him from his madness. Disconnected from the world that stands outside the walls that hold him, Rodrigo seems to engage with the material world that surrounds

²⁰ Years after the Pinochet's regime, international attention put enough pressure on the authoritarian government to allow for a transition back to democracy. The scene is referring to the moment when electoral campaigns were in full mode, producing advertisements for the two choices in the national referendum.

him in a different manner than his family does. He wonders in a ritualistic setup respecting the space that theatrical objects occupy and then delves into a deep literary analysis of the book of Genesis, annotating throughout his Bible. At the beginning of the scene, the family comes in to rescue him from his self-confinement and, in that encounter, a clash of ideals between him and the family triggers a deconstruction of the self in each member. In the midst of this altercation where the family clashes with the old man, the frame holding a memento, the first kite of the family's company, falls and suddenly an arrangement of hanging ropes descend to the stage. Astonished, the entire family witnesses a choreography where the ropes grab wood boards and rise them in the air. The scene is disconcerting, not only because the human characters do not know what is occurring, but the same enigma troubles the audience as well. Shortly, the family realizes and embrace a certain vitality of the nonhuman matter and begins questioning the purpose of the 'rising' of the objects, leading them to an abrupt final ritual. In what follows—and deprived of their humanity—the last surviving members of this family proceed to interact in a new choreography that metaphorically allows props to absorb their human bodies, so they allegorically and somatically become carpets: a metamorphosis from human to nonhuman.²¹ The play closes with the last surviving human suspended from a rope as other props hang parallelly.

While the storyline is simple and followed easily, a logical course of events containing a climax and a resolution is not evident. In fact, I argue that its plot, if one even exists here in its traditional sense, is not the core of the play. Instead, a storyline exists only as it takes the role of facilitating another layer of the performance which contains the actual intention of Infante. That is, *Realismo* is a play about an experience rather than the apparent chronological narration that is told on stage. In more than one instance, Infante has insisted that, at least with her later plays, her

²¹ The cast members literally go under carpets, lying flat on the floor, signaling a somatic fusion in becoming an entity beyond the human (a carpet).

intentions were not to tell a story, but to provide an experience.²² Following this characteristic in Infante's work, and in relation to the plot, Sebastián Pérez Rouliez writes:

Si nos mantuviéramos dentro de los márgenes de la ficción, pensaríamos que la historia que se nos cuenta es un intento por abordar una serie de eventos paranormales que le ocurrieron a esta familia. Pero en *Realismo* la ficción opera en términos instrumentales siendo el hilo conductor que permite dar continuidad y coherencia a la obra (“Realismo”).

I agree with Pérez Rouliez, but besides giving continuity and coherence to the play, the plot facilitates a perceptual experience. In attempting to control all the parts that a performance entails—lighting, human characters, props, music, and text—Infante manages to create an experience where she challenges an anthropocentric paradigm as she taunts the realist tradition in theatre.

When one thinks of realism in theatre, playwrights like Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, or Chekhov immediately come to mind as artists who pushed an entire movement in the late 19th century. As Thomas Postlewait explains, as a theatrical style, realism has its basis in Positivism in the sciences. In thoroughly depicting society and people, the playwrights who subscribed to this style sought to “represent ordinary details in order to capture both the texture of material life and the subtextual pulse of the characters’ lives—their psychological, social, economic, and moral beings” (497). In other words, in its conception, realism was a style that attempted to portray the human experience as it is—a theatre by and for human beings.

Starting with its title, *Realismo* mocks the realist representation of the human. The scene that opens the play is also a parody, showing an aristocratic family living a modern life in an indoor setting with authentic outfits and props that portray the era. But the actors immediately interrupt the realistic depiction by introducing slapstick moves into the acting, dislocating an

²² Such is the case during her master class at Santiago a Mil 2019. See Infante's Clase Magistral (00:01:30-48).

ordinary course of action.²³ Humor is the first factor that dislocates this realistic setting, followed by a gradual unfolding where the human actors treat and relate to theatrical objects beyond a utilitarian way. At first, this specific interaction with props is minimal, emphasized by pauses in the dialogue where specific characters interrupt their actions and either stare at objects or contemplate aimlessly, while tense orchestra and melodies accentuate an idea of an enigma. This is the case with Mauricio, who is obsessed with flying kites and repeats the word *cosa* whenever possible.

The deconstruction of a realist style is a challenge for the spectators. The audience faces an apparent realist plot that gets interrupted by the ‘acting up of objects’ that descend, swing, move, flicker, etc., leaving the spectators adrift as they attempt to comprehend what the objects are doing and what they are experiencing as an audience. In terms of construing, the audience fails to make meaning of what they are perceiving. Theatre commentator Maria José Durán juggles when it comes to describing what she experienced when she saw everyday objects ‘acting’ in a different matter:

Es súper interesante . . . lo que pasa . . . cuando ese objeto se empieza a mover ahí, frente a uno, en el escenario. Porque de repente si la silla se mueve no estando en el escenario [pensamos que] nos están penando y algo esta pasando aquí, sobrenatural. Pero en el escenario [de *Realismo*] toma otra cualidad. (“Hiedra FM” 00:48:46-00:49:00)

Durán is conscious of the intentions behind the treatment of the object in *Realismo*. As they are framed under a specific fiction, exhibiting the theatrical objects acting in a different manner creates an effect in the audience that is, in a way, incommensurable or pertains to a different ‘quality’ of the object, as she explains it. Duran’s analysis evidences the effect on the audience after they faced a transgression of the binary object/subject. Blurring the lines of anthropocentric-based dichotomies unsettles the spectators as they try to follow a seemingly

²³ Slapstick is style of humor characterized by exaggerated, clumsy movements, and make-believe violence.

central course of action. These moments are replicated many times throughout the play, and they are often accompanied by humor. Such is the case of the maneuvers resembling slapstick in the first scene where a comical sketch opens the play. While Alfonso dialogues with his son and sister-in-law about their experience in Paris, objects begin to interact with them. Elisa comically sews an embroidered fabric to her skirt. In an attempt to cut this off from her dress, Andrés gets a pair of scissors stuck to his hand. In the same scene, Andrés struggles to turn the pages of a newspaper that ‘resists’ being manipulated, and Darío ‘struggles’ to turn his jacket’s sleeves inside out. It is in this first scene that Infante introduces the audience to a bizarre relationship between the human characters and the props that surround them, indicating possible agentic actions by all the objects on stage.

Certain characters that appear to possess the sensibility of perceiving objects beyond their practicality emphasize this ambiguity of agentic traits between theatrical objects and human characters. That is, these actors behave strangely when referencing and interacting with those said objects. They are either in awe, confused, incoherent, perplexed, or solemn. With the appearance of each generation—as the play unfolds chronologically—, it is evident that the family becomes gradually awakened to a different way of relating to what surrounds them. Progressively, they begin distancing themselves from the utilitarian use of the object and perceive them instead, as another entity with agency within the space they inhabit. The first to show this characteristic is the telekinetic Mauricio. In dialogue with his cousin Darío, while flying a kite, Mauricio questions his ideology towards objects, as seen below:

[Mauricio] Toma una tijera y corta el hilo. Darío, tiene el impulso de ir a buscar el volantín. Mauri lo detiene.

MAURICIO. Déjalo ir. Lo hago siempre. Haz cuenta que hemos salido a pescar, al menos hemos devuelto el pescado al agua.

Darío no entiende.

MAURICIO. Las cosas se levantan por su propio peso. El suyo propio, ¿entiendes? Está

escrito en todas partes, fijate. (*Le apunta una frase, Dario la lee y empalidece. Mauricio se ríe con su risa*) ¿Ves? Las cosas se levantarán por su propio peso, porque así son las cosas . . . (Infante, “Realismo”)²⁴

The scene turns out to be very suggestive. With a closer reading, the spectator can distinguish an attribute in Mauricio’s vision that is indescribable. Mauricio remains awkwardly quiet throughout the dialogue of the first few scenes of the play, and he only speaks when referring to everyday objects or *cosas*. His constant reference to everyday objects alludes to an obsession, but one could also identify this as a specific sensibility that other characters might not possess. By recognizing this trait in the character, one can ask, what does Mauricio know, see, or perceive differently? There is an enigma behind the character that functions cohesively with other factors within the performance allowing space for the unknown: unexpected pauses in the dialogue, silence, trance melodies, and ludic lighting schemes. Personally, I perceived the ineffable sporadically. Throughout the play, strange and enigmatic moments interrupted me from following the apparent chronological storyline. That is, every generation of the family in the storyline has its own set of characters that are able to perceive, behave, and act differently when facing the objects that accompany them. As I have described, at the beginning we see Mauricio diagnosed as a telekinetic child. But in a later scene, Aura joins him exhibiting hints of alcoholism and interacting and observing with props strangely. Later, Rodrigo—in his isolation from the world and in his hoarding of objects—displays signs of Diogenes syndrome as he exuberantly accumulates objects.²⁵ With this particular behavioral pattern, all these characters remain misunderstood to the rest of the family members. They dwell in a spatiotemporality

²⁴ I am grateful to Manuela Infante for allowing me access to the unpublished scripts of *Realismo* and *Estado vegetal*.

²⁵ “Diogenes syndrome (DS) is a behavioral disorder described in the clinical literature in elderly individuals: the classical constellation of symptoms of this condition include extreme neglected physical state, social isolation, domestic squalor, and tendency to hoard excessively (sylllogomania)” (Cipriani, Gabriele et al.).

halfway connected to their family, and simultaneously, dislocated from their objective reality because of their association with the objects that surround them.

Interestingly, we can see two parallels here that appear to collapse. On the one hand, Infante introduces a different way of relating to objects in theatre, attempting to reconceptualize that which is beyond the human body through the stage. But on the other hand, she presents the characters with specific disabilities as the only ones who can coexist and have an affective relationship with theatrical objects. She has two sets of entities that, from a Western human perspective, are often understood as nonhuman or beyond the human. Bodies with a disability are central to her inhuman theatre, a characteristic that I deeply analyze later on in this chapter.

Inhuman Theatre and its Theoretical Base.

Whereas the story of the Chilean family is the guiding thread of *Realismo*, there are fissures in the overall performance where the theatrical event directs the spectator to the realm of the unknown. I say unknown because, repeatedly, the audience is unable to reduce their experience to the task of conceptualizing and finding meaning in what they perceive. To me, this trait is the core of Infante's latest productions. Reducing the experience to mere contemplation is a product of her role as not only an artist, but also a researcher who treats theatre as a laboratory.

It is necessary to understand that Infante creates philosophical plays. She draws from philosophy and dialogues with it in order to create theatre. Driven by her intellectual curiosity, in her current theatrical phase she explores the developments of an entire philosophical movement that Richard Grusin has identified as the *nonhuman turn*: an umbrella term that groups different currents of critical philosophy that stands asserting that humanity—our understanding of the self in relation to what surrounds us—has been improperly formulated and understood based on a

fabricated division between us, and those species and entities beyond.²⁶ Infante delves between different theoretical paths within this philosophical turn, that in conjunction with—but at different degrees and from different angles—question, challenge, and reconsider human exceptionalism.²⁷ With such an array of philosophical elaborations, there are multiple and inevitable intersections as well as distinctions. Infante’s approach to what I define as an inhuman theatre moves within and feeds from these philosophical currents. Hence, Infante’s practice follows a multi-layered approach that blends philosophies of the nonhuman turn without fully advocating for one of its specific currents. Nonetheless, in that amalgamation, she succeeds to present spectacles that visually challenge a human hubris that subjectifies everything that is deemed not human.

Infante stands among incongruities when it comes to her artistic motivations since the philosophical currents she approaches often contradict. A major discrepancy among these philosophical projects is discussed by Jane Bennett, who ponders about the individuation of objects versus the idea of arranging them as interconnected via networks—a difference of ontological positionalities between speculative realism and new materialisms (or vital materialism as she expresses it). On the one hand, speculative realism is a stance that, following the work of Heidegger, supports objects and their individuation regardless of their organic or inorganic composition. On the other hand, holism raises from the conception that matter is a becoming through dynamics of assemblages or systems—a Deleuzian-Guattarian origin.²⁸

Infante advocates for the individuation of theatrical objects in *Realismo* following the various

²⁶ Bruno Latour made us aware of the falsehood of this division in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991). In this canonical text for the developing philosophies contained within the nonhuman turn, Latour presents us with the idea that a distinction between nature and culture has never truly existed.

²⁷ Theoretical and intellectual developments in affect theory, animal studies, assemblage theory, new materialism, new media theory, various speculative realisms, and systems theory are some of the branches that compose the nonhuman turn.

²⁸ See “Systems and Things: On Vital Materialism and Object-Oriented Philosophy.” *The Nonhuman Turn* (2015).

facets of speculative realism, but I also argue that through her play other branches of the nonhuman turn emerge. It is with this in mind that I conceive her work as standing in between both philosophical poles. In other words, Infante's inhuman theatre explores the singularities and withdrawals of objects from human characters, but simultaneously exposes their synergetic or interdependent essence—objects becoming in their relationships with other entities. In embracing this division, Bennett invites “to do justice [to] both . . . systems and things—to acknowledge the stubborn reality of individuation and the essentially distributive quality of their affectivity” (“Systems and Things” 229).²⁹ In what follows I present different aspects of Infante's theatre in how first, she approaches speculative realism and second, and from my critical analysis, objects are revealed becoming on stage in complex assemblages.

Between Individuation and Assemblages.

Infante is aware that thinking beyond the human and the task of knowing the other is an impossible one, and the mere attempt to achieve this understanding is an ambitious act that confirms the power that one can inflict over the other. In my conversation with Infante about the impossibility of approaching objects, she referred to the concept of *speculation* and placed it at the center of the philosophical current of speculative realism:

La palabra especulativo en el fondo es: vamos a imaginar que podemos referirnos a un mundo que esta allá afuera, y que es independiente de nosotros, aún cuando ese gesto es imposible. Esa es la definición de especulación. Ian Bogost dice que la especulación es un acto creativo mediante el cual los seres imaginan cómo es el otro . . . (“Personal Interview”)

It is from this perspective that I understand *Realismo* as Infante's first approach to create an inhuman theatre that is above all, a performative exercise of speculation. In this speculative exercise, the playwright uses certain mechanisms that work cohesively in the staging of the play.

²⁹ Ibid.

Thus, in breaking the dualism of object/subject and contemplating a potential vitality of all matter, Infante: 1) observes a constant flow of the matter present on stage—be human bodies and theatrical objects—fluctuating from the positionalities of background to foreground and vice versa; 2) uses a ludic deployment of language evidencing a vitality of objects that is ironically concealed in the everyday language employed by all the human characters; and 3) uses humor to make the theatrical experience pleasant. Humor, as a third element, is a distinct signature of her inhuman theatre. As she specified, with *Realismo*, the theatre group analyzes “Chaplin y Mr. Bean por estar en un universo que siempre resulta cómico, pero en relación a las personas en conflicto con las cosas” (Mondaca Cea). As I exhibit later on, humor not only stands as a way to present a conflicting relationship between human characters and theatrical objects, but these humoristic moments give way to an introspection where the audience has a chance to rethink itself in the act of laughing.

In *Realismo*, props fluctuate, transitioning from being an object in the background and an actor in the foreground. In that oscillation, these props refuse to be used by human characters; they do not want to be operated on or manipulated by them. Everyday objects, or home appliances, fail to serve the needs of the human characters. In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton proposes that rethinking and developing new worldviews means in large part, an analysis of how human beings relate to their space (2). In thinking the efficient ways to approach nature beyond the romantic conception of representation, he proposes *ambient poetics* to undo what he conceives as a separation between “foreground and background” (47).³⁰ What lies in the foreground is “a perceptual event upon which we can focus” while the background is an event

³⁰ To Morton *ambient poetics* is “a materialist way of reading texts with a view to how they encode the literal space of their inscription... the spaces between words, the margins of the space, the physical and social environment of the reader” (3).

“that appears to surround us” (47).³¹ He continues, remembering that Jacques Derrida calls this a *re-mark*, which “differentiates between space and place. In modern life this distinction is between objective (space) and subjective (place) phenomena... A re-mark flips an ‘objective’ image into a ‘subjective’ one” (48-49).

Infante appears to be aware of this distinction and is able to give a tangible depiction on the stage by repeatedly situating props as part of the foreground—in other words, central to the course of actions. Whereas Morton’s *ambient poetics* can emerge in the act of reading, when the reader directs their focus to the space of inscription, for Infante, the same occurs as the play emphasizes the stage as the space of the performance, highlighting the theatricality on stage. In Infante’s theatre, the moment when objects cease to be ready-to-hand tools, they lose their objectivity. That freeing of objects from their ties to human subjectification can be rendered a performative re-mark. Such are the cases of the chairs that constantly rock and that need to be controlled with adhesive tape, the mattress that expands by itself ripping apart the box that holds it, the vacuum that resists human control, but functions on its own, the fax machine that refuses to dial, or the slats that were once positioned as the flooring and that later rise and extend vertically in an unintelligible choreography. These are all instances or gestures of re-marks where theatrical objects cross from an objective background (decorative elements of the scene as in a realist theatrical depiction) to the foreground where they acquire agency becoming actors that perform along with human characters. It is essential to highlight that theatrical objects acquire qualities of performing characters, but they do not transform or experience a metamorphosis towards the human. These entities are exhibited on stage with the possibility of

³¹ This would be another way of breaking the object/subject dualism that empowers human exceptionalism.

affecting and becoming affected in the relationships they establish with other human and nonhuman actants.³²

Consequently, in the act of withdrawing, objects paradoxically and spontaneously form assemblages. This is the other side of the coin, and perhaps a more efficient way of seeing how objects are presented in *Realismo*. For Bruno Latour, contrary to what Western science had told us, we don't live under strict dichotomies that separate culture from nature. Instead, we live among assemblages that are being constantly created (*We Have Never Been* 11-12). For Jane Bennett, these assemblages or groupings are dynamic, always changing and evolving from a relational perspective. To Bennett:

There is no need to choose between objects or their relations. Since every day, earthly experience routinely identifies some effects as coming from individual objects and some from larger systems (or, better put, from individuations within material configurations and from the complex assemblages in which they participate), why not aim for a theory that toggles between both kind of magnitudes of “unit”? (“System and Things” 228)

In light of this opposition, Infante's inhuman theatre stands toggling between the individuation of all entities on stage and how they also participate in complex assemblages. Yet, we can ask, how can we understand matter becoming, acknowledging both of these poles as part of the 'earthly experience' that Bennett affirms? In other words, how does matter in *Realismo*—constituted by both human bodies and theatrical objects—come into being? Central to understanding the above is Karen Barad's understanding of *posthuman performativity*. To Barad,

³² This displacement between foreground and backgrounds directly references the basis of what is now known as Object Oriented Ontology (OOO). Peter Wolfendale reminds us that OOO has its origins in Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Philosophy (OOP) who revisits Heidegger's tool-analysis. He states that while, on the one hand, there is a sensual object, a ready-to-hand one which we encounter in the experience. On the other hand, there is a 'real object,' that hides underneath the sensual one (297). Thus, the moment in *Realismo* when all the props break with their utilitarian quality, an uncanny reality is made tangible—an indescribable vitality of these theatrical objects. While it is evident the complex mechanical system that operates these props, the operation and manipulation of the object are surpassed since these negations of the object as ready-to-hand are stronger and appeals to the emotions of the spectator. There is a call to an uncanny experience in the act of dislocating the objects out of their ordinariness.

agency is simply the ability to act. She acknowledges that while human and nonhuman bodies can interact maintaining a level of independence before they account for one another, there are *intra-actions* that also constitute them. This is to be understood as bodies interacting in co-constitutive ways, or becoming in their contact, as they touch, confront, or face each other. Bodies, the theorist states, materialize or become through intra-actions, as they engage in relationships with other bodies. Agency, or the ability to act, arises from relationships (“Posthumanist Performativity” 135). Contextualizing this to the play, let’s observe a single and significant ‘object’ in *Realismo*. The kite company that follows the play’s narrative across the last three generations. It stands as the source of income that holds the family together, but the objects the company produces also exhibit intra-action. Kites are not only central to the family business, but they become and constitute themselves in the act of encountering the family members—in the process of manufacture, in the production of revenue, and in the creation of emotional ties from one generation to the other. Hence there is a reciprocal interaction with equal agential power from human character and objects. While the family members and kites exist in their own individuation, they most importantly become in the associations they form in space and over time. All entities involved—human beings and those that are not—become in and with each other in their connections and associations, however momentary.

Through intra-actions we constantly become—we are. As Barad says, “The world is intra-activity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency” (“Posthumanist Performativity” 135). In this agential flow understood under intra-actions one can conclude that “reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but of ‘things’-in-phenomena” (“Posthumanist Performativity” 135). Cynthia Francica speaks similarly, understanding the

symbiotic associations in *Realismo* as a “tipo de comunidad en y con las cosas,” a site that displays “los modos en que los seres humanos vibran al ritmo de, son absorbidos por y desarrollan identificaciones postidentitarias en relación con el mundo de las cosas” (352). What she considers a community, I identify as assemblages since this term emphasizes the fluidity of the associations. This idea of assemblages, understood under intra-actions, also leads me to identify *Realismo* as a performative microcosm, or an artistic capsule that reconsiders what it means to be a human as it presents the possibility of human bodies in contact and becoming with objects on stage. If for Barad “the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming,” the play then acts as the epitome of how intra-actions unfold and how existence derives from this dynamic (“Posthumanist Performativity” 135). Furthermore, this production is also a perceptual artistic apparatus that exhibits and visually trains the audience to understand a planetary exitance under intra-action dynamics. Theatre here, as an art of actions, is the site to observe and ponder matter. Matter, as Barad states, is “not a thing, but doing, a congealing of agency” (“Posthumanist Performativity” 139). Bearing this in mind, *Realismo* explores and exhibits a redefined ontological dimension of matter in the ephemeral of the performance. That is to say, the congealing of agency dwells in the transient facet of the performance. Matter is not only the human body standing in front of the audience or a static object (prop) predisposed for use by humans. Instead, matter surfaces in the theatrical event, in the very act of all the entities confronting each other in a given space and time. Subtly, the family members in *Realismo* are reminded of this near the end of the play, when the memento of a hanging framed kite falls to the ground and surprises them. The fall of the kite reminds them that objects have always been part

of their family through generations. The kite is a constitutive element of the different assemblages that identifies these human characters as the Montes family.³³

While matter is tangible, it also cannot escape one of the major signs in the semiotics of theatre—language. The verbal sign, ironically something very much human, is an essential element to mark the existence of bodies in *Realismo*. In other words, the play alludes to that intrinsic characteristic of the material, as “always already material-discursive” (“Posthumanist Performativity” 141). Consequently, both the physical and the discursive are enmeshed in the process of matter becoming, whether that materializes in a person or an inorganic entity.

The Paradox of Language

How do we trace the agency of matter (theatrical props) and its own resistance to become objects? While there is a physical dimension that Infante utilizes to visually interrupt the subject and object divide, the playwright is also conscious of the importance of language in this task. As is the case with most plays, in *Realismo* space and time, as well as human characters and props, are all central to the overall performance. All three of them form part of the elements that carry the storyline. They exhibit patterns and reveal the tangible as central to that which exists. But these bodies, their textures, and their liveness are not complete without words. Language, in its limiting capacity, complements the existence of all matter on stage. The language that emerges from human characters denotes a detailed and elaborated dramaturgy from Infante that allows for objects to invade the dialogue and meddle between the lines evidencing their agency. Infante’s

³³ Donna Haraway can also help us to understand interconnection, who proposes the concept of *making oddkin* to confront our current times (*Staying with the Trouble* 4). To Haraway, making oddkin is part of “unexpected collaboration and combinations, in host compost piles” (4). That is to say, between species, we “become-with each other or not at all” (*Staying with the Trouble* 4). Thus, in the process of deconstructing the human and nonhuman divide and supported by theatre’s semiotics, Infante allows for oddkin among those entities on stage. Theatre has the capacity to allow for what Infante calls “alquimia de lenguajes,” and it is in that complexity of signs with the potential of meaning-making that theatre visually and palpably suggests alternative associations between entities—a world of intra-actions (“Volver al futuro” 56).

theatre designates language as having a co-constitutive role along with the material dimension for matter to become on the stage. Emulating a devised theatrical tradition, the dramatic text emerges from the stage. In other words, the tangible and somatic experimentations of the actors during the creative process generate a text that becomes the structure to follow. It is the improvisations and the rehearsals with objects and human actors that produce a guiding text in the end. Language, which gets archived in the dramatic text and forms the plot, is a conducting thread providing the vital fluidity to the theatrical experience and making the play intelligible to the audience. When speaking about the role of language in her latest productions the playwright states:

El contenido es relevante, pero no hegemónico... Si la dramaturgia es un edificio que uno recorre, los textos son una luz que deja ver, guían. La historia nos sirve para iluminar en el sentido que nos emociona y en ese sentido esa emoción es luz. Si esa estructura no tuviera un relato que nos conmoviera un poco, no la podríamos ni siquiera experimentar. (“Clase magistral” 01:01:26-01:02:11)

Here, Infante reveals her stance towards language. While not the main component of her plays, the dialogue is a conduct or a device that allows the audience to experience a phenomenon. Theatre, as a multi-coded event and as an artistic expression made by humans, moves us by triggering emotions. Language (text) is central to Infante’s experimentation, and it allows for the theatrical experience to have a frame where to sustain itself and achieve a level of coherence so that spectators can process, partly consume, and/or absorb the performance.

Yet, behind Infante’s perception of the role of language in theatre rests a different feature of the linguistic dimension that is noteworthy if we consider what it facilitates. Language, as the resource of dialogue and discourse, plays a significant role that ironically reveals what Graham Harman calls the *real object*: the ineffable trait that seats under our encounter with objects on stage. OOO states that objects withdraw from one another, since “every object exceeds the ways

in which it is presented to other objects; and second, that every object is independent of every other object” (Wolfendale 297).³⁴ How Infante employs language reminds us of this exceeding characteristic held by all objects. In what I identify as ludic linguistic sequences, the playwright decontextualizes everyday language and, in the moment of enunciation by human characters, creates an uncanny feeling in the audience. Let’s look at a scene where ordinary newspaper quotes reveal agentic characteristics of objects:

RODRIGO. “Marejada causa terror en bañistas”
 “Película francesa conmociona al país”
 “Volcán podría despertar en Junio”
 “El dólar se desinfla”
 “Vallas papales impidieron el paso a manifestantes”
 “Tanquetas amenazan la casa de gobierno”
 “El azúcar en grandes cantidades te puede matar”
 “Colegios quedan de manos atadas”
 “La ley esta atrasada”
 “Torres de alta tensión son responsables del apagón que dejo a oscuras cuatro estados”
 “Muros del túnel colapsaron luego de soportar por décadas el peso de la montaña”
 ... No se trata de nosotros...
 “Travesaño del arco nos quitó el campeonato”
 “Biblioteca nacional te presta películas”
 “El retrato la hizo llorar”
 “El bikini hace milagros con tu figura”
 “El vino le destruyó la vida.” (Infante, “Realismo”)

While all these phrases can be anthropomorphic since they contain verbs, linguistic markers that emphasize the agency of objects, the act of decontextualizing them from being news titles converting them to an extended list, creates a perceptual challenge. Rodrigo reads this list slowly out loud, as if in the act of reading every word he is also discerning an unknown trait of the objects. It is not until halfway through the listing that he experiences an epiphany—“no se trata de nosotros” (Infante, “Realismo”). The act of isolating each anthropomorphic phrase invokes Harman’s real object, as well as Jane Bennett’s thing-power, or “the strange ability of ordinary,

³⁴ The independence being referenced here speaks to an opposition of relationality, the biggest critique offered by new materialism to this philosophical unit.

man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own existence” (*Vibrant Matter* xvi). Though for Bennett, *thing-power* can be “a small but irreducible degree of independence [of objects] from the words, images and feelings they provoke on us” (*Vibrant Matter* xvi). Intriguingly, in *Realismo* the human act of enunciation projects the independence of objects. This independence of objects leaks and slips away through ordinary human linguistic fabrications. In other words, Infante’s dramaturgy is so highly precise that her manipulation of linguistic constructions allows objects to manifest a hidden level of individuality. Through these lexical constructions, Infante reminds us of the intrinsic trait in objects to escape being fully controlled.³⁵

But what do we do when we face the uncanny and the indescribable as it is in the apparent independence of inorganic matter? An almost instinctive response is laughter. In this next section of my analysis, I argue that language activates another dynamic in the performance. Just as it can suggest the props’ independence, it also has the triggering capacity to provoke humor. The same type of prior mentioned ludic linguistic sequences incite laughter in the spectator when articulated on stage:

DANI. Se nos fueron de las manos las cosas
 CRISTIAN. Se puso negra la cosa
 JANI. No, es que las cosas no pueden seguir así
 DANI. Es que tenemos que conversar las cosas
 DYLAN. Rara la cosa
 CRISTIAN. Tu no te metai que estas son cosas de grandes
 JANI. Ya, no digai más cosas.
 DANI. Es que si no es una cosa es otra.
 JANI. Rodrigo, tu te mereces mejores cosas.
 RODRIGO. Siempre la misma cosa.
 DYLAN. Es cosa de él. Cada uno con sus cosas.
 JANI. Ya, tu anda para afuera a hacer otra cosa,
 DYLAN. ¿Qué cosa?
 JANI. No sé, cualquier cosa

³⁵ This remits to the principles of Object-Oriented-Ontology. To Graham Harman, objects “never encounter one another in their deepest being, but only *as-present-at-hand*” (2).

DANI. Ya cosita, déjelo cosita.

JANI. Decí cada cosa oh.

RODRIGO. Yo les voy a decir una sola cosa, hay que vivir aquí para saber cómo son las cosas.

JANI. Ah como si fuera la gran cosa.

CRISTIAN. Entonces a otra cosa mariposa. Si es cosa de tiempo.

JANI. Como que no quiere la cosa.

DANI. No po Cristian, digamos las cosas como son.

DYLAN. Difícil la cosa.

RODRIGO. Bueno así no más están las cosas.

CRISTIAN. Es que a mi me da cosa.

JANI. A mi también me da cosa, pero hay que hablar las cosas.

DANI. Ya, tanta cosa.

JANI. Y dale con la cosa.

RODRIGO. ¡No, me vengan con cosas aquí! (Infante, “Realismo”)

Infante’s cleverness and wit are evident in the scene. The word *cosa* follows every line that each character articulates. This repetitiveness makes it a leitmotiv. In the matter that objects (*cosas*) invade and flood this short sequence in the last scene, the spectator remembers how objects are present in everything we say, think and act. Out of our control, objects perform both alone and with us. Yet, the way this is presented is comical—a very important quality to consider. This sequence of the word *cosa* is also a double entendre. *Thing* is a vague term in both Spanish and English, and we often use the concept when language fails, or when we simply lack definite and descriptive words to explain ourselves. Thus, the comical in the scene resides not only in the repetitiveness of the sequence, but the vagueness that inhabits the dialogue between these characters. In a mundane conversation that lacks content, ironically, objects take over the focus through the word *cosa*, free from meaning and objectification, perhaps making us glimpse an inhuman communication.

Humor as a Guiding Thread

The scene I just described brings me to a central dimension of the production, its humor. In a highly unconventional play, where the challenge is to follow a performance that focuses on

deconstructing and reformulating ontological structures, humor is the site that transforms the experience into one that is amicable and discernable. Referring to the scene I described, Cynthia Francica states that “el intercambio entre los personajes instala la pregunta acerca de la posibilidad misma de «decir cosas»; en otras palabras, ¿es posible nombrar, (re)presentar y acceder al mundo material que nos rodea?” (347). In entertaining this “impossibility” the humoristic element comes in to relieve the spectator. In laughter, the audience rests as they put aside the tensions of the constant task of perceiving and conceptualizing. But just as the play entertains the spectator, I believe that humor simultaneously triggers an introspective exercise. When reflecting on the concept of humor as part of the linguistic structures employed, Infante shows that “humor is not a joke, it is a methodological tool. For [her,] humor is the rudder [of the play.]” (“Personal Interview”). Humor applied to linguistic and somatic exercises (slapstick), manages to guide the audience. It keeps them active and allows them to assimilate the performance. However, humor is not only a device of guidance, but it also allows the audience to engage in an exercise of reflection and self-examination.

In *Realismo*, humor brings the spectators to the limits of what they know. That is, discomfort arises in the audience, to which they respond with laughter, when they contemplate and partially understand the potential independence of objects beyond their ready-at-hand characteristic. Infante achieves this by not having objects serve their practical purpose, but instead, having them act in ways they affect human characters the same way other human characters would do.

When paradigms break, we laugh. To the unknown, the mysterious, and the unexpected, we laugh. But in *Realismo*, this moment of laughter also allows the spectator to enter a state of introspection. Such is the case of the most comical scene in the play, where kite orders flood

Aura and her son, Juan, as they fight against house appliances that refuse to work and prevent them from doing business—a fax machine that declines to dial, a paper that refuses to be manipulated, a lamp that constantly pokes Aura’s shoulder, etc. They all cause laughter in the audience as both human characters struggle to work with and against objects. It is in the act of laughter at something so mundane as in those slapstick moments between human characters and objects that the audience asks itself: what am I laughing at? Laughter allows reflecting on the uncanny encounter of the many entities, whether organic or inorganic, initiating an ontological inquiry to consider that we perhaps could have so much of non-homo sapiens as part of our human existence. In other words, humor and the subsequent laughter that emerges from it are the grounds that dissipate the binary human and nonhuman. Namely, humor allows a space to blur the dividing line between human characters and objects, placing all entities horizontally on stage in terms of agency. In short, everything on stage has the potential to act and to be acted upon.

Theatre theorist Eric Weitz ponders on the idea of laughter in theatre and its political capacity. Considering his theory, I observe that perhaps the act of laughing at those ludic linguistic attempts that reveal the agency of inorganic matter has a strong political and transformational power. Weitz remembers that humorous laughter can have results in the sociocultural transformation of human societies such as in the corresponding birth of democracy and comedy in 5th century Athens, or the proliferation of printed satires in the lead up to the American Revolution and considers the effects of laughter stating that “it is hard to believe that laughter... dissipates without a trace, and that the person/parties/situation [involved] remain precisely the same as if the laughter never happened” (82). I ask then, can humorous moments like the scene of Aura and her son, Juan, activate the initial steps toward an ontological shift reconsidering the taxonomies that separate homo sapiens from other inorganic bodies or entities?

In my experience, laughter impelled me to engage in a critical exercise. Unprecedentedly, I found myself laughing and asking the reason why. Laughter brought me to a critical position where I questioned, though momentarily, my relationships to the inorganic matter that was surrounding me—the theatre seats, the lighting features, the playbill that I was holding, etc. Although what is behind *Realismo* is a mere theatrical manipulation, at times, I felt as if these objects were controlling the entire situation that was unfolding. It was as if the props were now in control, and the human characters were now the ones being manipulated.

I agree with Weitz, there is an undeniable correlation between humor and crucial changes in human history, a correlation that directly speaks of Infante’s use of humor and the present we are living and one from where her theatre emerges. If humor has accompanied significant moments in the course of human history, what is the role of humor in an era where human beings not only acknowledge their harmful effects on planetary existence, but also look for ways to live in harmony with what surrounds them, and most importantly, live in and beyond the aftermath of ecological destruction?³⁶ As we reconsider our own existence in moments of living through and out of social and environmental crises, humor can act as a maneuver or aesthetic exercise that crafts a space that encourages the audience, as in Infante’s *Realismo*, to reconsider what constitutes their own being. I believe in laughter we can find a methodology to ask those ontological questions.

If, in *Realismo*, the audience can laugh through a series of deconstructions, which positions theatrical objects beyond the ready-at-hand role humans typically assigned to them,

³⁶ Beyond the terms of Anthropocene or Capitalocene that attempt to explain our current epoch and the impact of human development and behavior on the planet’s biodiversity, Donna Haraway coined the term *Chthulucene* to escape unproductive and cataclysmic narratives, and to focus instead on “ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet” (*Staying with the Trouble* 55). Infante’s latest theatre adheres to Haraway’s proposal. Her plays are visual multispecies narratives where humor is a port of entry to forms of being otherwise in the world, of becoming-with; stories of symbiotic relationships between human beings and the nonhuman.

then, in *Estado vegetal* (2017), there are ludic explorations of the vegetal world within humans that also spark laughter. There are comical instances in *Estado vegetal* that have a similar effect on the audience as it is the case with *Realismo*. With humor as a repetitive characteristic in both productions, Infante inscribes a trait in this period of theatrical investigation. *Estado vegetal* is Infante's work that immediately followed *Realismo*. Therefore, it is important to understand it as a theatrical project that cannot be disassociated from the previous one. In what follows, I describe this transition between the two works and how her last one feeds on the first one.

***Estado vegetal* (2017): The Next Step.**

Imagine a story not about a plant, but instead, being told as a plant. Imagine a stage with a performance that involves human actors, plants, lights, and sound that mimics a plant as it develops and extends during the show. Think of the beginning of this performance as a seed. Visualize a tiny unit that awaits to germinate into an energetic plant as it grows down into the soil forming roots and simultaneously upwards, finding sunrays and carbon dioxide to feed and to keep growing. Now, instead of imagining this seed as a tiny reproductive unit, visualize it as a specific event: a motorcyclist who collides with a tree, and as a result, becomes comatose or enters a vegetative state. In terms of space, a plant grows in all directions, uncontrollably, and it doesn't follow a linear path. But while it does this, it also remains a single unit. Likewise, a single event can unfold a series of other events following different paths, extending in all directions, but always having a single occurrence as the origin. Now, how can a narration imitate this act? And furthermore, what if this narration is a tangible one by means of the staging of a play? This is what Infante attempts in her latest work, *Estado vegetal*, another theatrical endeavor that challenges the limitations of theatre and the division between the human and the nonhuman. In her review of the play, Lucy Cotter clearly understands the significance of

Infante's work: "*Estado Vegetal* is not a plea for conservation, however, but a quietly subversive politicization of plant life, grounded in a post-Haraway conception of nature-culture" ("Plants as Other"). While I agree with her stance, in the following, I expand to exhibit that Infante not only politicizes plant being, but also reconsiders the limiting taxonomies of human and nonhuman. Infante demonstrates theatre's convivial potential to create a space to consider ontological interrogations and most importantly, to rethink and rehearse a new idea of the human.

Going back to our seed, *Estado vegetal* uses a simple event in order to unfold a complex performance. Initiating with a motorcyclist, Manuel, who collides with a tree, the play narrates the incident and its aftermath. Innovatively, it is in the act of narrating that the play becomes a vegetal one. In a one-woman show, the actress Marcela Salinas is the stem of the performance—the medium that gives voice to the different entities that appear throughout this theatrical narration. Her virtuosity allows her to become a ludic and malleable androgynous body that navigates different voices around the central event of the collision. The setting is simple including a chair and a table, with plants, pots, on-stage stands, and a looping microphone that comes in and out of the stage. Predominantly dressed in a pair of jeans and a salmon-colored shirt, Salinas is not only Manuel—the motorcyclist—but she is also his mother, a neighbor, a mentally disabled girl, a municipal employee, an elderly woman, and a handyman. Through this polyphony Salinas' performance imitate a plant. The municipal employee opens the performance, narrating his perspective of the event. A sequence of stand-alone scenes follows this opening—the child who has a distinct relationship with the tree involved in the accident, the neighbor who narrates the way in which she finds the body of the motorcyclist, an elderly woman in a peculiar dynamic with plants, among others. While all the scenes are connected to the accident, they are not performed in a linear and chronological order. In the end, the entire

theatrical production can be seen not only alluding to plants as part of the plot but grasping their traits and imitating them—a play as a plant.

What is this work responding to? Or, what is Infante’s drive to produce such a production? It is essential to understand the play as the continuation of the playwright’s exploratory phase of her latest theatrical series. In continuing what she began in *Realismo*, this new project takes the unanswered questions from this previous work and approaches what she understands as the complications of her first attempt at this type of theatre. Retrospectively, Infante has analyzed *Realismo* as a work that—far from being perfect—explores representation. Pondering on the idea of *Realismo*’s didacticism as failure, she states:

Es didáctico porque . . . esta todo el rato mostrando como una cosa [se] fuga hacia la otra. [La obra] te esta diciendo este es el realismo que tu conoces antropocéntrico y este es el realismo no antropocéntrico o neorrealismo, este es el territorio del nuevo materialismo y este es el realismo teatral que tu conoces . . . De hecho, es muy didáctico decir estos parecen ser los protagonistas, son los humanos y terminan siendo los protagonistas estas cosas. Era como una obra [donde] se mostraba el desplazamiento de lo humano a lo no humano, en vez de una obra que simplemente ‘embrace’ la mezcla entre humanidad y no humanidad. (“Personal Interview”)

Conscious of her creative process, she identifies *Realismo* as an anthropocentric trap. In her attempt to liberate props, Infante ends up controlling them, and thus reaffirming the superiority of human beings over objects. With *Estado vegetal*, she decides to remain in the limbo between categories and questions an anthropocentric drive in the act of standing midpoint between human beings and nonhuman beings. To me, the shortcomings of *Realismo* translate to a product that she possibly did not foresee and became aware of after several stagings. Now, beyond the negative connotation that she assigns to this limitation, I find this to be a necessary step in the process of experimentation. Perhaps, this is rooted in what Sara Janes Bailes identifies as intrinsic to the act of doing. She states that “we cannot ‘do’ without failure, in both senses of that expression (we cannot make, nor can we manage without). Its practicable potentiality enables us

to go on, and we go on because failure is a driver in the attempt to continue . . . Failure is a function of doing” (12). Far from being a failure, the didactic attribute of *Realismo* is essential and inevitable. Failure is, in Infante’s case, an initial phase towards improvement and further exploration. I expressed this to her, and she reacted by stating:

Si todo este periodo de obras fuera un gran ensayo, *Realismo* sería un párrafo básico. Un párrafo basal que me permite darme cuenta de que todas las cosas . . . producen [un] paso . . . Para mi cada obra nueva surge de lo que queda o [ha] fallado o [ha sido] expuesto en la anterior. (“Personal Interview”)

In understanding the transition from one play to another as improvement, it is necessary to explain the role of mimesis when it comes to the development of her latest theatrical cycle.

Infante’s theatre is not one to be easily understood. In fact, there have been instances where she has been invited to describe her complex current practice. In a master class given as part of Santiago a Mil 2019, she reminded her audience that theatre is risky since it can easily fall into careless representation, where a play can end up “giving voice to the voiceless [which] is a reaffirmation of our privilege” (“Clase Magistral” 00:17:35-44).³⁷ Being cautious with this ethical risk, *Estado vegetal* manages to approach a different species without invading their alterity. This awareness derives from her understanding of mimesis—a humble, and respectful stance in approaching the other through art. Following a rejection of human exceptionalism, to Infante, mimesis “is a suspension of the act of knowing and instead, is an act of speculation in trying to be the other” (“Clase Magistral” 00:45:16-23). Here, she takes inspiration from the

³⁷ The Santiago a Mil International Theatre Festival is an annual event held in Chile that hosts national and international productions throughout January.

work of speculative realist Ian Bogost in *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing*. To Bogost, the act of speculation is intrinsic to everything that exists. It is a way to approach the otherness as we observe not fully comprehending a different way of being (29-32). To Infante, theatre can be a form of speculation in its mimetic quality. To respect the alterity of plants in *Estado vegetal*, she attempted to experience them by means of what I observe as *somatic mimesis*—or what she describes as “physical speculation; [an act of] desiring to be the other with our own bodies” (“Clase Magistral” 00:45:28-33). With this as a foundation, Infante delved into her new play that it is not about plants, but a vegetal play. Even though plants are part of the plot, the focus is to experience plant being by way of how the performance unfolds. In other words, a play that through its structure—the development of its scenes and dialogues, lighting, sound, etc.,—and with a single actress, imitates plants.

Influenced by Michael Marder and Stefano Mancuso’s precepts on plant being—a reconsideration of plant perception to reflect on their possible intelligence—Infante ponders the idea of plant being from and through theatre. To accomplish this, she listed and converted to the stage the principles of contemporary theories on plant neurobiology. These approaches affirm that plants are cognitive organisms and therefore, intelligent beings. Her methodology avoided the thematization of plants, and instead grabbed the concept of *plant-thinking*—as coined by Michael Marder and that I later describe—to shape and give form to the play.

Theatre as Plant-thinking / Plant Intelligence

Are plants conscious beings? To Stefano Mancuso they are. To the neurobiologist, consciousness is the ability in which we form an idea of ourselves and our place in space in

relation to other beings and time. Hence consciousness can be measured in different degrees and at different time scales. Just like human beings, plants are conscious beings since they are tremendously sensitive to temperature, humidity, light, vibration, and gravity (“Are Plants Conscious?” 00:08:33–00:16:45). Therefore, we can state that consciousness exceeds homo sapiens, beyond the figure of the Enlightenment man who is rational and self-aware. In creating an idea of consciousness that is restricted to human beings only, we, as humans, have also created taxonomies to categorize species disregarding their own potentials, rights, and ways of being. We have placed ourselves above everything else that exists, and, in that act, we have relegated everything else as potential resources to be exploited for our own benefit and development.

Infante is successful in shedding light on this new idea about consciousness. Her work is innovative because she takes this abstract notion and makes it tangible through theatre. In this task, she realizes that imitating plants through the structure of the play becomes an efficient way of approaching them. In *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, Michael Marder questions the lack of contemporary philosophical production around plants, and considers the idea of, “encountering plants, instead of confronting them as still-murky objects of knowledge” (8). In coming closer to plants, without fetishizing them and reaffirming their alterity, Marder coins the term *plant-thinking*. This mode of thinking is the way in which we, as humans, can initiate a thinking process about the nonhuman world, and in the case of plants, reconsider our being as we make contact with them. This critical stance is defined by considering: “(1) the non-cognitive, non-ideational, and non-imagistic mode of thinking proper to plants (thinking without the head); (2) the human thinking about plants; (3) how human thinking is, to some extent, de-humanized and rendered plant-like, altered by its encounter with the plant-world; and finally, (4) the

ongoing symbiotic relation between this transfigured thinking and the existence of plants” (10). Marder continues stating that “*plant-thinking* is in the first place the promise and the name of an encounter . . . an invitation to abandon the familiar terrain of human and humanist thought” (10). Following this line of thinking, I argue that Infante takes the stage as the territory to substantially explore both the discursive and materiality of plant-thinking.

As I mentioned before, she gathers certain traits of plant being and adheres them to the structure of the performance. Consequently, the performance is plant-thinking praxis, and through the insertion of plant traits, the play becomes a plant. For example, the actress imitates phototropism—the orientation of plants in response to light—following a lighting structure in order to acquire movement, instead of the traditional theatrical conception of light following the actor.

What’s more, a modular structure is present throughout the play. Here, Infante alludes to Marder’s assertion that plants possess a modular structure, meaning all their basic functions as an organism are replicated throughout their bodies: all their leaves have lungs, all the roots have eyes, every stem has a brain, etc. In a talk at Nottingham Contemporary, Marder explains that to understand the modularity of plants, we have to dislocate the traditional idea of structure-function (“Contemporary Conversations” 01:20:42-47). In other words, senses should not be strictly associated with a specific organ. Thinking and sensing are not opposed. This is to say, “perceiving is already thinking” (01:21:35-37). Following this idea, Infante structured the play in a way that each scene is a module. That is, specific words and phrases inform all scenes, assisted at times by a voice looping as the actress records herself. These linguistic articulations are the way in which every scene connects to each other. Infante affirms: “about fifty percent of the text is repeated by every different character but said or organized in a different way, so that it seems

like a different story. That was how we imitated [plant] modularity” (Infante, “Performance as Philosophy” 330). Just like the parts that form plants, all scenes can be understood independently and, at the same time, they can all be connected as a single unit.

If *plant-thinking* is to Marder “how human thinking is, to some extent, de-humanized and rendered plant-like, altered by its encounter with the plant-world,” this can also be a new ontological path, a way by which the audience—people—can dissolve an anthropocentric paradigm (10). As I’ve mentioned earlier, Cotter reminds us that the play is a subtle politicization of plant being, since it opposes the passive role that a Western, anthropocentric, and extractive gaze has assigned to them (“Plants as Other”). It also opposes what Stefano Mancuso calls “plant blindness” —a cognitive bias understood as an evolutive process where human beings have learned to ignore plants (“Are Plants Conscious?” 00:01:46-00:02:26). But the play is more than just an opposition to human exceptionalism that disregards plants. In the task of performing plant-thinking, the play stands as a symbiotic and dissenting act. Due to how Infante makes use of different theatrical elements, she is able to achieve a material-discursive synergy between human beings and plants. The play is the enactment of a dual collision—materially and figuratively. There is an actual accident within the plot and an ontological collision. The performance is a playful erasure of boundaries between human beings and plants. In the act of imagining the potential vegetal within human characters, and through the form of the play, Infante points to another characteristic of *plant-thinking*: “the ongoing symbiotic relation between a transfigured thinking and the existence of plants” (Marder 10). In other words, the play suggests reciprocity between the two species. Somatic exercises and language enact, make tangible, and articulate the symbiosis between the two species.

Laughter, just like in *Realismo*, plays a major role in the audience when it comes to processing this symbiotic dynamic. Phrases in Spanish such as *irse por las ramas*, *estar plantada*, or *estaba enterrada* provide plant traits to the human subjects portrayed and—in the humoristic moments created when the actress enunciates them—force the audience to question our everyday language that appears to be already filled of vegetal life. At least, that is what I personally experienced when she articulated those linguistic structures. These linguistic moves are allusive and left me feeling reflective and absorbed. As an audience member, the play presented me with simple but suggestive phrases that caught me by surprise. The phrases were revealing and left me wondering. This personal reaction suggests that Infante is perhaps aware of the effect she creates on the audience. In more than one instance, she has metaphorically referenced her later productions as speculative dances around a theme, an act of ‘circling a fire,’ where one is able to perceive its heat, but cannot touch it (“Clase Magistral” 00:02:30-56). The fire can be interpreted as the unknown, something we as humans are aware of, but cannot access because of the absence of a suitable epistemology or port of entry.³⁸

As a spectator, experiencing the unknown and the uncanny feeling with the linguistic structures the actress articulated, produced anxiety in me to a certain degree. Her performance allowed me to simply glance and not fully understand a different reality. This is what Muñoz

³⁸ The experience of the unknown the Infante’s theatre generate is in part an explorative process that connects with what Sarat Maharaj understands as “non-knowledge,” or that which is found beyond the confines of knowledge (194). In defining contemporary artists as both, practitioners and researchers, Maharaj questions what it means to do art research nowadays when we consider how knowledge production works under extractive sociopolitical frames that brand artist, expecting them to produce under a particular discourse (199). Delving into non-knowledge indicates an action that cannot be reduced to a specific system or that is unable to follow a definite method. A practitioner, or artist, often begins their work not having a clear structure and prioritizing intuition as central to their practice. Cotter explains that “non-knowledge in relation to artistic research... [is] a search for a more organic relationship, for something which is already inherent, and which exists” (197). Bearing this in mind, I see Infante as a practitioner in search of a non-knowledge. A reductionist approach could easily place the playwright as an artist who carelessly interprets an entire contemporary philosophical corpus into theatre, but she does not. Infante engages with the production of different contemporary philosophical movements in order to give form to her work without fully subscribing to a specific philosophical trend.

might call the “nonhuman brownness:” an awareness that through “the screen of human perception” that ‘thing’ we encounter “is only partially knowable” and that, “at best, we can be attuned to what brownness does in the world, what it performs” (*The Sense of Brown* 3). Infante challenged my perceptive capabilities with a symbiotic relationship since it placed me in direct association with plants. In confronting these moments of confusion, ambiguity, and the unknown, where taxonomical limits are at stake, I realized a central trait to the staging of both her plays. After a closer look at her trajectory, I began noticing a trend in the subjectivities she usually presents. These are marginalized or bodies with a disability that, just like species beyond human beings, are also deemed less-than-human. What is the effect of these bodies in an inhuman theatre? Why approach these characters instead of the able-bodied? These bodies and forms of being are central to Infante’s latest dramaturgy. They emerge in her work because they are able to show alternative ways of being, something central to this theatrical cycle. These plays are crip performances—understood as an affirmation to be otherwise—which directly aligns with Infante’s intentions, and one that I call inhuman.

An Inhuman Theatre as Crip Performance

In creating tensions, deconstructing the human and nonhuman divide, and rethinking humanness, Infante reveals an intersectionality that runs in both plays. That is, there is an evident interconnection of social categorizations that affect specific characters and that, as the Oxford English Dictionary states, generate “overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage” (“intersectionality, n.”). I inferred this after noticing constant depictions of characters with a disability in both plays. When analyzing this continuity in her dramaturgy, Infante deduces:

Siempre ha habido [personajes con discapacidad] en muchas de mis obras . . . Si uno mira para atrás . . . lo que hay ahí es el deseo de hablar desde estas otredades que creo

que . . . es personal. O sea, tiene que ver con sentirse otra. Por diversas razones, en el mundo, la mayoría de los personajes de [ambas obras] son personajes que serían, o han sido considerados menos que humano. [Entendiendo] humano como el blanco, europeo, heterosexual, de la Ilustración . . . Ese humano . . . deja afuera a los niños, a los viejos, a la gente de la ruralidad, a la gente con cualquier discapacidad, [incluyendo] a la diversidad sexual. [Ahora, estos] son puros personajes que tienen dificultades con acceder al estatus de humano como lo entendemos . . . Pero estas son reflexiones que yo hago *a posteriori*. Esos personajes surgen de manera espontánea, normalmente surgen de los actores y las actrices en improvisaciones y yo me quedo con eso. O sea, [los actores] me muestran . . . posibilidades y yo digo eso, sí, vamos a usar esto. (“Personal Interview”)

As Infante states, her characters with a disability can also be read as nonhuman or sub-human because of the discrimination by a regulating social structure that classifies them outside the norm. One might feel this is Infante’s wit at its best, but she makes it clear that these characters might be emerging due to her personal experience of feeling like the other and occupying categories that don’t fit the figure of the human—a white heterosexual man. It is important to clarify these subjectivities with a disability are embodied by able-bodied actors, a casting choice that is ethically problematic. In analyzing disability theatre, Petra Kuppers asks, “when will come the moment when ‘cripping up’ (acting as though disabled) ceases to be socially acceptable, just as black-face and its history of racism is no longer part of the acceptable social theatre vocabulary?” (16). This is something to acknowledge and one must agree that this is a neglectful move by Infante. Taking advantage of virtuous actors who are capable of embodying these types of subjects is a simplistic maneuver. There is an ethical problem in representing subjects as disabled without giving the acting opportunity to actual actors with a disability—who are already relegated—to perform these roles. Perhaps, a justification for this approach would be Infante’s lack of experience working with actors with a disability and her trajectory working with acquainted actors. But far from this dilemma, I believe Infante’s intention exceeds this neglectful choice. She carefully crafted each representation, surpassing the mere spectacle of disability and,

most importantly, the restorative or curative portrayal of a body with a disability fighting to be accepted and integrated by the norm. In what follows, I briefly analyze three characters in *Realismo* and three in *Estado vegetal* that show Infante's approach to disability. I argue that her portrayals of bodies with a disability are part of crip performances or embodiments that introduce ways of being otherwise. Like the act of queering, to crip is the act of unsettling. But in a crip performance, those regarded as bodies with a disability take center stage with their lived experiences, opposing the discourses of the able-bodied in a process of emancipation from their status of inferiority.

I also argue that in the act of challenging the human and nonhuman divide, the interconnectedness of social categories, or intersectionality, is inevitably revealed. That is to say, in determining if the categories of human or nonhuman pertain to specific characters, other social categories surface, intersecting in patterns of discrimination towards these characters. This is true if we think that, as Alison Kafer and Eunjung Kim affirm, "categories such as race, class, and sex intersect with or create experiences of disability" (124). The way I approach disability and crip studies in this section is to explain how Infante's inhuman theatre exhibits different processes of discrimination and subjectification that act simultaneously in a given body, and how this synchronicity is shown both discursively and in the physical co-presence of bodies. To Cynthia Francica, in visualizing dissenting and marginalized characters, "se perfila una mirada política en torno a los límites y excepciones que han operado históricamente para definir la categoría excluyente de lo no humano" (342). What she understands as a political view is to me the intersectional characteristic of the simultaneous processes of discrimination inflicted on these characters.

Now, I must clarify that in understanding certain characters as bodies with a disability, I perceive them from my self-identity as an able-bodied person. They are disabled only in their experience of discrimination as bodies that oppose and resist the norm—its control and exclusion. Here, I expand from the regulating figure of the human and I understand the norm as the standards established and regulated by the figure of the *normate*, Rosemarie Garland Thompson's neologism to explain "the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definite human beings [...] The constructed identity of those, who by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them" (8). The subjectivities with a disability in both *Realismo* and *Estado vegetal* emerge enmeshed as part of Infante's attempt to scrutinize the category of the human. From an ableist position, these are characters that appear as different because of physical impairments or cognitive differences, obstructing them from communicating and socializing effectively with other able-bodied characters. Most of the characters in both plays could be considered marginal because they are subjectivities that inhabit the periphery, are often misunderstood, and are the target of discrimination and oppression: children with cognitive differences, characters with speech impairments, the elderly, women, and peasants. In *Realismo*, Mauricio and Cecilia stand up as characters that are a matter of scrutiny by those who surround them. Mauricio, who opens the play as a child with an apparent telekinetic capacity, has to constantly deal with his family's attempts to understand him. His brother, Andrés, pushes his father to take care of his well-being. In return, Alfonso, the father, controls him in a pharmacological manner during his laughter attacks, eventually resolving to send him off to Paris with Andrés so that he can receive electroshock treatment. Like Mauricio, a few years later, his niece Cecilia has to deal with what seems to be alcoholism, and the fact that she begins to relate

to and perceive objects differently, which forces his father Dario to arrange her in marriage, attempting to control her destiny. In the scene of her wedding, her brother—a catholic priest—reprimands her drunken state in front of her father and yells at her “compórtate como una mujer casada” (*Realismo*). Cecilia is not only the subject of misunderstandings due to her alcoholism and sensitivity to other nonhuman objects, but she has to face a patriarchal discourse that attempts to control her. Cecilia is a woman, an apparent alcoholic, and exhibits cognitive differences that place her as a marginalized character. In a sexist dynamic, it is the able-bodied male figure personified by her father, her brother the priest, and later her husband, who attempts to control her life and her erratic behavior.

Throughout *Realismo*, there is a correlation between characters with a disability and those that experience theatrical objects awkwardly in the eyes of able-bodied. It is as if bodies with a disability have different perceptual capacities. Max, a peasant and servant to the Montes family, speaks about this:

(Octavio lo sienta, toma la botella, le pasa la chupaya, le pone la peluca cariñosamente).
 MAX. Déjeme que le cuente una verdad que tengo atragantada acá desde hace años . . . Fíjese que fue la mismísima señora Aura, la mamacita de [Mauricio], la que le heredó eso que él tenía y que lo hacía reír y que la gente tomaba por zafaura'. Decían que era zafáo' . . . Pero el don Mauricio . . . No era nada telekinético: el don Mauricio no movía las cosas, a él lo movían las cosas, lo conmovían, que es muy distinto . . . y ahí lo tenía el viejo Don Alfonso husmeando ese 'remedio' siempre a media asta. Pero la señora Aura, la mamacita de él, lo contrariaba, le ecía' que lo dejara ser . . . hasta que Don Alfonso un día se cabrió' y la echo a piegrazo' limpio . . . Y así en esta familia los van alejando de a uno a los que saben alguna cosa de fuerza mayor: primero fue la señora Aura, después el don Mauricio y ahora . . . ¿Por qué cree usted que su papá está tan apurado en que se vaya de esta casa la señorita Cecilia?" (Infante, “Realismo”)

It is through the eyes of Max, an outsider to the inner family circle, that one can see the process of discrimination and silencing happening throughout the different generations. At the moment Max attempts to tell the family history to Octavio—who appears to be indifferent and does not listen—the servant highlights this process of marginalization. Beyond the enigma that

surrounds the subjectivities with a disability, there are significant discourses of exclusion, control, and pathologization that coexist within the family group. Interestingly, it is Max who explicitly discloses these discourses; someone who to other characters has a status of less-than-human, and, so, has a disregarded voice.

Realismo shares this characteristic with *Estado vegetal* since this last play also includes marginalized characters, all performed by Marcela Salinas: a girl with a cognitive disability, the elderly Nora, and Manuel who is comatose. Resembling *Realismo*, if one analyzes these characters from the perspective of the able-bodied, all of them seem to have the capacity to relate differently to plants. In a dynamic of referring to, talking to, and perceiving plants differently, these characters are differentiated. First, there is a young girl with a cognitive disability that prevents her from communicating effectively with others. Besides witnessing Manuel's accident, it seems that she can hear voices coming from the tree she climbs, the same tree that Manuel struck with his motorcycle. Raúl, a municipal worker, tells about her erratic behavior when she constantly climbs the tree and impedes the pruning project:

RAÚL. Hubo que bajarla en reiteradas ocasiones del árbol. Y lloraba y pateaba porque tiene algún tipo de 'deficiencia intelectual' o 'capacidad diferente' si se quiere decir de un modo más contemporáneo, más actual; entonces se hace bastante difícil hablar con ella. (Infante, "Estado vegetal")

Eva, a neighbor, who is the first one to witness the aftermath of the accident, narrates her impressions when she finds the girl:

EVA. "¡Na ma pada mavaaaaar!" gritaba y gritaba esa niña encaramada arriba del árbol mientras los bomberos trataban de bajarla. ¡¿Que esta diciendo esa niña?! "¡Namapadamavar!" Con esa boca rara que pone así pa'l la'o. ¡Claro que de niña no tiene nada, es una mujerona ya! ¿Cuánto debe tener? ¡¿Unos cuarenta años?! ¡Muchos más que yo! (Infante, "Estado vegetal")

Both Raúl and Eva, as able-bodied characters, situate the girl as different because of her strange behavior as she relates and interact in an unconventional way with the tree. Raúl and Eva

authorize themselves to analyze and criticize the girl because of her concurrent identities: a child and disabled. To a lesser degree, Infante portrays the elderly Nora alone with her plants but also incapacitated. Isolated from the rest, and with cognitive traits of Alzheimer's disease, Nora walks slowly and actively dialogues with her plants who, in an uncanny and enigmatic way, convince her to remove the flooring of the house so that she can replant them in the ground, including her own body. Another peasant, Joselino, narrates the scene when he finds Nora:

JOSELINO. “¡Joselino!, ¡Joselino!” escuchaba yo decir . . . Tenía la voz gastaita’, un hilito de voz, quizás cuánto, cuánto rato estuvo ahí con la... gritaera’... se siente cuando las palabras se cansan. Taba la señora así... ¿Cómo le explico?, taba así, porque se quedo, literalmente . . . estaba así plantada la señora. Tenía las piernas metidas en la tierra así hasta la altura del muslo más o menos. Taba así enterrada así... ¡en la tierra po’ ñor! Había levantado todo el entablado del piso así... había tomado todas las plantas de toda la casa . . . Lloraba como, así como un animalito lloraba la señora . . . Ese día la ñora me dijo con la voz, así como un hilito: “Joselino, dicen que quieren recuperar el territorio”. Me acuerdo patente que me pedía sacarle una hoja que tenía en la mano así toda amuñá la hoja, ¡toda ensangrentá! Una carta, un qué se yo, yo después lo interpreté como un poema... bueno yo tomé esa hoja y la guardé. (Infante, “Estado vegetal”)

Engraved in the words of Joselino one can perceive the effects of the isolation the older woman experiences. Disconnected from the world, she engages with the plants in a dynamic that is incomprehensible to the audience. The letter she was holding, translates into a cracking of a dry leaf that Salinas projects to a microphone. The repetitive sound of a cracking leaf eventually turns into the soundscape of a wildfire, allowing a transition to the next scene: Manuel's philosophical and misanthropic plead.

Manuel is the character that guides the storyline of the play. He is not just a motorcyclist, but a firefighter as well someone who desires the life of a plant, and who ironically ends up comatose, in a vegetative state. In this scene that perhaps indicates a time prior to the accident, he witnesses a forest fire and, devastated, implores for a change:

MANUEL. ¡Oh noble dispersión vegetal! Noble y maravillosa democracia ramificada. A Dios pido: ¡Absuélveme de las formas del reino animal! ¡Dame algo que es de ellos!

¡Que latan en vez mis pulmones! ¡Que respiren las puntas de mis dedos, que piense mi estomago! [...] Que las formas cambiantes de mi cuerpo sean mi único idioma, para que no tenga como mentir. Que morir sea algo que le ocurre a mi pecho mientras mi espalda, en cambio nace, y así nunca tenga la absurda idea de que vamos para adelante. Enséñenme hoy, ahora, aquí, con lo que queda de ustedes y lo que queda de mi, a hablar en químicos. Abran para mí su químico recitar. (Infante, “Estado vegetal”)

In this apparent flashback, he articulates a prophetic thought of what he later experiences with the accident. Manuel expresses his desire to be otherwise, away from his reality as a human being and a member of the animal kingdom. Worn out of what he sees as a limiting characteristic of the human condition, he expresses a yearning to be another in the form of a plant. In a poetic plea to Zeus, he embodies the desire of being the other, outside the norm, living with no regrets of transformation even if that means losing his current state as a human being. He embodies a crip desire which is to embrace a way of being beyond ableist and anthropocentric desires. This crip desire is a radical thought that arises from a devastating event—a wildfire—in order to reimagine other notions of body configuration, communication, and time.

Throughout the performance, different characters narrate the events surrounding the accident and we see Manuel’s mother trying to find someone or something guilty of his son’s condition. After entering a dialogue with plants toward the end of the play, the mother realizes that she cannot blame anyone for the accident:

MADRE. El árbol se lo llevó a su reino . . . En ese momento, en la oscuridad, cambiaron a mi hijo de reino . . . Eso traman. Alguien tenía que ponerse en el lugar del otro. Entiendo. (Infante, “Estado vegetal”)

The closing remarks from the mother explain the meaning behind the current medical state of her son. To become vegetative is to not only become a being with a disability but to change and experience a different way of being. To become vegetative is to transition from a human who is able to move, to a plant that moves and exists at a different pace, in a different timescale. After all, the son is not dead, he lives outside of what the able-minded and

anthropocentric norm expects. Is he still a human? Does he live like a human? Is he now living his best life based on the desires he expressed during the aftermath of the wildfire? Can we perhaps perceive a new type of humanity in the son's current vegetative state as a body with a disability? These are some of the questions the audience encounters in the end. These are suggesting, allusive, and inviting moments to think otherwise.

Infante's exploration and insertion of an array of different bodies often secluded to the peripheries of society point toward how diversity is constituted. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder write that "diverse embodiments coexist in racialized, sexed, gendered, classed, and disabled bodies simultaneously" (4). In problematizing the idea of the human, Infante's theatre materializes how these embodiments coexist. Now, in portraying these bodies with a disability, she not only reveals intersecting marginalized identities, but most importantly, exposes alternative ways of being. Crip studies have used the term *crip*,³⁹ as the figure that "identifies the ways in which . . . bodies represent alternative forms of being-in-the-world when navigating environments that privilege able-bodied participants as fully capacitated agential participants within democratic institutions" and that in their ability to be embodied, "are arguably in excess of the able-minded or able-bodied/disabled bodied" (Mitchel and Snyder 3; McRuer 20). Bearing this in mind, more than portraying disabled or marginalized subjects, Infante depicts *crip* subjects that are political in the act of disregarding being marginalized or rejected bodies. They are unapologetic in their act of disregarding the norm.

To further understand the political potential within a *crip* subject, one must understand the socioeconomic structures that attempt to control people with disabilities. Considering that

³⁹ It is important to note that *crip* (originating from the derogatory term *cripple*), and like the term *queer*, has been re-appropriated and reclaimed by activists, the disability right movement, and academia as a political tool of empowerment and identity figure by those who identified as disabled and do not subscribe to an able-bodied discourse.

neoliberalism is the imperative economic doctrine in the Western hemisphere, this socioeconomic structure imposes control on all aspects of the human experience, including bodies, both human and those beyond. Under its dogma, neoliberalism shapes the human body as “debilitated and in need of market commodities . . . a site of perpetual improvement for market-based exploitation and informational/affective resource extraction” (Mitchel and Snyder 12). Hence, a body with a disability in a neoliberal state is always in need to maximize its abilities and become a never-ending better. A crip subjectivity emerges from the conditions imposed on people with disabilities as an opposition that rejects to enter the extractive dynamic of the body. ‘Crip’ poses a threat to an economy that assigns the restraining label of abnormal to the disabled, declining to engage in processes of both inclusion and curing in order to highlight, instead, their lived experiences as sites of alternative ways of being. That is to say, a crip performance shows the act of living otherwise with potential alternative values for living that do not corroborate the controlling concepts of normalcy (Mitchel and Snyder 5).

Infante portrays crip characters as subjectivities that are not actively looking to overcome a particular disability, nor subjects of inclusion projects.⁴⁰ They simply are, under their own terms. It is the able-bodied characters the ones attempting to understand, categorize and/or control them. Most importantly, by not creating an idea of pity towards them, Infante presents an crip subject emancipated from the able/disabled binary.

In terms of audience reception, these crip subjects refuse what Garland-Thompson understands as the “economy of visual difference” where “bodies deemed inferior become

⁴⁰ Inclusionism is a modality within neoliberalism. It is a method to commodify the body with disability. Michel and Snyder write that “inclusionism requires that disability be tolerated as long as it does not demand an excessive degree of change from relatively inflexible institutions, environments, and norms of belonging” (14). Under the gear of normalcy, inclusionism maintains the disabled in the periphery and controls their overall human experience.

spectacles of otherness while the unmarked are sheltered in the neutral space of normalcy” (8). Although in Infante’s theatre, the crip body is part of a spectacle, the audience’s perception does not perpetuate a dynamic where the able-bodied remains in the privileged place of the unmarked and observant. Namely, the plays challenge the act of observation by able-bodied people—or the audience—having them experience feeling like an outsider, trying to understand the performances. The plays defy the audience to understand the seeming alternative knowledge the crip characters possess. This knowledge is never revealed to the spectator because it is meaningless. Instead, what is relevant to an inhuman theatre is for the audience to experience and feel a position of otherness in the act of attempting to grasp something unreachable, just like those bodies deemed disabled often do when they are constantly challenged to adjust themselves to the principles of the norm. Put differently, crip performances have the capacity to prompt Jacques Rancière’s figure of the *emancipated spectator*. Here, the audience is not simply the figure of the norm observing as a passive voyeur, but instead, they stand in a position where they are conducted to determine what a crip subjectivity entails. This active role in the audience resides in the spectators’ capacity to interpret or translate the performance on their own terms and based on their own experiences (Rancière 16-17). In my case, in observing these crip subjectivities, and in the act of forcibly experiencing the position of the other, I became aware that it is our assumptions of those whom we identify as disabled that produce inequality and social discrimination. Assumptions create stereotypes that build obstacles for those audacious enough to live otherwise.

In observing decades of a Chilean family through five actors appearing and disappearing between objects with *Realismo* and observing the artifice behind Salina’s one-woman show in *Estado vegetal*, I became cognizant of how we can socially construct a disability. That is to say,

it was through the theatricality in both performances that I became aware of the processes that involve social constructions. It was in my awareness of the play's fictionality that Infante reminded me how a disability is not part of an intrinsic reality, but instead, that it is a classification process performed by the norm. Hence it can be avoided. As I previously stated, we become through both corporeal interactions and language. That is, the discourses that run our interactions with others are as important as the physical interactions that determine either how we isolate ourselves from, or the contact we can have with other people. In a theatre of the inhuman, I became conscious that all those social categorizations that are constantly imposed on us, cannot and do not have to define us. Labels of human, nonhuman, disabled and abled-bodied, man or woman, are labels that—in their potential to be constructed—can also, and perhaps, must be deconstructed for the sake of equality and a more inclusive world.

Why highlight crip subjectivities in an inhuman theatre? One must understand that in order to create a project that wants to both, dissolve the lines between human and nonhuman and also rethink the category of the human, generating cultural products for alternative ways of being is an essential procedure. If one wants to redefine the human because of its violence, one must also consider other categories that traverse a given entity and that also enact discrimination and control of it. Social and identity categories either confirm a place of privilege as part of the *normate*, or on the contrary, they deepen the discrimination and intensify the vulnerability and precarity. Allowing space to be otherwise is central in order to redefine the human. Disability in these plays enters as a critical framework that visualizes how a process of exclusion and discrimination unfolds. Mitchell and Snyder remind us that neoliberalism proposes that we must be “more alike than different from each other” (14). In opposing this dynamic, the crip

performances presented in these plays serve as radical politics that inversely encourage difference and argue against the passivity and limiting characteristics of normalcy.

An Inhuman Theatre and the Brown Commons.

The turn in Infante's practice has been, so far, an innovative, provoking, and fructiferous period of production. Her determination to create pieces that are bold and provocative in the act of challenging the seeming intrinsic characteristics of theatre is remarkable. Central to the undertaking of dissecting the category of the human is an intersectional work—that is, in examining the division between human and nonhuman, there is an inevitable exposure of overlapping processes of discrimination and suppression that affect marginalized bodies and entities. Attempting to comprehend what should count as human vehemently displays other forms of being the norm frequently includes and excludes. Bodies, and matter in general, are never just human or nonhuman, since multiple categories traverse all entities defining their experience in the world.

In fact, I argue all the (disabled) characters and objects that are present in these two productions perform and are part of *brownness*, as I mentioned in the introduction of this project, a concept coined by the late José Esteban Muñoz to explain the complexity of bodies and entities living symbiotically among everything that exists. Muñoz summons a brownness of people and things as they “convey a certain difference” when facing the norm—white, able-bodied heterosexual man (3). While things are brown in their susceptibility to domination and how they are “partially knowable” to us, “people are brown in their vulnerability to the contempt and scorn of xenophobes, racists, and a class of people who are accustomed to savagely imposing their will on others” (3). The bodies that emerge in these performances speak to a conglomerate of subordinated bodies, organic and inorganic. Muñoz explains this to be a brown commons, “a

commons of brown people, places, feelings, sounds, animals, minerals, flora and other objects,” integrated in the way “they suffer and strive” but also the “swerve of matter, organic and otherwise, about the moment of contact, and the encounter and all that it can generate” (*The Sense of Brown* 2) By positioning both human and nonhuman entities interacting both somatically and discursively, Infante’s theatre performs and reveals the *brown commons* through aesthetic encounters. This is not just a mere spectacle, it is a thoughtful proposal to feel, experience, and live otherwise. Muñoz warns it is not about “enacting a brown common but rather of knowing a brownness that is our commonality” (*The Sense of Brown* 2). Hence, Infante’s practice reveals theatre as a site of experiences, corroborating that this commonality already exists (Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown* 121-122). The performative exercises analyzed in both plays not only work as moments that reveal the historical colonial heritage of Chile and the Latinx Americas—a fixed, individualistic, unidirectional, binary, and hierarchical conception of the world—but it provides an aesthetic experience of disclosure or uncovering for something else that is already here but that perhaps it has been historically silenced by the Western epistemological regime.

Last, Infante’s inhuman theatre demonstrates that seeing, feeling, and trying to be the other is an act of both determining how other species beyond the human are always different as much as they are alike to *homo sapiens*, and dismantling that which separates and creates differences between people. For as much as the playwright intends to create a somber and partly incomprehensible theatrical experience, the stagings of her plays function as guidance towards being otherwise. Her theatre allows for moments of unexpected kinship among entities, whether these are *homo sapiens* or not. However momentary, these associations are lasting in the audience’s mind, making her productions stimulating performances. In these two productions,

bodies and language interact in the ephemeral space of the performances, assisted by the amalgam of different theatrical signs. Cohesively, these two elements provide alternatives to our Western and exhausting notion of the world that insists on categorizing, and thus enclosing everything that exists. I believe Infante adheres to an active worldwide artistic production that is aware of what it means to live in a world of ecological turmoil and generalized inequality under constrictive social, economic, and political conditions. But most importantly, I believe she reminds us of the need to continue exploring living with and out of these constrictions.

Chapter 2: Affective Vindications Through the Performing Object

What do miners from the 19th and 20th centuries in South-Central Chile have in common with Puerto Ricans that suffered the disaster of Hurricane María in the 21st century? To live in the Americas is to live a colonial experience that is all too known across the continent. Even though modern nations in the 21st century stand far away from the colonial period where the Old World ruled, the present still suffers not only the repercussions of that colonial experience but also its mutations in the present. What dictates the ways we relate to and perceive each other nowadays, how our nations constitute themselves, and overall, how we all exist emerges from that colonial experience. Aníbal Quijano understood this transversality coining it as the *coloniality of power*. Most nations in the Americas indeed gained political independence from their colonizer more than two centuries ago. However, that colonial experience transcends to contemporaneity since “that specific colonial structure of power produced the specific social discrimination which later were codified as ‘racial,’ ‘ethnic,’ ‘anthropological’ or ‘national’, according to times, agents, and populations involved” (Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity” 168). In other words, the hierarchies that organize our experience in the present—condensed in anthropocentric and heteropatriarchal norms—are all grounded in that colonial experience. To Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and following Quijano, the present is dictated by coloniality, “the specific colonial matrix of power, being, and knowledge... [is] constitutive...of Western modernity” (“The Decolonial Turn” 111). Living in the coloniality of power in the present is catastrophic. This matrix means division, compartmentalization, and stratification of living things. That hierarchization of life brought by the colonial experience “represents a veritable catastrophe... whereby the world populations started to be divided according to, not merely specific practices or beliefs, but degrees of being human” (Maldonado-Torres, “Outline of Ten

Theses” 11). In other words, certain communities suffered and are suffering in the manner they are deemed less than human or are positioned below white, abled, heterosexual men, and the hierarchies sustained under this figure. In the Americas, the catastrophe persists as communities suffer unparalleled damage at the hands of this incommensurable coloniality of power which permeates all aspects of life: socioeconomic, gender, and racial inequality manifested in how people of color, women, or nonheteronormative subjects are constantly at a disadvantage within nation-state projects, and environmental degradation due to persistent extractive practices of the land, just to name a few. In thinking coloniality along similar lines, Mary Louise Pratt recognizes it as having the “power of self-creation and self-renewal” in the present, and as a force that “can operate in any arena” (21). Hence, considering the everlasting and permutating characteristic of the colonial experience, one can ask, in what way this is tangibly manifested and how can this be revealed and sensibly represented?

In light of the omnipresence of the coloniality of power, the following chapter looks at two seemingly distinct latitudes in the Americas to think about how the colonial matrix of power unleashes realities that are catastrophic to communities that have been persistently controlled and dispossessed. I argue the critical and sensible observations projected by two theatrical works constitute conscious and sensible stagings of ongoing colonial realities. It is that conscious observation by artists, which is always materially reflected on stage, that I frame as aesthetic decolonial attempts or gestures.

Both Chile and Puerto Rico share a common colonial reality. While their experiences are very much distinct in terms of geographies, time, and the ways the colonial power unfolded and unfolds, their communities share a similar experience of dispossession. My objects of analysis are two artistic performances in which the catastrophe of the coloniality of power reverberates on

stage, or, to put it another way: sensed. In analyzing these two works, I demonstrate that Chile and Puerto Rico also find commonalities in how their realities are materially mediated. Both theatrical works appeal to puppets or performing objects to tell these stories of subjugation and conquer. In both instances, the power of objects and the more-than-human—or that which originates in humans but also exceeds them such as music or sound—find the grounds on stage to visualize and materialize these realities as they vindicate the often-silenced communities of each country.⁴¹

On the one hand, the theatre group Silencio Blanco and their play *Chiflón, el silencio del carbón* [Chiflón, the Silence of Coal] (2013) exhibits the colonality of power, showing the mutations of colonality in Chile's present. As Chile gained independence from Spain, the nation was captured by neocolonialism due to how nations in the Global North exercised economic domination (Pratt 16). Foreign investment in the coal industry was one way this economic domination materialized. *Chiflón* attends to the effects of this economic annexation on the lives of coal miners over time. It visualizes how situated extractive practices are an imperialist praxis of what Macarena Gómez-Barris understands as colonial capitalism, or the “catastrophic event that has gobbled up the planet's resources... systematically destroying through dispossession, enslavement, and then producing the planet as a corporate bio-territory” (*The Extractive Zone* 4). Frenzied exploitation of the subsoil had a social toll. While Chile stood as one of the top coal producers in the region, generations of miners and their families suffered at the hands of extractive capitalism where their wellbeing was constantly at risk due to dangerous labor

⁴¹ More-than-human are things or phenomena may have an origin in the human—such as music—but also have agency of their own as things that produce outcomes beyond the purpose imposed by said humans. On the opposite, the nonhuman is that which exists specifically alongside human beings. These may be nonhuman species, such as animals or plants, as well as objects and inorganic matter, all coexisting alongside human beings with their own agency.

conditions. As the extraction decreased toward the end of the 20th century, giving way to new forms of energy, a former mining community in Lota emerged but was left adrift. *Chiflón* acknowledges how this community was stripped away of social and economic stability, where the Chilean state failed to provide a proper transition to alternative livelihoods. This recognition of an underprivileged community is part of a decolonial gesture, as I show later. Here, puppets tell the story of generational dispossession and, in doing so, they vindicate Lota's experience as an ex-mining community.

On the other hand, the Puerto Rican group Agua, Sol y Sereno and their play *Corazón de papel* [Paper Heart] (2018) uses kraft paper on stage, along with the Afro Puerto Rican dance sounding practice of bomba, to make sense of Hurricane María and the island's catastrophic experience due to the absence of proper aid post-hurricane. Puerto Rico has an extended history of colonial exploitation. In the present, this exploitation has been exacerbated by a debt crisis and federally imposed austerity by the imperial power of the United States. In this play, kraft paper enters the stage as an object with the capacity to transmit the affects of those who suffered and continue to suffer, the colonial reality of the island, and the human-made catastrophe of María. The performing object, along with the more-than-human elements of music—the agential characteristics of the danced sounding practice of bomba—are shown working alongside but also exceeding the human body to sensibly tell the colonial experience of Puerto Ricans.

As I mentioned, parallel to exposing the catastrophic colonial experience of these two countries, both performances find commonality in their mediums—puppetry and performing objects. While objects have been extensively analyzed in Latin American theatre and performance studies, puppetry and theatre of objects remain understudied, secluded as minoritarian expressions within the performing arts. In light of this, the critical project I present

uplifts these traditions. My study intervenes to assert puppetry as an artistic practice worth studying in the present because, as I show, it centralizes debates around the properties and potentialities of the performing object against the anthropocentric drive that has historically placed human bodies at the center of the theatrical event. As such, my analysis stems from understanding these theatrical works as *material performance* that, according to puppet theatre scholar Dassia Posner, emerges suggesting “that inanimate matter contains agency not simply to mimic or mirror, but also to shape and create” (Posner, Dassia N., et al. 5). In the following pages, I explore how these two artistic projects make use of material performance in what Teresa Brennan understands as the “transmission of affects” of living the colonial catastrophe in both countries (3). In doing so, these two plays validate the agential properties that are contained and performed by inanimate matter and the more-than-human on stage.

In sum, *Chiflón, el silencio blanco* and *Corazón de papel* deploy the following: 1) Both unfold independent ideas of what a performing object is and can do. In *Chiflón*, Silencio Blanco uses white puppets as central to the performance, and in *Corazón*, Agua, Sol y Sereno uses kraft paper to form dynamic figures on stage. 2) In performing (along) with objects, both groups vindicate the lives of subjugated communities that suffer at the hand of colonial power. In the case of the Chilean group, they materialize the lived experience of miners in South-Central Chile. In the Puerto Rican case, the play attends to the lived experience of the colonized human body as people were left disregarded in the wake of Hurricane María. 3) Both works employ paper as part of their performance to forge distinct aesthetics and material dramaturgies. 4) Last and most importantly, both plays exhibit objects (puppets and paper) with the capacity for affective transmission. Here, vitality resides beyond the human; in the manner objects, sound, —

—and their movements in space and time—transmit affects along with the presence of the linguistic sign and human bodies.

Aided by performance and affect theory as well as ideas emerging from new materialisms and music and sound studies, this study develops a particular perspective to analyze a theatrical event. Such perspective moves away from a reductionist approach of just observing the plays' symbolic dimensions. Instead of concentrating on what these plays mean, denote, or represent, I attend to what they 'do' in terms of reception and the affective relationships established between all actants in the theatrical space. In other words, my focus is on the interplay of all the forms that matter takes on stage and how these are sensed by the audience.

In highlighting these two plays, I do not intend to disregard the extended history of puppetry and objects on the Latin American stage, a trajectory that I recount later. Instead, I shed light on two particular contemporary examples of how the material presence on stage is central to understanding theatre's capacity to rehearse a reassembly of the social. In other words, one can analyze performances regarding the transmissions and exchanges at work prior to the audience's engagement in a meaning-making process. All in all, what is different about my approach is my emphasis on how these projects of social vindication unfold. Their affective transmission is central to the vindication of these communities, where the human actors are either visually removed or placed in the background. I situate the plays' significance in how that transmission occurs in a liminal state right before the object acquires meaning; before the image, sound, and/or music is codified into a symbol, a meaning. Hence, my main focus is on the temporality between presence and interpretation.

In the Vibratorium, We All Are

In observing these two plays as material performances, I untangle the affective potentiality of the object on the stage. In other words, what the object can do with its sole presence before it means something to the human audience. This task is difficult, if not impossible, because, as soon as we name something, we are already engaging in a meaning-making process. Everything on stage is evocative, as Mike Pearson understands it. Things on stage constantly denote and connote (Pearson 117). Nonetheless, I uphold that a dimension in the theatrical event precedes the meaning-making process that audiences engage in, which has been understudied because it requires refraining from the symbolic. In the following pages, I attempt to enlighten what is at the heart of the performance when mere human bodies, objects, and more-than-human elements of a performance communicate and thus transmit energies and vibrations. This dimension in performance is not novel to theatre theorist Nicholas Ridout, who describes it as a specific perspective when approaching the theatre auditorium. The “Vibratorium [is] the theater before it becomes either theatron or auditorium, the theater as a sensory threshold that momentarily precedes, or temporarily closes, representation” (Ridout 230). This perspective serves as an entry point to understanding the agency of objects, and their constant acting and becoming in companionship or along with human bodies. The Vibratorium traverses this chapter because it is at this grounding dimension that *Silencio Blanco* and *ASYS* speak about the repression and subjugation of colonized communities in Chile and Puerto Rico. The Vibratorium points to the elucidation of how we exchange energies, and how we transmit affect, as Theresa Brennan would put it. These two plays stand as events in the Vibratorium if we consider, on the one hand, that *Silencio Blanco*’s work play disregards the linguist sign altogether, or that *ASYS* displaces the dialogue to the background to experiment with objects and music as means of

communication. Both plays bring to the forefront materiality as central to the theatrical event. Understanding the *Vibratorium* is also understanding how theatre is a site where the spectator experiences an “oscillation of the theatrical image,” where the object on stage “wavers before settling into its codification” (Ridout 225). What Ridout could see as the *Vibratorium*, Jorge Dubbatti understands it as “un teatro liminal” which highlights the absence of the word or one where the word intersects with “el movimiento, la música, la plástica, los objetos,” such as puppetry (10).

I am aware that approaching theatre at this level can take us to a dark or what some might believe to be an unproductive terrain. The task can also be interpreted as a rather far-fetched analysis instead of looking at these two plays and their social relevance, considering they speak straightforwardly about marginalized communities. However, analyzing objects and human actors on stage at their affective and nonrepresentational dimensions proposes a new line to understanding the social. That is, these theatrical works present reformed ways of communicating and relations that are rehearsed on stage. I suggest these two plays act twofold: First, they search to vindicate the life of colonized subjects via alternative ways of communication that go beyond the linguistic sign (material presence of objects, sound, music). Second, in doing the above, both plays unveil the vitality of objects (Jane Bennet), reassembling how we see the social where both humans and objects are actants. Bruno Latour is conscious of the potential of art in the task of reassembling the social. He asserts that “the resource of fiction can bring... the solid objects of today into the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense” (*Reassembling the Social* 82). Objects are commodities in our daily lives, but, as these two plays show, they exceed this assignment since they have other capabilities. In attending theatre as *Vibratorium*, I make my task to delve into the material presence of human

bodies and objects on stage, moving away from a metaphysical undertaking that posits a higher value to the meaning of a theatrical phenomenon and thus disregards the material and sonic presence that occurs on stage. Remaining within the symbolic takes us dangerously closer to limiting binarism such as subject versus object. Observing theatre as the Vibratorium deconstructs it.

A Dramaturgy of Paper

The premise that bonds *Chiflón* and *Corazón* is not only their similar approach to disregarded communities but also the material presence of paper. The treatment and presence of paper on stage and what this achieves during both performances unfold toward a dramaturgy. That is, the material presence on stage of this ‘thing’ becomes a pivotal element to the dramatic composition of each play, showing the material potential of paper to tell stories and, most importantly, to engage in the process of affective transmission.

The grounds for what I see as the dramaturgy of paper emerges from an intellectual invitation by Mike Pearson, which is an effort to surpass the symbolic drive when it comes to deciphering what we perceive on stage:

let’s propose alternative optics in which things are taken to possess unique properties, potentialities and propensities for engendering sensation impacts, visceral and emotional, as well as perceptual; in which the performative acts indicate, foreground and make evident such characteristics; and in which performers become intimately involved and bound up with objects and materials, as co-creators of dramatic substance.” (Pearson 119)

Paper is no longer the material surface for textual inscription in both these plays. In *Chiflón*, recycled newspaper becomes the rudimentary element of the puppet. They are molded into worn-out figures to depict exhausted human bodies. In *Corazón*, kraft paper emerges on stage as a malleable and dynamic material that performs along with human actors. Following the line of object theatre, here kraft paper is borrowed in its natural state and, while not initially

manufactured for the stage, it performs temporarily in the manner of a puppet. Yes, in these two plays, paper is still being employed for human purposes and manipulated by human actors. However, I see paper partially stripping away from what Martin Heidegger would assert as the object' "*readiness-to-hand*," or its "manipulability" (98). Paper emerges on stage as an object with a degree of incommensurability, outstripping its functional capacity in what Bill Brown would call an "excessive object" (23). In both plays, paper displays a "force as a sensuous presence" (23). This sensuous aura relies highly on the haptic, which occurs as the actor touches the paper. It is that sensuous optic that traverses the lines of this chapter and that, at certain moments, it will be more noticeable than others. Before I delve into an analysis of these plays and consider the centrality of objects in these two plays, I succinctly touch on the history of objects in Latin American theatre.

Puppets and Objects in Latin American Theatre

In Latin America, as in any other region in the world, the performing object has always been present since the origins of culture. To trace the history of objects in the Latin American stage would require extensive research exceeding this project. Thus, in a synthesizing way, I present a brief history of the most noteworthy artists, puppeteers, and creative minds that make the performing objects central to their practice. The animated figure, or puppet, is inherent to culture and embedded in the foundations of humanity. To Francis Penny, "the animation of objects can be directly traced to the atavistic, universal belief in the spirit life hidden within and embodied by natural phenomena, things and materials. This belief forms the core of the animist religion and is intrinsic of the puppet's origins" (5). In our first attempts to understand the world and how we relate to everything that surrounds us, humanity turned into animism, "humankind's first belief system" (Penny 5). Since humans were "uncertain of their own power, unconscious if

their mental capacities, but certain of their dependence on nature, [they] deified everything that they feared or that brought them comfort and sustenance, investing any *thing* which represented the forces around them with *anima*” (Penny 5). While deification might not be a common practice in modernity, this ancient belief system might explain why it is not strange that today. In the 21st century, children and adults alike are still affected and often moved by puppets. When we sit in front of the performing puppet, we are susceptible to being deeply affected, often sympathizing with the character embodied by the puppet. Although humans have distanced away from an animist approach to life, this belief system has not entirely ceased to affect our perception of the world, with traces in the present. Penny explains this as a “residue of animism... universally present in twenty-first-century humans... [and which] explains the power of the staged puppet” (6).

Puppetry can be traced in Latin America back to pre-Columbian times. As Ana María Allende attests, the Inca, Maya, and Arawak, among other indigenous communities, “dominated the manufacturing and manipulation techniques of puppetry. Many articulated figurines with holes in their heads, either string puppets or glove puppets made of clay, rock, wood or other materials, were found in different sites and among different people” (“Latin America”). These traditions between humans and the material world have transcended to the present and were recovered and saved by perceptive and sensitive theatre groups like the Peruvian collective Yuyachkani. This collective has a longstanding tradition of including masks in their performances, which John Bell understands as the “rediscovery and reappraisal of the performance aesthetics of Andean culture” (“Rediscovering Mask Performance” 159). The mask is another performing object that has been historically present in theatre. In the words of Yuyachkani’s mask maker Gustavo Boada, the mask is “not only an object, but a process of

through which actor and matter come together to make an image” (170). Puppets, masks, and other objects on stage remind us of the symbiotic element between humans and matter. We become in the interaction of both human and nonhuman objects. Moreover, artists can find alternative discourses or ways to communicate through objects on stage. In the case of Yuyachkani, this means erecting images as it simultaneously revalues Andean culture in modern Perú.

As already stated, we can place puppetry under the broader umbrella of *material performance* which assumes the potentiality of objects to create or be another interlocutor along with humans beyond their mimetic potential. Considering the creative power of objects on stage, numerous theatre groups in the region have attempted to either highlight the significance of the performing objects alongside human actors or to establish a poetics rooted explicitly in the performing object. The latter is the case of theatre groups dedicated to a theatre of objects. To Allende, in the twentieth century, “the 1950s witnessed the most significant theatre puppetry artists in Latin America,” having Roberto Lago co-fund the Teatro Guinol in Mexico, whose practice served as a school to other artists in neighboring countries (“Latin America”). The end of the 1970s meant a worldwide turn in art in what is now known as the performative turn. Objects gained centrality as new theatrical developments in France arose more interested “en animar objetos en escena que en la puesta en escena de un repertorio preexistente” as Shaday Larios affirms (“Objetos vivos” 21). Here, objects “comenzaron a ser vistos como parejas de actores, vectores en sí mismo de historias” (“Objetos vivos” 21). The sparks of this turn eventually reached Latin America, where new groups emerged. That is the case of the renowned Argentinian group of object theatre, El Periférico de Objetos, who took a defining stance in the region when they established themselves in 1989, formulating a “dramaturgia posible para el

Teatro de Objetos y Títeres, ligada a la imagen, a la foto fija, más cercana al guión cinematográfico, al cómic pero, fundamentalmente, a la simple asociación poética de los objetos entre sí” (Alvarado 10). The group’s origin stems from a rather important institution for puppetry in Argentina and Latin America. The Grupo de Titiriteros del Teatro Municipal General San Martín, founded by Kive Staiff and Ariel Bufano in 1977, had such an impact on the Argentinian stage that it became “the first to receive the state’s technical and financial support for its research and creations” (Medina). For decades, the group has constantly been producing new works and forming new puppeteers, a project that Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires currently sustains.

The artistic instances where the object takes centerstage are endless in the region, covering performances at the border of Mexico/USA through Patagonia, South America. However, perhaps, the most influential and extensive exploration of the object on the Latin American stage has been at the hands of documentary theatre for most of the twentieth and beginning of the twentieth-first century. This has been a movement that has influenced most countries in the continent, with preponderance in the theatre hubs of Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. Documentary theatre embraces object and their potentiality in performance as true actants. To Paola Hernández, in Latin American documentary theatre, “artists and playwrights borrow the object from the past to bring new understanding to present life and expose the ways in which testimony, reenactments, and embodiment onstage transform the archive, which in turn might lead to new rules or conditions in the present” (4). Objects carry weight on stage, yielding a plethora of processes depending on the perspective from where we observe them. Objects affect humans on stage, as they also do outside the theatre. After all, we can situate ourselves in a constant network where humans are always affected by and interrelated with objects. By

focusing on the specific angle of puppetry as material performance, I explore objects on stage from a divergent angle, that of a *thing* before it becomes something to the audience. In other words, my approach to the object attempts to remain in dialogue with a “*thingness*” of matter rather than “its sensible (formed and perceived) *objecthood*” (Bill 5).

Silencio Blanco: A Pursuit of the Miner’s Experience

Entre morir de hambre o morir aplastado por un derrumbe, era preferible lo último: tenía la ventaja de la rapidez.

—Baldomero Lillo, “El Chiflón del Diablo,” *Sub terra*

As a collective, the theatremakers of Silencio Blanco have made puppets the center of their performances. Established in 2010 by Santiago Tobar and Dominga Gutiérrez, the two actors trained at the Theatre School at the University of Chile, began their journey in puppetry out of an intellectual and personal curiosity while interacting and researching puppets outside of the academic programs they were part of (Gutiérrez, “Personal Interview” 00:10:15-40). Ever since their inception, the group has produced *De Papel* (2010), *Chiflón: El silencio del carbón* (2013), and *Pescador* (2017). Using close-controlled rod figures, they have managed to develop nonverbal performances that are captivating and have gained national and international recognition.⁴² The company’s name, Silencio Blanco, or ‘White Silence,’ is revealing since these two words evoke and condense the artistic drive and aesthetic grounds of the theatre group. On the one hand, *white* refers directly to the group’s peculiar white puppets made of recycled newspaper, masking tape, and chopsticks turned into rods. The puppets are approximately a foot tall, humanoid and androgynous faceless figures that, in their neutrality, evoke human bodies. On

⁴² They have participated in numerous international theatre festivals. Among them is the Santiago a Mil (Chile), Krokus Festival (Belgium), Charleville-Mézières World Puppets Festival (France), Brighton Festival and CASA Festival (UK), Odin Teatret (Denmark), and they toured the US as part of the Mid Atlantic Foundation’s Southern Exposure: Performing Arts of Latin America. More information on <https://silencioblanco.cl/en/company/>

the other hand, the word *silence* has two connotations: the nonverbal characteristic that is particular to their theatre and how the characters they embody pertain to those who have been historically subjugated and silenced in Chile's history. In displacing the verbal sign, Silencio Blanco subscribes to a multi-sensorial theatre where kinetics, the sonic, as well as the visual collectively unfold to produce a story.⁴³

The following analysis explains an innovative way of doing puppetry in the present, presenting paper and sound as potentialities for narrating not only as elements with symbolic power but as agential elements that present themselves with the ability to transmit affects as much as a human body does. Together, the material presence of puppets, the sound recordings of the mine and Lota, and the miniature state of the setting present a play that challenges the audience to experience theatre otherwise and to realize how much we can be affected by nonhuman agents on stage. Parallely, as the group decenters from the human presence on stage, Silencio Blanco does theatre otherwise. *Chiflón* presents a decolonial gesture attuning to a delinking from Western epistemologies and modes of communication (dialogue) to uplift the dispossessed community of Lota in the present.

In 2013, Silencio Blanco premiered its show *Chiflón: el silencio del carbón*, a puppet performance that elevates the silenced story of the miner community of Lota in South-Central, Chile. In a 50-minute nonverbal show, the audience observes the extractive acts of exploiting natural resources and bodies that are reduced to arduous labor under restrictive capitalist dynamics. Operating these hand-made rod puppets, *Chiflón* tells the story of a miner—that I call the man—and his mother in the town of Lota and their interactions with their female neighbor and a foreman. Via puppets, gestures, and sound scores, the play narrates a detailed story of

⁴³ I base my prescription of the performance on the staging I saw at Edlis Neeson Theatre in the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago on January 21, 2017.

suffering, resilience, silence, expectation, and death. While watching the play at the Edlis Neeson Theatre in Chicago, I witnessed a performance that began *in medias res*, with the tragic and sudden death of the man in a mine accident. From this initial catastrophic scene, I was submerged into a flashback—a detailed portrayal of the man’s vulnerable life as a miner, explaining how he arrived at this tragic destiny. This flashback unfolded in an episodic manner. Upon the initial scene of the accident, I observed moments of the man’s modest life between the mine and the town above in dimmed setting. First, I saw the foreman overseeing the mine and proposing the man work at a dangerous shaft; an offer the man could not refuse as it was the only option available. Through a captivating and synchronized dynamic where the actors moved the set, the man descended the mine shaft through long stairs leading to the subsoil. Evoking a subterranean space, we saw the miner working. He was isolated working in silence and precarious conditions. A shift of space followed this scene to the grounds above the mine, the town of Lota, where the audience observed the precarity of the miner’s family. *Silencio Blanco* presented a woman, the man’s mother, who was anxiously waiting at home for her son to return.⁴⁴ She interacted with a neighbor while completing chores such as cooking and doing laundry, shedding light on what women experienced waiting for their relatives to return every afternoon from work. In a circular dynamic, the plot returned to the moment of the accident, but this time, the narrative line focused on the mother. The play concluded with the mine’s siren announcing the accident. Rattled by the alarm, the mother quickly descended the shaft to find the man’s lifeless body. Upon recovering his body, we spectated a lasting affectionate moment: the woman taking care of the body, covering it with a cloth, and sobbing in sadness as the stage went

⁴⁴ My assumption of the relationship between these two characters is based on the fact that *Silencio Blanco* partly based the plot on a well-known short story by Chilean storyteller Baldomero Lillo, *El chiflón del diablo*, which I later describe.

dark. These episodes expose that which is distressful in the miner's experience: the uncertainty of not having enough resources to survive and feeling trapped in a labor dynamic that inevitably culminates in death.

Inspired by the Bunraku style, a Japanese form of manipulation, the five puppeteers, all dressed in black, alternate controlling each puppet's limbs so that the spectator can constantly focus their attention on the puppets. It is essential to mention that they are only inspired by the Japanese style, meaning they do not replicate it. As Tobar explains "[de esa tradición] sacamos la técnica de los tres manipuladores que están atrás... en Silencio Blanco hacemos una mixtura, no somos tan ortodoxos... aquí no hay una jerarquía" (Gutiérrez, "Personal Interview" 00:22:00-31). The precise manipulation of each limb through rods gives the appearance of actual human movements in the puppets, enhancing the credibility of embodied miners. The puppets are all foot-tall figures made of recycled newspaper and masking tape. The end product is anthropomorphic figures that at first sight appear to be made of limestone. These are white to gray figures, with a rough, stained, and worn finish, denoting the exploited bodies of those who work the coal mines. The miniature scale of the set corresponds to the figures' tallness. The small-scale set urges the audience to stoop down in their seats, adjusting to the miniature performance. The set is a simple one, consisting mainly of wood slacks used to build small-scale mine tunnels, staircases, tables, chairs, and the indoors of a modest miner's house. Besides recycled wood, coal, and paper, other diminutive materials pertain to props. While the detailed setting is realistic, capturing both the mine spaces and the humble towns where the miners lived, what conveys the performance as an accurate depiction of a miner's life is the gestural work by the puppeteers into the puppets. This is central because, through movements, *Silencio Blanco* communicates and, most importantly, transmits affects. Original sound scores also complement

gesticulation, making the aural central to how the performance transmits affects, which I will later discuss.

Chiflón has significant social weight if we consider the community the group is approaching. In the 19th century, Chile was identified as a significant producer of coal. Extractive sectors were located from North to South, with major extractive sites at the Arauco Basin in South-Central, Chile. Nevertheless, the decline in the demand for coal in Chile—which began to be replaced by crude oil and hydroelectricity in the 1950s—had important socioeconomic repercussions on the nation and towns that relied entirely on coal monoculture. Lota is one of the communities affected. Ever since the coal fields began closing in the 1990s, entire communities were forced to reinvent themselves without significant and sustained support from the state to help them transition to alternative economic models of production. If in the past miners suffered under extreme labor conditions and a lack of resources, the ex-mining town now suffers from the nation’s neglect. The state has left the community without social mobility and a reliable economic system to sustain them because of a failed plan of reconversion.⁴⁵ The physical and emotional human suffering is the effect of an extractive view exerted by the state and foreign investors. Here, we have an example of how the colonial project in the Global South “render territories and peoples extractible... through a matrix of symbolic, physical, and representational violence” (Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone* 5). The play illustrates the physical violence enacted by the extractive view and how this enters a “reorganization of territories [and] populations... into extractible data.” *Chiflón* attempts to elucidate the emotional toll this

⁴⁵ Considering the causes for the failed transition of former miners to new job sectors, Juan Carlos Rodríguez Torrent and Patricio Medina Hernández argue that “el trabajo en las minas fue precario y permaneció precario. Siempre primó la destreza física más que el trabajo técnico. Por ello, puede entenderse que el proceso de reinserción laboral después de la minería haya sido en extremo difícil, ya que no hay muchos márgenes para la reinversión cuando lo físico prima por sobre otras habilidades; son escasos los éxitos de trabajadores que lograron un proceso de incorporación a otras actividades” (164).

inequitable extractive dynamic has on the community. The theatre group evokes the past and inspires themselves in a short story, as I show next, to vindicate the present of a community that has been historically underprivileged.

From Text to the Stage

To begin my analysis, I focus on the foundation of the group's creative process. While this is not a staging of a preconceived dramaturgical text, the artists' performance was inspired by a canonical literary Chilean short story. Baldomero Lillo published the short story "El Chiflón del diablo" (The Devil's Blast) as part of his compilation *Sub terra* (1904).⁴⁶ Silencio Blanco's *Chiflón* partially follows the plot of the short story, focusing on the effects of nineteenth-century extractivism. Namely, the exploitation of bodies and natural resources at the hands of the entrepreneurial Causiño family and British business people in a city that became a hub of the coal industry of Chile. As historian Leonardo Mazzei de Grazia states, "las condiciones de vida en Lota, a través de innumerables testimonios, has sido mostradas como paradigmas de la pobreza de los sectores populares. Allí la vida transcurría en medio de la miseria, la insalubridad, la promiscuidad y el hacinamiento (160)."⁴⁷ Theresa A. Warner has identified Lillo's short story and its exhibiting of the body as that which receives and exposes the effects of the extractive dynamics. In the play, one can perceive "el cuerpo nacional [como] violado, explotado, y abusado por intereses extranjeros... Lillo utiliza el cuerpo como espacio para exponer todos los males impuestos por este sistema que afecta tanto la vida personal como nacional, demostrando cómo la nación chilena está cediendo su soberanía a los ingleses a gran

⁴⁶ Literary criticism considers Lillo as the Chilean father of social realism—a 19th-century literary current in Latin America.

⁴⁷ For a historical account of foreign annexation with interest in Latin America's minerals, including Chile, see Eduardo Galeano's "The Invisible Sources of Power." For critical perspectives of large-scale mineral mining in Latin America, see Alimonda. For a comprehensive history of mining in Latin America from the colonial era to the present, see Kendall Brow.

costo humano” (183). In the fragility of the puppets and the exploited characters they embody, the play sustains the idea of the body as a repository for the damaging effects of extractivism. Nonetheless, considering it is a text, the short story contains nuances essential to written narration, such as a description of characters, dialogue, and an omnipresent narrator. As I explain below, all these nuances are absent and perhaps reinterpreted in the play.

Rather than reducing my analysis to a comparison between the short story and the play, I find the transition from the text to the stage to be key to the work by Silencio Blanco. I believe the play to be a completely different artistic work than the short story. *Chiflón* is not a short story made into theatre. Instead, it stands on its own, only inspired and stimulated by the short story. The play is a performance text made of movement and sound that distances itself from the written work, highlighting on stage a complex sign system that escapes and exceeds the written word. The performance suppresses the verbal sign, creating an independent work based on theatre’s polysemic nature involving live bodies—both human and objects—and the *mise-en-scène* or the materiality of all the elements that constitute the theatrical event.

Gabriel Fernández Chapo has identified a theatrical trend around contemporary theatre where classical texts and new best sellers are reinterpreted on stage. While he contextualizes this trend in Argentinian theatre, I perceive a similar process occurring in *Chiflón*. He calls the transit between literature and theatre a *transposición* or transposition. To the theatremaker:

los grandes espectáculos teatrales que toman como fuente obras literarias, son aquellos que no pretenden adecuar y/o modificar el estatuto literario al teatral, sino que logran promover un nuevo sistema poético-creativo en el que la fuente literaria puede emerger dentro del orden representacional, volver a nacer, desde una nueva singularidad y autonomía estética. (19)

Silencio Blanco falls in this dynamic, achieving a new aesthetic-creative system through a specific method. Lillos’ text transpires into the performance as its framework—a carcass—yet

the play remains autonomous in its nature as an ephemeral event with visual and sonic nuances that escape the text. In other words, *Chiflón* is coded under a different system, where specific signs regarding the theatrical outdo the literary text. Hence, not only the absence of the verbal code makes *Chiflón* an independent artistic work, but also the materiality of the puppet, the ways these move and interact with each other, and the tempo and sonic aspect of every scene. Proof of the play's independence is the reception by an international audience. When referring to the plot, Marissa Fenley's states:

The story primarily unfolded between two characters, a man and a woman; yet, the identity and relationship between the puppets was kept ambiguous. This ambiguity was preserved, in part, because the puppets only spoke through carefully crafted gestures, developed from Silencio Blanco's time spent among the miners of Lota, Chile. (408)

While the playbill mentions Lillo's influence in the play, there is no way for the critic to have known the woman's character pertains to the mother since the relationship established on stage is simply of a female figure caring for a male figure. Thus, it is worth discussing the transition from the literary text to the performance text as this translates to the appearance of a new artwork. However, these questions exceed this project.

Besides its written source of inspiration, a specific creative process adds complexity to the performance. This corresponds to the particular process employed by Silencio Blanco to approach the community of former miners and their families in Lota—the descendants of the community that inspired Lillo's text.

The Affective Repertoire of a Neglected Community

Crucial to Silencio Blanco's work stands a method based on fieldwork they have been developing ever since they established themselves as a group. The puppets in *Chiflón* are imbued with life by the extensive fieldwork at the hands of the puppeteers. That is, the physical score—the rehearsed way the puppets walk, how they observe, cough, breath, sigh, sound, etc.—comes

to being after the group's journey that took them to Lota in 2011 to meet and interact with the community of former miners. In this initial encounter, they experienced first-hand how an entire ex-mining town "moves" and how they relate communally, such as their everyday relationships, people's body language, the way they talk and communicated their experience to the artists, etc. According to Santiago Tobar—the group's artistic director—Silencio Blanco gradually arrived at this methodology after traveling for three months in Bolivia and Perú with a street puppet performance when they first started as a group. Here, they learned the value of direct contact with people when researching a new work. During that time, they realized the importance to be detailed and to be aware of "no solo... lo que te contaban sino en cómo contaban" (Gutiérrez, "Personal Interview" 00:12:46-50).

Through an empirical approach, the group gained experience in creating what I name an *affective repertoire*, which is generated based on a (re)collection of gestures, expressions of emotions, and body proportions, among other somatic and sensuous characteristics of those whom they encountered in their initial visit to Lota. They obtained this *repertoire* through experience, and reinforced it with an ethnographic archive of video recordings and more than 1,200 portraits of *lotinos*—or people from Lota, and internalized it through memory. As Tobar explains, this gives ground to build "la textura emocional" of the puppets (01:40:38-45). Besides this archive of videos and photographs, the sensuous elements contained in the interactions they had with people allowed the group to craft plausible puppet figures that, in their materiality and movement on stage, reenact the fragile bodies of the miners and their families. This is significant since, as Diana Taylor asserts, a dimension of embodied behavior resists being archived as it is "ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (*The Archive* 20). This affective repertoire elucidates what Theresa Brennan understands as the transmission of affects: "The... affects of one person,

and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another” (3). Silencio Blanco’s fieldwork, paired with the reenactment of the repertoire in the performance, makes a case for the transmission of affects. This diffusion begins in Lota and their people, who transmit affects to the actors. The actors—in turn—transmit this to the puppet. Eventually, both puppeteer and puppet transmit these affects to the audience in their interaction on stage. In this dynamic, theatre stands as an enunciator of how this transmission unfolds, considering that “all affects... are material, physiological things” (Brennan 6). If affects are physiological, I add, they are certainly most crystallized in theatre. Through their affective repertoire, Silencio Blanco achieves a level of sensitivity that makes their puppet performance intelligible and credible. This complex interplay of kinetic, mnemonic, and material presence on stage makes *Chiflón* a thoughtful work, drawing in spectators and, most importantly, the Lota community.

Francis Penny reflects on the act of providing an ‘imagined life’ to inert objects and states:

the perceived investment of the inanimate with *anima* or spirit is effected through the convincing transference of a performer’s energy to one or more of these figures and forms, endowing them with motion (normally) . . . and presence (always). The transference is effected through the natural or manufactured ‘controls’ of the puppet, combined with specific performing skills, innate or acquired, directly and immediately applied (in ‘real-time’) to the thing animated. (5)

However, what comprises that act of transfer that Penny references? How is an affective repertoire transmitted from a community to a puppeteer, passing through a puppet, and finally, to the spectator?

In trying to convey a grammar to explain the movement of puppets on stage and how puppeteers achieve coordination, rhythm, and convey meaning on stage, puppeteer and scholar Alissa Mello coined the term *trans-embodiment*, which involves a “transfer of direct and indirect embodied techniques among actor-puppeteer, puppets, and materials” (49). Through both

techniques, a puppet achieves credibility on stage as an object with anima or life-like characteristics. A direct technique “involves the transfer of body language in the form of gesture or physical action between live performers and puppets or material performing objects in a matter that is intended to be read and convey meaning” (Mello 51). In contrast, indirect embodiment techniques include “the transfers of memories, emotions, or thought vectors from a live performer to a puppet or material performing object” (Mello 54). Considering both, I perceive direct and indirect embodied techniques in *Chiflón*, but it is the indirect techniques that speak to the transfer of affects that involve objects.

In terms of direct or visible embodied techniques, the group constructed a series of actions for each of the four puppets present on stage that, as Mello would state, “convey a narrative, an emotion or thought” (51). The miner and the two female characters have a delicate demeanor when alluding to life above the mine. The miner moves gently, expressing his weariness in being underground under demanding and precarious labor conditions. The women move and perform daily chores slowly and delicately, but also nervously as they await, with a certain fragility that touches the audience. Conversely, the foreman is portrayed with a rough demeanor, taking firm steps as he walks, highlighting his impatience as he oversees the mine. As Mello states, all these gestures and physical actions can “communicate... age, class, weight, gender, economic and social status” (51). Thus, the movements that characterized each puppet not only can denote the specific emotional state of tired bodies and a person in a position of power, but also a power structure under strict dynamics of exploitation during the mine’s active years. As Fenley notices, “much like a Brechtian *gestus*, the gestures of *Chiflón* condensed the violent effects of the global economy within the lived experience and habituated practices of the miners” (408). Walking, seating, kneeling, chipping, kneading, thumping, and even sighing, are all actions that speak of

social and economic statuses (miners/exploited and foreman/exploiter) and the characters' genders, physical capacities, and limitations, as well as their states of mind as subjugated characters.

Nonetheless, what interests me the most is how *Silencio Blanco* arrived at the physical score of the play through their direct experience with the community of Lota. It was their interaction with this community in which they absorbed an affective dimension of the town. This same affective corpus is later transferred via the puppet and reenacted on stage. In arriving, they witnessed the community's state of social and economic abandonment due to the mine's closure in 1997. After visiting the community and recording their experiences via conversation, photographs, and video and sound recordings, the artists committed to recuperating Lota's idiosyncrasy in what I see as a gesture of respect, generosity, and sympathy towards their social state of neglect. Gutiérrez affirms that one *Silencio Blanco*'s premises is to recover "sonidos que están constantemente en nuestro cotidiano, sensaciones y emociones que la mayoría de las personas han tenido en su vida... y que tendemos como a no observar ("Personal Interview" 00:54:40-59). Aware of the same, Tobar emphasizes the group's drive to conduct research rather than speculating about the life of those they depict (01:21:50-59). Thus, it was the group's tangible and first-hand experience to wander around Lota—observing the people and interviewing former miners and their families—that directed them to observe and hear the city and its people to capture and internalize an affective repertoire.

Gutiérrez confessed to me that their original intention with their first trip to Lota was to determine the set design. Nonetheless, upon arrival and interacting with the people, they realized the richness of what they were about to create resided in the people themselves, their humanity, and what they were transmitting (00:15:40-56). What caught their attention was "cómo un gesto

físico puede narrar tan profundamente la historia social y emocional de un personaje” (00:16:07-19). She adds that they observed these gestures in “las mujeres de la feria, [o] en los hombres que caminaban” (00:16:22-29). In sum, she concludes, they spent the first eight days in the town, observing “la emocionalidad de los cuerpos de las personas, los tiempos, los movimientos, los gestos físicos” (00:16:55-00:17:00). It is clear the group’s interaction with the people in Lota significantly affected how the performing puppet emerges on stage. Now, considering this creative process is mnemonic, Mello reminds us that indirect embodiment techniques are “used to create physical vocabularies, emotional through-lines or substrata relating to a character’s journey, or... as elements of manufacturing a puppet or material performer’s anima – meaning its soul or vital force – or aliveness” (54). Memory, here, is central to understanding how the actors built this affective repertoire.

What Silencio Blanco experienced in Lota was powerful to the extent that it determined the physical score of the play and how they manufactured the puppets. In other words, the *affective repertoire*, which relies significantly on their memory, forms the basis of how the puppets would eventually move and how they are manufactured. In my interview with them, Gutiérrez explained that “La construcción de la marioneta esta empapada de la emocionalidad que nosotros íbamos observando en las personas de Lota... Nos inspiramos en ellos como para retratar a la mujer que espera, al personaje de la mujer universal de caderas anchas” (:17:30-46). The group imprinted the physical characteristics of those they could observe in the irregularity of the puppets’ bodies. The dilapidated and unfinished quality of all bodies: the man, the mother, and the neighbor are reminiscent of those delicate, overworked human bodies of ex-miners, their wives, and the families they encountered. Even though these are all white puppets, their whiteness is not pristine. They all have a rugged finish, stained, just like those human bodies that

at one point were living and breathing coal in Lota. However, the coordinated movement of the puppets is what conveys affects. The delicate way each limb is treated triggers an affective register that cannot be conveyed in words. It is in the movement of the puppets—how each limb delicately moves—where Lota’s affects are carried to the stage. It is this attention by the group to be plausible and sincere with the physical score of those they embody that was impactful to the Lota community once they saw the play.

***¡Somos nosotros!* —The Vicarious Power of Puppetry**

While the *repertoire* explained above develops as an attempt to be authentic to Lota’s that—up until 1997—depended on the mining industry, what is also remarkable is the community’s reception to the play in November 2015 when they saw themselves reflected on stage as part of the 6th Theatre Festival of Bio-Bio. Following four years after *Silencio Blanco*’s initial visit, they delivered their work back to the community in what I perceive as the conclusion of the group’s creative process. In that instance, the work stood as a mnemonic mirror, bringing back an experience shared collectively by many of those who attended the performance.

Interestingly, *Silencio Blanco* and its members are not the first to have approached the underprivileged community of Lota after the mine closed. In 2015, Isidora Aguirre’s play *¡Subiendo... Ultimo hombre!* was published posthumously, an allegory the dramaturg wrote in 2003-04 capturing the present reality of the former mining town. Just like *Silencio Blanco*, Aguirre traveled to Lota and met the community which resulted in a play that apprehends, as Alicia del Campos states, “una brutal metáfora de las consecuencias del modelo neoliberal... [donde] la pobreza, la miseria y la lucha social devienen... un patético espectáculo de hombres despojados de toda dignidad” (25). In encountering the former mining community, Aguirre reflects:

El cierre de la mina de carbón en Lota fue dramático, particularmente por lo inesperado: les dijeron a los que llegaban al segundo turno: “No bajen, porque se cerró la mina”, lo que provocó gran desazón y hasta hubo suicidios. Intentaron una *toma* de los piques, hubo marchas en Concepción y a Santiago de mineros y sus mujeres, y numerosas *tomas* de carretera.⁴⁸ Hasta hoy, años después, siguen las protestas, sigue la cesantía. Y no es sólo ese el problema: fue un corte brusco en una larga tradición minera. Amaban su oficio y era su orgullo ser mineros del carbón. Sienten —quizá sin tener cabal conciencia— una pérdida de identidad... [Luego] se inició la llamada “reconversión”, esto es, capacitarlos para otros oficios y entregarles una suma de dinero. Pero no tuvo el efecto que se esperaba: los ex mineros no supieron cómo manejar ese dinero, menos aún les agradó convertirse en mozos o peluqueros. Y al ser Lota una ciudad pequeña, tampoco había cupos para los nuevos profesionales. (128)⁴⁹

There are two distinct issues that Aguirre identifies: a loss of identity by the sudden closure of Lota’s main source of income and a failed transitional plan by the state to assist miners and their families. Once the mine closed, Lota became a town of disregarded Chileans without proper care and with a fate that remains uncertain. Considering what occurred in this city after 1997, the anthropological work of Sonia E. Reyes Herrera, Juan Carlos Rodríguez Torrent, and Patricio Medina Hernández concludes with a prescriptive declaration about what should be the proper approach and engage supportively with the community:

Los distintos eventos estructurantes del presente, acumulativos, residuales y traumáticos en la vida de lotinos y lotinas, requieren de lugares de integración para biografías que necesitan reescribirse y encontrar nuevos sentidos para una vida y cultura del carbón devaluadas social, familiar y generacionalmente, caracterizadas por la nostalgia más que por un sentido de realidad. El sufrimiento impone una urgencia: los hombres despojados de su vida cotidiana deben mitigar el dolor a través de mecanismos de comprensión, de apoyo y de solidaridad... Hoy, la pregunta es saber cómo es posible activar y restablecer el valor de la existencia. (126)

The matrix of coloniality is tenacious as it not only harm generations by inducing poor living conditions in an environment of unregulated extraction, but it also continues to affect the bodies

⁴⁸ A *toma* is the act of occupying empty land or property—often by impoverished people—as a form of protest or dissent.

⁴⁹ I bring Aguirre and her work as a dramaturg to help to cover the social context of Lota after the mine closed in 1997. My intention is not to perform a comparison between the two plays since Aguirre’s text distances from puppetry.

of the last generation that saw the closure of that extractive practice and was left without any socioeconomic support. Perhaps, in considering this anthropological assumption is that we can begin understanding what Silencio Blanco accomplishes with *Chiflón*. A key idea shared in this study is the urgency for a place to forge integration. The researchers call for the need to mitigate the current stagnated status of the former mining community which continues to suffer now as a disregarded community. What are the places of integration that can be generated and who should be responsible for them? Reflecting on how Lota deals with its current present as it attempts to make peace with its past, I understand *Chiflón* as a work of art that arrives to fill a void of recognition, identification, and belonging. Moreover, in doing so, the group presents a decolonial attempt to show the very structure of coloniality as that which needs to be questioned. As a decolonial move, the colonized—or the generations of miners—are not the “problem, but... a source for inquiry into problems created by modernity,” as Nelson Maldonado-Torres asserts (“The Decolonial Turn” 112). In the end, this decolonial move shatters the pattern of social injustice so this disregarded community can see themselves as worthy of being represented; seen.

Upon Silencio Blanco’s arrival to Lota in 2011, Tobar recalls the reaction of *lotinos* while they were photographing the community:

Recuerdo cuando empezamos esto de la fotografía una de las personas nos dijo: ¿qué es lo que van hacer?, ya que viene gente joven a hacer investigaciones de Lota y nosotros les abrimos nuestros corazones, les damos toda la información posible y después cuando salen los comunicados en la prensa o en alguna revista se habla de que Lota es una ciudad analfabeta... una ciudad alcohólica, que es una ciudad donde existe mucha violencia, mucha violación y finalmente tú dices, ¿dónde está el tesoro de Lota? Nosotros somos otra cosa, no somos eso. (Gutiérrez, “Personal Interview” 1:40:55-1:42:25)

What allowed Silencio Blanco to be welcomed by the community after much hesitation, Tobar clarified, was acknowledging the community’s concern with the group’s intervention. This drove Silencio Blanco to reveal straightforwardly their intention of telling their story rather than using

them as mere objects of analysis for nonrepresentational research (1:50:50-1:51:20).

Consequently, I understand the play assisting and becoming a place for this community to recover and reunite with their traumatic past as they tackle the uncertainty of the present. *Chiflón* is the indispensable mechanism as recommended by the anthropologists Reyes Herrera et al.—a cultural device aiming to restore Lota’s existential value that has been damaged by generational trauma and an aimless direction in the present. A testament to my claim is the reaction of one of the former miners who attended the play’s premiere in Lota in 2015. Reacting to the play, Fernando “Pepe” Concha affirmed: “Para que recuerden la historia de nuestros antepasados, de nuestros abuelos, de nuestros padres, y de los que aún quedamos vivos todavía. Esta historia que se ve ahí es realmente auténtica... realmente auténtica. No hay nada que sea inventado” (Marta Gutiérrez, 00:14:32-59).⁵⁰

The miner’s response leads me to conclude that the performing puppet evokes more than a reality and an experience in the former miner, at the symbolic level, who immediately identifies the performance as being real and not fiction. But in the silence of the puppet and its movement, the object on stage can transmit affects that are then received by the audience, which includes the former miners. Reaching the boundary between the real and the fictional is achieved by this liminal characteristic of the object where the coordinated movement of the puppet is already transmitting a lived experience before it begins to denote a subject. In what Pepe Concha concludes to be a biographical account, what we have on stage are puppets standing vicariously for the town of Lota. It was *Silencio Blanco*’s collective effort to generate an affective repertoire

⁵⁰ The miner’s reaction reminds us of the power of theatre as a platform for those who are dispossessed and lacking other spaces to reflect on their reality. While the miner’s reaction here remains as catharsis, the same speaks to other forms of participatory theatre where the lines between the real and fiction are erased. Such is the case of Augusto Boal’s work and his poetics of the oppressed. Distant from Aristotelian and Brechtian poetics, Boal offers theatre as a tool for the oppressed (peasants, workers, villagers) where the spectator “assumes the protagonist role, changes the dramatic action, and tries out solutions, discusses plans for change—in short trains himself for real action” (22).

based on empirical research, memory, photographs, and video recordings, that lead to a performance where most *lotinos* saw themselves reflected upon. The miner's reaction also evidences how this artistic project works as a decolonial one. In recuperating his existential value by calling the production a "reality," the miner's reaction is a testimony of how the performance effectively responds to the problems imposed by modernity—the neglect at the hand of an irresponsible state (Maldonado-Torres, "The Decolonial Turn" 112).

Gutiérrez remembers this performance: "Al final toda la gente, niños, adultos, etc... dicen desde una... ingenuidad y muy, pero muy sorprendidos, 'están hablando de nosotros. ¡Somos nosotros! ¡Somos nosotros!'— como si ellos estuviesen viéndose en la televisión... Nunca se habían sentido protagonistas... y al verse ahí retratados fue muy emocionante para ellos y para nosotros... Hacerlos sentir protagonistas de una forma tan sencilla creo que lo vale todo" ("Personal Interview" 1:31:17-1:32:55). If what this community needs is to restore their value of existence, in this performance that restorative process translates to the experience of feeling worthy of one's story being staged and having a platform to dignify one's own untold experience. Considering Lota's reaction to the play, *Chiflón*—as a live, material, and thus tangible and affective experience surpasses the mere invention of fiction and proves to be key in uplifting process for those who have been historically downgraded. As a cultural device, *Chiflón* generates an alternative within the convivial spatiotemporality of the theatrical event where the former miners and their families feel respected and valued.

Interestingly, the reception is no less different in all the other stagings of the play outside of Lota. As part of an ongoing trend of Chilean theatrical projects that have succeeded internationally in the last two decades, *Chiflón* has traveled extensively in Latin America,

Europe, and the United States.⁵¹ Recalling the reception by multiple audiences in all the countries Silencio Blanco has visited, Gutiérrez evokes their experience at the Brighton Festival (England) and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago: “En los conversatorios nos decían... ‘esa es la historia de mi abuelo, que no era minero pero que era trabajador de esta otra cosa’... [Ellos] también sienten que están hablando de ellos” (“Personal Interview” 1:44:31-41). This reaction is a product of the intentions behind the neutral white puppet, declares Tobar. With the white puppet, figuratively, “te proponemos a ti ponerle el vestuario que tú quieras... si es una ropa tuya, de tu abuelo, de tu papá, de quien sea... que tú hagas tu propio cuento también” (2:00:40-56). This invitation signals that the play is not just a work inspired by and for a local community. Silencio Blanco’s aesthetic choice to manufacture neutral, white puppets and produce a nonverbal performance allows for the play to become a universal story that is perceived, processed, and reflected in the reality of multiple communities that have seen it. With this common characteristic in the reception of the production, one can also deduce the emergence of a spectatorship coalition, where the audiences identify themselves with its storyline of vindication regardless of their language and cultural background. But this universality of Silencio Blanco’s puppetry is not only due to its white puppets, it is the ‘thingness’ of the puppet—its vitality—that allows for all the different audiences to grasp the affect that these objects transmit. When the spectators sense the affect transmitted by the puppets, they turn that into a thought. That thought remains individual, and while it pertains to an interpretation, it has an origin in a common affect that was previously transmitted. In other words, as Brennan reminds us, “the linguistic and visual content, meaning the thoughts [we] attach to that affect, remain [our] own: they remain the product of the particular historical conjunction of words and

⁵¹ Other theatre companies and dramaturgs that have succeeded internationally are Manuela Infante, Guillermo Calderón, Teatro La María, and Teatro Cinema, among others.

experiences [we] represent” (7). When facing these puppets, the spectators are sensing, “deploying smell and hearing as well as open vision” (Brennan 19). Affects are transmitted in that process of sensing, right before they are codified to mean something to the spectator. As Brennan says, “feelings are sensations that have found a match in words” (19). Therefore, it is in the very transmission of the *affective repertoire* of *Silencio Blanco* that we also witness the vitality of the object—an exchange of energy before it becomes an actual symbol.

The reception of the play is central to Tobar’s goals: “Yo sé lo que quiero generar en el público, quiero fragilizarlo, quiero humanizarlo, ese es el objetivo de la dirección siempre... La lucha no está en lo estético, sino en cómo humanizar, cómo fragilizar, cómo ver, cómo levantarlo, cómo hacerlo que se mueva” (Gutiérrez, “Personal Interview” 1:58:30-1:59:13). This is key to understand not only the objective of the group but also to realize what unfolds the moment the puppets begin to perform. There is a clear desire in Tobar to create an experience of humbleness in the spectator. That is, the performing object brings down the human from their pedestal of superiority as the one who is able to control an object. The white puppets, in their ontological ambiguity, as an object with life-like characteristics, tell a credible story that touches adults and children alike.

Es muy bonito ver cómo la gente se emociona... ver como algo tan sencillo... puede emocionar tanto... Muchas veces [una audiencia más viril] dicen confesándose: ‘no puedo creer que eso me haya hecho llorar’... ‘No puedo creer que esa miniatura, ese objeto sin vida haya logrado emocionarme’ (Gutiérrez, “Personal Interview” 2:04:15-2:05:10).

Cases of audience members being moved to tears are very frequent with *Chiflón*, which has led Tobar to acknowledge the responsibility they have as artists with not only the story they are telling, but also the reaction they are causing in the audience. Tobar’s reflections explain a peculiar event that occurs at the end of every staging of *Chiflón*. Once the play has ended, Tobar

typically descends from the control room to invite the audience members to the stage. Full house lights do not signal spectators that it is time to begin exiting the auditorium. Instead, it indicates an invitation to do a reflective work while still at the theatre. In my experience at the Edlis Neeson Theater at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Tobar invited us all to the stage. Most spectators took on the stage and got close to the puppets as they were still being operated by the puppeteers. These were very intimate encounters, where puppets often touched the spectators, acknowledging their hands with tender gestures. The puppets also raised their faceless heads and ‘looked’ at them—a very nurturing and humble act to witness as both object and spectator gazed reciprocally. With this unusual invitation to the stage, Tobar reflects: “[Yo les digo,] materialicen el sueño que acaban de vivir... hagan efectiva la imagen que a ustedes se les pasó por su cabeza [durante la obra]. Ahora vayan, toquen la marioneta, manipúlenla, conversen con quien está detrás si quieren por si tienen alguna pregunta” (Gutiérrez 2:01:47-2:02:00). This invitation is significant since the audience physically break the fourth wall as they enter the stage. Even though the play had ended, the actors remained on stage manipulating the puppets which, in a certain way, was a continuation of the fiction. Gutiérrez attempts to explain what she has perceived in the audience interacting with the puppet that embodies the mother: “[Cuando yo les tomo las manos a las personas con la marioneta hay gente que se emociona muchísimo como [si un anciano], con toda la historia que tiene la madre, les estuviese tomando la mano” (2:08:48-2:09:01). The audience reactions can be diverse according to each spectator, Gutiérrez shares:

Hay [quienes] se quedan más con esa relación mística de... sé que no es de verdad, pero igual me está mirando. Hay algo que está sucediendo que no tiene mucha explicación, siento algo a través de ella pero no es ella, es ‘eso’ [un objeto].... Esa cosa medio inexplicable de este fenómeno teatral es muy bello, porque queda muy expuesto. (2:09:25-2:09-53).

In understanding the core of puppet performance, John Bell remembers that “the essence of puppet, mask and object performance... is not mastery of the material world but a constant negotiation back and forth with it” (50). Thus, when the audience experiences the performing puppet, what unfolds is a mediation of energies where spectators must be willing to give in and be ‘manipulated’ by an object. This life-like condition of the object creates an uncanny feeling that appears from the ambiguity of the moving puppet. In trying to understand the ambiguity that a performing puppet can create or that ‘subjectness’ that spectators can perceive, puppet practitioner and researcher Eric Bass explains that “what is physical for the performer, whether actor or puppet, triggers emotional and psychological states for the audience,” and I agree (59). In the case of *Silencio Blanco*, the haptic engagement between actors and puppets radiates affects on the audience. The transmission of affect—that occurs in the audience’s act of sensing—is the step prior to imagining a character, a subject. It is in that act of transmission where I situate the ontological oscillation of the puppet, the instance of a thing before it becomes a symbol with meaning to the spectator. This ontological oscillation which stands simultaneous to the affective transmission is the becoming of a puppet.

Researcher and theatre director Paul Piris would agree since he asserts a puppet is not “perceived” as a human being “but imagined as such” (40). He claims a triad, or an *internal triangulation* is how the audience creates subjectness in the puppet. This is the result of 1) its physical presence on stage, 2) “the quality of the manipulation by the puppeteer,” and 3) “the audience imagination” (Piris 40). This triad can help us understand what occurs with *Silencio Blanco*’s performance. The detailed, realistic, and credible characteristics that are kinetically transferred to the puppets allow the audience to imagine a human in the object. In other words,

the performing puppet transmits affects, which in turn lead to a thought. Thus, the interpretation of the moving object rests within the process of imagination.

Sound in the Vibratorium

How humans imagine puppets' subjectness also has political implications. This exchange between humans and the material world, or what Bells call "negotiation," is political. It forces the audience to experience and situate themselves outside of an ontological superiority as beings who can control the material world that surrounds them. As in the case of *Silencio Blanco*, puppetry can perceptually dislocate the audience, preventing their passivity as spectators.

A theatrical performance that favors silence and eliminates the verbal sign is also a critical and political standpoint considering what theatre practitioner-researcher George Home-Cook asserts: "We tend to consider theatricality in terms of what we see, as opposed to what we hear" (10). *Silencio Blanco* instructs the audience not only to see but to hear as a way to follow and assimilate a story. The process of being affected and eventually engaging in meaning-making exceeds the text. The absence of utterances is not a disadvantage but a reminder of the fact that in theatre, there are alternative ways to narrate and thus, other possibilities to communicate outside the physical space of the theatre. Looking away from dependability and devotion to the text, Tobar explains that avoiding it is to search for alternative methods to communicate and give "una intención narrativa al sonido del silencio" (1:10:50-1:10:54). Hence, the verbal silence speaks not only to an aesthetic choice but also denotes a silenced and often isolated type of labor—that of the miner. This verbal silence also refers to the excluded communities in a post-coal era, silenced and purposeless in neoliberal Chile.

Home-Cook also reminds us that listening in theatre is an act. It is "not only something we do but is inherently theatrical. As a specialized mode of attention, listening both manipulates and

is manipulated by the phenomenon of sound” (Home-Cook 9). Therefore, the sonic universe in *Chiflón*—the steps, gasping, coughing, and sighs of the puppets, the birds chirping above the mine, the fire burning in the kitchen of the house, the miners chipping stones, among other reverberations—provide a storyline as they complement what is visually occurring on stage. Thinking of the sonic turn in performance studies emerging in the 2010s, Patrice Pavis makes a case for the reciprocity between image and sound. Pavis argues that “we experience the performance: by seeing it, hearing it, and embodying it, without always being able to distinguish between these perceptions. Thus, we must consider... the seeing ear, which discovers the visible and invisible worlds that sound endlessly creates and suggests” (xiii). So, when the spectator listens to the noises of Lota in *Chiflón* as they simultaneously see the moving object, they are attending a holistic and synesthetic experience of embodying the mine and the town of Lota, an “intersensorial process of attending” (Home-Cook 10). However, I would further argue that sound plays a major role in the *Vibratorium*. Sound is vibrations, as Nina Sun Eidsheim states. It is also a way to transmit affects if we understand it as vibration. Sound, according to Sun Eidsheim, can be understood as a “phenomenon [of] vibration... the energy in a body’s mass and its transmission, transduction, and transformation through different materials” before it begins to be named or codified (16-17). Before sound turns into music, it is affective vibrational transmission. At this level, and just as I explained about the object, the vibration of Lota on stage candidly transmits the affects of the town. Once unleashed in the auditorium, these are then sensed by the audience. Water dripping as it filters through rocks, the air running through the shafts, the vibration of metal tools, a burning fire in the kitchen, etc. are also facilitating the transmission of affects before denoting a specific sound to the audience. This is precisely how a

nonverbal performance relies on the vibrational, or the affective power of objects and sound to vindicate the life of the former mining community.

Transmitting affects in a nonverbal performance also resonates with the concept of decolonial gestures. I see Tobar's reluctance to engage with the linguistic sign as a decolonial move if we consider that at the base of a decolonial project, as Walter Mignolo states, lies a "recognition... that the colonization of knowledge and being consisted of using imperial knowledge to repress colonized subjectivities" ("Delinking" 492). In resisting the spoken word, Tobar breaks with language as the main system of knowledge production and transmission. Thus, the material presence of the puppets, their movements, and the sound universe surrounding the performance also participate as decolonial elements of transmitting knowledge and communicating affects of a colonized community otherwise.

Now, a nonverbal performance of white, anthropomorphic puppets that relies on the material, kinetics, and sound presence on stage intersects with another nuance of the *mise en scène*: the small-scale setting. In reflecting on how the performance provides an aesthetic experience, Tobar signals another goal when he asks: "¿Cómo hacemos que la gente intente hacer un ejercicio de humanizarse nuevamente?" (Gutiérrez, "Personal Interview" 1:15:29-34) To create an amicable experience, to humanize and mold a humble spectator without the pretentiousness of being in control as a passive spectator, *Silencio Blanco* reduces the scale of the set to diminish the field of view. A small-scale setting with miniature puppets encourages the audience to stoop down in their seats, forcing them to adjust their focus to a specific and reduced area on the stage. Analyzing the small-scale production or micro-practices, scholar and practitioner Shaday Larios affirms:

Las prácticas antecedidas por el prefijo micro (sociológicas, políticas, comunitarias, físicas) podrían tener en cierta medida, una correspondencia con la ética miniaturizante,

al practicarse desde una conciencia contra-monumental, anti-imperial respecto a los modos de producción; o como cuando se ejercita como una herramienta de transferencia de escalas para darle potencia, visibilidad y protagonismo a una individualidad o a un colectivo vulnerado. (“La brutal pequeñez”)

This is true for Silencio Blanco. The group develops a form of *micro-theater* twofold: on the one hand, they develop a theatrical practice that is still minoritarian as it opposes an actor-based theatre. On the other hand, it creates a small-scale production. However—and here I run parallel to Larios’ line of thought—what is most important is that the performance works as a device that alters the spectators in two ways. First, the performance shifts the audience’s focus toward a specific group of people. Second, in reducing the scope of the setting, the play gears against the monumental and towards an alternative form of attending, that of a scale model. This alters the typical attendance of ‘passive spectators’ as they have to stoop down to experience the performance.

Furthermore, the small-scale production also assists in underscoring the sonic dimension of the performance. This is the case if we believe that contemporary performance has turned toward a “relative dematerialization,” or the process of distancing from realistic depictions of places, avoiding human centrality on stage, along with the “minituarisation, and virtualization of visual and gestural elements [which] facilitate the marriage of sound and image” (Pavis xi). To the end, the small white puppets and their miniature world, together with the affective transmission brought directly by the moving object and the vibration of sound, strategically highlight and uphold the history of the marginalized community of Lota. Dissenting the prevailing 1:1 scale of traditional human-centered theatre, Silencio Blanco shapes an alternative and decolonial mode of transmitting that long and silenced experience of oppression in the mining community of Lota.

Bomba for Hurricane María: Aesthetic Encounters with Paper, Music, and Dance

BRYAN. Excuse me, do they distribute paper tarps here? (*Singing.*)
 Fue un 20 de septiembre
 Cuando nos cogió María
 Trump llegó a Puerto Rico
 Después de 13 días.
 Y el gobernador le dijo
 “aquí no ha pasado nada”
 Y el tirano anaranjado
 Nos tiró papel toalla. (48-49)

—Mariana Carbonell, et. al., *¡Ay María!*

In October 2017, images of Donald Trump began circulating in the media, where one could see him throwing rolls of paper towels to a group of Puerto Ricans while they attempted to capture the best shot of the presidential figure who was visiting the island in the aftermath of Hurricane María. Between him and the group of people stood a long table of *viveres*, provisions arranged in an orderly fashion—objects ready to engage in a show of egotism, false bounteousness, and disrespect. With a smirk and standing on the other side of the table, the man seated in the highest chair of the nation threw rolls of paper towels avoiding physical contact with the rest. It took Trump a few seconds in front of the camera to materialize a gesture that underscored the division between him and American citizens. In other words, this symbolic gesture to the camera materialized what Frances Negrón-Muntaner understands of Puerto Ricans in the present: “territorial citizens with limited rights” (118). The performance of hurling paper towels was, according to Naomi Klein, Trump’s “idea of aid and comfort” (29). In this performance, the president did not only feed his egocentrism but confirmed what was going to be the US federal government’s stance during the crisis—a sociopolitical disengagement by the US Congress from one of its territories during a major disaster.

While paper took center stage in this show, its role was nothing but another object serving a specific purpose to the president. Puerto Ricans quickly criticized the incident on the island and in the diaspora, as reflected in the play *¡Ay María!*, which traveled the island in the wake of the hurricane.⁵² Distinctively from the scene described above, for Puerto Rican theatre group Agua, Sol y Sereno (ASYS) paper has other properties and potentialities, serving to uplift the battered community. In the following, I show how ASYS's treatment of kraft paper on stage vindicates the colonial body of the survivors and those who perished. In this discussion, paper continues traversing my analysis as a performing object that expresses its vitality as an object capable of transmitting affects to the audience. Distancing from manipulations of an object as a commodity, ASYS includes paper as another actor on stage. Contrary to Trump's symbolic interaction with paper towels, ASYS paper transmutes in that it conveys a sensuous material presence as an affective element of scenic innovation, social justice, and storytelling for a devastated community.

My analysis of the work of this Puerto Rican group not only represents a geographical shift in the region but offers an expansion from my previous analysis of Chilean puppetry to understand the vindicating power of the object (paper) on stage. Considering the multiplicity of signs present in the theatre of ASYS, I return to the presence of the actor on stage, and its interplay with paper as a performing object, and bomba that I understand as Jade Power-Sotomayor interprets it, a traditional and complex "Afro Puerto Rican danced sounding practice" (43). All in all, in examining the interplay of theatre signs, I look at the group's play *Corazón de papel* (2018) [Paper Heart] and how their dramaturgy of paper, sound, and dance present more-

⁵² *¡Ay María!* was one of the first plays to depict the experience of Puerto Ricans with the hurricane. The play effectively archived Trump's despotic act of throwing paper towels in one of its scenes (See Mariana Carbonell).

than-human elements effectively transmitting the affects of those who suffered from the catastrophe of María. Considering the historical moment when the production premiered, I also situate this in what Carlos Rivera-Santana understands as *aesthetics of disaster*, “an artistic art form that is able to accelerate the discursive nullification of a deeply rooted colonial... problem by way of art as catharsis” (342). In addition, in including the mediums of paper—as a performing object—and bomba, I also ground this play within a decolonial move, since the work partially rescinds from the linguistic sign, giving way to other forms of communication and knowledge production that—in its ephemeral quality—engage in what Walter Mignolo understands as “delinking from... the Totality of Western epistemology” (493). To close my analysis, I theorize this production as part of a theatre of the diaspora considering that, up until recently, the stagings of this play have primarily occurred outside of the island in the continental US.

Agua, Sol y Sereno, and Contemporary Puerto Rican Theatre

Established in 1993 by Pedro Adorno and Cathy Vigo, ASYS has been at the forefront of Puerto Rican theatre at the turn of the 21st century. By navigating traditional and non-traditional theatrical spaces, the collective has managed to constantly redefine the methods of doing theatre with a clear conviction for social justice. Priscilla Meléndez has recently situated the group as a collective that emerged in the 1990s connected to a prior period of active theatrical production in the 1970s and 1980s, which enabled the group to sprint into the 21st century, always finding new ways to narrate (131-132). The collaboration between the group’s founders with other theatre groups such as Bread and Puppet, Los Teatros Ambulantes de Cayey, Teatro Pregones, and the teachings of Augusto Boal, have assisted them in grounding aesthetics and methodologies based on theatre of objects, masks, *zanquería* (stilt performances), *comparsas* (street performances),

community workshops and explorations of disciplinary boundaries placing their practice at the intersection of visual arts, theatre, and dance. ASYS is a multi-disciplinary group due to the members' multifaceted characteristics: artists trained as actors, musicians, dancers, and in other disciplines, all becoming *teatrerros* under collective works where they learn from each other. Because of the spontaneous and often quick assembly of their performances, some of their works have been described as incomplete or imperfect, as Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes states, remitting to their experience with Bread and Puppet Theater (202). Distinctive of their practice has been the creation of *cabezudos*. Remitting the tradition of the *vejigante*, these are giant *papier-mâché* heads meant to be worn as masks, often representing historical figures of the island during street performances.⁵³ Some of their major theatrical works have been *Tun-cutún-tun* (1993), *Una de cal y una de arena* (1996), *Marea Alta Marea Baja* (2002), and *Comer* (2016). To Meléndez, the collective is part of a generation of theatre groups where “the island’s persistent state of crisis (financial debt, corruption, lack of opportunities, unemployment, migration, racial disparities, social fragmentation...) become these groups’ source of artistic creation (as ironic beneficiaries) while these same horrors threaten their existence, turning them into potential victims” (140). This reciprocal relationship between art and life is a result of Puerto Rico’s constant state of crisis due to its continuous colonial state. First, as a Spanish colony and later under US control, Puerto Rico lives a colonial continuum that shapes and conditions the lives of its people, who now live under the economic and political control of the US Congress—that historically has had a disengaged role. Aware of this latent

⁵³ “The *vejigante* is a demon figure from medieval Spanish folklore that has become a staple in of Puerto Rican Carnival culture. During Carnival festivals, the *vejigante* dress in a horned mask called a *careta* and flowing costume... [It is worn] to join the crowds in singing and dancing. The *careta* masks are a cultural symbol of Puerto Rico. The masks are typically made in the cities of Ponce and Loiza for use in carnival celebrations and purchased as home decoration by tourists” (“*Puerto Rican Vejigante Mask*”). The famous play by Francisco Arriví, *Vejigantes* (1958) directly references this tradition. While recalling this tradition, ASYS distances from this folkloric object and approaches the material potential of kraft paper in its unaltered material state.

colonial reality, ASYS creates spaces for collective reflection, denunciation, and ultimately, the vindication of Puerto Ricans. Their latest work *Corazón de papel: Historias del huracán* (2018), emerges at a critical point revealing the island's lived catastrophe of a debt crisis that was exacerbated by the poorly managed aftermath of Hurricane María.

The Colonial Continuum

September 2017 brought Puerto Rico into a scene of devastation due to a category four hurricane that shook the island's spinal cord. Nevertheless, besides being one of the deadliest hurricanes to affect the Caribbean in recent history, María is now seen as an unveiling figure to an often-imperceptible Puerto Rican reality. The hurricane not only showed the country's faulty infrastructure due to austerity measures, but it dislocated a gaze. María, as a natural force, uncovered with significant potency the hidden colonial continuum, and how this affects the lives of Puerto Ricans on the island and its diaspora. In this uncovering, the hurricane brought questions to how one looks at natural disasters and, most importantly, how these are constructed. To Puerto Rican novelist, Eduardo Lalo, this uncovering is a coming to terms with a brutal reality that exceeds words, "it's impossible to express, it is unnamable" (92). Bearing this in mind, the following analysis shows how ASYS delved into the island's present to make sense of what they were experiencing in the wake of the hurricane, attempting to name and transmit that often unnamable characteristic of living under colonial subjugation. Perhaps the most controversial experience surrounding María was the inability of government officials to account for the number of deaths, an incapacity that Klein perceives as Puerto Ricans' "relative worth and ultimately disposability" (28). I see the work of ASYS inquiring about the present and asking: How do we start making sense of a catastrophe if there is a delay in naming it as such?

And, once we identify an event as a catastrophe, how do we begin telling the stories of the victims?

To understand where *Corazón de papel* stems from, one must understand the island's social, political, and economic present.⁵⁴ The US Congress's power to regulate the processes in which Puerto Rico's local government presently unfolds has caused an internal economic crisis. This political intervention is one of the many ways Puerto Rico's colonial state manifests. To Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón "Puerto Rico's territorial status prevents the local government from shaping and implementing many of its own policies, and encourages an overdependence on US capital investment... [which makes] Puerto Rico particularly vulnerable during periods of economic contraction" ("Introduction" 6). As a commonwealth, Puerto Rico depends both politically and economically on the US. Thus, governmental institutions coordinated by the US federal government are all responsible for the well-being of its citizens, including preparing the island for natural disasters. María itself should not be seen as a disaster. I argue the disaster around the hurricane is endogenous, meaning it was not due to a mere external atmospheric phenomenon, but rather the internal human mishandling of its effects. In other words, the disaster emerged from the actions and inactions of the government and its institutions in preparing for such disasters and the lack of proper managing of aid once the climate phenomenon had passed.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Bonilla and LeBrón recall the socioeconomic problems Puerto Rico was already suffering prior to September 2017. They write, "long before María, Puerto Rico was already suffering the effects of a prolonged economic recession, spiraling levels of debt, and deep austerity cuts to public resources" (5). These were, in part, escalated by the US Congress' stance in dealing with Puerto Rico's filing for bankruptcy in 2016. In denying their filing, Congress enacted the PROMESA bill to manage the island's finances which has done nothing other than "imposing structural-adjustment-style austerity measures," the same measures that provoked the island's infrastructure to collapse once the hurricane made landfall ("Introduction" 7).

⁵⁵ This is to say that such a disaster is not exogenous—a disaster that could not have been prevented due to the intensity and destructiveness of an external atmospheric phenomenon that exceeded the effectiveness of any human planning.

Disasters are created. Here I follow Bonilla's understanding of disaster, who, in trailing an extended cannon in the social sciences argues that disasters are "socially produced [, they are] the outcome of long processes of structural violence... [and] the product of racio-colonial governance" ("The Coloniality of Disaster" 1). This is to say, the ability of the local Puerto Rican government and its institutions—always empowered and disempowered by the US Congress—determine their processes of prioritization, which in turn, determine how Puerto Ricans will be particularly susceptible in times of crisis. Aware of the endogenous characteristic of disasters, artists have understood Puerto Rico's crisis as a multilayered phenomenon of socioeconomic issues beginning prior to the hurricane's landfall, and, with this in mind, they have begun finding ways to grapple with this reality and/or materialize ways otherwise.

According to Carlos Rivera-Santana, post-hurricane, Puerto Rican visual arts saw the emergence of an *aesthetics of disaster*, which attends to the holistic capacity of art in encompassing all facets of life under colonial rule. To Rivera Santana, the aesthetics of disaster function as a productive frame to comment on the post-hurricane situation and colonial state that is felt "in the flesh" and permeating "all the dimensions of life" (342, 355). The work of ASYS subscribes to this aesthetics of disaster "as catharsis... that expresses and purges social events that need to be made sense from a fresh and critical perspective" (Santana 343).

Corazón de papel

First premiered at the International Puppet Fringe Fest in August 2018, the play emerges as an artistic reaction by all ASYS members who survived and continue to suffer the effects of the hurricane. Alba Ortiz, a current member of the collective, recalls the group's initial reaction in the wake of the hurricane:

Tan pronto pasó el huracán... ASYS decidió ir a las comunidades, ir a los refugios y llevar arte pero también escuchar. Empezamos a escuchar esas historias y a compartir

con esas comunidades, presentando algunas piezas de nuestro repertorio, teniendo diálogos, haciendo talleres. Más o menos en noviembre de ese mismo año, como un proceso de sanación del grupo, empezamos a reunirnos en casa de Pedro Adorno a escribir y a improvisar cómo contar esos primeros destellos de historias... Escuchamos un disco de *Bomba con Buya* [e]... improvisamos, a manera de ejercicio, con esas primeras historias que teníamos... cambiándole la letra a una canción que ya existe... Ese fue nuestro primer contacto de cómo contar historias a través de la bomba... No teníamos en mente en ese momento el hacer una pieza. Estas improvisaciones fueron nuestra manera grupal de procesar todo lo que estábamos viviendo (Adorno, “Personal Interview” 48:59-51:10)

In the advent of the collective’s 25th anniversary, the members saw a forced shift in their work, redirecting it to assist the affected community and, in doing so, returning to the group’s original purpose. As founding member Cathy Vigo states “creo que el huracán lo que hizo fue que nos regresó a ese trabajo más simple, más sincero, más honesto, sin muchas pretensiones. Nos regresó a lo que somos, a lo que queremos transmitir” (Fullana Acosta, “Agua, Sol y Sereno”). As María Fullana Acosta tells it, they visited more than 18 towns bringing Puerto Rican art as a coping tool (“Agua, Sol y Sereno”). By interacting with the affected community, ASYS heard different stories of precarity, abandonment, mourning, and displacement. Once invited to the Puppet Fest in New York, the group revisited their personal and collective experience and prepared their first version of the play—a collection of fictional accounts inspired by the stories they heard during the first few weeks and months post-hurricane. In October 2021, the group approached the work once again and restaged it for *Destinos*, the 4th Chicago International Latino Theater Festival, an instance that I was able to witness and that I describe below.⁵⁶

As I entered the performance space at the Chopin Theatre in Chicago, I quickly noticed thick strings of what looked like kraft paper hanging from the fly tower. The stage was dimmed

⁵⁶ My references to the performance come from the play’s staging on October 16th, 2021 as part of the *Destinos*, the International Latino Theater Festival in Chicago.

lit, and while there were no human performers on stage, paper was already there, static, insisting on its presence as the audience continued filling the auditorium. The set was relatively simple, where a table, a chair, and kraft paper were the main objects occupying the stage. Other minor objects, such as pieces of luggage and more kraft paper would later enter the stage to assist the actors in evocating specific spaces or ideas in every scene. Shortly after I found a seat, a few women fully dressed in white entered and sat on stage left with percussion instruments. The high-pitched singing of one of the women—almost a cry—signaled the beginning of the performance. I later learned this is a *llamado* or call, which is central to the dynamics of the call-response in bomba singing. The kraft paper that was hanging quickly gained movement as five actors entered the space and took place behind the paper, which then began wrapping their bodies around the dangling sheets. Gradually, the actors began to oscillate their bodies, making it appear as if the paper was performing on its own, acquiring anthropomorphic shapes at times. The invitation by ASYS was clear, paper was central to the performance, an object that—with the unfolding of the plot—showed a vitality that Jane Bennett would define as the capacity “to act as quasi agents or forces, trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii). This paper, full of vitality, took different forms, twirling, expanding, and waking up from a dormant state as it was standing when I came into the theatre. In covering or masking the human body from the beginning of the performance, ASYS inscribed paper with its essential role in the theatrical event—paper as another actor, narrative agent, and most importantly, a transmitter of affects.

As this prelude ended, Esteban emerged from behind the hanging sheets of kraft paper and took centerstage. This disillusioned writer and teacher tells the audience how he has begun to be tormented by the whispering voices of those who perished during Hurricane María. With this

introduction, four different stories unfolded, materializing said whispering voices in the form of interspersed scenes: a drowning girl, María, who calls on her father to save her from drowning; an elderly couple where the wife, Marta, deals with the passing of her husband and the inability to give him proper burial; the evocative and ethereal narration of a young man, Sergio, as he drowns attempting to cross a river with his parents; and a young woman, Eneida, who loses her mother after they decided to stay in the island instead of fleeing to his brother's house who lives in continental United States. These are all stories based on the experience of ASYS members engaging with the affected community or by their own lived experience, as the case of actress Cristina Vives who built her character of Eneida, inspired by the diasporic story of her best friend who migrated to mainland United States (Adorno, "Personal Interview" 1:14:10-20).

As these stories were narrated, kraft paper continued interacting with the actors' bodies in every scene, taking different shapes, sometimes consuming the actors, and at other times forming dynamic sculptures animated by the same actors, but always complementing and reacting to the dialogue of each scene or the bomba music. Sporadically, abstract visual projections invaded the scene, molding visuals such as creases and shadows that convey branches, and colors that provide a particular texture to the moving paper. While present, captivating, and giving texture to the scene, these visuals are ultimately distant from my focus on the interplay of moving paper, human actors, and bomba that arrange the affective transmission, although they may complement it. The performing object in *Corazón de papel* stands at the heart of theatre as a Vibratorium. That is, the unfolding of the performance turns the auditorium toward a "sensory threshold" that allows for the transmission of affects (Ridout 230). Through paper, ASYS finds a sensuous element that executes an affective transmission along with the presence of human actors. Affects are what we sense before they become a feeling, an interpretation. Feelings are a codification,

“sensations that have found a match in words” (Brennan 19). There is a dramaturgy of paper in *Corazón* that lies in its movements and, thus, its capacity to transmit affects. It can be understood as a dramaturgy because it narrates affectively. Paper deploys vitality because, while it remains operated by a human, it oscillates between being a ‘thing’ and becoming a particular image that conveys meaning. Thus, paper grounds an aesthetic with its presence, which I later explain.

Nonetheless, as a Vibratorium, *Corazón de papel* does not focus only on the role of paper on stage. This is intertwined with the sound dancing dimension of the performance, all vibrating in transmitting affects to the audience. Beyond being a reductionist folkloric expression alluding to the Puerto Rican culture, the use of bomba enters the *mise-en-scène* from the very first moments of the play as another narrative element. Bomba is both a musical and a dance expression that, in the context of this play, can be seen as a materialization of what Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz call “the politics in motion, bringing people together in rhythmic affinity where identification takes the form of histories written on the body through gestures” (9). That is, in *Corazón de papel* this danced sounding practice serves as a guiding thread, navigating past and present and provoking a critical reflection of a Puerto Rico post-hurricane through embodied memory and affective transmission.

One cannot reduce *Corazón de papel*'s performance to a first impression. At first, the play might come across as an unintelligible and perhaps amateur production around the effects of the hurricane on the island and its people. However, the aesthetic work must be understood considering the motives that initiated the project. That is: How do we make sense of a tragedy or unaccounted human bodies or what could have been an avoidable toll of human loss? To think the present is something to be sensed and to direct our attention to it, said Lauren Berlant. “It involves anxiety about how to assess various knowledges and intuitions about what’s happening

and how to eke out a sense of what follows from those assessments” (Berlant 4). We must remember that *Corazón* emerges as a response to the emergency of a failed infrastructure, lack of resources, and, most importantly, misinformation about the human toll. What we see on stage is a coordinated and legible narration of the artistic process behind a group of people suffering the aftermath. The final product is, to my understanding, a visualization of not only the human but the nonhuman matter and more-than-human elements assisting in telling that story and thus, transmitting the affects of those who lived that particular situation. The play also has a temporal significance. It documents the sequenced trajectory of how people slowed down to make sense of that incommensurable present. In other words, the play recovers a collective state of impassivity, or the “diverse class, racial, sexual, and gendered styles of composure... The way the body slows down what’s going down... to clarify the relation of living on to ongoing crisis and loss” (Berlant 5).

With this in mind is that I understand the play as a work that documents what it means to live in the impasse, a temporal experience of dwelling in the catastrophe, “with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic” (Berlant 4). In other words, the play reenacts the process of inhabiting uncertainty on the island. Central to transmitting this experience stand kraft paper and bomba exceeding the human presence on stage and playing a central role in the transmission of affects of the impasse.

In *Corazón*, the audience attends to the stories of different people that either survived or perished in the hurricane. For ASYS, Hurricane María is a situation and, as Berlant would understand it, “social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos” (6). Sensing the situation of the hurricane is the process of sensing the present, viscerally,

in the flesh, before it becomes an event or something that we can name and analyze (Berlant 6).

This is perhaps why the play might be perceived as incomplete or fragmentary. Yet, *Corazón* is a finished product in that it visualizes an ever-changing colonial experience.

An Aesthetics of Kraft Paper

When one thinks of paper on stage, one often quickly associates it with the material composition of the setting of many theatrical productions. One might also think of the material that some performing objects are made of, i.e., puppets, or simply the thin sheets of paper where drama has been inscribed for hundreds of years. Seeing paper this way correlates with the many ways humans have historically exploited and consumed objects as a commodity, shutting down other agential, performative, and narrative possibilities that this material might contain outside of its objecthood.

I argue that ASYS treats paper on stage as an active material capable of transmitting affects, unfolding in movement and presence along with human actors and sometimes substituting them. ASYS' approach to the performative dimension of paper on stage is due to Pedro Adorno's direct experience with the theatre group Bread and Puppet in Vermont, New Hampshire. During a residency, he learned all the practices that characterize the Vermont-based group: organic performances known for colliding artistic expressions such as sideshows, circus, giant puppets, and stilts (Steve Abrams and John Bell). After being trained by Bread and Puppet, Adorno took these acquired skills back to the island, where he eventually integrated them into a theatrical practice that speaks directly to the reality of Puerto Rico. In doing so, ASYS became a socially committed forum, a theatrical practice that joined an entire generation of theatre artists in the 1990s that, according to Lowell Fiet, provided ways to observe “las tensiones frecuentemente contradictorias del diario vivir colonial—del engranaje de la dependencia y la

resistencia que afecta a casi todos los aspectos de la vida cotidiana puertorriqueña” (364). In other words, through diverse performances, ever since its inception, ASYS has been thinking and reflecting the colonial status of Puerto Rico and how this directly dictates the life experience of its people.

For ASYS, paper performs on stage in its natural state, unaltered but always manipulated by the actors. This is a case of an “animated object,” as Penny Francis would understand it, the nature of a performing object as one that, in its natural state, performs, even though its original purpose might not be to illustrate or depict a character (18).⁵⁷ A theatre that transpires from the idea of an *animated object* is, in other words, object theatre where spectators observe an “object-puppet” or “*objeto-títere*” (Penny 18; Larios, “Los objetos” 24). Even though my intention is not to centralize my analysis in creating distinctions when defining the practices of object theatre, there is a central component that defines the degree to which object theatre practices might differ from one another. To Larios, this difference lies in the “*grado de re-elaboración del objeto cotidiano*” (“Los objetos” 23). In other words, the re-elaboration of the object can go from building puppets from quotidian objects to a more drastic approach where the object is treated for what it is (Larios, “Los objetos” 24). All in all, the *animated object* is also an “objeto-títere” as it is, for example, the act of “tomar una cuchara, hacerla caminar... hacerla hablar, darle dirección a su mirada, etc.” These are “objetos que intentan luchar técnicamente contra el peso de lo que son en realidad” (“Los objetos” 24).

Though the treatment of paper on stage does not involve origami, the Japanese tradition of folding paper into figures, the effect of the performing kraft paper on stage appears as such—

⁵⁷ This is the opposite of Silencio Blanco’s work where paper is the building block of their white anthropomorphic puppets. In their case, a dramaturgy of paper arises as the composition of an actual puppet. They construct “animated figures” or actual puppets where paper is altered (recycled) in service of a puppet (Penny 18).

large paper figures that resemble diverse images, such as fish, the wind, floating spirits, or ghosts, and in a particular scene, a human corpse. To do so, the actors bring large sheets of kraft paper from backstage onto the stage and deploy them as a malleable material that takes multiple forms depending on what is unfolding around the plot. To crystalize what happens on stage, I bring an example that occurs toward the beginning of the play when Esteban begins to narrate the experience of being haunted by voices. I believe this to be one of the most moving moments when kraft paper performs because it occurs toward the beginning of the play, with a degree of the unexpected, when Esteban shows himself to be the most vulnerable.

While narrating the haunting experience of being followed by unknown voices, in a poetic moment, Esteban stumbles across crumples of paper on the floor and recites:

El paisaje seco
 Se levanta el polvo seco
 Todos los árboles secos, están las hojas secas
 Y debajo de las hojas secas está la sangre seca
 de miles. (Agua, Sol y Sereno, “Corazón de papel”)

As he continues, actors lying under the paper stand up and surround Esteban. As if it could float, kraft paper is momentarily no longer kraft paper as such, or at least not as we commodify it. Here, the object stands as a matter that observes and asks to be observed and acknowledged. The sheets of paper move around and get closer to Esteban, trying to catch his gaze. As the scene goes on, the sheets of paper engage choreographically, attempting to gain an intelligible form and raise to a particular static figure, however, never reaching such an image. In that choreography, paper moves in wanting to transmit fortitude, and the audience witnesses that act of insistence, the effort, that struggle. Before they become a symbol or materialize into something or someone, before they gain meaning, those sheets of paper move affecting and wanting to be affected. These sheets transmit what I name a desire to be visible, the desire to be

counted. Ironically, in this very act, the vitality of paper temporarily erases the human actors on stage in order to visualize those who have perished in the hurricane and their aspiration to be recognized. Movement is central to transmitting that desire, that affect. This is a profoundly moving moment since an object's simple presence on stage renders an intense transmission of affect, of what it might mean to be wanted and seen. And just as quickly as this scene climaxes affectively, it dissipates as the actors break the choreograph and move the paper backstage. This scene is one of the examples of how paper intervenes on stage sporadically, nonetheless, powerfully whenever it does. Even though kraft paper always has a material presence on stage, this constantly shifts throughout the performance to maintain the audience 'complicit' in the object's liveness. The malleability and durability of kraft paper allow the actors to operate it, fluctuating in how it moves, which also means fluctuating in affective intensity. These movements vary depending on the paper's position on stage: as background or in the forefront, as an inert material or a moving one, as a material performing next to human actors, or on its own where the actor hides behind it. Outside of the performance, these would have been unintelligible ludic interactions, as seen during experimental sessions of theatrical research or rehearsal. However, on the stage of *Corazón*, the actors' operation results in visuals of performing paper that are intelligible, carefully coordinated, vibrating, and exhibiting it as a material capable of generating an aesthetic experience for the audience.

Discussing the idea of the paper on stage, the director Pedro Adorno talks about "*garabatos de papel*" or scrawls of paper when speaking about their presence on stage. To Adorno, "si el actor no es una pez, tú [el espectador] no vas a ver un pez... pero si el actor está viendo el pez... aunque lo que tenga es un garabato de papel, tú [el espectador] vas a sentir ese pez" (Adorno, "Personal Interview" 1:30:50-1:31:10). Here, he refers to the affective dimension

between the actor and the object, an energy flow central to the material presence that is sensed and thus interpreted by the spectator. Considering affects as central in the relationship between actor-object and central to ASYS' practice, Adorno affirms that this solid affective relationship is possibly due to the actor's imagination. This is a mental image that gains form in the operation of the object. He goes on to explain that “sin una relación afectiva con la imagen, con la imaginación, ese actor no puede hacer creer que [el papel] es un pájaro” (Adorno, Personal Interview 1:30:30-50). Repositioning Adorno's dialectic, to my understanding, affects appear on stage as they emerge from the actors' experience on the island. These affects are transmitted from the actor's body, passing through the object and, eventually, to the audience. While the dialogue is present throughout the play, remaining within the symbolic in the linguistic sign, this unfolds parallelly. When it comes to paper, what determine how it transmits affects is its performed movements, the forms it acquires, its positionality along other sheets of paper and human actors, and the degree or intensities to which it moves.

The malleable characteristic of kraft paper allows the actors to play with it by stretching it, wrinkling it, or shaking it to take different forms or produce distinct sounds, often hiding their human presence behind it to reduce their visibility on stage. The vigor with which the actors engage with paper also creates a sense of vulnerability towards the material, this susceptibility is always present highlighting the uncertainty that surrounds material engagements that occur live, in the present. Kraft paper moves agilely on stage in great part due to the dancing body of the actors who move to the rhythms of bomba. Hence, the performing paper intersects with all other scopes of the theatrical event. Here, I place bomba centerstage as another element of the thinking machine which is theatre. This danced sounding expression joins the material presence of paper and human bodies in transmitting affects. In what follows, I analyze the practice of bomba

within theatre, understood as a cultural device that goes beyond being a folkloric representation of being Puerto Rican. The inclusion of bomba by ASYS results in a counterdiscourse; a decolonial aesthetic creating tension in forms of telling a colonial history beyond words and instead, as embodied knowledge in somatic moves and sound.

Dancing the Hurricane with Bomba

As Power-Sotomayor defines it, bomba is an “Afro Puerto Rican danced sounding practice,” involving an interplay of listening and sounding achieved by dancing, singing, and the playing of percussion instruments (43). The practice of bomba comes to being in the *batey*, the term that names the physical space where drummers, singers, and dancers create as they gather in this danced sounding practice. I consider the practice of bomba, along with the performance of paper, as a more-than-human element of the play. That is, while originating from human bodies (dance and sound), it exceeds them in the theatrical event, showing its own agential powers. Here we have a case where the *batey* enters the theatrical space. In doing so, the *batey* turns out to be not only a physical space of gathering between musicians and dancers but, in the context of the play, it is also a cultural device, an intimate performative locus where embodied memory manifests and, most importantly, transmit affects.

Bomba is a musical-dance tradition with contested origins. In demystifying the tradition away from a folkloric and reductionist stance, Raquel Z. Rivers traced its origins to the marronage in the archipelago that emerged after the Haitian Revolution (“New York Afro-Puerto Rican” 16).⁵⁸ However, its exact origin is still of debate. The musical ensemble of bomba is composed of drummers, a *barril buleador* or *segundo* and a *barril primo* or *subidor*, joined by the *cua*, or two wooden sticks, and a *maraca*. The *subidor* drum directly engages with the dancer

⁵⁸ “The term ‘maroons’ refers to people who escaped slavery to create independent groups and communities on the outskirts of slave societies” (Kars).

as it follows the dancer's moves producing different rhythmic patterns. Simultaneously, "the bomba dancer must listen to the sound being used to interpret their movements in order to make choices about their next moves" (Power-Sotomayor 48) The *canto de llama y respuesta* is the engagement of a lead singer who sings a small chorus to which the rest of the ensemble responds to. In the case of the staging of *Corazón* in Chicago, a Chicago all-women group called BomPleneras performed bomba music to which ASYS's actors danced. This group already materializes a decentralization of the traditional bomba practice since "bomba tends toward a gendered division of musical labor in which men constitute the majority of the musicians while women are mostly singers" (Alamo-Pastrana 582). In the play, bomba is not a mere musical accompaniment. It intervenes, and just like kraft paper, has its own dramaturgy—a narrating line within the performance.

By including bomba in *Corazón*, ASYS facilitates a different way of sensing the disaster of the hurricane hence, the colonial present of the island. Power-Sotomayor theorizes bomba as a practice capable of "occupying sonic space corporeally [,] ... a co-produced aesthetic sound practice... [that] requires and structures relationality [otherwise]" (45). That is, bomba does not limit itself to distinctions between music or dance (46). It has "choreosonic properties... where listening to dancing flesh, and in turn dancing to re-sound, activates radical relational possibilities" (46). This practice of "dancing to make music, to be heard and not just seen, challenges both patriarchal distinctions between dancer and drummer," and advocates for a reciprocity between the two genres (47). The interchange stems from bomba being "an inherently social practice," a praxis of interdependency, of mutual listening, companionship, and collaboration between the dancer and drummer that interrupts the "logics of selfhood and domination upon which the colonial state is founded" (48). Bomba possesses decolonial

characteristics. It is a practice of resistance that escapes the colonial logic in the manner it offers a relationality otherwise and, as I argue, it simultaneously presents itself as an alternative, nonimperial form of knowledge production and communication, exceeding the linguistic sign.

If one reads *Corazón* as an instance of Ridout's Vibratorium, music, as a more-than-human element, and the materiality of paper, enter the stage and transmit energies with their sole presence. They transmit, along with human bodies, prior to the audience engaging in a meaning-making process. In inserting bomba into the theatre, the actors (human and the performing kraft paper), drummers, singers, and the audience congregate in the shared space of the *batey*. Here I situate the Vibratorium and the *batey* as synonyms, a common viewpoint to understand a particular affective-ephemeral dimension of the play. *Corazón* shows us how theatre allows us to read a bomba performance under a different lens to highlight its affective potential that is simultaneously material (felt in the flesh) and vibrational (aurally sensed). In achieving this, ASYS's inclusion of bomba exceeds the folkloric. It is not a simplistic expression to express Puerto Ricanness or a mere traditional dance or musical expression. It is, instead, an expression of embodied memory and an alternative mode of communication that transmit affects. It is knowledge production in the flesh in sounding and listening.⁵⁹

I see ASYS's inclusion of bomba as an instance that subscribes to this decentralizing project of recuperating this practice before it commodified as folklore. From this angle, I recognize bomba as a communicating device that alludes to how the body carries memory

⁵⁹ The way bomba unfolds in the play acknowledges what Ashley Coleman Taylor identifies as the reductionist approach of understanding bomba as a static artistic expression alluding to the past and representing *what is 'Afro' in Puerto Rico* (143). Ideas of bomba as a folkloric representation—and thus a component of a specific, fixed expression—began in the 1950s with the efforts of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. This institute's drive pulled the tradition from past notions as a "site of improvisation and liberation" (Coleman Taylor 147). In recuperating this characteristic, specialists in the genre have been asking what it means to look at bomba beyond the folkloric label that has been assigned to it by a nationalist discourse. How can we look at bomba beyond the representation of the tripartite cultures: Taíno, Spanish and African and as a naïve symbol of "puertorriqueñidad"? (Power-Sotomayor and Rivera 9-10, 18-19; Raquel Z. Rivera 182-185; Abadía-Rexach 46; Coleman Taylor 143).

through dance and in listening and producing sound. In light of this, bomba makes the play wander a terrain between the secular and the sacred. As part Afro-Caribbean dance, bomba is an embodied practice that “writes history otherwise, moving within and against the constraints of Western writing” (Faser Delgado and Muñoz 13). This, when performed in the present, is decolonial praxis, knowledge making; a somatic and “sonic-scape that challenges dominant conceptualizations of ‘music’ and ‘dance’ and ‘performance’... [capable of] ‘listening to flesh,’ ‘listening to flesh speak,’” surpassing the language sign when it comes to affective transmission (Power-Sotomayor 45). I assert the affective potential of this practice lies in the vibration that is sensed in the body when listening, sounding, and dancing. This vibration is then sensed by spectators, in a congregation, while attending the theatre. This is the experience of the Vibratorium, the *batey* made theatre. In sensing a dancing body, whether this is a human actor or kraft paper, and feeling the vibrations of sound and movement, we are already performing relationality otherwise, engaging in the act of transmission of repressed stories and the experience of the colonized; an affective communication. As Brennan says, “Sights and sounds are physical matters in themselves, carriers of social matters, social in origin but physical in their effects” (71). Thus, besides the evident dialogue that carries the plot, the dancing body, the singing voice, and the musical vibration emanating from the percussion instruments transmit the lived experience of Puerto Ricans on the island. This is rather powerful because instead of only transmitting this lived experience in a codified and static way, as is the case of language, ASYS appeals to the possibilities of the stage and the significance of the moving and live body (human and nonhuman) to tell their reality otherwise.

ASYS’ application of bomba is part of the group’s intention of making sense of their present. The members of ASYS were living the impasse, as I explained earlier, living the

uncertainty of the present in the wake of a man-made catastrophe (Berlant 4). Bomba is a mechanism to materialize and transmit that affective dimension of the catastrophe, an act of redemption, of vindication when facing despair. By focusing on the improvised solo of actress Alba Ortiz and actor Kenneth Salgado, the following examples show how bomba stands as an affective transmitter as affects are manifested in the communication between the actors who serve as dancers, and the drums.

Ortiz characterizes Marta to perform a burial ritual. After she loses her husband, she needs to bury him in the backyard as there is no access to proper burial after the storm. In a symbolic dance, Marta sings and dances a short bolero they both used to like. In a parting ritual, she dances with a faceless humanoid figure made of paper. In hugging this figure with endearment and fondness, the paper figure turns into a corpse, visually and affectively. This is an instance where paper acts otherwise, showing a vitality beyond its objecthood as it replaces an affective and material void for Marta—her husband. Once the bolero ends, Marta unfolds a monologue, lamenting the outcome of burring her husband in the backyard. A monologue that she later accompanies by an intense dance.

MARTA. No soy la única que enterró a un familiar en su patio en el huracán. Y ustedes no los contaron. Sabes lo que es que no llegue nadie, que mis hijos no pudieran saber de nosotros por días ni tener manera de pedir ayuda. Tuve que enterrar al amor de mi vida en mi propio patio, sola. Uno viaja a un cementerio a despedir a su muerto con los seres que lo amaron y yo lo tuve que enterrar en mi casa sola. Un patio lleno de memorias hermosas y ahora guarda la experiencia más horrible. Nuestros muertos merecen un entierro digno. (Agua, Sol y Sereno, “Corazón de papel”)

Dancing upon performing this soliloquy is a cathartic experience for Marta, the character, as much as it is for the actress who also suffered the experience of the hurricane in the flesh.

Thinking of her experience in the act of dancing in the play, Ortiz reflects:

Esta pieza me ha dado la oportunidad de conectar con el Yubá que es un ritmo donde se hacen esos lamentos, donde uno puede soltar ese coraje, esa indignación... Yo no estoy

bailando bomba por bailar bomba, como yo ya lo sé hacer en un día en la tarde que hay un bombazo... sino que yo estoy haciendo ese llamado a esos ancestros a levantar esas historias que no han sido contadas, que están ahí bajo esas hojas secas, a sentir ese dolor, esa indignación, ese sufrimiento que viví yo y vivimos todos durante el huracán. (Adorno, "Personal Interview" 01:44:52-01:45:50)

The catharsis experienced by Ortiz erases the fictional divide since her dancing body is at once the one of Marta and of herself as an actress, who also experienced the hurricane. To Ashley Coleman Taylor, intrinsic to bomba practice stands "a method for survival and reclamation of selfhood," a process evident in Ortiz's experience while performing (139). In dancing, Ortiz experiences a sacred dimension of bomba, a performance that in its moves connects with her ancestors to purge those feelings that have been constricting her. Her gendered dancing body, as Power-Sotomayor would state, has "a moment of being seen and heard, claiming space and sound, occupying time and place" (47). As Ortiz dances in listening to the drums, and the drummers play as they perceive her moving body, the stage opens up a healing process as those congregated "process... impactful emotions, and then move beyond the pain they once experienced" (Coleman Taylor 155). In performing Marta, Ortiz recalls her own experience of living the hurricane and seeing others suffering, purging these emotions on stage. The dancing body and the music generated by the BomPleneras participate together in transmitting affects. Power-Sotomayor describes how "Bomba dancing is an improvised solo... [a] drum/dance relationship... [where] the interconnectedness of gaze, embodied syncopation, and aural signification hold the space together" (47). The affective power of bomba emerges from this interchange between body and drum, listening and sounding, a triad consisting of body-drum-drummer, accompanied by singers. The intensity to which Ortiz's body moves arises from this interplay on stage, and speaks of a suffering body in despair, one that in return affects the spectators who sense it—visually and aurally in the flesh. While this interplay unfolds, the

affective transmission of the catastrophe occurs. At the crossroad of sound, the singing, and the material presence of Ortiz's moving body and the drummers and singers, one can sense the anguish of those who could not properly bury their death, trapped without resources and aid.

To Fraser Delgado and Muñoz, a body that dances does not only protect the "cultural memory of the past, but the dances of resistance assure survival of the dancers in the present tense" (18). Bomba, as embodied memory, is partly informed by those who experienced slavery in the peninsula and across the Caribbean Sea, knowledge production that has been passed through generations and a means of communication that is "choreosonic" in other words, sound and bodies move at once (Power-Sotomayor 46). In deploying bomba on stage, ASYS centers the Puerto Rican body in a generational choreosonic of resistance and survival in the present. This is the artist's personal and intimate way of dealing with the trauma of the hurricane. Bomba, and its choreosonic characteristic, is the group's aesthetic choice to practice survival. It is their way of enduring as artists for themselves, as well as for the diaspora, who has been able to experience their performance, as I later explain.

Bomba also takes centerstage in the scenes of Kenneth Salgado, who characterizes Sergio and dances an improvised solo. Sergio is a man who stands for the lives of those who were forced into uncertainty, displaced, and leaving their homes as the land flooded to the raising waters. Through introspective monologues, Sergio describes the crossing of a river and the emotional toll this has on him and his parents. As the monologue goes on, the monologue turns into an act of saving himself from a flood, a metaphor of a soul standing on the threshold of life and death where crossing the river is also the act of dying; the liminal state of passing from one state of being to another. The monologue is highly poetic. It is a physical and symbolic fight of the self, materialized in the resistance to give in to the rising water. It is a performance of

embodied memory; a vindication and a denunciation of those lives lost in the hurricane that have gone unnamed and uncounted:

SERGIO... el agua reclama memoria
 de ríos que vienen desde los tiempos del África
 De corrientes que corren por las venas
 Con tambor ancestral que abre sus puertas al cielo
 Y enraíza los pies a la ceiba ancestral
 que carga consigo almas y memorias
 Cubiertas en fango que salen de su cauce
 Haciendo el cuerpo despertar viejos umbrales
 [...]
 Nos vamos ahora a casa de Martita, es la única casa más cerca de dos pisos;
 pero tenemos que cruzar el río, es la única manera de sobrevivir esto. Perdónenme
 si algún daño les he hecho.
 Yo sé.
 Entiendo, lo que significa esta casa, las memorias que carga, las vivencias, la
 entrega que han dado y todo lo que han creado. Yo he formado parte de todo esto,
 he sido testigo del esfuerzo y deseo de vivir una vida mejor. Pero esa vida no está
 aquí, está en nuestros corazones, en mis memorias cuando niño, en sus caricias[...]
 Confíen, nada se perderá jamás, es imposible, porque los amo y agradezco todo lo
 que han hecho por mí. Me han dado tanto para poder cuidar de mí y ahora yo de
 ustedes. Ese hogar es nuestro amor, nuestro encuentro en esta vida. Papi, ven,
 acércate. Agárrame la mano y crucemos este río. Mami, trae las bendiciones y
 acompáñanos para cruzar, cruzar para recordarnos para siempre y que nunca se
 nos interponga el olvido. (Agua, Sol y Sereno, “Corazón de papel”)

As Salgado's monologue progresses, it is intersected by bomba moments where the actor's body underscores what the dialogue is expressing. His energy rises as the monologue continues, exposing contained pain and anger. What is distinct from Salgado's intervention with bomba is how the actor fluctuates between dialogue and dance, which is different from Ortiz who separates the dialogue from a subsequent bomba performance. The dancing body and music complement and make tangible what is being expressed in the monologue. In other words, the monologue by itself would not be affectively intense if it were not for both the dance he performs and the accompanying music. In my reading, the affective transmission occurs in the

very material vibration of the body triggered by the sound of bomba. Reflecting on the power of music, Eidsheim asserts:

In encounters through and with music, we are physically touched, and we tangibly touch others. Whether we are performing, listening, or engaging in scholarship, what is at stake in music is nothing less than the fundamental human experience of touching and being touched. (183)

The moving bodies of Ortiz and Salgado gradually increase in intensity as bomba plays, speaking to the state of desperation, confusion, and confinement that Puerto Ricans sustain as colonial bodies in the present. Via bomba, Salgado and Ortiz perhaps embody what Sandra Ruiz understands as the present Puerto Rican subject, riding “out the inexhaustible constraints of one’s life under limited self-control in a nonstop state of economic and political impotence” (9). While in other scenes, kraft paper appears to transmit these affects. The constraints, limited self-control, and impotence are here encapsulated as affects transmitted by the danced sounding practice of bomba as embodied memory. Bomba is then, a “choreosonic” device of transmission, a form of resistance that, as an Afro-Caribbean dance, summons “counterhistories through motor-muscle memory, the incorporation of incommensurate histories through polyrhythmic sensitivity” (Fraser Delgado and Muñoz 16).

At the intersection of the danced sounding practice of bomba and the monologue, the play creates an ephemeral and affective space to remember and vindicate the struggle of what it has meant to be Puerto Rican throughout history. From slavery to the present, the Puerto Rican subject is conditioned and determined by a colonial power that limits their potential and systematically ostracizes their being. Post-hurricane, the Puerto Rican subject is molded around “state failure, social abandonment, capitalization on human misery, and the collective trauma produced by the botched response” of the State (Bonilla and LeBrón 2). This is the state of being that is affectively portrayed in this play.

What I have discussed here exhibits ASYS' deployment of bomba as an ephemeral, and thus, irreproducible dimension. If bomba "resists ways of being experienced other than in the flesh, *en vivo*, as something to be lived and not merely consumed," it can carry affects because affects must be experienced in the flesh (Power-Sotomayor and Rivera 9). This resistance to remain intrinsically ephemeral is where the decolonial characteristic resides. It is true that ASYS has a script and creates a nuanced dialogue for the stage, but the decolonial element of the performance resides—just like in the case of *Silencio Blanco*—in the process of delinking from Western epistemology and its "hegemonic ideas of what knowledge and understanding are" (Mignolo, "Delinking" 459). In other words, an attunement of embodied epistemologies that have been historically repressed, those that do not necessarily need words—language—as is the case of colonial epistemologies. In that sense, I believe ASYS managed to find an ideal medium for the transmission and materialization of Puerto Rico's present, a sensitive method—that is also decolonial—to discuss and articulate what entails experiencing the present as a colonial Puerto Rican subject.

Theatre in the Diaspora

While I wrote these lines, the performances of *Corazón* had only been seen on stages abroad. It was not until recently that the play was finally staged on the island.⁶⁰ Having primarily been staged in New York and Chicago, I treat the initial stagings of this work as diasporic theatre—a play that has been staged for an audience other than the Puerto Ricans on the island.⁶¹ There is much to think and analyze about what effects this work will have on those who directly experienced the hurricane—something ASYS is aware of and looks to explore. However, having

⁶⁰ The play premiered in Puerto Rico at the Teatro Braulio Castillo in Bayamón on August 27th, 2022.

⁶¹ Pregones Theater in New York City stands as one of the spaces that first incited the production of Puerto Rican theatre in the diaspora. See Eva Cristina Vázquez for a complete study.

staged the play in the continental United States is of considerable significance if we contemplate the fact that a great portion of Puerto Ricans live in the diaspora today, and as Bonilla asserts, they continue to migrate to the mainland with no clear indication of returning (“The Coloniality of Disaster” 6). Moreover, much of the initial aid received on the island post-hurricane came directly from the diasporic communities in the continental United States, as ASYS member Cristina Vives acknowledges (Adorno, “Personal Interview” 1:14:20-50).

The staging of *Corazón* that I attended in Chicago comprised varied audience members, including Puerto Ricans who are currently living in the city. During the talkback for the play on October 16, 2021, a Puerto Rican woman shared her thoughts after being part of the theatrical event. Moved by the stories being brought to life, she cried, sharing how references to characters drowning reminded her of her cousins’ experience of being trapped in the floodwaters for days before they were saved. Later on, another woman, who didn’t identify with a particular nationality, explained how the loss of lives in the hurricane reminded her of those who lost their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, including her parents (Adorno et al. “Talkback”) Through these testimonies, one can see a parallel in the emotional toll of the sudden loss of lives and not having the opportunity of performing proper burials in both tragedies.⁶² The cathartic power of *Corazón* is evident in both testimonies. The two distinct accounts remind us how the transmission of affects works. In sensing affects, one interprets them. In naming what they sensed during the performance, both spectators mirrored back the emotion felt in their own lived experiences.

⁶² While in Puerto Rico many did not receive proper burial due to systemic failures of infrastructure (failure of the electrical grid and undrivable roads), the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic also did not allow for people to congregate to bury their dead properly.

We are not self-contained in terms of our energies (Brennan 6). We always stand affecting as much as we can be affected. In this case, both spectators sensed the dynamic material presence of bodies (human and nonhuman) and the vibration emanating from the danced sounding practice of bomba. However, how each spectator interpreted what they sensed, differed (Brennan 6). What is important here is to highlight that everything on stage provoked the audience to arrive at this denoting process. All elements on stage performed collectively to transmit affects. If one were to remove the elements existing beyond the human (kraft paper, musical instruments, sounds), the effect would not have been the same.

Giving way to the symbolic dimension of theatre, *Corazón* serves as a healing instance for the actors who experienced and survived the hurricane. However, it is also an organic cultural product that provides a space of endurance for those in the continental United States who have also experienced the loss of lives due to the worldwide health crisis. Perhaps, the play exhibits an intersubjective moment where two or more people shared and found commonality in their lived subjective experiences. In fact, this might be interpreted as a case of theatrical creolization, as Édouard Glissant understands it: a contact “of... several elements of distinct cultures, in a particular place in the world, resulting in something new, completely unpredictable in relation to the sum or the simple synthesis of these elements” (22). This creolization of theatre embeds in a unique way a form of object theatre through paper, the Western tradition of theatre, and an Afro-Caribbean dance sounding expression by an all-women ensemble. All these elements converge in the theatre, where a pan-ethnic audience that includes Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, Latinx, and other non-Spanish speaking audience members interpret and react to the play collectively away from the local reality of the island. In other words, I consider this to be a form of coalition in the spectatorship, an experience of exposure that was achieved partly due to

the *creolization* elements proposed by ASYS. The talkback session serves as that spatiotemporality where a pan-ethnic audience shares and realizes a commonality. It is an event where the spectators identify their experiences intersecting with a common cause for the multiple losses of life. On the one hand, lives were lost due to the handling of COVID-19. On the other hand, there is also the loss of lives due to the mishandling of the effects of the hurricane. Both with a shared source—the (in)actions of the United States government. The interplay of bomba, performing paper, human bodies, and visual projections framed as a theatrical event take a new meaning when presented in the diaspora. In terms of reception, this is a pan-ethnic theatrical event, a contact zone with endless and unpredictable possibilities.

The Performing Object When the Human is Not Enough

Beyond the aesthetics and the social implications that I have analyzed, I close this analysis by contemplating the potentialities of the performing object. The stories of colonial domination presented via performing objects and other more-than-human elements engage in disarticulating established modes of accessing the world—e.g., language—and exploring alternative epistemologies. These theatrical explorations unfold a decolonial process of “delinking” from Western forms of knowledge and communication to construct, instead, “structures of knowledge that emerge from the experience of humiliation and marginalization that have been and continue to be enacted by the implementation of the colonial matrix” (Mignolo, “Delinking” 492).

What does the performing object reveal as these two plays unfold by focusing on movement and sounds? What do *Silencio Blanco* and *ASYS* remind us in their power to thrill, move, or create excitement and coalitions in spectatorship? *Chiflón* and *Corazón de papel* suggest alternative ways to communicate, narrate, and ultimately perceive colonial realities in their simple yet detailed materiality and animation of figures and objects. Both attend to

Pearson's invitation to unleash the object's property to produce "sensation impacts, visceral and emotional, as well as perceptual" (119). Silencio Blanco and ASYS invite spectators to submerge themselves and actively attend an event. By removing the spectators from a passive position as observers, the productions remind them how objects can and are constantly engaging with humans and that in this interaction—which is always a negotiation with the agency of inorganic matter—humans are not in control. Thinking about the contact between humans and objects on stage, John Bell affirms:

Modernity has traditionally asserted its confidence in human potential, in our rational minds, in our ability to impose logic over untamed and illogical features of our world, including societies we consider un-modern, and even over nature itself... But play with puppets, machines, projected images, and other objects is constantly unsettling because it always leads to doubt about our mastery of the material world. If that piece of wood, that lump of clay, that shadow figure, that machine, seems to be moving of its own accord, then where are we as humans? (50)

I agree with Bell. Playing with puppets and objects on stage returns us to that possibility outside of the colonial modernity he mentions, a move that I posit parallel to what Walter D. Mignolo calls the *decolonization of knowledge*, a "delinking" from Western logic. This is a "movement of unveiling the geo-political location of... scientific reason... affirming the modes and principles of knowledge that have been denied by the rhetoric of... civilization, progress, development, market democracy" ("Delinking" 463). In performing with puppets and objects on stage, we are reminded of the 'unsettling' characteristic of the object. This uncanny experience offers the opportunity for the so-called 'human potential' to be reconceptualized, giving way to acknowledging what makes us human is always in connection, embedded, and affected by the material world, beyond what the colonial Western logic has historically imposed—a practice to undo the Western idea of the human.

A great part of our experience in the world and how we come to exist resides in the ability to be affected by objects as much as we affect them. The material world is intrinsic to becoming human, and we cannot disassociate ourselves from this relationality. The social task that *white* puppets, kraft paper, and the sounding of the mine and bomba do when vindicating relegated communities on stage reminds us that our human bodies and capabilities are—at many times—not enough. I believe that humans occasionally must distance themselves from their bodies to understand who we are and let other bodies—those beyond the human—do the talking. Perhaps, some spectators must assert there is nothing too innovative about these two plays, but they cannot escape the humbling experience they produce. Both *Chiflón* and *Corazón* are the necessary aesthetic encounters that audiences need in the present to enter an ethical exercise of self-reflection toward sustainable and just futures.

Chapter 3: Queer Posthuman Inflections by Laura Aguilar and Josecarlo Henríquez

I begin with three portraits of violence in Chile.

1) The intersectional and trans-inclusive Chilean feminist collective, LASTESIS write about their shared experience with anger:

When we were little, they often touched us on the street... They have grabbed our asses, they have stroked their penises on the bus. They have kissed us by force... Once, one of us was walking around Valparaíso and a guy came out from behind some bushes and yelled: ‘You like it when they put it in your hole! Run bitch! And there was no choice but to run. Assault like that, invisible to many, is what we live with every day (3)

2) On December 12th, 2022, both national and international news outlets announced the death of 73-year-old, Chilean transgender activist, Claudia Díaz Pérez. Díaz Pérez, a spokeswoman for the “Club de Adultos Mayores Sobrevivientes del 73” —the first organization of senior transgender people in Chile—, ex-leader of Cartagena Atlético, and an icon of trans activism was found dead in her home. A homicide squad found that her bodily injury was compatible with those usually perpetrated by a third party (“Asesinan en Cartagena”). Weeks later, a suspect was detained in what is still being investigated as a hate crime (“Detienen a sospechoso”).

3) In 2012, 24-years old Daniel Zamudio was a victim of homophobic violence in a brutal murder on the streets of Santiago, a case that served as a turning point for politicians to legislate a major anti-discrimination bill, which I later discuss.

The LGBTQ+ community has continued to suffer in cisheteropatriarchal Chile. In their 21st annual human rights report of sexual and gender diversity in Chile, the Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual (Movilh) highlighted six reports of hate crimes, the highest number registered, and a total of 7,666 cases of homo/transphobia in a span of 21 years (17). Considering how the violence of a cisheteropatriarchal society mutates and constantly finds

new spaces to be enacted, how do queer bodies currently escape the everyday danger that haunts them? How can queer bodies escape a cruel destiny such as the one of Díaz Pérez or Zamudio? What are the present-day possibilities for members of the LGBTQ+ community to strategically create places or find instances where one can exist and become somehow freely and safely in the Latinx Americas?

The following analysis stems from the threat of the present to queer people and observes two distinct cases of brown bodies finding ways to exist with their tactical cultural production. I contend that certain performances, as cultural expressions, not only stand as instances of representation, but also as spaces to articulate demands and protest, and most importantly, to generate safe spaces to survive. First, I turn my attention to Josecarlo Henríquez in Chile, to observe how a queer sex worker navigates the dangerous urban space of the 21st century to live and survive within a lifestyle that constantly exposes his body to the violence shaped and performed by a cisheteropatriarchal society. From his own exposure via social media, television, and his alter ego in semi-fictional writing, I show how Henríquez learns fluid ways to survive. Next, I turn to Chicana queer photographer Laura Aguilar's work in the 1990s and early 2000s. Having encountered exclusion and marginalization because of a disability from a very young age, I observe how, in the act of photographing, Aguilar finds her own body. Furthermore, I show how by performing a line of flight for the camera, Aguilar also finds an escape that allows her to challenge the categorizations that have been imposed on her as a queer, brown, and dyslexic body.

As queer subjects, Aguilar and Henríquez are deemed, treated, and viewed as less than human. As a queer, disabled, fat, brown photographer, Aguilar had to fight for equity in the art world which was still dominated by white, able-bodied, and cisheterosexual people during the

late 20th century. As a sexual dissident, Henríquez must fight for space as sex work has not been regulated, exposing him to several instances of violence as a subject in the margins. Both have been exposed systematically to dangerous manifestations that infringe on their well-being, such as physical violence on the streets, exclusion, and/or institutional marginalization. They are thought to be less than human and become vulnerable for their deviation from the norm—whiteness, cisheterosexuality, and able-bodiedness. That is, both are forced to the margins as second-class citizens in the United States and Chile, respectively, since they do not conform to the standards of heterosexuality and actively challenge the rigid binarism that is at the base of gender norms. While both are established practitioners that differ in time periods and geographical location, Aguilar and Henríquez are an equal testament to localized expressions of dissent as brown bodies. For as much as a cisheteropatriarchal societal system expands and invigorates itself by establishing divisions, categorizations, dualities and binarism, Aguilar and Henríquez defy them. They stand at the limits of society, apprehensive and finding ways to exist otherwise, away from demarcations and fixed positionalities. In advocating for post-identity, they both find a way to exist, absent of essentialism. That is, in defining themselves, they embrace a mutational and fluid identity that emerges from their own experiences in the body, but also acknowledge an interconnectedness with other entities and recognize how technology constantly mediates their becoming in the world. To them, their bodies exist on the move, in the performance that is crossing boundaries, as a way of resisting, contesting, but also surviving.

The act of crossing summons, linguistically, the prefix ‘trans.’ This stands at the root of Henríquez and Aguilar’s aesthetic and performative actions, triggering processes of exceeding, being in motion, traversing, transitioning, and breaking dualities. However, when Aguilar or Henríquez engage in the act of transgression with their bodies, creating aesthetic experiences,

they do not have a goal or specific vision of the outcome of that crossing. Their non-essentialist position and non-identarian characteristic of their being highlights a position at the crossroad and displaces the need to arrive at an end. That said, I reflect on Jack Halberstam's formulation of adding the demarcation of the asterisk as *trans**. Halberstam invites us to rethink "the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and entity" (4). One must not forget that first and foremost, the naming of *trans** empowers transgender people by interrupting the goal of "knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be... making *trans** people the authors of the own categorization" (4). Yet, and here I agree with Goda Klumbytė, that *trans** entails movement and crossing in reference to sex and gender, but it does not limit itself to these categories (433). So, I recover Halberstam's empowering perspective of *trans** that will accompany me throughout this chapter to articulate what Henríquez and Aguilar perform. This is because both attempt to remain indefinite and in limbo, without the goal of a final form in terms of the (inter)subjectivity they modulate. *Trans** materializes the act of defiance to transcend and underlines that very act—its performativity—rather than the arrival to a new place or form.

Considering that at the heart of their self-understanding stands their own bodies, and the action of transgression, I consider Aguilar's and Henríquez's cultural production to be *trans-corporeal*. This is a term I deploy throughout this study to understand the different manners in which both practitioners exceed a conception of a gendered and limited body that supposedly finds its boundary in the skin. Coined by ecofeminist scholar Stacy Alaimo, *trans-corporeality* assists me to fathom Aguilar's and Henríquez's cultural production as a photographer and sex

worker, respectively, and how they articulate a boundless bodily conception of the self.⁶³ Trans-corporeality insists on the crossing and erasing of the boundary of a binary system that creates dualities such as subject and object, as well as nature and culture. It pays attention to the ideas of the self that are based on interconnection and communion with what surrounds and traverses each body. Alaimo tells us that trans-corporeality is the recognition “that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them” (“Trans-corporeality” 435). In sum, all bodies are already trans-corporeal, it is the state of our existence. However, this state is often overlooked by anthropocentric division that insist on separating human bodies from their surrounding environments.⁶⁴ As a lens, trans-corporeality makes visible Aguilar’s and Henríquez’s attempt to exceed their own bodies, crafting an idea of being that is altered by the material world their bodies encounter in desertic landscapes or the digital world. By materializing trans-corporeality, Aguilar and Henríquez defy the binarism that has been historically at the base of body politics. In other words, they refute the way the state and its institutions attempt to control all bodies through a fixed gendered, racialized, and anthropocentric system of categorization.

⁶³ While I have advocated for Halberstam’s reconsideration of the prefix trans* in adding the asterisk. Here I return to the dash by following the already coined term ‘trans-corporeality’ by Alaimo. However, in my use of the term, the spirit of trans* is continuously present.

⁶⁴ Beyond exhibiting interconnection and thus communion with nature/the environment (a positive ethics), Alaimo originally emphasized how a trans-corporeality ethics advocates for accountability. Pondering on the traffic of toxins in the world, a trans-corporeal ethics “demands that we inquire about all of the substances that surround us, those for which we may be somewhat responsible, those that may harm us, those that may harm others, and those that we suspect we do not know enough about. A trans-corporeal ethics calls us to somehow find ways of navigating through the simultaneously material, economic, and cultural systems that are so harmful to the living world and yet so difficult to contest or transform” (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 18).

Performing Trans-corporeally

Trans-corporeality entails first, and foremost, an acknowledgment of a continuous interconnectedness among all entities that exist, of all matter and their different material contexts. It is understanding that our bodies do not become alone, inertly. Instead, trans-corporeality makes evident how bodies are always fluctuating. That is to say that bodies are *intra-action*, as Karen Barad would understand it. Bodies exist as part of a phenomenon of “ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting ‘agencies’” that involve all matter (*Meeting the Universe* 139). Trans-corporality remits to the power of the trans*, focusing on the act of exceeding, instead of trying to arrive at something new. As a doing in the world, I recognize trans-corporeality has a performative potential that exhibits bodies not as self-contained, but as matter that engage in entanglements or relations with other material contexts including organic and inorganic forms of existence. In the case of queer bodies like the ones of Aguilar and Henríquez, this idea stands at the basis of disrupting dualisms and binarism. In embracing a constant state of transgression, trans-corporeality can also help us understand how different queer subjects negotiate their bodily experiences in the world. Trans-corporeality as an ethics and a lens is one of the ways in which one can contest the fixedness of binarism and its norms. Understanding oneself in connection and becoming with others opposes a self-sufficient and detached notion of the individual. As Alaimo posits it, understanding oneself as trans-corporeal disrupts “the sovereign individual subject... an invitation to... opening out unto the larger material world and being penetrated by all sorts of subsentences and material agencies that may or may not be captured” (*Exposed* 4). Trans-corporeality is then also the mapping and tracing of this disruption and the attempts to make this connection visible. Trans-corporeality entails an ethics that contests human exceptionalism away from hierarchical dynamics,

comprehending all bodies as continuous entanglements with other entities, with other human and nonhuman agencies. All matter exists in that way it becomes part of various and intersecting social contexts, as well as cultural and environmental processes. By engaging with the work of Aguilar and Henríquez, I also see trans-corporeality as a site for an intimate but also convivial praxis that opens the opportunity for new affective relationships with other material existences and other entities. It is also a praxis to fathom oneself away from limiting dualities, finding not only new affective relationships with what surrounds us, but also refuge away from the unsafety that means to inhabit the present.

I begin with the work of Josecarlo Henríquez, a queer sex worker and activist in the sexual dissident movement in Chile. Aware of the danger that involves executing sexual labor in the present, he enacts strategic modulations that extend his activism and labor beyond his body as a flight toward endurance. In a performance of defiance that challenges the understanding of the biological human body, Henríquez situates his space of doing and being in constant transit and interchanges. Departing from a practice in the flesh and among other bodies, to the pages of his books, to television appearances, to becoming a Twitter trending topic, and in social media posts, Henríquez visualizes trans-corporeality. He is cognizant that his body is always already entangled with multiple processes and always affecting, as much as he is affected by other material contexts and entities. Bearing in mind his associations with new technologies and multimedia (social media, television, etc.), his enactment of trans-corporeality is one that can also be viewed in connection with what Rosi Braidotti understands as a *technobody*. This is a way of doing, and thus a performance, where bodily negotiations with technology constantly blur the skin as a biological border that cannot be crossed. The term *technobody* refers to bodies where biology and technology meet. This figure can encapsulate a performance of trans-

corporeality and where contemporary practitioners, such as Henríquez, invite us to reconsider ideas of the self, agency, and how digital technology is shaping how we conceive of the human. As a technobody and aware of the potential of performance within social media, Henríquez becomes viral, making strategic use of the hashtag #SoyPuto on Twitter, showing the social capacities of such an act with worldmaking capacities and lasting outcomes, as Marcela Fuentes affirms of the metadata tag (“Performance Constellations” 99). So, in performing trans-corporeality—or the idea of the body traversed by different processes and intersecting different entities—Henríquez molds a technobody that challenges the historical male-human hubris of the Western world.

As with any performance, static and non-static visuals are central to making trans-corporeality noticeable. Just as Henríquez finds the opportunity to make perceptible a trans-corporeal idea of himself through visuals, Laura Aguilar performs trans-corporeality through self-portraiture. In my study of her series of self-portraiture in different desertic landscapes of the Western United States, I argue she performs for the camera crossings of identity that are captured by the lens and archived in the photograph. It took years for Aguilar to attain this nuanced self-portraiture. It was a journey—always performed—of gradual self-discovery and acceptance of her fat, brown, and queer body. Considering her reflections about photography and the self via testimonies and interviews before publishing her series *Nature Self-Portrait* (1996), I observe her oeuvre prior to 1996 as visual rehearsals toward her later production and as evidence of a durational performance of trans-corporeality. Performing under such terms is what we see in her work during the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s, presenting a liberated conception of the body, boundless of identity categories and intimately connected to the material world that surrounds it.

To think of queer bodies as manifestations of trans-corporeality enables us to interrogate the Western idea of the human. My provocations emerge from Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen's postulation: Has the queer ever been human? On one end, they argue queer theoretical, critical, and cultural production is very much human as it has highlighted how queer subjects have been historically seen and treated less than human, which "posit the human as a standard form" (188). Likewise, much of what is at the center of queer theorization legitimizes and centers "the human body and human sexuality" (188). However, at the same time, Luciano and Chen insist the 'queer' has not been human, since "queer theory has long been suspicious of the politics of rehabilitation and inclusion to which liberal-humanist values lead, and because 'full humanity' has never been the only horizon for queer becoming" (188). Considering both Henríquez and Aguilar's performances, I observe how queer cultural production—which is also a form of theorization—does not aim or has as a prospect or intention to reach 'full humanity.' In fact, I argue Henríquez and Aguilar's performances aim toward a different horizon away from Western binary forms of being that can be restrictive, and thus regulated in perpetuating dualisms and as sites mechanisms of control by cisheteronormativity. They both reappropriate the site of being less than human as a political and creative locus to imagine other forms of being. This is of course not a reiteration of their marginalized position, but instead, a perspective, an outlook, that desires to undo a Western gaze in negating a historical humanist frame of being 'human' in the Latinx Americas. Henríquez and Aguilar, undo the human rooted within feminist perspectives, where their body and its potentialities with and among other bodies present or (re)discover new forms of being in the world.

Josecarlo Henríquez's Sexual Dissidence and Cyber-activism

On March 2nd, 2012, headlines erupted in response to a horrendous hate crime that took place in a public park in Santiago, Chile's capital. A group of neo-Nazi men attacked 24-year-old Daniel Zamudio after they found out about his homosexuality. He was beaten, tortured, and left to die on the street because his attackers deemed him less of a human.⁶⁵ The hate crime provoked outrage across the nation, leading to the passage of an anti-discrimination law by the Chilean senate months later. This violent attack was a materialization and articulation of how a cisheteropatriarchal society is constantly seeking to punish and control subjectivities that stand outside of everything that is not a white, cisheterosexual man. The cowardly attack by the neo-Nazi men also made evident a present reality: the streets of the neoliberal city continue to be dangerous to women and minoritarian bodies such as queer, BIPOC, immigrants, and sex workers. If nowadays, the streets are an imminent danger to marginalized bodies, what alternatives do they have for survival? In a nation that continues to fail to secure the well-being of minoritarian subjects, where does one exist and/or become secure and free? In the following section, I observe instances of resistance, a performance exercise that responds to the systems of power that enabled Daniel Zamudio's murder. When embodied resistance on the streets is not enough or too dangerous, queer subjects, such as Josecarlo Henríquez, find unconventional or alternative spaces to work, advocate, exist, and ultimately survive. While Henríquez might be known by many for his text *#SoyPuto*, that I later discuss, I delve into what I understand as his performative exercises of resistance practiced as a queer sex worker, activist, and writer through his life on the streets, in private space, and digital world. In doing so, I demonstrate how Henríquez materializes a form of being situated in the act of transiting spaces, enacting

⁶⁵ In 2022 the Chilean theatre group Teatro La Matrera premiered *Daniel: voy a ser el gay más famoso de Chile*, a play that tells the story, desires, and ambitions of the young Daniel Zamudio.

homosexual practices that (re)consider and/or reappropriate spaces that have been created by the advent of new technologies. Lastly, I argue that materializing this diversification of queer becoming also entails a reexamination of what it means to be a human in the 21st century through modulation of innovative embodiments; *technobodies* as I later discuss.

From the Streets to the Screen

To queer Chilean cultural critic Juan Pablo Sutherland, the advent of new technologies has shifted the way Chilean homosexual bodies project and disseminate their desires in the present. The space of the cybercafe at the turn of the 21st century, and the possibilities it offered for homosexual encounters, gave the first glimpses of what later became the encounters and exchanges in social media and the world of mobile applications, such as Grindr (Sutherland 41).⁶⁶ In other words, there has been a shift, a “punto de inflexión donde la ciudad homo se virtualizará como un nuevo cuerpo” (Sutherland 41). To Sutherland, the act of urban *cruising* condensed homosexual desires prior to the arrival of the Internet and its possibilities. In the realm of cultural production, Latin American writers such as Néstor Perlongher, Manuel Puig, Osvaldo Lamborghini, Reinaldo Arenas, and Pedro Lemebel all used a variety of texts to illustrate how homosexual life and survival in the urban space created sociability in the act of “*cruising*, el yirar, el cancanear o el putear” (Sutherland 62). Today, that act of wandering the city in desire—which also means resistance and survival to the cisheteronormativity that criminalizes the homosexual expression—has shifted partially away from a materialized—only in the physical body—practice, and into the digital world filled with what we might call techno-cities (Sutherland 62). The new possibilities that come with techno-

⁶⁶ An account of the Chilean idiosyncrasy, its affects, and desires—including those of homosexuals and their sexual encounters in cybercafes prior to the arrival of mobile devices, social media, and dating apps—is traced in Ramón Griffero’s play *Tus Deseos en Fragmentos*, which originally premiered in 2003.

cities are also linked to the social substance of the nation. In other words, the diversification of homosexual practices does not occur without contextual factors nor is it isolated as a mere effect of new technologies. The changes in homosexual sociability run parallel to the overall sociability of the nation. To a specialist in queer Chilean cultural production, Fernando Blanco, these new articulations in the sociability of the nation are made possible due to a widespread shift in how new demands are being made and different exercises of citizenship are arising (102). If Chile navigated within the landscape of memory and the demands that came post-Pinochet dictatorship in the past, then today, while these demands have not been fully resolved, they are beginning to intermingle with others such as the “la emancipación sexual” (Blanco 102). That is, sexuality “es ahora eje de los reclamos por ciudadanía (normas y derechos)” (Blanco 97). Thus, the same legal rhetoric that informed the nation post-dictatorship around “sanciones, derechos, obligaciones, víctimas, y victimarios” has now shifted towards sexuality (Blanco 152).

It is with this in mind that I situate Henríquez embodying this shift through his sexual labor as well as his activism as a sexual dissident. While Henríquez salutes that past of queer resistance in urban spaces, represented in the Lemebelian figure of ‘la loca,’ he disassociates from it as soon as he enters cyberspace. If living Chile’s present, brings “nuevos... modos de habitar lo público y lo privado,” then Henríquez is the example par excellence (Blanco 103). As I later show, the act of being in the digital world is a posthuman form or a *technobody* with and beyond the material context of the body; a mode of existence or a performance of trans-corporeality that takes into account both a life in the flesh but also its permutations away from this material context. Henríquez has politicized those possibilities of exposure, existence, and activism that digital spaces and television have to offer.

A queer sex worker, writer, activist, and performer, Henríquez is at the center of the sexual dissident movement in Chile. As an activist, Henríquez vindicates sexual labor in a neoliberal and heteronormative society that consumes the services of sex work but does not validate it as work. Having refused a college education to resist the fate of being indebted, Henríquez has managed to introduce his writing into different academic circles. He has had a column in the newspaper *The Clinic* and has often participated in conferences nationally and internationally to discuss sex work and sexual dissidence from an empirical perspective. As an autodidact, Henríquez began his intellectual life in Diego Ramírez's poetry workshops, where he met the queer biologist Jorge Díaz. Both eventually became members of el Colectivo Universitario/Utópico de Disidencia Sexual (CUDS)—a group of intellectuals, writers, artists, scientists, and cultural critics, among others, that engage in grassroots activism and theoretical endeavors that originally intended to (re)occupy the space of the university. Through a variety of academic and nonacademic projects, CUDS, as Nelly Richard asserts, sways between “localizaciones disciplinarias y los indisciplinamientos creativos de cuerpos tráfugos cuyo activismo político-sexual insiste en la universidad como un campo de renovación de los saberes” (161). To Blanco, the members of CUDS are “herederos de... una hermenéutica urbana emparentada con las poéticas del CADA... [CUDS] opera sobre los espacios ciudadanos traficando imaginarios” (“Memorias y desclasificación” 106). CUDS' interventions involve critically thinking, and most importantly performing, about and against the Chilean cisheteropatriarchal paradigm. This oscillation of positionings mentioned by Richard somehow feeds Henríquez's overall practice, both in his activism with CUDS, and in his labor as a sex worker. The oscillation also corresponds with a trans-corporeal practice, of navigation and situation as a way of being and making in the crossings. It is this very ambivalence of situatedness that also led him

to explore the platform of television and social media as the vehicle of his activism and politicized intervention.

On June 11th, 2013, the year after Daniel Zamudio's murder in Santiago, Josecarlo Henríquez became a trending topic on Twitter with the hashtag *#SoyPuto*. In a daring interview, Henríquez sat down on a famous late-night show to talk about his experiences as a young, queer sex worker.⁶⁷ Here he talked bluntly about his motivations to be a sex worker, of his ideas about anti-love, desire, and the cynicism of heterosexual subjects, and provided a glimpse into stories about the type of clients that consume his work, furtively, as many of them are married men living a 'heterosexual' life. Weaved into his responses was an audacious manifesto for a life as a sex worker. His interview was a popular event that not only increased the TV channel's ratings but erupted as a major topic on social media. Alluding to this first television appearance, Henríquez titled his first book *#SoyPuto* in 2016. This book acts as an archive of social media posts, newspaper columns, and other texts that speak to his positionality as a person who subscribes to the sexual dissident movement of the country, standing suspicious, hesitant, and aware of living under a heteropatriarchal regime. To Hector Iglesias Pascual, the book "supone un posicionamiento teórico e ideológico acerca de la sexualidad y la prostitución" (128). To Jorge Díaz, *#SoyPuto* "se compromete con las ganas de poner en crisis la coherencia de la supuesta democracia heterosexual en la que vivimos" (169). Based on Henríquez's experiences engaging in prostitution, along with social media posts from their *alter ego* Camilo, the book presents the ideas of an unapologetic queer sex worker.

The manuscript is an amalgamation of thoughts, manifesto-like textual interventions, essays, past speeches and talks, and screenshots of social media posts containing images (mostly

⁶⁷ The full recorded interview can be found on the YouTube page of the TV show (Más Vale Tarde) that hosted him. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY2B6kiZbYU>

selfies or self-portraits) along with a caption. Reading the book resembles the act of observing a collage of different textual manifestations that, in this case, are arranged together as the act of archiving a way of life. It engages the reader in an episodic experience that attends to different experiences that Henríquez has lived. Whether these are personal reflections around the gender norms and Christian values that sustain the cisheteropatriarchy, or narrations about encounters with different clients such as a football player, a student, or ‘discreet men,’ Henríquez exhibits the multiple spaces that he navigates with his body in the city and within the digital world. Nevertheless, what is most important about *#SoyPuto* is that this amalgamation of texts materializes Henríquez’s navigations and crossings among different mediums and of life on the streets and in the flesh. The book is an attempt to document a conception of life that is ephemeral, dynamic, and one that is practiced in the act of constantly fleeting demarcated spaces.

In *#SoyPuto*, Henríquez also forges alliances with social demands pertinent to the feminist movement, advocating for abortion access and free choice when it comes to reproductive care. Additionally, he promotes the ideals of the sexual dissident movement, wanting to deconstruct the concept of the nuclear family, and rejecting the Christian values engraved in the nation such as *the principle of sacrifice* as the act and path to success in a cisheteropatriarchal and neoliberal nation. The heterogeneity of the texts in the book accounts for his localized activism, focused on micro-interventions that take multiple forms considering his multimedia practice. All of these micro- and multimedia interventions responds to what he calls his disapproval of “revolución,” advocating instead, for “una resistencia micropolítica” (Henríquez, “Josecarlo Henríquez, escritor”).

By choosing to name his book *#SoyPuto*, Henríquez signals his mindfulness of the potential of performing within the digital world and how one can do activism through the

metadata tag, as in the case of the hashtag. The book is his attempt to archive what is at the center of his practice: activism through multiple spaces. Henríquez's use of cyberspace and television is a strategy of being relentlessly *puto*—a whore—in a series of simultaneous becomings. While his book attempts to archive this performative deployment, I argue that Henríquez's *posthuman gesture* resides in his simultaneous unfolding between a life on the streets, private space, cyberspace, and television. This gesticulation—which is also a performance—allows him to deconstruct the established biological idea of the body as that which finds its limits on the skin. Henríquez's deployment of, and performances on social media and his television appearances, are modulations of being other than a human, a post-identity perspective that rejects the fixedness of limiting categories and binaries. Its deployment invokes Donna Haraway's figure of the *cyborg*. First coined by neuroscientists Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960, the term emerged as an acknowledgment of the limitations of the human body outside the earth's atmosphere and as an invitation to imagine a body that would need to be supplemented by technology to survive ("Cyborgs in Space"). Later advancements of the term, such as Haraway's, rooted the figure in the intersection of technology and feminism. As a metaphorical figure of resistance, the cyborg blurs the boundaries between body and technology and challenges fixed understandings of body politics, including gender and identity and nature and culture. In the 21st century, Henríquez's employment of new technologies remits to the cyborg's capacity for subversion that Haraway signaled. In 1985, Haraway presented the cyborg as a "cybernetic organism" in the context of new and rapidly evolving technological advancements, one that is both "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (*Cyborg Manifesto* 5). This idea introduced a framework for accepting possibilities that would redefine human beings as new technologies continued to emerge (*Cyborg Manifesto* 15).

However, the ways in which new technologies drive changes have depended on the context of each geographical region. We cannot reduce Haraway's perspective, one that stems from the Global North to the realities of latitudes in the Global South. In that sense, Henríquez bodily explorations with new technologies also speak to the intense and rapid introduction of "Internet technologies" (4) and the role "neoliberal policies of the 1990s" had for their advancement in Latin America, as J. Andrew Brown argues.

Henríquez's engagement and explorations with new technologies are the product of how technology has guided human beings towards new conceptions of the self. While the figure of the cyborg explains a history of how humans have understood themselves since the second half of the 20th century, I will utilize the technobody since this focuses on how technology affects an individual's experience in the world and their idea of the self. Whereas the figure of the cyborg is typically associated with direct physical alterations, incorporations, or integrations of technologies into the biological body of a human being, the technobody highlights the possibilities of new subjectivities at the intersection of the body and technology. The technobody allows us to experiment beyond the boundaries of our biggest organ, the skin, and the sort of (inter)subjectivities these experimentations provoke. As Braidotti states, by "overcoming hierarchical dichotomies and cultivating... multiple capacities relations and modes of communication in a multi-directional manner" we open to new possibilities of subjectivities (*Posthuman Knowledge* 63). Open to ontological explorations, the technobody—as a posthuman manifestation—can be "a formula for acting, a praxis to lead the new subjects that we are cable of becoming away from violent aspects of European Humanism, most notably the violence of sexualized, racialized and naturalized exclusions and of colonial domination" (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* 63). In sum, the figure emerges as a process of trespassing, engaging in

the performance of crossings, and challenging limiting conceptions of body and being. The technobody names what human beings have become in the present through their lived experiences, many of which are deeply embedded with technology. Technobodies bodies “are caught within a range of de-materialization techniques that turn them into providers and retrievers of data and information, integrated into the electronic circuit. But they also contribute to re-materialization of bodies within extensive multi-species webs of environmental and social relations” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 142). Henriquez flows between these processes of de-materialization and re-materialization as a form of survival—of not restraining and limiting one’s body to a single (thus, precarious, and unsafe) form of being. To me, in embodying the technobody, Henriquez performs trans-corporeally. In other words, in materializing the technobody, Henriquez articulates the specificity of the broader term, which is the performance of trans-corporeality—a crossing biological limits and opening to new relations, contacts, and entanglements with that which stands outside of the limits of the skin. For now, I will continue to link Henriquez’s performativity with trans-corporeality and will return to the idea of the technobody toward the end of this section.

While I began by framing Henriquez’s practice with theoretical inquiries in posthumanism and technology, his conception of the body, speaks to the grounded, localized movements that have a long history of challenging the treatment of bodies by the cisheteropatriarchy—such as the ongoing feminist movements in Latin America.

Sexual Dissidence, Coalitions, and Feminisms

Centerstage to enduring (feminist) social movements in Latin America stands the body as that which faces the constant threats of extermination, disappearance, or control by the cisheteropatriarchy. The active transnational movements of Ni Una Menos (NUM) or the Green

Tide that emerged in Argentina highlight the threat that women's bodies constantly receive as the subject of femicide or control (e.g., limiting access to legal, safe, and free abortion).⁶⁸ In the context of fourth-wave feminism, other iterations have erupted in the region. In 2019, social unrest arose from the systematized inequality in the country. The multidirectional social unrest of students, senior citizens, the working class, and indigenous communities, among others, demanded more equal treatment by the state. With this, a feminist movement anchored itself in the battleground of the streets, practicing intersectionality and gaining momentum within the mobilized nation. Among the different public manifestations during the last months of 2019, LASTESIS—an interdisciplinary, trans-inclusive, and intersectional feminist collective—garnered attention in Chile and the world with the protest song “A Rapist in Your Path” which unswervingly denounces the cisheteropatriarchal power over women’s bodies. The fact the song was quickly translated into many languages and performed in different countries in a matter of days speaks to a shared reality among the lived experience of women around the world.⁶⁹ While the song centers around the multi-directional subjectification of women by patriarchal power, LASTESIS’ composition as an intersectional and trans-inclusive collective exhibits the nature of the latest iterations of feminism in Chile and Latin America. A definite characteristic of fourth-wave feminism around the world has been its intersectional characteristic, where women form coalitions with other marginalized sectors of society, such as the LGBTQ+ community and BIPOC, to express how all are subjected to interlocking systems of power that affects them through the fixed norms governing gender, sex, and race. Having been historically overlooked by the left who, under heteronormativity ideals, prioritized a class struggle and disassociated this

⁶⁸ For more, see Marcela Fuentes’ “Critical Performances.”

⁶⁹ Las Tesis (Dafne Valdés, Sibila Sotomayor, Paula Cometa, and Lea Cáceres) first performed “Un violador en tu camino” (A Rapist in Your Path, 2019) in Valparaiso, Chile, with a major intervention on November 25, 2019 in Santiago. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB7r6hdo3W4>.

from a struggle for gender equality, LASTESIS reminds us that “feminist demands are intersectional” (27). Aware of the importance of coalitional efforts for feminism in the present,

LASTESIS explains that the fight for feminism in the present:

is intersectional and includes all so-called sexual minorities. It includes all women, with or without uteri, and all dissidents: gay, queer, transgender, transsexual, lesbian, homosexual, pansexual, bisexual, nonbinary, gender fluid, intersex, asexual... The bodies of women and dissidents carry a symbolic load of violence, and as a collective body they stand in defiance of oppressive institutions (31).

Intersectional feminism allows us to see a collective body where the social struggles of all women (and specifically racialized and transgender ones) can find alliances with other minority groups, including those who do not necessarily identify as women, who are subjected to mistreatment at the hands of the cisheteropatriarchy and the fixed idea of the body as dictated by Western thought. Henríquez, with a critical eye on the humanist idea of the body—his performance of trans-corporeality—intersects with feminism. The sexual dissidence of Henríquez and the feminist movements of the region meet at their shared efforts to challenge Western and otherwise fixed notions of gender and sexuality, as well as the violence derived from cisheteropatriarchal, racist, and able-bodied discourses.

The effects of the patriarchy and gender inequality, and the struggles of LGBTQ+ people and BIPOC are all intersectional. These struggles traverse all dimensions of life and the lived experiences of people, the public and the private life, and all the institutions that constitute the state. LASTESIS reminds us that “discrimination against and devaluation of women is not just patriarchal in a neoliberal context” (30). It affects all aspects of the political spectrum. The left, with its focus on a class struggle, has hidden a “social and familial configuration [that has been]

sexist, binary, and heteronormative” (30).⁷⁰ Fernando Blanco, would agree with this since, according to him, there is a sexual dissidence movement in contemporary Chile that confronts a seemingly inclusive agenda of the state as it strategically embraces homosexuality and non-heterosexual bodies into a nation-state framework that rigidly remains neoliberal and patriarchal (“Queer Latinoamérica” 40-41).

Today, Chilean sexual dissidence stands out from other modulations of sexual politics in the country as a moment that is “trans-móvil, [y que] interviene promiscua y provisionalmente los espacios,” as Felipe Rivas San Martín asserts (12). The trans mode of intervening in multiple spaces is at the heart of a version of intersectional feminism that embraces all bodies and fluid expressions of gender and sexuality. A “trans-móvil” intervention also defines groups such as LASTESIS, who intervene in the public space with an amalgamation of dissenting bodies, thus reaching beyond the boundaries of the nation becoming transnational through performative replications. Interestingly, this is also the way Henríquez circulates spaces, constantly fleeing as a mode of resistance, un-situated.

Henríquez advocates for sexual dissidence by strategically positioning his labor as a sex worker and activist in a transit mode. A life rooted in transitions allows for what I see as concurrent modes of becoming, where his body navigates life between public and private spaces; between his activism on the streets and encountering clients in person or digitally, as well as appearances on television and cyberspace. Recalling Deleuzian and Guattarian theorizations, Henríquez’s becoming is “an ontological and an ethical position that involves movement from stable, ‘molar’ entity to indeterminable, ‘molecular’ nonidentity, extending beyond the limits of

⁷⁰ LATESIS reminds us that even with the progressive moves of the Unidad Popular in the early 1970s, the political alliance that guided the government of Salvador Allende, was molded around the sexist idea of the “proletarian man and his female companion who cared for the home and the community” (31).

dominant corporeal and conceptual logics” (Garner 31). The ambivalence, the constant transition, and the oscillation between the spaces he inhabits is a performance insofar as it posits the body in both a process of becoming materially—in the flesh—and simultaneously, away from the body (in cyberspace and television). This is a two-way process of resistance and survival which is best understood when pondering on Henríquez’s articulation of his own sexual dissidence. As he states in *#SoyPuto*, his dissidence:

[Es] un ejercicio, una forma de deformar las cosas. Pensar al revés el mundo y desobedecer cada orden que otro te indica. Cuestionarse hasta unx mismx, mis gustos, mis odios, mis deseos y sospechar de lo que me rodea... Mirarme el cuerpo y desarmarlo, darles nuevos sentidos a mis órganos y desorganizar lo que alguna vez aprendí en el colegio sobre el cuerpo humano. No ser humano, no creer en el género, desaprender el romanticismo, imaginar nuevas formas del afecto, de la memoria y de la propia biografía. Pensar mis sucias ganas como una pulsión que puede ser política y hasta subversiva. Creer en el disenso y no en el consenso. Difuminar ese límite binario de realidad y ficción, travestir el habla también de feminismos. Atentar contra la sexualidad que conocemos. Sin estado, sin legalidad. La disidencia sexual es para mí un deseo de anarquismo sexual post-humano... Llenarse y contaminarse de escrituras corporizadas que nos entregan un lugar, que nos permiten hacernos de un cuerpo para luego quizás destruir. (*#SoyPuto* 119)

One idea that immediately stands out in this passage for me is the deconstruction or disorganization of the body and its organs. This remits directly to Antonin Artaud’s idea of a body without organs that served as a catalyst for philosophical critiques of Western ideas of subjectivity in the 20th century, as Patricia Pisters observes (74).⁷¹ In dislocating the body, Henríquez exposes his intentions and desires to go beyond its limits, to *desaprender*, to unlearn what was taught to him—a Western notion of the body. Henríquez is laying out what I understand is a desire to envision an idea of the self as trans-corporeal.

⁷¹ In tracing the idea of the *body without organs*, Pisters recalls Artaud’s radio play “To Have Done with the Judgment of God” (1947) where he advocated for an idea of the body “free from the capturing confinements of automatic reactions and habitual patterns” (74). This notion shaped Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s own conception of a body without organs in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) to critique a Western frame of subjectivity as autonomous and disembodied (74). Much of the theories of new materialisms are indebted to Deleuze and Guattari’s developments.

Through his idea of dissidence, we can observe that everything is at stake: From the affective realm, as in the relationships he establishes with his surroundings, to his own body and how he conceives it. Henríquez's sexual dissidence is a lifestyle, a worldview, and a form of becoming otherwise.

Henríquez's sexual dissidence praxis centers the body as a site of tension, experimentation, and deconstruction. In doing so, his practice pressures the very category of the human, undoing a notion that has been historically taught and transmitted in the Western world—a decolonial move. His obliteration of identity politics and restrictive binarism and dualities is at the core of his sexual dissidence. For Henríquez, the task of questioning the human is a systemized process of undoing everything that has defined him and imposed on him thus far. In a feminist new materialist way, Henríquez's sexual dissidence is tied to his understanding of becoming textually, and somatically, and to also see himself embedded in new technologies for social mediation.

Henríquez stance is a feminist one because it adheres to the modes of action but also impetus, and social struggle of women, as LASTESIS postulate. To Braidotti, feminism in the present “is by now an established social movement, greatly diversified across multiple constituencies and locations... [forcing us to point] toward a broad range of feminist positions” (*Posthuman Feminism* 3). As I postulated, fourth-wave feminism is about diversification resulting in coalitional projects and perspectives of dissent. As LASTESIS holds, it “is the struggle to empower those who live along multiple axes of inequality. It involves empowering the dispossessed and impoverished, not only women, but also LGBTQ+ people, people of colour, Black and Indigenous peoples” (3). Now, the localized demands and the experiences that traverse dissenting (feminist) bodies, such as the ones of Henríquez, speak to a trend of

contestation and defiance that transfeminist philosopher Sayak Valencia identifies as commonly emerging from dissenting and minoritarian subjects in the present:

En la actualidad algunos de los lenguajes de la visualidad que representan la política corporal y el agenciamiento contemporáneo más inesperado están contruidos desde las voces de sujetos sexual, racial, corporal y geográficamente periféricos (*transbordermestizxs*) que interpelan los binarismos: de género, sexuales, raciales y de localización (norte-sur). Dichas críticas se articulan desde distintos soportes: artístico, político, social, cultural y económico, teniendo predilección los lenguajes de la visualidad para su representación. (“Interferencias transfeministas”)

The voice of criticism that emerges from these subjects has been framed as transfeminisms with a genealogy that, according to Valencia, has four components: 1) U.S. Third World Feminism, 2) the eruption of sexual dissidence and its epistemic shift to the Global South (from *queer* to *cuir*), 3) the movement to de-pathologize trans identity and migration and, 4) the overall effects of global migrations and economic precariousness (“Interferencias transfeministas”). I position Valencia’s understanding of transfeminism in the present as another articulation of the fourth-wave feminism that has evolved in Latin America in the last decade and another of the different “feminist positions” in the conglomerate that Braidotti identifies. In other words, the different intersectional feminist iterations in the present have led to the emergence of Valencia’s understanding of transfeminism. This originates and considers the historical work of women but at the same time, it also includes and embraces other marginalized groups in coalitional efforts.

To Valencia, transfeminism:

no se reduce a la incorporación del discurso trans al feminismo sino que puede entenderse como... una articulación tanto del pensamiento como de resistencia social que es capaz de conservar como necesarios ciertos supuestos de la lucha feminista para la obtención de derechos en ciertos espacios geopolíticamente diversos o la contestación desobediente a los sistemas de representación y represión dominantes... Este transfeminismo, teje lazos con la memoria histórica y la herencia aportada por los movimientos feministas anteriores, integrados por las minorías raciales, sexuales, económicas, migrantes y se nutre tanto discursiva como políticamente de ellos. (“Interferencias transfeministas”).

Valencia is postulating here what I have identified earlier as intersectional feminism. In fact, she has placed the practice of CUDS in Chile—which includes Henríquez—as part of this transfeminism movement. In praxis, Valencia sees this transfeminism—or intersectional feminism—as a calling, “un llamado a proponer actualizaciones teórico-prácticas sobre la realidad y la condición de las mujeres dentro de ésta pero no sólo de las mujeres sino de las distintas corporalidades y disidencias críticas de todo tipo” (“Interferencias transfeministas”). In a similar manner, CUDS member Jorge Díaz’s viewpoints intersect with Valencia’s standpoint, connecting the practice of sexual dissidence with those of other feminist iterations in the country: “De todas las intersecciones que tienen las teorías de disidencia sexual, una habría que resaltar sobre todas, y esta es con el feminismo. Más que una intersección, podríamos decir que las teorías de disidencia sexual tienen en su base formadora al feminismo... Cuando decimos feminismo, en verdad decimos feminismos” (30). In the same spirit, LASTESIS acknowledges and embraces the multiplicities that grow from a single historical feminist power. They write: “There are multiple feminisms and they are all lived in practice. Many feminisms run through us. And in them we have found a place of resistance against the neoliberal and patriarchal system” (33).

The sexual dissident movement certainly encapsulates a feminist force of subversion against the Anthropos, or ‘man’ and its regulatory manifestation in the system of power that is the cisheteropatriarchy.⁷² The present multiple feminist iterations are enacted by various subjects that are affected by their geographies and traversed by their community’s own political, social, and economic histories. To Braidotti, the feminisms of the present speak to our historical condition that she names a *posthuman convergence*, where changes at the social, environmental,

⁷² Determining if the sexual dissidence movement in Chile is a feminist iteration is not my focus of attention as this only creates more division and empowers the very structure they are all opposing: cisheteropatriarchy.

and technological levels are redefining what it means to be a human in the Western world (*Posthuman Feminism* 3-4). Nowadays, those who have been historically considered less than human are leading movements such as Black Lives Matter, and other feminist articulations such as the #NiUnaMenos, and the #MeToo movements. In other words, “the politics of sexualized, racialized, naturalized minorities – the ‘others’ – are moving centre stage, pushing dominant ‘man’ (or Anthropos) off-centre” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 5). Henríquez intersects and joins these dissenting forces in the Chilean context, using his marginalized sociopolitical position as a site to reimagine the human. Performing trans-corporeally is then also a feminist manifestation not only because it dislocates a universal and atomic idea of the human, but it also opposes ‘man’ as a regulating figure. In moving away from the dominant figure of the human, the Anthropos, the ‘man,’ Henríquez gives way to a queer body that, from an often-vulnerable state, intervenes in the digital world.

I am on TV and Social Media

Henríquez’s first appearance on television, and the manner in which he gained popularity, speaks of the connections between, as Sayak Valencia explains, the “reapropiación de códigos de visualidad y la reivindicación de las prácticas sexuales alternativas,” which she understands to be engrained in feminist movements and the activism of dissident subjects (“Interferencias transfeministas”). Henríquez is aware of how television has served to feed cisheteropatriarchal patterns of behavior and forms of seeing, representing, and controlling women and queer subjects. In response, Henríquez reappropriated the screen by reclaiming the spotlight. His first television appearance, as I described previously, strategically disidentifies with the very structure of television. This is an example of the “process of recycling and rethinking the encoded meaning” of a minoritarian subject—as José Esteban Muñoz understands it—where Henríquez

situates himself with and against the discourses and power structures that operate and control him (*Disidentifications* 31). On the one hand, Henríquez subscribes to the capitalist system of entertainment, feeding the audience's morbid fascination created by his exposure as a homosexual sex worker and thus increasing the television channel's ratings. However, that same exposure runs against the heteronormative guidelines that have historically controlled the programming of television. His exposed body and the relentless utterance of his sexual dissidence on the screen are digital activism. What is most, that very exposure is also the catalyst for cyberactivism that finds its propagation in the hashtag. His television appearance '*se viralizó*' on Twitter, as people often refer to it in Spanish. As an analogy of spreading or contaminating information through social media, Henríquez 'goes viral' digitally, disseminating—through his audience—a way of being in the world that otherwise would not have been possible. The moment his television appearance became a trending topic, the hashtag revealed its potential “to do things in the world,” as Marcela Fuentes would state (“#NiUnaMenos” 180).

Initiated by the TV show that hosted him, #SoyPuto was a marketing strategy to gain viewers and raise the viewing rate while audience members shared their thoughts about the interview they were watching live on TV. There were many reactions to Henríquez's appearance, most against his ideologies and experiences, showing dismissal for a life lived otherwise. Using the search function on Twitter to trace the responses that tagged the hashtag on 06/10/2013 and the following days, one can see how others criticized his exposure: “Me apesta discurso burgués de JoseCarlo, prostitución no se ejerce x placer, si no por necesidad. No es grato mercantilizar cuerpo” (Luciano). Or Joséma who questioned Henríquez social awareness and his choice to engage in sex work: “#SoyPuto con tanta consciencia social, nunca pensó hacer otra cosa por su vida josecarlo?” (Josemá). There was a broad condemnation to execute sex work and to

empower it as an accepted labor practice. Conversely, there were those who showed appreciation, acceptance, and acknowledgment of Henríquez's vulnerability in exhibiting his life choice on national television. Such is the case of Rocio del Pilar who congratulated him:

“Felicitationesssss... Josecarlo falta gente que diga verdades en televisión.” Additionally, Juan Eduardo Menendez Miranda highlighted Henríquez tenacity and bluntness on the app as well: “Con razón quedo la grande con #SoyPuto si el #JoseCarlo saco todos los trapitos al sol, como duele q les refrieguen las verdades en la cara?”

Of the many uses and effects that a hashtag can have, #SoyPuto became a tool of visibility. The hashtag provoked what Fuentes identifies as the prompting of “debates over engrained cultural attitudes that severely compromise the lives of gendered and racially marked bodies” (“Performance Constellations” 99). With his exposure, Henríquez did not aim to find adherents. However, by establishing a discussion, he engaged in a mode of digital activism. The moment he became a trending topic, he had accomplished his purpose: Chile was talking about him and his interests; his desires. The performativity of the hashtag, as an “anchor of digitally networked iterative or citational practices with worldmaking effects,” was serving a purpose to Henríquez and to the sexual dissidence movement he supports (Fuentes “#Niunamenos” 180). If the concept of trans-corporeality insists that all embodied beings are “intermeshed” with their environment which not only “crosses them” but “transforms them,” Henríquez’s spectacle on television and Twitter—which is part of his digital environment—exposed how our very existence in the present is mediated, altered, and directly influenced by our entanglements with technology (Alaimo, “Trans-corporeality” 435). Henríquez’s spotlight in these platforms of communication did not only allow him a temporal extension of his body, his manifestation of

being, it also afforded a space for discourses of support and opposition to circulate as they engaged with his exposure.

In this instance, the hashtag, in its worldmaking potential, created a space and drew attention to the silenced, invisible, and ostracized world of sex work by queer subjects. Nonetheless, being in the spotlight of the TV screen and of mobile devices was also allowing Henríquez to become otherwise in a nation that refuses to give space to minoritarian subjects. Henríquez's iteration through Twitter posts that contained the marker *#SoyPuto* was more than the digitalization of his activism but also an instance of survival. This form of persistence was grounded on the “enduring ephemerality” of the hashtag within digital memory (Fuentes “Performance Constellations” 99). If the hashtag has the potential for regeneration, “and like, embodied performance, depend[s] on circulation and transfer for its durability,” *#SoyPuto*'s permanence was demonstrated as it reemerged and regenerated itself in 2014 and 2016, when a different TV show invited him for two new interviews (Fuentes “Performance Constellations” 99).⁷³

If the cisheteropatriarchal nation-state can murder young queer bodies, as it did with Zamudio in 2012, Henríquez enacted a resistance, in 2013, through iterations on television screens and Twitter as a performance of defiance, reclaiming (digital) spaces for existence. Performing trans-corporeally here—embedded in the digital world—is an act of digital activism, a resistance. Invading people's homes and mobile devices is a strategy, a form of protest, and a powerful unrestrained contestation. In 2013, Henríquez was rubbing the fact of the existence of sexual dissidence in the nation's face. Perhaps this is what Fuentes understands to be the possibilities of certain activism movements that traverse “physical and digital sites, body-based

⁷³ The talk show that hosted him was *Mentiras Verdaderas* in *La Red*.

and digitally mediated action,” potentially having the capacity to “redefine traditional repertoires of protest and activism in ways that are key to responding to contemporary systems of exploitation and subjection” (“Performance Constellations” 2).

Henríquez’s digital activism erupted in the act of becoming a trending topic on Twitter. As we will see, his digital activism—which takes different forms—is also a manifestation that performs virally. What determines a hashtag as a trending topic is “an algorithm that captures intensity over relevance... Trending hashtags are not the most used but those that are more rapidly replicated” (Fuentes, “Performance Constellations” 90). In other words, in the mode of being rapidly replicated, hashtags can be viral and so are subjects that benefit from the information being spread. In what follows, I examine what I see as another performative layer of Henríquez’s technobody and his performance of trans-corporeality. In the act of navigating both embodied and digital practices, and utilizing the hashtag as a strategy toward visibility, Henríquez enacts a viral mode of being that offers a new dimension to the way he communicates and spreads a narrative to vindicate his labor and sexual dissidence.

On Virality and Being Viral

Henríquez went viral in 2013. As I write these pages in 2022, I cannot disregard how the concepts of viral and virality have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. We now understand that to speak about virality and being viral is to speak about the material, affective, durational, and widespread effects that nonhuman agents, such as viruses, can have on the life of everything that exists on the planet. The COVID-19 pandemic meant, for many, a cease of action in the world. In confinement we learned to (un)do in new ways, isolated but never alone. As Braidotti states, the pandemic highlights the “destructive” as well as the “generative potential” of human and nonhuman contact (*Posthuman Feminism* 4). In seclusion,

people increased “the use of technology and digital mediation” searching for ways to remain connected and being social (*Posthuman Feminism* 4). Yet, as in the case of Henríquez, digital mediation was already in the works, a digital strategy of communication that a queer subject had already been practicing and performing. Contagion and living with and among a virus are not strange to queer subjects. If the COVID-19 pandemic reminded us of anything, it was that others—such as those members of the LGBTQ+ community—have already survived and learned how to live with and among virus(es). The AIDS crisis taught us that certain bodies, such as seropositive subjects for HIV, were able to endure the initial experience with COVID-19 because of their experience with government neglect during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Cultural critic Miguel Caballero-Vázquez ponders on the lessons and connections between a life with HIV and COVID-19, concluding that, when it comes to risks, these are measured by each individual. He adheres that carrying viruses have both a bodily and psychological toll, that overall safety does not exist, and that we live with the constant hope for a ‘cure’ (“El VIH enseña”). Years before COVID-19, Henríquez contemplated the idea of contagion and what it means to live a life as a sex worker at the risk of contracting different infections. Connecting with the site and practice of other sexual dissents, Henríquez demystified a life with and among infections, resisting the drive of the cisheteropatriarchy to pathologize the life and choices of queer subjects. To Henríquez, there is an inevitableness to contagion, one that cisheteropatriarchy has managed to regulate to their convenience in order to control queer bodies. Henríquez writes, “Existimos quienes bebemos del contagio ya no como víctimas, sino que como sujetos deseantes. Contagiarse es inherente” (*#SoyPuto* 210). Contagion is a way of life, an intrinsic characteristic that he performs and materializes in his body, labor, and digital activism. Henríquez advocates for a positive

ethics of contagion.⁷⁴ His vindication for infection is resistance against the neoliberal fiction of “el cuerpo sano,” of understanding differently the infected body, and anti-pathologization, and a way of facing the possibility of death away from the Christian idea of punishment that has been disseminated in the Western world (#*SoyPuto* 212). Contagion as resistance “no es ser pro-muerte ni mucho menos pro-vida. Las dicotomías son tan poco deseantes. Es, quizás, situar nuestro deseo disidente de reivindicar otros cuerpos que se generan bajo estas mutaciones contemporáneas del sistema” (#*SoyPuto* 213). Thinking contagion otherwise and the positive ethics this carries allows for these “mutations” into other possible bodies; perhaps a technobody that sees in the interaction with the digital world a way of extension and annex to spread infinitely as data but always remembering and returning to its biological form, in the flesh.

From his analysis of queer subjects, viruses, and forms of contagion, Henríquez draws a path that explains what I also recognize as his mode of *performing virally*. In vindicating contagion and those (infected) bodies, there is a possibility for new forms of being in the world, materially, affectively, and relationally. This is, of course, a non-identity and non-essentialist stance, an idea of the self as ever-changing, disseminated through multiple mediums and taking different forms. The potentialities of being viral for Henríquez reside in the act of transformation, remitting to the already-discussed ideas of trans-corporeality. Performing virally, is also a performance of trans-corporeality that alters the Western gaze of an autonomous and detached being. To think of the body at crossings or transits, as trans-corporeality does, also invites us to

⁷⁴ In analyzing the subculture of barebacking, which refers to engaging in condomless sex, Tim Dean contemplates the practice and its implications on the "profound changes in the social organization of kinship and relationality" for gay men following the AIDS pandemic (6). While bareback sex among gay men may be directly associated with the risk of death, for some individuals who partake in the practice, it represents "alternative forms of life, reproduction, and kinship" (6). Similar to Henríquez's ideas around contagion, the theorist argues that barebacking, despite its risks, disrupts heteronormative discourses and challenges the regulation of bodies, questioning how we differentiate between life-giving activities and those that lead to death (6).

think of the unexpected this might bring (Alaimo “Trans-corporeality” 437) In those transits, in meeting what is within, across, and beyond the biological body, we encounter entanglements that can lead to changes, variation, or mutations. To Patricia Clough and Jasbir Puar, what we understand as viral in the present—biologically, culturally, politically, and technologically—as in our understanding of social movements, digital media, etc., is not “about the transfer of messages or ideologies... but rather the process of transformation” (13-14). The viral draws from the characteristic of the virus and from its capacity to change as it replicates. While the viral and virus are not the same—because being viral highlights the ability to duplicate and circulate lacking the ability for mutation—both are not entirely oppositional (Clough and Puar 14). The viral feeds from the very characteristics of the virus. That is to say, “There is becoming of the virus in the viral... the viral seeks to be an infecting form, to have the virus's capacity for mutation, its sensitivity to the timing of repetition, the rhythm of the speeds of repetition” (Clough and Puar 14). When we name the cultural production of a community as viral, we are thinking of the effects of such designation in the terms of “subjectivity, memory, desire, and history... a move away from identity” or fixedness (Clough and Puar 15).

Thus, in the figure of the virus and performing virally, Henríquez finds a productive trope for confronting a precarious present. The idea of virus and viral also point to the interactions and crossing between taxonomies, categories, and species, one that Henríquez materializes by executing a trans-corporeal practice (Clough and Puar 15). Most importantly, the viral remind us of the permeability of the boundaries we have created under binary oppositions and the need to cross those toward transformation. (Clough & Puar 15). If we understand Henríquez’s activism and aesthetic provocations navigating both the realms of bodily interactions and interventions in the digital world, we can see how being viral has served him as a way to transit, and to transform

and be transformed. Once he became a trending Twitter topic. There was an immediate change in the clients he was attracting. In an interview, he pondered on the ways in which his media and television appearances opened the door for new, younger clients, “aquellos a los que no les da miedo. Chicos que me han visto en la tele, que han leído mis crónicas” (“Juegete rabioso”). In becoming viral, we are seeing Henríquez’s transformative effects on others, and the attraction of a new audience/followers/clients with emancipatory characteristics as they are not afraid to live their desires with and alongside Henríquez. In performing trans-corporally, embedded in the digital world, and embracing virality, Henríquez experienced a transformative effect.

Away from essentialism, fixedness, and binaries that might limit his existence, in the constant crossings among mediums of visualization, Henríquez finds a way of being that allows him to live truthfully with his desires. In shaping and directing his desires as viral, Henríquez locates a way of becoming otherwise as a sex worker and activist. Michel Foucault implied that “with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation” and it is through the same principle that Henríquez shapes his idea of sexuality, activism, being, and body (163). Desires dictate Henríquez’s being in the world. By foregrounding desires as that which shapes his way of being, Henríquez also allows himself to radically redefine his body and its extension beyond the limits of physical and biological matter. In other words, becoming viral through replications and mutations of desire has a generative potential, one that rethinks the idea of the (biological) body and its limitations.

The Technobody to Survive

Drawing from Foucault, Paul Preciado understands the “resistance to disciplinary production of sexuality in our liberal societies” as “the productions of... forms of pleasure-knowledge as alternatives to the discipline of the modern sexual regime” (21). These productions

place the body traversed by (new) technologies, creating a “theory of the body situated outside the polarities man/woman, masculine/feminine, heterosexuality/homosexuality, trans/cis” (Preciado 21). Henríquez dissidence, in becoming viral, also subscribes to a similar theory of the body which is interlaced with his idea of dissidence: “mirarme el cuerpo y desarmarlo, darle nuevos sentidos a mis órganos y desorganizar lo que alguna vez aprendí en el colegio sobre el cuerpo humano. No ser humano, no creer en el género, desaprender el romanticismo, imaginar nuevas formas del afecto, de la memoria y de la propia biografía” (*#SoyPuto* 119). Henríquez’s dissidence involves tenacity, persistence in undoing, and a determination to feel and be otherwise. These endeavors are full of uncertainties and suspicion, leading him to a feeling of discomfort. In embracing the collective, Henríquez asserts that to the sexual dissident movement, discomfort is “una postura política importante para estar siempre atentxs as las jugadas seductoras de este sistema normalizante, que absorbe todo”—the cisheteropatriarchy and neoliberal nation-state (*#SoyPuto* 150).

From a post-identity position, Henríquez understands his material body in conjunction with what surrounds and transverses him. He embodies *trans-corporeality* and advocates for a trans-corporeal ethics when it comes to his activism and by being simultaneously positioned in the streets of Chile and the digital world that he occupies. To Alaimo, “The trans-corporeal subject is generated through and entangled with biological, technological, economic, social, political and other systems, processes and events, at vastly different scales” (“Trans-corporeality” 436). Henríquez lives these entanglements and makes them his lines of flight, escaping the threats he endures as a queer person in contemporary Chile. As I have shown, through his book *#SoyPuto*, his textual provocations in cyberspace, and his performative interventions in the digital world and television, he manifests and materializes his body entwined

through various systems and at different scales of time and space. In other words, Henríquez understands how the neoliberal socioeconomic system crosses his body and the manner in which it controls his life. He is also aware of the limitations the cisheteropatriarchy posits on him as a dissenting person. But most importantly, he is aware of how new technologies can impact his labor and how he can influence other individuals and publics—as I mentioned in the act of becoming viral—and executes resistance.

The case of Henríquez allows us to consider a technobody that performs trans-corporally and is directly informed by social media and other new technologies. Such a technobody activates a specific form of transit. Henríquez’s situated trans-corporal subjectivity between body and the digital world embodies a communion between his material body and new technologies, an act that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would name as deterritorialization, or the “disruption and transcoding of... planes of consistencies,” as in the stability of conceptions such as gender, biological body, sexuality, etc. (Fournier 121). Henríquez disrupts the idea of a Western, and thus independent and transcendent body that ends in the skin, to embrace the entanglements that compose his material and digital existence. Henríquez performance of trans-corporeality is a posthuman performance of transits, that in its contact with the digital world, finds specificity in embodying a *technobody*. Henríquez flows between these processes of dematerialization and re-materialization as a form of survival—of not restraining and limiting one’s body to a single form of being. Remembering Muñoz, Braidotti asserts that a technobody is a “position [that] requires a loss of innocence about the ‘natural-ness’ of bodies, involving a high degree of dis-identifications from set habits of thought” (*Posthuman Feminism* 142). Henríquez manifests this in the oscillation between being with his body and beyond. Being a technobody that performs trans-corporeality means being in a constant state of tension. It is understanding

and living one's body circumscribed to the flesh, but also beyond. Sexual dissidence activist Jorge Díaz captures Henríquez's alternation between de-materialization and re-materialization when observing his chronicles in *#SoyPuto*. He asserts that Henríquez's writings present their preference for the digital world but also chronicle the dangerous life on the streets (37).

The conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified Henríquez's use of digital platforms. Perhaps we can presume Henríquez's preference for digital mediums of production but also his predilections to always register a material experience lived (and sometimes suffered) in the flesh. Having experience using social media and other virtual spaces, Henríquez was forced to produce and execute his labor online and practice social distancing.⁷⁵

His wandering of the urban spaces has been documented in the short film *Putito*, directed by Leo Mena and Alvaro Puentes, while his wandering of cyberspace remains archived in social media posts (whenever these are not censored), blog posts, and both editions of *#SoyPuto*.⁷⁶ Recounting his life after the publication of the first edition of *#SoyPuto* in 2016, he declares that he has not stopped inhabiting “las redes sociales, pero tampoco las calle y todo ese recoveco de lo que no puede contener Internet” (*#SoyPuto* 184).⁷⁷ When the streets become too dangerous or clients are not actively seeking his services, Henríquez tactically appeals to the digital world to continue his labor and exposure. However, when his social media accounts are attacked and censored by heteropatriarchal conventions, Henríquez re-materializes, returning to his body; an

⁷⁵ In March 2020 when numerous countries implemented lockdowns and quarantines, it was common to find Henríquez posts in different social media accounts where one could distinguish his cleverness. He promoted the digital version of his *#SoyPuto*'s second edition, offered his services as an adviser for “cyber-prostitution,” as well as private video calls and chat. During this period, Henríquez was a privileged body, considering that essential workers (many of them working class) were directly exposed to the virus as they continued to work.

⁷⁶ *Putito* can be accessed in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR0sprgXkFY>.

⁷⁷ This reflection is drawn from the second edition of the book where he ponders about what has occurred since the publication of the first edition. The publication of the first edition in 2014 allowed him to enter a network with other (queer) sex workers in Latin America and connect with other localized resistances. Acknowledging these other voices, he included texts and reflections from other sex workers in Latin America that complement his own writings in the second edition.

embodied practice of corporeal interactions with others in the private space and/or the streets.⁷⁸

Reflecting on the many manifestations of censorship he has experienced, he declares:

Que me hayan deshabilitado mi cuenta de Facebook no me extraña: desde que comencé a escribir en la web he estado, como todxs, propenso a la censura. Estoy consciente del odio que genero en mucha gente y que eso me seguirá regalando nuevas denuncias, censuras, y en el peor de los casos, golpes físicos. (*#SoyPuto* 117)

In having this awareness, as spaces constantly become a threat to his existence, Henríquez finds in being a technobody and performing trans-corporeally, an opportunity to survive the present.

As such, Josecarlo Henríquez is a manifestation and articulation of a queer subject in Chile who survives a precarious present. The radicality of his activism intersecting his labor speaks to his body, which, in the act of resistance, critically charges against that figure of the human that has historically marginalized and excluded him from being considered as such.

Laura Aguilar's Porous Boundaries

As shown, visuals are central to a performance of trans-corporeality. Henríquez entanglements of a body beyond the skin are captured in his texts, but also in the data created via the hashtag, as well as in the audiovisuals that appear on television and in multiple social media outlets. Of these many iterations in the digital world, the 'selfie' or the image of oneself taken by oneself using a digital camera, accompanies many of Henríquez's posts. In its photographic nature, I contend that the selfie or self-portraiture in general has the capacity to materialize or codify the attempts to expose the permeability of the biological body and the moments of an artist's attempts to perform trans-corporeally. This next section traces the attempts of self-portraiture understood as the product of a performance of trans-corporeality by the late Chicana photographer, Laura Aguilar. In *Grounded #111* (2006-7), Aguilar offers an image of the semi-

⁷⁸ It is very common to find Josecarlo Henríquez's Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts closed due to hacking, or in other cases, censored for explicit or inappropriate content based on these companies' guidelines. Because of this discontinuity, it is challenging to trace his digital engagement.

arid landscape of the Joshua Tree National Park in Southern California. Center-left stands a cropped boulder surrounded by branchy vegetation and the light blue and partly cloudy sky, while the top of a few hills lean out in the background. In front of that porous and rough-appearing boulder stands another smaller boulder-like figure. However, what is conspicuous about this figure is its surface and warm tones. This smaller figure has a less porous appearance than the actual boulder standing behind it, resembling that of human skin.⁷⁹ At a closer look, I discover the visual provocation. From the top of this boulder-like figure, one can deduce a small string of dark hair on top. The hair reveals that Laura Aguilar is the one standing but looking away from the camera. Her copious overweight naked body refuses to face the lens. With a faceless posture, her naked body mass melts into the landscape, where the lens captures an endearing moment of this natural landscape welcoming her body with open arms in a performance of haptic kinship. The image, capturing the blending of her skin with the surface of the large rock is the capture of a moment, the instance of a performance that I call trans-corporeal. As I show in this study, a trans-corporeal performance translates into Aguilar's work as visual and tactual passages or transits. These are captured by the lens and undo notions of her body and herself in the act of being embedded in the landscape.

The following analysis delves into the ludic visual provocations of Aguilar's self-portraiture. Specifically, I observe her self-portraiture in distinct landscapes since 1996 as a praxis where *photography is revealed as a performative process*. I depart here from Susan Sontag's idea that "photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood" (2). In sustaining that photography captures

⁷⁹ This is my punctum in observing the image, which in the words of Roland Barthes, is "the element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [the observer]" (26). It punctures because it dislocates my experience in viewing the image. It moves me to discern it and to establish a grammar to describe what I am observing.

experiences, one can also maintain that photography can have a performative dimension, meaning that photographs do more than represent. They involve the act of framing, which is to choose an angle of the scene and subject, and the possibility of this subject to pose. This next section is first and foremost, an acknowledgment of that performative element that not only precedes the photographic print but that is intrinsic to photographic art. Here I follow Richard Shusterman's idea that photography's aesthetic grounds should not be reduced to its materiality, the print. There is a performative breadth to photographic art which takes place before taking the photographic shot. When considered, the concept of photography gets expanded affirming "the aesthetic experience of photography [begins] before the existence of the photograph that is its product" (68). By basing photography as an activity, what interest me is the process before the static photographic image comes to fruition. My analysis pays close attention to two photographic series by Aguilar: *Nature Self-Portrait* (1996) and *Grounded* (2006-7), and how these become the product of earlier experimentations, or rehearsals, of performing her queer Chicana self to the lens.

I also argue that, in considering the performative process of Aguilar's self-portraiture, one can also grasp Aguilar's performance of trans-corporeality. Aguilar's non-identity visual contemplation fuses her body with the nonhuman elements that surround her, an instance that is captured by the lens and turned into a photograph. To this, I contend there is a performative process before arriving at the very moment of the pose and eventual shot that can also be understood as part of the aesthetic experience she generates. In considering Aguilar's performative process in her photography, I argue one can distinguish her performance of trans-corporeality which is presented in a rehearsed manner. Aguilar's posing for the camera is also a praxis to mold an intersubjectivity that does not follow Western notions of an individual—one

autonomous and disengaged from the environment. In a ludic manner, refusing to confine herself to fixed identities, her faceless body in her self-portraits is a manifestation of (un)doing the category of the human. In doing so, Aguilar collapses the structures that have marginalized her as a queer, mestiza, large, auditory dyslexic, and depressive subject. In performing trans-corporeality, Aguilar (un)does a progression that—in the case of her photography—visualizes how human bodies can be “intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them” (Alaimo “Trans-corporeality” 435). In advocating for mutuality and nonduality, instead of individualization and autonomous subjectivity, resides the political potential of her self-portraiture. As an aesthetic process, Aguilar’s trans-corporeality is not merely an abstract expression. Instead, in fusing and embracing a conglomerate of bodies—which include her own—in different landscapes in the U.S. Southwest and Southern California, she speaks to the historic cultural imbrications that traverse her identity and undoes the cisheteronormative, white-centered, and able-bodied discourses that have relegated her as less than human.

The First Steps Before a Daring Self-portraiture

Laura Aguilar is known today as a photographer who, in her earlier years, produced portraiture of nonconforming, queer subjects in Los Angeles. She began her career documenting the Day of the Dead and other cultural activities on the Eastside of Los Angeles. Her series *Latina Lesbian* (1986-90), *Clothed/Unclothed* (1990-1994), and *Plush Pony* (1992) are part of her earlier production, characterized by a “social portraiture,” according to Rebeca Epstein, where she explored ideas of self-acceptance, confidence, resistance, community, and relation in the act of photographing the queer community she belonged to (2). As I later show, this earlier stage serves as a period of rehearsal, trials, and preparations that began to frame and define her

later artistic production, one that I identify as the materialization of a performance of trans-corporeality deriving from her self-portraiture. The series *Nature Self-Portrait* (1996), *Motion* (1999), *Center* (2000), and *Grounded* (2006-7) all speak as a defying type of self-portraiture that captures her naked body—mostly unaccompanied but sometimes with other female bodies—in different arid landscapes, exploring both the static and non-static presentation of the body that visually dialogues with objects and other (nonhuman) entities surrounding it. Centering the body next to the landscape is not fortuitous. In doing so, Aguilar alludes to her infancy, where she grew up with a family that nurtured an affective connection with nature.

Aguilar's former teacher and mentor at East Los Angeles College, Sybil Venegas, speaks of Aguilar's infancy and remembers her referring to her hometown in South San Gabriel as the "edge of nothingness" (12). Here she grew up in "an area rooted in nature, most significantly water, woodlands, rivers, and rocks" (Venegas 12). This terrain is the same one that informs the period of self-portraiture that I analyze, one where Aguilar grounds herself as she traces and embraces a life 'in nature,' which was cultivated in her psyche by different family members during her childhood.

Born to Mexican-American parents, she grew up in a home with strong affective bonds with different family members. Perhaps her most enduring relationship growing up was with her maternal grandmother who passed away when Aguilar was seven years old. Losing this crucial figure in her life left a lasting mark on Aguilar. To this, Venegas recounts: "In some ways, Aguilar's adult relationship with food, her increased body weight, and her depression began shortly after the passing of her grandmother, which she compares to the shocking and unexpected loss of a best friend" (12).

Aguilar suffered from auditory dyslexia from a very young age which affected her schooling. While she grew up in a house where Spanish was spoken, she did not practice it, something rather common to “third-generation Mexican American families striving to assimilate into mainstream US culture” (Venegas 12). Her dyslexic condition was also shared by her mother Juanita Aguilar—though this was undiagnosed. Aguilar’s mother taught Laura how to describe light, color, and formations, which amassed, led her to be able to describe someone’s “facial features, expressions, and textures (Venegas 12). These earlier experiences with visual elements and informal training were also enhanced by a special bond with her paternal aunt, Inez. As her aunt began losing her sight, during walks outdoors, Aguilar would verbally describe to her the landscape. While Aguilar struggled with dyslexia from a very early stage in life, it was her experience with strong female figures that fostered a visual grammar that allowed her to develop skills to express herself via photography. Later in life, she attuned to these skills with her photographic art, capturing subjects and her own body enmeshed in landscapes. Growing up with an inciting family allowed her to experience other forms of learning and exploiting new skills, conditions that make us consider her a self-taught artist. While later in life she took courses at East Los Angeles College, “her higher education was highly intuitive” (Venegas 13).

Often marginalized because of her disability and struggle to communicate, Aguilar generated solid mentoring bonds with teachers and other artists such as Suda House, Judy Miranda, and Mei Valenzuela. However, her most influential relationships were those established later in life with photographers Judy Dater and Joyce Tenneson. Dater’s exploration of self-portraiture was immensely inspirational to Aguilar, resulting in a homage to her work with a black and white self-portrait Aguilar shot while traveling to New Mexico. *Nature Self-Portrait #11* (1996) was her rendition of Dater and one that later became part of her world-

renowned series *Nature Self-Portraits* (1996). During one of her last talks at the CalArts Arts School in 2017, Aguilar stated: “Every time I look at this picture it reminds me it was the first time I saw myself at peace with myself” (29:07). Clearly, Dater was central to Aguilar’s self-portraiture after the mid-1990s. Nonetheless, it was Aguilar’s experimentation with her own body which gave her ground to find photography as a healing performative process to accept herself, always aided by her contact with the nonhuman elements that surround her.

The Neglected Performative Process of Photography

As Shusterman states, to think of the performative dimension of photography, one must establish a distinction between “the performative process of a photo session,” or that which occurs before a subject is photographed, and the “photographic image or a photographic print that results from a particular moment or part of that performative process” (75n4). What we encounter in the photographic print is a moment, or “experience captured” as Susan Sontag contends (2). In fact, photography contains a performative process that begins prior to the photo session. This photographic process of performance is “what goes on in the process of setting, preparing, and taking the photographic shots in a photography session” (Shusterman 68). There are decisions the photographer makes, as well as a somatic process for the subject being photographed that are part of this performance. However, this performative process is often “occluded by our one-sided concentration on the photograph itself (a static object), with which we tend to identify photographic art” (Shusterman 68). The photographic print can be seen as a finished, standalone work since, in its static nature, produces an aesthetic experience for the viewer. But one needs to keep in mind that a “prior process— involving the mise-en-scène performative activity of the photographer and the posing subject—is necessary for achieving the desired optical image in the camera lens that one then seeks to fix in the photographic image”

(Shusterman 72). In the case of Aguilar, I argue the performative process of her self-portraiture in natural settings exceeded the space where the photographic sessions occurred. This performative process also incorporates the intricate space and time of both her prior experience with photography and the various experimentations in the studio and through video recordings that prepared her to be able to pose outdoors and naked in front of the camera. In her self-portraiture, Aguilar is both the subject and photographer. She cancels the difference between subject and photographer and, instead, presents us with photographic art that is deeply personal, where the aesthetic experience is revealed as a process of reflection, self-discovery, and acceptance over time.

In the 1960s, the genres of painting and sculpture began to be challenged by the flourishing of rupturing artistic forms such as performance art, installation, happenings, body art, and photography (Jobey n.p.). This not only established photography and performance art as art forms, but it also allowed for the transgression of disciplines. In the case of photography, gazing at different subjects, sometimes performing, allows us to (re)think the dualities between subject and object, and how one acts and is also acted upon. Artists such as Allan Kaprow—the instigator of ‘happenings’—argued that instead of thinking of artists producing within specific genres, we could think of them as “simply artists” without placing them within specific artistic categories (Jobey n.p.). Ever since these reconsiderations of artistic practices, the art world became aware of other dimensions of photography, allowing, for example, to see the performative process that goes on prior to a photographic print as part of the aesthetic experience this art form provides. The processes of setting, preparing, and taking the shot are also part of the aesthetics that involve photography. And I would add, in the case of Aguilar’s self-portraiture,

the studio research and her explorations with film feed this performative process with a durational characteristic.

We must not forget that as the subject of her self-portraiture, Aguilar performs an idea of herself, her body, and what others might perceive of her to the lens. Mindful of the process involved when the subject deliberately faces the camera, Roland Barthes states: “once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing,’ I instantaneously make another body of myself, I transform myself in advance into an image” (10). Similarly, in analyzing portrait photography, Peggy Phelan asserts that in being uncertain of how our bodies look when confronting the camera, “we perform an image of it by imitating what we think we look like. We imagine what people might see when they look at us, and then we try to perform (and conform to) those images” (36). This concept is rather important for my analysis since the act of posing constitutes the core of what I argue to be Aguilar’s performance of transcorporeality. In the act of posing to the camera, Aguilar creates a new body for the lens and for others to see in the photographic print. The act of posing—which is also one of transfer per Barthes—and the act of looking away from the camera allows her to detach from those identity categories that are imposed on her—brown, queer, dyslexic, and fat. The act of posing allows Aguilar to be embodied and embedded with the environments that surround her. In posing to the camera, faceless, and in relation to the landscape, Aguilar constitutes her own way of transgressing Western and colonial notions of the body. It is a visual and tangible locus away from that ‘human’ regulatory identity that has marginalized her.

Jay Buchanan has also pondered on the performative dimensions of Aguilar’s self-portraiture. To the critic, Aguilar’s self-portraits in nature simultaneously accomplish different statements: “They are assertions of private selfhood, refractions of objectifying gazes, refusals of

humanist subjectivity, and demonstrations of the political capacity of the inanimate” (45). In other words, posing to become an image—and a new body—has political implications not only for herself but for the inanimate matter that surrounds her. Buchanan’s observation returns me to the idea of trans-corporeality, which assumes the agencies of all that exist in the act of transits and contacts and what these crossings produce. The visual links and continuities projected by Aguilar between her body and the material presence around her, overtly demonstrate the agential—and thus political—power of all that is present in space since these agencies engage in a dynamic of coproduction, communion, and affinity. This is Aguilar’s visual and haptic trans-corporeality.

Moreover, Buchanan also asserts that Aguilar enacts a *prosthetic performance*. Following Uri McMillan’s use of Black feminist thought to newly theorize performance, Buchanan reads Aguilar’s performance as becoming an object, a potent tool to perform one’s body, rewriting how her body is seen by others (45). This prosthetic performance is one where the subjects perform their objecthood, as they also act in cooperation with inanimate objects or props, making tangible their agential potential (46). Read from this framework, “she deprioritizes the human and the animate in favor of dehierarchal meaning-making” (46). While I agree with Buchanan, I assume this disengagement from the category of human occurs as a durational and progressive performative process. As I show next, Aguilar performs various rehearsals as part of her performative process of self-portraiture. This process includes not only setting up the space for the photo shot in nature, but also her explorations in the studio and with video recordings. I detail how this process brings a progressive and durational nature to what I call her performance of trans-corporeality where her body meets and dialogues with arid lands and nonhuman elements found in the Southwest and Southern California.

Rehearsing to Be with the Landscape

There are clear indications in Aguilar's pre-1996 work that speak to how she trained to see her own body in relation to space. In other words, the performative process of her self-portraiture in nature began by practicing being comfortably nude to understand the liberating potentials of producing self-portraiture as a marginalized subject. Having a long and complex history with bodyweight and mental health issues, Aguilar's first steps into self-portraiture are an exercise of observance as well as of practicing self-acceptance and self-definition. Feasibly, her kicking point to embracing her own naked body occurred in *In Sandy's Room* (1989). Taken while housesitting for her friend Sandy, in the photograph Aguilar poses naked, reclined on a chair and feet up in an ottoman, holding a drink, with a fan in front of her. All of this while there is an opened window in the background that exposes the outdoors, lush with vegetation. The semblance of Aguilar—eyes closed—is one of a relaxed woman who is immersed in the moment, unapologetically accepting her body in direct contact against the chair as the wind from the fan and the outdoors hits her skin. In this photograph, she approaches or performs, what she has referred to as “relaxed acceptance” (Venegas 16). While the moment captured evokes an impulsiveness and unplanned setting, the staging of the setting to produce that image was not spontaneous. In fact, “After she experimented with several images of herself in the chair, she then relaxed into the process by placing the fan and drink as humorous props as she reclined nude in front of the open window” (Venegas 16). The experimentation with several shots here announces a rehearsal-like characteristic that will become a feature of Aguilar's self-portraiture. The act of posing in this photograph reflects an understanding of the self and one's body through time. It also projects and materializes an idea of how others see us and what we want them to see or understand of us. In this photograph, her naked, fat body begins to be resignified, challenging

a white and heterosexual gaze that often idolizes and commodifies the archetype of a white and thin woman. This same rehearsal or trial toward self-acceptance continued in the series *Nude Exercises* (1991). Before exploring her own body in harmony with the landscape, Aguilar studied her body in the studio. *Nude Exercises* documents these rehearsals as she learned about framing her body and its relations to space. In this series, she posed and performed to the camera several times. In *Nude Exercise #3*, while in a studio with a white backdrop, Aguilar lies naked in a fetal position, facing away from the camera. To her left and next to her head rests an arranged small cluster of rocks. Cutting through both her body and the cluster of rocks there is a black cord that leads off the picture frame in the lower left corner. This is the cable release that connects and operates the shutter of the camera, allowing her to operate the device while posing. In these rehearsals, she used actual props to begin experimenting with contact and the act of being in connection with other nonhuman objects in a common space. This was an exercise of trans-corporeality, an experiment in feeling and exploring how to establish resemblances, consonance, or dialogue with matter adjacent to her body. This was her visual attempt to find and understand herself in harmony with nonhuman elements and to establish a nonhierarchical and horizontal association with that which exceeded her biological body. These exercises were necessary to begin understanding herself against those identities that have been imposed on her. During a visit to CalArts Art School in 2015, Aguilar remembered this period and the context of this particular photograph:

I did a series of exercises and I sat at my friend's studio... [*Nude Exercise #3*] was an exercise to photograph my body, look at my body, maybe go on a diet... A lot of people asked me how I knew how my body looked because [,in my nude self-portraits in landscapes,] I am out there in nature, seating... having an assistant help me, and they just click and bracket [the picture] for me... So [using the shutter release cord] is how I found how to look at myself without looking at myself. ("Fall 2015" 00:19:10-00:21:32)

Her work in the studio and her exploration of her body and rocks resembles very much the work of Judy Dater who photographed herself in a flat, rocky landscape in *Self-Portrait with Stone* (1981). While *Nude Exercises* can be a homage to Dater—evidencing Dater’s influence in Aguilar—this is also an exploration where Aguilar tested the qualities and capacities of her own body in front of the camera.

While Aguilar rehearsed as a way of performing to the camera, as seen in the examples above, she also explored with audiovisuals. There are video accounts that were recorded after the *Nude Exercises* series which give a different dimension to her photography, and perhaps tell us that we cannot condense her work to photographic prints. As if the visual dimension of her photographs were not enough, *The Body*, *The Body 2*, *Talking About Depression*, *Talking About Depression 2*, and *The Knife*, are all short video recordings—or performed testimonies—produced in 1995 that offer—of the many themes she discusses—a first-person account of her thoughts about her body and struggles with mental health. In *Talking About Depression* and *The Knife*, the viewer hears her own narration of her battles with depression, death, and the desire to physically harm herself. The videos are made of different camera cuts that focus on different parts of her body all done while she performs the narration facing the camera. These camera cuts—which avoid her face for the most part—result in a narration as a voiceover. As Tracy M. Zuniga states, *Talking About Depression* and *The Knife* “reveal the pain, angst, and numbing nature of depression and self-loathing” (69). On the contrary, *The Body* and *Body 2* reveal a different standpoint when it comes to Aguilar and her view of her own body, possibly evidencing a journey and progress toward self-acceptance. In *The Body*, Aguilar stands naked in front of the camera with a neutral white background that accentuates her body’s fleshiness. With the

assistance of Becky Villaseñor, the video begins framing her upper body to include her face, moving later to crop one of her breasts, and later her abdominal area.

I'm comfortable with myself. I never thought I would be comfortable with myself. This is who I am today, and maybe this is who I will be tomorrow. But... through my art, I've been able to find some comfort and some peace within my own body, through its sags and its stretchmarks, and its shapes. (Stone 00:07:00-43)

The tone of the content in these narrations has changed. Here she features a positive take on her body. Though not so much prideful, Aguilar is defiantly peaceful, revealing a renewed relationship with her flesh. To Zuniga, *The Body* videos “can be read as a nude subject as she dwells in her state of comfortable undress” (70). Here we have Aguilar inhabiting a space of freedom, of self-acknowledgment, of being content; one that perhaps was negated in her life, but that photographic art gifted her as she learned to stand in front of the capturing lens. I see these video recordings as part of Aguilar’s performative process toward her self-portraiture in nature. These film explorations prove how arriving at her distinct pose in nature was rehearsed over time and how, in doing so, she needed to come to terms with her body to reach self-acceptance. Most importantly, these visual rehearsals in front of a video camera prepared her to consolidate a self-portraiture that can capture her performance of trans-corporeality, as I will exhibit regarding the second half of her body of work.

Self-Portraiture in Nature

While Aguilar reached a level of self-acceptance with her work when it comes to her body, her auditory dyslexia continued to affect her ability to express herself through words. Nonetheless, when words are not enough, or a constant battle to reach or articulate, we appeal to other forms of communication and expression. Images supplant words, and sometimes with a more comprehensive capacity, conveying or grappling a message that can only be triggered with light, color, and material dialogues between human bodies, objects, or other entities. The series Nature

Self-Portraits (1996) speaks to this capacity of photographs to articulate an aesthetic provocation through the visual as well as to create a space, an encounter, to perform acceptance and to archive it. Produced in black and white in various arid landscapes, Aguilar created self-portraits of her naked body with the aid of an assistant. Here she is no longer capturing the bodies and presence of other marginalized subjects in urban Los Angeles but has turned the attention to herself. In *Nature Self Portrait #6* Aguilar poses laying on top of a rock, adjacent to a body of water and some aquatic flora that surrounds her. Interestingly, her semblance and pose remind us of her earlier work *In Sandy's Room*. However, this time, her performance is done outdoors. Her naked body and her work with shadows and color contrasts create a continuity between the surface of the rocks and the surface of her body as they both interact with the natural light. Her body's creases, curves, and overall fleshiness replicate the features and materiality of the rocks. While she is not interrupting the landscape, Aguilar is intentionally and vibrantly fusing her body with the inanimate world in the act of posing. This a capture of a trans-corporeal performance. Her right arm falls to the side toward the body of water, contouring the shape of the intact and uninterrupted rock as if they were welded—sediments to skin. Her arm's position against the rock, aiming toward the water, is a tactile and affective bonding with that rock. Facing the sky, eyes closed, Aguilar joins the rest of the landscape contemplating and sensing the void above. She simply is, at that time and space, like the rock that sustains her.

The props that she might have relied on in her studio or in her work indoors are no longer present. In *Sandy's Room*, she made use of chairs, a cup, and a fan. In *Nature Self Portrait #6*, her body is the only prop. In analyzing Aguilar's self-portraiture in *Nature Self-Portraits*, Macarena Gómez-Barris argues, Aguilar's:

'props' are nothing more than the folds of her skin and the play of sunlight on leaf and debris, branches, and her own skin. Land surfaces and textures blend with her own form

in a fluid interchange that seemingly does not disturb what is already there. By minimizing the disturbance to the landscape and visually linking her body to the features that surround her, these images force the viewer to consider the experience of nonduality. (“Mestiza Cultural Memory” 83)

Becoming a prop is also enacting and articulating a politics of objecthood. In blending and visually enmeshing her Chicana, learning-disabled, and queer body into the landscape, Aguilar speaks to the degree to which her marginalized body has been an object of observance, commodification, difference, and even repudiation by the different systems of oppression that have ostracized her as well as other peripheric bodies. Yet in this series, as it is in the case of *Nature Self Portrait #6*, the process of objectification is self-inflicting, as Buchanan also notes (45-46). Acting as an object with free will also enacts vulnerability. The landscape exists, untouched, as her body enters this space. The rough surface of the rocks—though subject to change at a different time scale—alludes to permanence and some stability. On the contrary, Aguilar’s naked body reminds us that it is not a rock. Her body is organic flesh that is subject to be physically affected or harmed as it is traversed by many identity categories that position her as vulnerable in the social realm. Feminist new materialists like Braidotti are very aware of this paradoxical stance in the act of contact between the human and the nonhuman. Feminist new materialisms understand there are practices and principles of an “affirmative ethical nucleus” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 104). That is to say, “‘we’ are in *this* together although we are not one and the same” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* 104). In other words, Aguilar embraces her individuality and that of the entities that surround her, and from that point of departure, she performs an affective and material temporal encounter—or a visual symbiosis if you will—where her body meets the landscape and the matter that composes it. This material and visual encounter also creates a coalition against a common gaze that overpowers all involved. While Aguilar’s body poses in a horizontal relationship or nonhierarchical association with the

nonhuman entities of the landscape, she presents a visual and haptic coalition of entities that are often deemed ‘less than human’ in the face of beliefs or systems of oppression such as anthropocentrism, cisheteronormativity, and the discourse of able-bodiedness. That said, we can sustain that the visual exercise on mutuality or nonduality is where the political potential of these photographs resides and where perhaps she molds a decolonial move. The common image that emanates from this series “highlights the mutual capacity to affect and be affected by others” (Gómez-Barris, “Mestiza Cultural Memory” 83). The lens captures this potential in time as Aguilar performs trans-corporeally. By extending the limits of her body beyond the skin, Aguilar redefines an often disembodied and singular subjectivity that is perpetuated and reinforced by an anthropocentric perspective that insists on disengaging and separating from what surrounds the human body.

Performing Trans-corporeality through Self-portraiture

In the series *Nature-Self Portraits*, along with *Motion* (1999), *Stillness* (1999), and *Center* (2000), Aguilar reinforces the same politics of objecthood through her body and performs trans-corporeality when coming together as one with inanimate matter, as I showed with *Nature Self Portrait #6*. In these newer series, there are many photographs in the same type of arid landscape, but she now begins to show her face, and the bodies of other women as subjects of her photographs. The series *Grounded* (2006-07) marks a drastic shift in her self-portraiture exploration. This—one of her last series before she passed away in 2018—is also the only one of self-portraiture in color. Aguilar explained that her shift to color photography was not one strictly based on aesthetic motives, but instead, a necessity. Around that time, she began losing sight due to her diabetes. Analog photography was not an option for her since she could no longer focus when employing the analog camera. The digital camera became her only option.

(“CalArts Visiting Artist Lecture” 00:48:40-00:49:25). Yet, I contend her forced shift to color photography brought a different dimension to her self-portraiture. Through her monochrome work, she was successful to generate a dialogue between her body and the landscape via contrast, shadows, shape, and texture. However, the color self-portraiture brought hue, value, and saturation (color, brightness, and intensity respectively) to this dialogue.

Having covered the trajectory and rehearsals of Aguilar’s self-portraiture, I would like to return to the photograph that opened my analysis, *Grounded #114*, to bring a different element to my reading. The fact she is facing away from the camera and giving her back to the viewer presents us with a different gaze, one that opposes “the classic artistic trope of the female figure being enveloped within nature,” as Roy Pérez observes (308). “Aguilar is neither the stereotypical male figure mastering nature nor the female figure sprawled passively within it” (308). In fact, what Aguilar introduces to us here is a distinct way of seeing, a decolonial but also a non-anthropocentric way of gazing. Considering the spaces of her self-portraiture (Southwest landscapes and Southern California), Aguilar not only performs trans-corporeality by challenging the skin as the boundary to her body, but the spaces she selected to perform shed light on the histories of dispossession that accumulate over time in her ancestry. As Gómez-Barris states, her self-portraiture of a queer mestiza body in these landscapes “makes present settler histories of violence and enlivens the possibility of seeing and being otherwise” (“Mestiza Cultural Memory” 85). This gazing but also being or becoming otherwise is an ontological challenge to the viewer, one that I argue pertains to a feminist positionality. Here I equate a new materialist way of understanding the human body in photography, as in performing trans-corporeality, with the undertakings of feminism. In the act of seeing otherwise, Aguilar reminds us how the realm of aesthetics has the capacity to train us to reconsider the way we look,

perceive, and ultimately relate to others. It forces us to reevaluate our position in reference to the land, and most importantly, it proposes a challenge to limiting notions of a Western idea of the human.

I have been asserting that Aguilar's series of self-portraits after 1996 are captures of a performance of trans-corporeality and that these emerge from a series of rehearsals or exercises that are part of the performative process of her photography that ultimately led to the photographic print. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the trans-corporeal performance of Josecarlo Henríquez as he navigates different mediums to project his activism, labor, sexual dissidence, and being in the world. Likewise, through the domain of the visual, Aguilar performs trans-corporeally from a different (photographic) angle. She accomplishes this by establishing visual and haptic relationships among entities that are typically disconnected or unrelated to the Western gaze. It is through this trans-corporeal capacity that Aguilar erases the border between nature and culture, and thus the one between the human body and that of nonhuman matter. Trans-corporeality, as Alaimo formulates it, suspends "the figure/ground relations between the human and the environment... as the outline of the human is traversed by substantial material interchanges" ("Trans-corporeality" 435). To me, these material exchanges are visual, non-static, and chromatic ones, where factors such as surfaces, color, texture, (non)movement, and position, create intriguing continuities and transitions, between her naked body and those of nonhuman entities present in the landscape. These continuities are at the heart of the prefix trans* in trans-corporeality, as Alaimo asserts, "crossings, transits, and transformations" that can take different forms, and I would add, leading us to various and endless outcomes and without a goal or end in mind ("Trans-corporeality" 436). This attunement toward an act of trans-corporeality involves

rehearsing an attitude, a pose to the camera she learned with her prior somatic experimentations.

In reflecting on the act of posing and its performativity, Shusterman states that:

with a more creative, fluid attitude, one can see the camera's invitation to pose as an opportunity to create a new look, a new posture, a new element in the construction of the self whose identity is not a fixed essence but an ongoing project whose continuous construction can either reinforce habitual modes of being or creatively seek new ones.
(70)

And this is what Aguilar does with her self-portraiture. She achieves a performance of trans-corporeality because of the prospect she noticed in the act of facing the camera. To Aguilar, the camera works as an apparatus that captures the experiences of constructing the self. The result is the photographic print that preserves a moment of that performance and archives it for others to observe, and perhaps emulate.

Understanding Aguilar's self-projection to the land as trans-corporeal also "suggests a new figuration of the human after the Human, which is not founded in detachment, dualisms hierarchies or exceptionalism" (Alaimo "Trans-corporeality" 436). That is to say, for as much as these self-portrait series are performances of vulnerability, they are also performances of humbleness and self-acceptance and of existence beyond a limiting Western gaze.

In the safe space of wild and arid landscapes, Aguilar's self-portraiture advocates for heterogeneity with other forms of existence materialized in and stemming from nonhuman entities. This performance of heterogeneity comes not only at the individual level of embracing one's body as is (fat, brown, dyslexic, queer), but also embracing its direct and symbiotic relationship to that which it is not the human body: rocks, boulders, soil, branches, bodies of water, light, etc. Alaimo insists that when we map these material interchanges, we introduce "trans-corporeal ethics and politics" ("Trans-corporeality" 435). Enacting a trans-corporeal performance through different photographs, different bodies, and landscapes, and through a span

of many years, Aguilar molds a trans-corporeal ethics as an exercise of somatic engagement, away from human exceptionalism, opposing the very dualisms that have marginalized her.

In analyzing *Grounded #114*, Luciano and Chen argue that Aguilar invites us to look at the boulder standing behind her body “not as ‘mere’ backdrop or landscape but as equally important, equally in need of inquiry” (184). Thus, Aguilar establishes a suggestive relationship within the frame of this picture. The relationship serves as a visual and haptic evocation of kinships beyond the human as we know it, which erupt in the material interaction of different bodies. Aguilar’s body, situated nonhierarchically, and instead, horizontally with that which surrounds her, is also a praxis of coalition, inviting the viewer to find instances to do the same. Whereas as Luciano and Chen state, “her skin brings out a softness in the stone,” I contend that the stone reminds the viewer of a sedimented and layered reality that makes up our identities, considering how one’s becoming in the social is always traversed by the intersecting and layered identities that our body carries (184).

Performing a Mestiza Consciousness

The way Aguilar relates to the land has a long history in Chicana/o/e/x identity and subjectivity. In her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa advocates for a new consciousness from a situated mestiza locus. Understanding how colonial and heteronormativity have historically shaped a mestiza identity, Anzaldúa promotes the liminal space of multiculturalism, the very threshold that I believe defines the Latina/o/e/x reality. Standing at this threshold challenges misogynist, heterosexual, racial, and settler violence, as well as binarism and dualities that limit and create fixed, marginalized subjects.

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through images in her work how duality is transcended. As a *mestiza*... I am cultureless because... I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured

because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each and to the planet. (Anzaldúa 80-81)

Anzaldúa's intersubjective way of becoming in the world is evident. Such situatedness produces a specific perspective, one that—in challenging the Western epistemic regime—enters the realm of the ontological and how one emerges in the world. We can situate Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness in what Walter D. Mignolo understands as border thinking, the enunciation of alternative epistemologies “located at the borders of (interiors or exteriors) of the modern/colonial system” (*Local Histories* 85). Border thinking repels the centralization of Eurocentric thinking as the epistemological perspective from where one enunciates (Mignolo, *Local Histories* 87).

That is to say, border thinking is mestiza consciousness. To Anzaldúa, this arises from *la facultad*:

the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (60)

In observing her self-portraiture, Aguilar seems to possess this *facultad*. Her performance of trans-corporality, which is also her manifestation of mestiza consciousness, occurs from the ability to see otherwise. Aguilar does not need words to communicate. She is able to “excruciatingly” live the world through her body. While this could have been triggered by a medical condition, leaving her to be often misunderstood, this also speaks to her mestiza psyche, one that “communicates in images” (Anzaldúa 60). Aguilar's self-portraiture is multi-layered. Her body as a subject and its relationships to space and other material manifestations offer a visual sedimentation of these various bodies and their histories and experiences. While the

nonhuman is horizontally placed in relation to the human body, her self-portraits also shed light on the marginalization of a queer, Chicana, and disabled body and hint at the experiences of displacement, annihilation, and settler violence of the southwestern territory of the United States.

Trans-corporeality for a Brownness of the World

All in all, in performing trans-corporeally, both Aguilar and Henríquez point directly to what José Esteban Muñoz understands as “brownness.” Here I come full circle with what I presented in the introduction of this project. The performances of Aguilar and Henríquez are manifestations of the brown commons, expressing a commonality between humans and nonhuman, organic, and inorganic entities. In performing trans-corporeally, Aguilar and Henríquez embody brownness which is the ability “to see what is here but is concealed. It is a sustained practice of... touching an aspect of being with and in the world,” rejecting the fixedness of the colonial Western gaze (*The Sense of Brown* 118-119). While geographically and temporally different, Aguilar and Henríquez find cohesion in being of what Muñoz theorizes as the “brown commons” (*The Sense of Brown* 121). They are attentive to their individual experiences of oppression since it is what motivates them to think of themselves as trans-corporeal. But they are also mindful that those “singularities are always part of vaster pluralities” (*The Sense of Brown* 121). From their marginalized position, they embark on a dissociation with the Western notion of the human by outspreading their idea of the self and body into conglomerates of nonhuman entanglements that transverse and touch them. As brown people, they might not be “equally brown, but they can productively be conceptualized as being beside each other” since they shared the experience of living under colonial power in the Latinx Americas (*The Sense of Brown* 121). They are cognizant of a shared experience of harm that

includes them along with their communities and other human and nonhumans entities. Their performance of trans-corporeality is an “ontopoetic state,” allowing them to constantly shape their existence through creative processes (*The Sense of Brown* 122). Moreover, their performances of trans-corporeality and brownness are an articulation of a “shared flourishing that transpires and unfolds despite and in the face of systemic harm” (*The Sense of Brown* 121).

Concluding Remarks: Beyond the Human and into Kowkülen (Liquid Being)

Tray Tray Ko (2022) is a video performance by Mapuche visual artist Sebastián (Seba) Calfuqueo that takes place in the Pehuén Forest in the Andean pre-mountain range of the Araucanía region of Chile.⁸⁰ The performance begins with Calfuqueo walking backwards, showing their back to the camera. Accompanying this walk is the ringing of what could be the *kaskawilla* instrument.⁸¹ Calfuqueo has left their long hair loose and is topless, wearing a satiny blue fabric around their waist. As they walk backwards through a trail in the middle of the forest, the artist is also holding a wooden stick that has attached to it another lengthy piece of the same fabric they are wearing around their waist.

As the performer begins their walk, the fabric falls and drags as a veil, following the steps of Calfuqueo. Their pace is a slow one, reflecting the vulnerability and struggle of walking in this manner in rough terrain while dragging a long piece of fabric. At one point, Calfuqueo stumbles upon a set of steps in the trail. The artist walks up the steps and in doing so, the fabric that follows acquires mobility resembling a stream of water, a waterfall. The glossy blue is luminous, spectacular-like, and dynamic, recalling a sense of liquid vitality as it is dragged through the soil. The lustrous blue fabric is visually seducing in the act of being contrasted by the earthy tones of the landscape which are mostly browns and greens due to the vegetation and soil.

Later, and from a bird's-eye perspective, the camera captures the same performance as Calfuqueo drags the fabric through a small trail among dense vegetation. The moving fabric resembling a liquid body is even more noticeable from this viewpoint as the frame also captures an actual creek that runs parallel to Calfuqueo's performance. From this bird's-eye perspective,

⁸⁰ The Araucanía region in Chile is part of the historical Mapuche territory in South America—Wallmapu—that stretches from the Pacific to the Atlantic oceans in what is presently known as Argentina and Chile. The video performance can be accessed via <https://sebacalfuqueo.com/2022/06/10/tray-tray-ko/>

⁸¹ The *kaskawilla* is a Mapuche instrument and their ringing resembles the sound of sleigh bells.

Calfuqueo's walking body is somehow erased, reminding us, as Diana Taylor states, that the "bird's-eye view of geographic formations in European maps" during the colonization assisted in suppressing, distancing, and dislocating a "practice on the ground" or the embodiment of indigenous knowledges (*¡Presente!* 43). While this angle can be read as a commentary of historical colonial erasure, the artist's intention to summon a liquid and aquatic performance by positioning their performance parallel to an actual body of water is evident. In the last part of this work, the artist's walk meets a creek, adjacent to a waterfall—a *trayenko* in the Mapuche worldview.⁸² As Calfuqueo submerges themselves in the water, walking against the current, the walk becomes a heavy one. It is a physical struggle against the current walking backwards since the submerged fabric has acquired weight.

The sound universe of the recording is also a different one now as the creek and a nearby waterfall are part of the image being captured. As if it were driven by a certain magnetic force, their walk begins to be absorbed or aims toward the falling water. The dragging of this fabric ends in the last scene once the artist's body is submerged up to the neck and their head begins to engage with the rapidly falling water.

As discussed during the introduction of this project, challenging a Western idea of the human in the Latinx Americas must also consider the localized and territorialized struggles of those who have historically suffered the most due to coloniality—the indigenous communities of the land. Layered into their practice, Calfuqueo's *Tray Tray Ko* succinctly contests a fixed and Western notion of the human. This video performance is a perfect summary of my core argument in this project which argues for the power of performance to disrupt the pervasive and divisive category of the human, inscribed in modernity, and sustained by Western thought. This also

⁸² *Trayenkos* or waterfalls are sacred sites for the Mapuche since they not only appear as part of their cosmogenic stories but are vital for the *lawen*—the medicinal herbs used by *machis* (Calfuqueo, "Tray Tray Ko").

sheds light on the direction of my research as I plan to expand this project to include indigenous performances in the Latinx Americas. In what follows, I show how Calfuqueo's work not only recalls the Mapuche struggles for and of the waters tied to symbolic and political relationships of the Mapuche—as cultural theorist Cristian Vargas Paillahueque asserts of Calfuqueo's work⁸³—but it is an aesthetic vindication of a suppressed Mapuche vision with transformative powers (“Ko Konümpakey Tañi”; Fischer-Lichte). In the process of uplifting this gaze, the aesthetic encounter Calfuqueo offers stands as the decolonial gesture, one that I have tried to exhibit throughout this project as the basis of contesting Western thought. In doing so, Calfuqueo (re)politicizes a non-Western subjectivity that pertains to the Mapuche and that is closely related to the land. Their aesthetic proposal stands against an extractive anthropocentric colonial gaze and disrupts the binary optic of multiculturalism that overlooks the symbiotic relationship of the Mapuche to the land.

Calfuqueo is a Chilean visual artist, curator of Espacio218, and member of the Mapuche collective Rangüñtulewfü and Yene Revista.⁸⁴ As nonbinary and Mapuche, Calfuqueo centers their work as part of a decolonial praxis that challenges notions of gender, sexuality, and identity, as well as the history and narratives of the Mapuche that have been controlled by Western colonial notions that make up the modern Chilean nation-state. As a multifaceted artist, their work has navigated installations, ceramics, performance, and video. Since 2020, Calfuqueo's work has seen a sharp focus where water as an element takes center stage.⁸⁵ This turn directly connects Calfuqueo's work to one of the major socioeconomic issues of the nation-state in the

⁸³ Translated by the author.

⁸⁴ Rangüñtulewfü is the editorial team of Yene Revista, a digital magazine of art, thought, and texts of Wallmapu and Abya Yala. For more information visit: <https://yener revista.com/>

⁸⁵ I conclude this considering that *Ko ta mapungey ka (Agua también es territorio)* (2020), *Kowkülen (Ser líquido)* (2020), *Esporas* (2021), *Mercado de aguas* (2021), and *Palabras a las aguas* (2021) emerge and deal with the element of water. For more information see <https://sebacalfuqueo.com/>

present. Considering how their work has evolved since 2020 vis-à-vis the major social struggles of Chile, I argue Calfuqueo's performance stands as a decolonial praxis that defiantly echoes and materializes the social demands of the people and recuperates the Mapuche cosmovision.

The year 2020 marked an important process in the sociopolitical realm of Chile. In late 2019 the nation experienced generalized social unrest. October 2019 was the culminating point for decades of inequities advanced through a neoliberal economic framework put in place during the Pinochet regime. For weeks, the people took to the streets demanding educational, pension, and health reforms, among other demands, revealing the need to tackle a limiting and imbalanced constitution. Weeks of unrest led to a call for a plebiscite that determined the constitution needed to be rewritten.⁸⁶ The de-privatization of water was one of the many issues expressed during the 2019-2020 protests, and one of the rights attempted to be secured by the new draft of the constitution.

Chile is one of the few nations in the world where water has been fully privatized. As mentioned, Pinochet's Constitution of 1980 had many lasting effects, one being the privatization of water. The Water Code of 1981 turned water into private property, allowing powerful entities to fully control its distribution and use with legal underpinning. In the present, the monoculture of avocado trees and vineyards in central Chile, pine trees organized by European enterprises in the south, along with hydroelectric and mining projects throughout the nation, have caused a broad water crisis. From its many effects, the most visible and tangible ones are extreme drought in rural sectors, limited access to water for local and impoverished communities, and the depletion of biodiversity.

⁸⁶ The draft for a new constitution was rejected by most of the population during a national plebiscite in September 2022. A poll post-referendum revealed that 40% of those interviewed had voted against it "because they didn't trust the assembly members who led the process" (Schneider and Williamson-García "Chile's New Constitutional Process").

Calfuqueo's *Tray Tray Ko* (2022) directly speaks to this water crisis and the struggle of those most affected, as it intersects with the historical and silenced relationship of the Mapuche people to the land. Regarding Calfuqueo's *Kowkülen* (2020)—another performative work that takes place in a river of the Araucanía region—Macarena Gómez-Barris argues for the manifestation of “the liquid capacities of water to break the barriers of ossified colonial modes of seeing” (Calfuqueo, “Into the Fluid Heart” 76). In the same manner, in *Tray Tray Ko*, Calfuqueo engages with water, not as a mere metaphor of a non-Western cosmology, but it candidly embodies a Mapuche understanding that believes in a direct and irrefutable connection between the human body, subjectivity, and the land, erasing any modern binaries such as nature/culture or subject/object. As Vargas Paillahueque argues, a multiculturalist optic sees and understands indigenous communities as mere cultural subjects and not political beings (“Ko Konümpakey Tañi”). This optic is that which turns them into passive subjects and depoliticizes their struggle, vision, and conceptions of life that are embedded in the land for the benefit of extractive projects. Calfuqueo's aesthetic work opposes this reductionist gaze and re-politicizes a cosmovision that has been deemed decorative and symbolic under multiculturalism.⁸⁷

Strategically—and just like the work of *Silencio Blanco* seen in Chapter 2—the video performance lacks words. Calfuqueo performs without uttering words and all one can hear is the ringing of the *kaskawilla*, the natural soundscape of the forest, and later, the creek and waterfall.⁸⁸ The soundscape of the video performance openly alludes to *Mapudungun*, the

⁸⁷ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has exhibited the emergence of “an ornamental and symbolic multiculturalism” in Latin American nation-states at the turn of the 21st century. With this vision, “the indigenous people are turned into multicultural adornment for neoliberalism. The new stereotype of the indigenous combines the idea of a continuous territorial occupation, invariably rural, with a range of ethnic and cultural traits, and classifies indigenous behavior and constructs scenarios for an almost theatrical display of alterity” (110).

⁸⁸ While there are no words uttered throughout the performance, at the end of the video, Calfuqueo includes the text “Siete canciones de machi” both in *Mapudungun* and translated into Spanish. This text highlights the importance of bodies of water in the forest as sites where medicinal plants grow to be used by *machis*— traditional Mapuche healers and religious leaders.

language of the Mapuche. As someone who was born outside of Wallmapu, in Santiago, Calfuqueo affirms their learning of the language has been a gradual process (“Into the Fluid Heart” 80). In fact, they remember how their grandparents were physically scolded “for speaking the language,” a direct effect of the constricting process of assimilation (80). *Mapudungun* opposes the logics of Western colonial modernity. As Mapuche scholar Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante explains, the word indicates “the symbolic and sensorial relationship between nature, territory, and sound” (103). In its multiple meanings, *mapu* can be understood as “‘land,’ ‘territory,’ ‘space,’ ‘environment,’ or ‘universe’” while *dungun* can be translated as “‘tongue,’ ‘language,’ ‘voice,’ ‘sound,’ and ‘sense’” (Cárcamo-Huechante 103). Thus, the term turns language into a communicative manifestation not only of humans but also of the land, the nonhuman. The language “detaches from an anthropocentric logic and expresses a linguistic territory of multiple resonances: the phonetics of a world populated by beings that whisper, mumble, talk, shout, sing, weep, scream, whistle, bleat, or moo” (Cárcamo-Huechante 103). Thus, in the video performance, Calfuqueo silence themselves so that water speaks, and the forest can be heard. In alluding to this dimension of *Mapudungun* in their video performance, Calfuqueo begins to challenge the Western epistemological regime by embracing the silence of the human voice and allowing other haptic and aural qualities to engage in the process of communication.

The material presence of Calfuqueo and that of those entities in the forest are significant in the process of recovering the Mapuche worldview, and in rejecting Western colonial modernity and its binominal logic. As stated, Calfuqueo regards themselves as nonbinary, opposing Western binary norms of male and female. Similar to what we saw in Chapter 3 with Laura Aguilar’s work, in this video performance, Calfuqueo performs mostly facing away from

the camera, either by giving us their back, by looking away, or by having the camera positioned from a bird's-eye view obstructing a frontal perspective. As viewers, what we face most of the performance is a long-haired individual with a wrapped fabric to their waist that refuses to be confined to a specific gender. Refusing gender delineations is Calfuqueo's way of alluding to the Mapuche nonbinary notion of body and identity which has been suppressed by the Western epistemic regime.⁸⁹ This nonbinary presentation coupled with water as a performative fluid element direct us to think of *Tray Tray Ko* as a doing beyond the Western notion of the human, stressing, instead, the process of becoming with the other.

The nonbinary Mapuche body of the artist that walks and meets the element of water speaks to a Mapuche form of being, *Kowkülen*, which translates to 'liquid being.' To me, this liquid being takes shape in the intricate intersection of Calfuqueo's identity and material manifestations. That is, in the act of embracing a nonbinary positionality along with the fluid blue fabric hauled through the soil and forest and toward the waterfall. To this, Calfuqueo writes: "We as a species are not binary, and we move through waters that adapt to diverse containers of our experiences and bodies" ("Into the Fluid Heart" 80). They affirm that water is not only a basic element of (organic) life, but it is inscribed into the very histories of the Mapuche, an element that links life and death (81). This relationship of water to existence is inscribed in their stories, both oral and written, and in their "surnames and toponymies" (81).⁹⁰ To Calfuqueo, the

⁸⁹ In dialogue with Gómez-Barris, Calfuqueo asserted that "gender is a colonial construction" ("Into the Fluid Heart" 77). The artist also states that in doing research, they have noticed how "in the Indigenous archive of gender and sex, we find traces of other ways of thinking far beyond the prevailing binary introduced by the Western world" (78). In letting their hair grow, Calfuqueo points to their process of seeking femininity and to contest the cutting of hair of the "Mapuche peoples assigned male at birth" as part of a historical assimilation process of "a Western vision of masculinity" (79).

⁹⁰ Surnames carry a symbolic weight to the Mapuche. Evidence of this is the artist's surname, Calfuqueo, which translates to 'blue flint' (Calfuqueo, "Into the Fluid Heart" 81). In addition, the color blue has a central meaning in the Mapuche culture. According to Mapuche poet Elicura Chihuailaf, and as cited by Florencia San Martín, blue "means all that is sacred: the mountains, the lakes, the rivers, the sound" ("Sebastián Calfuqueo's *Kowkülen*").

waters “are about fluidity and thinking forms other than the mere binary of masculine and feminine. In the power of water, I also see life, territory... The diverse species of the forest want collaboration to arrive in the waters, in the fluid forms of being where the waters are a point of connection and sensibility, as well as a form of resistance” (“Into the Fluid Heart” 81). It has been my goal to show across this project the intersectionality that Calfuqueo presents with their work. I believe that in the simultaneous undoing of gender norms, the uplifting of non-Western epistemologies, and the act of putting in tension dichotomies that limit our experience in the world, resides a decolonial praxis that contests the category of the human as we know it.

Yet, the evocation of fluidity is superposed with the act of walking backwards, a procedure that also evokes an act of ‘undoing’ but also resistance or defiance of moving forward in corroborating a Western colonial gaze. Calfuqueo’s struggle in the act of walking backwards through uneven terrain and later into the water, materially and affectively expresses their own struggle of sustaining and living a Mapuche cosmovision that is nonessentialist, nonlinear and unfolds away from a binary logic, toward a conception of fluid being. As Diana Taylor affirms, when walking, our bodies “transmit traces of familiar, group, and territorial affinities, obligations, and belonging... walking, as one way of becoming in motion, is utterly culturally coded” (*jPresente!* 43-44). Calfuqueo’s walk is fluid being made tangible that materializes a Mapuche cosmovision, an act of a continuous resistance of *andar* against the Western colonial modernity that traverses the Chilean nation-state. Their walk is also an allegory to the work of those that I have discussed throughout these chapters: It is resistance, at times unsafe and uncertain. It allows for other epistemologies to find a path against the Western epistemic regime. Calfuqueo’s performance in *Tray Tray Ko* amasses all their perceptions and notions about water and finds an aesthetic finale in the act of being fully submerged in the waterfall—having their

body and the fabric fused into one as the lens begins to lose the artist's head under the falling water.

In the process of extraction of the land and its resources, capitalist powers have not only rendered all forms of life extractible, but, as Vargas Paillahueque reminds us, this has been made possible due to the discrediting of non-Western knowledges and their relation to the land (“Sebastián Calfuqueo’s *Kowkülen*”). Calfuqueo’s *Tray Tray Ko* is aware of this and presents an aesthetic vindication of Mapuche knowledge rejecting this discrediting process. Calfuqueo executes a complex performance that challenges fixed notions of gender and taxonomical limitations between the human body and nonhuman elements and presents us with a walk—a performance—that is transformative. Calfuqueo’s *Tray Tray Ko* is transformational in that it suspends Western notions of interpretation. The transformational power of their performance resides in that liminal terrain where binary oppositions are contested, as performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte affirms of performance (177). *Tray Tray Ko* is transformational since its intersectional feature disrupts a Western colonial multicultural gaze. The aesthetic encounter generated where an embodied trans-Mapuche meets water, the forest, and the inorganic (fabric), alters a hegemonic colonial and extractive gaze. It is with the transformative power of *Tray Tray Ko* that Calfuqueo not only thinks beyond the Western idea of the human but politicizes and empowers a Mapuche cosmovision calling on the necessity to embrace indigenous knowledges in the fight for more sustainable ways of thinking politics, culture, and the social.

A Surfacing of the Less than Human

As a nonbinary and Mapuche person, Calfuqueo belongs to communities that have been deemed less than human in Chile. In *Tray Tray Ko*, their body emerges as a refutative force, nullifying the excluding, assimilationist, and heteronormative discourses that navigate Chile.

Their performance unfolds asserting their subjectivity in space and time, but most importantly, in communion and in a nonhierarchical correlation with the nonhuman, the forest and the *trayenko*—the waterfall. Their body surfaces in this video performance to expose the viewer to affective, haptic, and visual possibilities away from Western norms.

With Calfuqueo's performance, I come to conclude that my initial exploration of the capacity of performance to challenge a Western idea of the human in the Latinx Americas created a cartography of specific subjectivities. It resulted in the mapping of a range of performances where different bodies treated and designated less than human surfaced under their own accord through aesthetic experiences. In observing this project comprehensively, I conclude that bodies deemed less than human arise to confront different discourses that control and consider them as disposable, unrecognizable, or undeserving.

In the case of Manuela Infante, the productions of *Realismo* and *Estado vegetal* develop complex performances that are philosophically driven to bring the (Western) human to its limits. However, in doing so, the characters that emerge engaging in contact and interaction with the nonhuman—such as objects or plants—are all human characters that have been historically downgraded or that have been marginalized, such as disabled or older people, peasants, and women. In the surfacing of these specific characters, Infante's theatre indicates the experiences of those who have been marginalized having a transformative potential to begin shaping new relationships with that which exceeds the human biological body.

In the case of Silencio Blanco, the theatre group's *Chiflón, el silencio del carbón* relies on the animation of puppets to vindicate a disregarded former mining community in Chile and return their dignity by presenting their experience as worthy of being told on stage. In a paradoxical yet effective move, the theatre group relies on objects, and not directly on human

actors, to transmit affects during the performance. It is the thingness of the object that reminds the audience of the capacity of nonhuman bodies to shape, condition, and collaborate with human bodies. The disregarded human bodies of the miners and their families appear as rescued and uplifted via animated puppets that stand vicariously on stage guiding the audience toward an equitable, non-anthropocentric gazing.

In a similar move, Agua, Sol y Sereno includes in their performance of *Corazón de papel* the elements of paper and music. These components exceed the dialogue and act prosthetically, collaborating with the human actors in a performance of restoration to the devastated community of Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane María. Here, kraft paper figures formed by human actors on stage materialize an affective facet that is palpable, moving the audience to grasp the experience of a colonized Puerto Rico facing the devastating effects of a human-made disaster. The theatrical production is a restorative event for a community that has historically been treated as less than human in its condition of a colonized society for over five centuries. In a complex juxtaposition, the human actors—as artists who navigated a vulnerable condition as survivors of the hurricane—encounter on stage the precariousness of those who perished because of the storm, coupled with the fragility of paper. In this intersecting dynamic of precariousness experienced by different bodies, the work of the theatre group alludes to the shared characteristic of precarious bodies that overlap as in processes of differentiation—political, social, economic—that conceive them as not-quite-human or simply nonhuman.

Josecarlo Henríquez's digital as well as textual manifestations invoke another body considered to be less than human unfolding performances of endurance and survival. Henríquez's fleeting characteristic in navigating different mediums of production and occupying various platforms suggests the ability of queer, dissenting, and vulnerable bodies to appropriate

the spaces of the heteropatriarchal, mainstream culture. In traversing both the digital space, the streets, and the pages of his texts, Henríquez develops an ethics beyond the Western idea of the human. This ethics underscores how the human biological body should be reconsidered, away from a limiting gender system and cognizant of the ways in which new technologies are currently reshaping the social realm.

In the haptic performance of her self-portraiture in nature, Laura Aguilar understood what it meant to feel and be designated less than human—as a queer, brown, and large body with a disability—living in an able-bodied and heteropatriarchal society. To her, photography became a liberating practice where she learned to capture her flesh enmeshed in the environments that surrounded her, abandoning fixed identity categories that ostracized her. In her communion with the nonhuman, organic and inorganic material manifestations collaborated with her flesh—visually and haptically—revealing a performance where she refuses to be disciplined and designated in a homogenous way. Her photographs are simple but unswerving testimonies of being, in the flesh, without falling into social conceptualizations controlled by an anthropocentric and heteronormative gaze.

The surfacing of bodies that are less than human returns me to speak of all these works as decolonial. The works I covered are decolonial unfoldings because a project as such in the Latinx Americas should emerge from the very bodies that have undergone colonial power. In remembering Frantz Fanon's viewpoints, Walter D. Mignolo asserts that while decolonial projects involve both the colonized and the colonizer, these must be "enacted from the perspective and interests of the *damnés*," or the bodies that have been colonized ("Delinking" 458). Organically, in these performances, these dispossessed bodies find ways to unbound themselves from restrictive dynamics that encapsulate, limit, and control them. In contact with the nonhuman,

these human bodies not only dislocate the human/nonhuman binary, but discover spaces to inhabit, and/or find visibility and vindication.

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