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ARTICLES

Torres-Rodríguez, Laura J. "El género de la burocracia: <i>El libro vacío</i> de Josefina Vicens"	2
Andúgar, Rafael. "El retorno del desierto y los espectros del Antropoceno en <i>Blanco Nocturno</i> de Ricardo Piglia"	12
Eslava-Bejarano, Santiago. "Of Cattle and Men: Interspecies Encounters in Ana Paula Maia's <i>De Gados e Homens</i> "	20
Ordóñez Robles, Samanta. "La cara oculta de las masculinidades nuevas en el cine mexicano comercial"	32
Avila Ponce de León, Eric Miguel. "La vida es pornografía igualitaria. <i>Inmaculada o los placeres de la inocencia</i> de Juan García Ponce"	41
Veloria, Elyse. "On the Other Shore: Water in Latin American Illness Narratives"	53

ESSAYS AND INTERVENTIONS

Campanioni, Chris. "Simulation Game: The Pleasures of Disintegration in Sarduy's Theater of Bodies"	62
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CREATIVE WRITING

Ross Laguna, Jen. "Macho Mama"	70
Spooner, T. M. "The Coquí Call"	75
Romero, Galo. "Maria"	78
Ronderos, Clara Eugenia. "Cuando las montañas son paisaje, y otros poemas"	79
Zak, Leila. "Tierra y mar"	82

BOOK REVIEWS

<i>Escrituras geológicas</i> , de Cristina Rivera Garza. Madrid: Vervuert, 2022. 205 páginas. Reviewed by Caro Register	84
<i>Revolutionary Visions: Jewish Life and Politics in Latin American Film</i> , by Stephanie Pridgeon. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. 194 pages. Reviewed by Claire Solomon	86
<i>Asaltos al escenario: humor, género e historia en el teatro de Sabina Berman</i> , de Priscilla Meléndez. Mexico City: Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2021. 384 páginas. Reviewed by Stuart A. Day	88
<i>The Business of Conquest. Empire, Love, and Law in the Atlantic World</i> , by Nicole D. Legnani. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. 282 pages. Reviewed by Christian Elguera.....	89

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Simulation Game: The Pleasures of Disintegration in Sarduy's Theater of Bodies

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ABSTRACT: What are the ways in which our imposed and asserted identities work in tandem to undermine a shared politics, by obfuscating the various political projects in which these identity positions are grounded? This essay examines the work that Severo Sarduy—novelist, poet, playwright, painter, critic—produced toward the end of his life to consider the uses and usefulness of simulation as an exercise counter to the assimilation projects of the nation. In entangling the modes of autobiography, cultural reportage, and literary criticism, “Simulation Game” also looks at a poetics for migrants and their children to understand exile and extant cultural dislocation. What I am interested in is not the elaboration of a theory so much as putting its conjectures to the test of flesh; and moreover, to return this practice to the body of the text, to accommodate a narrative form that can run alongside our thoughts.

KEYWORDS: autobiography studies, Cuba, diaspora studies, exile, migration, translation

RESUMEN: ¿Cuáles son las formas en que nuestras identidades impuestas y afirmadas funcionan en conjunto para socavar una política compartida, al ofuscar los diversos proyectos políticos en los que se basan estas posiciones identitarias? Este ensayo examina la obra que Severo Sarduy—novelista, poeta, dramaturgo, pintor, crítico—produjo hacia el final de su vida para considerar los usos y utilidad de la simulación como ejercicio contrario a los proyectos de asimilación de la nación. Al entrelazar los modos de autobiografía, reportaje cultural y crítica literaria, “Simulation Game” también analiza una poética para que los inmigrantes y sus hijos comprendan el exilio y la dislocación cultural. Lo que me interesa no es tanto la elaboración de una teoría como poner a prueba sus conjeturas en la piel; y, además, devolver esta práctica al cuerpo del texto, para dar cabida a una forma narrativa que pueda transcurrir junto a nuestros pensamientos.

PALABRAS CLAVES: estudios autobiografía, Cuba, estudios de la diáspora, exilio, migración, traducción

It's in public where I crawl deeper within myself; in public where I can be most private, if privacy means, in the context of the life of an artist: solitude, concentration, boredom, and the insecurity I've always felt to be necessary for anyone who's ever pretended, who's ever felt the need to pretend in order to survive, in order to re-make life into a series of indefinite coordinates, as tenuous as a sentence, the swerve of flesh on an electronic alphabet. Cadence of the sun at 1:17 PM to remind me I've lived this moment not once but twice.

When I was a child, and even later, I'd pretend to be doing anything else, anything other than watching how people moved, the way their upper lips trembled when they spoke or how their eyes darted when they looked up, when it was their turn to speak to the other people I was also watching, carefully, from a distance, thinking that if I could pick up on certain mannerisms, if I could imitate them, I would be closer to human, closer to having a public self, while retaining, trying to retain, my inner world, or better: to converge the world of the body and the world of the mind, to converge so as to not have to retreat anymore, so as to not have to withdraw all the time, even from myself.

* * *

My dad says he'll never go back. He says he only ever returns to Cuba in his dreams and that's enough. In the spring of 2017, we engaged in storytelling exercises.³ J told me about his dreams of Cuba and I wrote them down in English. I didn't know what I'd find and what I found was that he was able to speak again about his home. About the day he left. Sometimes the reality of dreams leaks out into the reality we call our everyday life.

I want to think about how memory might serve, not as a monument to the past, but as an instrument that informs our capacity to analyze the present. Memory, from Latin *memoria*: mindful, connected to Late Latin *martyr*: witness, related to the Greek *mēmēra*: care. To be mindful is to be aware, to attend to, to devote attention and concern, to *keep* a thing or person *in mind*. But how to reaffirm the agency of memory in the face of cultural erasure without reproducing the self-silencing and trauma so common in diasporic communities? Maybe it begins by sidestepping the binary of silence and testimony. Maybe these storytelling exercises with my dad also imagined a proposal: to re-imagine the historical unconscious.

* * *

Perhaps no other writer has taught me as much as Cuban compatriot and posthumous pressmate, Severo Sarduy. When I read Sarduy—novelist, poet, playwright, painter, critic; a hybrid of the ethnic identities: Spanish, African, Chinese, which created Cuba, the hybridity that the colonizing project of every nation both fetishizes

and obscures—I take up the invitation to get lost in his tortuous sentences, to surrender to their residual dizziness, vivacity, vertigo; revisiting Sarduy's neo baroque prose is to re-envision his body as a text, and the text as a tissue or texture of the body, because his work is nothing if not fleshy, extravagant and corpulent, but also delicate, fragile, self-dissolving—think of the early nineties film *Darkman*: "A brilliant scientist left for dead returns to exact revenge on the people who burned him alive"—a skin set to combust, within unspecified time limits, or: the phenomenology of reading. If you've ever encountered Severo Sarduy on the page, you already know all of this.

From Sarduy I learned that excess bears fruit; that scarcity, too, in the intermission of momentous returns, could be a form of abundance. From Sarduy I learned it was not unusual to exist between disparate cultures, to feel, every day, as if an abject interloper—too brown or too queer in some spaces and not brown or queer enough in others—to negotiate the interstices of languages, to cycle sexuality with an exuberance that embraced my desires for both women and men. From Sarduy I learned that *belonging* is a feeling that has less to do with place than how we gather ourselves and the people we call home. And when I finally returned to a home I had never been—a metropolitan Polish port city that is about as far spatially (455km) as it is psychically to the rural village (present-day population: 236) in which my mom was born—it felt like I had nevertheless been given back a piece of her childhood. How to give someone a memory of something they have never seen? Take a photo; destroy the source or model.

Reading Sarduy, I absorb his hyper elusive/allusive style: gaudy, flamboyant, wanton, flirty, inflated but also aseptic, deadened, vaporous, expired. One reads Sarduy to re-create the otherwise innocuous action of ascending the steps toward a party that evaporates the moment you're finally inside; Sarduy's readers feel *so up close* to the narratorial lens as to glimpse the vanishing point of consciousness coming to a froth, well-buffed by polysemy and double-entendre, a reminder that to blow up an image is to produce hyper clarity, and a clarity that harvests blur. To read Sarduy is to join a consensual sacrifice, not of life so much as the lyric I: a desire to evacuate subjectification and the regime of representation; to recede, instead, into volume, acoustic emulsion, voluminous prose, gibberish and sibilations, words that don't necessarily add up but explode into other words, images, sounds. Another writer once labeled Sarduy's work "tropical writing" (Benderson 17), and, although I am reluctant to recycle the empty adjectives brought by stereotype, I think we can appreciate what "tropical" uncovers on the level of form: exfoliated, intricate, fecund.

Perhaps, too, we can read "tropical" alongside the vibrant topography of the body, its erratic rhythms and effervescent developments. In Sarduy's "El texto devorado," which he published just before be-

ginning what would become his final work, *Pájaros de la playa*—translated into English fourteen years after his death, by Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier, and published by Otis Books / Seismicity Editions as *Beach Birds*—he writes of the rich complexity of another novel by imagining that in order to produce such a text its author must have devoured all the texts that preceded it, including the author's own, thereby surpassing the act of writing, which is to say the act of reading, or perhaps calling into question what it means to read. In fact, Sarduy, who died of complications of AIDS thirty years ago, had to live like he was reading, or read as if he was living the text; to eat texts, incarnate them through the mouth. When I read Sarduy, I remember that to copy out an original is also to imbibe it through a second hand, since all ventriloquism relies on what can't be seen, what has to be believed in spite of the absence of the material subject. A text, after all, is *always only a version* of another; in its Latin origins, both the act of weaving and that which is woven. From Sarduy I learned that the culmination of genre like gender was destruction, and the memo for readers was to help participate in its re-assembly.

* * *

It isn't just visuals that begin to stand in place of people and things and feelings, not just visuals that can petrify a memory—first fixed, then framed—but language. I'd heard the reasons why we can't remember a pre-verbal thing was the fact of verbs itself; that after acquiring language we no longer knew how to process memories. That experiences, or at least a large chunk of them, were meant to be lived and then forgotten. That the idea of "degrading memory" is redundant. That every act of remembering is degradation, contamination. I want to keep Cuba in my heart, my dad would say. To forget it. If memory is a form of death can forgetting become another form of life, of living?

In another book, I'd written that remembering is an act of memory but also an act of love, and that forgetting is the greatest act of love (*A and B and Also Nothing* 63). And I still believe that, even if I haven't forgotten it, even if I transcribe this here so as to repeat it, as if I were miming memory, under the guise of forgetfulness.

I heard that stories must be repeated all the time because they are forgotten all the time. Still I wonder: how does memory travel across the borders of generations?

And when I organized my dad's dreams and arranged them in a list, I wrote down in English what he had dreamed in Spanish. *But we never cut the other kites. We only raced. And from where I would stand, I could see the whole of Santiago.*

Where are the gaps and slips, I wondered, as I held the tape recorder with my left hand, and with my right, scrawled the notes that will

eventually re-constitute this story. Where are the gaps and how can I make them wider, instead of trying to fill them; how can I make them wider so I can breathe within them, in and out, out and in, and make song from all those unknowable breaths?

Another way of asking this is asking what it means to enter history, to become legible as a literary fact; what does it mean to be represented? I ventriloquize J, and in recording his voice on the audio track, I need to also overlay mine, to record this in an English that will allow it to circulate beyond the home, to make it misunderstood within it. Is all passage born of this necessary violence? Is absence the precondition of every representation?

When I play the tape back I can hear my dad's voice come in through the sound of silverware and plates shaking, and the growl of a lawn mower, and the chimes that herald a visitor, outside, at the foot of a front door. I am thinking about all the breaths we don't see.

* * *

In that book about personal accounting, that book about forgetting as an act of love, I recast my life through the lives and literature of Henry James and Gertrude Stein, a cross-pollination in which hybridity emerged. What I am interested in is not the elaboration of a theory so much as putting its conjectures to the test of flesh; and moreover, to return this practice to the corpus of the text, to accommodate a narrative form that could run alongside our thoughts. To translate Henry James and Gertrude Stein into another American was not a matter of grammatical conversion, or an assimilation to a predetermined semantic or phonological model, but rather an allegiance to form, for its disintegration, the generative tempo of dispersal, a passing which throws an extant want into sharp relief.

* * *

Cuba is among the scattered centers of the African diaspora, manifesting in the island's religious traditions, its celebrated music and dance, its promiscuous cooking and cuisine, and its culturally signified *manera der ser*, a general way of being, which is expressed, so often, through specific syntax and styles of speech. Yet Blackness also signals invisibility and immobility on the island and in the cultural imaginary of *Cuba*, dominated, in the imagination as outside of it, by light-skinned Cubans who left, like my dad, and those who remained, and who remained in power, as the Castro regime has, for an interminable era.

Two years after his first public address on racist discrimination as president of the republic, Fidel Castro declared, in 1961, that the age of racism and discrimination was over. Whereas a rediscovery and celebration of Cuba's African heritage—following the short-lived Afro-Cubanismo artistic campaign—served as the heart of

revolutionary rhetoric in the years following the 26 of July uprising, Black Cubans are today still excluded from positions in highly-coveted tourism jobs and lack the same access to higher education and quality housing as their white counterparts.

Where can we locate the ninety-four-mile distance of the United States from Cuba if not in the chasm of guilt experienced by both the *gusano* (exile; traitor) and the *compañero* (Cuban countryman; comrade), a stretch that exceeds coordinates both geographic and generational? This communal guilt, so often linked within its larger category of shame, is the tacit tradition that knits disparate Cuban communities within and without. If *cubanía* can be expressed, in José Esteban Muñoz's words, as "a structure of feeling that supersedes national boundaries and pedagogies" (87), then we need to think about how guilt—and shame—can be mobilized into a ledger of accountability and an ethics of care: not just for those who were "left behind" on the island (or for those who, alternatively, have not or can never return) but even and especially for the Black Cubans who remain alternatively silenced and fetishized, for a Blackness that continues to be obscured in popular national discourses and international ethnic designations, the coalition of pan-Latinx politics that aspires toward a future of inclusion just as it forgets its history of racialization and enslavement.

* * *

"So, if you want to really hurt me," Gloria Anzaldúa writes, in her code-switching *Borderlands/La Frontera*, "talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (81). More revealing is how Anzaldúa, pages later, describes the effects of lingual essentialization: alienation and split identity, the consequences of not acculturating for people of color. "I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero," she writes, "nothing, no one" (85).

I remember the first time I was asked to speak Spanish to authenticate my experience—my membership—to the Latin American diaspora. I remember thinking how strange it was, the paradoxical request to talk in the colonizer's tongue, in order to affirm my shared lineage of colonial displacement, my cultural difference as commodity—the commodification of cultural difference—and nevertheless, as the Zapatistas and other Indigenous insurgencies across the Americas and Asia have already shown, how hegemonic languages like English, Spanish, and French can be appropriated to articulate positions of subalternity.

What did it matter that I spoke Spanish like a foreigner—one who belongs, as its etymology reveals, to another—since aren't we all, us children of diaspora, estranged from our origins but also from the cultural landscape of so many of the nations we now call home? Af-

fronted every day by the gaze that asks us to entertain and thus reproduce the projections that others cast on us. This has everything to do with language, everything to do with looking.

* * *

The history of Cuba is a history of exile, from the eradication of the Indigenous Ciboney and Guanahatabey population in the 1500s to the forced departure of nonconformists by the Castro government in the second half of the twentieth century. "To be Cuban," José Lezama Lima once said, "is to already feel foreign" (qtd. in Campanioni, "Mea Cuba: On Exile and Excess"). But to be Cuban is also to be manifold, as José Martí proclaimed in his celebrated poem "Yo soy un hombre sincero": Yo vengo de todas partes, Y hacia todas partes voy ("I come from everywhere, and I am going toward everywhere"). To be Cuban is to be a body comprised of various parts. And so Cuba's rich literary history is filled with writers like Severo Sarduy (and Lezama Lima, and José Martí, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and Nicolás Guillén, & & ...), linguists for whom language is a banquet, a feast of words where everything goes through the mouth—*se la comió!*—and comes out as essay, before the examination is absorbed again, each part re-formulated and refashioned, elongated and expanded to create a utopia that has no location but the location of the text: the possibility of excess and an excess of possibilities.

Sarduy, ever flexible, remained adamant, nevertheless, about maintaining the distinction between *copia* (copy) and *simulación* (simulation), which does not reproduce the presence of a model or its dimensions but transforms, instead, the signifier—normative and normalizing—because of a fundamental lack. It is the *non-existence* of the worshipped being, Sarduy makes clear, "that constitutes the space, the region, or the support of his [sic] simulation [...]" (*Written on a Body* 93). It is because there is no material source that simulation may arise, as both less and more of an impossible unreality. The point of simulation is not imitation; the point of simulation is radical transformation of the organism. Such is the paradoxical task: to alter one's internal being through external modification; not exactly to appear, but—like a casein paint—to blend, to refuse calcification, to disappear within the variegated tapestry of self-bricolage, the entanglements of surface, skin, sediment; the innate animal desire to pass.

What comes first, the image or the imagination that conjures possibility into being? If it is not also true that in order to become what I am I've first had to copy out my life into words, to return the text to the body.

Resemblance, too, cannot be reduced to its manifestations in the *flesh*. Since to simulate is to pursue neither subject nor object—"woman," "accountant," "athlete," "soap bar"—but an idea. Since

to simulate is to proceed always from a representation, a copy, for which there is no original. This is why simulation—as Sarduy knew well through his transvestic poetics, through his compulsion for pastiche, adaptation, ventriloquism, appropriation, theatricality—is as much about excess as absence; this is why to simulate is not to reproduce but to subvert. What drives us to simulate, then, is not rapture so much as rupture: an attendance to holes, openings from which we might invite others to observe the alchemical oscillation between appearance and disappearance, which is all illusion. It's in public where I crawl deeper within myself; in public where I may be granted the conditions in which to simulate, "using the position of the observer," Sarduy clarifies, "including him [sic] in [my] imposture" (*Written on a Body* 97). If we require the gaze of another in order to better become who we are and what, moreover, *we can never be*, it is only because of the fiction of resemblance, a slippage between likeness and being that marks the effort *to make what is the same be what it is not*. This has everything to do with language, everything to do with looking.

Carol Maier, who translated Sarduy's essays into English, combining those from *Escrito sobre un Cuerpo* (1969) with the first third of *La simulación* (1982) to assemble 1989's *Written on a Body*, speaks about her own urges to translate the act of simulation as well as the words used, by the author, to describe it. "I preferred to distort English, to Cubanize it [...]," she writes in her introduction, mimicking (simulating?) Sarduy's own preferences for deranging Spanish with attention to both Cuba's pre-Columbian soundscape and the unsettlement of Spanish colonialism (v).

* * *

In the late spring of 1912, near the city of my father's birth, there occurred a series of protests and uprisings, later called the Levantamiento Armado de los Independientes de Color ("Armed Uprising of the Independents of Color"). Not many people write about this because not much of this was ever written down. Facts intermingle with propaganda by both the US and Cuban governments, whose narratives converged on the tropes of white supremacy and xenophobia, the eradication of alterity for the preservation of capital. Veterans of the Cuban War of Independence from Spain (a war that saw the deaths of 86,000 Afro-Cubans) had organized the Independent Party of Color just four years before, in the hopes of attaining better living conditions for Black Cubans, who almost exclusively provided the labor for the island's sugarcane industry. Almost immediately, Cuban President José Miguel Gómez ordered the party disbanded under the Morúa Law of 1909, which forbid political parties based on race.

Fearing a transnational Black collective, migration to Cuba by Haitians and Jamaicans was also banned. Skirmishes and demonstrations ensued; President Gómez requested military aid from

United States President William H. Taft, who sent multiple marine reinforcements, assigned to protect the American-owned sugarcane plantations and their associated properties. President Gómez called on the Cuban people to fight for "civilization" against "ferocious savagery"; the Cuban newspaper *El Día* reported that Cuba should copy Jim Crow Laws in the United States where "blacks are mistreated and society is segregated," concluding that "dominated races do submit." Similar articles in *La Discusión*, *La Prensa*, *El Triunfo*, and *El Mundo* followed, rehashing concerns over the "barbarism" of the demonstrators and declaring: *this is the free and beautiful America defending herself against a clawing scratch from Africa*. President Gómez reinstated concentration camps in Oriente province, where families were involuntarily admitted under the pretext of clearing out the countryside of potential threats. Black Cubans became suspects overnight, harassed and arrested for the suspicion of their skin color, while bodies of suspected rebels were left hanging outside town gates, their severed heads placed along railroad tracks so passengers could see the faces of their enemies: a warning to the public or an invitation.

Weeks later, the rebellion was put to an end, but not until the massacre of an estimated 6,000 Afro-Cubans, and with their deaths, the swift dissolution of the Partido Independiente de Color, its hope of a free, integrated Cuban nation with equal access for her citizens. How often such legacies of white supremacy are inherited and revised as a raceless revolutionary nationalism, as the il/legality of persons or the impermissibility of movement.

Trauma, too, does not migrate in linear movements but transcends parameters of a human life, passing on the way genetic code penetrates generations. "American identity," the Cuban critic Roberto González Echevarría once asserted, "is an absence, a deficiency from which emerges a culture that always seems to be wrought in the zero of the beginning" (qtd. in Campanioni "Mea Cuba: On Exile and Excess"). An origin requires both the discovery and recovery of the past, a desire to realize and retrieve. But an origin is also always multiple, contradictory, and open-ended. What do the children of diaspora inherit except the eternal exile, whose absence is not just a home but a nation, not just a nation but an origin story, not just an origin story but the chronology which connects the past to the present. And yet what gets produced in that catastrophe is another break: spatial, temporal, national, ontological—the means to remake our relationship to space. Such is the difference between the superficial celebration of a raceless society and the testament of a hybrid, multi-ethnic, multi-racial culture, a culture of neo mestizaje and manifold beginnings, which Sarduy re-cast (again and again) until the end of his life, until what was sketched out in *Pájaros de la playa* could only be sketched out at the end, too, of exile, not just another text but another textual mode of production, thirty-three years in the making.

* * *

So you speak bad about my language because I seem to speak my languages—whether Spanish or English, and especially Polish—badly. And yet each fraught enunciation, even and especially the errors, have made me who I am, which is to say a writer, so entranced was I, as a child, by the obscurity of the words that passed before me, so fascinated am I still today by the residue of broken forms, and the sonic valences produced by each fragmentation. Multilingualism may place us in an intermediary position whose function is not necessarily to translate on behalf of another but, moreover, to produce *another form* of expression. The resistance to translation was not a refusal but a gift. The refusal of the body was not a resignation but the body's final resistance.

"Here, I write," Sarduy writes, toward the very end of his *Beach Birds*, "in this absence of time and place, in order for that negation to be stated and for everyone to feel within himself that same motionless deprivation of being" (96).

When I read Sarduy, when I participate in the elegy of *Pájaros de la playa*, the elegy which is a celebration, I think about self-disgust, shame, the curse of dragging one's body along, but also the beauty that comes from the knowledge of the body's approaching negation, a moment in which all appearances collapse into absolute abstraction, a moment—if one were to locate in that precarious state a sense of empowerment—returned as faith: to succumb to sickness as a way of being together with the body and its limits; to succumb to life as a way of being together with the expanse of death, the death that, as Rilke also knew, we carry within ourselves from the moment we are born. Sarduy's bodies are sick, tattooed, defective, costumed; his characters, as a result, are anything they aspire to be, not in spite of their scars, their imprints of trauma, but because of them. Later on (but before the end), Sarduy's polyphonic narrator will remark: "Before, I enjoyed a persistent illusion: I was one. Now we are two, inseparable, identical: the disease and me. It seems pregnancy produces the same sensation" (*Beach Birds* 116).

Pájaros de la playa is Sarduy's symptom diary, and also: a love letter to the island of nativity to which he would never return, and also: a cultural critique on the medical-industrial complex, and also: a political reportage on the necropolitics of the government's policies of quarantine and deportation for HIV positive Cubans. The expansiveness indexed by Sarduy's final work might be read as a frenetic revelation written at the edge of death, although *Pájaros de la playa's* textual hybridity is representative of Sarduy's lifelong project of gathering dissimilar phenomena "into a single energy," what he characterized, in his own preface to *La simulación* (1982), as "the drive of simulation" (qtd. in Maier i).

Like the ensemble cast of patients that populate the rotating stage sets of *Pájaros de la playa*, Sarduy finds relief, not in the medical-political figureheads who desire to manage and supervise the bodies

of the diseased and infected, but in returning language to the phatic communion of bodily murmur: beyond semiotics, beyond discursive meaning, beyond the surveillant documentation of the state and the examination of its subjects—beyond the frame of narrative and its generic classifications. When the conditions to speak are such that one can only declare themselves at a loss—condemned as an already re-presented version of one's self—we might remember, too, that anything we say can be used against us, and very likely, already has. Asked to speak within an economy of orality, in the language of one's oppressor, we have the right to remain silent. And such an act is more than a gesture of defiance, but a way to dodge the script of resistance that relies on opposition.

* * *

What happened across Cuba at the height of the HIV epidemic—the exclusionary measures, the systematic deportations and terminal quarantines—is happening again to Cubans on an opposite shore, as United States government officials mobilize *disease* to serve securitization. Title 42, the immigration order that has been used approximately two-and-a-half million times to expel migrants and refugees arriving at the country's borders since its invocation under the Trump administration in March of 2020, refers to a US public health law first enacted in 1944, which allows the government to prohibit the entry of foreigners if they present a "serious danger" of spreading communicable diseases. Just last year, the US Customs and Border Protection logged 224,607 "encounters" with Cuban migrants and refugees; the Coast Guard reported 6,182 Cubans intercepted at sea. Today we are witnessing the largest Cuban migration in the country's history, doubling the crises in 1980 and 1994, the Mariel Boatlift and the Cuban raft exodus, greater, too, than the 1959 Cuban diaspora. Not many people write about this because not much of this is being written down.

* * *

Nothing fits, my dad says. Things don't add up. At least to a whole. Memories and experiences and imagination and dreams—now dreams. And not one of them can return my father to his birthplace nor can they return him to himself. If there is a truth, we have had to invent it. But our endeavor, my reading of his dreams, the translation from unconscious to waking life, Spanish to English and back into Spanish, the digressions, the gaps, inform the ways in which we—communities of migrants, and their children—tell our stories, stories that serve as a reminder that movement does not have to be tied to tragedy, but triumph; that movement does not need to be directed by the either/or of flight and return. In returning to the question of identity, to what characterizes a shared Latin heritage, or *Latinidad*, Juana María Rodríguez moves beyond language—beyond the imposed and erased languages spoken in Latin America and the Caribbean—and to the shared legacy of colonization. "Spain

and Portugal also spread their colonial seeds everywhere," Rodríguez writes, "in the Philippines, the Canary Islands, Cape Verde, Morocco, Macao, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Angola, for example. In México, the mixture of Indigenous and Spanish blood is considered *mestizo*, yet in the Philippines this same mixture is considered Asian" (11–12). What are the ways in which our imposed and asserted identities work in tandem to undermine a shared politics, by obfuscating the various political projects in which these identity positions are grounded? What is at stake is legibility; the conflation of race, ethnicity, nation, culture; the reproduction of assimilation to an imaginary whole. How simulation entangles that. How simulation seeks neither completion nor preservation but dis-integration.

I think again of my abuelo, Juan, like my brother, like my father, like no one but himself, "El Chino," and how maybe his familiar and familial nickname served another point, an unintended or unintentional gesture toward our heritage—*cubanismo*—of colonization and displacement and ultimately, dispersion. The transnational imagination demands that we read the names and categories by which we are hailed and which we ourselves employ as both less and more than what they pretend to portray. Something happens—but what? The pulse of tactility, the text breathing, as if a body—whenever I try to articulate the non-arrival of my diaspora.

* * *

I have listened to these tapes each night. I listen to them until my dad's voice is embedded in my mind, until my dad's voice becomes mine. And then we sleep.

* * *

The Polish port city I'd visited wasn't even located in Poland until October 4, 1945, when Stettin became Szczecin; when borders were remade, and flags replaced. A ministry for renaming appeared: Polish was substituted for German; streets were given different names, names were stamped in a different typeface, with different diacritics. In my memory (my imagination), this occurred overnight, instead of—as is the truth about almost anything imperceptible—in broad daylight. In my memory, still other coordinates, neither here nor there: Louis Napoleon, who invented the term "Latin America"

to justify French rule in Mexico. *Latin America*: Europe's ontological mirage of an other superimposed upon the newly independent nations south of the United States, in order to undermine their claims to sovereignty, rationalize their economic exploitation, codify the racializing project of colonialism.

What's the difference between being seen without being heard and heard without speaking? So every separation could be a link. So I had too often confused an inability to speak for my being unwilling.

* * *

I heard that people, like languages, were once thought to be impure the moment they began to mix as a combination. Unrecoverable origins, tainted by an/other's influence. An echo of the colonial—and extant—privileging of fair-skinned bodies, blanco and rubio over negro and moreno and mestizo and mulatto identities across the Americas, and beyond. I heard that the sense of distinction, in Pierre Bourdieu's summary, demands that certain things be brought together and others kept apart, part and parcel of the exclusion of all "misalliances and all unnatural unions" (474–475).

And still I ask my students: Where are you in the stories you read, or watch, or listen to? And still I ask all of us together:

What is a break, a cut? Or rather, what does the cut make possible? In music, repetition does not produce accumulation but perhaps its reverse: tonal and rhythmic improvisation. In that newly opened sound-space, we are brought to another beginning, which we have already heard, and differently. Maybe then, I ask aloud, this time standing behind a lectern during a symposium on *diasporic poetics* titled "Archipelago Dreaming," what I'm after is not the elaboration of an epistemic practice, or even a poetics, but a diasporic phenomenology, an unpolished examination of glide and caress, where the indeterminacy and ephemerality of touch—the immensity of minor things—calls into question the historical frames of periodization and essentialism, all those desires to locate, to contain, to grasp. The way every return begs difference, neither closure nor origin but linkage, a threading that should remain as "unnatural" as the overlaying of samples on an audio track.

NOTES

¹ See: Chris Campanioni, "Letters From Santiago: Re-membering the Displaced Body Through Dreams," *IC: Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación* 15 (2019): 59-87 and "Cartas de Santiago: Rememorando el cuerpo desplazado a través de los sueños," *IC: Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación* 15 (2019): 89-118.

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