

Copyright

by

Peter Clair Haney

2004

**The Dissertation Committee for Peter Clair Haney Certifies that this is the
approved version of the following dissertation:**

CARPA Y TEATRO, SOL Y SOMBRA

Show Business and Public Culture in San Antonio's Mexican Colony,

1900-1940

Committee:

Richard R. Flores, Supervisor

Deborah Kapchan

José Limón

Joel Sherzer

Kathleen Stewart

CARPA Y TEATRO, SOL Y SOMBRA

Show Business and Public Culture in San Antonio's Mexican Colony,

1900-1940

by

Peter Clair Haney, M.A., B.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2004

Dedication

To the memories of Raúl Almaguer, Lalo Astol, Raymundo García, Carlos Monsiváis,
Amada Navarro de Monsiváis, and Enrique Valero, all of who made invaluable
contributions to this study and did not live to see its completion

Acknowledgements

This project began fourteen years ago this June, and during that time, I have benefited from the assistance of many people. This dissertation would not have been possible without the financial support of Grinnell College's Rosenfield Program in Public Affairs, International Relations, and Human Rights, the University of Texas at Austin, the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project at the University of Houston, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Rockefeller Foundation through the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center's Gateways Humanities Fellowship Program. My parents, Bernard and Carlena Haney, also provided significant financial and moral support during some of the leanest years of my graduate study and deserve special thanks.

Of course, all the financial support in the world would not have made a research project had it not been for the willingness of a number of remarkable individuals to share their stories and memories with me. Raúl Almaguer, Marieta Batilla, Rosita Fernández, Leonardo García Astol, Rodolfo García, Esther Robinson, Raymundo and Virginia García, Ramiro González-González, Leandra Aguirre de González, Jesusa "Susie" Mijares, Carlos Monsiváis, Amada Monsiváis, Normalinda Monsiváis, Domingo Monsiváis, Herminia Monsiváis, Rolando Morales Mimi Reyes, Enrique Valero, Aurora Valero, Amparo Webber, and Walter Webber all received me in their homes with

exemplary hospitality and I can only hope that this dissertation conveys something of their depth, wit, and eloquence. Rodolfo García in particular spent considerable time with me on the project, and I will miss the camaraderie of our afternoon meals at the Luby's in Las Palmas Mall. Several relatives of my consultants also assisted in the research process. To Frank García, Rodolfo García Jr., and Ricardo Medina, I owe special thanks.

Over the years I have benefited greatly from the guidance of Richard Flores, my dissertation director, as well as that of the members of my committee, Deborah Kapchan, José Limón, Joel Sherzer, and Kathleen Stewart. These individuals have provided me with invaluable insights and encouragement in and out of class, and I cannot express my gratitude to them enough. Other members of the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin also provided advice and support, including Elizabeth Keating, James Nicolopolous, Manuel Peña, Pauline Turner Strong, Keith Walters, and Tony Woodbury. A special word of thanks is due to Elizabeth C. Ramírez and Pablo Miguel Martínez for their careful proofreading of an earlier version of Chapter Five, which I submitted to the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center as fellow in 2000, and to Marcia Stephenson, Jim McNutt, and Jerry Poyo, who mentored me through my initial research in 1990. Thanks are also due to the editors of *The Journal of American Folklore*, *Pragmatics*, and *The Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* and to anonymous reviewers associated with those publications, who provided invaluable comments on earlier versions of Chapters Six, Three, and Five, respectively. At conferences and similar scholarly venues, I have enjoyed useful input and encouragement from Richard Bauman, Mary Bucholtz, Antonia Castañeda, Kenya Dworkin y Méndez, Jorge Huerta, Alexandra Jaffe, Nicolás Kanellos, Arturo Madrid, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Deborah Paredez, Jack Sidnell, Erik Lee Skjön, and Valentina Pagliai. Finally, my fellow graduate students at

the University of Texas at Austin have been, in many ways, my best teachers and mentors. Ben Chappell, Maribel García, Miguel Gómez, Anne-Marie Guerra, Sandya Hewamanne, Joel Huerta, Anne Johnson, Chris Labuski, Hari Kanta Ogren, Virginia Raymond, David Samuels, Chantal Tetreault, Mike Trujillo, the members of the 1999 Advanced Seminar for Chicano Research, the members of the 1998-1999 editorial board of *Text, Practice, Performance*, and the members of the 1994-1997 Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology Group (SLAG), all deserve thanks for their support and for their comments on various incarnations of my work.

This project also owes much of its richness to the assistance of various archivists and cultural workers who have provided me with research assistance, leads, and support over the years. Jorge Piña, formerly of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center helped me get on the right track in research and helped me in ways I may never fully appreciate. José Manuel Galván Leguizamo provided me with access to his own interviews and copies of his own unpublished manuscripts as well as serving as an able and effective field assistant during my 1997 research. Karina Galindo provided diligent and cheerful administrative support for me during my Gateways fellowship, and I thank her and all the other folks at the Guadalupe for treating me like *familia*. Warm thanks are due to Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records, who generously provided me with access to the Arhoolie Foundation's collection of Mexican American music and expressed genuine interest in and enthusiasm for my translations of some of those recordings (cf. www.arhoolie.com for information about the foundation). Stephen Davidson of UCLA's online "Frontera" archive also deserves a word of thanks for allowing me early access to the project's online database. Numerous librarians and archivists have assisted me over the course of my research, including Margo Gutiérrez of the University of Texas at Austin's Mexican American Library Project; Lupita Fernández of the San Antonio Conservation Society;

Chris Floerke, Dolores Olivarez, Tom Shelton, and Kendra Trachta of the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio; Bob O'Connor, Barbara Saletan and the staff of the Hertzberg Circus Museum, Carolina Villaroel of the Houston Public Library; and the staffs of the Benson Latin American Collection and the Center for American History, both at the University of Texas at Austin, and of the Texana/Genealogy collection at the San Antonio Public Library. I also thank Frances Terry, Pam Becker, Andi Shively, Susan Lane, Anne Merill, and M.A. Simms for helping guide me through the University's administrative maze and for making the Department of Anthropology and the Américo Paredes Center for Cultural Studies such pleasant, friendly, and inviting places to be.

Finally, to Laura Padilla, my partner and best friend, I offer loving thanks for emotional support, insightful comments, proofreading help, and for putting up with me during the difficult final stages of writing the dissertation. Her parents, Eligio and Kathleen Padilla, also deserve thanks for their support and understanding and for taking me to Costco.

CARPA Y TEATRO, SOL Y SOMBRA

Show Business and Public Culture in San Antonio's Mexican Colony,

1900-1940

Publication No._____

Peter Clair Haney, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

Supervisor: Richard Flores

This project describes and analyzes the theatrical life of the ethnic Mexican colony in San Antonio, Texas, during the first half of the twentieth century, both as a historical phenomenon and as the object of public historical discourse. The study focuses the commercial musical comedy, vaudeville, and circus-like entertainments that are usually referred to as popular theater and the non-profit politically-oriented performance of Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s that claimed the earlier theater as a precursor. Key sources include fifty oral interviews with twenty former participants in that theatrical life, sound recordings of comic dialogues and sketches made by performers during the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, newspaper sources, the business records of a tent show called the Carpa Cubana, a set of manuscripts used by another tent show, the Carpa Monsiváis, and photographic records of several interviewees. The project argues that theatrical entertainment was a key part of a set of interlocking public discursive

institutions through which ethnic Mexicans formed themselves into a community in San Antonio and southern Texas. In particular, the theater offered a space in which ethnic Mexicans symbolically reflected on the contradictions involved in their processes of community formation, resisted their socially subordinate position in a modernizing Texas, and created an image of themselves directed at the encompassing Anglo-dominated social order. This study surveys the typology of theatrical space in San Antonio's Mexican colony, showing how the distinction between *carpa* ("tent show") and *teatro* ("theater") symbolized class divisions in the colony and led to status distinctions among performers. It also examines thematic material from various theatrical entertainments, examining the ways in which a gendered sense of Mexican identity was articulated in the theater through stock character types, the mixing of English and Spanish, and the ironic juxtaposition of incongruous generic frameworks. Finally, the study details the politics of history in which the earlier popular theater is embedded today, examining the heritage discourse of the Chicano Movement and the autobiographical discourse of a comedian who was active with his family's tent show in San Antonio.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Historical Background of the Site.....	7
Mexicana/o Theater in the United States.....	16
The Present Study.....	29
Chapter 2. Show Business and the Emergence of.....	41
a Mexican Public in San Antonio and Southern Texas	
Introduction.....	41
Types of Performance Space in Mexican American San Antonio.....	45
<i>La Plaza del Zacate</i>	48
<i>El Lado Sombra</i> . The <i>Teatros</i> and their Audience.....	62
<i>El Lado Sol</i> : the <i>Carpas</i> and their Audience.....	82
Discussion.....	105
Chapter 3. Singing to the Machine.....	111
Introduction.....	111
Rodolfo García's Recordings and their Market.....	114
The 1990 Reporte.....	120
The Dialogue of Narrative and List.....	125
List as Autotopography.....	130
From <i>Relajo</i> to Reverie.....	135
A Return to Narrative.....	141
Reveie, <i>Relajo</i> , and Recording.....	166
Conclusion?.....	178
Chapter 4. The Indiscreet Charm of the Greater Mexican <i>Pelado</i> Comedian.....	180
Introduction.....	180
From the <i>Lépero</i> to the <i>Pelado</i>	183
The <i>Pelado</i> and the <i>Catrín</i>	193

From Clown to Comedian.....	198
<i>Actores Cómicos</i> in Southern Texas.....	205
Don Fito: from <i>Pelado</i> to <i>Pachuco</i>	213
Disobedient Sons.....	220
Genre Play and Class Consciousness.....	230
Conclusion.....	242
Chapter 5. The Greater Mexican Comic Dialogue on Phonograph.....	245
Introduction.....	245
Early Recordings of Ethnic Mexican Comedy in the United States.....	247
The Performers.....	252
<i>Costumbrismo</i> in the ‘Estamos Sumidos’	259
Politics in the Dialogues.....	263
Mexican Love and its Discontents.....	270
Discussion.....	289
Chapter 6. Bilingual Theater, Language Purism, and the.....	292
Gendered Contradictions of Cultural Nationalism	
Introduction.....	292
The Mexican Precursors of Bilingual Theater.....	299
Language Purism and English Use in Mexican Immigrant Public Culture.....	308
Overview of the Dialogues.....	315
Contestation and Contradiction.....	338
Conclusions.....	346
Chapter 7. Una mirada que mata.....	350
Introduction.....	350
The <i>Vedette</i> and the <i>Bataclán</i>	352
<i>Folklórico</i> Dance and the Frigidity of Nationalism.....	366
From <i>Rataplán</i> to <i>Fantasía</i>	371
La Chata Noloesca.....	379
Mimi Reyes— <i>La Pachuca del West Side</i>	387

Conclusion.....	404
Chapter 8. The Restoration of Chicano Theater.....	408
Introduction.....	408
Somewhere Between Brecht and Cantinflas.....	411
To Make Whole What Has Been Smashed.....	416
Restored Tradition and the Politics of Style in Chicano Theater.....	424
The Restoration Goes On.....	439
Chapter 9. Conclusions.....	445
Appendix. List of Interviews and Self-Recordings.....	459
by Participants in this Study	
Bibliography	473
Vita.....	500

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, poets, novelists, actors and playwrights of Mexican heritage in the United States lent their talents to *la causa*, often believing themselves to be operating in a historical vacuum. This belief had many sources, but one of the most important was the widespread common-sense view that ethnic Mexican communities in the United States were too poor, too ignorant, and too challenged by the daily struggle for survival to nurture artistic creation outside those genres considered “folkloric.” In retrospect, it appears the Chicano Movement’s own populist identification with the downtrodden sectors of the Mexican-origin population in the United States may have unwittingly dovetailed with this view, but the movement had other, more salutary effects. It also inspired many ethnic Mexicans and other U.S. Latinas/os whose memories and life experiences did not match widespread preconceptions to make their voices heard. As artists and academics, many of these individuals have sought to move “common sense” in the United States toward “good sense,” and after the end of the *movimiento*’s charismatic phase, the study of the long history of aesthetic production by ethnic Mexicans and other peoples of Latin American heritage in this country has become a new field of academic inquiry. Research on theater spearheaded these efforts, in part because of the importance of theater for the Chicano Movement itself. In recent years, however, more attention has turned to the vast archive of novelistic writing that researchers in a variety of disciplines have uncovered. This

dissertation seeks to advance the study of theater by and for ethnic Mexicans in the United States by focusing on San Antonio and southern Texas before World War II.

This choice of locations is dictated in part by the availability of sources. Although Los Angeles was clearly the most important center of ethnic Mexican theatrical activity during the early decades of the twentieth century, many of the plays and musical revues written during the boom years of the 1920s are now lost (Kanellos 1990:xv).¹ For San Antonio, on the other hand, considerable archival sources are available, and at the time of this writing, there are still many living residents of San Antonio who participated in theater by and for ethnic Mexicans during the period in question. The memories of these individuals, as recounted to me in recorded interviews, form the core of this study. The choice of San Antonio also dictates a certain generic focus. Although the city enjoyed a rich and varied theatrical life that included such genres as drama, melodrama, and opera, it was best known for vaudeville-like variety acts and circuses of various sizes. These genres, which I will call “popular theater,” had an importance for San Antonio’s Mexican colony that belied their ostensible lack of seriousness. This study will examine the ways in which ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio constituted themselves as a public (Warner 2002) through the popular theater and allied commercial and discursive institutions.

Now this is perhaps an odd topic for somebody like me to be writing about, and that reminds me of a story. Like many people in the United States who are understood

¹ Of course, if the Recovery Project has taught us anything, it is never to say “never” or “lost.” It is my hope that future research will turn up more texts from the vibrant ethnic Mexican theatrical scene in early twentieth-century Los Angeles.

and understand themselves to be middle-class, White, and male, I am used to being asked about my occupation soon after meeting somebody new. I didn't think much about the historical and social specificity of that question until I saw a reading by the movement poet Neftalí De León in 1991. The son of migrant farmworkers, De León recalled the strangeness of mingling with White professional types who would inevitably get around to asking him, "what field are you in?" (Get it?) For me, the strangeness comes when I answer the question. Upon hearing that I am writing a history of popular theater among ethnic Mexicans in Texas, people follow up with something like, "how did *you* get interested in *that*?" At this point, the conversation tends to diverge depending on my interlocutor's ethnicity. "Non-Hispanic Whites" and other non-Latinas/os tend to react like a colleague of mine, who studies a language spoken by a few thousand people in the Peruvian Amazon, and who thought that the greater Mexican popular theater—which entertained millions in two countries in its day and had parallels in all of the former Spanish colonies that came under U.S. influence between 1848 and 1898—seemed an esoteric topic. Ethnic Mexicans who are either over sixty or have a background in Chicana/o studies recognize my topic, but they coincide with my other interlocutors in wondering how a person like me came to study such a subject. People ask this as if youngish teachers' sons of mixed European descent from northeast Kansas were not flocking to the doors of elderly Mexican American vaudevillians in San Antonio with recording devices in hand. And to be honest, during my research I didn't have to elbow people like myself out of the way on my interviewees' doorsteps, a fact that the people whose stories are the basis of this study recognized as clearly as anybody else.

All of the questions about how I came to be studying Mexican American popular theater and not something else are really inquiries into what might be called my ‘positionality.’ There’s a spatial metaphor gasping for breath somewhere underneath the weight of the unnecessary suffixes in that word, and I could answer that metaphor in kind, perhaps flippantly: “I’m standing here talking to you about sitting on a relative stranger’s sofa, with recording equipment on the coffee table, and with that relative stranger sitting somewhere within microphone range, talking to an unspecified public through me.” A more serious answer might include a litany of the axes of identity and difference that intersect in my life and in those of my consultants. I usually find, though, that what people who question me about my work really want is not a spatial but a temporal accounting: a story about how I came to be a conduit for other people’s stories. Critical anthropologists have spilled a lot of ink in the last two decades ruminating about such questions, too often resulting in an un-theorized confessional mode of writing, “a self-reflexive narcissism that [has] further displaced Third World people by making them the objects of theoretical speculation” (Padilla 1993:240).

What to say, then, in the absence of a solution to that problem? It all depends on who I’m talking to and when and where. Sometimes I tell people that I came across the topic in a 1989 symposium on Chicano theater at the small Midwestern liberal arts college where I earned my BA in Spanish language and literature. Often I continue by explaining that my interest in Spanish itself stemmed from the growing importance of that language in the United States and my own desire to apply my language skills (here the Career Development Office’s language creeps in) to social problems. I sometimes

allude to the focus of what passes for a Left in this country on Latin America during my young adulthood, and how that Left, which is scrambling to learn about the Middle East now that the doctrine of preemptive war has turned its gaze in that direction, influenced me. Less often, I talk about the atmosphere of my small college, where my peers and I found ourselves collectively possessed with what can only be called a missionary zeal for issues related to global justice and racial equality as we searched our souls to justify the resources that were being invested in us. In all of this, we somehow managed to turn away from the stark inequalities between poor mostly-White town and rich mostly-White college that were staring us in the face. I usually tell people that I conducted my initial research for this project in the summer of 1990 as an intern at a museum of the cultural diversity of Texas. Less often, I mention that the professional and managerial staff of that museum was overwhelmingly White, while the custodial staff was overwhelmingly *mexicana/o*. I usually tell people that my Spanish was relatively limited during the initial interviews and that the things my consultants told me only started to make sense after I spent a semester abroad in Costa Rica and then lived for three years in southern Texas near the U.S./Mexico border. Sometimes, I admit that those eight initial interviews, in which I had almost no explicitly theorized idea of what I was doing and limited language skills, were richer than the more than forty interviews that would follow, in which I was able to shape the discussion as much through the referential content of my questions as through my presence and demeanor.

I managed to get a grant for that initial research from a program at my college that usually funded internships in public policy and international human rights by arguing that

the presence of ethnic Mexicans in public narratives of U.S. history and culture was a matter of urgent political concern. Maybe I even said it was a human right. At the time, the Reagan-era literature on the history of ethnic Mexican theater in the United States before World War II, a theater whose existence the academy had not previously acknowledged, seemed to me a small revolution of memory, and I felt optimistic about my own ability to contribute to that process. Some fourteen years later, the rise of the hard right in U.S. politics, which has accompanied the institutionalization of Chicana/o Studies, suggests that revolution may be too strong a word for anything that is happening in the Humanities at this moment. Nevertheless, as I have noted above, that literature has led the way toward the recovery of what has come to be called a U.S. Hispanic literary heritage, permanently changing the face of Chicana/o Studies and challenging established understandings of U.S. literary and cultural history. I still think that is a useful challenge, and I hope that my early optimism about contributing to it is not misplaced.

In my native northeast Kansas, public history centers on what might be called “White-on-White violence.” It is common to hear history buffs say, with a little too much pride in their voices, that the first shots fired in anger in the conflict that would become the U.S. Civil War were fired in Kansas. Even people who care relatively little about history have tacked the name “free state” onto everything from trendy microbreweries to the new suburban high school in my home town of Lawrence. For all this vaunting of abolitionist heritage, however, public historical discourse in my hometown tends to focus on White combatants. African Americans tend to be issues, not actors, in these narratives, but at least they do not appear as villains. That role is reserved

for the pro-slavery “border ruffians” from Missouri, whose depredations are the only thing that ever gets Kansas mentioned in history textbooks or on PBS. When I first arrived in San Antonio in 1990, I was struck first by the greater strength of public history there and second by its paradoxical nature. In the twentieth century, the so-called “Alamo City” has created a multimillion-dollar tourist industry by simultaneously celebrating its Spanish-Mexican heritage and vilifying ethnic Mexicans in a racialized narrative of the Texas Revolution (Flores 2002;xvi-xvii). When I began research for this project, I quickly made contact with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, a non-profit organization begun in 1981 by artists who had been active in the Chicano Movement. There I found that theater had become an important symbol in the efforts of local *mexicana/o* cultural activists to reclaim a sense of historical grounding in the face of the exploitative recontextualizations of their heritage

Historical Background of the Site.

The area that is now San Antonio was home some of the oldest European settlements in Texas and was the capital of the Spanish province of Tejas. The city itself began as several different communities: five missions and a military presidio founded between 1718 and 1731 on the banks of the San Antonio River. The missions were controlled by Franciscan friars who ministered to populations of settled, Christianized indigenous people, while the military garrison was staffed by soldiers from northern Mexico. In addition to these settlements, the Crown established the community of San Fernando de Béxar and provided financial assistance to fifty families from the Canary

Islands who settled there. Farming, ranching, and trade were central to the economy of early San Antonio. Recent work on this phase of the city's history has shown how, through a complex process of economic competition for land and resources, the presidio community and the Bexareños came to form a unified élite by the final decades of the eighteenth century (Poyo and Hinojosa 1991:53). This work has also highlighted the paradoxical salience and flexibility of ethnic categories in early San Antonio, a feature that was typical of much of colonial New Spain. Although the community was stratified by race and racialized genealogy, with individuals of "Spanish" descent at the top, non- "Spanish" individuals were able to attain economic prominence and sometimes to become officially Hispanicized in municipal records (139). However, the essays collected in Poyo and Hinojosa's volume to not fully support their central point, that the *Tejano* identity that developed in eighteenth-century "continued and shaped the nineteenth- and twentieth-century *Tejano* and Mexican American identity" (142). An equally strong case could be made for a *discontinuity* between the early *Tejano* identities and contemporary sense of *mexicanidad* in San Antonio.

Of course, one of the most significant factors in this discontinuity has been the incorporation of the city into the United States. The imperialistic westward expansion of the United States brought to San Antonio an era of "crisis, tension, and conflict" (Flores 1995:102) whose legacy reverberates in public discourses of history and identity even today. The United States's encroachment on the northernmost reaches of a newly independent Mexico brought about an intermingling of cultural influences which continues to be seen as distinctive of the region. As early as 1828, a French visitor to San

Antonio de Béxar wrote that “trade with the Anglo-Americans, and the blending in to some degree of their customs, make the inhabitants of Texas a little different from the Mexicans of the interior” (Poyo and Hinojosa 1991:2). Although Anglo Americans only began to enter Texas in large numbers in 1821 with Austin's colony, it is worth noting that Benjamin Franklin had “marked Mexico and Cuba for future expansion” as far back as 1767 and that U.S. filibusters had planned expeditions into Texas in the 1790s (Acuña 1981:3). It is also worth noting that in the course of their incursion into Texas, the Anglo Americans produced a set of racially charged discourses that are familiar to students of colonialism, characterizing their project as one of 'civilizing' a savage land. An example from the 1830s is illustrative:

The justice and benevolence of God, will forbid that the delightful region of Texas should again become a howling wilderness, trod only by savages, or that it should be permanently benighted by the ignorance and superstition, the anarchy and rapine of Mexican misrule. The Anglo-American race are destined to be for ever the proprietors of this land of promise and fulfillment” (William H. Wharton, quoted in De León 1983: 2).

The first wave of Anglo-American settlers and their slaves entered with the blessing of the Mexican government, and though many of them probably held the sort of racial sentiments the above passage might lead one to expect, their relationship with the local *mexicana/o* population was not exclusively conflictive. As Montejano and others have documented, the new arrivals collaborated with ethnic Mexicans in defense against indigenous raiders and often intermarried with local landed families. Furthermore, they found that the local *mexicana/o* population shared their distrust of Mexican centralism, and when open hostility erupted in 1835, the conflict was not divided along racial or ethnic lines. Nevertheless, during this early period, Anglo Americans had come to

outnumber Mexicans in Coahuila-Texas by 5,000 (Flores 1998:14), and much evidence supports the claim that the settlers had always intended for Texas to be annexed by the United States (Acuña 1981:4-6).

After the success of the Texas revolution, the ethnic Mexican population of San Antonio experienced a brief period of peaceful co-existence with the Anglo Americans. But the expulsion of former mayor Juan Seguín in 1842 and the end of the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1848 heralded the decline of the old Spanish-Mexican elite and the beginning of several decades of dislocation and dispossession of *mexicana/os* at large. By 1856, many of the San Antonio's leading families had departed, and the Mexican population of the city as a whole had decreased to some 4,000. The property that had belonged to the élite passed into the hands of a new Anglo oligarchy. Although some remnants of the old aristocracy remained, the majority of the city's *mexicana/o* population was relegated to the lower socio-economic strata and denied access to lucrative work, sometimes violently (e.g. Acuña 1981:31). For these reasons, *mexicana/os* did not share in the economic growth that the expansion of the Texas cattle-export industry brought to San Antonio between 1866 and 1880 (Montejano 1987:54).

When the Southern Pacific Railroad reached San Antonio in 1875, the city began a transition from being the marketing center of a mercantile ranching economy to being the hub of an economy "organized around capitalist production and the emerging bureaucracy of the state" (Flores 1998:15). The introduction of the railroad and of barbed wire in the rural areas led to the closing of the cattle trails, and this event in turn effected cities like San Antonio which had served as regional markets for the cattle industry (13). The railroads also brought an influx of Anglo-American settlers and investors accustomed to a different way of doing business. All of this led to the further decline of the *mexicana/o* élite and the further exodus of *mexicana/os* from San Antonio.

Mexicana/os moved out of the plaza surrounding the new railroad station, and San Pedro Creek became the dividing line between Anglo and *mexicana/o* communities in the city (Montejano 1987:95). Although racialized images of *mexicana/os* in Texas predated this period, they acquired a new salience as San Antonio entered this new phase of its early modernization (Flores 2002:50). As the *mexicana/o* elite became more and more marginalized, and as the railroad brought Anglo Americans in increasingly greater numbers, the number of *mexicana/o*-Anglo intermarriages declined sharply (Montejano 1987:92). In the rural parts of southern Texas, a new drive on *mexicana/o*-owned land on the part of Eastern and foreign capital began, and San Antonio was the financial center from which many of these transactions were conducted.

This process laid the groundwork for a new wave of Anglo settlement. Beginning around the turn of the century, farmers from the Midwest descended upon South Texas, buying up land from the ranchers for use in commercial monocrop agriculture. As Montejano (1987) has documented, the penetration of this new agricultural order was uneven, but where it took hold, it brought about sweeping changes in land use and productive relations. Displaced *mexicana/o* cattle workers, who had previously been subject to informal, paternalistic, and personalistic labor controls on ranches, suddenly became wage laborers in more or less impersonal, legalistic relationships with growers. It was in this environment that the mostly county-based patchwork of pass-systems, vagrancy laws, and de facto and de iure institutions of segregation became institutionalized in South Texas. The pattern of the prototypical south Texas town, divided into Anglo and *mexicana/o* halves by railroad tracks, formed during this period (1987:164). These transformations were one of the chief causes of the *mexicana/o* insurrections that took place in the Rio Grande Valley in the mid-teens (122).. The rise of agriculture in Texas was also linked to the growth in Mexican immigration to Texas.

During the twentieth century, the *mexicana/o* population in Texas was augmented by an influx of immigrants fleeing the poverty and chaos of revolutionary Mexico and seeking work in Texas agriculture and industry.

As agrarian change swept over the Texas countryside during the first two decades of the twentieth century, San Antonio experienced an unprecedented economic boom that transformed it “from a frontier town to a modern city” (García 1991:26). This boom was centered on labor-intensive industries, such as the city’s military bases, shipping, pecan shelling, and garment factories. These industries depended heavily on *Mexicana/o* labor—for the most part the labor of immigrant workers—and the new immigrants increased the city’s *mexicana/o* population by seventy-five percent between 1900 and 1910 alone (28). In addition to attracting immigrant workers, San Antonio was also a major center for the recruitment and transportation of Mexican workers to other parts of Texas and to the Midwest (Montejano 1987:208). Many of these workers used San Antonio as a home base from which to migrate to seasonal jobs elsewhere. Wherever they worked in Texas, *mexicana/o* workers faced a dual wage system, earning less than Anglo workers for the same work (Zamora 1993:24). *Mexicana/os* also faced a gendered division of labor with women earning lower wages than men. While married women often remained in the home, taking care of their children and sometimes supplementing the household's income by doing laundry or piece-work in the home or joining the agricultural labor force with their whole families, many young, unmarried women were drawn into wage labor (26). In most cases, these laborers moved into the “Mexican Town” on the West Side that had grown up during the nineteenth century as *mexicana/os* were displaced from the center of the city. They lived in neighborhoods “characterized by poverty, dilapidated housing, and almost no sanitary facilities” (García 1991:38). In spite of this residential segregation, the kind of discrimination against ethnic Mexicans in

public accommodations that occurred in the smaller towns in farm counties was less common in San Antonio, as was violence against ethnic Mexicans by Anglo authorities. In 1917, the Spanish-language newspaper *La Prensa* attributed these facts to the size, and hence the strength, of the mexicano population in San Antonio; to the availability of consular action there; and (of course) to the protection provided by “*los mil ojos de Argos de la curiosidad periodística*” [“the thousand Argos-eyes of journalistic curiosity”] (September 13, 1917). Although *mexicana/os* in cities like San Antonio faced the same forms of segregation that their rural counterparts did, urban residents had somewhat better access to education (Montejano 1987:265).

San Antonio's industrialization and the corresponding growth of the *mexicana/o* population also led to a sharpening of class divisions within that population. Although the vast majority of *mexicana/os* in San Antonio were workers, there also emerged a small but prominent élite made up of exiled Porfiristas and Huertistas during this period. This group became a sort of Gramscian *clase dirigente* for the *mexicana/o* enclave, monopolizing many of that community's public institutions and exercising considerable influence on the theater, as we shall see. The Spanish-language newspaper *La prensa*, which enjoyed a national and international circulation, was the group's major ideological organ. In their public pronouncements and activities, the *ricos* displayed an expatriate mentality focused on homeland politics and a concern for “civility, decency, and elitism as contained in Mexican tradition and high culture” (García 1991:146-147). A small professional class also emerged during this time, and by the late 1920s and 1930s, “the Mexican American middle class, a child of the Southwest's industrialization and Mexican immigration, was beginning to be visible in San Antonio” (33). Embodied in such organizations as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), this group is usually seen as oriented toward the United States rather than Mexico. These two sectors

reacted quite differently to the nativist fever of repatriation that occurred during the depression of the 1930s. While LULAC protested the mass deportations, the *ricos*, whose sense of nationalism led them to see repatriation as a positive step, were muted in their criticism of the U.S. government (114-115). By the end of the 1930s, “the Mexican laboring class was simply surviving, the middle class was finding and building its sense of Mexican American community, and the ricos were losing their totally Mexican sense of identity” (77).

Most historians agree that a number of social processes that began in the 1940s enabled the Mexican American middle class to step into a directing role in its community and contributed to the end of official segregation of *mexicana/os* in Texas. According to Montejano, the pivotal developments included “the emergency of World War II, the mechanization of labor-intensive agriculture, the emergence of urban-based political power, and pressure from below and outside—the civil rights struggle of the 1960s” (1987:264). A related process was the rapid and sweeping urbanization of the *mexicana/o* population in Texas that occurred between 1940 and 1960 (Peña 1985:124). In addition to attracting workers to the cities, the war provided many *mexicana/o* veterans with a newfound sense of investment in the United States and new reasons to demand equal treatment within this country. Furthermore, the G.I. bill of rights provided educational opportunities to those veterans that they had never previously had, laying the foundation for the expansion of the *mexicana/o* middle class (Montejano 1987:280). In San Antonio, this newly enfranchised *mexicana/o* middle class found a degree of common cause with a reformist Anglo business leaders, leading to the defeat of old political machines and an unprecedented participation of *mexicanas/os* in institutions of the state and ‘mainstream’ civil society. The promise of these developments, combined with continuing inequities in education, the intransigence of some Anglo segregationists, and the incompleteness of

new *mexicana/o* middle class's access to political power and social capital created the impetus for the local struggles that came to form part of the Chicano Movement during the 1960s. During this time, according to Montejano, coalitions between middle class groups of various ideological stripes and labor unions, rather than middle-class organizations alone, made the successes of this movement possible (1987:282). By 1969, de iure segregation of *mexicana/os* in Texas was more or less dead (286).

In 1960, San Antonio was the largest *mexicana/o* community in Texas, with a large second- and third-generation population (Acuña 1981:266). The postwar period also saw a second wave of Mexican immigration, spurred in part by the *bracero* program, by which the U.S. imported guest workers from Mexico. Originally established in 1942 to compensate for wartime labor shortages, the program effectively installed the U.S. government as a tax-funded labor-broker for growers. During the recession of 1953-1955, the INS initiated a massive and brutal, if selective, crackdown on undocumented immigration, much of which had been encouraged by the *bracero* program itself (Acuña 1981:156). The growing mechanization of agriculture, however, combined with tensions between the U.S. and Mexico and pressure from nativists and organized labor, contributed to the end of the program in 1964 (150). Nevertheless, the program had the unintended effect of establishing patterns of Mexican migration to the U.S. that continue to this day. In this context, differences between native-born *mexicanas/os* and immigrants have become increasingly salient in San Antonio and the rest of South Texas. Although agricultural laborers and other unskilled remained a large (roughly 30%) portion of the *mexicana/o* population in Texas and San Antonio, an unprecedented number of *mexicana/os* (roughly 69%) have found their way into skilled and professional occupations (Montejano 1987:299). Nevertheless, many displaced agricultural workers have not found a place in the new relations of production, leading to the creation of a

more or less permanent marginalized mass of unemployed urban workers (Barrera 1979:150, quoted in Limón 1994:99). Although discourses of race have lost some of their salience in San Antonio, the city remains residentially segregated, and the effects of the current national backlash against the gains of the civil rights movement are beginning to be felt. It should be noted, however, while an official anti-Mexican hysteria has continuously surfaced in California during recent periods of economic downturn, such discourses remain more muted in Texas

Mexicana/o Theater in the United States

If the preceding narrative says little about theater, it is in part because authors interested in the broad narrative of Chicana/o history have paid little attention to theater. The same may be said about commentators on Chicano Theater, who have made relatively few attempts to bring their work into any kind of detailed dialogue with the work of historians. In the course of my own research, I have sought to answer F. Arturo Rosales's (1984) call for just such a dialogue. The academic literature on Chicano Theater history before 1965, most of which was written by scholars who had themselves participated in post-1965 theater groups, begins with a fiercely diachronic and traditionalizing approach. This literature seems to begin in 1971, when Chicano Theater named as such had been in existence for some six years and two nationwide festivals of the genre had been held. Vertical metaphors of “depth,” “roots,” and “foundations,” predominate. Huerta, for example, in an early article in the nascent journal *Aztlán*, states that theater “is not new to the Chicano, but is firmly rooted in the indigenous as well as the Spanish and African heritage of the Américas” (1971:63). This characterization

separates Chicano Theater from that of the United States as a whole, suggesting that its genealogy lies in what has come to be called “Latin America.” In a later article, Huerta revises this genealogy slightly, stating that Chicano Theater has “very complex roots in our Aztec, Mayan, Spanish, Mestizo, *and Gabacho* experiences” (1973:16, emphasis in original). Note that the idea of an African ancestry for Chicano Theater drops away here; to my knowledge, no commentator has rigorously investigated this idea.²

Many accounts, however, seek to trace the history of Teatro Chicana/o back to pre-conquest Aztec and Maya theatrical forms and rituals. In an early manifesto, for example, Luis Valdez himself expressed only lukewarm approval for the participation of Chicanos/as in Spanish plays, arguing that this practice, while acceptable, tended to “obscure the indio fountains of Chicano culture” (1971:53). In the preface to the published edition of the group’s early *actos*, Valdez expressed pride in a history “as ancient and beautiful as life itself,” arguing that El Teatro Campesino was “taking from the old and creating something new” (1994 [1971]:16). The “old” sources he was referring to were the myths and rituals of pre-Columbian civilizations. Although this current of metacultural thought appears continuously from the early 1970s to very recent accounts, no academic studies explore the historical links between pre-Columbian performance forms and Chicano Theater in depth. This is due in part to a lack of research on the earlier forms. Some commentators refer in passing to the *Rabinal Achí*, a K’ichee’ Mayan dance-drama of pre-conquest vintage, as a source (e.g. Huerta 1971:63; Valdez

² Cf. Weiss et. al. 1993:33-35 for a brief and somewhat overgeneralized discussion of African performance forms, the possible influence of these forms on Latin American theater. Chicano Theater is not mentioned here as a beneficiary of African influence.

1971:53; Ybarra-Frausto 1971:52), but once again none of them examine in detail the influence of that work or similar works on Chicano Theater. In more recent studies, this *indigenista* current has continued. Kanellos, for example, notes that the work *carpa* is derived from Quechua (1987:78) and alludes briefly to the widespread indigenous Mexican *voladores* dance as a current that may have fed into the Mexican circus tradition and thereby into Chicano Theater (76). He offers little analysis or description of this process, however.

More recently, Broyles-González has advanced a polemical re-affirmation of the Chicano Theater's indigenous roots. Among other things, she suggests that the comic hobo character called the *pelado* (lit. “naked one”) that was so common in the *carpa* and in Movement Theater is in fact descended from an indigenous type of versifying clown described by such colonial chroniclers as Bernal Díaz del Castillo and Diego Durán (1994:33). Briefly citing studies of Mexica verbal art that list a form of buffoonery among that people's major performance genres, she argues that existing scholarship, “in neocolonial fashion,” has “sought to establish a European ancestry for the *carpa*” and, by extension, *Teatro Chicano*, ignoring evidence for these forms' pre-Columbian roots (1994: 34). Although somewhat extreme in its dismissal of European and Euro-American influence on greater Mexican popular theater, her work does point to relatively unexplored avenues for the future study of continuities between the popular culture of laughter that exists among contemporary *mexicanas/os* and that of their indigenous ancestors. For most *indigenista* commentators, however, the emphasis seems not to have been creating a detailed genealogy linking Chicano Theater to the pre-Columbian

performance forms, but rather examining, criticizing, or defending the interpretation of Aztec and Mayan philosophy and thought that appears in Chicano Theater (e.g. Shank 1974; Morton 1974).

For all of indigenism, El Teatro Campesino has never entirely renounced the Spanish side of the Mexican heritage that it claimed. Indeed, its mythico-religious productions have tended to mix indigenous and Catholic symbols, and Valdez's early 1970s poem, *Pensamiento serpantino* famously asserted the identity of Aztec deities and Christian figures (1994:177). Similarly, the literature on Chicano Theater has generally looked for roots in Spanish theatrical traditions and *mestizo* traditions not specifically identified as indigenous. Furthermore, it is in reference to the Spanish/Mexican tradition that scholars of Chicano Theater have made their most detailed, specific, and significant contributions. Few accounts fail to mention that members of the 1598 Oñate expedition to New Mexico staged the first theatrical productions in a European language in what is now the United States, including a performance of *Moros y cristianos* (e.g. Ybarra-Frausto 1971:52; Huerta 1982:192). Significantly, these discussions tend to overlook Oñate's massacres of local indigenous people. Similarly, most commentators cite the ceremonies and religious theater of the Catholic Church as a source for Chicano Theater. Indeed, Huerta has suggested that the Church unwittingly "gave the Chicano a tool" that would later "sprout into a socio-political weapon" (1973:13). But perhaps the most important contribution of this traditionalist literature has been the discovery of a history of secular Spanish-language theatrical activity in what is now the United States that scholars had previously assumed out of existence.

The exemplary figure in this current is Nicolás Kanellos, whose meticulous and pioneering work has documented a florescence of Spanish-language theater, circus, and other performance genres in the United States, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and continuing through the 1940s (also cf. Ybarra-Frauto 1983, 1984; Rosales 1984). Although Kanellos's most complete work on theater, published in 1990, draws on more than a decade of research, the broad metacultural thrust of his project has been remained more or less constant since the publication of an early study of Mexican community theater in Gary and East Chicago, Indiana (1973). In the first place, Kanellos forcefully demonstrates that ethnic Mexicans in the United States had an active professional and community theatrical life prior to 1965 that academic researchers and the English-language press almost completely ignored. Secondly, he argues that this theatrical life helped the community to maintain “social and cultural solidarity” and pride in the face of a hostile dominant culture (43).

In later writings, Kanellos develops this argument further, maintaining that the Spanish-language theater served as a “sounding board for cultural conflict” and a rallying point for political organization (1986:83). Thirdly, in a polemic against the existing academic literature on Chicana/o performance, which was largely devoted to “folk” theater, Kanellos stresses the diversity, richness, and professionalism of Mexican American theatrical life, noting that ethnic Mexicans consumed and produced prestigious genres such as opera and serious drama. Drawing on written primary sources such as newspapers and oral interviews, Kanellos has established that Los Angeles, San Antonio, New York, and Tampa, Florida were the major centers of Spanish-language theater in the

United States before 1940. He also documents a rich theatrical life in Mexican American communities in Texas and other parts of the U.S. Southwest outside of those major centers, showing how U.S. Latina/o theater in general underwent a generic progression from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth "from serious drama to zarzuela [Spanish-style operetta] to vaudeville and the *carpas* and then on to radio and television" (1990:93). While Los Angeles supported a number of playwrights who authored original dramas and *revistas* (satirical one-act musical revues, often on topical themes) during the 1920s, San Antonio's primary strength appears to have been vaudeville, circus, and *carpas* ("tent shows"). In documenting all this activity, Kanellos argues against the misconception that the Mexican communities "consist mostly of illiterate laborers who are not refined, educated, nor cultured enough to appreciate the artistic dramas" (43). He thus places considerable emphasis on the activities and tastes of elites. In his articles about the *carpa* and other forms of popular theater, however, he demonstrates a populist appreciation for the sensibility of the working masses (e.g. 1987:78-80).

Finally, Kanellos argues that because the earlier professional and community theater was central to the social and political life of the Mexican American community, it may be seen as a precursor to the activist Chicano Theater of the 1960s and 1970s. In one article, for example, he notes that in 1933, "the professional theaters in Los Angeles dedicated a percentage of their box office to support striking Mexican farmworkers" (1986:90). He develops this last, and perhaps most important, point in a polemic against the work of John Brokaw, perhaps the only "Anglo" academic other than myself to make

an extensive study of the ethnic Mexican theater of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Relying exclusively on the papers of the Hernández-Villalongín Dramatic Company, Brokaw has argued that the Chicano Theater of the 1960s and 1970s was “closer to psychodrama and agit-prop drama than to the Mexican-American theater of the preceding generation” (1978:541). He has, in other words, sought to debunk the notion that Chicana/o *teatristas* were working in a tradition of theater established by their ancestors, thus implying that Chicano Theater is the product of diffusion. In support of this claim, he notes that the earlier companies were professional while the groups of the 1960s and 1970s were largely amateur. Second, he argues that while the earlier groups saw themselves as artists, the later Chicana/o groups were preoccupied with politics and therefore uninterested in the aesthetic aspects of their work (note the odd parallel with Valdez’s early comments). By contrast, he claims that “controversial subjects … had no place” in the *teatro* of the 1910s and ‘20s (538). In these earlier years, he suggests, theater companies sought to reflect the values of the whole of their audience, while the later Chicana/o groups sought to change their community’s values by persuading audiences to support a revolutionary agenda that did not enjoy wide popular appeal (542). Finally, Brokaw maintains that *mexicana/o* theatrical activity in the United States stopped “almost as if a switch had been turned off” in the mid 1920s, suggesting a lull of some forty years before the emergence of *movimiento* theater (540).

It would, perhaps, be inappropriate to speak of a “Brokaw-Kanellos debate,” as Brokaw has not, to my knowledge, responded to any of Kanellos’ criticisms of his work. However, his conclusions are questionable for a number of reasons, not the least of which

is the tone of condescension with which it treats the Chicano Theater of the 1970s. In the first place, his myopic reliance on the archives of San Antonio's Hernández-Villalongín company and his failure to consult newspaper sources leads him to assume out of existence the rich theatrical life of other cities, not to mention the other theatrical companies that were operating in San Antonio. Furthermore, by contrasting the professional character of the Villalongín Company with the amateur character of many Chicana/o groups, Brokaw ignores the rich tradition of amateur theatrical activity in ethnic Mexican communities that Kanellos has so convincingly documented. In his discussion of stylistic differences between Chicano Theater and the earlier theater, Brokaw fails to include vaudeville companies and tents shows in his analysis, selecting instead a company whose style and aesthetic seems to have differed maximally from that of the later Chicana/o groups as his key example. This error is fatal, because it leads Brokaw to ignore theatrical forms that were especially responsive to local social and political conditions, erasing evidence that would contradict his sense that the early *teatros* were textually apolitical.

As Kanellos (1987) and Ybarra-Frausto (1984) have noted, the *carpas* in Texas and other parts of the Southwest did not avoid "controversial issues," although few of them seem to have been as rhetorically radical or as focused on politics as the Chicana/o groups of the 1960s and 1970s. Even professional dramatic companies took part in fundraisers for various political causes. In Los Angeles, for example, such groups staged polemical plays about the trial and execution of Mexican immigrant Aurelio Pompa in the 1920s. This theme of the racial inequities of the criminal justice system would return

in the Chicano Theater of the 1970s (Huerta 1983:157). As Kanellos has exhaustively demonstrated, ethnic Mexicans in Los Angeles were writing musical revues in Spanish on topical themes such as repatriation and the dislocations of immigrant life during that same decade. As I will show in a subsequent chapter, class politics and the brutality of Anglo authorities were significant themes in the *carpa*, and the manuscripts of the Monsiváis *carpa* family include satirical poems about such issues as the dispute between the U.S. and Mexico over Chamizal, a small area of land on the border in the El Paso/Juárez area.

For all these reasons, Brokaw's characterization of early Mexican American theater as apolitical cannot stand. His claim that the political didacticism of Chicano Theater distinguishes it from the earlier tradition of Spanish-language theatrical activity in the United States is even shakier. Subsequent studies, including Ramírez's study of the selfsame Villalongín Company, have forcefully demonstrated that ethnic Mexican theater companies in the early twentieth century tended to see theater as a didactic, moral example for its audience (Ramírez 1990:13). Indeed, much of the earliest European-style theater in colonial New Spain was aimed not at reflecting the values of the community but at converting indigenous peoples to Christianity. Given this historical background, the didactic tendency in Movement Theater would seem to lend itself to a traditionalist interpretation rather than the diffusionist one that Brokaw advances. Finally, as Kanellos has convincingly demonstrated and as my own interviewees remember, theatrical entertainment continued to be commercially viable for some twenty years after Brokaw would have us believe it disappeared. In San Antonio, non-commercial community

theaters and church halls presented secular drama of the kind performed by the Villalongín Company well into the 1950s (Kanellos 1990:86-90).

In spite of these faults, Brokaw's core argument that there was a gap between the earlier ethnic Mexican theater and its movement-era successor cannot be dismissed entirely. Without a doubt, Kanellos and other researchers have advanced strong arguments for continuity in the social functions of performance from the late nineteenth century to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Added to this is Broyles-González's assertion that the early Teatro Campesino built its performance style on the foundation of a greater Mexican "popular performance tradition," a repertoire of performance styles and texts whose time-depth is considerable (1994:3-78). In making their cases, however, these authors have glossed over the discontinuities between earlier historical periods and the *movimiento*, begging the question of why their own arguments were necessary in the first place. For example, Kanellos's early study of theater in Gary and East Chicago, Indiana, notes the presence in the movement group Teatro Desengaño del Pueblo of a woman whose mother had worked with a mexicana/o community theater group during the 1920s (1973:46). This fact is presented as a "find," and I suspect that it is the exception rather than the rule. In my own research in San Antonio, which was a major center of ethnic Mexican theatrical activity before World War II, I have encountered few similar cases. There, few *artistas* who were active in the commercial and community stages of San Antonio seem to have participated in Chicano Theater during the 1960s and 1970s, and few actors on that city's contemporary Chicana/o stage come from families with a history of theatrical activity before World War II.

Perhaps the most theoretically sophisticated and deeply interpretive of the accounts of the early Spanish-language vaudeville is to be found in the work of Ybarra-Frausto (1983; 1984), which seems to transcend the debate over origins. His accounts of the *carpas* and *tandas de variedad* and of career of San Antonio's La Chata Noloesca provide an experience-near analysis of the popular theater inspired by Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque (1984). Like the European popular-festive culture, the *carpas* and stage vaudeville elaborated an unruly, grotesque aesthetic based on humor drawn from the generating lower stratum of the body. For Ybarra-Frausto, this theater was a prime example of *rascuachismo*, an aesthetic of flamboyant, irreverent bricolage that characterizes much Chicano cultural production. He argues that in the United States, Mexican popular theater was less politically partisan than it was in Mexico. Where the Mexican *farándula* lampooned public figures, its Mexican American counterpart did not engage politics as explicitly. Instead, he suggests, it focused on carnivalesque humor and what Ybarra-Frausto calls "situationally political" themes such as comic attempts at border crossing. Ybarra-Frausto does not speculate about the reasons for this difference, nor does he make clear what evidence supports his claim. However, my examination of texts from my own and others' oral history interviews and historic sound recordings suggests that the statement is at least partly justified.

Ybarra-Frausto's observation about differences in the political character of the popular theater in the U.S. and Mexico also draws attention to the fact that this theater was a binational phenomenon. Kanellos's work too documents the U.S. tours of many important Mexican performers and the occasional forays into Mexico of performers

based in the U.S. Interestingly enough, the Mexican and the U.S. Latino literature on the popular theater both saw increased activity during the decade of the 1980s, but there seems to have been relatively little intellectual exchange regarding these projects between Mexican and U.S. scholars. Although U.S. commentators typically demonstrate awareness of Mexican theater history, attention to theater in *el México de afuera* is lacking in the Mexican literature.³ Much of that literature is nostalgic and anecdotal in character, and while it often contains valuable information, it tends to lack analysis, with the work of Carlos Monsiváis as a notable exception. Like the literature on U.S. Latino theater history, the Mexican accounts are often celebratory attempts to make past expressive forms into heritage culture. But the Mexican literature is not animated by a polemical desire to exert the existence of a professional theater in the face of official denials, as is the U.S. Latino literature. Furthermore, the Mexican studies are addressed to an audience that remembers the names and faces of the entertainers being invoked, while the U.S. Latino literature is the result of research into a theatrical past that many had forgotten. Finally, where the Mexican literature offers searching social analysis, it is on the role of theater as an aspect of an emergent modern consumer culture. These important themes are largely absent in the U.S. Latino literature. One could say that where the U.S. literature interprets theater according to the horizon of ethnicity and the immigrant experience, the Mexican literature's fundamental horizon is the national spectacle—and the spectacularization of nationalism.

³The Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares's mid-1980s on the popular theater was shown in Los Angeles and sponsored there by UCLA's Chicano Studies Center, so there has been some degree of intellectual exchange. The book that resulted from the project makes little mention of the visits of the famous personalities it profiles to the United States.

Perhaps the most important sources of basic information on the circus and popular theater in Mexico are the writings of Armando de María y Campos. Both a historian and an ardent aficionado of the theater, María y Campos traces the history of the versifying clown in Mexico, culminating with the work of Cantinflas (1939) and chronicles the emergence of the *teatro de revista*, a type of musical comedy revue that often served as a sort of satirical newspaper for the poor of Mexico during the revolution (1959). It is perhaps this engagement with politics that most distinguishes the musical comedy of Revolutionary Mexico from its English-language counterpart in the United States. A posthumously published work examines the work of José F. Elizondo, a poet and journalist who wrote many of the most important *revistas* and who had ties to San Antonio's exiled elite. Building on the fundamental work of María y Campos, a body of literature on Mexican popular theater and tent shows has emerged (e.g. Dueñas-Herrera 1994; Garza-Guajardo 1990; Granados 1984; Morales 1987). These authors have continued in an anecdotal mode, often offering rich details about the lives and careers of notable stars and fascinating excerpts from comic sketches and songs. Their work offers ample documentation of important venues, personalities, and some textual and contextual information. Perhaps the most ambitious effort in this vein is a book associated with the "País de las tandas" project of the Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, which resulted in an insightful and historically contextualized book as well as a number of re-releases of historic recordings from the popular theater (Morales et.al. 1984). An interesting difference between the Mexican and U.S. Latino literatures is their respective stances on vaudeville. Where the U.S. Latino celebrates the popular ethos of vaudeville, the

Mexican commentators tend to see decadence in that form, painting the political musical revue as the high moment "cuando el teatro fue del pueblo" ("when theater belonged to the people") (1984:9).⁴ To the theoretically inclined reader, the most interesting contribution to the literature on the popular theater in Mexico is doubtlessly the work of Carlos Monsiváis (1984; 1981). Through a series of *crónicas* that play with the conventions of journalistic cultural writing, Monsiváis explores the construction of Mexican national identity through massified and commodified cultural forms. In the spirit of Benjamin, Monsiváis concentrates attention on the ephemera of a show business gone by. Postcards, photographs, popular songs, and other leavings of Mexico's early twentieth-century consumer culture are for him both empirical objects and theoretical constructs. All of these accounts point to the complex imbrication of post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism and an emerging modern consumer culture.

The Present Study

Previous accounts have characterized ethnic Mexican theater of the early twentieth century United States as an artistic institution through which its audience created and maintained ethnic solidarity and gave voice to the cultural conflict occasioned by residence in the United States. Beginning with the wealth of detail that this literature offers about venues, personalities, and the general trajectory of the theater, my own study moves in two directions at once. On the one hand, I have sought to place

⁴The use of the preterite tense in this phrase suggests that the theater "was," and has ceased to be, of the people. This idea of the individually authored musical revue of the revolution as a sort of populist high point and improvised vaudeville sketches as a decadence has much in common with some commentators' view of the corrido's "rise" and "fall."

existing chronicles of theater within broader macro-level narratives of Mexican American history in Texas. On the other, I have zeroed in on the micro-level details of specific sketches, dialogues, jokes, song parodies, costumes, and other artifacts of aesthetic practice in order to demonstrate how the larger historical processes manifested themselves in the theater. The resulting portrait of Mexican American theater balances recognition of Anglo-Mexican conflict with a consideration of intra-ethnic contradictions based on gender, class, and citizenship status. Furthermore, rather than seeing these contradictions as independent of one another, I have sought to demonstrate their complex interaction and interillumination. Furthermore, although the literature has enthusiastically emphasized the professionalism and artistic sophistication of early twentieth century Mexican American theatrical performance, it has tended to downplay that theater's commercialism. My study, in contrast, has sought to take the commodification of theater seriously, elaborating a view of *mexicana/o* popular theater in the early twentieth century as a "counter-product" (Negt and Kluge 1993:79-79) if not a uniformly proletarian one. As such a product, the popular theater was at the center of the deeply gendered tension between the growing involvement of ethnic Mexican youth in consumer culture and the nostalgic nationalism of Mexican exiles.

Of course, there is nationalist cultural baggage implicit in the concept of 'popular theater' that defines my object of inquiry. Yes, I said 'popular,' and I use that word not so much in either of the most common English senses to mean 'beloved by all' or 'commercial and mass-mediated' but in the sense more common in romance languages to mean 'of and for the people,' whoever 'the people' is supposed to be this week (Canclini

1995:148-149; Bourdieu 1991:90). As Canclini has observed, ‘the people’ and ‘the popular’ are in many ways Romantic abstractions. Nevertheless, commentators on Latin American theater seem to share a consensus about the extension of the term ‘popular theater’ as including a set of stage activities “directed toward lower economic sectors of the urban population” (Weiss et.al. 1993:4), and a subset of a broader category called ‘popular culture,’ which is understood broadly to be the knowledge and expressive forms that emerge from the daily lived experience of marginalized sectors of a given population. Weiss and her colleagues distinguish “popular” from “populist” culture, defining the latter as “popular cultures ... fragmented and assimilated in a decontextualized fashion” (6). Such processes of decontextualization and recontextualization of expressive forms are very important to the history of the theatrical forms I am studying, but the line between “popular” and “populist” culture is not always as clear in them as one might expect. Indeed, an examination of the history of the performance genres that are usually grouped together under the label “teatro popular” in Mexico does not reveal the autochthonous creations of an isolated, homogeneous working class with a clearly bounded national identity. Rather these genres emerged from a process of symbolic struggle in which performers, audiences, and authors have always been heterogeneous, and the interests represented on stage have never been monolithic.

It is worth noting that the performers I have interviewed do not use either “popular theater” or “teatro popular,” choosing instead to refer to their art with the English term “show business.” In an interview with researchers associated with the

Hertzberg Circus Museum's exhibit on the *carpa*, dancer and actor Susie Mijares expressed typical sentiments when she declared, "When I hear that song I just want to cry, because there really *is* no business like show business." This attitude frustrates the usual anthropological assumption of extreme cultural difference between observers and observed (Canclini 1995:178), and part of the challenge of this project has been to reconcile the idea of greater Mexican popular theater as "show business" with my own preconceptions. This process has included reflection on the symbolic centrality of the *carpa*, arguably a marginal sector of the greater Mexican live entertainment industry, in people's memories of that industry. Although different people bring different "baggage" to the phenomenon, there is a romance about the tent shows or *carpas* that seems common to all. The idea of small, ragtag family-based troupes traveling from town to town and entertaining largely impoverished audiences is as appealing to the 'outsider' as it is to the populist Chicana/o nationalist, and not for entirely different reasons. To seek to deny that something of this romance attracted me to the topic and to seek to repress that romance the name of some sort of objectivity would be both dishonest and futile.

During the course of my research, however, it became clear to me that to focus exclusively on the *carpas* would be to distort the history of a community in which opposing socioeconomic classes symbolically constituted themselves through the theater and other institutions of public discussion. For this reason, I have made every effort to convince people that my project is about the popular theater in general, focusing both on entertainment that took place in luxurious theaters and entertainment that took place in humble tents. Nevertheless, when people—liberal Anglos and Chicano nationalists

alike—mention my work it is the *carpas* they remember and the *carpas* they mention. The association of “ethnic Mexican” with “working-class” and by extension “tent show” is impossible to escape.

Also difficult to escape is a certain vicarious populism that leads academics, writing from the relative calm of libraries and University offices, to romanticize resistance and the rough-and-tumble aspects of working-class existence from which we have spent our lives distancing ourselves (Abu-Lughod 1990). This disjuncture between academic discourse and the experience of non-academics was never clearer to me than during an exchange with my consultant Esther Robinson about an article I had published in the *Journal of American Folklore* whose arguments are developed further in Chapter Six (Haney 1999). I originally intended the title of this article, “Fantasía and Disobedient Daughters,” to refer at once to the generalized parent-daughter conflict that Vicki Ruiz has documented among ethnic Mexicans in the United States during the interwar years (1998) and to the corrido “El hijo desobediente,” a parody of which figured prominently in the repertoire of Mrs. Robinson’s brother Rodolfo. Although I went over the substance of the article with Mrs. Robinson before submitting it for publication, I neglected to mention the title. In June of 2000, after reading an offprint of the article that I had given her, Mrs. Robinson telephoned me objecting to the title. Who, she asked, were the disobedient daughters in question? Of all the shows I was studying, only her family had daughters who performed. The title appeared to her to be an affront to her family and particularly to her mother, who spent considerable effort in teaching her daughters to behave correctly and made sure they steered clear of vice. My attempts to explain that it

was really the daughters in the *audience* who were disobedient, and that this disobedience wasn't necessarily a bad thing, led nowhere. The disagreement between us was not, or not only, the result of a "cultural misunderstanding" or differences in our information states, but rather of our respective social locations. It was one thing for me to celebrate disobedience of patriarchal authority from the relative security of my own position in an academic community that claimed to value such disobedience, and entirely another for Mrs. Robinson to have to face the consequences that the mention of such disobedience might have for her reputation.

This study draws on fifty loosely structured interviews with twenty individuals who participated in show business for ethnic Mexican audiences in San Antonio and southern Texas during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The interviews were united by a focus on the interviewees' memories of show business and of their participation in it. When possible, I tried to elicit descriptions of sketches and demonstration performances of songs, jokes, and similar material. In general, my consultants welcomed interviews with me as an opportunity to access an audience they had lost, and most wished to be named in connection with their artistic accomplishments. Nevertheless, they tended to be less comfortable about discussing aspects of their lives that they considered 'personal,' and when my efforts to elicit marital histories or genealogies met with resistance, I respected the limits that my consultants set. Although my consultants' narratives were often colored by professional and personal enmities and jealousies, I have chosen to convey the broad sociological implications of these tensions and leave the named details unstated. After my initial interviews in 1990, I conducted a series of interviews in 1997

focused on life histories of performers and several more between 1999 and 2000. During the initial interviews I was not sufficiently competent in Spanish to influence the direction of my conversations decisively, and results of those interviews had more to do with the stories the interviewees wanted to tell than with the research questions I had formulated. Nevertheless, my presence had a significant effect on what was discussed and what was not. My consultants, for example, did not begin to describe jokes and sketches that ridiculed or criticized English-speaking Euro-Americans as a group until 1999, after some ten years of acquaintance with me. It is likely that such material is underrepresented in my interviews even today.

In addition to the oral sources, I also consulted accounts of theatrical entertainment in Spanish-language newspapers of the period and a collection of written manuscripts of comic dialogues, sketches, pantomimes, and songs from the Carpa Monsiváis created by comedian Carlos Monsiváis, who toured southern Texas with his family's show from approximately 1912 until approximately 1941. The Monsiváis manuscripts have not been previously studied, and my treatment of them only scratches the surface of what promises to be an important resource for future studies of *mexicana/o* popular theater in Texas. I have also made unprecedented and systematic use of sound recordings made by ethnic Mexican vaudevillians in San Antonio during the 1920s and 1930s. Although San Antonio is the center of my analysis, the attention of my project wanders to other sites just as performers based or born in that city did when that show business was at its apex.

Chapter 2 places ethnic Mexican popular theater in its socio-historical context, showing how it emerged as part of ethnic Mexican involvement in the racially stratified social order that Flores has called the Texas Modern (2002). In particular, the chapter examines the social life of ethnic Mexican performance space and how the distinction between “carpa” (“tent shows”) and “teatro” (“theater”) contributed to the consolidation of class distinctions in the Mexican *colonia* (“neighborhood,” “colony”). A central concern of this chapter is the role of theater in the formation of ethnic Mexican public sphere in southern Texas and the ways in which class-based cleavages and a self-conscious need to project an image outward to the dominant Anglo order affected that formation.

Chapter 3 examines the methodological and political issues raised by my particular mode of inquiry through a close analysis the life-narrative of Rodolfo García, a former comedian who came to be my principal consultant. In addition to participating in interviews with me, Mr. García recorded solo autobiographical statements on his own home tape recorder, enacting something of an inversion of the usual relation between researcher and interviewee. By describing and situating the narratives and demonstration performances contained in tapes Mr. García recorded over a period of ten years, I seek both to do some justice to his narrative subjectivity and to highlight the issues of ethnographic representation and narrative authority that bracket all of the information presented in this study. Rather than an attempt to provide the reader with a convincing illusion of unmediated access to Mr. García’s words, then, this chapter is an exploration

of what oral history can do in the face of social and technological mediations that refuse to go away.

Chapter 4 examines images of working-class masculinity in San Antonio's popular stage, arguing that the preoccupation in the popular theater with the figure of the *pelado* and the *catrín* (roughly "working-class rogue" and "dandy," respectively) was a symbolic manifestation of the way that class cleavages defined Mexican identity. After detailing a history of this figure, I examine the texts of song parodies from Mr. García's repertoire, showing how class conflict manifests itself in those texts through a dialogue of genres. This dialogue appears to be a common, perhaps a characteristic strategy in greater Mexican popular theater, and it involves a complex interaction of indexical signs arranged in ironic configurations whose dissonances metaphorically represent social contradictions. The parodies, in other words, render those contradictions through a complex and densely layered array of tropes.

Chapter 5 examines a series of comic dialogues recorded on phonograph between 1928 and 1937 by Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, two Mexican immigrant vaudevillians who enjoyed considerable success in San Antonio's ethnic Mexican stage. The chapter argues that in those recordings, a nostalgic aesthetic of *costumbrismo*, something like Weiss's "populist culture," re-interprets the dislocations of exile in gendered terms, positing a mythical Mexican family as the solution to the problems of working class immigrants. I also show how over the course of the nine years the dialogues were recorded, the couple's work moves from relatively optimistic "boy meets girl" scenarios to more pessimistic situations in which dissipated, amoral, individualistic characters show their

lack of regard for others. For Netty and Jesús Rodríguez this anomie was a symptom of the deep social pathology of life in the United States.

Chapter 6 continues with a focus on the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, focusing on the mixing of English and Spanish in their work and the paradoxes of their linguistic purism. Although such language-mixing has often been considered to be a hallmark of the Mexican American experience, I show that it has important precedents in post-1848 cultural expression in Mexico. This chapter also draws on loosely structured feedback interviews (Stone and Stone 1981) with my consultants in which I played a series of dialogues for the individuals and elicited their comments. The dialogues selected were “Una mula de tantas” [‘One of So Many She-Mules’] (Anonymous Author 1935a), in which a monolingual male character reacts unfavorably to a language-mixing female character; “The Mexican from New York” (1935b), in which an uneducated monolingual woman reacts favorably to a language-mixing man; “Cabrestea o se ahorca” (Rodríguez-Valero 1936b), in which an educated monolingual woman reacts unfavorably to a language-mixing man, and “Es mi hombre” [“He’s my man”] (Anonymous Author 1930), in which both characters alternate between Spanish and English. These four recordings contrast with one another according to the oppositions of favorable versus unfavorable impression given by the language-mixing speaker, male versus female language mixer, uneducated versus educated female, and monolingual versus bilingual. Significantly, the logically possible scenario in which a monolingual man, educated or uneducated, reacts favorably to a language-mixing woman does not occur in any of the Rodríguez duo’s extant recordings. I argue that the dialogues present characters that mix

English and Spanish as transgressors of gender roles and national identities, reserving their harshest criticism for women. However, bilingual wordplay in the dialogues suggests a dialectically opposed ideological move toward a celebration of linguistic and cultural hybridity.

Chapter 7 examines images of femininity in the popular theater. These include the female singer-dancer-actors known as *vedettes*, the singer of risqué *couplets*, the virginal populism of *folklórico* dance, and parodies of that dance form in which performers imbued reified images of Mexican tradition with a sexualized flair that was seen as modern. Finally, the chapter examines the work of female comedians, focusing on the careers of Beatriz “La Chata” Noloesca and Manuela “Mimi” Reyes, two stars of the San Antonio stage. I argue that the popular theater’s celebration of feminine transgression was, in a sense, an answer to the retrograde gender politics of *costumbrismo*. Nevertheless, women in the popular theater remained subject to the panoptic desiring male gaze and prisoners of consumer culture’s eternal youth. The ironic recontextualization of symbols taken from *folklórico* dance and other symbols of nationalism involves a play of tropes similar to those of the parodies described in Chapter 3.

Finally, chapter 8 briefly describes the end of the popular theater in southern Texas and surveys its subsequent rebirth in the *Nuevo teatro popular* of the Chicano movement and the Mexican student movement. Here I provide a detailed review of academic and popular literature on teatro Chicano in relation to its historical precursors, showing how different commentators have viewed this theater either as the product of

diffusion or tradition. I also suggest an alternative paradigm for the understanding Chicano theater: that of a restored tradition. I argue that by rescuing residual forms from historical oblivion, Chicano performers were at once asserting the importance of their own historical experience in the United States and the productivity of ethnic Mexican leisure time. Nevertheless, in their celebration of working-class entertainment, early Chicana/o teatristas revisited some of the *costumbrista* tropes of the past. Ultimately, the populism of early Chicano theater marked the historical entrance of a Mexican American middle class whose claim to middle class status was recent and tenuous, but nevertheless important for their cultural production.

CHAPTER 2. SHOW BUSINESS AND THE EMERGENCE OF A MEXICAN PUBLIC IN SAN ANTONIO AND SOUTHERN TEXAS.

Introduction

To trace the history of show business among ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio from its beginnings in the middle of the Nineteenth Century to its decline in middle of the twentieth is to trace the *mexicana/o* community's development into an ethnic enclave in a modernized political economy able to come together as a counterpublic. This synecdochic argument, in which I take *mexicana/o* theater as a part that symbolizes the condition of the whole, is not a scholarly imposition, or not only that. Rather, it is a response to the demonstrable historical fact that ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio and the encompassing ‘Anglo’-dominated order in which they found themselves, have themselves understood this theater and the public spaces devoted to it as such a synecdoche. As ethnic Mexican communities in the United States underwent a transformation from dwindling, conquered ruins into racially subordinated but growing *colonias* (“settlements,” “neighborhoods,” “colonies”) during the late nineteenth early twentieth centuries, must supported a thriving theater industry.⁵ In San Antonio, theater was not the only institution of public discourse that mediated the *colonia’s* transformation, but it was one of the more important. Theatrical space also came to symbolize class divisions among *mexicanas/os* that took on renewed salience during the

⁵ The term’s codification by state government as a label for marginalized rural settlements cities that lack basic services is probably recent. I suspect that it derives from the usage of residents of those communities, but as officialese it may well have taken on a specificity that those residents might not recognize. For some ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio after 1910, it seems to have captured a sense of being an enclave in exile.

early twentieth century. These divisions and the consciousness associated with them may have varied geographically. In San Antonio, they appear to have been intense.

Of course, performance and ritual contributed greatly to the formation of San Antonio's *mexicana/o* community from much earlier on in its history. Writing about California's early missions, historian Rosaura Sánchez has noted that "the spectacle of the church rites and the ostentatious performative allure of the missionaries" were as important as the force of arms in enabling the Catholic friars to convert indigenous peoples and harness their labor for European-style enterprises (1995:81). San Antonio was likely similar. Religious performances included the Mass, processions, festivals, and such sacred dramas such as "Los pastores," a nativity play of medieval Spanish origin that is still performed in the backyards and church halls of San Antonio's West Side today (García 1991:20; Flores 1998:126). The documentary record of secular theatrical entertainment before the last decades of the nineteenth century is sparse, however, suggesting that such entertainment may have been less common and less developed in Texas than in California. Kanellos, for example, notes that an 1856 editorial in the Spanish-language newspaper *El Bejareño* criticized certain individuals who were preparing to construct a theater for the *mexicana/o* community, arguing that other needs, such as hospitals, were more pressing. Among other things, this article suggests that such a theater did not, in fact, exist (Kanellos 1990:13).

Historians of U.S. Latina/o theater agree that San Antonio and the rest of southern Texas enjoyed only sporadic visits by interior Mexican and Spanish traveling theater, opera, and *zarzuela* companies, mostly in San Antonio and Laredo, from the middle of

the nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth (Kanellos 1990:14-15; Ramírez 1990:10).⁶ According to Kanellos, *El Bejareño* also reported visits to the city by a Mexican circus later in 1856 (1990:13), and similar reports occurred in the English-language press in 1852 and 1869 (1987:80). It is likely that other such companies visited during this time and even earlier but were not documented. Unlike Los Angeles and other cities in California, then, San Antonio did not become a major center of theatrical entertainment until after 1910, when refugees fleeing the Mexican Revolution began settling there (1990:71). Furthermore, as we have noted, San Antonio “did not produce a body of dramatic literature comparable to that of the Hispanic playwrights in Los Angeles,” due in large part to the fact that more refugees from Mexico settled in the latter city (73). Nevertheless, ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio held the theater in high esteem, and theater became an important institution in the civil society that emerged among the new, twentieth-century immigrants (Rosales 1984). Furthermore, performers from San Antonio made important contributions to Mexican American vaudeville, and the city was an important center for *carpas* of various sizes (Kanellos 1990:73).

One of the earliest accounts of the carpa-like entertainment comes from the memoirs of Zebulon Pike, who passed through San Antonio on a trip from Mexico in June of 1807. Pike described a troupe of Mexican acrobats and actors who danced on a tightrope in one of the city’s plazas and used language that “would bring a blush to the cheek of the most abandoned of the female sex in the United States” (cited in Bollaert 1956:228). Thirty-six years later, the English traveler William Bollaert made a similar

⁶ Zarzuela is a Spanish genre of musical comedy, similar to operetta.

observation during his journey through the newly independent Texas Republic. The company he observed in San Antonio on September 22nd, 1843 performed outside by firelight in the yard of a family whose house abutted one of the city's plazas. The act consisted of dancing on a tightrope, tumbling, and actors on "a rude stage" performing "a comedy and two farces ... occupying about twenty minutes" (228). On October 1st of the same year, Bollaert saw another performance.

Fine weather again with southern breezes. The Maromeros, or Mexican rope dancers, are jumping about this evening. Although San Antonio is governed by Texas laws, Mexican customs prevail; rope dancing, tumbling and plays on a Sunday! (230)

Unfortunately, Bollaert's account provides little detail about either performers or audience, although the fact that the performances that he and Pike observed seem to have taken place outside enclosures is intriguing. His linking of *maromeros* ("tumblers") with such plays suggests that San Antonio followed the tendency of Mexican circuses to integrate drama and other forms of theater alongside the acrobatics and clowning that are most often associated with the circus in the Anglo-American tradition. Of particular interest is his use of the word "although" to contrast San Antonio's "Texas laws" with its supposedly foreign "Mexican customs." Bollaert arrived at this interpretation by taking the performances of the *maromeros* and rope dancers as signs of the *mexicana/o* community's difference from "Texas."

As I have suggested, the history of Mexican American theater in Texas and in San Antonio in particular is in part the history of such interpretive moves by which various social actors have attributed sign value to that theater. By referring to theatrical space as

having “sign value,” I seek to draw attention to the fact that its capacity to signify, as in Bollaert’s account above, was derived from its place in systems of differences. I also seek to draw attention to the social labor involved in creating theatrical space within the political-economic formation that Flores has called the “Texas Modern” (1998:5). The theater was an important part of a set of interconnected commercial and discursive institutions that ethnic Mexicans created in San Antonio during the early twentieth century in response to Anglo-dominated modernization. Through these institutions, ethnic Mexicans mobilized to serve their own needs, advocate for their own interests, and create images of themselves both for external and internal consumption. Theater played an important part in this process, but while *mexicanas/os* owned and controlled some of their institutions, most notably Spanish-language newspapers, they did not own or fully control their community’s most prestigious theatrical spaces. *Mexicana/o* theater occurred in spaces that were financially and cognitively intimate with the dominant society, and the community’s typologies of theatrical space functioned as symbols of both ethnic solidarity and intra-ethnic class divisions.

Types of Performance Space in Mexican American San Antonio

In their accounts of their performance activities, my interviewees tend to distinguish five types of performance space: *plaza* (“plaza/marketplace”), *teatro* (“theater”), *carpa*, (“tent show”), *circo* (“circus”), and *nightclub* (“nightclub”). Two additional types, the *salón* (“hall”) and *redondel* (a round, roofless area enclosed by canvas walls) appear in written primary sources and secondary accounts derived from

them, all of which also distinguish the earlier four categories. Comparing these venue-types according to what seem to be their focal characteristics leads to the following semantic schema:

Venue type	Enclosed structure	Roof	Large structure	Mobile structure	Solid structure	Independent structure	Space focused on alcohol-use
teatro	+	+	+/-	-	+	+	-
carpa	+	+	-	+/-	-	+	-
plaza	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
circo	+	+	+	+	-	+	-
redondel	+	-	-	+	-	+	-
salon	+	+	+/-	-	+	-	-
nightclub	+	+	+/-	-	+	+	+

In this schema, a “carpa” is distinguished from a “circo” largely by its size, while a “teatro” is distinguished from a “salón” by the virtue of the fact that the latter type of venue tended to be associated with a church or fraternal organization, while the theaters had more independent public identities. Although these terms and their relations seem straightforward at first glance, the categories seem to have been fuzzy and overlapping in actual application. Many performance companies and venues, such as the “Teatro Carpa Independencia” and the “Teatro Salón de la Unión” used two of these terms in their names. Furthermore, the physical and social characteristics of some venues blurred boundaries between categories.⁷ Most importantly, however, hierarchies of prestige among theatrical venues symbolized and reinforced social tensions and hierarchies within the *mexicana/o* community.

⁷ For example the New Mexico-based Ortiz Brothers’ Circus, which toured Texas from time to time, appears to have been a small operation, with few permanent members other than the Ortiz family itself. It referred to itself as a “circo” because of the size and prestige implied by the term.

In interviews, my consultants' discussions of theatrical space center on the late 1930s and early 1940s and are structured first and foremost around an opposition between *carpa* and *teatro*. A significant, if somewhat less charged, distinction between *circo* and *carpa* also seemed to obtain, but of all the theoretically possible oppositions among the above six terms, *carpa/teatro* seemed to carry the greatest emotional weight. This dichotomy also underlies Ybarra-Frausto's (1984) interpretive account of the popular theater in San Antonio, which is divided into two sections: one dealing with the *carpas* and a second dealing with what he calls “*tandas de variedad*.” Roughly translatable as “variety shows,” this latter term refers to series of vaudeville-type acts presented on the stages of a *teatro*, and Ybarra-Frausto seems to oppose “*tandas*” to “*carpas*.” In doing so, he may be replicating a local San Antonio usage that differed from the usage in Mexico City, for example, where both *carpas* and *teatros* commonly offered three *tandas* (i.e. three consecutive sets of variety acts with breaks in between) for one ticket. Although Ybarra-Frausto's account sometimes seems to shy away from explaining why “*carpas*” and “*tandas de variedad*” require separate treatments, his interviewee Raúl Salinas does not.

Nomás se oían los chismes de que hay venía la carpa maldita y todos los padres de la iglesia decían que no era propio dejar ir a los niños a esas diversiones. Ni tampoco era apropiado para los adultos porque daban mal ejemplo. Las carpas eran para la pura raspa ... la plebe

(“You just heard the rumor that here came the damned carpa and all the priests in the church said that it wasn't proper to let kids go to those entertainments. It wasn't appropriate for the adults either, because they gave a bad example. The carpas were for the poor people ... the plebs.”) (46, translation mine.)

Similarly, Kanellos describes the tent theater as serving “an exclusively working class audience” (1990:73). The salience of the distinction between “carpa” and “teatro,” in other words, was linked to the distinctions drawn between the audiences those venues were assumed to serve. Neither Kanellos nor Ybarra-Frausto, however, investigates in detail the relationship between theatrical space and class differentiation, a task that this chapter will take up. To properly address this question, it will be necessary to ask why theaters that catered to *mexicanas/os* were located where they were, how various constituencies used those spaces, and how the theaters related to other spaces of public discussion available to what came to be called San Antonio’s *colonia mexicana*. One of the most important such spaces was the *Plaza del Zacate*.

The Plaza del Zacate

“La Plaza del Zacate” was the name the *mexicana/o* community gave to the area also known as Milam Park, today a tree-lined island of unpaved ground on the western edge of San Antonio’s downtown, bounded by West Commerce Street on the South, West Houston Street on the North, Santa Rosa Avenue on the East, and San Saba Street on the West. Although the Plaza del Zacate would become the heart of Mexican San Antonio in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was apparently covered by a lake in the early nineteenth (Rodríguez 1913:37). Although some observers have seen this plaza as a survival of the Spanish/Mexican market culture that had existed since colonial times, it was just as much a product of a social struggle over space that ethnic Mexicans in the city faced as their community became part of the racialized modernity of the

United States. Even the name of the Plaza del Zacate seems to reflect the displacement of the people who socialized and made their livings there, for it parallels and contrasts with the names of San Antonio's original plazas.

Like most Spanish settlements in the New World, the communities that became the city of San Antonio were built around churches that faced square, open areas known as *plazas*. Indeed, the original *plano de población* ("town plan") of the town of San Fernando de Béxar specified that the colonists should have "squares and plazas...for their use and entertainment" (Noonan Guerra 1988:3). As in other colonial towns, these plazas were important centers of social, recreational, and commercial life and important performance sites in their own right. The *Plaza de las Islas* (lit. "Plaza of the Islands," now Main Plaza), located in front (i.e. on the Eastern face) of San Fernando Cathedral, was primarily intended for socializing, political rallies, religious festivities, and other related activities. Behind the Cathedral lay the *Plaza de Armas* ("Military Plaza"), which was originally reserved for military training of the soldiers in the nearby garrison. Where the names of these plazas evoked past military use by the Spanish/Mexican elite and origin of one sector of that elite in the Canary Islands, the name of the Plaza del Zacate alluded to nothing other than the fact that grass grew there. The Plaza del Zacate also differed from its predecessors in that it was not associated with a church and that it was primarily dedicated to continuous, largely secular commercial activity. Of course, such activity was not unprecedented on San Antonio's Plazas. Flores has noted that by 1830, Military Plaza, was beginning to double as a market for meat and produce. That same year, the City Council considered using prison labor to construct a slaughterhouse to

facilitate that industry (Freeman 1972:1). In general, however, the efforts of city officials were directed towards keeping market activities in check and strictly regulated (Flores 1998:6). Markets were not a feature of daily life, but rather periodic, special events in a religious calendar.

After the Texas revolution, U.S. annexation, the rise of Anglo-Texans to power in the city, and the flight of much of the old Mexican elite, Anglo-American business interests began to displace ethnic Mexicans from the area around Military Plaza. With restrictions on commercial activity lifted, the Plaza was quickly adopted by the growing cattle industry, which used it as “a holding ground for small herds, a public lot for the trading of goods, and an ideal location for overnight stays of covered wagons” (Flores 1998:8). To accommodate this growing industry, the City began to construct enclosed markets for the trade in meat, hides, and produce, the first of which was probably located on the Plaza’s northern side (Freeman 1972:1-2). Businessmen bought many of the residential lots around the Plaza and converted them into commercial establishments, and the herding and sale of cattle on the there made the area increasingly inhospitable to residential use and everyday traffic. A visitor to San Antonio in 1877 noted that “brawny Mexicans and Negroes” hauling carts of unhewn stone through the Plaza made passage difficult for ordinary pedestrian and carriage traffic. The workers cut the stones right in the Plaza, which was often “entirely covered with these teams, the great oxen lying all day in the sun ...” (quoted in House 1949:164). It is often remarked that the cowboys and *vaqueros* who drove their cattle to and from San Antonio were early tourists in a city that would come to depend heavily on the tourist industry later in its history.

Their presence led to the proliferation of rowdy bars, saloons, and gambling houses, many of them right in the shadow of the cathedral (Peyton 1946:49; House 1949:175-180). This commercial transformation of the Plaza became even more pronounced after the introduction of the railroad in 1877, which opened up the city to Eastern and foreign capital, as well as Anglo-American settlers and visitors (Montejano 1987:92). As these new commercial interests rose to increasing prominence and the city began to “boom,” ethnic Mexican homeowners were increasingly pushed to the west of downtown. San Pedro Creek became the unofficial dividing line between “American San Antonio and Mexican San Antonio” (95).

Nevertheless, ethnic Mexican still retained their custom of socializing in the plazas, and a strong *mexicana/o* informal sector emerged in Military Plaza. As the town became increasingly divided along racial lines, its market system became equally divided. Anglo-American and European immigrant vendors tended to occupy a series of city-owned, highly regulated market houses while *mexicanas/os* conducted a less regulated form of commerce on the plazas (Freeman 1979:10). An 1879 newspaper account claimed that this outdoor informal sector had existed prior to the U.S. Civil War but had disappeared during that war due to “poor police protection” and “an extraordinarily high tax” (San Antonio *Express*. June 3, 1879, in Everett 1975). The paper also reported that this business had “revived” in recent years (*ibid.*), and that one of its fixtures were the “chili stands” at which women served such dishes as tamales, beans,

and “chili con carne”⁸ both on Military Plaza and the area in front of the Alamo. The following recollection of a long-time resident of the city is typical of Anglo accounts of the vendors.

The Chili Stands that we used to have consisted of hollow square built-up plank tables covered with colored oil cloths, colored tin hexagon lanterns, colored glassware, flowers, etc. Continuous benches were built on three sides and in the rear center a large wood fire with grating supported large pottery cooking utensils. The special charm of each individual stand were their attractive, colorfully dressed ‘Chili Queens’ who served the splendid typical Mexican food. I noted, at all times, especially on Alamo Plaza, that the Chili Stands attracted loads of out of town guests at night. I recall going to New York and having people tell me that they remembered our city because of the Chili Stands, the Menger Hotel and the Alamo. –Atlee B. Ayers, 1960. (quoted in Noonan Guerra 1988:14).

Although these food stands appear to have dominated the informal sector, English-language newspapers in the late nineteenth century describe *mexicanas/os* selling a variety of goods including tamales, candy and sweets, wicker bird cages, firewood, and such handcrafts as lace, leather goods, and painted ceramic sculptures.

In all these accounts, the vendors appear as exoticized symbols of the city’s Mexican heritage. It is clear that Anglo-American observers of the informal sector thought that they were describing a pristine tradition innocent of outside influence. As one *Express* reporter put it, “the customs of the Mexican people remain unchanged, and there are thousands of Mexicans still here who maintain an independent little community

⁸ Reference to “chili con carne” are common in Anglo accounts of the “chili queens.” The term also appears in the cry of a street vendor in a dialogue titled “Una mula de tantas” (“One of so many she-mules”) recorded in San Antonio 1930 by Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. I am not sure exactly what the “chili con carne” sold in the “chili stands” was or what mexicanos called it among themselves. Consultants of mine who remember the plaza del zacate of the 1920s and 1930s speak of vendors selling menudo, a spicy soup made of beef tripe. It is possible that the “chili con carne” referred to in the nineteenth-century journalistic accounts was in fact menudo. If so, it would seem that the “chili queens” Anglo clients didn’t know what they were eating!

of their own" (June 3, 1879 in Everett 1975). But the specifics of their descriptions show how deeply the presence of Anglo-American visitors and settlers had affected the market culture. One condescending yet perceptive reporter noted the self-conscious commodification of Mexican identity itself among bird-cage vendors.

They [the vendors] represent a very low phase of Mexican life, but possess a quaint picturesqueness that is peculiarly their own. *That they realize this* is shown by the fact that they refuse to allow photographs to be taken of themselves or their outfits without a liberal tip being given them (*Express* June 17, 1894, in Everett 1975, emphasis mine).

This passage is remarkable both for the metacultural awareness it displays and for the limits of that awareness. The reporter, like the tourist, is seeking signs of difference in the *mexicano* vendor, who is said to "represent a very low phase of Mexican life." The reporter, however, takes his own status as observer for granted; he fails to ask himself *to whom* the vendor is representative. The vendor's representativeness of something, then, seems to be an inherent property rather than the outcome of an interaction between observers and observed. The reporter is keenly aware that the *mexicano* vendor is conscious of his "picturesqueness," in the eyes of the Anglo Other, but once again, that picturesqueness is fetishized as an inherent characteristic of the vendor. Of course, this scene, in which the marginal street vendor in a tourist situation converts his or her sign-value into cash, finds itself repeated today on the streets of cities and towns throughout Mexico, Guatemala, and many other Latin American countries. We historical observers may take the fact that such relations existed in nineteenth-century San Antonio as a sign of the growing social gulf between the Anglo visitors and newcomers and long-term ethnic Mexican residents. It is clear from the above quote that by the late nineteenth

century, *mexicanas/os* in the plazas were not only selling to their own community but also beginning to make a living off Anglo fascination with their difference. This practice continues in a more formalized way in the many restaurants and curio shops that line the western edge of downtown today.

By the end of the 1880s the city administration, under the autocratic rule of mayor Bryan Callaghan II, began to move market activity west of the San Pedro. Meat and produce sales were beginning to outgrow Military Plaza, and space became even tighter when a new City Hall was completed there in 1888, moving the seat of Anglo-dominated political power to the old center of Spanish military power (Noonan Guerra 1988:23). As the Plaza changed, even the “chili stands” that had so intrigued visitors and journalists were forced to relocate. In May of 1893, in response to a citizens’ petition to restore the stands to Military Plaza, the city commission simply responded that Haymarket Square had been designated that purpose for over a year (Freeman 1972:17). A week later, the city passed new regulations for outdoor vendors, obliging them to clean and remove trash from their spaces or face a fine. Business was clearly draining away from the markets east of the San Pedro, for that same year, the city decided to sell off the Market House that it had built some thirty years before on Market Street. The rent it was collecting was not enough to cover gas and maintenance for the building (*ibid.*). Then in 1894, the City designated the area around Paschal square, “a strip of land from Santa Rosa to Leona” (Noonan Guerra 1988:29), as the official space for vegetable stands, ending the practice of selling vegetables in Alamo Plaza, further to the east (Freeman 1972:17). The area

bounded by Dolorosa, San Saba, Houston, and Laredo Streets began to operate as the city's de facto market center.

To accommodate the bustling produce and livestock business that had previously taken place in the old Market House, the city hired architect Alfred Giles to plan a new, more ambitious facility on land adjoining Paschal Square, donated by a French-born businessman named Elie Arnaud (Noonan Guerra 1988:29). When completed in 1901, this building dominated the West side of downtown and provided an unprecedented level of service and comfort to vendors and shoppers.

Giles' market house looked like a castle in the middle of the prairie. Of brick and decorative ironwork, it had graceful verandas, cupolas, towers and an auditorium for concerts, boxing matches, and political rallies. ... The new municipal market house had refrigeration and running water, plus adjoining open squares for the fast-growing wholesale produce business (ii).

In the shadow of this temple of commerce, the *mexicana/o* informal sector continued to thrive both in Haymarket Plaza and in the Plaza del Zacate. These outdoor markets were the sites not only of commerce, but also of artistic activity and political commentary. Ambulant singers and musical groups of various sizes frequented the area around the “chili” stands, and professional and amateur Spanish-language theater companies performed in the Market House’s auditorium during the first decade of the twentieth century (Kanellos 1990:73). Typically, the English-language press zeroed in on the most marginal sectors of this culture. One story from the *Express* featured the disheveled Francisco Yturbide, listed in the city directory as a “professional poet,” who sold copies of topical verses (which the paper dismisses as “doggerel”) that he printed himself on a

small press.⁹ The *Express* described Yturbide as a dangerous drunkard and a vagabond and characterized his literary output as follows:

The topics of his poems are generally current events, especially elections. As soon as nominations were made in elections now passed he would compose a poem on each candidate setting forth his peculiar qualifications or disqualifications for office. These productions are all in Spanish and are sometimes quaint... in their phraseology (June 17, 1894).

Grudgingly acknowledging that Yturbide possessed a certain wit, the newspaper nevertheless assured its readers that he was a relic of San Antonio's dying past, doomed to disappear "in the influx of new life into the city." Far from disappearing, however, the city's mexicano community would enjoy a renaissance of sorts in the coming years as the Mexican Revolution swelled an "influx of new life" of a different kind that had already begun in the 1890s. The market area and the Plaza del Zacate would become the epicenter of this process.

As the city boomed during the early twentieth century, the emerging *mexicana/o* business district boomed with it, and the area around Plaza del Zacate became an important market for human labor as well as produce. Day laborers went there to find local jobs, and many of the *enganchistas* ("contractors") who sent Mexican agricultural workers to points north were also located in or near the Plaza. The dangers and uncertainties of these arrangements are highlighted in the comic dialogue "*Comunista en San Antonio*" ("Communist in San Antonio") recorded in 1930 by the comic duo Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. In this piece, a lazy but honest Mexican immigrant named Pío

⁹ For San Antonio's ethnic Mexican community, "poetry" and "lyric" had not become synonymous, and as we will see, topical verse of all kinds was an important form of public discourse.

Regalado, who is a “communist” in the sense that he has cleaned communal toilets for a living, seeks out work in the Plaza del Zacate. In an opening soliloquy, he laments the hard knocks that life, the authorities, and the job market, have dealt him in his adopted country.

¡Lo que es estar uno de malas!	What a thing it is to be down on your luck.
Hasta los perros lo ven mal a uno. Yo, Pío Regalado de apellido, he tenido que salir de mi tierra, porque allí no me querían ni regala'o.	Even the dogs give you dirty looks. I, Pío Regalado (“Freeh”) by name, have had to leave my homeland ‘cause back there they didn’t even want me for “free.”
Y me vine a los United States a probar fortuna.	And I came to the United States to try my fortune.
Pasé de puritita chiripada. Y cuando ya tenía diez días de estar esperando chamba,	I got across by pure dumb luck. And when I'd been here ten days
¡Zas! Al bote por vago y peligroso.	waiting for work, Bam! In the slammer for being a dangerous bum
Gracias a que pude comprobar que soy hombre trabajador, ¡Sí señores! Yo al trabajo lo respeto. Por eso no me meto con él. ¿Hay algo más bonito que trabajo cuando uno no lo tiene?	Luckily, I could prove that I'm a working man, Yes siree! I respect work a whole lot. That's why I don't mess with ‘it. Is there anything nicer than work when you haven't got it?
Y nada que tendrá que trabajar por fin.	And in the end, I'm gonna have to work anyway.
Dicen que aquí en la Plaza del Zacate, salen buenas chambas. Vamos a ver. Por allí viene una rota.	Folks say that in here in the Plaza del Zacate, good jobs come your way. Let's see. Here comes a dame (Rodríguez- Valero 1930a)

The “rota” in question turns out to be a wealthy bootlegger named “Mrs. Flowers”¹⁰, who is looking for a naïve “mojado” (“wetback”) to transport two hundred gallons of moonshine without asking any questions. When she offers to pay Regalado a high fee to drive a car but will not explain the nature of the cargo, he refuses the job, defending his honor as an immigrant worker and reminding her that if all he wanted to do was be a delinquent, he could have stayed in Mexico. “Para morir a balazos,” he reminds her, “en nuestra tierra tiempo nos sobra” (“back in our country we've got more than enough time to get ourselves shot”). As the villainous “Mrs. Flowers” retreats, foiled, and Regalado has the last word, saying “Adiós” to her “Bye-bye.” Where at the beginning of the piece he seems to embody the lazy Mexican peon of Anglo stereotype, at the end he echoes discussions of the honor of honest work and struggle that even today remain common in the United States among immigrants of all nationalities.

A trabajar de comunista o de
lavaplatos,
de lo que el pan que me llene la
boca no me amargue,
y el dinero que me gane
no me deshonre.

Now to work as a “communist” or a
dishwasher
anything, so long as my bread won’t
turn bitter in my mouth,
and the money I earn
won’t dishonor me.¹¹

But the message of the dialogue is also sobering, as it highlights the uncertainties of appearances and the ambiguities of the more or less anonymous “quick-hit” relationships that the Plaza made possible.¹² Indeed, Spanish-language newspapers of the day

¹⁰ This name, which is probably intended to be seen as a translation of the Spanish surname “Flores,” might make this character an ancestor of “Miss JIM-inez” of El Teatro Campesino’s “Los Vendidos.”

¹¹ All references to this dialogue are taken from “Comunista en San Antonio,” Vo 8395, SA 7022, recorded December 6, 1930 by Netty and Jesús Rodríguez.

¹² I am indebted to Andrew Causey for this characterization of social relationships in market spaces.

frequently reported incidents in which Mexican workers were recruited for work in distant parts, only to be refused pay once their season was over. Like all markets, then, the Plaza del Zacate was a space of lies and hucksterism, where social license was intensified and the private and public domains of life fused uneasily (Kapchan 1996:3).

In spite, or because of these ambiguities, the western edge of downtown had become not only the site of the San Antonio's most important market, but also the commercial, social, and intellectual heart of the Mexican colony, a scene full of contrasts and paradoxes. Although identified with ethnic Mexicans in the public mind, vendors from German, Italy, France, Belgium, shared the space, along with Anglo-Americans, African Americans, and ethnic Chinese refugees from Mexico (Noonan Guerra 1988:28-35). It was a space in which “many voices, ethics, and nations” were represented (Kapchan 1996:8). In an interview, San Antonio *veterano* Alex Aguilar described visiting the plaza as a child during the late 1930s.

I remember there was a black preacher. Tall, skinny black preacher that would attract the crowd of blacks and *mexicanos* preaching la palabra [“the word”]. Then there was another man that would preach the socialist line. He got a big crowd. There was still a lot of Mexican people that stayed across the border and he was condemning the Mexican government. He was preaching the socialist line. Y some would say, “Ese es puro comunista.” [“He’s nothing but a communist”] I didn’t understand what that “puro comunista” was. Then este Ramirín, which is Pedro González-González. Which is first cousin to Don Fito would play the...he had little pans made out of either stainless steel, and he played tunes on the pans ¹³

However contradictory they may have been, the Plaza’s politics were serious.

The late Emma Tenayuca, known for having organized important strikes of pecan

¹³ AA9.21.99-1:1

shellers in the late 1930s, claimed to have gained her first exposure to socialist ideas there, in a space so near the center of San Antonio's brash capitalism. For vaudevillians such as "Ramirín," who was a mainstay of Spanish-language variety shows in San Antonio and New York in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Plaza was surely a secondary source of employment in comparison to the nearby theaters and nightclubs. But the performers appeared there nonetheless, adding their wit and gaiety to the eclectic mix of ideologies, while musicians and poets of all stripes continued to ply their trade, as Alex Aguilar also recalled to me.

Then there was another man that had made a violin out of a square two-gallon can of oil. He'd hollowed it out and made a violin. He got a fairly good sound out of the violin and he'd play valses mexicanos. Como "el vals Alejandra" y "Cuando escuches este waltz" is another title. In those type of houses he used to play on this- [PH: Oilcan.] That was to attract attention. There was free entertainment y todo. His main thing was selling copies of poems that he'd reproduce somehow. Sheets or poemas by several poets Amado Nervo y Antonio Palza. Which was very popular, Antonio Palza was very popular.¹⁴

The violinist that Aguilar described appears to have occupied an economic niche similar to that of Francisco Yturbié, some forty years after the *Express* predicted the imminent demise of such figures. Sandwiched between the growing Anglo-dominated centers of town and the growing West Side slums, the Plaza was the site of the commingling of "categories usually kept separate and opposed: center and periphery, inside and outside, stranger and local, commerce and festivity, high and low" (Stallybrass and White 1986:25).

¹⁴ AA9.21.99-1:1

Although marginal figures like the “chili queens” and the man with the oilcan violin stand out in many peoples’ memories, the Plaza was also the site of many of the more formalized businesses and institutions that formed the backbone of the *mexicana/o* community and the power base of its conservative, exiled elite. Prominent among these was the Botica de León, a drugstore established in 1895 by the Matamoros-born Col. Francisco Chapa at the corner of Commerce and Santa Rosa streets. A close ally of governor Oscar Colquitt, Chapa became an important political broker in San Antonio by helping to turn out the vote of the *mexicana/o* electorate for the local machine. In the teens, he served two terms as an alderman and published the Spanish-language newspaper *El Imparcial*. To the south of Chapa’s pharmacy was the Panadería El Fénix, known both for its Mexican pastries and as a meeting-place. Half a block north on Santa Rosa Street were the offices of *La Prensa*, where publisher Ignacio Lozano also maintained a bookstore stocked with a wide variety of Spanish-language books, newspapers, and magazines, ranging from classics of Spanish literature to other European works in translation, Mexican history, devotional readings, and works on the occult. From its beginning in 1913 until its final issue in 1962, *La Prensa* was the voice of the city’s exiled Mexican elite and one of the most important Spanish-language newspapers in the United States, second only to Los Angeles’s *La Opinión*, which Lozano also owned. Nearby, on Dolorosa Street, was a library established by the Mexican consulate, and on Produce Row, a few blocks away, a Mexican News Stand sold newspapers and magazines from all over Latin America (Noonan Guerra 1988:24). Also in the area of the plaza was the Casino Mexicano, an exclusive social club that was the center of the

immigrant elite's social life (25). In addition to holding regular Sunday dances and *tertulias* (gatherings for conversation, refreshments, and sometimes lectures), the members of the Casino played a significant organizing role in the annual celebration of Mexico's *fiestas patrias* ("Independence Day Celebrations"). On West Houston Street, the exiled elite established a free clinic for the poor, which was run by Dr. Aureliano Urrutia, a descendent of an old San Antonio family who had once served as a personal physician to Porfirio Díaz (Noonan Guerra 1988:25; Peyton 1946:158).

El lado sombra. The teatros and their audience

As the commercial institutions centered on the Plaza grew, so did Spanish-language theater. Initially, performances took place in church halls, in the market itself as noted above, in *salones* erected by fraternal organizations and mutual aid societies (Kanellos 1990:74), and. Even venues that were not explicitly identified with the *mexicana/o* community such as the Majestic Theater, the Aztec Theater, Beethoven Hall, the Princess Theater, the Gunter Hotel, and the Municipal Auditorium housed performances of various kinds for that community (Kanellos 1990:73). Of these, Beethoven Hall appears to have had the closest relations with the *mexicana/o* elite. It hosted such prestigious acts as the famous Virginia Fábregas company during the 1910s and 1920s (Kanellos 1990:75; Ramírez 2000:16). Soon theaters were also built specifically to meet the demand for entertainment catering to ethnic Mexicans. Although the locations of some of these theaters remain unknown, most of the venues for which information exists were clustered either around the western edge of downtown or on

Guadalupe street between Brazos and Zarzamora streets. Many of the earliest theaters catering to ethnic Mexican audiences appear to have been non-profit spaces that belonged to fraternal organizations and mutual aid societies. This was true of the Teatro Salón de la Unión, for example, which was erected by the Sociedad de la Unión. On Houston Street, there was a small theater called the Teatro Obrero whose name suggests an association with workers' organizations. Little is known of this theater, as the elite press did not cover it. It appears in Manuel Gamio's 1926 survey of ethnic Mexican businesses in San Antonio (Kanellos 1990:89), and by 1938 it was under the management of a Paul Garza and was described by the San Antonio *Light* as one of the city's few surviving nickel movie houses (November 13, 1988).

The houses that became the key centers of Spanish-language entertainment in San Antonio, however, were not owned by ethnic Mexicans. In the teens, Sam Lucchese, a Sicilian-born immigrant whose family owned a prosperous boot company, began building theaters for Spanish-language entertainment, eventually creating "an empire in San Antonio and Laredo that was unrivaled," and which would supplant the smaller venues to a degree (Kanellos 1990:77). Born into a boot-making family, Sam Lucchese and his brother Joseph immigrated to Texas through Galveston in the early 1880s and soon moved to San Antonio to set up a boot shop at a time when the city's economic boom was attracting numerous immigrants from Europe and the Eastern United States (Institute of Texan Cultures 1987:16; Lucchese 1980:2).¹⁵ Their business grew quickly, nourished

¹⁵ The actual year of the Lucchese's arrival in Texas is unclear. Lucchese (1980) reports it as 1880, while Institute of Texan Cultures 1987 reports it as 1882.

by demand from two of the industries that were central to the creation of the Texas Modern: the shipping of cattle and the military (3). The Luccheses also enriched themselves by participating in the land speculation that transformed downtown San Antonio in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as his grandson, also named Sam Lucchese, relates.

Grandfather Sam moved his place of business often and the Lucchese Boot Company had many addresses in San Antonio. He always owned the buildings and believed in real estate. He did well with his properties. From the time my grandfather died in 1929 until my grandmother died in 1958, she was supported nicely on the real estate my grandfather left her (3).

The family's decision to expand into the theater business was most likely related to its real estate interests. In another interview, the younger Lucchese characterized the move as a chance event.

At one time he could not get a location for his boot shop on Houston Street, which was the main street in town. But there was a man who owned a theater and wanted to sell it. So my grandfather bought the theater, ripped out the seats, tore out all the equipment, and put his shoe shop in there. He then bought a piece of property over by the Hay Market Plaza, built a theater, put the theater equipment in there and decided that he was going to bring culture to South Texas. He hired an opera company from Mexico. He did not get customers to come though. In fact, he often bought most of the seats himself. He kept the opera company for six months and finally decided that that was enough culture for South Texas. He eventually had two theaters but they have since been sold. My dad's older brother went in that business while my dad took over the boot shop. But that all came about because of the fact that my grandfather could not find a place to put his boot shop. (Brandt and Secrest 1971:33).

The Theater business seems to have been more important and lucrative for Lucchese than this quote might suggest. Furthermore, Kanellos, notes that Lucchese's cousin, Ben Racugna, owned the Dixie theater in San Antonio, and that the two cousins bought the

Teatro Zaragoza together, suggesting a less casual move than that described above (1990:77). The “piece of property over by Hay Market Plaza” mentioned above is more than likely the site of the Teatro Zaragoza, which was built in 1912.

Although all secondary sources agree on the year of the Teatro Zaragoza’s opening, they differ regarding some aspects of its early history. According to Ramírez, Lucchese owned the Zaragoza from the beginning and hired the merged theatrical companies of Carlos Villalongín and Juan Padilla to perform there in 1912 when the theater opened (1990:67). Kanellos, on the other hand, claims that Lucchese and Racugna bought the Zaragoza in 1915 (1990:77). Although both authors agree that Lucchese was responsible for remodeling and enlarging the Zaragoza to a capacity of some 800 seats, they differ regarding the dates of this occurrence.¹⁶ Ramírez, drawing on interviews and on the memoirs of Carlos Villalongín states that the Villalongín’s company was the resident at the Zaragoza until 1915, and that as directors of the company, Villalongín and Padilla managed the theater. By 1915, however, Lucchese had learned the ins and outs of the business from his employees and took over the managerial role himself, often traveling to Mexico to book performers (Ramírez 1990:68). For his part, Carlos Villalongín moved to the theater at the Salón San Fernando, where he assumed managerial responsibilities together with José F. Contreras (70). As Ramírez notes, relations of production were decidedly different back at the Zaragoza.

... actors became employees rather than independent artists, no longer running their own companies as they had before. By 1915, Lucchese

¹⁶ Since both Ramírez seem to have drawn on interviews with Tano Lucchese, the elder Sam Lucchese’s son who took over the theater business, it is unlikely that these differences will ever be cleared up.

determined what would be presented on stage. He contracted actors individually and also determined the length of each actor's employment based on that individual's drawing power (71).

During this time, the Villalongín company seems to have suffered both artistically and financially. Its advertisements no longer announced “sensational, splendid, grand drama,” a fact that Ramírez interprets as a sign that the company could no longer afford the level of scenery and costuming it had once provided (74). Kanellos notes that one of the first companies to perform at the Zaragoza in 1915 was the Compañía Dramática de Pajujo, a famous group that specialized in comedy and *zarzuela* (1990:78).

The Lucchese enterprise prospered and made important contributions to the theatrical life of the Mexican colony. During the year 1916, a number of performers who would greatly influence San Antonio’s Spanish-language stage performed there, including the Hermanos Areu and Bernanrdo Fougá (78). The Lucchese family itself seemed to have enjoyed warm relations with the exiled Mexican elite, who saw the theater as a way of teaching morality and preserving their sense of Mexican culture. The comings and goings of Lucchese’s daughters were noted in the society pages of *La Prensa*, who, on the occasion of the marriage of Maria Lucchese in 1917, noted that the bride enjoyed “numerosas simpatías entre las colonias italiana, americana, y mexicana” (“enjoys numerous favors among the Italian, Amreican, and Mexican colonies”).¹⁷ Lucchese’s other daughter Josephine, a coloratura soprano whose talents took her to the Metropolitan opera and to Europe, also captured the hearts of the Mexican elite with her

¹⁷ *La Prensa*. November 21, 1917.

performances at her father's theaters.¹⁸ *La Prensa*'s coverage of events at Lucchese's theaters sometimes alludes to extensive contact between the newspaper and the theater's management.¹⁹ This situation may be seen as a particularly flamboyant example of the dynamic that, according to historian David Montejano, frequently arose between ethnic Mexican consumers and those non-*mexicana/o* merchants who catered to them.

The merchant-customer relation moved Anglo merchants to behave in a friendly manner in their everyday contact with Mexicans. Many of these acts were of a symbolic nature, to be sure, but within an inhospitable context such gestures (the friendly conversation at the store, attendance at Mexican community functions) were seen as important. ...Mexicans, in short, were a clientele to be protected and sheltered (1987:240).

Note that the *mexicana/o* theatergoing public fit Montejano's requirement for such relations to exist: they were free to take their business elsewhere (241-242). Although the Lucchese family never completely monopolized the entertainment industry that catered to ethnic Mexicans, spaces that they owned dominated that industry well into the 1960s.

Lucchese's early success with the Zaragoza led him to buy the space formerly inhabited by the Teatro Juárez (Kanellos 1990:76-77) to build what would be the center of San Antonio's Mexican theatrical life for more than forty years, the Teatro Nacional. The Nacional was originally scheduled to open on the sixteenth of September, 1917, in time to take part in the Mexican independence day celebrations organized by the Casino.

¹⁸ Known as the "American Nightengale," Josephine Lucchese debuted in New York in 1922 and went on to an international career as a performer. From 1957 to 1970 she served on the music faculty of the University of Texas at Austin (Institute of Texan Cultures 1987:27).

¹⁹ For example, in a story to be discussed in more detail below, the review of the opening night of the Teatro Nacional clearly refers to conversations between the representative of the newspaper and Lucchese, in which the former actively gives advice to the latter.

Unfortunately, construction delays postponed the event until November 2nd of that year.

On Thursday, November 1st, *La Prensa* reported that the theater would open the following day with the San Antonio debut of the Spanish drama “Malvaloca”[date] by the brothers Joaquín and Serafín Alvarez-Quintero, performed by the María del Carmen Martínez dramatic company. The newspaper commented approvingly that the space was ample, well ventilated, and beautifully decorated, but it devoted fully half its story to lamenting the fact that the seats were not numbered and urging the theater’s management to solve the problem. Such a comfort, it argued, was indispensable “para el público mexicano que acostumbra concurrir a espectáculos cultos” (“for the Mexican public who is accustomed to attending cultivated spectacles”), for it allowed the audience to find its seats in an orderly fashion without uncomfortable moments. The day after the opening, *La Prensa* reported that the theater had opened to a packed house and that the evening had been both an artistic and a financial success. Indeed, the turnout for the performance apparently exceeded the management’s expectations. However, the combination of open seating and the community’s enthusiasm had led to a disorderly rush, and many families left as soon as they arrived and saw the crowd in the lobby. In the paper’s opinion, these problems had detracted both from the theater’s opening and from the company’s debut, and it again urged the management to number the seats, not only to prevent further scenes, but also to erase “la mala impresión que se produjo” (“the bad impression that was produced”). The paper did not specify who had made bad impression on whom.

The seating issue disappears from *La Prensa*’s coverage after November 3rd, suggesting that the problem was resolved, but the concern for order and cultural hierarchy

that is evident from the coverage of the Nacional's opening continues to be evident. The following Friday, November 9th, in a review of a production of another Spanish drama, "La Garra" by Manuel Linares Rivas, the newspaper gently scolded audience members for their behavior during the production.

La obra y sus intérpretes fueron muy aplaudidos, y solo una cosa hubo de lamentarse: la inoportunidad de una parte del público para tributar los aplausos a los artistas, interrumpiendo la escena y restando con ello mérito a la obra y al declamador. De desearse sería que el público no diera estas muestras de poca cultura pues para premiar el artista su labor tiene tiempo de sobra al final de la escena ...

("The work and its interpreters were very much applauded, and there was only one lamentable thing: the inopportune tendency of one part of the audience to applaud the artists, interrupting the scene and detracting with this [action] from the merit of the work and the orator [*declamador*]. It would be desirable for the audience not to give these signs of little culture, for it has more than enough time to reward the artists for their labor at the end of the scene ...")

Several factors are notable in this complaint. In the first place, the paper was careful to censure *part* of the audience, most likely the working-class sectors, for displaying "signs of little culture." In the second place, it is not the nature of the applause but its timing that is criticized. In other reviews, the newspaper approvingly reports thunderous applause from audiences. The concern here is that the audience limit itself to responding to the spectacle at "appropriate" times, keeping intact the prescribed flow of the dramatic work. Finally there is a sense that the work is understood more as a text than a performance. We know nothing, for example, of the moments that elicited the spontaneous applause. In general, *La Prensa* devoted most of its theater reviews first to summarizing the plots of the plays performed and second to complimenting the lead

actors in somewhat vague terms for their intelligence and for the passionate realism of their portrayals of central characters. Like the elitist Anglo critics in Levine's (1988) study of the emergence of cultural hierarchy among Anglo-Americans in the late nineteenth century, *La Prensa*'s critics saw spontaneous applause not as the realization of the performer/audience nexus but rather as the interruption of a literary work best appreciated in reverent silence.

Around the same time in Laredo, the newspaper *La fé católica* criticized an even more participatory audience in much less diplomatic language.

"[We] must censure harshly the courtesy of some poorly educated people who without proper respect of any sort for the families, interrupted the performances by conversing in loud voices, laughing ridiculously and, what is more incredible, singing each verse during the choruses which even sheep herders would not do" (Ramírez 1990:16. Translation by Ramírez).

The fact that the newspaper would need to censure such behavior with a disparaging reference to an occupation like sheep herding suggests that the elite editors saw the working sectors of the audience as a threat to standards of decency and decorum. To support this position, the journalist appeals to notions "buena educación" ("good manners") and "respeto" ("respect") for "families" that still constitute the language of legitimacy among ethnic Mexicans today. The term *respeto* in particular encapsulates core ethical and interactive values of decency, gentility, politeness, deference to elders, and "the responsible sense of self and others" (Limón 1994:110). Furthermore, in relation to the dominant U.S. society, ethnic Mexicans have often used the term when claiming equal rights and fair treatment. Noting that the idea of *respeto* bridges "the

discourses of the state and everyday life, of citizenship and culture,” Rosaldo has suggested that it might serve as a “defining demand of cultural citizenship” (1997:38). The theater criticism of early twentieth-century Spanish language newspapers, however, pressed *respeto* into the service of a class-bound aesthetic.

The term has occurred with a similar sense in my own oral interviews. When asked to contrast the variety shows presented in *carpas* with those of the theater, the veteran actor Lalo Astol responded as follows:

PH: ¿Cómo eran diferentes las variedades que se presentaban en los teatros a los [sic] que se presentaban en las carpas?

(How were the variety shows in the theaters different from those that were presented in the *carpas*?)

LA: Bueno, venía siendo lo mismo, nada más que en un teatro, el artista tenía más soltura, más facilidad, más escenario mientras que en una carpa, era el espacio más reducido, con más dificultades. No se podía poner telones, cambiar escenografía, ni nada de esas cosas, y en el teatro sí pero artísticamente, no había ninguno.

(Well, it was about the same, except that in a theater, the artist has more freedom, more ease, more scenery while in a *carpa*, the space was more reduced, with more difficulties. One could not place curtains, change scenery, or any of those things, and in the theater, one could but artistically, there was no difference.)

PH: ¿Y los temas que se trataban?

(And the subjects that were treated?)

LA: Eso era lo mismo

(That was the same.)

PH: ¿Y la lengua que se usaba, en esos dos lugares, era lo mismo o era diferente?

(And the language that was used in those two locations, was it the same or different?)

LA: No exactamente, porque en el teatro, se tenía que hablar el español correcto.

(Not exactly, because in the theater, one had to speak correct Spanish.)

PH: ¿En el vaudeville también?

(In vaudeville too?)

LA: Sí, pero un español correcto, aunque hubiera una palabra mala, que no hay palabra mala si no es mal tomada. Pero si hubiera una palabra malsonante para el público, en el teatro se decía de una forma más . . . más correcta. En cambio, en una carpa, el artista se soltaba mucho, y decía las cosas con más picardía, más descarada. Vamos a decir que una palabra malsonante . . . se decía con más . . . suelto en una carpa.

(Yes, but a correct Spanish, even if there were a bad word, and there is no bad word if it isn't taken badly. But if there was a word that was bad-sounding for the audience, in the theater, it was said in a more . . . a more correct way. On the other hand, in a *carpa*, the artist let himself go quite a bit, and said things with more *picardía*, more baldly. Let's say that a bad-sounding word . . . was said with more . . . freely in a *carpa*.)

PH: ¿Más suelto?

(More freely?)

LA: Mas suelto, más . . . franco, le voy a poner un ejemplo. Sería una palabra que no es mala, pero . . . se ha tomado por mala: “pendejo,” vamos a decir. ¿Sabes lo que es, verdad? La toman como una grosería en todas partes.

(More freely, more . . . frankly, I'm going to give you an example. It would be a word that isn't bad . . . but has been taken badly: "*pendejo*," let's say. You know what it is, right? They consider it a vulgarity everywhere.)

PH "Pendejo."

('Fool")

LA: Pendejo. Bueno, en un teatro, decía Ud., "Éste es un . . . [suavemente] pendejo." Y en una carpa, "Ay, este ¡¡¡PENDEJO!!!" ¿Me entiendes?

(All right, in a theater, you said, "This guy is a . . . [softly, with falling intonation] *pendejo*." And in a *carpa*, "Oh this *PENDEJO!!!*" Do you understand me?)

PH: Entonces, ¿se dice francamente sin concelarlo?

(So it is said frankly without concealing it?)

LA: Controlarlo. Eso era una de las diferencias que había entre carpa y teatro. El teatro era más retraído, más . . . respetuoso, vamos a decir. Y en la carpa, se soltaba uno más.

(Controlling it. That was one of the differences that existed between *carpa* and *teatro*. The theater was more restrained, more respectful, let's say. And in a *carpa*, one let oneself go more).²⁰

Here, Mr. Astol's comments combine a concern with the appropriateness of tabooed vocabulary with a prescriptivist ideology of "correct" language. The latter ideology was common in Spanish-language theater in the United States and will be discussed further in Chapter Five. In Mr. Astol's view, *artistas de teatro*, showed their *respeto* for the *respetable público* by speaking "correct" Spanish and exercising a certain patrician

²⁰ ibid.

restraint in their use of offensive vocabulary or subject matter.²¹ Audiences in the theaters were also expected to show a corresponding *respeto* towards the performers, and in Astol's view, this was another difference between *carpa* and *teatro*.

LA: En aquellos tiempos, iba Ud. a un teatro, el público a ver un espectáculo. Iba Ud. con su corbatita, se sentaba Ud. en la luneta

(In those times, you went to a theater, the audience, to see a spectacle. You went with your little tie, you sat in the front rows)

PH ¿Muy fina?
(Very finely [dressed]?)

LA Sí Ropa bien presentada, muy serio, el público se sentaba a ver el espectáculo. En cambio, iba Ud. a una carpa con la camisa desabrochada, subía Ud. los pies encima

(Yes, with well-presented clothes, very serious, the audience sat down to see the show. On the other hand, you went to a *carpa* with your shirt unbuttoned, you put your feet up)

PH Mas informal, más corriente.

(More informal, more common.)

LA Informal. ¡Exactamente corriente! Informal completamente.

(Informal. Exactly common! Completely informal.)

In his description of the *carpa*'s atmosphere, Astol used the Spanish word “*corriente*” ('common'), which is often used to distinguish *la gente corriente* ('the common people') from *la gente decente* ("decent people," "people of distinction"). Some reference to the class identity of the audiences was clearly intended. Note, however that Mr. Astol

²¹ The phrase “respetable público” is used to address audiences in the Spanish-speaking world, much as “ladies and gentlemen” is used in the English-speaking world.

referred not to the actual composition of the audiences but to the styles of self-presentation that were characteristic of audiences in each set of venues. Mr. Astol paints a picture of theatrical entertainment—even vaudeville—as a refined amusement for serious-minded people of character, *la gente decente*. The *carpa*, with its unabashedly earthy humor and informal atmosphere was for the *gente corriente*.

The son of the prominent Mexican actress Socorro Astol and a half-brother of the famous comedian “Mantequilla,” Astol comes from a long line of stage performers. He began his career in Mexico and moved to Laredo in 1921 to join his father in the Compañía Manuel Cotera. Originally a dramatic actor, he continued to be a popular performer as vaudeville swept the Spanish-language theater scene in San Antonio during the 1920s and 1930s. After a long career on the stage in San Antonio and Los Angeles, he acted in Spanish language radio and television and for years hosted a show titled “El Mercado del Aire” on radio station KCOR. As Kanellos has noted, his career “illustrates the course taken by Hispanic theater arts in the United States Southwest” from drama to vaudeville to electronic media (Kanellos 1990:93). Before our interview, he told me that during his years in the United States, he had not bothered to learn English well, preferring to concentrate on Spanish. He saw it as his mission to provide an example of good, correct Spanish for the *mexicanas/os* of San Antonio, most of whom, in his opinion were descended from uneducated peasants and spoke neither English nor Spanish well. In this, Astol's opinions are quite representative of those of the exiled Mexican elite of San Antonio. According to Richard García this group strove to use such public culture institutions as *La Prensa*, the theaters, the Casino, and similar groups to keep

mexicanas/os in the city in touch with the Spanish language and *lo mexicano* (1991:246-47). Furthermore, the *ricos* saw themselves as “*gente decente*,” and they aspired to “raise” the cultural level of the community in which they lived. The theater reviews discussed above show the concern for “civility, decency and elitism as contained in Mexican tradition and high culture” that García believes to be characteristic of this group (147). The term *respeto* as used above is in essence and application of the elite’s ideology of civic virtue, hierarchy, and formalism to the context of the theater, where it served to guide proper behavior, for both performers and audience members.

Less than two months after its opening, the Teatro Nacional began to be used for charitable activities. Late in November of 1917, *La Prensa* announced that it was organizing a fund-raising drive to purchase Christmas presents for poor and orphaned children of the Mexican *colonia*. This drive appears to have originated in the newspaper’s offices, but it soon became a joint effort between *La Prensa*, and the Casino. On December 2nd, the paper reported that the Compañía María del Carmen Martínez, which was currently performing at the Nacional, would assist in the effort by staging a benefit performance. Two days later, it was reported that Josephine Lucchese would sing at this benefit as well. As the month of December progressed, the newspaper continued to run front-page stories about the benefit, lamenting in the plight of the city’s poor children and praising the altruism and civic-mindedness of contributors in florid, sentimental language. From the sixteenth through the twenty-first, long columns of the names of donors, with the amounts donated, appeared in the newspaper. Finally, on December 21st, the day of the gala benefit arrived. A packed house in the Nacional

enjoyed a highly varied program, including a dramatic performance by the Martínez company, musical performances by Lucchese; Celia Treviño, a child prodigy violinist who was the darling of Mexican society in San Antonio; and several other local musicians and dancers. Many of *La Prensa*'s own columnists appear to have performed a comic sketch, as recounted the following day in a humorous poem by the comic actor Luis Quevedo.

Al fin sale CHANTECLER
haciendo un suegro amoroso
que le trae a la mujer
al calaverón esposo
y el público delirante,
le hace ovación sin igual,

Finally, enter CHANTECLER
(LP's usual satirical poet)
as a loving father-in-law
who brings the woman back
to the debauched and lecherous husband
and the delirious audience gives him
an ovation without peer.

The sketch appears to have depicted a love triangle involving a drunken, lecherous husband and a gallant suitor, which was finally resolved by the father of the woman concerned. The poem does not reveal, however, who played the female role in the sketch, if indeed there was one.

At the end of its drive, *La Prensa* had succeeded in raising \$964.74, mostly in small donations of between twenty-five cents to a dollar. With this money, it bought and distributed one present each to two thousand Children on Christmas Eve of 1917. That day, the newspaper published a notice that the distribution would occur at 1pm sharp in the Plaza in front of its offices. It also warned parents and tutors to bring their children on time to be sure of getting a present. On Christmas Day, the distribution of toys was once again front-page news. *La Prensa* published not only an extensive article about the

event but a panoramic photograph of the children and families gathered in the Plaza and a smaller picture of the society ladies associated with the Casino who had organized the event. Although these ladies are not named in the paper as the donors to the drive had been, they appear as individuals, and their faces would have been clearly identifiable to anyone who knew them. By contrast, the recipients of the gifts and their parents appear as a faceless, anonymous mass. But there was more to the gift giving than simple paternalistic humanitarianism. *La Prensa* urged its readers to feel for the suffering of poor *mexicano* children in San Antonio not merely because those children were poor, but because they were not in Mexico. In his poem on the benefit at the Teatro Nacional, the comic actor Luis Quevedo put it this way when he described the genesis of the charitable campaign:

Cuatro chicos de “LA PRENSA”
platicando una mañana
con esa pasión inmensa
de la RAZA MEXICANA,
se pusieron a pensar
en esos niñitos tiernos
que llevan varios Inviernos
sin Patria, sin paz, ni hogar

Four fellows from “LA PRENSA,”
while chatting one fine morning
with that tremendous passion
felt by the MEXICAN RACE,
all put themselves to thinking
about those tender children
who have spent many Winters
lacking Country, peace, and home.

For Lozano and his collaborators, then, the deprivation and poverty of San Antonio’s *mexicana/o* children became a metonym of sorts for the deprivations of exile. By bringing together ethnic Mexicans of means to alleviate the suffering of poor children, the journalists, actors, and society ladies sought to provide their public with a symbolic solution to its nostalgia for home and country.

Benefits like the 1917 charitable drive remained prominent in the life of the Teatro Nacional in succeeding years. In 1921, for example, in commemoration of the centenary of Mexico's independence, *La Prensa* initiated another benefit drive, this time to construct two new school buildings in the city of Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato. As before, the newspaper's effort touched many aspects of the *mexicana/o* civil society centered on the Plaza. The nearby Casa de Cambio Monterrey, which provided money-changing and sending services in its office near the *Plaza del Zacate*, took up a collection to support the effort, and the Sociedad Hidalgo, a mutual aid society, organized a benefit with theatrical entertainment. By this time, *La Prensa*'s circulation had widened, and the fund-raising drive encompassed not only the San Antonio's Mexican *colonia*, but also those of many other cities. Donations arrived from various sites in Texas, Arizona, California, Kansas, Ohio in the United States and from the city of Magdalena, Sonora, Mexico. On July 15th, a large benefit spectacle occurred at San Antonio's Teatro Nacional, which included musical performances by singers Carmen de Granada and Sara Villegas and comic sketches by Carmen Higares and the Dueto Higares Novelty. In its July 16th story on the event, *La Prensa* noted that another benefit, featuring the Compañía Internacional de Diversiones, was scheduled for that day at El Paso's Teatro Hidalgo. It also noted that the Carpa Cubana, which was touring in deep south Texas, had announced its intention to stage a benefit performance in Kingsville for the schools. The total raised was by July 16, 1921 was \$2700.37.

Some three years after the end of the charitable drive, a *revista* ("musical review") titled *De México a Texas, o efectos de la revolución*, written by Leonardo García, the

father of Lalo Astol, included a dialogue commemorating the charitable drive. In the *revista*, *La Prensa* itself appeared as an allegorical character in a dialogue with a rustic regional type named “Cayetano él de Guanajuato” (“Cayetano from Guanajuato”). In a brief selection from this dialogue that was reprinted in the February 27, 1924 edition of the newspaper, the character “*La Prensa*” appears on stage triumphantly announcing its status as the best Spanish-language daily in the United States, its independence, and its ever-increasing prestige and grandeur. “Esa es la pura verdá” (“That shore is the truth”), agrees Cayetano, who describes the Mexican people’s gratefulness to the newspaper.

This leads to the following exchange:

LA PRENSA—

Qué tienen que agradecer?

CAYETANO—

El empeño infatigable
que en sus desdichas tomó,
tratando de mitigarlas
con noblísimo tezón,
el afán de que la Patria
cese en su lucha cruel
y más que todo el deseo
de educar a la niñez.
La colonia mexicana
gracias a Ud. despertó
del sueño en que reposaba
con criminal inacción.
y no ha mucho que ha legado
dos magníficas escuelas
que en Dolores se levantan
orgullosas y risueñas.
Por eso agradecimiento
México tiene y amor

LA PRENSA—

For what favor do they thank me?

CAYETANO—

For the never ending mission
that in their sadness you took up
trying to soothe their pain
with the noblest of zeal
your desire to see the fatherland
leave off its brutal war
and more than anything the desire
to educate our youth.
The Mexican colony here
thanks to you has woken up
from the sleep in which it lay
with criminal inaction.
and not long ago moved to sponsor
two magnificent schools
that are being raised up
in Dolores, proud and happy.
For all this Mexico bears
thankfulness and love

al hombre probe y honrado
al hijo de Nuevo León
que ha sabido de LA PRENSA
hacer el diario mejor
que en los Estados Unidos
se publica en español:

to the pore and honorable man²²
to that son of Nuevo León
who's been able to make LA PRENSA
the very best newspaper
that is published in Spanish
in the United States:

LA PRENSA—

Agradezco sus finezas
y si útil en algo soy,
sabe, amigo, que me tiene
siempre a su disposición.

LA PRENSA—

I thank you for your kindness
and if I can be of use to you
in anything, my friend, then know
you have me at your service.

This passage encapsulates both the *ricos'* intense exile patriotism and their vision of the social advancement of the Mexican nation and the local community through education and the benevolence of the powerful. The appearance of *La Prensa* as a character on stage—in a dialogue that the newspaper then reproduced—shows both how intertwined the theater was with other institutions of public discourse in the *mexicana/o* community and how those institutions came to stand for the community itself as public signs before various audiences, not to mention the degree to which those institutions were influenced by class distinctions. For all their opposition to movements for the redistribution of wealth in Mexico, the exiled *ricos* were humanitarians (García 1991:245), and in activities like *La Prensa*'s charitable drives and the benefits at the Teatro Nacional, they sought both to alleviate the suffering of San Antonio's *mexicana/o* community and justify their position as its directing class.

²² In the Spanish original, a non-standard pronunciation of the word “pobre” is used. These scattered non-standard forms contrast sharply with the elevated vocabulary and tone of Caetano’s overall speech.

Of course, the theaters were by no means the exclusive domain of the elite who, in the end, would not have been numerous enough to support a commercial theater industry on their own. Perched in their exclusive opera boxes which “*no los tocaba nadie* (nobody touched),” the elite shared the *teatros* with the middle and working class *público* (‘audience’) in the orchestra pit” (Ybarra-Frausto 1983: 43). As we have already seen in the discussion of the Teatro Nacional’s opening and the newspaper’s later criticism of audience mores, this coexistence was not without its tensions. One area in which these tensions became evident was that of repertory and billing. All sectors of the mexicana/o public saw the theater as a “temple of instruction” in which audiences would learn good morals and Mexican culture (Kanellos 1990:79; Ramírez 1990:126). Although the elite, the ideal genres for this purpose was serious drama and melodrama, the ethos of didacticism pervaded even the so-called “frivolous” theater as we shall see in later chapters.

El Lado Sol: the *Carpas* and their Audience

At the height of its prestige, the Teatro Nacional with its sumptuous curtains, elaborate scenery, and exclusive boxes must have contrasted sharply with the *carpas* that appeared regularly in vacant lots south and west of downtown. The type of entertainment that occurred in tents and theaters, however, may not have differed as consistently. Of the South Texas *carpas*, perhaps the best remembered were the Carpa Cubana, the Carpa Monsiváis, and the Carpa García, all of which were traveling shows owned by a family that offered a mixture of acrobatics, musical performance, and comedy. Although this

form of organization has come to be the most common image of a *carpa* today, Kanellos notes that the succession of theatrical genres that occurred in theaters and cinemas, “beginning with melodrama at the turn of the century and gradually evolving toward *zarzuela*, *revista*, and variety acts” also occurred in the tent shows (1990:100).²³ It is likely that San Antonio’s *mexicana/o* community applied the term “carpa” to nearly any form of entertainment that took place in a tent. Furthermore written sources and the recollections of performers coincide in suggesting that texts and performers circulated readily between the tents and the theaters. All of this suggests that a complex mixture of interdependence and conflict then, characterized the relationship between *teatros* and *carpas* over the course of the *mexicana/o* entertainment industry’s development in San Antonio.

Some of the earliest accounts of *carpa* performances that occur in the city’s Spanish-language newspapers refer to a wide variety of genres present in tent shows, and nothing in their writing seems to suggest the kind of stigma that surviving *carperas/os* recall facing. On May 11 of 1914, for example, *La Prensa* reported that the “spacious” Carpa Sanabía on Pecos Street had housed a highly successful and generously applauded performance by the well-known Drama, Opera, and Zarzuela Company of Ricardo de la Vega. The bill included Lehar’s operetta “The Merry Widow,” and other works

²³ Kanellos is wrong, however, to argue that the *carpas* “never converted to showing films.” Whether films were ever shown in San Antonio tent shows is unclear to me, but the conversion certainly occurred in the *carpas* owned by Thomas Jefferson “Stout” Jackson in the Coastal Bend area and in a West Texas tent show catering to ethnic Mexicans owned by Walter Webber. Jackson eventually enjoyed enough success to erect more permanent movie houses on the sites of his tents in Alice, Robstown, and Kingsville, and his enterprise has been extensively documented by local historians. After World War II, the Monsiváis family, which had settled in Kenedy, Texas, used their tents and other structures to show Mexican films that they rented in San Antonio. Carlos Monsiváis’s manuscripts contain handwritten schedules of these films.

including “La Señora X” (“Madam X”), a melodrama that enjoyed long favor with *mexicana/o* audiences in southern Texas. A week later, the newspaper lamented the unexplained decision of the municipal authorities to close the *carpa*, hinting that other impresarios’ jealousy of the venue’s financial and artistic success may have been behind the action. In spite of the existence of several other performance venues in the city, the newspaper’s anonymous reporter characterized the Carpa Sanabía as “el único lugar donde puede hoy por hoy pasarse el rato” (“the only place where time can be passed day by day”). After moving to San Antonio’s Teatro Aurora, the de la Vega company left town, turning up again in El Paso in January of the following year (Kanellos 1990:101).

During the late 1910s and early 1920s, reports of *carpa* performances continue to appear in San Antonio newspapers. Some of the companies appear to have been resident, others itinerant. On August 18, 1917, *La Prensa* noted a benefit function for performer María del Carmen Guzmani at the Teatro Carpa ‘Independencia’ at the corner of South Pecos and El Paso Streets. The show included acrobatic acts, a Guatemalan marimba quintet, and the vocal duet “Carmencita y Tiburcio”. On September 17 of the same year, the newspaper reported that the maestro Gabino Calderón was directing performances of Mexican *zarzuelas*, including Elizondo’s popular *Chin Chun-Chan*, in the Carpa Guzmani, still on El Paso Street.²⁴ By April 29, 1918, the *carpa* had moved to the corner of El Paso and Frío Streets, and the newspaper noted that the artists, who included Guzmani, María P. de Sampers, and Amelia Solsona, had long resided in San Antonio. The corner of Pecos and El Paso later saw performances by the Carpa Romana, owned by

²⁴ For more discussion of *Chin Chun-Chan*, see Chapter Five.

one Emiliano Ortiz. This Ortiz shows up later on the payroll of the Carpa Cubana and is related to another Ortiz family, which operated a small circus in New Mexico from the late nineteenth century until the 1940s.²⁵ Although *La prensa* does not seem to have given the early *carpas* the same level of coverage that it did to the theaters

One of the longest lived and most prestigious of the San Antonio-based *carpas* was the Carpa Cubana, also known as the Cuban Show. In a 1990 letter to me, Mrs. Rita S. Utley, a long-time resident of Benavides, who had seen the show repeatedly in her youth, described the Carpa Cubana as “more exclusive” than other shows in its class. In terms that echo Mrs. Utley’s assessment of the Cuban Show, Lydia Mendoza has recalled performing there.

The Carpa Cubana was a higher-class operation. We sort of 'graduated' to working at La Cubana after we had been with the García's for a while. (Mendoza 1993:83).

Mrs. Utley described the show’s arrival in her town as a grand parade with trained dogs, ponies, and dancing girls waving Mexican and U.S. flags and throwing pencils to the crowd. This last action suggests a pattern of public display of generosity activities similar to those noted in connection with *La Prensa* and the San Antonio theaters. The pencils, of course, were surely a highly charged symbol in much southern Texas, where the authorities actively worked to keep ethnic Mexicans uneducated. In these communities, where much of the carpa’s audience had little money for school supplies, this company’s gesture of throwing pencils to announce its presence must surely have

²⁵ Kanellos (1990:101) may have confused these two branches of the Ortiz family, which seem to have been independent of one another as artists and businesspeople. My information comes from interviews with descendent Steven Ortiz. Cf. also his compact disc *Welcome to the Library of My Life*.

both met a practical need and appealed to the audience's dreams of advancement and achievement through education.

Some of the Carpa Cubana's prestige may have come from its connections to important figures in the larger world of the circus. The owners and founders, acrobats Virgilio Abreu and Federica Aguilera de Abreu, Married in 1904,²⁶ e were uncle and aunt to the famous flying Codonas.²⁷ According to Kanellos, they performed with such important Mexican circuses as the Circo Orrin, and with such U.S. circuses as Lowande and Hoffman, Barnum and Bailey, Sells-Floto, and the Ringling Brothers from the 1880s until the around 1919 (1990:102). Photographs in the Hertzberg Circus Museum's Sabino Gómez collection show the Abreus in Monterrey and other northern Mexican cities in the early teens, where they seem to have performed with two of their sons as a family acrobatic act.²⁸ From there, they moved to Chicago, continuing to perform both in the U.S. and Mexico.²⁹ They appear to have arrived in San Antonio some time between 1917 and 1920 and remained there at least until 1959.³⁰ During the *carpa's*

²⁶ Telegram, Alfredo Codona to Virgilio and Federica Abru, February 16, 1929 (congratulates Abreus for their Silver Wedding Anniversary). Box 3B48 of the Carpa Cubana Collection.

²⁷Numerous photographs and articles of correspondence in the Carpa Cubana Collection attest to this family relationship.

²⁸ Photographs in the Sabino Gómez collection, formerly in the Hertzberg Circus Museum, document performances by the Abreu troupe in parts of northern Mexico in 1912 and 1913. Correspondence in the Carpa Cubana collection indicates that the Abreus had at least two sons, one named José (Joe) and another named Alfredo, probably named after Alfredo Codona. I have not, however, been able to clearly link these two names to the young boys who appear in early photographs of the Abreu Troupe. [Check dates]

²⁹I first became aware of the Abreu's Chicago connection in an interview with Susie Mijares, interview (look). An article about José Abreu in the newspaper of his Army company ("Big Top to Barracks" Off tight Rope and 'On the Ball' in G.I. Balance Act" by Cpl. H.R. Loewen, also alludes to the Abreu's living in Chicago.

³⁰ A 1926 poll tax receipt in CCC Box 3B48 lists both Don Virgilio and Doña Federica as having lived in San Antonio for seven years, which would place their date of arrival in 1919. On a 1928 poll tax receipt in the same box, the couple listed their length of residence in San Antonio as eight years. On still another

most active period, however, it continued to buy lumber, wooden folding chairs, candy, and theatrical supplies from companies in Chicago, and it is likely that management was continuing business relationships that had begun before the family arrived in Texas. The Abreu family owned a home in San Antonio at 302 Keller Street, south and slightly West of downtown.

The Carpa Cubana, so named because don Virgilio was Cuban-born, performed in San Antonio and toured the rest of south Texas by train and truck throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the documentation that remains of the company is from the mid 1920s, particularly 1925 and 1926, but some receipts for performances exist from as late as 1938. In addition to the Abreu family, the Carpa Cubana included a number of hired actors, acrobats, and dancers. These included Spanish-style dancer Abelardo Saenz, who performed with the Abreu's daughter Amelia, clown Rodolfo ("Pirrimplín") Domínguez, and contortionist Fidel Aguirre. Known as "La Rana" ("The Frog"), Aguirre performed in tights and a grotesque papier maché frog mask and was reputedly able to place his feet behind his head while balanced on a champagne glass. The show also included a group of hired dancers, acrobats, and musicians. Members of the Mijares family, another well-known Latin American circus clan, joined the Carpa Cubana during the 1920s. According to former acrobat Jesusa "Susie" Mijares, the widow of Lalo Astol, her family later formed its own show, the Carpa Modelo, after the Cuban show fell on hard times. In some cases the *carpa*'s management established ties of *compadrazgo* with hired

such receipt, dated 1937, they claimed to have lived in San Antonio for twenty years! There are also postcards and receipts for San Antonio city and county taxes dated as late as 1959. CCC Box 3B48.

performers, bringing them into the family. Virginia García, a former dancer and daughter of Fidel Aguirre, recalled in an interview that her mother, dancer Angela Hernández de Aguirre, made just such an arrangement with doña Federica.

The earliest mention of the Carpa Cubana in San Antonio's Spanish language press places the company on tour in Lyford on July 16, 1921. *La prensa* reported that day that the company's management was planning to give a benefit performance in Kingsville for the paper's drive mentioned earlier to raise funds for the 'Centenary' schools in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato. After this, mention of the Carpa is sporadic in *La prensa*, and the rest of what is knowable about the show comes from the recollections of ex-performers and the company's own records.³¹ These document both the financial reality of the *carpa* enterprise and something of its geographical scope and seasonal schedule. In 1925 and 1926, the *carpa* spent much of its time in the Rio Grande Valley, the Coastal Bend, and the Houston area during the spring and summer, then moved to San Antonio and Central Texas in November and December. Although it is possible that the show visited Mexico during this time, there are no specific records of such a visit. A significant proportion of the company's surviving papers are receipts for occupancy taxes.³² During the 1920s and 1930s, the State of Texas collected taxes on public commercial entertainments through county governments, which levied their own taxes as

³¹ The Carpa Cubana is the only *mexicana/o* tent show in the United States for which written business records are now known to survive, although it was almost certainly not the only such enterprise that kept written records. The surviving papers are largely from the middle of the 1920s, which appears to have been the company's most active time.

³² In the Carpa Cubana Collection, Box 3A101, receipts are to be found for part of 1924, most of 1925, and most of 1926. A few receipts are available for 1935, but those for the intervening years are lost. Duplicates may exist in state archives.

well. Many larger cities also levied occupancy taxes. In 1925 and 1926, most counties categorized the Carpa Cubana's performance as a "Concert," assessing a total tax of three dollars per day. In a relatively small number of cases, the show was assessed a \$15.00 tax for "Acrobatic Feats, Side Shows, Etc.," obviously a better description of the act. Clearly, the show's economic viability depended in part on its ability to negotiate with the county-based administrative apparatus that became increasingly influential in Texas during the first three decades of the twentieth century (Montejano 1987:133-135).

The full extent of the Carpa Cubana's daily financial practice will never be known, as the company appears to have conducted most of its business in cash. However, surviving bank statements and cancelled checks from the Abreu family's personal bank account provide a few hints. Importantly, these show that the family remained financially solvent through the depths of the Depression. Although the records begin with a negative balance of \$54.57 on March 6th of 1925, that balance rises to an all-time high of \$1585.25 by April of the following year. The 1925-1926 period season appears to have been prosperous, and the couple remained in the black at least until 1938, the last year for which records are available. This fact provides some corroboration for the claims of surviving *carperas/os* that they were often financially better off than *artistas de teatro* in spite of the latter group's pretensions. Nevertheless, the Abreu family's bank statements suggest that running a *carpa* was not a uniformly lucrative proposition. Their deposits exceeded expenditures in only five of the thirteen years for

which records exist.³³ Although the family had some relatively sharp financial ups and downs, the overall trend appears to have been a very modest rise. By 1938 the couple's balance had dropped to \$219.59. One low point appears to have occurred between August of 1928 and September of 1929, when a disastrous flood caught the *carpa* in Mercedes. Surviving photographs show that the company's equipment was severely damaged and suggest that the losses must have been heavy. The following year however, the Abreu family bounced back, bringing its balance from an all-time low of \$97.87 in September of 1929 to \$1,148.23 in November of 1930.

Like the Teatro Nacional, the Carpa Cubana engaged in periodic benefit functions in the communities it visited. In 1925, the only year for which documentation of the show's charitable activity exists, these benefits generated at least \$558.44 for community organizations in the Rio Grande Valley and the Coastal Bend. This amount is greater than the total city, state, and county occupancy taxes documented on surviving tax receipts for either 1925 (\$333.25) or 1926 (\$131.50). Because some gift receipts specify the donation as a percentage of the nightly box office take, it is possible in some cases to estimate that nightly take. As the following table shows, this seems to have fluctuated drastically, but most of the performances appear to have taken in between \$200 and \$300.

RECEIPTS OF CARPA CUBANA BENEFIT PERFORMANCES, 1925³⁴

Date	City	Charity	Amt.	% of box office take
4/21/25	Robstown	Sociedad Mutualista Hijos de Hidalgo ("Sons of Hidalgo Mutual Aid Society")	\$40.75	unspecified
4/26/25	Kingsville	Cruz Azul Mexicana	\$56.18	25%

³³ These were 1925, 1928, 1930, 1931, and 1935.

³⁴ Carpa Cubana Collection, Box 3A101, San Antonio Public Library.

			(“Mexican Blue Cross”), Kingsville		
5/17/25	Mission	Cruz Azul Mexicana, Mission	\$65.10	30%	
5/24/25	McAllen	Cruz Azul Mexicana 1 st Div. Dist. #10	\$78.59	30%	
6/3/25	San Juan	Cruz Azul Mexicana	\$22.00	20%	
6/14/25	Mercedes	Cuerpo de Bomberos (“Fire Dept.”) #2	\$67.55	unspecified	
6/16/25	Mercedes	Park fund for the city’s “Mexican side”	\$145.52	15%	
6/31/25	Port Arthur	Brigada 125, Cruz Azul Mexicana	\$28.40	unspecified	
7/5/25	Kingsville	Cruz Azul Mexicana, Kingsville	\$21.92	unspecified	
8/18/25	Magnolia Park	Comité Patriótico de Magnolia Park (“Magnolia Park Patriotic Committee.”)	\$32.53	unspecified	
10/6/25	Wharton	Mexican Cemetery	unspecified	unspecified	\$558.54

As this list makes clear, mutual aid societies, particularly the Cruz Azul Mexicana were the major beneficiaries of the Carpa Cubana’s largesse during the tour.

Established by upper-class ethnic Mexican women in San Antonio in 1920, the Cruz Azul spread throughout southern Texas during the next two decades and became an important institution in many communities. Its first vice president was the wealthy and well-known San Antonio pastor Santiago Tafolla. Although the Mexican consulate supervised some of its activities, the organization drew most of its funds from charitable giving and benefit performances. These funds supported a variety of services to the poor, including food aid, health education, and legal assistance. In San Antonio, the Cruz Azul raised \$4,000 to create a free health clinic in 1925, and the organization was also responsible for the library near the Plaza (Palomo Acosta 2002). Because records are not available for any period other than the six months of 1925 shown above, it is difficult to determine how consistent the Carpa Cubana was in its support of these organizations. When the show did the first of its 1925 benefit performances, it was beginning what was apparently one of its more lucrative tours. By April of 1926 the Abreus deposited a total of \$ 4423.75 in their bank account, an amount that exceeded withdrawals by \$ 1639.82.

Nevertheless, on that night in Robstown when they donated \$40.75 to the Order of the Sons of Hidalgo, don Virgilio and doña Federica must surely have thought at least in passing of the checks they had bounced before March 5th. Clearly these artists were strongly motivated to contribute to the institutions of *mexicana/o* civil society in the communities they visited.

As is the case with many of the ethnic Mexican theaters and theatrical companies that flourished during the 1920s, the end of the Carpa Cubana is poorly documented. Although 1938 is the last year for which business records of the *carpa* exist, it is unclear how active the company was during the latter years of the 1930s and equally unclear exactly when it stopped performing altogether. By 1938, however, don Virgilio and doña Federica would have been in show business for at least forty years, a long career for any family of artists. A surviving story from an Army newspaper mentions that the Abreus' son José, who seems not to have returned from World War II, performed as a wire walker for the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Combined shows from 1936 to 1939. The Ringling Brothers'—and the Abreu family's—gain was likely one of the final losses for the Carpa Cubana after some twenty-eight years of touring southern Texas.

Another well-known south Texas *carpa* was that of the Monsiváis family. Unlike many other shows, the Carpa Monsiváis never based itself in San Antonio, Texas, although the company seems to have interacted extensively with artists based there. The family understands itself to be of French descent, and comedian Carlos Monsiváis, who was my source for most of the following information, claimed to have learned French as his first language, although when I met him in 1990 he remembered very little of the

language. According to Mr. Monsiváis, the family moved from the small town of San Antonio, Coahuila to El Paso, Texas, in approximately 1924. At that time, the brothers Ysavel and Anastacio Monsiváis, sons of Lucas Monsiváis and his wife Anselma, worked together with their wives and children as part of a single company. In El Paso, the two brothers separated for reasons that remain unclear, and don Ysavel, together with his wife Luz Santos de Monsiváis and five sons, traveled south to Crystal City with only a small tent, three trucks, and a collection of folding chairs. In Crystal City the group merged for a time with a smaller tent show called the Carpa Martínez that centered on magic and marionettes, and don Ysavel's oldest son who would become the show's manager, married Herminia Martínez, a daughter of the Carpa Martínez's owner. In Crystal City the company obtained credit to buy a larger tent and other equipment, and from there they set off to tour in New Mexico, Colorado, and other points north. Although the carpa seems to have concentrated on southern and western Texas during the 1930s, they appear to have visited New Mexico again at least once during that time.

The Monsiváis family was always the center of the company during its life, and the family prided itself on its material self-sufficiency. Don Ysavel, who was a musical and versifying clown (under the name "Pavito") and mentalist, enforced his authority over the show with a bullwhip, which he did not hesitate to use on his sons even after they married. His wife, doña Luz, managed the company's finances and also performed in the *carpa* by bending hot iron bars with her feet. Aside from a sister who died quite young, the Monsiváis brothers included Juan, an acrobat and trapeze artist and the company's electrician; Daniel, a trapeze artist; Alberto, a clown who told jokes

(“Charrito”); Carlos, a dancer, singer, comic actor and wire walker; and the Reymundo, a musician and wire walker. Of these five children, only Reymundo, the youngest, was born in the United States. All of the sons married women from the small Texas towns the *carpa* visited. Although Juan’s wife Herminia seldom performed, the other’s including Daniel’s wife Gregoria (“Golla”), Alberto’s wife Natividad, Carlos’s wife Amada; and Raymundo’s wife Juanita worked as chorus girls. Amada, who was born on a ranch outside of Edinburg, Texas, joined the company in 1932 when she married Carlos and soon became his partner in comedy. The Carpa Monsiváis appears to have toured actively until 1941, when the men in the family were drafted. Although none of them served in the military, they were all put to work in domestic war industries. After the war, some of the family went to California, while others settled in Kenedy and later in the San Antonio area. In Kenedy, members of the company still performed occasionally for local benefit functions, and the family supported itself for some time by showing films in its tent.

Although the San Antonio-based Carpa García was not as large as either the Carpa Cubana or the Carpa Monsiváis, it is relatively well-documented on the literature on the *carpa* in the United States, in part because the many survivors of the *carpa* itself continue to live in San Antonio. Furthermore, their descendants in that city take great pride in their show business heritage, and some of them have played prominent roles in Chicano cultural and political activity in the city. The show’s founder, Manuel V. García, came to the United States in 1914 with his wife, Teresa González de García, their children Aída, Manolo, and Conseulo, and Mrs. González’s children Gilberta, Juan and

Rafael. Like many principal figures in ethnic Mexican circuses, Manuel García was a clown (“Tony”), and he also appears to have worked as an acrobat. Don Manuel first came to the United States in 1914 with a tent show called the Carpa Progresista. He then remained in the United States and, according to the family, obtained equipment of his own from the well-known Mantecón family and formed a show called the Carpa Metropolitana. When a troupe of Argentine dancers joined the company, don Manuel renamed the carpa the “Argentine Show.” Finally, when his children were old enough to perform, the show became the Carpa Hermanos García (“García Brothers Show”). Around the same time, Mrs. González’s brothers and sisters: Michaela, Carmen and Miguel, who formed a Spanish dance trio, performed at the Teatro Zaragoza in San Antonio and ended up residing in the city as well. Miguel, whose nephews and nieces remember him as an autodidact of unusual intelligence, eventually came to work with the Carpa García as a magician and mentalist.

Each of the García children was forced to learn multiple acts. Manolo, who was a pianist, wrestler, acrobat, clown, and comic actor appears to have been the star of the show during the late 1920s and through the 1930s. Aída and Consuelo worked as singers, comic actors, acrobats, and dancers. Consuelo was also a contortionist and came to be the show’s costumer. Her husband Pilar, whose last name was also García, was a wirewalker and is remembered for dancing *jarabes* on the high wire while dressed as a *charro*. The younger, U.S. born García children included Rodolfo, Esther and Raymundo. As she came of age, Esther began working as a singer, dancer, and acrobat, eventually leaving the company to work with such Anglo-American circuses as the Cole

Brothers. Raymundo played the drums and acted in sketches, in addition to taking over the role of handyman for the show. Although Rodolfo initially refused to work in the family business, he eventually found his way into comedy and is remembered for this in spite of the fact that he did not share his siblings' extensive experience and artistic versatility. The Carpa García also included numerous hired performers at various times. Perhaps the most prominent of these was Lydia Mendoza, as we have seen. In the late 1930s, the Carpa García moved its base of operations from San Antonio to Corpus Christi and spent much of the remainder of the 1940s touring southern Texas. In approximately 1948, the show stopped touring in response to Mrs. González's declining health and returned to San Antonio.

Having surveyed some of the more important south Texas *carpas* we may return to the *teatro/carpa* opposition, beginning with a *carpero*'s view of the difference between these sets of venues. In the comments transcribed below, Rodolfo García uses the ways in which the *ricos* (whom he calls *los lagartijos*, 'the lizards') and *la plebe* ('the common people') distinguished themselves from one another at a bullfight to stand for the difference between the tastes of the two groups and to explain the idea of *categoría*, a term which, with a nod to Bourdieu, we might translate as "distinction" (1984).

Aquí venían al teatro muchos actores cómicos de México, y venían unos que no usaban mal vocabulario. Usaban chistes que eran aceptados por el público de aquí, porque habían cómicos de categoría, cómicos que decían chistes . . . menos colorados

Me voy a referir con, por ejemplo, en una corrida de toros. En una corrida de toros, hay diferentes asientos. Allá hay *sombra* allá, ves. Allá es 'onde va la gente de categoría, los que . . . *lagartijos*, les dicen, con

corbata y todo éso, catrines. Catrines que van muy arregladitos con corbata, y allí 'stan con mucha categoría y nomás que apla:uden así

[RG aplaude con los puntos de los dedos.]

Y acá en *sol*, acá 'onde 'staba más barata, es 'onde iba yo. A mí nunca me gustaba. Yo tenía dinero pa' ir allá, pero a mí me gustaba ir acá 'onde dicen, “¡É:ese no sirve! ¡Écha ese cabrón pa' fuera!” y quién sabe qué, y luego una vieja se desmallaba, y “¡A:y!” Y 'stá uno viendo, verdad; 'stá uno mirando y diciendo jokes . . . “Échate un trago,” y que agarra la botella. Allí no hay escrupulo de que . . . tú tomas o yo voy a tomar u otro. No, “A:y, echa la botella.” ¡Baum! ¡Baum! y es pura tequila pesada, lo más corriente, que estás tomando. Pos . . . prendes una mecha y puede ser explosión allí, pues. Es puro high rolling, (se rie) puro . . . ninety-two octane . . . éste, pura . . . whiskey muy fuerte, muy pesado, o cerveza muy barata.

Y allí puedes gritar, gritarle al torrero, “¡E:se no sirve!” Y allá en sol [sombra], no. Esa allá son muy . . . categoría allá. Las viejas traen un vasito así, de whiskey o lo que sea. Es lo mismo con el actor cómico. Hay cómicos que vienen y hablan muy bonito y dicen muchos chistes, y hay cómicos muy pesados.

(Here, many comedians from Mexico came to the theater, and some came who didn't use bad vocabulary. They used jokes that were accepted by the public here, because there were comedians of *categoría*, comedians who told . . . less dirty jokes

I'll refer, for example, to a bullfight. In a bullfight, there are different seats. There there's *sombra* [“shade”] over there, you see. That's where the people of *categoría* go, the ones . . . they call *lagartijos*, with ties and all that, dandies. Dandies who go all gussied up with ties, and there they are with lots of *categoría*, and they just applaud like this

[RG claps the tips of his fingers together]

And here in the *sol* [“sun”], where it was cheaper, is where I went. I never liked it. I had money to go over there, but I liked to go here, where they say, “He:y, that guy's no good! Throw the bum out!” and who knows what, and then a broad faints, and “A:y!” And you're seeing, right; you're watching and telling jokes . . . “Have a drink,” and you grab the bottle. There, there's no scruples about . . . you drinking or me drinking or somebody else. No, “A:ay, give me the bottle.” Boom! Boom! and it's

pure hard tequila, the most common, that you're drinking. Well . . . you light a match and there could be an explosion there. It's pure high rolling, [laughs] pure . . . ninety two octane . . . um, pure . . . really strong whiskey, real heavy, or real cheap beer.

And there you can yell, yell to the bullfighter, "He:ey, that guy's no good!" And there in the *sol* [RG probably means to say "*sombra*"], no. Over there, they're . . . *categoría*. The broads have their little glass there, of whiskey or whatever. It's the same with the comedian. There are comedians who come and talk real pretty and tell lots of jokes, and there are real heavy comedians.³⁵

In these comments, Mr. García is distinguishing not between the *carpa* and *teatro per se*, but between two types of performers: *cómicos de categoría* ('high-class comedians) and *cómicos pesados* ('heavy, rough comedians') and the different kinds of audiences that appreciated each type. While the elite and the upwardly mobile middle class affected a dignified, refined manner in the shady, more expensive side of the arena for the bullfight (*sombra*), the working class in the cheaper, unshaded side (*sol*) defined the area relegated to them as a chaotic, ludic space reminiscent of what Bakhtin calls the "carnivalesque crowd." Bakhtin describes such a grouping as "both concrete and sensual." It is "not merely a crowd," but "the people as a whole . . . organized in their own way . . . It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of coercive socioeconomic and political organization" (1984:255). The intense heat of the sun and the feel and smell of bodies packed together made it impossible to forget one's surroundings, sit back, and observe the show detachedly. *El lado sol* was an intense space, where people had to become the show, where they played and drank hard. Their heckling was a forum in

³⁵from tape PH90-1-2:2, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio. I have placed words that appear to me to stand for key 'emic' concepts that inform don Rodolfo's understanding of class.

which all of the pleasures and pains of life found their expression. These people, who enjoyed little dialogue with the dominant Anglo power structure, or even with the dominant sectors of the *mexicana/o* community, used their taunts and outrageous behavior to forcibly convert the bullfight into a dialogue and to make themselves impossible to ignore. The *carpa* was designed for exactly such a dialogue. Heckling and other forms of performer/audience interaction were part of the show, as the following routine, as narrated by Mr. García, illustrates.

Están como ese chiste que decían,	They're like that joke where they said,
“Te voy a decir un chiste, pero está muy colorado.”	“I'm going to tell you a joke, but it's very dirty (lit. “red.”).
“Pues, no. Dílo.”	“Well, no. Tell it.”
Y yo respondo,	And I respond,
“No, hombre, no, no.”	“No, man. No. No.”
“¡Sí, hombre! ¡Dílo!”	“Yes, man, tell it!”
Y yo respondo,	And I respond,
“Bueno, lo voy a decir.”	“O.K., I'm going to tell it.”
No, hombre, pero está muy colorado.	“No, man, but it's really dirty.”
“No le hace,”	“It doesn't matter,”
yo respondo.	I respond.
“¡Dilo!”	“Tell it!”
Y yo respondo ultimadamente.	And I respond finally, and then the people start to say that I should tell it or shouldn't tell it. Yeah, since the people know what those programs are doing once you tell the public, “yes,” if they do what he's saying.
Y luego empieza a decir la gente que lo diga o no lo diga. Sí, como saben la gente qué están haciendo estos programas desde que le dice uno al público que sí, si hacen lo que esta diciendo él.	O.K., something like that, and then, I tell him,
Bueno, ago así por el estilo, y luego le digo yo,	“O.K., then. I'm going to tell it.”
“Bueno, pues lo voy a decir entonces.”	And then he says, “Let's see, start it.”
Y luego, dice, “A ver, comié mzale.”	

Y dice,
“Anteanoche pasé por tu casa, y
me fuiste para decirme allí te
pican las hormigas.”

Y luego me dicen,
“¿Qué tiene ése de colorado? ¿Y
de picoso? ¿Y de picoso, qué
tiene ése de picoso?”

“Pues luego las hormigas y la
picoteada que me dieron.”
(Sandoval, 1987:15)

And he says,
“Last night I passed by your
house, and you went out to
tell me that there the ants
bite you.”

And then, they ask me,
“What's dirty (lit. “red”) about
that? And biting? And
biting, what's biting about
that?

“Well then it's about the ants and
the bite that they gave me.”

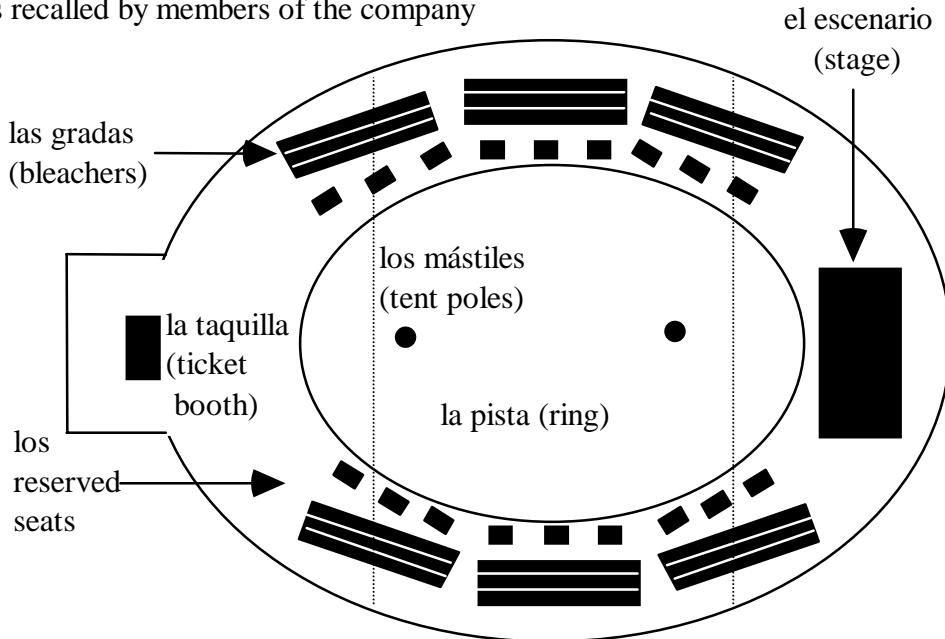
The actors' dialogue described here was designed to build up the audience's anticipation for the joke, and the audience, as if on cue, made its own contribution to the success of the joke. In some cases, the interaction between performer and audience was more antagonistic. In a post-interview conversation with me, Mr. García recalled an incident in which, during his routine, a man in the audience continuously interrupted him by shouting, “¡Ora cuñado!” ('Hey, brother-in-law!' i.e. 'I fucked your sister'). Mr. García claims to have dispatched the young man by responding, “Ah pues sí, parece que te reconocía. Tú serás mi entenado. Dile a tu mamá que nos vamos a reunir en el mismo lugar que siempre” ('Oh yeah, I thought I recognized you. You must be my stepson. Tell your mother we'll meet in the usual place').³⁶ These examples show how the “*espacio más reducido* (more reduced space)” of the *carpa*, combined with the social facts of shared working class origin and a common struggle for existence, created an intimate, if sometimes conflictive, relationship between performer and audience, similar to that

³⁶ I reproduce Mr. García's story from memory, as it was told at a moment after a formal interview when the tape recorder was not running.

which existed in performances of *conjunto* music (Peña, 1985:151). In a space like the smaller, neighborhood *carpa*, in which working-class people set the tone, the atmosphere was one of irrepressible gaiety, raunchy madcap humor, and carnivalesque degradation and renewal. It seems likely, then, that the *sketches*, jokes and dance routines, many of which were similar to, or even directly borrowed or adapted from those presented in the “legitimate” Spanish-language theater, assumed an entirely different character in the *carpa*.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the ideology of *respeto* disappeared with this change in setting, audience, and tone. My interviews with the Garcías and others suggest that while the atmosphere of the *carpa* may have indeed been more informal and carnivalesque than that of the theaters, performers still had to take care about the use of obscenity. It would also be a mistake to assume, as Don Lalo Astol seemed to in the interview quoted above, that the audiences of the *carpas* shared a uniform love of *groserías* (coarse language) and that performers could simply blurt out such words as “*pendejo*” all of the time and everywhere. There were doubtlessly companies that staged racy, uncensored revues with the *soltura* (“abandon”) that Astol describes above, but the *artistas* of the Carpa García claim to have taken the idea of *respeto* quite seriously. For not all audiences, and not all sectors of any individual audience were alike. Like the theater with its opera boxes and orchestra pit, the Carpa García had *los reserved seats* ('reserved seats') near the ring and *las gradas* ('bleachers') further back, differentiated by price. Although the correspondence between class

^fFigure 2: FLOOR PLAN OF THE CARPA GARCIA
as recalled by members of the company



affiliation and choice of seating was undoubtedly less rigid in the *carpa* than in the Teatro Nacional, the existence of the difference suggests a heterogeneous audience. In discussing the appropriateness of various jokes and *sketches* for different audiences with me, the Garcías consistently distinguished between the “*la palomilla*,” a rough, mostly male sector audience, and “*familias*,” or families with children. The dialogue mentioned above, in which some sectors of the audience shout for the comedian to tell the dirty joke and others shout for him not to, provides an idealized illustration of the attitudes these two sectors appear to have held toward erotic humor. Rodolfo García comments on the effect that his audience's divergent tastes had on the choices he made as a performer.

There's different kinds of people in Mexico. There's the high-class people, and there's the middle-class people, and there's the re:al nasty people. Those are the poor people, *la plebe*, que hablan de pura picardía, puras

palabras ofensivas, vulgares (who use lots of rough language, lots of offensive, vulgar words.)

Esos cómicos que venian de México pensaban que viniendo aqui, donde hay Spanish languages, 'onde hay gente mexicana, usaban estas palabras so the people get more kick out of it. (Those comedians who came from Mexico thought that coming here, where there are Spanish languages, where there are Mexcian people, they would use these words so people get more of a kick out of it). So that people like them. And sometimes, people like hear a real nasty jokes, but there's a lot of people, they don't want to hear that, especially if they've got his kids. But I never used that kind of language³⁷

Note that in contrast to the previously quoted statement, in which he identifies himself enthusiastically with *la plebe*, Mr. García here tries to distance himself here from that sector of the *plebe* that delighted in vulgarity. Other comments suggest that his use of tabooed vocabulary and subject matter varied with his the preferences of different audiences in different settings, but the distinctions he makes here between the various sectors of the audience and their corresponding tastes remain instructive. In my interviews, he stressed the division between jokes and parodies of popular songs that were acceptable for *familias* in the *carpa* and those that were only appropriate for a nightclub audience consisting primarily of *palomilla*. While the latter sector of the audience appreciated *colorado* humor and required none of the restraint demanded by the ideology of *respeto*, the former tended to be much more easily offended. These differences illustrate Richard García's statement that "the ideal of being *gente decente* permeated the everyday life of the entire community" (1991:146-47), as well as the danger of assuming the unity of a particular class *a priori* (Hall, 1986:14). While the *palomilla* probably tended to reject bourgeois concepts of decency, *familias* who aspired

³⁷from tape PH90-5-1:2, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

to work their way up the social ladder or at least to maintain an appearance of decency within class-bound norms, demanded that their children be protected from “bad influences.”

The fear of “bad influences” caused hostility towards the *carpa* form itself in some of the small towns that the Carpa García visited. This stigma was due both to the *carpa's* association with the working class and to the fact that women displayed themselves in public on its stage. To counteract this stigma, the Garcías often performed under the sponsorship of the Catholic Church, donating between ten and twenty percent of their profits to local church activities. Manuel V. García, the show's owner and Mr. García's father, traveled ahead of the company, *agarrando el lugar*: sizing up the towns and making arrangements with the municipal and ecclesiastical authorities in each place. The presence of church personnel taking tickets at the entrance to the tent allayed the public's fears that the show would be too risqué. Manuel García's daughter Esther, herself an actress, acrobat, and dancer, remembered the measures her father had to take as the show's representative when arranging a performance

The church, they always needed help, and we needed help also, so they were very nice about it. They would let us . . . on one condition. They would say, “We don't want a circus to come in here and they have any of those gamblers or women to go out. They had their own regulations, and my Daddy would say, “No. This is a whole family. They're all married. My sons are all married. My daughters are all married. It's only the family. We promise you that nothing bad will go on.”

“Well, we want you to respect the town.”³⁸

³⁸from tape PH90-3-1:3, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

“Respecting the town” (*respeto*) involved avoiding public vices in order to preserve the company's reputation for being “a quiet, family show business.”³⁹ In our interview, Mrs. Robinson remembered a negative example.

There were some shows you know
where the girls used to go into town and make the *cantinas* and all that
other shows, you know.⁴⁰

Because in some towns they locked the girls from one show
and they burn those towns
and then when a good family goes in there
they wouldn't let you in.

That was along the Valley where these girls from this show went out with
some boys from the town and they lock 'em in. So they didn't want
nothing like that.

Now, after the show, they would drink in the *carpa* there.
They would drink fight and then the law would come in to the scene
and that's what they didn't want a disturbance.
So my mother and Daddy never allowed that.
If you wanted to drink you had to do it in your trailer and then go to
sleep.⁴¹

In the stricter towns, the Garcías could only overcome the common perception that the *carpas* were bawdy vehicles for vice and corruption by working with the church and observing strict behavioral codes. In towns that the company saw as less strict, however, church benefits were less necessary, and the *carpa* often kept its profits to itself.

Discussion

I remember that during my initial interviews in 1990, when members of the García family described their *carpa*'s benefit actions as above, I found their account

³⁹ibid.

⁴⁰ Here Mrs. Robinson seems to be implying that female performers in some *carpas* engaged in prostitution. Although this is not surprising, little is known about such shows. When performers like Mrs. Robinson mention a connection between the *carpas* and prostitution it is to provide a contrast with their own families' decency.

⁴¹from tape PH90-3-1:3, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

disappointing. The Garcías did not recognize the term “mutualista” when I used it, and although comedian Rodolfo García, who we will meet in Chapter 2, recalled being hired by fraternal organizations such as the Mexican American Lions Clubs and the Knights of Columbus in Corpus Christi to work at parties, his experiences sounded nothing like the vigorous civic life that was described in the literature. These expectations of mine found their confirmation not in interviews but in the 1920s-era records of the Carpa Cubana. It is entirely possible that the surviving members of the García family, all of whom were born in or after 1917, might not be old enough to have understood the network of mutual aid societies and other voluntary associations that had been such a prominent feature of earlier ethnic Mexican sociality in the United States up to the beginning of the Depression. Nevertheless, their stories raise an interesting question about the charitable uses of such spaces as the Teatro Nacional and the Carpa Cubana. We know that in 1925 the Cuban Show held at least eleven benefit performances, through which it donated at least \$558.54 to ethnic Mexican voluntary associations and civic causes in the lower Rio Grande Valley and the Coastal Bend. We also know that the company paid at least \$333.25 in increments of roughly \$3.00 over the course of at least seventy-nine Texas performances that same year. The question is: what is the difference between a tax and a donation to the Catholic Church or the Cruz Azul Mexicana?

The question might at first seem an insult, an affront to the companies’ spirit of civic engagement and *raza* solidarity. The theater and tent show companies were businesses, yes, but surely the artists were in it for more than the money. More than a few *artistas de teatro* in particular appear to have died in relative poverty after long

careers of raising money for the poor—who could question their motivations? And how could anyone compare voluntary donations to *mexicana/o* community organizations with payments to the mostly Anglo-dominated county administrative apparatus? We must remember, however, that the Cruz Azul was itself partly supervised by the Mexican consulate and that at one point it planned a census of the neighborhoods inhabited by people of Mexican origin in order to determine the precise characteristics of their living conditions and social needs (Palomo Acosta 2002). After the defeat of *mexicana/o* uprisings in southern Texas during the teens, none of the voluntary organizations' para-state activities seem to have been accompanied by claims on the legitimate use of violence, and this seems to be a key difference between Cruz Azul with its clinics, health education programs, and library, and the state and country governments with theirs. Where the Anglo-dominated government operated both through coercion and the organization of consent, the *mexicana/o* voluntary organizations appear to have focused only on the latter area. And as organizers of consent, their stamp of approval could have made a big difference to an otherwise suspicious company of traveling artists coming into a small town with a retinue of acrobats, contortionists, and chorus girls. Similarly, that stamp of approval would have done wonders for the business prospects of a Sicilian entrepreneur seeking to sell theatrical entertainment to the various sectors of San Antonio's West Side.

This chapter has reviewed the development of spaces for secular commercial theatrical performance among ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio, beginning with a sketch of what little is known of the early nineteenth century and continuing to the much better-

documented florescence of such performance during the first three decades of the twentieth. The analysis has centered on the Mexican *colonia*'s evolving typology of performance spaces, concentrating on the relations of interdependence and conflict among those spaces and their interactions with other institutions of commerce and discourse. Of course, by speaking of "spaces" and "institutions," "the community," and "the *colonia*," as things, I come dangerously close to fetishizing what were in fact evolving products of collective action (Joseph 2002). Although I have found it impossible to do without these terms, I have nevertheless sought to remain focused on the social practices that brought newspapers, theaters, the market plaza, voluntary organizations, tent shows, and the web of connections between these discursive sites into existence.

Previous accounts (e.g. Rosales 1984; Kanellos 1990) have understandably highlighted the contribution of theater to *mexicana/o* solidarity and the preservation of cultural knowledge and identity in the face of racism and assimilative pressures. Although the accounts of Kanellos and Ramírez both contain many useful and telling details of the 'business side' of the theater, their rhetoric sometimes makes that side seem almost extraneous. Kanellos, for his part, reserves his highest praise for those performers who continued their work after 1932 when serious drama was no longer commercially viable.

The valiant response of the resident theatrical artists of San Antonio to their displacement from the professional theater houses was to take their art directly to the people. Manuel Cotera, Bernardo Fougá, and Carlos Villalongín ... continued to direct and manage companies that now toured neighborhood halls in San Antonio and also traveled to Dallas, Houston,

Laredo, and small cities during the 1930s. In most cases in San Antonio, theatrical arts were placed at the service of the community and the church during those hard times of the Depression. Most of the performances by the San Antonio artists were for raising funds for one charity and worthy cause or another (1990:87).

This moment, when serious drama moves to neighborhood halls in a more or less nonprofit mode, appears in Kanellos' narrative as the moral high point of *mexicana/o* theater in San Antonio. It would be hard to fault this enthusiasm for the artists' selfless dedication to their fellows and their vocation. The danger lies in assuming that the theater and the publics it created were supplementary to capital and independent of the circulation of commodities.

As we imagine neighborhood folks raising funds for a health clinic by enjoying a night of drama in a church hall or circus acts and comedy in canvas tent, we are brought face to face with the productivity of consumption and the value of surplus time. It is too easy, however, to imagine that the economic forces that brought those people to that neighborhood in the first place were somehow external to the sense of community being developed there. In this chapter I have sought to examine the relationship between such forces and performance spaces in San Antonio, sometimes following San Antonio-based tent shows into other Texas communities. Focusing on the sign-value of theatrical space I have demonstrated the relationship between those spaces and the *mexicana/o* community's consciousness of itself as a racialized enclave. I have also stressed the importance of that community's own internal class divisions and the relationship between those divisions and typologies of theatrical space and peoples' ways of inhabiting it. Where previous authors have stressed the contribution of theater to social cohesion, I

have taken pains to point out its equally important role as a symbolic arena of social conflict. In what follows, I will examine how these processes manifested themselves in ethnic Mexican popular theater in San Antonio on a textual level. First, however, it will be necessary to explore the recorded narratives that are my key. Although these narratives can be seen as sources of ‘information,’ that ‘information’ cannot be fully understood and evaluated without attention to its context of production.

CHAPTER 3. SINGING TO THE MACHINE

Introduction

I had read about Rodolfo García before I met him. His comic persona, don Fito, figured prominently in the academic writing on Mexican American popular theater that made me aware of that theater's existence and attracted me to the topic (Kanellos 1987; Ybarra-Frausto 1984). During the rush of cultural rediscovery that followed the Chicana/o movement, none of the academic articles published on Chicana/o theater history failed to reproduce a photograph of don Fito leaning back with hips thrust forward in a defiant *chuco* slouch, one hand holding out the unusually long tie that was his trademark,⁴² the other hanging at his side with a feather duster that represented a nod to Cantinflas. In 1990, when I began research for this project with the idea of collecting information for a museum exhibit, people at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center told me, somewhat reverently, "You need to talk to Diamond. His Dad was don Fito. "Rudy "Diamond" García Jr. is one of the founders of the center, where he supervised graphic design and publicity work until his recent retirement, and he has a long history with the cultural side of the Chicana/o movement in San Antonio. Without much hesitation, he agreed to allow me to interview his father, saying that when he was a boy, a teacher of his had used a Texas history book she herself had written titled "Our Texas," which said nothing about ethnic Mexicans.⁴³ Rodolfo García Sr. was equally accommodating, and at

⁴² The tie appears not to have been a legal "trademark," but as we will see in Chapter 3, the attributes that identified a comedian's onstage persona were distinctive enough to be seen as a form of intellectual property. The usage is thus not entirely metaphorical.

⁴³ Several history textbooks by this name were published in Texas after World War II (e.g. Donecker 1948; Cox 1965).

the end of that first interview, my first extended conversation in a language other than English, he handed me a 3M AVX-90 cassette tape with nothing written on the label, saying only that he wanted me to have it.

The cassette was the first of seven recordings that Mr. García would give me beginning July of 1990 and continuing until May of 2000. During these ten years, Mr. García used his home tape recorder to record for me some eight hours of narratives and performances intended to evoke his *carpa* act. It is impossible to know how many people are interviewed for oral history projects every year in the United States, but I suspect that few such interviewees take the initiative to record their own solo statements in this way. Out of some twenty individuals interviewed on tape and minidisk for this project, Mr. García was the only one who took the technology of into his own hands and recorded himself, even though I encouraged other interviewees to do so and even lent my own equipment to some of them. Although they are exceptional in this sense, Mr. García's recordings are of interest both because of the story they tell and because they offer the opportunity for more general reflections on narrative, history and memory as these emerge in the ethnographic encounter.

By giving me these tapes, Mr. García profoundly influenced the direction of my research and began to take on the role that anthropologists of an earlier generation called the “key informant.” Although many anthropologists now blanch at the term “informant,” and favor “consultant,” the change in terminology has not led to much change in the institutional underpinnings and power dynamics of the relationship. “We” still get the degrees and the teaching jobs. “They” get some credit if they want their

names used, which Mr. García definitely did. Indeed, during our later interviews, he often made a joke of this disparity during our at the Luby's Cafeteria in the mall near his house, saying, "Tú te vas a hacer profesor, pos yo soy profesor de mañas" ("You're going to be a professor, well I'm a professor of shenanigans.")⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he seemed to relish the chance to talk about his family and about his experiences as a comedian, both in interviews and on his solo cassettes. All of my subsequent interviews with him that summer revolved around material taken from the first tape, as have many of my later writings (Haney 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000). Apparently recorded without other individuals present, the first tape contains a long monologue, which Mr. García calls, after some hesitation, a "*reporte*" ("report"), and which begins with a discussion of his career and his family's history of involvement in the performing arts. Midway through the tape, he begins to sing the parodies of popular songs that he once used to close his comic act. These song performances lead to other recollections and contextualizing comments. After singing several parodies, Mr. García is cut off in mid-sentence as the first side of the tape ends while he is relating childhood memories of performing in blackface on the stage of his family's show. The *reporte* does not continue on the other side of the tape, but several weeks later, Mr. García gave me a second tape, which did not pick up where the first tape left off, but rather contained song performances and memories after the fashion of the second half of the first tape. In the intervening ten years, he has given me five more such tapes, with a total of some eight hours of recorded narratives, songs, and

⁴⁴ The word "maña" has a sense that ranges from "skill" to "trick" to "habit" in various parts of the Spanish-speaking world. Among ethnic Mexicans I have most often heard it used to refer to trickery, bad habits, or untrustworthiness, with a "mañoso" being someone to watch out for.

karaoke-style performances using a tape of songs by the Mexican singer/composer Agustín Lara as accompaniment.⁴⁵

Literary critic Genaro Padilla's has argued persuasively that it is impossible to read collaboratively produced narrative "naively ... without thinking about editorial construction with all of its customary manipulations" (1993:28). By taping his own monologues, Mr. García partly circumvented such manipulations, achieving a level of agency in the research process that would not have been possible otherwise. This agency, however, was tempered by his awareness of the conflicting demands of various sectors of his potential audience. For him, as for any autobiographer, the act of narrating the self necessarily involved a process of negotiation and compromise between social forces larger than the self being presented. As John Haviland has noted in his study of an autobiographical fragment by an aboriginal Australian man, "why these reminiscences emerge, in this context, and with these interlocutors is in part a political matter, with . . . indelible consequences on the self this autobiographical fragment inscribes" (1991:333). The aim of this chapter is both to present Mr. García's recordings "de una manera digna de ellos," recognizing all the while that un-mediated access to the self represented in the recordings is never possible.

Rodolfo García's Recordings and their Market

Of the social forces that shaped Mr. García's recordings, one of the most important is the ethnographic research context from which they emerged. Indeed, my

⁴⁵ Mr. García recorded at least one other tape for Amelia García Brooks, a sister-in-law of his who lives in West Virginia and who had taken an interest in the family's history and created a web page about the Carpa García. When I asked for a copy, Mrs. Brooks told me she had lost the tape. There may well be others.

own and others' research on and representation of Spanish-language theater in San Antonio has exerted both a constraining and a generative influence on Mr. García's narrative. In relating his life history, Mr. García was forced to consider the demands of researchers, what might be the interest of the general public, and the possible reactions of other former *artistas* who were also involved in the events he describes and who might one day have access to his words. The status distinctions among these *artistas*, especially the divide between performers who identify with the tent shows and those who identify with theater, also influences Mr. García's rhetorical strategy. If we consider all of the potential receivers of the information on the cassette as a linguistic market in Bourdieu's (1991) sense, then our task is to unravel the influences of different fractions of that market on Mr. García's recordings. But Mr. García's statements must also be considered in relation to the snowballing discursive production about Mexican American theater in San Antonio that began with the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s and continues to the present day. My own fieldwork was only the latest in a series of attempts to document and recover the city's theatrical past.

By 1950, competition from Mexican films and later from television had sent the city's once prosperous Mexican American theater industry into decline. Because few Anglos were willing to recognize the importance of *mexicana/o* artistic achievement, and because many members of the emerging Mexican American middle class sought to distance themselves from the theater, the subject remained largely absent from public discourse until the Chicano movement. During the *movimiento*, activists in San Antonio and elsewhere converted their childhood memories of the theatrical past into a proud

cultural patrimony. Local Chicano performers used images of Mr. García's onstage persona, don Fito or "el Bato Suave," as a symbol of that patrimony.

Now if the goal is to treat Mr. García's autobiographical recordings as they deserve, it only makes sense to start at the beginning. If that is so, then I have gone and screwed things up already, because these recordings began in the 1970s, long before I entered the picture. Indeed, Mr. García's efforts to document his past began before sound recording entered the picture. In the late 1950s, along with his cousin Pedro González-González and former comic partner turned Sheriff's deputy Alfredo Carrión, he posed for a series of photographs re-enacting the sort of humorous interactions that were characteristic of the *carpa* stage. In many of these, Mr. García appears drunk, and Carrión holds him up by his tie. In one picture, he blows on a saxophone while the other two cover their ears in mock agony. During this time, Mr. García also seems to have made a home movie, from which only a few stills remain, in which he demonstrated his characteristic shuffle, slips and falls, and similar actions. By 1975 he had acquired a reel-to-reel tape recorder, and in the wake of his contacts with young Chicana/o teatristas eager to learn about the *carpas*, Mr. García began to make recordings about his comic career. These autobiographical recordings are mixed in with recordings of music from a New Braunfels polka station, Spanish-language news and soap operas from San Antonio's KCOR, and attempts to get his grandchildren to speak on tape. No clear order is evident in the distribution of material on the reels.⁴⁶ At one point in the tape, Mr.

⁴⁶ I thank Mr. García's son Pancho for finding these reels in his garage and allowing me to listen to them and dub parts of them to minidisk.

García begins to narrate, giving his date and place of birth and a few details about his life and career. The recording soon cuts off, however, followed by more music. On another reel, Mr. Garcia sings “Chencha,” his parody of the *bolero* “Desvelo de amor,” with guitar accompaniment provided by a friend of his sister Esther’s. In these early reels, then, he takes two alternate approaches to representing his past: narrative and the demonstration performance. This dichotomy continues to inform the later autobiographical recordings.

Since the end of the Chicano movement, or at least of its charismatic phase, efforts to revive and document the *carpa* have not declined but increased, both in academia and the public sector. In the 1980s, Chicano artists who had been active in the *movimiento* invoked San Antonio's theatrical tradition in the process of creating the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, which is centered on the restored Guadalupe Theater. In academia, a new generation of Chicano scholars engaged in impressive projects of recovery and documentation of the U.S. Latino theatrical heritage (e.g. Kanellos 1990, Ybarra-Frausto 1984, Ramírez 1990), some of which involved interviews with members of Mr. García’s family. Chris Strachwitz and James Nicolopolous interviewed Mr. García himself in 1983, and they include a highly edited version of this interview in their biography of singer Lydia Mendoza (1993: 80-83). More recently, in 1989 a Mexican playwright named José Manuel Galván wrote a play titled “*Las tandas de San Cuilmas: los carperos*” based on oral history interviews he conducted with Mr. García and other vaudeville performers (1989). During one of the interviews he granted Galván, Mr. García speaks alone into the tape recorder, telling his date and place of birth and

beginning a narrative sequence much like that on the 1975 reel.⁴⁷ Once again, he is cut off in mid-sentence and the narrative is relatively short. At the first performance of this play, the *artistas* who served as Mr. Galván's sources, Mr. García among them, were publicly recognized. The play enjoyed such success that it was staged a second time in 1991. In 1998, the San Antonio Public Library's Hertzberg Circus Museum opened an exhibit on Mexican American tent shows, which included a miniature tent built by Mr. García's brother Raymundo and which remained open until the museum itself was closed in 2001. As of this writing, an organization called the Grupo Alameda, in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution, is in the process of completing the restoration of the Teatro Alameda, an elegant Art Deco theater and cinema building built in 1949. Pictures of Mr. García's brother and sister-in-law, Pilar and Consuelo García, appear on the back cover of the organization's 1998-99 glossy annual report.

This local heritage boom has profoundly affected many of the musicians and actors who were active in San Antonio's Spanish-language theater scene before World War II. Some of these artistas, who lost their audience with the decline of their industry, have discovered in heritage culture a new audience and a new market in which their memories are valued symbolic goods. Others have simply gone about their lives, ignoring the efforts at historical recovery entirely. In telling their stories and participating in recovery efforts, they have brought tensions and rivalries that already existed among them to a new field. From the artists' statements to me in interviews, it appears that many of these rivalries derived partly from the rift between *artistas de teatro*

⁴⁷ I thank José Manuel Galván-Leguizamo for allowing me access to his interview tapes.

and *artistas de carpa* discussed above. But whatever the reasons for friendships and rivalries, a complex interpersonal politics informs the *artistas'* decisions about whom to mention to whom and in what sort of light.

In Mr. García's *reporte*, ethnographic and historical documentation provide not only a chance to make statements based on the authority of experience, but also external sources of authority for those statements. At one point, he marshals references to a book about the *carpas* and *teatro*, possibly one of Kanellos' edited volumes, to show the credibility of his memories.

Pero si alguna persona que que crea que lo que yo estoy grabando son imaginaciones mías pos ... no sé eh ... cómo podría él averiguar de ese libro que salió que dice uno que está hablando de las carpas teatro de los Spanish comedians. Así vi en ese libro	But if some person who who thinks that what I'm recording are my inventions well ... I don't know eh ... how he could find out about that book that came out that says somebody who's talking about carpas Theater about the Spanish comedians. That's what I saw in that book. ⁴⁸
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

This statement shows the extent to which Mr. García's memories have been colored by the various efforts at reconstruction and documentation of the *carpa* that have occurred during the past twenty years. Indeed, it confounds to a certain extent the distinction that historians often make between primary and secondary sources. Whether or not the work

⁴⁸ From PH90-8-1:1, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

of historians has influenced the content of Mr. García's memories, that work has certainly affected his attitudes towards those memories. These representations thus mediate his narrative presentation of self as much as any tape recorder could.

But the interaction between ethnographer and consultant in the production of narrative has other political implications. Arising as it does from the ethnographic encounter, Mr. García's *reporte* resembles a genre of narrative that has become known as in Latin America the *testimonio*. *Testimonios* are usually elicited autobiographical statements by subaltern individuals, usually identified as members of some community in struggle, which are then edited and published by academics as first-person narratives. Such mediated autobiographies have also been common in the United States, in the form of slave narratives and anthropological life histories (Padilla 1993). In folklore studies, such narratives became popular when theoretical attention turned to the bearers of tradition (e.g. Riddle and Abrahams 1970). Sociolinguist and literary critic Rosaura Sánchez has characterized the *testimonio* as a dependent mode of textual production, clearly implying an analogy to Wallerstein's world systems theory (1996:7). Despite—and because of—the contradictions involved in their creation, Sánchez argues, testimonials create a narrative space in which “the subaltern collectivity speaks, neither always hegemonically nor subversively, but always, through a continual realignment of discourses, in search of both voice and audience” (14). In what follows, I will show how this search plays itself out in Mr. García's *reporte*.

The 1990 *Reporte*.

At the beginning of the tape, Mr. García locates himself and his art in the history of his family and that of the Carpa García, with a series of statements that closely resemble the truncated beginnings of the 1975 reels and the 1989 interview with Galván. Faced with social science's bureaucratic requirement that he identify himself and state his place, date of birth, and other "vital facts," Mr. García answers in sentence fragments, speaking slowly and deliberately, as if filling in blanks on a questionnaire.

Nacido ... aquí en San Antonio Téjas en las calles ... Comerico y Santa Rosa	Born ... here in San Antonio Texas on the corner of ... Commerce and Santa Rosa
en la mera esquina 'onde estaba el Teatro ... Nacional que antes de "Teatro Nacional" se llamaba el Morelos.	on the very corner where the Teatro ... Nacional once stood which before "Teatro Nacional" was called the Morelos. ⁴⁹
En esa época de mil novecientos ... diez y siete el siete de enero fue ... cuando nací el Señor Rodolfo G. García.	In those days In nineteen ... seventeen the seventh of January was ... when I was born Mr. Rodolfo G. García.
Nombre de mis padres ... y mi madre el Señor Manuel V. García la Señora ... Teresa González de García. Nacido aquí en San Antonio	The names of my parents ... and my mother ⁵⁰ Mr. Manuel V. García Mrs. ... Teresa González de García. Born ... here in San Antonio

⁴⁹ According to Kanellos, the building that would house the Teatro Nacional was previously the site of the Teatro Juárez. Mr. García may have confused this theater with the Hotel Morelos, which was located across the street from the Teatro Nacional.

⁵⁰The Spanish word for "parents," which Mr. García uses in the preceeding line, is "padres." It is because "padre" is also the word for "father" that Mr. García mentions his mother in this line, in what amounts to something like conversational repair.

ese—el jóven Rodolfo G.
García.
Bueno está hablando de
joven allá cuando
el cuarenta cual—treinta el
treinta y cinco.
Bueno.
La razón de dar este ...
reporte
para un ... camarada que
está
aquí grabando
todo ésto que yo 'stoy
diciendo
porque quiere que
primeramente diga mi
nombre todo
para después seguir
haciéndome preguntas
tocante ... a mi carrera
artística.

ese—the young Rodolfo G.
García.
Well I'm talking about
young back then in
'forty fou—'thirty 'thirty-
five.
All right.
The reason for giving this ...
report
for a ... comrade who is
here recording
all of this that I'm saying
because he wants me to first
say my name and
everything
so he can later continue
asking me questions
about ... my artistic career.⁵¹

But here Mr. García goes beyond those requirements, bringing in a fragment of a story about his birth that circulates in his family.⁵² By linking himself to the Teatro Nacional—in which, incidentally, he claims never to have performed—he anchors his life story and his narrative authority in a place that symbolizes San Antonio's theatrical past.⁵³ This

⁵¹ PH90-80-1:1

⁵²In a recent interview, unfortunately while the tape recorder was not running, Mr García's sister Esther told me that Mr. García had been born in a hotel near the Teatro Nacional at a time when some of the violence of the Mexican Revolution was affecting San Antonio. She claims that while her mother was giving birth to Mr. García, a general from one faction ran into the room and hid himself under the birthing table. When his pursuers, who belonged to another faction, came into the room looking for him, the midwife upbraided them for disturbing a pregnant woman. They apologized and left, somewhat sheepishly. After they were gone, the general came out of hiding, thanked don Manuel and doña Teresa, and ran out of the room, leaving a large wad of money behind as payment. Mr. García's parents did not know what to do with the money, so the midwife took it. As I say, I do not have a version of this story on tape, and I need to speak with Mr. García to try to get his version of it.

⁵³Neither Kanellos (1990) nor Ramírez (1990) mentions the location of the Teatro Nacional nor its existence under a previous name. Indeed, neither author mentions the existence of a Teatro Morelos in San Antonio. According to Kanellos, one of the earliest newspaper clippings about the Teatro Nacional, which

approach to space continues later in the 1990 monologue and in later recordings. In Mr. García's discussions of his work as a comedian, the corner of Agnes and 19th Street (sometimes 18th Street) in Corpus Christi, where his family set up the carpa in the early 1940s plays a pivotal role. Discussions of his family's show and its work in the barrios of San Antonio often lead to a list of intersections and names of neighborhoods where the carpa stood: San Fernando and Sabinas, Guadalupe and Calaveras, "La piedrera" ("the quarry"), a neighborhood that once existed in what is now Brackenridge Park.

Although Mr. García's voice is the only one heard on the tape, he frequently refers to a "camarada" ("comrade") who is there present, stating that this comrade has asked him to make the taped statement. After listening to the tape for the first time, I asked Mr. García whom he had recorded the statement for, and he said he had done it for me. This confused me, because I had requested no such statement. Throughout the course of his monologue, Mr. García marks changes in topic by stating that the camarada has asked him to talk about the thing he then proceeds to talk about. No such requests are audible on the tape, and I do not remember having made them. Later in the tape, the comrade appears again.

Primeramente
antes que nada
le dije aquí al ... camarada
que está aquí oyendo
que si quería él hacerme
entrevista preguntarme y
decirle y no que él quiere
que yo diga

First
before anything else
I told the ... comrade
who's here listening
that if he wanted to do an
interview with me ask
me questions and no
he wants me to tell

announces its impending opening, is dated August 19th, 1917. Construction was not actually finished until November (1990: 80). It would seem, then, that Mr. García's birth actually occurred before the Teatro Nacional was built.

todo lo que yo tenga que
decir
tocante ... a mi carrera
artística

everything I might have to
say
about ... my artistic
career⁵⁴

Mr. García thus positions—and justifies—his uninterrupted monologue as a response to an elicitation, a project undertaken in spite of his own reservations. This strategy of using the comrade's reported speech to introduce or retrospectively explain changes in topic continues in the section in which the song performances begin. At this point, Mr. García signals his intent to begin remembering and singing his song parodies saying that the comrade had suggested this. Once again, no such suggestion is audible on the tape, and there are no stops in the tape before this utterance. Further on, Mr. García hedges an upcoming performance by saying that he has told the comrade that he is used to singing with a piano, implying that singing and remembering will be more difficult without accompaniment. In all of these selections, reported conversation between Mr. García and the comrade index Mr. García's footing (Goffman 1981:143) by framing the monologue as the response to another's request rather than an independent production. Although it is possible that the tape was made for another researcher, it is more likely that Mr. García is, as it were, putting words in my mouth, anticipating my interests in my absence.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this approach is the reference to the comrade in the third person while the tape-recorder audience is referred to in the second person plural.

Voy a ... platicarles también
de mi hermano,

I'm also going to tell you [pl.]
about my brother

⁵⁴ PH90-8-1:1

que era el pianista.

who was the pianist.⁵⁵

This device is an example of what Hanks (1993:67) and others have called “creative deixis,” and through it, Mr. García rhetorically minimizes the mediation of the unnamed researcher. Furthermore, he mentions the researcher as a generic category, the interested interlocutor as such, rather than naming him. This act may be seen as a small symbolic inversion of the customary relationship between analyst and (usually anonymous) “human subject.” If, as literary critic Gernaro Padilla has suggested, the editors of mediated autobiographies speak over the “invisible bodies” of subaltern narrators (1993:9) then Mr. García has partly reversed that dynamic by anticipating the researcher’s speech and rhetorically placing that researcher, figured as his co-present interlocutor, in the background.

The Dialogue of Narrative and List.

Throughout his 1990 *reporte*, and in many of the subsequent recordings Mr. García oscillates between two distinct ways of entextualizing and remembering past which I will call narrative and list. Following Labov I take a narrative to be a “method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events” (1972: 360). Narrative then creates a diachronic “story world” (Hill and Zepeda 1993: 212) in which the rhetorical progression of the text mirrors the progression of events, whether real or imagined. Although this does occur in the *reporte*, especially during the first half, it is not as prevalent after Mr. García’s decision to sing,

⁵⁵ PH90-8-1:1

when the act of remembering the songs almost demands a list-like form of organization. I define the list as a series of clauses or other discourse units whose order is tied more to the exigencies of memory in the present than to the sequence of past events being related, and which represent not events but things. The unity of a list comes not from its relation of a completed action or series of action but from some common factor shared by the objects represented. The view of the past that emerges through the list is synchronic, a sense of “the moment,” more like a daydream than a story.⁵⁶

In the section of the *reporte* in which narrative predominates, Mr. García presents his family's history, beginning with a discussion of his maternal aunts and uncles who formed the Trío Hermanos González and then a discussion of his father's immigration to the United States with the Circo Hermanos Mantecón. This section includes numerous discussions of relatives who are or were prominent artists. A discussion of his family's *carpa* and its activities in Corpus Christi follows. The succession of topics thus forms a rough chronology from 1917 to the 1940s a chronology that generally coincides with the organization of a series of groups of lines each of which is introduced by explicit metadiscourse. Although they are arranged in narrative order many of the groups are primarily made up of lists and many combine elements of narrative with elements of the list. In one passage, for instance Mr. García illustrates the point that the mainstays of the Carpa García were all his close relatives by listing his brothers who were musicians. Interestingly enough, Mr. García neglects to mention his sisters who were also

⁵⁶My use of the term list is distinct from that of Goody (1977) and O'Banion (1992). My sense of the list also problematizes any attempt to link narrative with an essentialized orality or list with an essentialized literacy.

performers. The general point of all of this, which Mr. García repeatedly drives home, is that art runs in the family, and that his own performance skills are part of a family tradition. Indeed, it is remarkable how little space Mr. García devotes to his own personal activities and memories in the narrative section of the 1990 reporte.

Genaro Padilla has suggested that such a strategy, in which the narrated self “is subsumed within a narrative of regional or cultural history,” is a defining characteristic of ethnic Mexican autobiography in the United States (1993:29). Of course, Padilla implies a contrast with conceptions of an autonomous self associated with the European and Anglo-American traditions of autobiography. But if we accept this statement as applying to Mr. García’s recordings, we need not stop there. Rather, we ought to ask ourselves how the collectivity is defined and what relationship the “I” has to that matrix. One way of approaching this question is to look at statements that locate the narrated self by describing it in relation to others, such as the following example:

Yo, yo no fui un, un actor cómico	I wasn’t a pretentious comedian
Pretencioso de esos que nomás en el puro teatro trabajan de una vergüenza de ir a trabajar con pico y pala.	one of those who works in nothing but theater out of some shame of going to work with a pick and shovel.
No: mi padre no enseñó a trabajar como los hombres.	No: my father taught us to work like men. ⁵⁷

Here, Mr. García is at pains to distinguish himself from certain other artists who, he claims, refused to do manual labor when economic need arose. He does so by making

⁵⁷ Carlos Monsiváis offered the opposite characterization of his family’s show in our 1990 interview, maintaining that when he and his brothers were drafted to work in military industries during the early 1940s, he had a difficult time of it precisely because he had never worked in anything but art.

reference both to a sense of class identity and a normative masculinity. In other words, class, status, and gender divide the ethnic Mexican collectivity and its regional and cultural history.

In addition to explicitly invoking these identities, Mr. García takes them into account when relating the lives of other performers. For example, when he mentions his aunts and uncles who formed Trío Hermanos González, a dance troupe that arrived in San Antonio in the teens, he wonders aloud about the propriety of mentioning them and those associated with them.

Los agentes ...que traían
a estos artistas,
no sé
si será propio,
o será ... un honor,
o no sé el mencionar
esas personas
que trajeron
a estos artistas
que en esa época
era ... una cosa muy ... novedosa.

The agents ... who brought
these artists,
I don't know
if it's for me
or if it's ... an honor,
or I don't know to mention
those people
who brought
these artists
which in those days
was ... something pretty ... novel. ⁵⁸

In fact, he does not mention the names of the agents who brought his aunts and uncles to San Antonio. Further on, once again in relation to the Trío Hermanos González, he entertains the possibility that these relatives of his might not want him to mention them.

Bueno.
Todo esto eh
No sé [clears throat]
si muchos de ... estos artistas

O.K.
All this eh
I don't know [clears throat]
if many of ... these artists

⁵⁸ PH90-8-1:1

querrán que yo los pronuncie ellos
los anuncie o los diga le— ... es
decir relate algo de ellos.

Pero yo creo que no
hay ningún ... conveniente porque
... no decir
porque son mis propios ...
familiares
que son
mi tía Michaela la mamá de Pedro
González-González
y mi madre
Teresa González de García
que es er—era hermana
de mi tía Michaela
la mamá de Pedro González-
González.

would want me to make
pronouncements about them to
announce them or say the— ...
that is to say to tell something
about them.

But I think that there's
no ... reason not ... to say it

because they're my own ... relatives

who are
my aunt Michaela the mother of
Pedro González-González
and my mother
Teresa González de García
who is— was the sister
of my aunt Michaela
the mother of Pedro González-
González.⁵⁹

In the end, however, the family tie is judged sufficient justification for mentioning the González side of the family. Why should this reflection be necessary? In the summer of 1997, I interviewed Pedro González-González, Mr. García's cousin, who was also a comedian and who made a career in the 1950s and 1960s playing supporting roles in Hollywood Westerns. In interviews with me, Mr. González spoke disparagingly of the Garcías and the Carpa García, asserting that it was only a neighborhood *carpa* and that it did not deserve the attention that larger circuses like the Carpa Cubana did. He identified himself and his side of the family as *artistas de teatro*, repeating without prompting many of the kinds of statements that other theater performers had made about this distinction in earlier interviews. Some of this is likely a response to the attention received by the Carpa García during the *movimiento* days, which caused confusion and jealousy among many of

⁵⁹ PH90-8-1:1

the performers who identified with the theater. In this narrative, then, internal cleavages within the mexicana/o collectivity intersect with a politics of ethnographic representation, forcing Mr. García to make political choices as he relates his narrated self to family and community. It is in the narrative portion of his *reporte* where he explicitly reflects on the authority and legitimacy of his recollections, and on his right to relate them.

List as Autotopography.

All of the narrative section has served, in effect, to contextualize Mr. García's career as a comedian. But when Mr. García reaches the subject of his own career, narrative quickly gives way to the list, which leads to a mode of telling and knowing past that I call reverie. I take reverie to be a synchronic, emotionally laden apprehension of a past understood as a synchronic "moment." In the groups following his initial announcement of intent to sing, Mr. García tells relatively few stories of any particular experiences he had as a comedian, and he does not limit himself either to his own work or to work itself. Instead, he portrays the wild, glamorous years of his early adulthood through a series of song performances. When these begin, they take center stage, as it were, moving the *reporte* away from narrative and towards the list and reverie. The work of distinguishing these performances from the discourse around them and rendering them as more or less coherent wholes in themselves, that is, the work of entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990:73), draws both speaker and listener's attention to the songs as things. The questions of narrative authority and legitimacy mentioned earlier turn away from events and toward the authentication and ownership of the song texts themselves. Mr. García's assertions of authorship, together with his already-established association with the San Antonio theater scene, anchor the performances and their author in historical concreteness, in "an act of authentication, akin to the art or antique dealer's authentication

of an object by tracing its provenance” (Bauman 1992:137). In their particularity and detail, these songs stand metonymically for the early 1940s in southern Texas and for Mr. García's youth, forming less of a narrative than a collection. Unified not by topic or genre, but by a sense of time and place, this recollection moves easily from the song parodies Mr. García claims to have sung in the *carpa* to those he claims not to have sung in the *carpa*, to serious songs his brother composed, to the popular songs on which the parodies were based, and back again.

In this, the collection of song texts, which also includes a narrative joke, becomes what Jennifer González has called an “autotopography.” González, defines an autotopography as a “syntagmatic array of physical signs in a spatial representation of identity” (1997:133). Although her work is focused on displays of material objects such as Mexican American home altars, many of her arguments apply to Mr. García's tape, in which a collection of objectified stretches of discourse, like the heirlooms, photographs, and souvenirs González describes, serve as prostheses of memory, “props” which “maintain the structure of this mental architecture” (1997:135). Note, however, that the autotopographical element in Mr. García's *reporte* is not limited to the section in which the song performances occur. Indeed, as I have shown, the diachronic time of narrative and the synchronic time of the list coexist uneasily in what I have called the text's narrative section. In that section, it is possible to speak of a series of autotopographical lists embedded in a narrative matrix. As I will show, the process of re-collecting song performances reverses this organization. Once the songs begin, the autotopographical list becomes the matrix in which small narratives are embedded. In this process, the order of the songs and other discourse units comes uncoupled from the narrative time of past events, becoming a function of the act of remembering itself. It is probably for this reason that Mr. García begins to stop and start the recorder repeatedly in the second half

of the tape. Before the switch to demonstration performances, no tape stops occur. In the song performance section however, Mr. García's focus on remembering the parodies accurately displaces what seems to have been a previous need to keep talking and fill the tape with discourse. In many cases, it is clear that he has stopped the tape and rewound to judge his singing for himself. The exact time frame over which the parodies were recorded in this first 1990 tape is unclear to me. It could stretch over days, or it could encompass a single evening. In any case, the switch to the list as an ordering framework creates a new recording situation in which the act of remembering is paramount.

If an autotopography is a “syntagmatic” array of signs, then the logical question to ask is what exactly the syntax of that array is. In the second section of Mr. García’s *reporte*, the song performances are always bracketed by clear pre-announcements (Levinson 1989:349) and an evaluation. Here I adapt Levinson’s concept of the pre-announcement to a non-conversational mode of speaking. For this reason, the sequence of turns and positions he describes (350) does not apply. Nevertheless, statements that Mr. García makes before and after song performances are quite regular, and there is clearly something about the change from speaking to singing that demands the metacommunicative smoothing that the announcements and comments provide. In general, the pre-announcements are longer than the post-comments. Most of the pre-announcements follow a common sequence:

- 1) Announcement of intention to sing a parody.
- 2) Information about the parody, its authorship, its title, the title of the original song, some words from the original song, and sometimes information about the venues in which the parodies were performed, and sometimes about events to which the parodies refer.

- 3) Final transitional words such as “Bueno” (“O.K.”), “Dice así” (“It goes like this,”), “a ver,” (“Let’s see”), and “a ver como sale” (“Let’s see how it comes out”).⁶⁰

The evaluations are often limited to a few statements about the quality of the performance (“well, that one came out a little low”) or the state of Mr. García’s memory, and they frequently contain the hedge “algo así por el estilo” (“something like that”). All of the parodies are preceded by a pre-announcement and followed by an evaluation. In some cases, more retrospective comments and other memories follow the evaluation before the next pre-announcement occurs.

The song performances themselves framed as demonstrations of past performances, as doings “of a tasklike activity out of its usual functional context in order to allow someone who is not the performer to obtain a close picture of the doing of the activity” (Goffman 1974:66). As such, they iconically represent the original performances and index both the performer’s artistic ability and the original performance context. Goffman has noted that the demonstration or documentary key imposes a certain limit on the “dissociation between the action documented and the document itself” (70). In other words, a person who performs a reprehensible or stigmatized action as a demonstration can sometimes be held responsible for the activity being demonstrated. This is particularly true when one is demonstrating one’s own past performances, and at several points in his re-collection of his parodies, Mr. García hedges performances that

⁶⁰Mexicana/o musicians often use these verbal formulae before musical performances in northern Mexico and southern Texas.

might be deemed too *colorado* (“dirty”) and even engages in overt self-censorship, as in the following example of repair in a copla⁶¹ from the final parody, “El Cateto.”

E:ntre melón y— no, hombre, no. Ése ‘ta muy choteada.	Between melon and— no way, man, no. That one’s real vulgar. ⁶²
Las mujeres y los gatos [clicks tongue] Son igual de condición, Que faltando carne en casa, Salen a buscar ratones.	Women and cats [clicks tongue] Are in the same condition. If they don’t get meat at home, They go out to look for rats. ⁶³

But hedging occurs more often in the comments surrounding the performances. As I have mentioned before, detailed commentary on a song tends to form part of the pre-announcement rather than the evaluation in the re-collection section. One exception to this rule is his performance of “Chencha,” a parody of the *bolero* “Desvelo de amor,” which is followed by an extensive discussion of the song’s propriety and the venues for which it was appropriate.

These demonstration performances convert the *reporte* into what Bakhtin might call an internally dialogized hybrid utterance. By juxtaposing verbal commentary with verbal artifacts, Mr. García creates a “dialogue of social forces perceived not only in their static co-existence, but also as a dialogue of different times, epochs and days, a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born” (Bakhtin 1981:365). In this active mixture, the

⁶¹A copla is a rhymed, four-line octosyllabic verse common in vernacular poetry throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

⁶²The word “choteada” means that the copla is an example of *choteo*, or ribald sexual wordplay.

⁶³PH90-8-1:1. The copla Mr. García started to recite is one of many that begin with this formula. One example goes as follows: Entre Melón y Melambes/ mataron a un pajarito./ Melón se comió la colita./ Y tú Melambes el... (“Melon and Youlickmy/ killed a bird in between them./ Melon ate its little tail,/ And Youlickmy...”).

demonstration performances show a capacity to “shape and permeate the narrative” beyond their “own formal boundaries” (Bauman 1992:134). Their very presence forces the discourse in which they are embedded to anticipate them and comment on their passing in the sequences described above. They color the commentary by bringing back memories of past events and popular culture, adding weight and specificity to the narrative. The commentary, in turn, contextualizes and explicates the content of the artifact performances themselves. The overall effect of the taped narrative is to create an active dialogue in which past verbal artifact engages present narrativized memory in a process of mutual traditionalization and contextualization.

From *Relajo* to Reverie

In the Spring of 1997, as I was making preparations for a series of interviews with performers I had not yet contacted, I visited Mr. García, and he gave me a third tape with a single recorded side. The beginning of the recorded portion of that side catches him in the middle of a word as he introduces himself.

—los que ‘tán presentes	—those who are present here
y que están oyendo	and are listening
mi nombre ... de actor cómico ...	my name ... as a comedian ...
don Fito	don Fito
que salía en el escenario ... a	who came out on stage ... to
cantar parodias	sing parodies
decir chistes	tell jokes
bailar: ... danzones	dance ... danzones
bailar tangos	dance tangos
en fin	in the end
esa era mi especialidad	that was my specialty
pero lo hacía de chiste	but I did it as a joke
pa’ que se rieran los chamacos	so that the kids, the boys, the
los niños las niñas porque	girls would laugh because

yo era un actor cómico que
nunca usé un mal vocabulario.
en un escenario.⁶⁴

I was a comedian who
never used a bad vocabulary.
on any stage.

Of course, I had heard all this from Mr. García before, and he knew that. The information seems intended for the benefit of the absent tape-recorder-audience, which Mr. García explicitly hails in the plural as if it were immediately present. He begins by narrating briefly the carpa's arrival in Corpus Christi in the early 1940s, describing its successful stay there, and claiming that while smaller than those three-ring circuses like the Ringling Brothers, his family's tent seated twice as many people as any theater in town at the time. He then announces his intention to sing a song and introduces it, much as he had introduced his parodies on the earlier tapes.

La primera canción que voy a a... cantar es ... una canción de Agustín Lara.	The first song I'm going to to... sing is ... a song by Agustín Lara.
Estas canciones de Agustín Lara las arremedaba	These songs by Agustín Lara, I used to spoof them.
Era nomás un relajo él que hacía. No cantaba como Agustín Lara pero Hacía payasadas y me dejaba caer en el suelo y luego me levantaba con la corbata pa'rriba y la gente se reía y todo eso y los niños se reían y eso lo que más me importaba	It was just a <i>relajo</i> what I was doing. I didn't sing like Agustín Lara but I clowned around and I let myself fall on the ground and then I would drag myself up with my tie pointing up and the people laughed and all that and the kids laughed and that [was] what mattered to me

⁶⁴ From tape RGSOLO4.12.97-1:1

most.⁶⁵

But rather than singing a parody after this introduction, Mr. García uses a second tape recorder to play a recording of Agustín Lara's "Escarcha" ["Frost"] (1991[1960]), and sings in unison with Lara, imitating the singer's brooding, tubercular voice. After the end of this song, more music of Lara plays, and Mr. García continues singing along in this fashion until the end of his own blank tape, not stopping the tape, and not offering further comments, stories, or explanations. The effect is something like karaoke, but unlike karaoke enthusiasts, who perform to specially recorded versions of songs with the vocal parts cut out, Mr. García superimposed his own voice over Lara's, which is frequently, if not always, audible on the resulting recording. Furthermore, during instrumental breaks in the songs, he improvised what he alternately calls "*tonterías*" ("silliness"), "*un vacilón*" ("a romp"), and most often, "*relajo*."

Although recorded in apparent isolation, Mr. García's *relajo* addresses both the researcher and the tape recorder audience while juxtaposing various voices. Spoken over the musical background of Lara's songs, it takes the form of a series of conversations among four characters, each of which Mr. García represents by altering his voice. Sometimes these conversations play off song lyrics, but more often, they seem relatively independent of the content of the songs. The most frequently heard voice is a grating, nasal falsetto, which usually seems to be a woman, as in the following example, which was performed over an instrumental break in "Escarcha."

Woman: Mira Joe.

Look Joe.

⁶⁵ ibid.

Este que está cantando es mi esposo Joe.	This guy who's singing is my husband Joe.
Te voy a presentar a mi esposo.	I'm going to introduce you to my husband.
Mira viejito.	Look, honey.
Este se llama Joe.	This guy's name is Joe.
Salúdale Joe. ⁶⁶	Say 'hello' to him Joe.

With remarkable succinctness, these statements re-frame Lara's studio-recorded music, originally addressed to no one in particular, as a "live" nightclub performance. When the female character refers to the singer in the third person as "este" ("this guy") while talking to someone she calls Joe, then address the singer directly as "viejito," she establishes a story-world in which she is a spectator watching a show, along with a man named Joe, and claims romantic involvement with both him and the singer. In later exchanges, and in later tapes made in the same vein, the woman becomes more aggressive, as in this example, performed over "Rival."

RG&AL: (sing)	No quiero que te vayas. Me duele que te alejes...	I don't want you to go. It hurts me that you withdraw.
"Woman":	¿Le duele?	It hurts?
AL:	No quiero que me dejes [I don't want you to leave [
RG: (sings)	—ro que me dejes	—ant you to leave
RG&AL:	que ya no vuelvas más.	For you never to return.
[instrumental break begins]		
"Woman:"	¿Le duele? No me gusta. Mira Joe. Este es mi viejo Joe.	It hurts him? No I like it. Look Joe. This is my old man Joe.

⁶⁶ From tape RGSOLO4.12.97-1:1

A mí me gusta que se peleen por mí Joe. Peléate con mi viejo Joe. ⁶⁷	I like it when they fight over me Joe. Fight with my old man Joe.
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------

In most of her comments, the female character tries to provoke a fight between the singer and “Joe.”

For his part, Joe, the only named character in the relajo, speaks in a voice higher in pitch than Mr. García’s natural voice but lower than that of the female character, and nasalized and velarized in such a way that the character’s words are difficult to understand. His speech seldom initiates an exchange, appearing rather as a response to another character. Often, he sounds drunk and reacts to the woman’s attempts to make him jealous with submissive statements like, “A pos qué bien canta tu viejo” (“Oh, why how well your old man sings”). A second male voice also appears, speaking in low, courtly tones that resemble Mr. García’s imitation of Agustín Lara’s singing voice and seems to be a composite of Lara and Mr. García’s own narrated self. In a typical exchange between these two characters, during an instrumental break in “María bonita” (Lara 1991 [1953b]), the Lara/García character uses formulae associated with politeness and collegiality to insult Joe.

Joe:	(?)tu ruca ¿No quiere un trago de wine?	(?) your old lady Don’t you want a drink of wine?
RG : “Lara Voice”	Oh hermano del alma Yo no tomo babas hermano del alma.	Oh, brother of my soul I don’t drink drool, brother of my soul.

⁶⁷ From tape RGSOLO5.2.2000-1:2. Although this example does not come from the same tape with which I began my discussion of Mr. García’s relajo, it is representative of examples of relajo found on that tape and two others.

	Y báñate porque hueles mucho a chivo.	And take a bath because you smell like a goat [i.e. cuckold].
Joe:	(Hey ‘ora verás. Me voy a) bañar. ⁶⁸	(Hey, you’ll see. I’m gonna) take a bath.

True to form, Joe does not respond in kind to the singer’s insults, and the apparent love triangle between him, the woman, and the singer never comes to blows or reaches any kind of resolution. Rather than developing a narrative, the *relajo* unfolds in a series of vignettes in the interstices of Lara’s songs, each time introducing new variations (or repeating old variations) on the themes of the treacherous, vain woman who enjoys provoking two men to fight over her, the pliant, abject fool who allows himself to be cuckolded, and an aggressive, patrician man who upbraids the cuckold for his failings.

At some points in the 1997 tape and in later tapes, another nasal voice appears; although it appears to be male, it resembles the voice of the female character. In some cases, the voice addresses the female character, as in the following example.

Man:	Me hacías de chivo los tamales. mujer (insorrruta.) Nomás miras un bato y se te caen los cal:cetines. ⁷⁰	You made my tamales from goat meat [i.e. cheated on me]. (dissolute) woman. ⁶⁹ You just see some guy and down come your ... socks.
-------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In this last line of this example, Mr. García implies a double entendre typical of carpa humor by elongating the “l” in “calcetines” (“socks”), leading the listener familiar with this type of humor to expect the word “calzones” (“panties”). At no point in any of Mr. Garcías tapes does the woman answer back to challenges like this. Sometimes the male

⁶⁸ From tape RGSOLO5.4.2000-1:2

⁶⁹ I am not certain of this translation of “insorrruta.” It may be a transcription error.

⁷⁰ From tape RG5.4.2000-1:1. This is not the tape under discussion, but it is an example of the sort of *relajo* that Mr. García did on tapes he gave to me between 1997 and 2000.

nasal voice appears as a *pachuco* type. His interventions are short, confined to comments like, “¡Nel ese! Présteme su tizón pa’ encender mi cañon mono” (“No way, man! Gimme your torch [i.e. match] to light by cannon [i.e. cigarette], dude”), a phrase Mr. García has often repeated to me in interviews as an example of *pachuco* speech. It is the *pachuco* whose speech ends the only recorded side of the April 1997 tape. After a brief “Nel ese,” there is a tape stop; then the tape starts again briefly with something unintelligible and then abruptly ends.

A Return to Narrative.

Thus far, we have seen Mr. García’s autobiographical recordings progress from family-centered narrative, to list-like collections of demonstration performances, to karaoke-like *relajo*. With the tapes of 1997 and 1999, Mr. García seemed to be continuing in the movement away from narrative that he began in the first 1990 tape when he started singing parodies. But then on May 4, 2000, he surprised me with a new recording that filled both sides of two ninety-minute tapes, in which narrative returned with a vengeance. At the time, I had reached the point of being unsure of what more to ask Mr. García about his past. As our interviews had begun to seem more and more repetitive, I had started taking my minidisk recorder to our meetings less and less. Although we were meeting weekly for lunch at Luby’s, we had not recorded an interview in months. On this day, however, Mr. García seemed anxious to tell me about things he had not talked about before, and after our usual lunch meeting, we had a recorded conversation of over two hours in which considerable new ‘information’ came to light.

When I listened to the solo tapes he gave me that day, I found that between stretches of live/mediated *relajo*, he had already recorded many of the stories he told me during the interview. Unlike the narrative portion of the first 1990 tape, which focused on Mr. García's family and its history, the stories in the 2000 tapes, although they retain some of this family orientation, are all about personal experience. Furthermore, the sense of hesitation with, and discomfort with the act of narration that he seemed to show in the 1990 tape disappears in the 2000 tapes.

The stories on the latest tape each stand alone and are clearly marked off from one another by metanarration, pre- and post-sequences, and other transitional comments. At the same time, they form an overarching narrative that begins with incidents from Mr. García's childhood in the 1920s, moves on to the beginnings of his work as a comedian in San Antonio, dwells on his days as the *carpa*'s headlining comedian in 1941 and 1942 (including his marriage in Kingsville), and ends by describing the end of the *carpa*, and a few aspects of his later life in San Antonio. When performances of song parodies and karaoke-style singing of songs by Agustín Lara occur, at least in the first of the two tapes given to me on May 4, 2002, they serve as examples to illustrate this narrative and are themselves surrounded by extensive, detailed stories about memorable occasions on which he performed them. As always, Mr. García frames his stories as responses to elicitation by co-present interlocutors whose voices are not audible on the tape. One of these is referred to in the singular as a "cólega," almost certainly a reference to me. The other is the tape-recorder audience, which makes its appearance after a discussion of Mr. García's retirement.

Bueno... Este ... que están oyendo lo que estoy platicando. Quieren que platicue algo de la carpa. Más de la carpa. Ya les platicué todo eso.	All right ... This ... (um) who are listening to what I'm talking about. (You) Want me to say something about the carpa. More about the carpa. I already told them (you?) about all that.
Pero aun quieren oír más.	But they (you?) still want to hear more.
Bueno... Voy a platicarles.	All right... I'm going to tell them (you?). ⁷¹

The pronouns in this passage are somewhat ambiguous and present a problem. A long pause follows the “este” in the first line, and the plural verb in the following line could be interpreted as repair of that singular pronoun, which would suggest that the tape-recorder audience is being referred to in the third person in what follows. But if this is the case, it is not clear who Mr. García is talking to. Alternately, “este” could be interpreted as a place-holding word and the occurrences of “les” as second-person references to the tape-recorder audience. In either case, it is clear that the audience is longer content to play the role of passive addressee; instead it has taken its place alongside the researcher who has been its broker and elicits narrative on its own. Here the fetish character of the tape recorder is fully realized. This episode of metanarration is also the first time that Mr. García acknowledges redundancy in his recordings. Although the passage could be interpreted as indicating that he is beginning to tire of being asked about the *carpa*, it is more likely an example of the sort of devices that storytellers use to move their audiences

⁷¹ RG5.04.2000-1:2

to ask them to continue speaking. In any case, Mr. García continues for the rest of side B of the first tape and through two sides of another.

The first story on the tape is one that Mr. García had frequently told me during interviews and during our lunches at Luby's, of an incident that occurred when he was around ten years old, while his father, don Manuel García, was working for the Carpa Modelo, which belonged to the Mijares family of San Antonio.⁷² As the story goes, during a stop in the Dallas area, Mr. García asked to be put to work selling bags of peanuts to members of the audience during the show. Nobody would buy his peanuts however, and he becomes frustrated. Noting that he was having little luck selling peanuts, Candelario, the show's saxophone player, took him aside and offered, in exchange for a bag, to tell him a secret that will help him. At this point in the recorded version, Mr. García begins to explain how doña Tomasita Mijares didn't mind if he took a bag or two for himself and becomes so focused on this issue that he must eventually resort to metanarration to restore the narrative line and reach the heart of the story.

Bueno la cuestión que
Me di— le dije “Bueno a ver
“¿en que forma?
“A ver ¿como?
Dice “Bueno mira.
“Vas a vender cacahuates.
 Comienza
‘Cacahuate:s
‘ca::cacahuates. ¿Quién quiere
 comprar cacahuates?”
Y si ves que nadie te hace caso

O.K. the thing is that
He said—I asked him “O.K.
 let's see
“in what way?
“Let's see. How?”
He says “O.K. look.
“You're going to sell
 peanuts. Start out
‘Peanu:ts
‘pe::anuts. Who wants to
 buy peanuts?”
And if you see that nobody

⁷² Jesusa (“Susie”) Mijares Astol, who performed with the Carpa Modelo, the Carpa Cubana, and later in San Antonio's Spanish-language theaters and on radio, is doña Tomasita's granddaughter.

entonces dices

‘Cacahuates pa’ hacer **pus**
‘cacahuate::s pa’ cargar la
batería.’”

Y que comienza toda la palomilla a
reírse
ya unos con otros y todo.

Por supuesto que la gente sabía que
yo no sabía lo que estaba
hablando.⁷³

pays any attention to
you then you say

‘Peanuts to make **pus**
‘Peanu::ts to charge your
battery.’”

And all the *palomilla* starts
laughing
with each other and
everything.

Of course the people knew I
didn’t know what I was
talking about.

With this pitch, the peanuts started selling wildly, and, elated by his success, Mr. García continued shouting it out. Soon the audience wasn’t even paying attention to the show, but some people, especially women with children, were quite offended. Angered, don Manuel ordered one of the show’s *mozos* (workers) to fetch him, but when the *mozo* arrived to summon Mr. García, the boy replied, “O no. Dile a mi ‘apá que estoy muy apurado. Ando vendiendo cacahuates” (“Oh, no tell my father I’m real busy. I’m selling peanuts”). In Mr. García’s words, “hice yo un payaso yo ahí sin...sin...sin decir que iba a ser payaso ni nada” (“I played a clown there without... without... without saying I was going to be a clown or anything”).

When the *mozo* returned to the don Manuel with this news, the latter shouted, “¡Sácame lo en rastra al carbrón!” (“Drag the bastard here!”), and finally, two *mozos* managed to convince Mr. García to leave the tent to see his father, amid the audience’s laughter. Although don Manuel was angry at having been defied and at the disruption of

⁷³ From tape RGSOLO5.4.2000-1:2. The cry seems to be a reference to a belief that peanuts lead to copious production of semen in men.

the show, the situation amused him nevertheless. Trying not to laugh himself, he rebuked his son harshly.

‘...pendejo’ me dijo
‘¿Por qué anda ... diciendo
‘esa pendejada?’ dijo. ‘Cállese la
boca porque a la otra
‘que lo...oiga hablar que diga eso le
voy a dar una cachetada bien
dada.
‘No:’ dije ‘no pos ya no digo.
No:’ digo.

‘..idiot’ he told me
‘Why are you ... saying
‘that stupid crap?’ he said. ‘Shut up
because the next time
‘I hear you talking and saying that
I’m gonna give you a good
licking.’
‘No:’ I said ‘no well I won’t say it
anymore. No:’ I said.

It was only through the intercession of the indulgent doña Tomasita that the true source of the vulgar sales pitch came to light. Laughing in spite of herself, she warned Mr. García not to say such bad words, and there ends the story with no word on the fate of Candelario. At this point, in a sort of coda, Mr. García positions the story in respect to his larger narrative, stating, “Ya me venía a mí eso de cómico. Pero en primer lugar, nacimos y somos criados... en el circo” (“This comedían thing was already coming at me. But in the first place, we are born and raised in the circus”).

The next story also deals with a performance of sorts, but not such a benign or voluntary one. After making a transition by describing the closing of the Carpa Modelo and his father’s striking out as an independent entrepreneur, Mr. García seeks to cushion the blow of what is to come by highlighting its accuracy.

En esa época
ya estaba mas grandecito.
No recuerdo ... la fecha ni el año.

Pero lo que voy a contar
es nada mas que la pura verdad.
No: estoy exagerando.

In those days
I was a little older
I don’t remember ... the date or
the year

But what I’m going to tell
is nothing but the pure truth.
I: am not exaggerating.

No estoy
Pero eso ...Eran
aventuras que le pasan a uno.

I am not
But that ... those were
adventures that happen to a
person.

The adventure in question is an incident that took place while don Manuel was driving to Houston with doña Teresa, the young Mr. García, and Manolo to meet the rest of the show, which was headed to Houston by train. Stopping at a gas station in a small town, they aroused the curiosity of the station's owner.

Dijo "He:y hombre" dijo
"Where you goin'?"
Le dijo mi apá. "Vamos pa— pa"
Houston."
Dijo "O:" dijo
"A— Allá no hay pizca hombre"
dijo.
"Yo tengo aquí
"un amigo que 'tá necesitando
gente" dice "Oh you no going
nowhere. You goin' with my
friend to pickin' cotton."
Y le'ijo mi apá eh le'ijo "No" 'ijo
"pos yo no:

"Yo no:
"Yo no ando buscando pizca" dijo.

"Yo: ... tengo un circo que ahorita
"ya está ahí ... llegando
"a Houston. Ya ahorita 'tán
poniendo todo ya porque ya
nomás están esperando que
llegue yo
"para abrir el circo."
"Circo" [tose] Y comenzó a reírse
de mi 'apá.
A burlarse.
"A:h" dijo "bullshit what you
talkin'?" dijo.

He said 'He:y man" he said

My Dad told him. "We're going
to— to Houston."
He said "O:h" he said
"The— There ain't no harvest there
man" he said.
"I got here
"a friend who's needin' folks" he
says [English follows.]

And my father told him my father
told him "No" he said "well I'm
no:t
"I'm no:t
"I'm not looking for any harvest"
he said.
"I've ...got a circus that right now
"ought to be there ... arriving
"in Houston. Right now they're
putting up everything already
because now they're just
waiting for me to get there.
"to open the circus."
"Circus" [coughs] And he started
to laugh at my Dad.
To make fun of him.
"A:h" he said "bullshit what you
talkin'?" he said.

“You goin” pickin cotton” dijo “I’ve got”.	[English]
“Plenty packin” “pickin’ cotton for you.”	[English] [English]

Perhaps conscious of a potential “Anglo” listenership, Mr. García insists that the gas station owner was not “Americano” but a Pole or German. In his descriptions of the men, however, he uses the term *bolillo*, one of many words that place the English-speaking Euro-American in contrast with the *mexicana/o*. Furthermore, he repeatedly describes in grotesque detail their indulgence in a habit that ethnic Mexican observers of the “Anglo-American” in Texas have found particularly repulsive since the mid-nineteenth century at least.

Y se le salían las babas al otro bolillo chinga—	And fu—the other white guy was drooling.
Andaban ... tragando ...este ... chewing gum.	They were ... swallowing ... um ... chewing gum.
Bueno no era chewing gum. Era snuff.	Well it wasn’t chewing gum. It was snuff.
Eso que se meten aquí debajo de los labios.	That stuff they put here underneath their lips.
O sea y arriba de los labios se ponen así unos pedacitos que parecen cagada [se ríe.]	That is and above the lips you put them like this some pieces [of it] that look like shit. [laughs.]
I’m sorry what I’m saying but I’m trying to explain myself.	[English]
Uh ... so ... I have to talk Spanish and English because I forgot some words.	[English]
No me dijo él que “Go ahead” me dijo.	No he said “Go ahead” he said to me.
“Habla en español o habla lo— en lo que quieras...hablar.”	“Speak in Spanish or speak wha—in whatever you want.”
“En español también te lo	“I understand you in Spanish

entiendo.”	too.”
Dije “Bueno.”	I said “O.K.”
La cuestión que	The thing is that
De buena suerte que me ‘apá había	Luckily my Dad had already put
echado gasolina. Si no ni eso le	gasoline in. If he hadn’t they
venden.	wouldn’t even sell him that.

Here, Mr. García paints his portrait of the *bolillos* through a series of conversational self-repairs, beginning with an inaccurate description, then correcting it, and finally explaining the phenomenon, as if to someone unfamiliar with the habit in question. This approach emphasizes the alien quality of the practice, making it appear to be something that at first resists description entirely. It might seem that the use of the word “cagada” (“shit”), which occasions a second instance of self-repair is the result of the narrator’s becoming so enthusiastic in his description that he loses a sense of restraint. It is worth noting however, that this same explanation of just what snuff is and how it looks like “cagada” occurs at a very similar point in a version of this story that Mr. García told me during an interview on the day he gave me the solo tape. At that point, he did not apologize, partly because the phrase made both of us laugh, thus reducing the need. On the solo tape, however, in the absence of a co-present interlocutor, Mr. García switches to English in a highly marked way to apologize for his use of tabooed language. Note, however, that he does not stop the tape, erase the offending words, and start again. Although it might be tempting to assume that the switch to English is for the benefit a non-mexicana/o audience, it is worth noting that Mr. García often uses English to communicate with his grandchildren. Having broken the established frame of language-choice, in which Spanish was the narrative matrix language, with English used primarily

for direct quotation, he finds himself compelled to comment on his choice of language itself, evoking the authority of the researcher, referred to only as “él” (“he”). Along with the switch to English and the apology, then, there is a corresponding shift of the indexical ground of Mr. García’s speech from the narrated event to the narrative event, of which the absent interlocutors are explicitly a part.

As seems to be his custom, Mr. García uses the phrase “la cuestión que” above to restore the narrative line, but following the foray into metanarration, an important detail goes missing from the solo recorded version of the story. In the interview version, after a similar apology for a different use of tabooed language, Mr. García states that the *bolillo* put his foot on the crank of don Manuel’s model T to keep him from starting the car. This is an aggressive move, and it raises the level of dramatic tension in the story, creating a challenge that don Manuel must answer. In both versions, don Manuel’s answer to the *bolillo*’s challenge is a counter-challenge.

Y luego..	And then
dijo mi apá	my Dad said
ya que vió le 'ijo “Bueno”	once he say him he said “Well”
dijo “Ent—”	he said “So—”
Les dijo a ellos le 'ijo...Le dijo	He said to them he said ... He said
“¿Entonces es decir	“So you’re saying
“no me van a dejar ir. Me van a	“you’re not going to let me go.
detener aquí como si fuera yo	You’re going to hold me here
un criminal o	like I was a criminal or
“o ... que robé algo?” le dijo.	or ... like I stole something?” he said.

In the interview version, don Manuel threatens to call the Sheriff’s department in Houston. In both versions, the *bolillo* gives in. In the solo-recorded version, Mr. García describes this action by saying “se hizo para un lado el mendigo. Y le dio cranque mi apá

y se subió a la troca y nos, nos, nos fuimos” (“the bastard moved to one side. And my Dad cranked the truck and climbed in and we, we, we left.”) This statement seems to imply that the *bolillo* was blocking the car, but no explicit mention of such an action is made, and the story does not clarify the reason why don Manuel stays to talk with the man at all. In the interview version, the man lifts his foot from the crank, and the family leaves. It seems, then, that in the solo version, after focusing on retrospectively hedging his tabooed language, Mr. García briefly loses a degree of focus on the story itself.

He makes no corresponding apology, however, when he continues the story, stating that when his family stopped for lunch about a mile away from the gas station, he and Manolo went out playing with “n***** shooters.”⁷⁴ The concern for tabooed language, in other words, applies only to sexual and scatological terms and not to racial slurs, a small irony in this story of racial injustice. Armed with their slingshots, the two brothers make their way back to the gas station to buy candy. Although Mr. García is reluctant to patronize the place because of the poor treatment the family had received there, Manolo insists that everything will be all right, that all will be forgotten. When the two boys arrive at the gas station, however, the drooling, tobacco-chewing *bolillos* react according to type, saying “We don’t serve no Mexicans over here.” When the two brothers ignore this affront and politely ask to buy candy, the men at the store remember them.

Y luego dijo el otro [then the other guy said] “You know what?”
“These ... these... the one that say they got a show business.

⁷⁴ This is a synonym for “slingshot” that is common in Texas, at least among non African-Americans of Mr. García’s generation.

“Come let make this son-of-a-bitch ... dance over here.”
Y luego dijo [And then he said] “He:y
“You better dance over here ‘cause that man got the **pistola**.
“He gonna get the **pistola**.
“And **shoot you**.

At first, Mr. García defies the men, while Manolo cautions him to be reasonable and dance. Then, the *bolillo* ends the controversy.

Y le apretó al gatillo al pistolón que traía.	And he pressed on the trigger of that big pistol he had.
Ya nomás le abrió el gatillo.	He just opened the trigger.
“O yes.” [sings the melody to “El jarabe tapatío”]	
Trararatarara.Tarara... [laughs]	
Comenzamos a bailar yo y mi hermano ahí.	My brother and I start to dance there.
Nomás...e...nomás un ratito y nos ... fuimos corriendo.	Just ... eh ... just a little while and we ... ran away.
Salimos corriendo de allí.	We ran out of there.

Enraged and humiliated, Mr. García expresses his desire to get their father’s pistol and go back to settle the score with the men. Manolo, however, warns him not to tell their father and mother what had happened, for fear of what their father might do to the men:

“los va a patalear. No necesitas ...	“he’s going to beat them up. You don’t need
“No necesita la pistola mi apá.	“My papá doesn’t need a pistol.
“Con plena mano los patalea a los dos.” Dijo asi.	“With his bare hands he’ll beat them both up.” That’s what he said.

So when asked where they had been all that time, the brothers tell their *papás* they were just out fishing and leave it at that. As the García family moves on to Houston, the hearer is at least left with the consolation that don Manuel is an entrepreneur, not a laborer, and that he could have defeated the cowardly *bolillos* even without his pistol in his hand.

With a pistol, he would have killed them like dogs, “porque [because]… that’s what they are; goddamn dogs.” Although the story is not a surprising depiction of race relations in the small Texas towns that the carpas passed through, the fact that it did not appear in interviews or solo recordings until ten years after my first contact with Mr. García is significant. The metanarration at the beginning of the story underscores Mr. García’s apparent concern that “Anglo” listeners—or perhaps even an “Anglo” ethnographer—who had not experienced southern Texas’ era of segregation might find the story offensive or unbelievable. There may be much more that has been left out for the same reason, or for others.

More revelations continue in the next story on the solo tape, which describes the beginning of Mr. García’s career as a comedian. Mr. García seems to be responding in his monologues at least partly his relatives’ responses to the recognition he has received since he was “noticed” by the Chicano Movement. When I have met other members of his family, I have often heard stories about how Mr. García wasn’t “really” the “star” of the show. These stories describe how as a child, Mr. García rebelled against his parents’ discipline and refused to participate fully in the show. Unlike his brothers and sisters, all of whom were performing on stage by age three and all of whom had to learn at least four specialized acrobatic acts in addition to singing, dancing, and acting, Mr. García confined himself to acting in the occasional sketch and helping in the raising and daily maintenance of the tent. If anyone was the “star” of the show for most of its life, these relatives invariably tell me, it was the multi-talented Manolo. In the 1990 monologue, we shall recall, Mr. García makes few explicit narrative comments about his career, moving

into demonstration performances of song parodies, and also making a few mysterious comments like “Yo … por razones equis-equis no trabajé aquí” (“I … for xx reasons didn’t work here [in San Antonio].” In the May, 2000 recording, he finally speaks denotatively of his own career, and in doing so, brings his own self-narrative more or less into line with his relatives’ narratives. After a discussion of Mr. García’s start as a comedian, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, the story moves on to the *carpa*’s arrival in Corpus Christi. With this, the monologue arrives at the peak of Mr. García’s career as a comedian. In spite of his lack of formal preparation, something about his onstage persona appeals to audiences, and his family keeps him on. The name “Don Fito” is attributed to Manolo.

After briefly describing his act, Mr. García sings a parody of the corrido “El hijo desobediente” (“The disobedient son”) and describes the social conditions to which the parody refers, something we will examine in more detail in a later chapter. There follows a brief episode of *relajo* to a the music of Agustín Lara (including “María bonita” and “Amor de mis amores”), followed by a pre-sequence introducing “Chencha,” Mr. García’s parody of “Desvelo de amor.” In the 1990 recording, Mr. García had maintained that he never sang this parody in the carpa at all because it was too vulgar. In interviews, however, he described singing it in the carpa during a visit to a small South Texas town in which there happened to live a woman named Inocencia who was widely known as “Chencha.” In the 2000 recording, after introducing the parody with a brief abstract of this story, Mr. García sings it, this time ending not with “llorar” (“to cry”) but with “ca::ntar” (“to sing,” elongated)and follows this double entendre with a spoken

interjection in a nasal voice, “Pa’ que no haya una mala interpretación.” (“So there won’t be a bad interpretation”). The “bad interpretation,” of course, would be interpreting the initial syllable of “cantar” (“to sing”) as the beginning of the word “cagar” (“to shit”). The day after he sang this song in the carpa, the story goes, Mr. García went to the store and met a man from the town who asked him, “Dispense la pregunta … ¿Usted es Fito?” (“Pardon the question … Are you Fito?”). Mr. García responded, “Sí señor muy a la orden” (“Yes sir, at your service”), and the man proceeded to explain that there was a woman named Chencha in the town and that everybody in the audience was laughing and wondering how Mr. García knew her. Mr. García responded

“Lo que pasa” le ‘ije “este que.
“Yo canto parodias” le ‘ije.
“Yo no, yo no conozco a nadien
 aquí en el pueblo.
“Yo no sabía que a esa muchacha
“le decían Chencha” le ‘ije.
“Si he sabido y si mi madre sabe

“no me deja que cante esa canción”
 le dije yo.
“Porque ella no quiere que use un
 mal vocabulario en el escenario.
“Principalmente porque van … niños
“y… se ríen con los chistes que digo.
 Con las payasadas que hago.
 Que me resbaló y me caigo.”

“The thing is” um I said “that
“I sing parodies” I told him.
“I don’t , I don’t know anybody here in
 town.
“I didn’t know that that girl
“was called Chencha” I told him.
“If I have known and if my mother
 knows
“she won’t let me sing that song” I told
 him.
“Becuase she doesn’t want me to use a
 bad vocabulary on stage.
“Mainly because … kids go there
“and … they laugh at the jokes I tell. At
 my clowning around. When I slip
 and fall.”

Here, the narrated Rodolfo García of the 1940s describes his act to his audience member in terms that closely follow those used by the narrating Rodolfo García of the year 2000 for the benefit of the tape-recorder audience. Although Mr. García may well have said something very much like this to people in the town, it is clear that he mentions having

done so because he wishes to communicate the message to the tape-recorder audience.

Formulae developed to make a point about the past, in other words, are made to emanate from that past, in an attempt to reinforce the original point and also in an attempt to diminish the potential threat represented by the double entendres in the parody. In the story, the man from the town protests, saying Mr. García should not worry, that everybody in the town knows everyone else, and then proceeds to describe how Chencha's friends and family made fun of her after the carpa show. This occasions another such disclaimer from Mr. García. Right in the middle of this disclaimer, however, the recording stops and starts again.

“Esas parodias yo las canto nomás
en los night clubs” le ‘ije.

Y no porque vaya a tra—
[PARADA]

Pasemos a la parte número dos.
Parte número dos.

La conversación de “Chencha.”
[PARADA]

Le quité muchas cosas nomás le
deje ciertas cosas.
Dijo “No qué barbaridad” dice

“Those parodies I just sing them in night
clubs” I told him.

And not because I’m going to wo—
[TAPE STOP]

Let’s move on to part two.
Part two.

The conversation about “Chencha.”
[TAPE STOP]

I took out lots of things I just left certain
things in.
He said “Wow that’s wild” he said.

These breaks in the continuity of the recording lead to some ambiguity. The pre-sequence between the two tape stops appears to have been recorded over part of the story, possibly by mistake. It is unclear, however, whether the speech that follows is a continuation of the speech that preceded the first tape stop or whether it is something recorded over that earlier speech. The interruption also makes the frame of the sentence immediately following the second tape stop unclear. It is very possibly a quotation, something that Mr. García was saying to the man from the town in the conversation about

“Chencha”—that he took some things out of the parody and only left certain things in. However, it could be interpreted as non-quoted speech, as a metanarrative comment on the recording itself, explaining the tape stops as markers of an act of excision of something that was later deemed unfit for inclusion in the recording. In any case, the end of the first side of the tape interrupts the narrative once again.

The story about “Chencha” continues at the beginning of the first tape’s second side, beginning almost in mid-sentence with Mr. García speaking once again to someone in the town.

“No creas que yo sea mamas boy
“que yo tenga que estoy vacilando
diciendo que tengo que decirle a
mi madre” le ‘ije pero
“Mi madre no quiere que use
un vocabulario malo en el
escenario.

“Don’t think I’m a mama’s boy
“that what I have that I’m just playing
saying that I have to tell my mother”
I told him “but
“my mother doesn’t want me to use
“a bad vocabulary on stage.”

Mr. García advised the townspeople to go to the carpa and explain to his mother that the song offended nobody. When he performed that night in the tent, the audience was impatient with jokes; everyone wanted to hear “Chencha,” and the song was a huge success when he finally did sing it. The day after the performance, the story goes, Mr. García went out into the town again, and this time, Chencha’s brother came and introduced him to the namesake of the absent beloved in his song who, as it turned out, was in the audience of the carpa the previous night. He also related how several dances were postponed the previous night because so many people in the town were curious about the song. Chencha itself was quite serious during this introduction, but in the end, she told Mr. García that she had told his mother not to worry, that no offense was taken.

With this, the story ends, somewhat abruptly. Mr. García summarizes it simply by saying “son...podría yo decirle ...este...casualidades que suceden” (“those are...I could say...um...coincidences that happen.”)

After this summary, Mr. García moves on to a pre-sequence for another episode of relajo. In doing so, he describes singing in nightclubs, but maintains that he did so only for recreation. He would go a nightclub to drink a beer or two—only one or two, he assures the audience—and people he met there who recognized him from the *carpa* would invite him to sing. It was here, he claims, that some of his more raunchy parodies found their usual outlet. He is adamant in maintaining that he never contracted himself out to work in nightclubs, because his family had its own independent business. After this introduction, he moves into the relajo, after which he sings “El hijo desobediente” and follows it with another story, this time about children who had seen him in the carpa approaching him on the street. There follows the story of his marriage in Kingsville and the audience’s reaction to that event.

Pos esa noche que trabajé
pos toda la gente me miraba y

unos a los otros se decían
“Sí es cierto hombre. Sí se casó
hombre.”
“A mi me dijeron que se había ido a
casar. Los casó el juez.”

Y que quien sabe qué.
Ya ni me acuerdo como se llamaba
el juez.
Hasta que ... no remedio

les dije en el escenario ahí.

Well that night when I worked
well all the people were watching
me and
some were saying to the others
“Yes it’s true man. He did get
married man.”
“They told me that he’d gone to
get married. The judge
married them.”
And who knows what.
I don’t even remember the
judge’s name.
Until ... there was nothing else to
do.
I told them on the stage there.

“Me da mucho gusto el estar aquí con ustedes y haber tenido la dicha y el gran placer de contraer matrimonio en este bonito pueblo de Kingsville” dije

“La ... esposa mía es “de la familia de los Navarro de Premont Texas.”

U: comenzaron a gritar la palomilla le ... las ... señoritas aplaudieron y después venían a felicitarme.

Venían a hablarle que “¿'Onde estaba don Fito?” Querían saludarle.

Y decían muchas muchachas “Pos ya no va a ser igual hombre.”

“Ya no vamos a gritarle a Fito cuando salía.

“Y nada de eso pos 'ora “ya es casado ya no nos va a hacer caso.”

Y no yo les decía “No no tengan cuidado yo como quiera yo les hablo de muy buena voluntad” le dije.

“Y las quiero como si fueran “todas mis hermanas “hermanos.”

“I am pleased to be here with you and to have had the joy and great pleasure of contracting matrimony in this lovely town of Kingsville” I said.

“My ... wife is “of the Navarro family of Premont Texas.”

Oo:h the guys started to shout the ... the ... ladies applauded and later came to congratulate me.

They came to see me saying “Where was don Fito?” They wanted to say hello to him.

And many young women said “Well it won't be the same as before man.”

“We aren't going to yell at Fito when he came out anymore.

“And none of that why now “he's married and he won't pay attention to us anymore.”

And I told them “No don't worry I'll still talk to you with the very best of intentions” I said.

“And I love you as if you were “all my sisters “brothers.”

By telling this story, Mr. García was, among other things, able to integrate the “milestone” of his marriage into a story about his comedy, thus including the event in his monologue without explicitly discussing its end or even mentioning his former wife's full name. Furthermore, by having the unmarried women, addressed as sisters once they were no longer potential wives, allude to shouting at him when he came out on stage, Mr. García placed in the voices of others a suggestion that there was more to his show than

mere family entertainment for children. Indeed, here he gives a sense of the *carpa* that is closer to the carnivalesque image that many authors have painted of it than his own stated concerns for “family” entertainment might sometimes suggest.

In particular, the story places Mr. García’s onstage persona, the personification of the penniless lumpenproletarian underdog, in a relation of difference to the world of home, family, and propriety. This difference, which is manifested in the emerging distinction between don Fito the onstage persona and Rodolfo García the man on the street, structures all the stories on the first and the second tape of the May 2000 recording that describe Mr. García’s career as a comedian in deep South Texas during World War II. These stories focus not on his actions on stage but on his interactions with audience members outside the *carpa*. The motif of the encounter with townspeople who suddenly recognize him as the man who was telling jokes and singing parodies on stage, which we first saw in the story about “Chencha” recurs frequently. In one story, little kids come up to Mr. García, arguing about whether it was he that was on stage the previous night. In another he goes to church, and when a group of women who had been in the *carpa* see him there, they begin to laugh. After several minutes of this, the priest sends a member of the congregation to take Mr. García outside and ask what he is doing to the women. Mr. García suggests that the women are probably remembering his performance of the previous night, explains his family’s business, and offers to do a benefit performance for the church. In many stories, nightclub patrons recognize Mr. García there and ask him to sing one of his parodies. He demurs, saying he would perform without charging a cent but that he worries that he will interfere with the ongoing floorshow. The men get

permission from the nightclub owner, who recognizes the name of the Carpa García, and Mr. García sings his parodies, leading to a shower of free beers that, of course, he cannot drink because of his strict limit. All of these stories hinge on a shock of recognition between performer and audience outside the ordinary performance setting. While the townspeople are shocked to see the comedian on the street in ordinary clothes, the comedian is himself somewhat shocked by his sudden notoriety. In the stories, Mr. García plays a Jekyll to don Fito's Hyde, treating his admirers with the utmost respect, deference, and generosity. Nevertheless, what attracts these admirers is not the polite Rodolfo García but the uncanny double whose memory his appearance conjures up, and this memory disrupts the normal routines of daily life far outside the boundaries of the *carpa*.

Having described these incidents, Mr. García's narrative itself returns to the realm of the quotidian and the domestic. As his mother's health fails, the show is forced to stop touring, and the family relocates to San Antonio where some work in one way, others in another. Although Mr. García devotes considerable attention to his own occupational history, he does not mention his subsequent family life. Unlike fairy tales and other stories structured around the “Quest” sequence, Mr. García's autobiography does not end in a marriage. If there is a liquidation of lack at the story's end, it is brought not by some union but by the institutions of the Fordist truce between labor and capital, which Mr. García sees as having benefited him greatly.

estoy retirado y retardado.
I'm retired ... and retarded.
Las dos cosas.

I'm retired and retarded
[English]
Both things.

Y ahí duré
hasta estos momentos.
Yo estoy ahorita ...disfrutando
de un bue— buen retirement
Estoy recibiendo mi buen
retirement
mi seguro social
Y ahora
bendito sea Dios
ahora no trabajo en nada

Y estoy ganando el doble que
cuando estaba trabajando.

De manera que gracias ... a
Dios
Y a las bendiciones de mi
madre
hice una ...carrera
entré a trabajar de ... de
janitor.
Pero ah ... al tiempo me
pusieron de ...
mayordomo.
‘tuve encargado de todos los
janitors
del City Hall.
Y luego entró mi hermano a
trabajar
Y también
hizo una buena carrera
Él era supervisor
Y yo era mayordomo.
de la cual
‘tamos disfrutando
de un buen retirement.

And there I lasted
up to these moments
I'm ...enjoying right now
a good retirement.
I'm receiving my good
retirement
my social security
and now
blessed be God
now I don't work in
anything
and I'm earning double
what I earned when I
was working.

So in that way thanks ... to
God
and to my mother's
blessings
I made a career
I started working as ... as
a janitor
But uh ... after a time they
made me a foreman.

I was in charge of all the
janitors
of City Hall.
And then my brother came
to work
and he also
made a good career.
He was a supervisor
and I was a foreman.
for which
we are enjoying
a good retirement

And this would be the end, were it not for the intervention of the tape recorder audience,
who, as we have seen earlier, wants to hear more about the *carpa*. Obligingly, Mr.
García continues, but having come to the end of his story, he does not seek to construct a

new overarching chronological framework. What follows his meta-narrative comment, from the final minutes of the first cassette all though the second, is once again a collection of vignettes: stories, song performances, contextualizing comments, and episodes of *relajo*. At one point, the subject of Mr. García's retirement comes up again.

Bueno	Well
Voy a seguir platicando	I'm going to keep talking
Ahora ya	This time
del cincuenta ... para acá	about 1950 ... up to now
cuando entré a la ciudad	when I went to work for the city
E:sto que voy a platicar [se ríe]	Thi:s thing I'm going to talk about [laughs]
Lo voy a platicar	I'm going to tell about it
Y la gente ... no lo va ... a creer.	And the people ... aren't going ... to believe it.
Yo no sé ... por qué ... forma ... o	I don't know ... in what ... way ... or
cuál	what
era ... el destino ya:	my ... destiny was by the:n.
Entré a trabajar de mayordomo	I went to work as a foreman
[PARADA]	[TAPE STOP]

But a stop in the tape interrupts the narration, and the audience never learns what the unbelievable story was going to be. Only the metanarrative pre-sequence remains, frustrating the audience with its lost promise and its reminder that custodial workers see everything. But here I may be saying too much.

The final minutes of side B of the first cassette return to the mid 1940s and to the Coastal Bend area, beginning with a demonstration of the way the carpa was announced. A demonstration performance of “Noche redonda” and a description of Mr. García’s stage act follow. He then begins to wind down, announcing his intention to continue remembering more at a later date, God willing. As he begins to recite a list of all the

things that the life of a traveling show is full of—adventures, disappointments, triumphs—the thought of disappointments leads him to the story of his first daughter.

Estábamos en un pueblito
llamado Benavides.
Ahí pusimos la carpa.
Trabajamos una semana.
Y ...ya ... iba a ser la última
semana.
Y mi hija ... que era la mayor

la que ... me había dado Dios.
La primera hija ... que Dios me
había dado
comenzó a estar mala y cuando
llegamos a ese pueblo pos ya
no resistió mi hija.
Le complicaron muchas
la tos ferina.
Los dientes
Y en fin
Naturalmente que
La llevé con el doctor y todo y
dijo...el doctor
dijo se le han complicado muchas
cosas a esta niña.
[la grabación acelera] Ya tenía
como 6 o 8 meses.
[PARADA]
[velocidad normal] En Benavides
Texas.
A:y Diosito de mi vida.
El viernes...murió.
Vino el doctor la examinó: y todo.

El Jueves
Porque el viernes ...la ...
enterramos en ese pueblito
de... Benavides Texas.
Nunca se me olvida. Nunca ...
mientras que yo viva.
Siempre me recuerda

We were in a little town
called Benavides.
There we put up the carpa.
We worked for a week.
And it was already going to be the
last week.
And my daughter who was the oldest
one
that God had given me
The first daughter that God had given
me
started to get sick and when we got to
that town well she couldn't hold
up any longer my daughter.
Many [things] went wrong with her
whooping cough.
Her teeth
And in the end
Naturally
I took her to the doctor and
everything and the doctor ... said
he said a lot of things have gone
wrong with this girl.
[tape speeds up.] She was already six
or eight weeks old. [TAPE STOP]

[normal speed] In Benavides Texas.

A:y Lord of my life.
On Friday ... she died.
The doctor came to examine her and
everything.
On Thursday.
Because on Friday ... we ... buried
her in that little town of ...
Benavides Texas.
I will never forget. Never ... while I
live.
I will always remember

mi hija que era la mayor
de todos mis hijos.
Pero Dios quiso ... recogerla
y nadien puede ... ante Dios.

Esa fue otra de mis ... des:—
desenlaces.
Esa fue otra tristeza en mí.
Y luego el sábado

teníamos que trabajar.
Mi padre y mi madre no querían
que trabajara.
Me dijeron “No usted no tiene
que trabajar. Usted
“descanse y...y...este...
“resistiendo lo que Dios mande y
se acabó.
Pero... yo no me sentía a gusto.
Dije... “me siento más
“mal de estar aquí solo
“que estar ahí
“haciendo chistes y
“que se ría la gente cuando a mí”
Cada chiste que decía
Cada que la gente ... se reían.
Yo sentía un dolor muy grande
dentro de mi alma.
Esa es otra aventura
que le pasa a un hombre
a un carpero.
La plática ... aventuras de un
carpero.

my daughter who was the oldest
of all my children.
But God wished to take her up
and nobody can do a thing ... before
God.
That was another one of my ... con—
conclusions.
that was another sadness in me.
And then on Saturday we had to
work.
My father and my mother
didn't want me to work.

They told me “No you don't have to
work. You
“rest and ... and ... uh
“enduring what God commands and
it's over.”
But ... I didn't feel right.
I said ... “I feel worse
“about being here by myself
“than about being out there
“telling jokes and
“having the people laugh at me.”
Every joke I told
every time the crowd ... they laughed
I felt a very great pain inside my soul.

That's another adventure.
that happens to a man
to a carpero.
The talk ... adventures of a carpero.

Once again, the contrast between don Fito the onstage persona and Rodolfo García the private man appears, but this time it emerges from an incident that is hard to reconcile with the romantic image of a troupe of touring vaudevillians. This daughter, whom Mr. García never names on the tape, is the only one of his five children to appear in any of his monologues.

Reverie, Relajo, and Recording

Clearly, Mr. García's autobiographical tapes, recorded over a period of ten years, offer a complex dialogue of modes of representing the past. One of the more challenging is the karaoke-like *relajo*. This term is difficult to translate into English and is likely to be unknown to Spanish speakers unfamiliar with greater Mexico. In different contexts, it can encapsulate such divergent senses as “play,” “spoof,” “disorder,” “insult,” and “fun.” The verbal performance that Mr. García calls a *relajo* shows many of the characteristics attributed to that form by the Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla; indeed the correspondence is so close as to warrant a brief discussion of Portilla, who is poorly known in the U.S. Published posthumously in 1966, Portilla's *Fenomenología del relajo* is framed in explicitly dialectical and existentialist terms. Although the book is situated within the twentieth century tradition of philosophical studies of Mexican national character, its most explicit references are to continental and classical philosophy. Sartre and Kirkegaard figure prominently among the author's inspirations. Indeed, because Portilla's essay is so “universal” in its sweep, it is sometimes difficult to remember that he is explicating and elaborating terms from Mexican vernacular speech.

Portilla begins by distinguishing between two character types, the *relajiente* (“practitioner of *relajo*”) and the *apretado* (“tense, tight person”). Where the former is gregarious, community-oriented, and takes nothing seriously, the latter is individualistic and serious. The *apretado* represents normative rules and values in all their restrictive force, while the *relajiente* represents disorder and resistance. For Portilla, the famous comedian Cantinflas, who achieved fame by playing the type of character also

represented by Mr. García's onstage persona, epitomized the latter type. Portilla argues that “*relajientes* and *apretados* constitute two poles of dissolution of the Mexican community, of an authentic community and not one of a society divided into property owners and dispossessed” (1986:95, translation mine). *Relajo* itself is defined as a communal communicative action that takes place in groups of three or more people. Portilla distinguishes it from other forms of verbal art, such as *choteo* (“verbal dueling”), which he sees as competitive where the *relajo* is collaborative. Sarcasm, too, differs from the *relajo* because in his view it expresses negativity towards a person and paralyzes social action, while the *relajo* is constituted in an interactional nexus of action and is directed against an abstract ideal or its embodiment. The *relajo* often involves humor, but it is not always funny, and cannot be subsumed under humor. As an example, Portilla describes a long, exaggerated groan from a wag in a movie-theater audience during the screening of a film of Shakespeare's Julius Ceasar, in reaction to the tragic death of Cassius. By lampooning the expected response to the incident, the groan places the high-minded values of tragedy in an ironic light. Thus, the *relajo* is a communal communicative act expressing negation of some absolute social value or moral imperative.⁷⁵

Through this negation, Portilla argues, the *relajo* makes a gesture toward freedom, with freedom understood as a subject's relation of authorship to his or her actions. It is an attempt by a subject to establish itself as the locus of causality and responsibility for events. But, Portilla concludes, *relajo* falls short of such freedom and only succeeds in

⁷⁵ cf. Díaz-Barriga 1997:50-51 for an insightful discussion and critique of Portilla.

being the mirror opposite of the value it negates. Although similar to irony, the *relajo* as interpreted by Portilla lacks irony's progressive, synthesizing tendency. The *relajo*, in Portilla's words, has no future and cannot foresee one; from a dialectical perspective it is a dead end. Although his account of Mexican social life is less elitist and more critical of class domination than those of, say, Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos, Portilla's conclusion echoes these earlier accounts by finding a fundamental inadequacy at the heart of Mexican national character. Portilla's theory of *relajo* has been compared to Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque (Broyles-González 1994:28), but it has more in common with that author's discussions of parody, hybrid utterances, and heteroglossia. In particular, Portilla does not share Bakhtin's Utopian optimism with respect to the vernacular culture of disorder; nor does he emphasize the grotesque image of the body. Furthermore, for Portilla, the *relajo* represents the dispossessed subject's frustrated aspiration towards mastery and completeness, while for Bakhtin, popular-festive humor revels in its own relativity and incompleteness. As my analysis of Mr. García's *relajo* will show, both Portilla's absolute pessimism and Bakhtin's absolute optimism may be unrealistic.

The karaoke-like *relajo* mode of Mr. García's 1997 tape recurs in later recordings. During my later fieldwork in 1999 and 2000, Mr. García gave me three more tapes (two 90-minute cassettes with one side recorded and one with two sides recorded) dominated by this device. Indeed, there was considerable repetition of the jokes that occurred in the 1997 tape. A final recording on two tapes, which he gave me in May of 2000, contained a mixture of narrative and song performance, interspersed with a few short episodes of

singing and speaking to Lara's recordings. The prominence of this technique in Mr. García's recordings demands attention and analysis, but such analysis is complicated by the fact that in the spoofs, Mr. García has moved almost entirely away from a denotationally explicit mode of representing the past and into a mode that foregrounds the indexical density of popular song. His *relajo*, in other words, derives its effect from popular song's ability to bring back a rush of associations with particular events, settings, and people. The problem, of course, is that the associations of any given person with any given song are individual and impossible to communicate fully. When I listened to the first of these recordings "cold," I felt oddly voyeuristic, as if I were eavesdropping on an inscrutable dream in progress that belonged to someone else. For all of Mr. García's explicit references to the tape recorder audience, his recordings that incorporate the music of Agustín Lara seem partly to have abandoned the goal of making a statement that some audience could experience as "understandable in itself" (Benjamin 1968:175). If the singing of parodies in the earlier tapes leads to a sort of reverie, the live/mediated *relajo* in the later ones moves even deeper into that kind of synchronic, feelingful engagement with the past. The *relajo* obviously means something, perhaps many things, but those meanings are half hidden, teasing and frustrating the listener who hopes to extract "information" from the recordings.

Nevertheless, Mr. García did not abandon the idea of communication entirely in making these recordings. Indeed, sometimes he went out of his way to explain their meanings to me, and our conversations in and out of interviews have shed considerable light on the *relajo*. As we were talking about "*Noche redonda*," his parody of Lara's

“*Noche de ronda*,” in our first interview, it became clear to him that I had no idea who Lara was. Groping for a way to explain the singer’s significance, he described him as a “poeta” (“poet”) and then hunted for an analogy, asking me if I knew of any poets. Unsure of whom to name, I turned the question back, and after failing to remember the name of an African American singer who he thought would make a good comparison, Mr. García finally hit on the name of Johnny Cash. He added, however, that Lara was a greater artist than Cash because he composed all of his own songs. Characterizing Lara as a “poeta enamorado” (“lovelorn poet”), he mentioned that the composer had dedicated the song “*María bonita*” to the film idol María Félix, who was then Lara’s wife. Finally, Mr. García drew an analogy between himself and Lara, noting that like the composer’s songs his own parodies “están relacionadas con lo mismo, con una mujer” (“are all related to the same thing, a woman.”)⁷⁶ In this early interview, then, Mr. García made explicit the identification with Agustín Lara that he would later perform in the *relajo* tapes.

In the intervening years, I have found out more about Agustín Lara. Known as “el flaco de oro” (“the Golden Beanpole”), Lara began his career as a pianist in the brothels and cabarets of Mexico City. During Mr. García’s youth, in the 1930s and 1940s, Lara was the most celebrated and successful of Mexican popular songwriters. Paradoxically enough, his highly public persona was established in part through a program called “*La hora íntima*” (“The intimate hour”) on XEW, Mexico City’s first radio station. As Mr. García told me in the interview, this persona was that of the

⁷⁶ From PH90-1-1:2. Side A.

lovelorn poet. What Mr. García did not make clear, in part because of the somewhat infelicitous comparison to Johnny Cash, which appears to have been a half-successful attempt to accommodate my ignorance, was that Lara also projected the image of the dissolute urban bohemian. He scandalized Mexico by writing love songs in praise of prostitutes, echoing Baudelaire. According to critic Carlos Monsiváis, Lara's image embodied

the double flowing of Mexican romanticism, the delight in marginality (the bohemian life) and the rejection of the surrounding vulgarity ... on the other [hand], it expresses radically new melodic and literary tastes to the extent that they arrive in another way to another public and contain the preferences of the growing cities (1984:31, translation mine).

Lara's mass appeal lay both in his embodiment of this romantic ideal and in the fact that his well-publicized defects—poor health, a scarred face, an unusually thin frame, poor luck in love, drug problems—captured for his audience the general sense of having defects, of possessing particularities that distinguish one from an ideal. Monsiváis has argued convincingly that Lara's songs deify women using a language associated with the *modernista* poetry of the nineteenth century, vulgarizing this formerly elite register by bringing it to a new mass audience (28). As feminist critic Alaíde Foppa has noted, Lara's music participates in a long tradition of Western poetry that either condemns women for frustrating the hopes of male lovers or places them on a pedestal as idealized, impersonal, almost inanimate objects of desire (1993:137). Although these accounts offer valuable analysis and information, they tell us relatively little about what consumers have done with Lara's music, especially in its various mediated forms.

In Mr. García's recordings, that mediated music is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides an accompaniment, making singing more comfortable, and a sense of connection to the past that the songs represent. On the other hand, the slick studio recording imposes a high, mechanized standard on the performance, an external model whose perfection is difficult to match (Keil 1994:253). When Lara's voice is audible, it is hard not to compare his singing to Mr. García's. Moments when the latter has to cough and spit, or when he gets the words to a song "wrong" stand out like sore thumbs. But Lara's recorded voice is more than an external standard in Mr. García's tapes. It is also a symbolic resource that, once recontextualized, acquires many layers of significance. In the first place, there is the established, explicitly announced frame in which the recordings are the background of the *relajo*, itself framed as a demonstration of something that would have happened in the *carpa*. Within this frame, Lara becomes the *apretado* to Mr. García's *relajiente*. The conversations among Mr. García's characters clearly show the seamy side of love, its aggression, jealousy, and the quest for selfish gratification and petty mastery that so often lies behind flowery phrases like those of Lara's songs. Emerging from the shadows of Lara's refined masculinity, Don Fito appears rough, aggressive, and brutally honest. If, as Monsiváis has argued, the *canción romántica* "masks a hard and voracious system that suppresses woman and only conceives of her ethereally" (1984:26), then Mr. García's parodies and *relajo* unmask that system. Although they fall short of a critique of the masculinist preconceptions of the *canción*, they do expose its contradictions and explore the disappointments that accompany consumer society's promise of happiness through sexual

love (Buck-Morss 1989:188). That said, it is worth noting that there is as much homage as negation in Mr. García's *relajo*. His admiration for Lara and everything the singer stands for is genuine and unwavering. His *relajo*, then, is not a dialectical negation of the values of the *canción romántica*, and it does not achieve or seek a "higher" synthesis. Rather, it offers a dissonant, unfinished juxtaposition of the two contradictory sides of the ideal of romantic love represented by Lara's songs.

As I have stated earlier, Mr. García uses the *relajo* to project his own identity onto the figure of Agustín Lara. It is worth noting, however, that the identifications with Lara are multiple. In part, the recorded songs substitute for, and pay homage to, the piano playing of Mr. García's older brother Manolo. As we learned in the previous chapter, Manolo was the *carpa*'s original comedian; Mr. García himself began working as a comedian only when the show lost its pianist, forcing Manolo to take over the role of musician full-time. Mr. García has often recalled, both in interviews and his solo tapes, that Manolo played and sang Lara's songs well. But Lara is not simply a stand-in for Manolo; he also stands, in complicated ways, for Mr. García himself.

One night in February of 1999, as I was driving him back home after we had visited his sister Esther, Mr. García explained to me that the recurring scenario in the *relajo*, in which a woman tells the man she is with that the singer is her husband, is partly a reference to María Félix, Agustín Lara, and Jorge Negrete, a film star who married Félix some years after she and Lara were divorced. At the same time, he told me, it is a reference to an incident in his own life, in which he saw his former wife in a public place with another man, and she introduced him to the man as her husband in spite of their

having been divorced for some thirty years. Although he claimed that she did this out of insanity, not malice, he nevertheless made it clear that being called “husband” after so many years of official separation offended him deeply. The *relajo* puts those words into the mouth of a character that represents a composite of his ex-wife and María Félix. In one of his later spoofs on the song “María bonita,” a nasal male voice harshly mocks Félix for her infidelity.

Me hacías de chivo los tamales	You made my tamales out of goat meat.
Nomás miras un bato y comenzabas a resbalarte toda Comenzabas a chiflarte.	You just look at some guy and you'd start getting all slippery You'd start to make an ass of yourself
Por eso le decían María la ... manguera María la calculadora María la computadora ⁷⁷	That's why they called you María the ... hose María the calculator María the computer

Here, of course, the syllables “puta” in “computadora” imply the Spanish word for prostitute. Both soliloquies like this and vignettes of conversation between different voices are built around an implied analogy in which Mr. García is to Lara as his ex-wife is to Félix and his ex-wife’s lover is to Jorge Negrete (“Joe”). However, as the *relajo* zeroes in on the issue of female infidelity, it ignores the conventional wisdom that Lara himself was less than a paragon of faithfulness in his early marriages. This “fact” is peripheral to the themes of the wronged ex-husband’s bitter resentment towards his ex-wife and his wish for vindication and masculine dignity. The fact that Mr. García continued to record *relajo* tapes revolving around this scenario through the year 2000—

⁷⁷ From tape RGSOLO5.04.2000-2:2

three years after he gave me the first one—shows how compelling these themes were for him.

However, there is more in the tapes than the simple fulfillment of a private wish. By directing his *relajo* at a tape recorder audience and projecting aspects of his own personal life onto the publicly accessible love lives of celebrities, Mr. García was also meditating on the paradox of mass positivity and self-abstraction that underlies the relationships of subjects in consumer society to the mass media. This action shows the lie in Monsiváis's glib remark that the *canción romántica* sought “to express (to forge) for the public those emotions that that public had no time to imagine for itself” (1984:29). Like the readers of gossip columns and tabloids, Mr. García was not projecting mass-mediated emotions internally but recontextualizing the iconic figures of Lara, Félix, and Negrete as covert, prosthetic symbols of his own personal trauma. In doing so, he sought to address the desire, near-universal in consumer society, to see one's own desires recognized and ratified through public display, to have one's wants and choices witnessed by a collective consumer (Warner 1992:386). I suspect that it was precisely this desire that led Mr. García to seek to explain the symbolism in his *relajo* to me. Although he was reluctant to speak explicitly of his relationship with his former wife in interviews or in the narrative sections of his solo recordings, the trauma of their separation returned nevertheless in those sections of the recordings that moved away from transparent reference.

In some of the later *relajo* tapes, Mr. García incorporates incidents from daily life into the routines, thus bringing commentary on the present into his representation of the

past. During a *relajo* section of a tape recorded in May of 2000, for example, his female character makes the following statement over Lara's "Farolito."

Woman:	Ah que jijo 'e la chin— Ya te pesqué desgracia'o. Tú comiendo fried chicken y yo muriéndome de hambre en la casa desgracia'o.	Ah what a sonofa— I caught you this time bastard. You eating fried chicken and me dying of hunger in the house bastard.
	'Ora veras ^{n.} ⁷⁸	This time you'll see.

This statement turns out to be partly a play on the song's lyrics. Like Mr. García's *relajo* "Farolito" centers on a piece of creative deixis that establishes the song as the lament of a male lover endlessly and fruitlessly knocking on the door of his beloved.

Farolito que alumbras apenas mi calle desierta	Little street lamp that barely illuminates my deserted street
¿Cuántas noches me viste llorando llamar a su puerta?	How many nights have you seen me in tears calling at her door?
Sin llevarle más que una canción, un pedazo de mi corazón, sin llevarle más nada que un beso, friolento y travieso, amargo y dulzón.	Without out bringing her more than a song, A piece of my heart, Without bringing her more than a kiss, chilly and mischievous, bitter and sweet (Lara 1991:1953a, translation mine).

In a later, similar *relajo*, Mr. García's "Joe" voice answers the woman, stating, "Pos te traigo una canción. No te traje fried chicken pero te traje una canción" ("Well I bring you a song. I didn't bring you fried chicken but I brought you a song"). After a brief

⁷⁸ From tape RGSOLO5.04.2000-1:1

exchange, the woman replies, “Sí pero no, me tienes sin tragar dos semanas. Puras canciones me trae” (“Yeah but you’ve got me without a thing to eat for two weeks. All you bring me are songs.”) Where in Lara’s song the beloved woman is present only as the referent of the pronouns “su” and “le” Mr. García reverses the song’s perspective and gives her voice, reducing to absurdity the romantic image of the penniless lover.

These words come not from Mr. García’s ex-wife but to a former co-worker’s current wife. In the months before giving me this tape, Mr. García had repeatedly complained to me about this woman, claiming that she seldom let her husband go out to eat with him at the nearby Luby’s Cafeteria out of jealous suspicion that the man was going there to meet other women. Those times that he did manage to take the man out, he claimed, the woman called the poor fellow at the restaurant, just so the staff would have to announce on the loudspeaker, “Mr. ___, you have a telephone call from your **wife.**” Several times, Mr. García mentioned an incident in which she had come and shouted the accusations reproduced in the above quote, which he believes to be false, at her husband in the middle of Luby’s. As in his *carpa* routines, Mr. García took incidents from daily life and re-worked them according to established comic formulae in making his autobiographical recordings. In this excerpt, as always, the stereotype of the treacherous woman, which seems to have figured prominently in his comedy even before his divorce, serves both as a foil for his narrated self and as a device for making sense of those aspects of his life that are too personal and traumatic to narrate openly. His attempts to speak in her voice may be seen as an attempt to contain and master that trauma through imitation.

Conclusion?

Some years ago, I hammered out and published an analysis of Mr. García’s 1990 recording, in which I suggested that the recording as an autobiographical statement was most fruitful when it abandoned narrative altogether, in favor of the picaresque genres of speech that were its author’s specialty as a performer (Haney 1999b). In other words, I argued that it was precisely through such “conventionalized discursive strategies,” that human beings could “meaningfully articulate . . . life—or past giving seemingly full expression to his (her) self” (Crapanzano 1996:107). This wasn’t entirely wrong. The song parodies re-collected in Mr. García’s tapes, along with the subsequent *relajo* on Agustín Lara, were themselves the vehicles of memory, mental traces of the past that he was able to make material by singing into a machine in a way that was impossible through narrative alone. Nevertheless, seven tapes later I am forced to revise my assessment. Narrative—and narrative of personal experience, no less—did not disappear from Mr. García’s autobiographical project. It was merely a long time in coming, and there could be more to come. Mr. García’s tapes are never fully finished, of course. The possibility of adding on another story, remembering another song, or spoofing the music of Agustín Lara one more time always remains. I won’t jinx this discussion again by offering a conclusion.

Mr. García’s self-recordings are not so much autobiography as a dialogue of autobiographical and autotopographical modes of representing the self and its past. Of course, there is more to the life of an eighty-seven-year-old man than can be summarized on seven 90-minute cassettes. Mr. García chose to narrate not his life story, but that part

of his life that he wanted to be remembered for, the time in his life that, I would suggest, remains central to his sense of self. As I have demonstrated, these actions were intimate with power: both because they were thoroughly enmeshed in the asymmetries of the ethnographic encounter and because they necessarily invoked a community that suffered from asymmetries of its own. Indeed at many points in the narrative Mr. García seems to have wanted an interlocutor, someone to ask him questions and guide his process of remembering. Whatever the circumstances of the recordings, however, his decision to give the tapes to me ensured that he could make accessible to the public a record of his career that was uninterrupted by my questions. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the space constraints of a dissertation do not allow the interested reader to review the entire body of recordings. As it is, we must settle for a highly mediated version of Rodolfo García's memories

de esos días tan gloriosos tan llenos de vida que fueron para mí y pa' todos los que ... traba—los que trabajamos en el arte las aventuras las decepciones las amarguras Bueno un sínfín.	of those glorious days so full of life that were for me and for all of us who ... wor— who worked in art the adventures the disappointments the bitternesses Well any number of things. ⁷⁹
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

⁷⁹ From PH90-8-1:1.

CHAPTER 4: THE INDISCREET CHARM OF THE GREATER MEXICAN *PELADO*-COMEDIAN

Introduction

One of the most widely acknowledged characteristics of greater Mexican popular theater is its reliance on broadly drawn, larger-than-life stock characters, and of these, none is as widely discussed as the *pelado* or *peladito*, a figure that Kanellos calls “the Mexican national clown” (1987:78). Best known from the films of Mario Moreno “Cantinflas,” this figure was important for the Chicano theater of the late 1960s and early 1970s (1990:xiv) and has been justifiably celebrated in the literature on the *carpa*. Ybarra-Frausto defines the pelado as “a feisty underdog” who, as a “portavoz of group consciousness, ... assumed the role of a symbolic Chicano Everyman” (1984:51). Perhaps the most expansive characterization of the figure comes from Yolanda Broyles-González.

We can include under the heading of *peladita/peladito* such stock characters as the penniless trickster, the down-and-out Indian, the recent immigrant, the infant, the naughty child, the indigent drunkard, the naïve country bumpkin (*ranchero*), or the altar boy, all of which populate the *carpa* tradition. The performance logic of these characters pivots around their maneuvers within the larger established social order and its system of power relations (1994:36).

The *pelado*, in this view, is essentially an “underdog-trickster” related to Pepito, Pedro de Ordimalas, and the bawdy *hermitaño* of the greater Mexican *pastorela* (37), all of which symbolize the daily struggle of marginalized *mexicanas/os* to survive by their wits. My interview discussions with performers who had brought such characters to life on stage bore out much of this view but also pointed to controversy surrounding the character that

celebratory interpretations of the *pelado* have tended to overlook. To understand this controversy, it is necessary to trace a genealogy of the figure with regard to its circulation across a range of discursive media, social classes, and national groups.⁸⁰

Some sense of the controversy surrounding the *pelado* is visible in Kanellos' study, for example, which notes that Leonardo García Astol refused to use that term to describe his own "don Lalo" character, preferring to call him a "comic hobo" (1990:83), and that theater critics of San Antonio's Spanish-language press criticized the inclusion of the figure in theatrical spectacles (82-83). In my own fifty interviews with twenty individuals conducted over the course of some ten years, the terms "pelado" and "peladito" do not occur spontaneously, and Rodolfo García, whose onstage persona is frequently cited as an example of the figure (e.g. Kanellos 1987:86; Ybarra-Frausto 1984:51), refers to his character simply as "actor cómico" ("comedian"). There are two reasons for this. One is the class-based politics whose manifestation we have already seen in the San Antonio's *mexicana/o* community's hierarchy of theatrical space. The other is that the term "pelado" was not simply a "native" term in greater Mexico, if by this we mean a term coined, defined, and used exclusively by a clearly bounded group of "natives."

Although English-language newspapers in nineteenth-century Texas are not remembered for their sensitivity to the nuances of *tejana/o* culture, they seem to have had

⁸⁰ Of course, there were *peladita* figures in the *carpa* and other types of popular theater. This chapter, however, focuses on the stereotype of the marginalized male because of the symbolic weight that has been attached to him. For a discussion of these, see Ch.6.

no trouble discovering the idea of the *pelado*, which the San Antonio *Express* defined in August of 1895 as

the name given in Mexico to the densely ignorant and worthless branch of the commoner class of Mexicans. The term is scarcely synonymous with tramp or hobo, for the pelado is a more industrious creature than our own vagabond, little though that be in his favor (August 19, 1897, cited in Everett 1975).

For the *Express*'s correspondent the *pelado*, unlike the Euro-American hobo, was a family man: a neglectful, selfish, and violently abusive father and husband who alternated between beating his long-suffering common-law wife and lying around in a drunken stupor. His laziness and irresponsibility condemned his unfortunate and numerous offspring to short, dreary lives in a *jacal* "patched up of brush and flattened tin cans, and erected in any vacant lot" (*ibid.*). Although the newspaper's race- and class-bound crassness is obvious to the contemporary reader, it is not far from the spirit of many elite Mexican intellectuals and foreign travelers to Mexico and the southwestern United States, all of whom have made the impoverished mestizo male into a synecdoche for Mexican national character. Often, this evolving but always unfavorable image finds itself balanced by an ironically affectionate view of the *pelado*, and with him greater Mexico, as a sympathetic underdog. All of this suggests that if working-class *mexicanas/os* have made the *pelado* into a symbol of their everyday resistance, they have not done so in circumstances of their choosing or with material that was entirely of their own creation.

Two new historical accounts of this stereotype have made space for a more detailed and grounded appreciation of that figure's ambiguities and contradictions.

Jeffery Pilcher, in an important social biography of Cantinflas, has produced the most comprehensive genealogy available in English of the *pelado* figure, offering a sophisticated and readable synthesis of Mexican scholarship on the subject (2001). At the same time the Mexican anthropologist Ana María Prieto Hernández, in a careful study of the image of the *lépero* in nineteenth-century Mexico, provides new insights into the circulation of discourse about the marginalized urban Mexican male between national elites and foreign travel writers. Taken together, these two accounts allow us to see the *pelado* figure was the object both of tradition and diffusion. In addition to being a symbol of struggle, the *pelado* was also the product and object of a struggle over aesthetic standards that pointed to diverging analyses of social reality. Like many stereotypical figures, he has meant different things for different constituencies at different times. This chapter will examine the *pelado*'s incarnation on the mexicana/o stage of Texas by tracing genealogies both of the *pelado* itself and of the category artist who typically played him. The latter was a comedian (*cómico* or *actor cómico*) who is widely seen as the descendant of the versifying Mexican clown of the nineteenth century. Many *cómicos* were versifiers as well, and in addition to telling jokes and interacting with onstage partners, most sang parodies of popular songs. These parodies appropriated song texts that circulated in the emerging mass media and, by playing with indexical associations of generic categories, invited audiences to reflect on the class- and gender-based tensions of mid-century *mexicana/o* life in Texas in a visceral, feelingful way.

From the *lépero* to the *pelado*

In her study of elite constructions of the marginalized sectors of Mexico City's population, Prieto-Hernández notes that the term “pelado” occurs in reference to poor mestizos in official Spanish correspondence as early as 1563 (2001:269). She also maintains that many sources draw a distinction between the “*pelado*” and the “*lépero*,” applying the former term to those who are merely economically destitute, and the latter term to impoverished individuals who deserve their lot in life because of their bad moral character (265). Nevertheless, the urban poor in nineteenth-century Mexico, especially in the capital, seem to have been such a numerous group, with so little opportunity to make a living by selling their labor on a steady basis, that the “workers,” “artisans,” and “vagabonds” did not necessarily form discrete communities or clearly bounded social categories there (109). The distinction between the deserving *pelado* and the undeserving *lépero*, then, probably had less to do with social reality than with the experiences, preoccupations, and preconceptions of those who used the terms. Foreign visitors to Mexico, most of them men, were very much preoccupied with the *lépero*, and although there are some national differences among the various authors, their accounts display considerable intertextuality, making it clear that they read one another and reinforced one another’s prejudices (51). Coming largely from France, Germany, Britain, and the United States, they found in the image of the *lépero* a convenient symbol for the condition of Mexico, a country where they believed European civilization and Enlightenment values had not fully taken root. Although each commentator seems to have experienced the *léperos* as a clearly defined group, easily identified by sight, preferably from a distance, Prieto-Hernández finds the term to be “a shifting social

category, depending on the speaker, the moment, and on occasion almost the circumstances in which it is employed” (103, translation mine). Furthermore, neither “lépero” nor “pelado” seem to have been terms of self-identity. Rather, they were ascriptive categories used by individuals who believed themselves to be talking about someone else.

Prieto-Hernández argues that the prominence of the lépero stereotype in nineteenth-century representations of Mexico was a symbolic manifestation of Mexico City’s chaotic urbanization and the transition from the colonial social order based on a hierarchy of racialized types or *castas* to a nominally independent social order stratified by class and less clearly defined racial types (104). By the end of the eighteenth century, an economic boom in silver mining and agricultural exports had spurred a rapid influx of migrants from the countryside to Mexico City, swelling the capital’s population to 137,000. As many as two-thirds of these migrants were unable to find regular wage labor and were forced to live “precariously from day labor, petty commerce, begging, or criminal activities,” sleeping “in overcrowded tenements or in the streets” (Pilcher 2001:5). This group was ethnically heterogeneous, and although the former era’s web of racial distinctions based on genealogy seems to have waned in importance during this period, the stigma attached to dark skin and the association of “African” and “Indian” phenotype with poverty remained salient.

Non-Mexican travel writers, who were on speaking terms with local elites and gawking terms with the poor, found the idea of an impoverished “colored” mass disturbing, and they imbued the figure of the *lépero* with an aura of danger and pollution

because of his “mixed” racial identity. For these observers, the supposed hybridity of the marginalized Mexican male made him “the negation of virtue and nobility” (20, translation mine). In this, he was distinguished from the supposedly “pure” Indians, whose difference made them worthy of being “separated out, educated, and guided by the lights of reason and grace” (*ibid.*). In their vilification of the *lépero*, visitors to Mexico coincided with English-speaking Texans of European descent, who decried the supposed “racial mixture” of their tejano neighbors during the same period (De León 1983:22-23). Of course, the boundaries between the poor identified as indigenous and the poor who were not so identified was and permeable in nineteenth-century Mexico, where the two communities often lived side-by-side and suffered from related forms of discrimination and dispossession (Prieto-Hernández 2001:102). Nevertheless, the idea of racial mixture seems to have been key to the symbolic construct of the *lépero*, and it distinguished him in the eyes of visitors to Mexico from the proletarian and lumpenproletarian communities of their own cities (104).

The idea of racial mixture was also key to the efforts of nineteenth-century Mexican writers and intellectuals who reacted to what they saw as the distortions of foreign authors by seeking to produce favorable, sympathetic representations of national “popular types” (53), including the *lépero*. As early as 1816, Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi used linguistic forms identified with the capital’s urban poor in patriotic pamphlets, and in what is generally considered to be Mexico’s first novel, novel: *El periquillo sarniento* (“The Itching Parrot”) (Pilcher 2001:11). This work’s title character was an urban rogue typical of picaresque fiction who passed “from one master

to the next, pointing up hypocrisy while trying to find his next meal,” paired with a foppish character, Don Catrín, who was his antithesis (30). The *lépero* was also the object of semi-ethnographic *costumbrista* writers, who in short essays known as *cuadros de costumbres* sought to capture the Mexican national soul by describing the dynamics of ordinary life, often focusing on specific occupations. Although such writers as Guillermo Prieto, Manuel Payno y Flores, and others did portray the *lépero* as a rebel given to crime and vice, they also praised his quick-wits, resourcefulness, generosity, passion for life, and will to survive in terms that sometimes resonate with the much later arguments of late twentieth-century accounts of Chicana/o theater (Prieto-Hernández 2001:105). Highlighting the *lépero*’s capacity to reform himself and enter “respectable” life, they portrayed his reform as the model for a racially ‘mixed’ but culturally ‘whitened’ society based on equality and organized according to European-derived conceptions of reason, order, and progress (26).

Although there seems to be little historical record of what the individuals called *pelados* and *léperos* in nineteenth-century Mexico had to say about themselves, the stereotype of the *lépero* seems to have lived not only in the writings of national and foreign elites, but also in popular entertainment, especially the puppet theater. In the work of the famous, Rosete Aranda puppet troupe, for example, the character of Vale Coyote exemplified the mixed-blood *lépero* (Pilcher 2001:11). Prieto-Hernández reproduces a surprisingly sophisticated and sympathetic description by the French traveler Biart of a puppet show starring a similar figure.

The performance was given in a smoke-blackened space. The attendance was numerous, but hardly select. *Léperos*, their women, and a few *chinas* laughed and loudly called out to the wooden actors by name. My black greatcoat got some looks. Evidently I was considered an intruder; but there was no hostility in those looks [...] After a long wait, the curtain rose, to the chords of a mandolin, and *Juan Panadero*, the Mexican Polchinella, made his triumphant entry onto the stage. *Juan Panadero* was a drunk, a rake, and a libertine whose cynicism exceeds all limits. If he does not thrash the commissioner, he spills blood: his knife takes the place of the club of our Guiñol. He rides horses, fights bulls, kisses his neighbor's wife and uselessly gives the Devil many warnings before being carried off. The original role of this hero cannot be understood except by those who have intimate knowledge of the customs of the Mexican plebeians. The series of his adventures forms a sequence of sketches; neither a critique, nor much less a caricature. The only morality of the piece consists in the sad end of the indurate sinner, devoured by a dragon with wings who vomits fire. *Juan Panadero* is neither spiritual nor delicate. He provokes laughter from the force of his obscenities crudely thrown in the public's faces. If he were to wrap his thoughts in circumlocution, his hearers would not understand him. (Biart 1959:263-264, cited in Preito-Hernández 2001:213).⁸¹

Although Biart saw the *Juan Panadero* character as incomprehensible to those unfamiliar with the customs of the Mexican *plebe*, his description of the character resembles nothing so much as the English Punch and similar characters from the Italian Commedia Dell'Arte. The structure of the performance described above, with its sequence of short sketch-like pieces, is suggestive of the later variety-show format of the *carpas*. Although I have yet to identify similar examples from Texas, it is clear from this that in Mexico City at least, that a character like the pelado of the twentieth century enjoyed a life in the arena of popular performance in which he was a figure neither of racist slander nor of nationalist rehabilitation, but rather a morally ambiguous amalgam of hero and anti-hero whose misadventures embodied the everyday rough-and-tumble struggle of his audience.

⁸¹ The translation is mine from Prieto-Hernández's Spanish. The change of verb tenses is in the Spanish.

In the twentieth century, after the Revolution, the marginalized male re-emerges as a synecdoche for Mexican identity and national character, both in the writings of national elites and in mass culture. Although lexicographers dedicated to the study of Mexican Spanish drew a distinction between “*pelado*” and “*lépero*” during this time, the image of the former figure in the writings of national elites contains many of the characteristics attributed to the latter. As José Limón has noted, the Mexican Revolution “removed one cadre of elite thinkers—the positivists of the Díaz regime,” only to replace them with “another cadre no less elitist in its so-called humanism” (1998:79), and this new group of intellectuals found much in common with its foreign and national precursors in its reflections on the marginalized urban male. Although Porfirian sociologists had already engaged in their own analysis of the behavior of marginalized urban males, it is the philosopher Samuel Ramos, whose account of the *pelado* has been most influential (Pilcher 2001:40).

Ramos portrayed the *pelado* as “the most elemental and clearly defined expression of national character” (1962:58), a move that gave the impoverished male of Mexico City “a generic name that extracted him from any reality and buried him in an abstraction” (Monsiváis 1988:88, translation mine). Believing unflinchingly in this abstraction and drawing on Adlerian conformist psychology, he saw the phallic obsession and violent temper attributed to the *pelado* as a key symptom of what he called a national inferiority complex (Ramos 1962:56). To his credit, Ramos also saw the Eurocentric pretensions of the Mexican elite as such a symptom, but the tone of his oft-quoted

description of the *pelado* betrays a class-bound hatred and fear that seems to run deeper than his disdain for the elite.

The pelado belongs to a most vile category of social fauna; he is a form of human rubbish from the great city. He is less than a proletarian in the economic hierarchy, and a primitive man in the intellectual one. Life from every quarter has been hostile to him and his reaction has been black resentment. He is an explosive being with whom relationship his dangerous, for the slightest friction causes him to blow up (59).

For Ramos, this aggressive hypermasculine facade conceals feelings of inferiority that stem from a history of national subordination. The effort of maintaining this concealment forces the pelado to concentrate all his energy on his ego, failing to attend to reality (62). Importantly, this account distinguishes the “pelado” from the “Indian” as its European predecessors had done. Where the former is seen as representative of the Mexican psyche, the latter appears as the usual anthropological stereotype: a fundamentally passive being, “incapable of accepting technology” and lacking “the will to power” (120). Like many of his nineteenth-century liberal predecessors, Ramos saw both the pelado and the “Indian” as representing elements of national culture that kept Mexico from achieving the heights of modernity (Prieto-Hernández 2001:100), although Ramos, unlike the *científicos* of the Díaz era, maintained a healthy distrust of the mechanizing and alienating elements of modernity.

Ramos’s diagnosis of the *pelado* focuses extensive attention on that figure’s use of *albures*, ritualized insults involving *doble sentido* (often translated as “double entendre”). In this, he echoes nineteenth century foreign observers, who noted in the *lépero* “a repertoire of words as rich and salty as the most daring *gamin* of Paris” (Prieto-

Hernández 2001:46). In an odd rhetorical turn, he finds in the brutish, semi-civilized *pelado* a capacity for linguistic play that is as threatening as it is sophisticated (Limón 1998:77). According to Ramos, the Mexican *pelado* “has created a dialectic of his own, a diction which abounds in ordinary words, but he gives these words a new meaning” (quoted in Limón 1998:77). For Octavio Paz, as for Ramos, this diction is fundamentally aggressive and male. Describing duels of doble sentido insults called *albures*, Paz argues that “each of the speakers tries to humiliate his adversary with verbal traps and ingenious linguistic combinations, and the loser is the person who cannot think of a comeback, who has to swallow his opponent's jibes. These jibes are full of aggressive sexual allusions; the loser is possessed, is violated, by the winner, and the spectators laugh and sneer at him” (quoted in Limón 1998:81).

José Limón (1994, 1998) and others (e.g. Pilcher 2001:40-41) have already subjected Paz, Ramos, and their intellectual progeny to a thoroughgoing and incisive critique, and there is no reason to revisit that critique here. I would only add that in their obsession with lumpenproletarian masculinity, these scholars and their predecessors fall into a pattern of thought established by the European bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century who, as Stallybrass and White have noted, constructed their own sense of identity through a rejection of the perceived excesses of the “dangerous” classes. They describe this process as follows.

The complex of utilitarianism, industry and calculating parsimony which were fundamental to the English bourgeoisie by the nineteenth century drew its imaginative sustenance from precisely those groups, practices and activities which it was earnestly and relentlessly working to marginalize and destroy . . . a construction of subjectivity through totally ambivalent

internalizations of the city slum, the domestic servant and the carnivalesque (1986:21).

They add that in bourgeois ideology, the marginal lumpenproletariat always becomes symbolically central, effacing the actual economic centrality of the laboring classes (25). A similar dynamic is clearly at work in the thought of Paz and Ramos, whose critique of the verbal play they attribute to the *pelado* draws on precisely this complex of utilitarian parsimony. It is not only the aggressiveness of this play that they find threatening, but its baroque polysemy, its deviation from the norm of simple, transparent, reference. I say “attribute” here because neither Paz nor Ramos offers empirical support for the thesis that the albur or doble sentido are characteristic of the speech of the lower classes. Carlos Monsiváis, by contrast, has hypothesized that the origin of the *albur* may lie with “lascivious priests, lawyers sick of the Procedural Code, unsuccessful writers, and provincial doctors anxious to disguise their literary meanderings” (1988:305).

Whatever the real macrosociology of the *albur* may have been, the association between this form of wordplay and the marginal urban male was also strong in the postrevolutionary popular theater, in which stage performers known as *cómicos* (“comedians”) inverted the received ascriptive image of the *pelado* as a figure of populist self-identification. Thus reinterpreted, the *peladito*, complete with affectionate diminutive, became a beloved, sympathetic figure for working class *mexicanas/os* on both sides of the border. Still a synecdoche for national identity, he became the scrappy underdog described by Ybarra-Frausto whose trials mirrored the urban Mexican

everyman's struggle to survive, at once symbolizing a Utopian desire for redemption and a resignation to the reality of class inequality (Monsiváis, 1988:88-89).

The *Pelado* and the *Catrín*

Pilcher has noted that beginning with Lizardi at least, popular imagination in greater Mexico has paired the *pelado* with another figure, the *catrín* ("dandy," "city-slicker"). The latter character "dedicated himself to appearances," swaggering about in the finest clothes "without a peso to spare" (2001:30). Although the dandy seems not to have inspired the level of moral panic that the *pelado* figure did, he was nevertheless an unsettling figure, as becomes clear in San Antonio's Mexican exile press. On November 6, 1917, for example, an anonymous *cronista* in *La prensa* saw melancholy in San Antonio's balmy autumn. The Day of the Dead had come and gone, and the residents of the city's Mexican colony, in addition to being far from the graves of their loved ones and ancestors, were forced to go without the customary staging of José Zorilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. To the *cronista*, the lack of such a performance seemed a symptom of a larger social ill, for in the Mexican colony, he claimed, real men like the Seducer of Seville were not to be found. And even if such men did exist, their dashing bravado would be wasted on the jaded women of San Antonio, where "una doncella de quince años se burlaría de Don Juan y de todas sus audacias y todos sus recursos de galanteador" ("a young lady of fifteen would make fun of Don Juan, of all of his daring, and of all of his talents as a flatterer").

Three days later, a poem by “Chantecler” on this same theme appeared on the newspaper’s editorial page. Titled “La muerte de don Juan” (“The Death of don Juan”), it took this argument further, and after much praise of the famous character and the poets who created him, the poem turns to the young men of the day.

Nuestro Don Juan...causa risa,
no sólo con su persona
que lleva como preceptos
los cánones de la moda;
no tan sólo con su aspecto
que a cualquiera se le antoja
de mono confeccionado
para provocar la mofa,
sino en todos los detalles
de su risible persona.
Pobrecitos los don Juanes
y pobrecitas la mozas [sic]
que cargan en estos tiempos
con las olientes personas
de esos galanes sin fibra,
sin chambergo y sin tizona
que no cuidan una reja
ni obscuras calles rondan
Ni se mueren por su dama,
ni juran por la Madona...
pero quizá si fallezcan
de una borrachera sorda. .

Our Don Juan ...causes laughter,
not just from his personage
which takes as its precept
the canons of fashion;
not only with his appearance
which would make anyone imagine
him a to be monkey dolled up
to provoke our mocking laughter,
but in all of the details
of his risible personage.
Poor Don Juanes
and poor ladies
who must put up in these days
with the smelly perfumed figures
of those young men without vigor
lacking rounded hats and swords
who don’t wait at a window’s bars
or roam the darkened streets,
or die for their beloved
or swear by the Madonna...
but perhaps might expire after all
from a deaf and drunken stupor. .

Both the cronista and the poet expressed longing for an earlier day when men were men and women were women. The complaint about the sorry state of young *mexicano* men in San Antonio was more than a simple adult critique of youth culture, however. In both pieces, it was embedded within a discussion of the passage of time, the changing of the seasons, and the abandonment of old customs and traditions.

On one level, the play's absence symbolized the adjustments of an exiled elite accustomed to such entertainments. Nostalgia for the adventures of don Juan, in other words, was nostalgia for Porfirian Mexico. But on another level, the columnists sought, through the larger-than-life, swashbuckling adventures of don Juan, to cast a disparaging light on the humdrum character of modern life itself.

El don Juan de hoy, qué distinto
vive y piensa, lucha y obra;
sus hechos no son aquellos
que pusieron en las hojas

Today's don Juan, how differently
he lives, thinks, works and struggles;
his deeds are nothing like those
that were written on the pages.

Of course, these were journalists—contemporaries of Pancho Villa—who had chosen to live in San Antonio and sit out a social revolution that provided fodder for literary and journalistic depictions that have easily matched Zorilla's play in floridity. Further south in Texas, the emerging *corrido* of intercultural conflict told the stories of ethnic Mexican uprisings, highlighting larger-than-life heroes with clearer senses of conscience and honor than the either the historical or the fictional don Juan. Nevertheless *La prensa*'s writers seemed to have preferred the figure of the dissolute patrician rebel without a cause to that of the social bandit. One could forgive them, perhaps, the occasional wistful yawn at a society where there were no great deeds left to be done. What is clear in their commentaries is that they saw the young men of San Antonio as unfit for such deeds and that unfitness as a symptom of the ills of exile and modernity.

Recent historical accounts of gender relations in early twentieth-century Mexican America have drawn considerable attention to the situation of the “pelonas” (“flappers”) of the late teens and 1920s and the moral crisis these young women engendered among

Mexican immigrant parents (e.g. Ruiz 1996). Little attention, however, has been paid to the male counterparts of the “*pelonas*.” The example above underscores the seldom-acknowledged fact that ethnic Mexican flappers in the United States were participants in a youth culture movement that also involved men, and that male behavior caused similar anxieties based on similar normative ideas of gender. In the title of an editorial poem from September of that same year, “Una hermandad moderna” (“A Modern Brotherhood”), “Chantecler” made this link between modernity and the failure of young men to live up to masculine ideals explicit.

The poem began by asking if the reader had never seen the “*fifíes*” (“dandies”) who made up the “hermandad del vaso de agua” (“the Glass of Water Brotherhood”), implying that these “*fifíes*” were everywhere in San Antonio. As if the label “*fifí*” were not sufficient, it described their typical dress and comportment in detail.

No han contemplado de cerca
sus posturas estudiadas
sus manos de señorita,
sus rechillantes corbatas,
sus calcetines de seda
(de seda falsificada)
su pelo, siempre cortado
como la moda lo manda,

Have you never studied closely
their studied ways of posing
their dainty maiden’s hands,
their lurid flashy ties,
their socks made of silk
(of falsified silk, that is)
their hair, always trimmed
the way fashion commands it,

Although the poet drew attention to the men’s “maiden’s hands,” clearly marking them as both effeminate and too lazy to do physical labor, he did not go so far as to accuse them of homosexuality. Indeed, he focused on their monomaniacal interest in wooing young women. These young men, in the author’s view, lived to dance frenetically with women in the dance halls, giving up everyday necessities and living on bread and water in order

to buy sharp clothes and pay cover charges. During the dances, the “fifíes” showed their true colors in their treatment of women.

y bailando con cada una
de ellas, lo menos dos tandas
de valses, polkas, “fox-trot”
y lanceros y danzadas,
y viéndolas sudorosas
y viéndolas fatigadas,
ellos, que son incansables,
el cabo también se cansan,
las llevan a sus asientos,
y les obsequian....las gracias.

and dancing with each one
of those women at least two sets
of waltzes, polkas, “fox-trots,”
and (lanceros) and (dances)
and seeing them all sweaty
and seeing them all tired,
they, who are themselves tireless,
finally also feel fatigued,
they take the women to their seats,
they give them the gift of....thanks.

Thanks was all the women got from these young gentlemen, who would then run at top speed to the bar to beg the bartender for a glass of water—hence the name “glass of water brotherhood.” The youths were, in “Chantecler’s” opinion, either too cheap or too poor to buy themselves drinks, and too selfish to buy for their dancing partners. In this critique of the “fifíes,” then, there was an overlay of anxiety about possible social dissolution, about the surrender of youth to crass individualism, and about the death of the concern for others implied by the conventions for gentlemanly treatment of women. There was also more than a hint of class-consciousness: the “hermandad del vaso de agua” behaved badly because its members were poor and uneducated. They were to be condemned for acting above their station, for putting on airs and selfishly seeking luxuries they could not afford instead of cleaving to an ethic of hard work and self-improvement. Although I have yet to determine the historical range of this critique of the *catrín* or *fifí*, it is clear that characters of this type appear in the popular theater in San Antonio throughout the 1930s. In creating characters such as the *pelado* and the *catrín*,

comedians drew both on the so-called frivolous theater that accompanied the Mexican Revolution and on the clowning traditions of the Mexican circus.

From Clown to Comedian.

The relationship between clown and comedian represents one surprising gap in Pilcher's otherwise thorough and insightful genealogy of the *pelado* figure, for many discussions of Mexican popular theater and circus refer to the *cómico* ("comedian") and the *payaso* or *clown* ("clown") in the same breath. María y Campos, for example, places Cantinflas at the end of a long lineage of Mexican clown-poets (1939). On one level, such a move is perfectly reasonable, for it is clear both that Mexican clowns and comedians have long drawn on a shared body of comic material and that many performers have alternated between the clown and comedian roles. Furthermore, the stylized makeup and dress used by comedians in greater Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century invites comparison to the rough *auguste* or hobo-clown. Nevertheless, performers I have interviewed draw a sharp distinction between clown and comedian and are often quite adamant about the difference. For these individuals, the difference between clown and comedian seems to be linked to a distinction between the traditional and the modern, on the one hand, and between an audience of children and an audience of adults on the other.

María y Campos's history of the circus in Mexico suggests that the heyday of the clown in that country was the latter half of the nineteenth century. The clowns whose names are remembered were often stars and administrators of companies that presented

circus acts alongside Spanish drama, comedy, and *zarzuela*. Clowns such as José Soledad Aycardo and Ricardo Bell were also poets, and although we will never know the full extent of their verbal art, some of it is preserved in programs, flyers, and other ephemera. The surviving verses overwhelmingly consist of flowery greetings, leave-takings, and descriptions of acts on the night's program, all directed at the audience as a whole and rendered in elaborate sequences of *coplas*, *décimas*, and sonnets. María y Campos notes that for José Soledad Aycardo, women and morality were another key theme.

Among Aycardo's characteristics were the little jabs in verse that he directed at old women and mothers-in-law and flirtatious compliments to pretty women, along with critiques of social vices, in particular those of drunkards and rakes. (María y Campos 1939:43).

These verses seem to have been directed less at particular women than at women in general, often lavishing praise on desirable physical characteristics or even such arbitrary characteristics as names.

Las Mariquitas son finas las Juanitas muy hermosas. Las Catarinas garbosas y lindas la Agustinas (160).	Mariquitas are refined. Juanitas, very striking. Catarinas dress to my liking and Agustinas, divine.
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

But the clowns cast half-serious aspersions on women in general with equal ease.

El diablo la mujer es. de quien el hombre va en pos pues cuando no engaña a dos es porque entretiene a tres. (161).	Woman is the devil whom the men all follow after for when she isn't fooling two, it's because she's entertaining three.
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

As with much light, Spanish-language verse in greater Mexico, joking attributions of cruelty, fickleness, and excessive materialism to women played for knowing laughs in the circus.

In the Mexican American carpa, this tradition of verse continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. Steven Ortiz, a performer whose family's New Mexico-based circus traveled all over Texas, New Mexico, and other parts of the Southwestern United States during that time recalled in an interview that his father, José Torres Ortiz, took his leave of his audiences with this rhyme:

Adiós ciudad de _____	Farewell city of _____
con sus calles arenosas.	with your streets all full of sand.
Adiós muchachas bonitas.	Farewell pretty maidens.
Adiós viejas lagañas.	Farewell rheumy-eyed old hags.

Although these barbs were surely not innocent of larger currents of misogyny, neither were they one-sided reflections of those currents. Similar barbs against men were also common in the popular theater, especially in the performances of female comedians, and in these insults, male and female members of the audiences played with the gendered tensions that structured their lives.

In the Carpa Monsiváis, as in many early twentieth-century Mexican and Mexican American circuses and carpas, the versifying clown was central to the show. Clown verses from the Monsiváis family that survive in manuscript form combine an anti-imperialist political critique of United States policy toward Mexico and the repatriation campaigns of the 1930s with clever *albures*.

Soy el pueblo Mexicano
El que lucha por la raza,

I am the Mexican People
Who struggles for the Race

El que defiende su casa Contra el odio Americano.	Who defends the home against American hatred
Los gringos nos an corrido Nos hand [sic] quitado el trabajo	The gringos have run us off They have taken away our jobs
Mas no les pedimos nada,	But we don't ask a thing of them
Aunque nos lleve el ...	Though we're taken by the... ⁸²
Caray que situación De llorar hasta dan ganas De ver la repartición [sic] De familias Mexicanas. Yo por eso no los quero	Gosh what a situation! One even feels like crying To see the repartition [sic] Of Mexican families. That's why I have no love for them
Los odio con tanto brillo Espero, ver que arrastren el fu...	My hate for them never passes. I hope, to see them drag their ... ⁸³
Juera bueno y es mejor Que mi raza este llegando Y no sigan explotando	It would be good and it is better for my race to keep on coming So that they won't keep exploiting
Al pobre trabajador [continues].	the poor worker [continues].

María y Campos does not reproduce examples of this sort of political commentary or this sort of off-color humor in his study, which is surprising, given that the mixture of the two has been often cited as fundamental to Mexican humor in the early twentieth century.

In addition to versifying, the Mexican clown, like his cousins in other national circus traditions, engaged and continues to engage in an eclectic array of routines, known in Spanish as “entradas de payaso” (lit. “clown entries”). *Entradas* range from games to short theatrical pieces resembling comic dialogues or sketches. In Mexico City, clowns

⁸² Here the obscene word “carajo” is expected.

⁸³ Here the obscene word “fundillo” is expected. The rhyme in the translation should lead the reader to anticipate the sense of this term.

have long had a guild system that, among other things, keeps written records of these *entradas* and seeks to limit their circulation among the uninitiated, even though some of the routines consist of games like “musical chairs” (“la entrada de las sillas musicales”) that clearly exist in the public domain.⁸⁴ I have yet to determine the extent to which this guild structure operated or continues to operate among ethnic Mexican clowns in the United States. As in many traditions of humor in the world, the comical clown is often paired with a rebellious upstart clown with a “*serio*” (“straight man” or “heavy”) played by another, more refined figure, either another clown or the Master of Ceremonies. In one such routine from the repertoire of the Carpa García family, described to me by Esther Robinson, the *serio* encounters the comic upstart, and after exchanging greetings with him, fulminates about the lack of justice in the world. The comic is not convinced.

And then, he said ‘Why, why do you say there is no justice in this world?
‘Well because today I went by the road
and going toward the park and I saw this cow.
Gives the milk.
The butter.
The steaks.
The *chicharrones*.’
And he starts saying funny things.
‘And the poor cow is tied up with a little rope this big [measures a small
rope with hands]
and she’s trying to reach a green piece of grass.
And she can’t reach it because they have her tied with such a small rope.
I don’t think there is justice in this world.
After she give us all that.
Why don’t they turn her loose?
Now, comparing to a bird.
A bird don’t give nothing but eats our crop.
Eats our plants.
And he has all the space to fly.

⁸⁴ Alfonso Vega Villamar, Interview. Los Angeles, CA. July, 2000.

I don't think there is justice in this world.'

In response, the comical clown enacts a striking, carnivalesque reversal of the *serio's* metaphorical social protest, arguing that the world is indeed just.

'I was sitting under this tree reading my paper
and I heard **Plik!** on my hat and **Plik!** on my head.
And it was a little bird spitting on me.
'What do you mean spitting on you?' the straight man tells the clown.
He says 'Yes he was, you know, spitting my hat.
Now if this little bird had been the cow
what a big spit it would have been on my hat see?
That's why I say the world is just.'⁸⁵

Here, the clown's carnivalesque, if slightly bowdlerized humor turns the heavy-handed social symbolism of the *serio's* image on its head, preventing any possible move towards ideological or rhetorical closure. Although the social message about the unjust distribution of wealth and work remains intact, it finds itself relativized by the fantastic, Utopian image of a day when cows fly and the rest of us had better watch out for what comes down. Many other clown acts from the greater Mexican *carpa* and circus operate in this way, setting up a frame and then destroying it with an incongruous element that takes the presuppositions of the frame to an absurd conclusion. Similarly, acts involving musical instruments made from found objects, especially struck ideophones made from tuned bottles, skillets, and hubcaps showcased uncommon uses for common objects, disrupting taken-for-granted frames of reference by introducing novel twists.

For audiences whose lives revolved around social distinctions based on age, gender, racialized phenotype, and class, the clown appeared as a liminal figure, neither

⁸⁵ From Interview PH90-3-1:3, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

entirely outside nor comfortably inside these categories. Of these, the distinction between adult and child appears to have been especially important. The clown was and remains an adult-sized person who, paired with a reasonable, adult “straight man” often behaves like a naughty child and plays with children in ways that adults, who must retain a certain distance in order to inspire respect, cannot. Many Mexican clowns spoke then and continue to speak today in a stylized falsetto that suggests a child’s voice while raising the “e” vowel to “i” and replacing “s” with “ch.” For Spanish speakers, these phonological transformations usually mark a “baby talk” register that adults use to speak playfully to children, but for the clown they are normal speech, and he uses them not only to talk to children but also to engage their parents in exchanges of insults laced with double entendres that the children are assumed not to understand. Furthermore, by coloring their faces white with greasepaint or flour and grotesquely exaggerating their facial features with makeup, clowns symbolically removed and remove themselves from the hierarchies of racial phenotype that continue exist among ethnic Mexicans. With respect to age and race, in other words, the clown was and is ambiguous, but the references to women in the clowns’ verses leave no doubt about the characters’ gender. Although many clowns, in their physical appearance and behavior, showed hints of an androgynous streak—Ricardo Bell, for example, sometimes donned a Spanish mantilla that contrasted sharply with his bushy handlebar moustache—the content of the clowns’ verses set limits on this gender play. As in many circus traditions, some clowns in the Mexican circus and *carpa* represent a rough masculinity in a hobo-like persona, while others, like the “white-face” clown known in the United States, portray a more refined

and less clearly gendered figure. The former persona, obviously may be seen as a relative of the *pelado* figure and of the comedian who came to play him.

In spite of this similarity a review of the literature on the Mexican circus in the nineteenth century reveals few references to clowns who played characters who were identified as *pelados*. Unlike clowns, comedians were associated with the theater rather than the circus, and in the carpas, which combined these two forms, clowns performed on the ring, while comedians performed on stage. The figure of the pelado-comedian seems to emerge in twentieth century, not in the circus but in the *teatro de revista*. As early as 1904, for example, Elizondo and Medina's "Chin Chun Chan" centered on the *pícaro* Don Columbo who disguised himself as a Chinese man in an attempt to flee from his jealous and shrewish wife, and similar characters followed in later *revistas*. The most famous of the early comedians who worked in these *revistas* was Leopoldo "El Cuatezón" Beristáin, who often played an obese, drunken *pícaro*, recently arrived in the big city (Pilcher 2001:13). For all of his character's working-class trappings, Beristáin himself was not allied with the formal political groups that claimed the workers' cause as their own. And after participating in a *revista* supporting Huerta, he was forced into exile in Cuba when Carranza came to power.⁸⁶

***Actores Cómicos* in Southern Texas**

As in Mexico and as in U.S. vaudeville and film comedy, many comedians of the south Texas theater and the carpa sought success not so much through novel material as

⁸⁶ For further discussion of many important Mexican comedians, see Morales 1987.

through developing distinctive, memorable interpretations of the broadly-drawn stock characters that were so important to the popular stage (Pilcher 2001:25). Not all performers who were involved in *variedades* were remembered for having developed such characters. Singer/comedians Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, whose career will be discussed in Chapter 4, do not seem to have had consistent onstage personae with distinct proper names, although certain types do recur in their recordings. Nevertheless, such characters were extremely common in southern Texas and more varied than discussions of the *pelado* as an archetype might lead one to expect. Like their clown contemporaries and predecessors, the *cómicos* of Texas were versifiers, sometimes reciting poetry in a singsong declamatory style, and just as often singing parodies of the popular songs that circulated on phonograph records and on the radio. Although the *auguste*-like figure described by Ybarra-Frausto, “dressed in baggy pants and a battered hat” (1984:51) was common, the comedians of San Antonio and southern Texas developed characters that did not fit this description.

As I have already noted noted, characters representing well-dressed *catrines* (“dandies,” “city slickers”) were often paired with the *pelado* in Mexico City’s *carpa* stage during the 1930s. In southern Texas, too, *catrín* characters were paired with *pelado* types. One of the better remembered was Jesús Rodríguez Valero’s older brother Carlos, who went by the stage name “don Suave.” A fixture of the Spanish-language theater during its twilight years, don Suave shared the stage with Don Lalo, the “comic hobo” character played by Leonardo García Astol (Kanellos 1990:92). During the late 1930s and early 1940s, don Suave wore baggy pants and a watch chain that alluded to the

pachuco style, and his trademark was to always appear on stage in a different hat. On May 8, 1938, the San Antonio *Light* described their act as featuring “much pants-kicking knockabout and … a song called ‘The Sheik of the West Side,’” probably a parody of the popular ‘Sheik of Araby. The light’s reporter thought the song contained “some pretty blue stuff.” Don Suave’s former wife, Marieta Batilla, remembers Valero and Astol singing a duel in which the characters traded insults directed at female kin, all to piano accompaniment.

DS:	Chaparro pelón y feo nunca cantes de mañana. Chaparro pelón y feo... nunca cantes de mañana si no quieres que te diga hijo de la marihuana. Y hazme el favor de prestarme a la mula de tu hermana	Short, bald and ugly don’t you ever crow at morning. Short, bald and ugly don’t you ever crow at morning if you don’t want me to call you son of... marijuana. And do me a favor and let me have that mule you call your sister.
DL:	Si te presto yo a mi hermana si ella quiere y si se deja. si te presto yo a mi hermana si ella quiere y si se deja. Eso no importa conmigo ni de tu amistad me aleja. Yo sin pedirte permiso ya me conseguí a tu vieja.	If I let you have my sister if she wants to and if she allows it If I let you have my sister if she want to and if she allows it That doesn’t bother me at all or even spoil our friendship. I, without even asking you just went and bagged your old lady. ⁸⁷

In this fragment, the quick-witted *pelado* gains the upper hand over the *catrín*, with a rejoinder that intensifies the latter’s challenge at every turn, alluding to an actual rather than proposed sexual liaison with the *catrín*’s wife, rather than his sister. This sort of verbal duel, of course was and remains endemic to the greater Mexican countryside and

⁸⁷ MB 5-22-2000-1;1

to working class urban communities, and may have been a bit of a stoop for a classically trained actor like Astol. Audiences accustomed to such duels in daily life could appreciate them in themselves when they were recontextualized in the theaters, but onstage the duel also became more complex. When the stylized *pelado* and *catrín* figures traded barbs, they at once evoked the nationalist associations attached to these folkorized speech genres and modeled the conflict between dispossessed men and those who had achieved or aspired to dominance.

Another *catrín* figure that many interviewees remember but about whom little information exists is “El Coqueno” (“The Guinea-Cock”) Ortiz, whose natty dark suit, top hat, cane, and exaggeratedly stiff bearing on stage reminded Raymundo García of the Carpa García of the “Penguin” character in Batman comics. Alex Aguilar remembers him as “trying to act patrician” but nevertheless as given to vulgar humor. Members of the García family remember El Coqueno as a comedian and magician who worked sometimes in their carpa and made extra money by selling printed poetry in nightclubs. Raymond García recalled a fragment of one of his works, titled “La tembladera” (“The Trembling”).

Tiembla la hoja en la mata
cuando el fuerte viento azota
como temblaba Nerón
cuando cantaba Cleopatra.
Tiembla al campeón el bate
cuando pasa la pelota
como tiemblan los bootleggers
cuando miran a la chota
Tiemblo yo. Tiemblan ustedes

The leaf will tremble in the wind
as to the plant it clings.
like Nero used to tremble⁸⁸
When he heard Cleopatra sing.
The champion’s bat will tremble
when the ball comes rushing by
just like bootleggers tremble
when they give the cops the eye.
I tremble and you tremble too

⁸⁸ Why the poem alludes to Nero rather than Mark Anthony here is unclear.

c <u>uando nos pega el garrotillo.</u>	w <u>hen croup coughs come to pain us</u>
Y si comemos chile bravo	A <u>nd if we eat hot chiles,</u>
también nos tiembla hasta el ...	w <u>hy we tremble at the ... throat</u> ⁸⁹
galillo.	

The similarity to the verses of clowns is obvious, and as in many the examples we have seen so far, El Coqueno's humor centers on the juxtaposition of incongruous elements. Here flowery descriptions, careful parallelism, and privileged knowledge associated with classical antiquity grate against references to the seamy side of urban life and subtle allusions to tabooed vocabulary and the lower stratum of the body. If the *catrín* sometimes stood for the privileged classes he also represented those who aspired to put forth the false impression of status by spending every last cent on clothing and affecting patrician manners. In figures like El Coqueno, the *catrín* sometimes showed a capacity for picaresque humor that matched his ruffianesque counterpart.

However important it may have been, the opposition between the *catrín* and *pelado* did not exhaust the repertoire of comic male figures in the ethnic Mexican popular stage of southern Texas, and the verbal duels of that stage were not just between men. Carlos Monsiváis of the Carpa Monsiváis, for example, appeared in his family's tent show as a sort of comic *ranchero* ("country man") named don Chema Tamalina. This second half of his name was a brand of corn flour for tortillas and tamales that was milled in San Antonio during the time, an early version of what is now called "product placement." During the 1930s and early 1940s he was paired not with a straight man but with a shrewish *peladita*, Doña Pomposa Tracalada ("Miz Pompous Noisemaker"),

⁸⁹ RVG 07-12-99-2:2

played by his second wife, Amada Navarro de Monsiváis. Doña Pomposa sported blackened teeth, a long skirt that covered a grotesquely stuffed buttocks and anachronistic frilly drawers, and a mismatched shawl and blouse. For his part, Don Chema's costume was a parody of the *charro* suit that became standardized in Mexico's official culture during the early twentieth century. The phrase “¡Viva México!” appeared on the back of his cowboy-style jacket, and although he did have guns at his waist, they hung in front of his groin and buttocks rather than at his hips. His wide-brimmed hat crowned a face decorated with intricate makeup and a slender, droopy false moustache that hung from his septum and fluttered when he blew on it through his nose or mouth. In a home video of Mr. and Mrs. Monsiváis performing for a flea market audience in Kenedy, don Chema bursts out onto the performance space, vaunting himself and egging on the crowd by placing himself in front of audience members, thrusting his chin defiantly forward and fluttering the moustache. In a subsequent sketch, which is inaudible because of the video's poor sound quality, Mr. Monsiváis moves his shoulders back, flashes his eyebrows, and flutters the moustache when he sees doña Pomposa, in a reaction suggesting sexual excitement. The fluttering moustache, then, seems to have embodied all the phallic aggression and drive that elite discourses have attributed to the marginalized Mexican male, but its visible delicateness and fragility added an ironic twist to this symbolism.

In their act, don Chema and doña Pomposa combined grotesque, knockabout visual humor with snappy verbal repartee. In “Preguntas callejeras” (“Street Questions”), a dialogue that the couple recorded for me in 1990 and which also appears with relatively

few alterations in Mr. Monsiváis's manuscript collection, don Chema woos doña Pomposa, as she resists, alluding to a husband to whom she must be faithful. The exchange leads to an exchange of boasts and insults in which the male character gets as much abuse as he gives and did not automatically get the last word.

DC:	Oiga no se ataque Por que yo soy muy remacho Y tengo muchos calzones Yo me trago los lagartijos y ya luego escupo purititos escorpiones.	Hey don't you attack me Because I'm really macho and I've got a lot of balls I gulp down lizards and then I spit out nothing but scorpions
DP:	¿Alacranes de Durango Con cola de se:is canutos, ¿Qué: me les das a los hombres Que me los vuelves tan brutos?	Scorpions of Durango With tails si:x segments long, What do you do to men for me That you make them all so dumb?

These coplas, of course, were and are standard and widely occurring fare in greater Mexican vernacular poetry, and they would have been familiar to the carpa's audience. The comic effect derives from their artful pairing, with the one framed as a rejoinder to the other, unified by the reference to scorpions.

In another dialogue, titled “Los perfumes” (“The perfumes”), the emphasis was not on the characters' verbal alacrity but on gesture.⁹⁰ A manuscript of the dialogue, in Mr. Monsiváis's collection begins as follows.

<u>COMICO</u>	ME DISEN QUE USTED USA MUY BUENOS PERFUMES	THEY TELL ME YOU USE VERY NICE PERFUMES
<u>LLA—</u>	SEGURO MIRE GUELALE AQUI	SURE LOOK SMELL HERE

⁹⁰ In 2000 interview, comedian and clown Alfonso Vega Villamar, a 50-year veteran of carpas and circuses in Mexico, recognized this dialogue and identified it as a common *entrada de payaso* in Mexico.

<u>EL</u>	COMO SELLA ESE PERFUME	WHAT'S THAT PERFUME CALLED
<u>ELLA</u>	UNA NOCHE EN PARIS	EVENING IN PARIS
<u>EL</u>	PERO NO MEGANA – GUELALE AQUÍ	BUT YOU HAVEN'T BEATENME — SMELL HERE
<u>ELLA</u>	COMO SE LLAMA ESE PERFUME	WHAT'S THAT PERFUME CALLED
<u>EL</u>	UNA NOCHE EN LA CARSEL DE ROGUE CON SUS RATITA ALREDEDOR	A NIGHT IN THE ROGGE [TX] JAIL WITH ITS LITTLE RATS ALL AROUND

This manuscript is analogous to a sheet of song lyrics intended for singers who know the melody and chords of a song. The parallelism between “Evening in Paris” and “A Night in Jail” is clear, but the joke has little effect without the crucial information supplied by gesture: in the fourth line she holds up her wrist for him to smell for the former, and he offers her his armpit for the latter in the fifth line.⁹¹ Both react with disgust to the smells, pinching their noses or fanning the air in front of their faces, and crying “¡fuchi!” (“pee-yew!”) as the series of perfume names and body parts becomes progressively raunchier. Novelist Denise Chávez recalls the perfume “Evening in Paris” in *Last of the Menu Girls*, where a bottle of it inspires dreams of exotic locales, luxury, and happiness in the female protagonist and her mother (1986:69-71). At each turn, doña Pomposa waxes enthusiastic over names that evoke the bottled romance of consumer culture in this way, while don Chema, ever the ruffianesque *pícaro*, responds with earthy parodies that

⁹¹ The couple performs this dialogue on the video, which was in the personal collection of Normalinda Monsiváis when I saw it. Mrs. Monsiváis is now unable to find it.

foreground the grotesque image of the body and the hardscrabble reality of working class *mexicana/o* life in Texas.

Although characters like don Chema, don Lalo, and many others were popular with working class audiences in southern Texas, they were also controversial. In the South Texas context, the figure was highly controversial, in part because of the synecdochic violence we have already discussed. During the 1920s, *La prensa's* reviewers tended to link the stage incarnation of the *pelado* to negative stereotypes of Mexicans in the Anglo media, calling the figure “a discredit for those who do not know Mexico” (Kanellos 1990:82) and expressing disdain for his rough, obscene vocabulary. Here the class-consciousness of Mexican elite thought found itself wedded to a heightened image-consciousness derived from the community’s status as a stigmatized ethnic enclave. Kanellos notes that vaudeville companies featuring the *pelado* and other regional types flourished on San Antonio’s ethnic Mexican stage in spite of the unfavorable press.

Don Fito: from *Pelado* to *Pachuco*

Rodolfo García of the Carpa García, whom we already met in Chapter 2, came to the comedian’s vocation late in the life of ethnic Mexican commercial popular theater in southern Texas, at a time when his family’s show found itself taking refuge outside of San Antonio in areas where profit was still to be made in live entertainment by following the migrant stream. He was not his family’s first comedian or its most versatile performer, but Alex Aguilar, who as a boy sold apples and peanuts in the Carpa García when it visited his San Antonio neighborhood remembers that working class audiences

“loved el Vato Suave.”⁹² Like other *carpa* comedians, Mr. García faced the contradictory task of representing a familiar stock type while remaining distinctive enough to stand out from the crowd. (Pilcher 2001:25). What Pilcher and other commentators on vaudeville call “personality” might just as well be expressed as the performer’s manipulation of the intertextual gap between cultural model and actual performance to create a unique token of a recognizable type (Briggs and Bauman 1992). Mr. García seems to have accomplished this, in part, by incorporating elements of the *pachuco* language into his routines.⁹³

Born in 1917, Mr. García began performing almost as soon as he could walk. He remembers, for example, dancing the Charleston in blackface on the stage of his father’s show at age four (circa 1922). However, unlike his brothers and sisters, who all learned a variety of acts in order to be able to replace one another in emergencies, Mr. García rebelled against the family business as he grew older and refused to perform during most his adolescence. He relates that as he approached his late teens, while the *carpa* was in San Antonio, a friend who was not a professional actor suggested that the two develop a stage act. At first reluctant, Mr. García allowed himself to be convinced. Then, of course, he had to face don Manuel, who was reluctant to allow his son to perform on a lark.

Pa’ no alargar el cuento
me dijo mi padre
“Usted no está preparado

To make a long story short
my father told me
“You are still not ready

⁹² Interview, September 21, 1999. San Antonio, TX

⁹³ Cf. Barker for a description of this variety of Spanish and for an intriguing discussion of the ways in which youth who were only marginally involved with the *pachuco* subculture incorporated shreds and patches of its slang into their talk.

todavía para
salir en un escenario.
Y especialmente de cómico.”
Dijo “porque pa’ ser cómico
hay que dar bastante
y recibir”
Yo quería saber qué era eso.

Dar.

to go
out on a stage.
And especially as a comedian.”
He said “because to be a comedian
you have to give a lot
and receive.”
I wanted to know what that
was.
To give.⁹⁴

Finally, don Manuel relented, and Mr. García and his friend took to the stage of the *carpa* before a West Side audience, including many people the performers knew personally.

Pos salimos
No: que barbaridad.
Parecía una cosa
no ... nunca visto.
‘Taban...risi y risi la gente.

Porque
él él era chistoso también. El
tenía también gracia para
el público.
Y comenzamos a hablar
puras tonterías como
decía mi amá puras
“Tonterías son las que están
hablando ahí. No sé por
qué la gente se está
riendo.
“Se estarán burlando de
ellos.”

Well we went out.
Shee:sh what craziness.
It looked like something
never ... seen before.
The people were laughing
and laughing.
Because
he he was funny too. He had
a lot of appeal for the
audience too.
And we started to say nothing
but foolishness like my
Mom said nothing but
“Foolishness is what they’re
saying up there. I don’t
know why the people are
laughing.
“They must be making fun of
them.”⁹⁵

The appeal of this act was as much a mystery to doña Teresa as the appeal of the *pachucos*’ “mumbling damn foolishness into a microphone” would later be for Américo

⁹⁴ García, Rodolfo. Untitled solo autobiographical recording. Given to researcher May 4, 2000. Each indented passage represents a line defined by pausing and intonation. Ellipses indicate line-internal pauses, not deletions. Enlongation of a sound is indicated by a dash and repetition of the sound (e.g. No-o).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Paredes (1958:34). Nevertheless, Mr. García maintains that the audience laughed ‘with,’ not ‘at’ him and his friend, despite their improvised routine’s lack of professional polish. This success in itself, however, did not earn Mr. García a regular slot in his family’s show. This would come in 1939 or 1940, when the carpa moved its base of operations to Corpus Christi and began limiting its tours to the small towns of southern Texas. At this time, the show lost its pianist, and Mr. García’s brother Manolo, who had been the show’s headlining comedian, took over that position, leaving the job of comedian vacant. Suddenly thrust into the spotlight, Mr. García developed his onstage persona, “don Fito,” also known as “El Vato Suave.”⁹⁶

Mr. García’s character cruised onto the stage with hips thrust forward and head and shoulders tilted back, looking down at the world in spite of his short stature and moving in a low, slow, rhythmic shuffle, only to slip and fall, his impact punctuated by brother Raymundo on drums. Sporting baggy pants, a T-shirt, a messy wig, clown-like makeup, a long watch chain, and an unusually long tie, don Fito embodied the young mexicano “Wise Guy” from the streets of San Antonio or Corpus Christi (Kanellos 1990:102). His costume, like that of many *actores cómicos*, drew its effect from its intentional mismatching, particularly the pairing of the tie and the T-shirt, which was even more incongruous in the 1940s, when a person who appeared in public wearing a T-shirt was considered half-naked (*pelado!*), than it would be today. Although don Fito’s partial moustache recalls that of Cantinflas, Mr. García insists that he was more inspired

⁹⁶ There are similarities between Mr. García’s narrative of his beginning and the sketch of Cantinflas’s early career provided by Pilcher (2001). From Mr. García’s descriptions of his act, it does not seem that he engaged in the kind of nonsensical verbiage that was Cantinflas’s trademark.

by Eusebio Pirrín (“Don Catarino”) than by the more famous comedian. The watch chain, however, and the specifics of his streetwise, slangy language linked don Fito to another figure that was just becoming known in the southwestern United States: the *pachuco*. Indeed, as we shall see, don Fito was influenced as much by Tin Tan, a prominent Mexican interpreter of the *pachuco*, as he was by Cantinflas or don Catarino.

According to most accounts, the *pachuco* phenomenon began to be noticeable during the Depression (Hernández 1991:20), a time when the Spanish-language stage in this country had begun to decline, plagued by the mass deportation of its audience base and competition from film (Kanellos 1990:86). During the wartime moral panics that culminated in the famous “Sleepy Lagoon” case of 1941 and the Zoot Suit riots of 1943, *mexicana/o* theater as a commercial phenomenon was on its last legs throughout the Southwest, and even many itinerant *carpa* companies (“tent shows”) had stopped touring due to wartime shortages of fuel and tires.⁹⁷ During this time, the *pachuco* became an important resource for a theater struggling to capitalize on current themes of emotional interest to its waning audience. During this time of deep and rapid social change, zoot suit culture became a strong symbol through which ethnic Mexicans in the United States collectively reflected both on their conflicted relationship with the encompassing Anglo-American society and on their own internal divisions through the lens of gender. The popular theater, with characters like don Fito, was part of this process of reflection.

⁹⁷ Peter C. Haney, interview with Carlos Monsiváis and Amada Navarro Monsiváis. July 31, 1990, Universal City, Texas. This interview is on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio, under the label PH90-5-1:1.

Although both the *pachuco* and *pelado* have been interpreted as symbols of nonconformist lumpenproletarian masculinity, they express two distinct negative reactions to normative masculinity in their behavior and personal appearances. The *pelado* figure, in its stage incarnation, has traditionally achieved his comic effect through mismatched, ragged, and ill-fitting clothes, unkempt hair, five o-clock shadows, and other signs of a lack of self-care. By contrast, the *pachuco*'s elaborate appearance challenged normative values of masculine self-care through excess, exaggeration and parody rather than negation. According to don Luis Leal, literary and scholarly writings on the *pachuco* have advanced three distinct portraits of the figure: the rootless, lumpenproletarian outlaw of English-language yellow journalism and Paz's *Labrynth of Solitude*; the deified anti-assimilationist rebel of Luis Valdez's plays and other movement writing; and finally the demystified, tragic hero of José Montoya's "El Louie" (Leal 1995:100).

Recently, some provocative new interpretations of zoot suit culture have emerged which seek to add complexity to established genealogies of the phenomenon and challenge the bounded ethnic-nationalist framework within which it has been understood. The recent work of Luis Alvarez, for example, sees in zoot suit culture a cross-ethnic movement through which young men and women of color in the wartime United States used style to create a sense of community and claim public space for themselves in the face of a dominant racialized discourse of juvenile delinquency (2001:165). In a somewhat earlier, and very different, study of Chicano satire, Guillermo Hernández has noted the existence of parallel youth movements in Cuba and Argentina during the period (1991:25). Although Hernández does not question the generally accepted origin narrative

by which the *pachuco* as such emerges in El Paso during the 1930s and then spreads to Los Angeles, he does suggest a relationship between the *pachucos* and a dandy-type figure that was known in Mexico City by such names as “*gomoso*,” “*roto*,” “*fifí*,” “*lagartijo*,” and of course, “*catrín*” during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (21). In doing so, Hernández implicitly challenges traditional narratives of origin that link the *pachuco* primarily with lumpenproletarian elements (e.g. Mazón 1984:2-3), and I would argue that his research suggests that the *pachuco* as a stereotype may in fact represent a hybrid of the *pelado* and the *catrín*.

Mr. García’s character was clearly further toward the *pelado* side of this dichotomy, using selected accessories associated with the *pachucos* and in particular their creative slang to give his character a streetwise feel. Although his impromptu dialogue with the *carpa*’s dapper Master of Ceremonies is difficult to reconstruct, some of the feel of his act survives in his memorized repertoire of song parodies. Parodies of popular songs appear to have been important for greater Mexican comedians. Kanellos, for example, reproduces the text about *agringamiento* (“Americanization”) sung by Los Angeles comic Romualdo Tirado to the tune of the *bolero* “Dame un beso” (“Give Me a Kiss”) (1990:62). Mr. García used song parodies to close his act, and his repertoire includes a version of the *corrido* “El hijo desobediente” that uses language “from the back of the penitentiary” to comment on the contradictions of ethnic Mexican life in Texas’ racialized modernity.⁹⁸

⁹⁸from tape PH90-5-1:2, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

Disobedient Sons

The original “Hijo,” one of the more aggressively canonized *corridos*, presents a didactic narrative in which a son who refuses to obey his father’s command to stop fighting is cursed and, in some versions, dies an untimely death as a result of his transgression. The song is a clear example of the patriarchal ethos of the semifuedal ranching culture that existed in southern Texas and northeastern Mexico before and immediately after the revolution of 1836. Paredes has noted that in this society, the father was the worldly representative of God’s authority, and his “curse was thought to be the most terrible thing on earth” (1958:11). In many versions of the *corrido*, a black bull brought down from the mountains for branding carries out the father’s curse by goring Felipe, the disobedient son. It is worth noting, however, that the lyrical lines in which the son asks not to be buried on sacred ground are among the song’s most compelling moments.

—Lo que le pido a mi padre
que no me entierre en sagrado,

que me entierre en tierra bruta
donde me trille el ganado,
con una mano de fuera
y un papel sobre-dorado,
con un letrero que diga,
“Felipe fue desgraciado”

—I only ask of my father
Do not bury me in sacred
ground,
Bury me in brute earth
Where the stock may tamale me
With one hand out of the grave
And a gilded paper
With an epitaph that reads
“Felipe was an ill-fated man”
(quoted in Limón, 1992:47,
trans. by Limón)

If the song reinforced the values of its society of origin, it also clearly derived its aesthetic interest from its portrayal of a figure struggling with the limits imposed by those

values. It is not surprising, then that this of all *corridos* came to be associated with the *pachuco* phenomenon.

Pachuco parodies of “El hijo desobediente” appear to have circulated in face-to-face contexts among *pachucos* themselves, in the *carpas* and other theatrical venues, and through the mass media. I have encountered three such parodies, all of which share enough elements to be considered at least related to one another and probably derived of a single source text; all three playfully degrade the patriarchal, rural values espoused by the original *corrido*. Perhaps the best known of these is a version collected from *pachucos* in Tucson, Arizona by George C. Barker and published in the early 1950s. In a footnote, Barker attributes the song to a young man named Nano, stating that Nano “said he learned it in 1947 from another boy in Gilroy, California” (1970:37, n21), but he does not describe how the youth who were the objects of his ethnography used the text. He does, however, include other such texts, some of which are attributed to his consultants, suggesting that young *pachucos* did compose, sing, and transmit such songs.

Although Barker indicates awareness of the songs of Lalo Guerrero, he does not acknowledge the influence of the Mexican comedian Germán Valdés (“Tin Tan”) and of the film “El hijo desobediente” (Gómez-Landero 1945) in which Valdés performs the parody in a barroom scene, along with his *carnal* (“buddy”) Marcelo Chávez. The film does not follow the plot of either the *corrido* or the parody but rather tells the story of a frivolous, dandyish zoot suiter who is too enthralled with American music, barely intelligible slang, and fancy clothes to bother doing any work around his family’s farm. Expelled from his home, he travels from El Paso to Mexico City in the hope of becoming

a singing star and falls by chance and mistaken identity into the intrigues of a wealthy family. Valdés's *pachuco* in this film is an eccentric fop whose general stupidity and laziness never stop him from scheming a way to scam meals or shelter off of others in classic *pícaro* style. He is, however, almost completely non-violent, exuding none of the danger and toughness of the figure we know from the plays of Luis Valdez and the interpretation of Edward James Olmos.

Rodolfo García claims to have heard Tin Tan sing a version the parody on stage, and he has performed his own version of the parody from memory for me several times, beginning with our first interviews in 1990.⁹⁹ Although Mr. García does not claim authorship of the parody, he does claim that his version is unique and that he changed parts of the parody that contained tabooed language and concepts. If this is true, then the film version, which the shortest of the three extant versions, may have been an abridgement of a fuller text used in live performance. Valdés is credited with the songs that appear in the film, but it is impossible to know whether he composed the parody or whether he adapted to the stage a parody that already circulated in face-to-face contexts. I reproduce the three versions together to facilitate comparison by the reader:

El hijo desobediente
(Rodolfo García)¹⁰⁰

El hijo desobediente,”
Tucson versión (Barker
1970:37)

El hijo desobediente
Film versión.
(Gómez-Landero
1945).

⁹⁹ Mr. García recalls at least eight parodies that he used in the carpa for his solo act, as well as several other songs that were part of comic dialogues and similar acts in the carpa. Some of these parodies are fragmentary, but most seem complete. Of course these versions may differ in some ways from the versions he performed in the *carpa*, due to the vagaries of memory and other factors.

¹⁰⁰ PH90-8-1:1. Mr. García has recorded this parody for me several times, and the text varies slightly from performance to performance. “Fierros” in line 3 is sometimes rendered as “filas,” as is the case with the other two versions. “Rejoluvia” is sometimes rendered “rejoluvlia” in line 7 and 13. “Raye” sometimes

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Un domingo, andando grifo, 2. Se encontraron dos pachucos, 3. Metiendo mano a sus fierros, 4. Como queriendo pelear. 5. Cuando se estaban cateando, 6. Pues llegó su ruco de uno. 7. —Hijo de la rejoluvia, 8. Ya no pelees con ninguno. 9. —Quítese de aquí, mi padre, 10. Que estoy más bravo que un burro. 11. No vaya a sacar la fila 12. Y le saque todo el menudo. 13. —Hijo de la rejoluvia, 14. Por lo que acabas de hablar, 15. Antes de que salga el sol, 16. El hocico te han de rayar. 17. —Lo que le encargo a mi jefe: 18. Que no le diga a mi nana 19. Que por andar de pachuco, 20. Me quitaron toda la lana. 21. Pobrecito y los pachucos. 22. Ni me quisiera acordar. 23. Los levantan de la calle 24. Pa' llevarlos a pelar. 25. Ya con esta me despido, 26. Porque me llevan al bote 27. Y eso le puede pasar 28. A todo que haga mitote. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Un domingo, entrando a lunes, 2. Se encontraron dos pachucos, 3. Metiendo mano a sus filas, 4. Como queriendo forjear. 5. Cuando se estaban forjeando, 6. Pues llegó el jefe de uno. 7. —Hijo de mi corazón, 8. Ya no forjees con ninguno. 9. —Quítese de aquí, mi jefe, 10. Que estoy más bravo que un burro. 11. No vaya a sacar la fila 12. Y le trapase el menudo. 13. —Hijo de mi corazón, 14. Por lo que acabas de hablar, 15. Antes de que vaya el sol, 16. La vida te han deuitar. 17. —Lo que le encargué a mi jefe: 18. Que no me entierre en Califa 19. Que me entierre en Arizona, 20. Con tres costales de grifa. 21. Con una visa de fuera 22. Y un picotazo en el brazo. 23. Yo ya no quiero morfina, 24. Ahora quiero una cosa fina. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Un domingo entrando a lunes 2. Se encontraron dos pachucos. 3. Metiendo mano a sus filas 4. Como queriendo pelear 5. Cuando se estaban cateando 6. Pues llegó su padre de uno. 7. —Hijo de mis [entretenidas]¹⁰¹ 8. Ya no pele:es con ninguno. 9. —Quítese de aquí rucailo 10. Que estoy más bravo que un burro. 11. No vaya a sacar la fila 12. Y le checo en el menudo. 13. —Hijo de la refolufia 14. Por lo que acabas de hablar 15. Antes de que salga el sol 16. En la torre:::
te han de da:::r¹⁰² |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Rodolfo García's Pachuco version of "El hijo desobediente"
(translation mine)

1. One Sunday, walking around stoned,
2. Two pachuchos met,
3. Reaching for their knives
4. As if wanting to fight.
5. While they were hitting each other,
6. The old man of one arrived, saying.

Tucson versión (1947)
(translation mine)

1. One Sunday - really Monday morning -
2. Two pachuchos met,
3. Reaching for their knives
4. As if wanting to fight.
5. While they were fighting,
6. The father of one arrived, saying.

Film version.
(translation mine)

1. One Sunday – really Monday morning
2. Two pachucos met
3. Reaching for their knives
4. As if wanting to fight.
5. While they were hitting each other
6. The father of one arrived.

replaces "salga" in line 15. "Rayar" in line 16 sometimes appears as "quebrar." Finally, "borlote" sometimes substitutes for "mitote" in line 28.

¹⁰¹ Brackets indicate doubt about the accuracy of the transcription.

¹⁰² Once again, colons indicate elongation of the vowel sounds. Repeated colons indicated extensive elongation.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>7. "Son-of-a-gun,
8. Don't you fight with
anyone."
9. Get out of here, my father,
10. Because I feel fiercer than a
donkey.
11. If he tries to take out his
knife,
12. I'll rip all his guts out.
13. "Son-of-a-gun,
14. For what you have just
said,
15. Before the next sunrise,
16. Your face will surely be
slashed."
17. "My last words to my dad
18. Is that he not tell my
grandma
19. That because I was a
pachuco,
20. They took away all my
dough."
21. Poor pachucos!
22. I don't even want to
remember.
23. They [the cops] pick them
up off the street
24. To go get them a shave.
25. And with this, I say
goodbye,
26. Because they're taking me
to the slammer.
27. And this can happen
28. To anyone who makes a
commotion.</p> | <p>7. "My dear son,
8. Don't you fight with
anyone."
9. "Get out of here, Daddy-
O,
10. 'cause I feel fiercer than a
donkey.
11. If he tries to take out his
knife,
12. I'll run his gut through."
13. "My dear son,
14. For what you have just
said,
15. Before the next sunset,
16. Your will surely lose your
life."
17. "My last words to my
father:
18. That they bury me not in
"Califa"
19. That they bury me in
Arizona,
20. With three sacks of
weed."
21. "With an outside visa
22. And a shot in the arm,
23. I don't want morphine
now -
24. I just want some kind
bud."</p> | <p>7. "Son of my[underpants]
8. Don't you fight with
anyone."
9. "Get out of here Daddy-O
10. 'cause I feel fiercer than a
donkey.
11. If he tries to take out his
knife,
12. I'll get him in the guts.
13. "Son of the revolution
14. For what you have just said
15. Before the next sunset
16. They'll give it to you in the
"tower."</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Of the three versions of parody, Mr. García's is the longest, in part because it is in the only one to spoof the original's formulaic *despedida* (final leave-taking by the singer). The three versions coincide in most major points, however. By changing from the rural setting of the original to an urban street fight and substituting slang for the high-minded language of the heroic *corrido*, the parody speaks in a distinctly *pocho* and carnivalesque idiom which brings down to earth everything that is high and serious. The presence of selected vocabulary from the *pachuco* argot (e.g. "jefe" and "ruco" instead of "padre," "grifo" or "stoned," "lana" or "wool" for "money," etc.) gives the song a

streetwise feel and increases its appeal to *lumpen*-sensibility of the *palomilla*. Tin Tan's version and the Tucson version specify the time of the fight as the late night or early morning, while Mr. García's version uses the opening lines to effect a clownish inversion of the heroic world of the traditional *corrido*, where men directly confront each other, each one defending his right (Limón 1992:40). Here, we see the two strong-willed *mancebos* of the original replaced by two stoned pachucos.

The parodic inversion of the original continues with the son's response to his father's admonition in line 10. In all three versions, the son feels not fiercer than a lion but fiercer than a burro, and he threatens to stab his opponent not in the heart, but in his guts. This last feature is an excellent example of the anatomically specific dismemberment that characterizes the grotesque image of the body (Bakhtin 1984:207). The tripe, according to Bakhtin, is "linked with death, with slaughter, murder, since to disembowel is to kill," but simultaneously "linked with birth, for the belly generates" (163). The degradation continues with the father's curse, which, in both Tin Tan's version and Mr. García's, appears in diminished form, downgraded from death to a good beating of one kind or another, and once again framed in the street-language of the *pachucos*. At this point, the film parody ends with the father's curse unrealized and the *pachuco* unrepentant, although those audiences for whom Tin Tan's character symbolized the ridiculousness of the *agringado* might well have identified with the sentiments expressed in these final lines. In Mr. García's version and in the Tucson version, the son answers the father with a request as in the original. The Tucson version converts the burial request of the original into an appeal to the taste in illegal drugs stereotypically associated with the *pachuco*. In Mr. García's version, the son asks his father to keep his misadventures secret from his grandmother, a move that alludes to generational conflict.

In Mr. García's and Tin Tan's versions of the parody, the father expresses not love for his son in lines 7 and 13, but contempt in a thinly veiled expletive, "hijo de la rejoluvia." The Tucson version retains the original's "hijo de mi corazón" in both lines. This change may offer a clue to the genealogy of the parody. In interviews with me, Mr. García has stated that he was unfamiliar with this sense of the term and simply used it "por no decir una mala palabra" ("so as not to say a bad word"), in a manner analogous to the English "son of a gun." Aside from this, he seems to interpret the word as nonsense, and in some of his recordings of the parody, he changes "rejoluvia" to "rejoluvlia." In line 7 of Tin Tan's version of the parody, "hijo de mi corazón" is replaced with something that is probably "hijo de mis entretelas," most likely a veiled reference to the father's genitals.¹⁰³ "Hijo de la refolufia" appears in line 13 in Tin Tan's version, just as it does in Mr. García's. Mexican-born speakers of Spanish with whom I have discussed this parody have identified "refolufia" to me as an ironic and affectionate nickname for the Revolution of 1910. Its appearance adds a layer of referentially explicit social commentary to the substitution that Mr. García recognizes, suggesting a direct link between the disaffected, displaced urban youth represented by the *pachuco* and the inaugural trauma of Mexico's chaotic twentieth-century modernization. It would appear, then, that Mr. García has adapted the text; retaining the term "refolufia" without fully understanding the sense the term had acquired "en el otro lado" (on the other side). How his audiences interpreted the word is, of course, impossible to determine. Nevertheless, the confusion over this term highlights the fact that even though this parody responded to broad similarities in the social situations of the southwestern United States and Mexico, and even though it circulated extensively through many channels between the two

¹⁰³ I am unsure of the transcription of "entretelas," and although I have found no references to this term in dictionaries, it strikes me as combining "entre" ("between") and "telas" ("cloth"). This suggests a reference to underwear and, by metonymy, the genitals.

countries, it also responded to the growing differentiation between the countries.

Although the border did not stop the exchange of ideas represented by this circulation, it was not altogether without effect.

Mr. García's adaptation of the song to specifics of life in South Texas appears in the sixth stanza (lines 21-24), when a voice speaking in the present tense and the first person interrupts the linear third person past tense narrative of the original *corrido*. Although it is possible that this stanza may represent reported speech by the disobedient son, it could also be the voice of the singer. In interviews with me, Mr. García has never tired of describing the violent actions of the Sheriff of Nueces County that led him to introduce this stanza.

Este desgraciado sheriff miraba
un chamaco de unos 12 años.

Hay muchos chamacos de 12 15
años que ya están grandotes y
andaban vestidos así de
pachucos y todo eso
y ese desgraciado sheriff nomas
miraba y les mochaba los
pantalones y luego les daba
dos tres cachetadas chinga
Porque era antimexicano y estaba
usando la ley para abusar de la
ley.

Para
para conformarse él con darle una
cachetada
a una criatura que no sabía por
qué le pegaba.
Los chamacos esos estaban
llorando
porque los chamacos no traían
navaja no traían nada.
Ellos nomás andaban usando la
moda

That damned sheriff [of Nueces
County] would see a kid about 12
years old.

There are a lot of kids about 12 15
years old who're big now and
went around dressed like pachucos
and all that
and fuck that stupid sheriff would just
see them and he'd cut their pants
and then he'd sock 'em two or
three times.
'Cause he was anti-Mexican and he
was using the law to abuse the
law.

To
to comfort himself by socking
a kid who didn't know why he was
hitting him.
Those kids were bawling
because the kids didn't have razors
they didn't have anything.
They were just following fashion

porque así como ahora que son
 se quitan todo el pelo chinga
 pa'que parezcan negros
 como los Spurs y a mí me dio
 mucho coraje.
 Y por eso cantaba esa canción de
 el hijo desobediente
 pero yo la compuse a modo mío.
 Esa canción la cantaba Tin Tan y
 Marcelo.
 La cantaban muchos cómicos y
 todo eso.
 Pero yo la compuse en 1941
 que era cuando los pachucos que
 los levantaban los llevaba y
 les cor— había una barbería
 que se llamaba Memo Reyes.

 En la calle Leopardo en Corpus
 Christi. Ahi le— los pelaba.
 Les mochaba todo el pelo.
 Pa'que no trajeran aquí el pelo
 largo como te digo les cortaba
 asi chinga
 y luego les cortaba los pantalones
 chinga
 Goddamn son of a bitch y les
 daba una cachetada y se iban
 llorando pa'l casa.
 No había quien se metiera allí en
 Corpus.
 Porque porque él era el sherife.
 Hombre de muchos negocios ahi.
 No se querían meter.
 Mi ‘amá tenía mucho cuidado
 porque decia
 “Este hombre va a dar hablar de
 ese hombre
 las injusticias que anda haciendo
 pero no hay quién lo respalde.””

‘cause just like today that are
 fuck they shave off all their hair so
 they'll look Black
 like the Spurs and it really made me
 mad.¹⁰⁴
 And that's why I sang that song about
 the disobedient son
 but I re-composed it in my way.
 That song Tin Tan and Marcelo used
 to sing it.
 Lots of comedians used to sang it and
 all that.
 But I composed it in 1941.
 which was when the pachucos were
 around when they picked them up
 they took them and they cu—there
 was a barbershop that was called
 Memo Reyes.
 On Leopardo street in Corpus Christi.
 There t— they shaved them.
 They cut off all their hair.
 So they wouldn't have their hair long
 here like I say he'd cut them like
 that fuck
 and then he'd cut their pants fuck.

 Goddamn son of a bitch and he'd sock
 ‘em one and they'd go on home
 crying.
 Nobody would get involved there in
 Corpus.
 ‘Cause he was the sheriff.
 A man with lots of businesses there.
 They didn't want to get involved.
 My Mom was worried ‘cause she said

 “This man is going to talk about that
 man
 the injustices he's doing
 but there's nobody to back him up.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ This, of course, is a reference to the San Antonio Spurs basketball team.

Of course, police brutality against zoot suit-wearing youth of various ethnicities was widespread during the time. Nevertheless, Mr. García's recollection of the victims of the Nueces County Sheriff's department is distinctive in that he highlights their innocence rather than their worldliness.¹⁰⁶ His description of the zoot suit-wearing youth in Corpus highlights the heterogeneity of zoot suit culture, the differences in local perceptions of the phenomenon, and the varying degrees to which its participants adopted the various attributes associated with the *pachucos*. In the parody, the switch from the past tense to the present tense mentioned above heightens the sense of a juxtaposition of the past (the original *corrido*) and the present (the *pachuco* phenomenon). Furthermore, by switching from a portrayal of the *pachucos* as active, fighting subjects to one in which they appear as passive victims of injustice, the parody juxtaposes a number of residual and then-emergent Mexican-American *corrido* themes. As Peña has noted, the protagonists of the majority of Mexican-American *corridos* composed before World War II appeared engaged in active struggles against Anglo domination, while those of some postwar *corridos* appeared as passive victims whose plight would move listeners to action. In these ‘victim’ *corridos*, the ethnic Mexican collectivity becomes the hero (1982:36).¹⁰⁷ In the pachuco of Mr. García's parody, these types are juxtaposed to one another, with the latter following the former.

¹⁰⁵ RG10.10.1999-1:1

¹⁰⁶ Further research on the Coastal Bend area during World War II would be required to evaluate the accuracy of Mr. García's statements and place them in full historical context. Here I present them to give a sense of his portrayal of this situation and of his understanding of the parody.

¹⁰⁷ Writing in 1982, Peña seemed to feel that the “victim” corrido was the wave of the future, a theme that would replace the older theme of the valiant hero as the Mexican American community itself became more empowered in society. Today, in the context of the decades long “war on drugs” and the growing

I would also suggest that in the figure of the fighting *pachucos*, we may also see the embryo of the anti-heroes of the mid-century smuggler *corridos* and their contemporary *narcocorrido* descendants, whose challenges to authority display a manly valor uncoupled from any moral code and community ties. In the complex figure of its protagonist, then, the *pachuco* parody of “El hijo desobediente” in all its versions performs the evolution of the *corrido* form itself. In doing so, it blazes a trail that the Chicano novel would take after World War II. Saldívar has argued that the literature of the Chicano movement

takes as its object the mainstays of traditional culture, ranging from the nature of family and community interactions, to the process of individual subject-formation itself. Patterns of belief and behavior that go unquestioned in the corrido because they served as the grounds of personal and group identity now begin to be put at stake in narrative (Saldívar 1990:50).

This sort of self-reflexive questioning of received patterns of behavior and tradition also seems to be at the heart of Mr. García’s parody and all its variants. Whether there are direct intertextual connections between this parody and later Chicano novels, or whether this would be an example of convergent aesthetic strategies occasioned by related social formations is unclear.

Genre Play and Class Consciousness

The extensive circulation between face-to-face and mass-mediated modes of transmission evidenced by the parody of “El hijo desobediente” is far from unusual,

militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, the *corrido* has experiencing a revival of sorts both in Mexico and the United States. The most popular contemporary corridos are gritty narratives of the exploits of bold, amoral drug traffickers. The victim *corrido*, by contrast, does not enjoy the prominence that Peña would have predicted for it. Although I would agree that the victim corrido could, in the context of 1940s’ southern Texas, appear to be an emergent form, it is clear that it is not likely to acquire the status of a cultural dominant any time soon.

either in the *carpa* as a whole or in Mr. García's repertoire. As Socorro Merlin has noted, the *carpa* and the radio were involved in a constant exchange of genres, texts, personnel, and material, of which the imported, sophisticated *bolero* and the homespun folksy *ranchera* were among the most important objects (1995:22-23). During our interviews, Mr. García was able to remember at least fragments of some ten song parodies, and among these there are no other *corridos*; the rest are tangos, boleros, and other imported song types that in greater Mexico came to fall under the broad label of the *canción romántica* during the early twentieth century. Unlike the parody sung by Romualdo Tirado that Kanellos reproduces, Mr. García's parodies tend to revolve around a single theme: lost love and the treachery of women. His parodies use earthy, carnivalesque humor to disrupt the flowery, sentimental tone of the originals. Although these songs do not contain the sort of explicit political commentary seen in the *corrido* parody, they play with their audiences' generic expectations in ways that resonate with the class-based tensions in Mexican American South Texas. One particularly clear example of this dynamic is the parody "A medias copas."

[A medias copas (parodia)¹⁰⁸

1. Coyuya, sesenta y nueve
2. Y allí, tengo mi jacal
3. Por cama, tengo un petate,
4. Por almohada, un cajón;
5. Un sillón, mocho y chinchoso
6. Que la vieja me dejó.
7. En un clavo están colgadas

Halfway drunk (parody, gloss)

In the barrio, seventy-nine,
And there, I have my *jacal* ('hut').
For my bed, I have a *petate* ('reed mat'),
For my pillow, a crate;
A buggy, broken armchair
That the *vieja* ('broad') left me.
From a nail is hanging

¹⁰⁸ This text is from PH90-8-1:1. The analysis is adapted from that published in Haney 2000. I thank Richard Flores, Jessica Montalvo, Nadjah Ríos, and Angélica Bautista for their close proofreading of my translation of the parody and the original. I especially thank Susana Kaiser, whose knowledge of Buenos Aires revealed important details in the original that would have been unintelligible to me otherwise.

8. Unas enaguas chorreadas
9. Que la ingrata me dejó;
10. Un perro, flaco, amarillo
11. Que de pulgas me llenó.

(estribillo)

12. Por esa ingratitud
13. Que no puedo olvidar,
14. Estoy a medias copas.
15. Me las voy a curar.
16. Ya a medias copas, yo
17. Recuerdo su traición,
18. Que triste y atontado
19. Por otro, me dejó.

20. Parrandas y borracheras
21. No sé lo que voy a hacer.
22. La culpa que me las ponga
23. La tiene esa infiel mujer.
24. No encuentro quién me consuele.
25. Sin camisa me quedé.
26. Los amigos ya no me invitan.
27. No hay quién me de una copita
28. Ni un vasito de aguamiel.
29. Sino al contrario, se burlan
30. Que mi vieja me hizo güey.

(estribillo)

31. Por esa ingratitud
32. Que no puedo olvidar,
33. Estoy a medias copas.
34. Me las voy a curar.
35. Y un consejo les doy
36. A los que oyendo están
37. Que esas viejas chorreadas

A filthy, mottled slip
That the ungrateful woman left me;¹⁰⁹
A skinny, yellow dog,
Who covered me with fleas.

(chorus)

For that ingratitudo
That I cannot forget,
I am halfway drunk.
I'm going to cure myself.
Now halfway drunk, I
Remember her betrayal,
Who left me stunned and sad
For another.

Carousing and drunkenness,
I don't know what I'm going to do.
The blame for my doing this
Belongs to that unfaithful woman.
I find no one to comfort me.
I'm left without a shirt.
Now my friends don't buy me drinks.
There's nobody to give me a little shot
Or a glass of *aguamiel* ('maguey-juice').
On the contrary, they jeer
That my *vieja* made me a *güey*
(lit. "ox"/ fig."impotent fool")¹¹⁰.

(chorus)

For that ingratitudo
That I cannot forget,
I am halfway drunk.
I'm going to cure myself.
And I'll give some advice
To those who are listening
That they send those dirty *viejitas*

¹⁰⁹Some proofreaders have preferred that this word be translated as “ungrateful woman,” while others have preferred “cruel woman.” In any case, it is a verbal formula so strongly associated with the stereotype of the treacherous, ungrateful, cruel, conniving woman of the *canción ranchera* that it may point to all of these qualities.

¹¹⁰In some performances of this song parody during interviews, Mr. García has brought his hands to his temples, with the first fingers pointing upward, as if to suggest horns, upon saying, “güey.”

38. Les manden . . . a bañar. . . . To take a bath.¹¹¹

Mr. García claims to have learned the parody from a published book from Mexico that is no longer in his possession. He also claims to have altered the parody's text to fit the tastes of his South Texas audience, both by replacing tabooed vocabulary with less offensive expressions and by changing unfamiliar expressions.¹¹² The title and phrase “*A medias copas*,” for example, is a transformation of “*A medios chiles*” (lit. “Halfway chilied”), whose figurative meaning is more or less the same thing as Mr. García’s title but was less familiar in Texas than it was in Mexico. In addition to these changes, Mr. García also describes localizing his parodies in towns the carpa visited. Regarding “Chencha,” a parody of a *bolero* titled “Desvelo de amor,” Mr. Garcia argued that his parodies

....vienen de la vida pública, de la vida real. Esas son palabras que éste platica así, “Oyes, fíjate que éste dice de otro. Oyes, aquella muchacha se llama Chencha. Mire que éste que el otro.” Y yo estoy agarrando lo que dijo éste, lo que dijo aquél. Y luego, yo lo compongo en esa parodia.

... come from the public life, from real life. These are words that somebody says like this: “Listen, you know that so-and-so said such-and-such about somebody else. Listen, that girl's name is Chencha. Look, [let me tell you] this and that,” and I'm getting everything that this one says, and that one says. And then I work it into that parody.)¹¹³

¹¹¹The pause in the middle of this line may lead some listeners to expect the sentence to end “. . . a la chingada” ('to fuck'), “al diablo” ('to the devil') or some other such expression. The actual ending of the sentence “les manden . . . a bañar” ('send them . . . to take a bath') frustrates this expectation.

¹¹²I have as yet been unable to locate any such book or any other version of this parody. I cannot therefore say with any certainty how much Mr. García changed it and in what ways.

¹¹³From tape PH90- 8-1:1, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio. For an analysis of “Chencha,” which exhibits a genre play similar to that of “*A medias copas*,” see Haney 1996.

In bars and other gathering-places, then, Mr. García would talk to locals, listen to their conversations, and incorporate material he encountered into his routines and sometimes into his parodies. The version of “*A medias copas*” that he recorded for me, however, seems to have little in the way of localizing detail.

“*A medias copas*” is a parody of a popular tango titled “*A media luz*,” which I reproduce for reference.

A media luz (original)
por C. Lenzi y E. Donato, 1925
(Romano 1989)

1. Corrientes tres-cuatro-ocho,
2. Segundo piso, ascensor.
3. No hay porteros ni vecinos,
4. Adentro cocktail y amor ...
5. Pisito que puso Maple,
6. Piano, estera y velador;
7. Un teléfono que contesta,
8. Una vitrola que llora
9. Viejos tangos de mi flor
10. Y un gato de porcelana
11. Pa' que no maulle al amor.

(estribillo)

12. Y todo a media luz,
 13. ¡Que brujo es el amor!
 14. A media luz los besos
 15. A media luz los dos.
 16. Y todo a media luz.
 17. Crepúsculo interior,
 18. ¡Qué suave terciopelo
 19. La media luz de amor!
-
20. Juncal doce veinticuatro,
 21. Telefoneá sin temor;

In half-light (original)

Three- four-eight Corrientes Street,
Second floor, the elevator;
There are no custodians or neighbors,
Inside, cocktails and love.
A little flat, furnished by Maple.¹¹⁴
A piano, a mat, and a nightstand;
A telephone for answering,
A victrola that weeps out
Old tangos of my youth.
And a cat made of porcelain
So that it won't meow at love.

(chorus)

And all in half-light,
What a wizard love is!
In half-light the kisses,
In half-light, the two of us.
And all in half-light,
Interior twilight,
What soft velvet,
The half-light of love

Twelve-twenty-four Juncal Street
Call without fear;

¹¹⁴Maple is a prestigious furniture store in Buenos Aires.

- 22. De tarde, té con masitas,
- 23. De noche, tango y cantar;
- 24. Los domingos, té danzante,
- 25. Los lunes, desolación.
- 26. Hay de todo en la casita,
- 27. Almohadones y divanes,
- 28. Como en botica . . . cocó,
- 29. Alfombras que no hacen ruido,
- 30. Y mesa puesta al amor.

(estibillo)

- 31. ¡Y todo a media luz,
- 32. Que brujo es el amor!
- 33. A media luz los besos
- 34. A media luz los dos.
- 35. Y todo a media luz.
- 36. Crepúsculo interior,
- 37. ¡Qué suave terciopelo
- 38. La media luz de amor!

In the afternoon, tea and pastries,
 At night, tango and song;
 On Sundays, a tea dance,
 On Mondays, desolation.
 The house has some of everything,
 Like in a drugstore,
 Great cushions and divans . . . cocaine,
 Carpets that don't make noise,
 And the table set for love.

(chorus)

And all in half-light,
 What a wizard love is!
 In half-light the kisses,
 In half-light, the two of us.
 And all in half-light,
 Interior twilight,
 What soft velvet (is),
 The half-light of love

Although there are important parallels between the parody and the original text, Mr. García has been reluctant to reflect upon them in interviews. When questioned about the original, he has stated that he knows the parody best and has only a passing familiarity with the original. These comments might suggest that the parody could stand alone, without comparison to the original text, and indeed, it has probably done so for many listeners. In analysis that follows, however, I will make much of the relationship between the parody and the original song. I argue that the transformations the parody effects on the original song, as exemplified by Mr. García's version, are emblematic of its implicit commentary on the tango itself and the history of that form's use in southern Texas.

Having drawn attention to key aspects of the *carpa* and its historical and social milieu, we may return to the text of "A medias copas" for a more detailed analysis. Like

all parodies, “A medias copas” is foregrounds the generic conventions and the “social, ideological, and political-economic connections” of the original (Briggs and Bauman 1992:147), and can therefore be considered ‘metacultural.’¹¹⁵ The tango enjoyed a florescence in Mexico beginning in the 1930s (Sareli 1977:13), and was probably brought to Texas by commercial recordings and by touring musical and theatrical acts from that country that visited San Antonio and other southwestern cities. Although the bandoneon, an accordion-like free-reed instrument, was the centerpiece of most Argentine tango groups, the form was never popular with the accordion-based *conjunto*. All available evidence suggests that to the extent that the tango was performed live in southern Texas, it was performed by the middle-class *orquestas* (large wind ensembles modeled after American jazz bands) and by solo singers. It is partly for this reason that the tango was received in southern Texas as an exotic, cosmopolitan, high-society genre, more a symbol of a generalized, encompassing pan-Latin-American culture than of local tradition

The tango's middle-class association in Texas is the result of its complex transnational history. According to Marta Savigliano, the tango first emerged among marginal Argentines in the late nineteenth century as a scandalous, tense dance “in which a male/female embrace tried to heal the racial and class displacement provoked by urbanization and war” (1995:30). In the lyrics of these early “ruffianesque” tangos,

¹¹⁵ An anonymous reviewer of an article in which earlier versions of this analysis appeared (Haney 2000) objected to my assertion that “all” parodies foreground the social, ideological, and political-economic connections of some original, arguing that some parodies are narrower in focus than the one under consideration and that some are even self-celebratory. I would grant that parodies engage the social and political-economic associations of their originals with varying degrees of denotative explicitness and with different kinds of “spin.” However, I find it hard to imagine a parody that did not bring some such aspects of its original to consciousness in some way. For that reason, I choose to retain my original wording at the beginning of this sentence.

treacherous, cruel women betray their male romantic partners, often by seeking out men of higher status. In these songs, then, “class issues are interpreted as a sex problem,” and “women are accused of lacking class loyalty and are assured a decadent and lonely end” (62). Originally a stigmatized form in Argentina, the tango spread to the theaters and dance halls of Paris and London, driven by a colonialist desire for the exotic. Like the raw materials imported to metropolitan industrial centers and converted into manufactured products to be sold to the dependent south, the tango later returned to its land of origin in a refined form. The romantic tango that arrived in Mexico in the 1930s, then, was the product of this global traffic in emotional capital.

This would be especially true of “*A media luz*,” the song that Mr. García chose to parody, which is an intriguing example of the romantic tango discussed earlier. This song immerses the listener in the blissful, decadent opulence of an apartment rented by a presumably wealthy man for a secret amorous liaison, celebrating exactly the sort of situation that the older, working-class tango condemns. It reveals the silent, enclosed space of this apartment to the listener through an enumeration of the luxury commodities that adorn that space. The “interior twilight” (**line 17**) of the apartment forms a darkened reflection—in half-light—of the bourgeois home itself, an intimate space away from the intimate sphere, whose silence keeps secrets and nurtures inconspicuous consumption. Because it is an illicit affair that occurs in the apartment, “*A media luz*” retains a hint of the tango’s old transgressive character. But the song’s transgression is a thoroughly bourgeoisified one in which the illicit love affair is reduced to one more piece in a

collection, an object to be stashed away next to the piano and the cocaine, far from the prying eyes of competitors.

Rodolfo García's parody first engages its original in the way that a retort in a verbal duel engages the utterance that precedes it: by using a minimal economy of formal effort to achieve a maximally semantically powerful reversal (Sherzer 1987:306, n7). In the first line of the parody, a made-up address located not in any particular street, but merely in the “*coyuya*” (the *barrio*), mimics the Buenos Aires street address that appears in the original. In line 2, the luxury apartment is replaced with a *jacal*, a house of sticks and adobe that in the 1940s had only recently ceased to be common among the rural poor in Mexican American south Texas. The piano, night-stand, victrola and telephone (**lines 6-9**) are replaced with a *petate* (a humble reed-mat) (**line 3**) a crate for a pillow (**line 4**), a broken armchair full of bedbugs (**line 5**), and a dirty slip left behind by the cruel, offstage woman who is the parody's ostensible object (**line 7-9**).¹¹⁶ Standing metonymically for the lower stratum of the *ingrata*'s absent body, this detail carnivalizes and embodies the sentimentality of the original. This tactic continues in the final lines of the first stanza, which juxtaposes the porcelain cat of the original with a living dog whose fleas violate the boundaries of the speaker's body.

The parody reverses the original not only in its treatment of inanimate objects but also in its reified treatment of femininity. Savigliano has noted that women in the tango . . . can be either the object of male disputes or the trigger of a

¹¹⁶ I thank Celso Alvarez-Cáccamo for his helpful and merciful discretion in pointing out a mis-transcription and mis-translation of this line in the version of this argument presented at the AAA meetings in December of 1998.

man's reflections. In either case, it is hard for a woman to overcome her status as a piece of passional inventory. The difference is that in the first position, the woman is conceived as an inert object of passion, whereas in the second she is a living one. (1995:48).

Where the original places its female character in the first position, Mr. García's parody clearly places her in the second. In doing so, it returns the romantic tango to its ruffianesque roots. But the parody's intertextual manipulation does not stop there. The whiny confession of male weakness that characterized the ruffianesque tango, with its construction of a treacherous, cruel, absent woman, closely resembles a similar trope that Mr. García's audience would have associated with the greater Mexican *canción ranchera*. The *mexicano* ideology of *lo ranchero* differs in some ways from the transgressive lumpenproletarian masculinity celebrated in the tango, focusing as it does on ". . . self-sufficiency, candor, simplicity, sincerity, and patriotism . . ." (Peña 1985:11). Yet the *canción ranchera* often portrays such masculinity through its breach, by showing the *ranchero's* vulnerability to the stratagems of a woman whose character is diametrically opposed to the qualities listed above.

The second stanza of the parody follows the original out of the intimate sphere into the public realm of recreation. But where the original tango describes activities that are as rigorously scheduled as the work-week that circumscribes them (**lines 20-25**), the parody breaks out of the *jacal* into the undisciplined, or perhaps differently disciplined, male public sphere of the *cantina*. There, the speaker vents his feelings of impotence, loss, and abandonment in a *parranda* that recognizes neither boundaries nor schedules. But as he licks his wounds in this space of mourning, he is an object of ridicule, for his

treacherous ex-lover has made a *güey* (lit. “ox”, fig. “impotent fool, cuckold”) of him. This image of the abandoned man driven to drink is also the topic of the chorus, which displays less parallelism with the original than the two other stanzas, and the parody treats this subject with some degree of seriousness. In interviews, Mr. García has argued that betrayed heterosexual love and male humiliation is a universal theme. Indeed, it seems that his own emotional identification with the protagonists of his parodies is behind his statements that his parodies come from “*la realidad—de lo que pasa*” (‘reality—from what happens’). What appears as a highly conventionalized plot to the outsider is for him a crystallization of the emotional impact of actual events. Like the popular songs they satirize, his parodies are not introspective, novelistic descriptions of characters, but broadly constructed templates into which the details of personal experience can be written.¹¹⁷

Of course, the *canción ranchera*’s stereotype of a treacherous, cruel woman is linked to an ideology of male dominance. In a widely-debated examination of this issue, Peña has characterized this figure as a key symbol of a greater Mexican “folklore of machismo” which symbolically displaces class conflict onto the more readily visible gender conflict (1992:40). Peña concludes that for *mexicano* working men, this move becomes a principle of illusory compensation, a ‘false consciousness’ that prevents them from comprehending the true reality of class inequality (41). This analysis, of course, recalls Ramos and Paz, but it is also similar to Savigliano’s interpretation of the tango cited above and is not entirely without explanatory value. Its usefulness is limited,

¹¹⁷ Cf. Haggard 1966 for a lyrical examination of this issue in Anglo-American Country Music.

however, by its relegation of gender to the status of a mere mediator of a supposedly more fundamental class conflict. A more complete analysis would acknowledge this stereotype as one of many examples of the complex overdetermined relationship between gendered and class-based discourses of identity. Indeed, this relationship is not limited to greater Mexico or to Latin America, for similar stereotypes have emerged both in Anglo-American country music and in the blues. None of these genres is monolithic, of course, and discourse about treacherous women has always generated a counter-discourse dealing with the treachery and cruelty of men in heterosexual love.

Indeed, all of these musical styles seem fixated on the frustration of consumer society's promise of happiness through heterosexual intimacy (Buck-Morss 1989:188). Mr. García's parody highlights this theme by focusing the ruined possessions and carnivalesque, bodily details discussed above. The dirty slip hung from a nail, the vermin which infest the body of the whiny narrator, and the dirtiness attributed to women in general in the song's final misogynistic jab (**lines 37-38**), bring the heart-centered sentiment of the tango and the *ranchera* down to the generating lower stratum of the body. Furthermore, Don Fito's clownlike costume, his exaggerated slapstick movements on stage, and the bawdy *picardía* of his lyrics must have contrasted sharply both with the genteel passion of the romantic tango and the wounded pride of the *ranchera*. The seriousness of the male narrator's self-pity thus became relativized and was placed in "cheerfully irreverent quotation marks" (Bakhtin 1981:55). But I suspect that this attempt to bring laughter and sorrow together only went so far. Carnivalesque though it

may be, the parody ends on a somber note, highlighting “the increasing self-alienation of the person who inventories his[her] past as dead possessions” (Buck-Morss 1989:189).

Conclusion

Like the clown jokes described earlier, Mr. García’s parodies operate by setting up frames of reference and generic expectations only to and disrupt them in order to articulate an implicit, and sometimes explicit, critical stance towards some aspects of the social formation from which they emerged. In the song parodies, this is accomplished through a series of symbolic inversions of the original song. In “A medias copas,” these inversions juxtaposed the conventions of the romantic tango with those of the ruffianesque tango and the Mexican *canción ranchera*. By invoking symbols of traditional *mexicana/o* material culture and rural poverty, as well as the bitter lovelorn masculine subject of the *ranchera*, the parody reversed the original song's bourgeoisified focus on luxury goods and interior space. By inscribing a “low,” localized register of language onto the “high”, cosmopolitan music of the tango, the parody established a critical relationship to received, class-bound aesthetic standards of evaluation that were prevalent in San Antonio’s theatrical public, among both performers and audience-members.

Similarly, the parody of “El hijo desobediente” makes the *corrido* not merely “the form of the whole, but the object of representation, . . . the hero of the parody” (Bakhtin 1981:51). In both of the parodies examined here, the conventions and associations of the serious song types appear in “cheerfully irreverent quotation marks” (55). By rewording

a rural form like the *corrido* in the urban slang of the *pachucos*, the latter parody performs the cultural conflict occasioned by the migration to the cities that the Tejano population was undergoing in the 1940s (Montejano 1987:265). By grafting the image of the *pachuco* onto the story of the disobedient son, the singers of the parody, in and out of the popular theater, pointed to the most extreme example of the generational conflict that troubled many of the families in their audiences. Thus, through manipulation of the formal conventions of the original songs the parody offered a feelingful icon of a moment of intense change in the lives of its audience, highlighting “the sedimented ideological traces of older modes of production in conflict with the present or the anticipatory messages of a future mode of production” (Limón 1992:32).

In the voice of the greater Mexican pelado-comic in San Antonio and elsewhere, techniques like these helped to transform a pathologizing discourse of Mexican masculinity into a fundamentally open, unfinished discourse that left open avenues for positive self-identification, unfortunately limited by a misogynistic current that no amount of carnivalesque degradation and renewal could erase. In doing so, comedians like Cantinflas, Tin Tan, Don Chema, Don Lalo, and Don Fito drew on a vast linguistic commons of jokes, *albures*, parodies, and other artful expressions. At the same time, they participated in a market in which they were seen as owners and authors of distinct characters marked by distinctive attributes, and in which texts circulated through massified and commodified means as well as the face-to-face. In the *carpa*, and in the other contexts in which they circulated, the art of the *actor cómico* offered listeners as a

way of converting the shock of historical transitions and social displacement into renewing laughter.

CHAPTER 5: THE GREATER MEXICAN COMIC DIALOGUE ON PHONOGRAPH

Introduction

After reading secondary accounts of ethnic Mexican popular theater in San Antonio, talking with elderly ex-performers, and squinting at seventy-year-old theater reviews in microfilmed Spanish-language newspapers, I felt both an odd sense of immediacy and a strange letdown when I first heard recordings made by theatrical performers from the period. All of the clichés and pieties that have surrounded recorded sound since the latter half of the nineteenth century came swirling up through my mind—the idea that recordings bring distant public figures into our intimate, private space, that in sound recording we can hear the voices of the dead, the presumption of some original event external to the recording process of which the recording is a document. At the same time, something elusive seemed lacking. Trying to direct my ears at voices mingled with the cracks and pops of aging disks, which were first copied onto DAT for archival purposes and then dubbed onto an audiocassettes for me, I realized that the texture of the old recordings carried a double message. One the one hand, their lack of fidelity drew my attention to the fact that the sounds being produced were technologically mediated. On the other hand, there came the seductive promise of a different kind of immediacy: for was I not hearing something close to same sounds as those heard by the people who originally bought and listened to those disks back when they were commercially available? Surely these reproducible sounds brought with them a reproducible experience.

I came to see things differently in 1999, when I had the good fortune of locating the late Enrique Valero, whose older brother, Jesús Rodríguez-Valero, had recorded more than sixty sides, consisting mostly of comic dialogues, between 1928 and 1937 with his wife Ernestina Edgel de Rodríguez (“La Bella Netty”). On our first meeting, I gave Mr. Valero and his wife Aurora, who survives him, a copy of the cassette of Netty and Jesús’s recordings that I had received from the Arhoolie foundation. Some weeks later, Mrs. Valero commented that listening to the dialogues again more than sixty years after they were first recorded was surprising; they were not as funny as she had remembered. However faithfully these reproductions of the artists’ voices may have reproduced the sounds of those hotel-room recording sessions, the dialogues have aged. They circulate now in a different semiotic environment, and although the sounds themselves may be reproducible, no listener can hear them in the same context twice. Furthermore, while performers and audience members experienced these recordings one by one, as commentaries on a series of continuously unfolding life events, the contemporary listener inevitably experiences the recordings as a closed corpus. This chapter, then, can only survey the Rodríguez recordings as such a corpus, finding points of comparison and contrast among them, linking trends in the recordings to larger historical processes, and seeking to reconstruct the social formations of which the dialogues and the institutions that produced them were a part. All the while, it will be necessary to remember that this global perspective does not exhaust the ways in which performers and audiences used individual recordings.

Early Recordings of Ethnic Mexican Comedy in the United States

Of all the ethnic Mexican actors to record theatrical material for U.S. record companies, Netty and Jesús Rodríguez have left the largest body of work, and their career as recording artists in by far the longest. They were not, however, the first to record such material. The initial florescence of ethnic Mexican professional theater in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century coincided with the emergence of the recording industry in something like the form in which we know it today. In the early 1900s, after decades of casting about for marketable uses of new recording technologies, the industry settled on the now-familiar business model in which playback equipment was sold at relatively low prices in order to create a market for pre-recorded music, where the real money was to be made (Bauman 2003). Before 1910, the three companies that dominated commercial sound recording in the United States and Europe “tried to penetrate every possible market from Tibet to Bolivia” (Gronow 1982:5) both by sending agents abroad and by reaching out to immigrant and ‘ethnic’ communities at home. Then, as now, ethnic Mexicans on both sides of “the” border formed a large and important market for commercial recordings, and although music dominated the field, some recordings of theatrical entertainment were also made. Of course, the lengthy tragic dramas favored by *mexicana/o* communities during the teens were poorly adapted for distribution on discs that could accommodate a maximum of four minutes per side. Comic afterpieces, monologues, dialogues, and sketches proved more amenable to the new technology.

Although sound recordings are doubtlessly valuable documents of the ethnic Mexican popular theater of the southwestern United States, they appear to have been marginal in their time to both of the industries that produced them. Among the tens of thousands of musical phonograph records that U.S. companies marketed to Spanish-speaking consumers between 1900 and 1940, we find at most a few hundred theatrical recordings. This fact suggests that the phonograph disk did not play the prominent role in the careers of Spanish-speaking actors and comedians in the United States before World War II that, for example, the LP would play for English-speaking comedians in the 1960s and 1970s. In the few theatrical recordings that survive, the work of resident Mexican immigrant and Mexican American performers appears side-by-side with that of performers who made careers in Mexico and visited the United States either on tour or with the specific idea of recording. The list of Mexican performers who recorded in the U.S., for example, includes Manuel Noriega and the famous comedian Leopoldo “El Cuatezón” Beristáin.¹¹⁸ Indeed, the recording industry was sufficiently international that received categories such as “Mexican,” “Mexican immigrant,” and “Mexican American” may well impede an understanding of how the disks were produced and marketed. Although some recordings are clearly aimed at a U.S. audience or at least an ethnic Mexican audience, we know that music recorded by *mexicanas/os* in Texas was marketed as far away as South America, and it is reasonable to assume that some of the theatrical recordings were just as widely distributed.

¹¹⁸ The latter comedian recorded four sides in San Antonio, one of these with Salvador Quiroz (Spottswood 1990:1673).

The earliest theatrical recordings by *mexicana/o* artists in the United States appear to have been made in New York in 1906 by Maximiliano Rosales and Rafael H. Robinson, who recorded twenty sides with guitar accompaniment for Columbia Records. A mixture of songs, dialogues, and descriptive pieces, their material tends toward the comic and the nationalist picturesque. Rosales and Robinson continued in this vein with an unknown number of recordings made between 1908 and 1911, of which three sides survive.¹¹⁹ After the initial efforts by Noriega and Rosales y Robinson, there seems to have been relatively little recording activity by ethnic Mexican theater artists until the middle of the 1920s, when we see sharp increases in the number of theatrical recordings made, the number of artists making them, and the number of locations in which they were being made. In 1922, Eduardo Arozamena, who would later become a star in Mexican cinema and enjoy some success in Hollywood, recorded eight sides in New York, again for Columbia, of poetry readings; comic recitations, dialogues; and one patriotic monologues about Mexican history. This last was titled “Los niños héroes,” and likely told the story of the six young military cadets who died defending Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City during the U.S. invasion of 1846-48. After Arozamena, only one other ethnic Mexican theatrical group seems to have recorded in New York: the Compañía Dramática Victor, who in 1930 also produced a series of four dramatic disks on themes related to Mexican history.

¹¹⁹ These recordings are not listed in Spottswood but do appear in the online catalogue of the Frontera project. Their catalogue numbers suggest that they were recorded between 1908 and 1911.

During the decade of the 1920s, the center of theatrical recording by ethnic Mexican artists seems to have shifted from New York to the Los Angeles area, and the first theatrical performer documented as recording in the latter city was none other than the famous Beatriz Noloesca of San Antonio. Together with the Hermanos Areu and other artists including Angélica Chacel, Roberto Escalera, a male actor identified only as “Ramírez,” pianist Edward D. King, and a number of unidentified musicians, she recorded a total of fifteen sides in five sessions. The first of these was in March of 1925 for Victor, where it appears she only recorded one side with husband Enrique Areu. Then in February of 1926, she and Enrique recorded there for a second time. In December of 1926, “La Chata” and company conducted two more recording sessions. Around the same time that Noloesca and her company were recording, the duo Eduardo Pastor and Roberto Guzmán made four recordings, also in Los Angeles that were meant to evoke the comedy routines of Ricardo Bell, Mexico’s greatest clown, whose family also bought the Teatro Capitol in Los Angeles in 1927 (Kanellos 1987:84).

The theatrical recordings of the first three decades of the twentieth century are dominated by the genre of the descriptive specialty or “*Escena descriptiva*.” Sterne describes this genre, which was intended to showcase the potential of sound reproduction technology itself, as “somewhere between a contrived re-creation of an actual event and a vaudeville sketch” (2003:243). The idea of the descriptive specialty was to simulate the aural experience of some scene and to give the listener a sense of being part of that scene. The recordings, in other words, were meant to be soundscapes or ‘slices’ of aurally simulated life. In the ethnic Mexican *escenas descriptivas*, the drive to reproduce

everyday life was wedded to a sense of nationalism and a taste for local color. Rosales and Robinson's recordings, for example, include titles like "Pleito de borrachos en una pulquería" ["A fight among drunks in a pulquería"] (Anonymous 1926c), "Casamiento de indios" ["Indian wedding"] (Anonymous 1926a), and "Gran tapada de gallos en Aguascalientes" ["Great cockfight in Aguascalientes"] (Anonymous 1926b) in addition to their reproductions of historical events (Spottswood 1990:2274-2275). Similarly, "La Chata" Noloesca's *descriptivas*, with titles like "Chismitos de vecindad" ["Neighborhood Gossip"] (García-Arellano 1926b), and "Mi comadre en Santa Anita" ["My comadre in Santa Anita"] (1926a) portray goings-on in marginal neighborhoods, markets, and rural towns that come to stand in as metonyms for the Mexican nation itself. Few of Noloesca's recordings have clearly defined plots. They begin *en media res* and string together exchanges of jokes and musical numbers in a manner that seems designed partly to replicate the flow of daily life, yet the scenes are populated by the broadly-drawn larger-than-life characters common in vaudeville sketches, including the mischievous light-hearted *peladita* that Noloesca made famous. By contrast, the recordings of Julio Ayala (Anonymous 1923a; 1923b; 1923c; 1923d) and the duo Eduardo Pastor and Roberto Guzmán (Anonymous 1926a; 1926b; 1926c; 1926d), which are intended to reproduce the ambience of the Circo Orrin in Mexico City, include more or less complete dialogues between the clown Ricardo Bell (played by either Pastor or Guzmán) and a straight man, known only as "Mr. Orrin," complete with brass band accompaniment and the simulated laughter of an audience. Although Netty and Jesús did record descriptive specialties with a group of San Antonio musicians under the name "Los parranderos

alegres” (“The happy party animals”), their non-musical recordings tend to be comic dialogues with clearly defined plots, rather than evocations of a sense of place (Sandoval 1930a; 1930b). To place their recordings in the proper light, some attention to the performers’ individual histories is in order.

The Performers

The careers of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez are in many ways representative of those of other Mexican immigrant actors who worked in San Antonio during the early twentieth century. In an interview with me, Enrique Valero related that Jesús was born in 1900 in Concepción del Oro, Zacatecas, while Netty was born in an unknown year in Mazatlán.¹²⁰ Mr. Valero said that his and Jesús’ father, who was also named Jesús Rodríguez and who died when the children were quite young, owned a silver mine in Concepción del Oro. In the tumultuous first years of the Revolution, Mr. Valero’s mother Esther Valero and stepfather Raimundo Heredia were forced to take the family to San Luis Potosí due to political problems about which Mr. Valero remembers little. There, they survived by operating a small store and lived near the *muladar* (“city dump”), which was a common site for executions by firing squad. Although Mr. Valero was too young to understand who was fighting whom around him, he retained vivid memories of those executions all his life, and the same was probably true of his brothers. His oldest brother, Carlos, was drafted into service in one of the warring armies and rose to the rank

¹²⁰ The discussion of the Rodríguez-Valero family that follows is taken largely from recorded interviews with Enrique Valero conducted on November 13 (EVAV11.13.99-1:1), and December 2, 1999 (EVAV12.2.99-1:1) and from a conversation with Mr. Valero and his wife on November 6, 1999.

of Lieutenant. He remained in Mexico fighting, while the rest of the family fled to the relative safety of the United States, joining them only years afterward.

On the 31st of October 1916 the Rodríguez-Valero family crossed into Texas to join cousins who already lived in San Antonio. Mr. Valero recalled that the family reached Nuevo Laredo loaded down with furniture and other belongings, but that Mexican customs officials refused to allow them to take the luggage across the border. After trying vainly to sell what they could, they were forced to leave everything behind, and they arrived in San Antonio with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. There they took up residence with their cousins, and soon, thanks in part to a monthly allowance that came from the elder Jesús Rodríguez's estate, they were able to find their own living quarters. Mr. Valero recalled that his stepfather became the manager of the twenty-room Hotel Morelos, which was located on the West Side of downtown San Antonio, just across the street from the Teatro Nacional and Teatro Zaragoza. There the family rented living quarters from the hotel's owners and oversaw the day-to-day business, often renting rooms to performers who visited the Lucchese theaters. Soon, the family allowance from Mexico stopped coming, and out of necessity the older sons, Jesús and Carlos, went north to work on the railroad.¹²¹

At some point, either because of his work with the railroad or because of the family's proximity to the theaters, Jesús made contact with the vaudeville company of Nelly Fernández, who hired him as a singer. It was apparently on a tour with this

¹²¹ Jesús' experiences on the railroad may have inspired some of the jokes in a recorded dialogue titled "El Rielero," ("The Railroad Worker") (SA 190, Vo 8218).

company that he met Netty, who would become his wife and partner in song, dance and comedy. In the meantime, Mr. Heredia became a successful businessman and a prominent citizen of San Antonio's *mexicana/o* West Side. The 1927 San Antonio city directory lists him as a superintendent for the American National Insurance Company of Galveston, and members of the family recall that he went on to run a number of businesses including a labor contracting service, a print shop, and even the Teatro Venus, an entertainment venue at the corner of Guadalupe and Zarzamora streets.¹²² He is also remembered for having campaigned to erect a statue of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in San Antonio after the President's death. Netty and Jesús, for their part, appear to have been mainstays of the Spanish-language stage San Antonio during the florescence of vaudeville in the 1920s. Artists whom I have interviewed recall them as identified with the theater, and although they may very well have worked in tent shows at some point in their careers, I have found no evidence of this.

The two began their career as recording artists in San Antonio in 1928 and, as previously noted, continued for some nine years, working primarily for the Vocalion and Blue Bird (RCA) labels. During this time, the recording industry nationally began to move away from making "ethnic" recordings (Gronow 1982:25), and after 1931, few recordings of ethnic Mexican theater or comedy appear to have been made in Los Angeles and New York.¹²³ Although I have been able to find little information about the couple's specific experiences during their recording sessions, more is known about the

¹²² This information comes from various informal conversations I have had with Mr. Ricardo Medina, a nephew of Jesús Rodríguez, with Enrique Valero, and with Mr. Valero's widow Aurora.

¹²³ I have been able to find no theatrical recordings other than those of the Rodríguez duo listed in Spottswood's catalogue after 1931 (1990).

general conditions under which ethnic Mexican artists recorded for the major labels in San Antonio during this period. Historian and ethnomusicologist Manuel Peña has noted that the companies were drawn to the *mexicana/o* market in Texas by their earlier success in commercially exploiting vernacular African American music (1986:39). Most of the recordings were made in downtown hotels, notably the Texas Hotel and the Bluebonnet. Peña recounts that the companies attracted talent both by advertising their recording sessions in local newspapers and by using ethnic Mexican business-owners as “go-betweens” (1986: 40). In one of her autobiographical *testimonios*, the famous singer Lydia Mendoza echoes this statement, recalling that Blue Bird used a saleswoman from a local music store as an interpreter to negotiate with the artists (1993:88). The *conjunto* musicians that Peña interviewed were paid a flat fee of some \$15.00 to \$20.00 for each record they made, but typically received no royalties from the sales of those records (1986:42). Mendoza also recalls working for a flat fee—up to \$40.00 at the height of her career—and claims to have unknowingly signed away the rights to royalties from her recordings. The situation became clear to her only after she received an enormous tax bill from the IRS for royalties that she had never collected (1993:92). Although the commercial arrangements surrounding these recordings were clearly exploitative, the artists did benefit from the exposure that record sales and radio play afforded to their work.

During the 1930s, as the Spanish-language theater went into decline, the Rodríguez duo remained active as performers and continued to record. Brother Carlos also remained active under the stage name “don Suave,” as we saw in the previous

chapter. During the 1940s, when work in commercial popular theater was scarce in San Antonio, the Rodríguez duo graced the stage of the Teatro Hispano in New York as part of La Chata Noloesca's famous vaudeville company (Kanellos 1990:135). Even after Spanish-language theater ceased to be commercially viable in San Antonio, the couple continued to perform in community theater and even worked in the electronic media. In the 1960s, toward the ends of their lives, they acted in radionovelas ("radio soap operas") on KCOR, a prominent Spanish-language AM radio station in San Antonio and rented out the costumes they had once used on the stage to Halloween partygoers.¹²⁴ Although it is possible that the duo recorded further theatrical material with the regional companies owned by ethnic Mexicans that emerged in the Southwestern United States after World War II, I have yet to find such recordings.

Although the Rodríguez dialogues clearly circulated in a variety of live performance contexts, the recorded versions seem to bear the mark of the circumstances of their production. They lack, for example, the audience reaction and input that would likely have been crucial to any live performance. Unlike the descriptive specialties of Pastor and Guzmán, they make no attempt to reproduce applause or laughter. Furthermore, the dialogues had to fit within the maximum length of a 78-rpm record, leaving little room for elaboration and improvisation. Schedules for these recording sessions were crowded, and the companies expected a finished recording in one or two "takes" with little time for rehearsal (Peña 1986:41). Probably to make the sessions

¹²⁴ A photograph of the cast of a 1960s radionovela is preserved in the personal collection of Susie Mijares Astol, the widow of Lalo Astol.

worthwhile, the couple tended to record enough material for at least two records in each session. In one marathon session in 1936, they recorded eight sides. Perhaps because of these time constraints, several of the dialogues contain such errors as repair of misread words and false starts that anticipate lines further ahead. If the recording format constrained the length of the dialogues, it also forced the performers to be concise. Sometimes light-hearted and witty, other times bitingly satirical, the resulting comic pieces are all tightly- and elegantly-written theatrical statements. In their themes, and tone, they echo the satirical essays called *crónicas* that were fixtures of the Spanish-language press in the United States. Like these columns, the duo's recordings served both as a sort of entertainment and as a mass-mediated public conscience for the community. The appearance of a dog named "Sufrelambre" ("Gohungry") in a dialogue recorded in 1931 titled *La póliza de a daime* ("The dime policy") is clearly a reference to Daniel Venegas' *Las aventuras de don Chipote* (1999[1929]) and a sign that the institutions of ethnic Mexican public discourse that included newspapers like Venegas' *El Malcriado* and the popular theater were connected intertextually as well as institutionally (Rodríguez-Valero 1931b). Although the dialogues elaborate a satirical sensibility that resembles that of Venegas in many ways, there are also many important differences between his work and theirs, which will become clear.

According to Mr. Valero, Netty and Jesús began their career as singers, and many of their recordings, especially the earlier ones, feature musical performance. The vast majority of their recorded work, however, consists of comic dialogues, sometimes with songs at the end. Of the sixty-four sides they recorded, fifty-nine survive. Jesús is listed

as author on the record labels of seventeen of these, and whatever the authorship of the remaining dialogues, it is likely that the performers at least incorporated their own ideas into the material.¹²⁵ Mr. Valero recalls that the couple performed these dialogues on stage as well as recording them, and there is direct evidence that the dialogues circulated, entering the repertoires of other theatrical performers via the recordings. In interviews with me, Carlos Monsiváis recalled transcribing the dialogues by hand from the phonograph records and using them in his family's *carpa*, sometimes making his own improvements in the process.¹²⁶ Several of these transcriptions remain in Mr. Monsiváis's personal collection of manuscripts.¹²⁷ This example illustrates the fact that performers and comic material circulated extensively between the theaters and the tent shows during the florescence of vaudeville in southern Texas.¹²⁸

The existence of different versions of the dialogues also provides some sense of how the pieces might have varied from performance to performance. While some of Mr. Monsiváis' versions of the Rodríguez dialogues are transcribed more or less verbatim, others are altered, sometimes quite extensively. The carpa's version of "The Mexican

125 The dialogues attributed to Jesús were all recorded for Vocalion, although some Vocalion recordings are not attributed. Furthermore, the sessions in which the attributed dialogues were recorded include dialogues without any indication of authorship. None of the Blue Bird recordings are attributed.

126 CM8.10.99-1:1, interview with Carlos Monsiváis, Universal City, Texas. Some of the manuscripts themselves are dated as having been written down in the early- to mid-1940s, when the Carpa Monsiváis was no longer active. Several are dedicated to Mr. Monsiváis's son, Carlos Jr., and were clearly intended as gifts for him to keep and pass on.

127 Mr. Monsiváis's manuscripts include versions of dialogues recorded by Netty and Jesús Rodríguez as "The Mexican from New York;" "Una mula de tantas;" "Los deportados;" "Ah pos ahí 'stá;" "Alma tricolor" and "La ponchada." Only the recorded versions are transcribed and translated here. All subsequent references to the Monsiváis manuscripts are based on my own study of photocopies of Mr. Monsiváis's manuscripts. Mr. Monsiváis has allowed me to study these and photocopy them, but he has not given permission for the dialogues to be published, so I do not reproduce them extensively here.

128 Cf. Haney 2000 for a more extended discussion of this circulation and of the status differences between *artistas de teatro* and *artistas de carpa*.

from New York” (Anonymous 1935h) for example, opens with a sequence that establishes Mr. Monsiváis’s comic persona and that of his wife and partner, followed a sequence of jokes that is extremely close to that recorded by the Rodríguez duo. In other cases, the Monsiváis dialogues revolve around themes similar to those of the Rodríguez recordings and use many of the same jokes, but those jokes appear in different order and mixed in with material that does not appear on the recordings. These examples suggest that comic material on the *mexicana/o* popular stage of southern Texas may well have ranged from highly entextualized pieces that were memorized more or less verbatim to looser scenarios with re-occurring jokes that allowed more room for extemporization, to completely improvised “patter” that would have drawn on a repertoire of formulaic expressions, jokes, themes, and stock characters. The dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez clearly draw as much on this linguistic commons as they do on written sources.

Costumbrismo in “Los Estamos Sumidos”

Like Venegas’ *Don Chipote*, the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez participate in the literary tendency that is known in the Spanish-speaking world as “costumbrismo.” This term, derived from the Spanish word *costumbre*, or “custom”, is often translated into English as “local color.” It refers to a literary and theatrical aesthetic current, important in many Spanish-speaking countries, particularly Mexico and Colombia, that is characterized by a drive to represent national customs, usually with a paradoxical mixture of populist sentimentality and elitist satire (Gómez-Gil 1968:344).

Associated with print journalism and with the rise of Latin American nationalisms since the successful independence movements of the nineteenth century, costumbrismo tends to make the rural and urban poor into synecdoches for the nation's distinctiveness. Indeed the Spanish words *típica/o* ("typical") and *característica/o* ("characteristic") are often used to describe the aspects of speech, material culture, dance, animal husbandry, and other lifeways that this sort of writing and performance highlights. Visual metaphors, especially metaphors of painting and photography, abound in critical discussions of costumbrismo. Short descriptive essays called *cuadros de costumbres*, for example, are often likened to portraits of the nation, and the adjective *pintoresca/o* ("picturesque") often appears in discussions of a wide variety of genres from essays to novels to folkloric dance spectacles. In some cases this last term is used to criticize representations that are perceived as overly folksy and quaint.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Mexico, costumbrismo was often seen as a revolt against received Spanish and European aesthetic norms and a way of nationalizing foreign genres. Nevertheless, this move is always incomplete, easily forgotten, and always in need of repetition. Commentators on the zarzuela, for example, note that in the middle to late nineteenth century works such as the 1866 *Una fiesta en Santa Anita* (Peza and Arcaraz n.d.) and many others brought Mexican nationalism to the popular stage by presenting Mexican customs, "typical" songs and dances, and references to local history and events. Similar assertions are made about the *teatro de revista* of the revolutionary period, which is often credited with being the first truly "Mexican" theatrical genre (Merino-Lanzilotti 1967:18), a break with an overly Hispanicized past in

which appeals to local character were supposedly exceptions to the rule (Morales et. al. 1986:18). The nation, it seems, required continuous reinvention on stage.

Commentators seem to place particular importance on the use of “popular language” in the teatro de revista and its progeny. Morales, for example, attributes the longevity and popularity of José Elizondo’s 1904 play *Chin Chun-Chan* to its linguistic populism.

El *Chin-Chun-Chan* arrasa con el cuadro porque sabe que los originarios de Chamacuero no dicen quieres sino *queres*, ni enaguas sino *naguas*, no encuentran parecidos sino *afiguraciones y aigres*, llevan atados los billetes en un paliacate, son muy suspicaces a las *tantiadas* y con su jarano *galoniao* van en busca de las tinajeras—que no trajineras—de Xochimilco para seguir gozando *pos onque* (1986:18).

Chin-Chun-Chan takes the stage by storm because it knows that the people of Chamacuero don’t say “quieres” (“you want”) but *queres*, nor “enaguas” (“slip”) but *naguas*, don’t find reflections but *figgerin’s* and *airs*, carry their money tied up in a handkerchief, are wary of *makin’ fun*, and with their *ten gallon hat* they go looking for clay jars (tinajeras)—or was it canoes (trajineras)—of Xochimilco to keep enjoying themselves, *wull O.K.*

In this paragraph, nonstandard vocabulary and orthographic representations of nonstandard pronunciations are italicized, setting them apart from the surrounding text as if they were words from a foreign language. This convention also appears in the script of *Chin Chun-Chan* (Medina and Elizondo 1904) and many other *revistas*, and seems designed in part to perform the function often performed by the phrase “sic” after a quoted grammatical ‘mistake.’ The italics, in other words, are a print convention that indicate knowledge on the author’s part of the standard orthography for the given word and signal to the discerning reader that the nonstandard spelling is intentional. Italics, then, allow an author to present “popular” speech without inviting questions about his or

her own access to conventions of literacy that are seen as unmarked, neutral, and somehow foreign the nation. They invite both reader and author to imagine themselves as speakers of the standard language who are capable of recognizing deviations from that standard, yet simultaneously able to identify from a distance with the speech of their peasant compatriots.

Although the Rodríguez dialogues appear not to have been published in written form, the characters in them use such forms as “ansina” for “así” (“thus”) and “güeno” for “bueno” (“good”) in such a marked way that ironic italics or quotations marks almost seem to appear around the words. In “La fritangera” [“The Fry-Cook”], for example, Jesús Rodríguez plays a gluttonous, flirtatious communist named don Espidión, who tries to explain the doctrines of communism to a street vendor played by Netty.

Pos verá Asté'.	Now you looky here.
El comunismo es una cosa chulísima.	Communism is jes' the nicest thang.
Afigúrese Asté' que yo soy <i>probe</i> , y que Asté' rica.	Now s'pose I'm pore and yer rich.
Y que como eso no es justo <i>asigún</i> nuestras <i>dotrinas</i> , la acuso de <i>raicionaria</i> .	And since that ain't just accordin' to our doctrines, I accuse you of bein' a ree-actionary (Anonymous 1935d).

Don Espidón's awkward name itself ironically evokes the rural custom of naming babies after the Catholic saint on whose day they are born, and it is his way of speaking, as much as what he says, that convinces the listener of his ignorance. The message is clear: communism is a dangerous doctrine that only an uneducated fool like this would give credence. Throughout the dialogues, nonstandard forms tend to occur in the speech of characters like these who are countrified, ignorant, and otherwise “backward,” and they

invite the audience to recognize the character's ignorance as a negative example. For all the irony associated with this stylized peasant speech, however there is a paradoxical synecdochal sense of identification as well. In Mexico, *costumbrismo* had often been denounced by urban elites unaccustomed to seeing even caricatures of 'national' types on stage. In San Antonio, Netty and Jesús Rodríguez's audience consisted largely of working-class ethnic Mexicans who were at least not far removed from a rural background. Like the caricature of countrified speech in the comedy of Nashville's Grand Ole Opry, *costumbrista* language on San Antonio's Spanish-language stage would not have survived commercially had it not appealed to many of the very people it was meant to satirize. For former peasants struggling to survive as urban workers in a new country, the *ranchera/o* characters in the dialogues with their stylized folksy language likely helped to provide a sense of holding onto one's past.

Politics in the Dialogues

Although the Rodríguez dialogues devote considerable attention to social problems faced by Mexican immigrants to the United States, they hardly mention this country's formal politics. The characters and situations portrayed in the dialogues frequently touch on such issues as the mass deportations faced by the duo's audience, the abuses of border law enforcement, the perils of vice and of shady *enganchistas* ("labor contractors"), and the ravages of the Depression, all themes that could be considered "political" in a broad sense. But in the surviving fifty-nine sides, recorded over a period of nine years, there is only one reference to a U.S. elected official. This fact is striking in

part because popular theater in Mexico was intensely political during the Revolution and its aftermath, both in a broader social sense and a narrower partisan and referential one. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Mexican audiences of all classes turned to the popular stage, particularly to one-act musical revues (*revistas*), for political commentary that newspapers could not always provide. In these *revistas*, scantily-clad chorines and broadly drawn stock characters shared the stage with allegorical figures and choruses embodying abstract principles, noteworthy events, institutions, new technologies, and even the political leadership itself. Important political figures regularly attended the theater both to contribute to their public presences and to see what was being said about them. The Mexican Presidency was a coveted yet dangerous target of satire, and the careers of actors and librettists were often tied to the fates of political figures and factions they were seen as praising or criticizing. Sometimes risking exile and assassination, these theatrical satirists skewered corrupt and authoritarian officials and lambasted foreigners who sought to intervene in Mexican affairs. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto has suggested that *mexicana/o* popular theater in the United States moved away from this focus on formal politics, turning instead to “situationally political” routines that alluded to generalized social conditions and highlighted “verbal play and innuendo”(1983:47). The dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez bear this assertion out to a degree. An examination of the duo’s lone reference to U.S. politics will show, however, that there is more to the story.

In “*Vacilando en San Antonio*” [“Fooling Around in San Antonio”], two immigrants who had known each other in Zacatecas meet by chance on the street. Doña

Julia, the female character, has put on weight in her comfortable restaurant job, while her old friend don Melquiades is lean, hungry, and out of work due to the economic crisis, or perhaps to his own laziness. At first, his story appears to be that of many immigrants: he came to San Antonio seeking his fortune after hearing exaggerated reports of the city's glorious opportunities, only to find himself adrift and destitute. Doña Julia also heard such reports, which she relates by describing the moment when she told her husband she would leave him.

y juí y le dije a mi viejo:
—Viejo
no más gritos ni más golpes

Que acabó la esclavitud.
Me voy pa' la tierra de la
libertad
donde la mujer es respetada
y lleva las riendas de la casa
donde una mujer es la
gobernadora del estado.

and I went and told my old man
“Old man
no more yelling and no more
hitting.
The slavery is over.
I'm going to the land of freedom

where women are respected
and hold the reins of the house
where a woman is the governor
of the state” (Anonymous
1934a)

The reference, of course, is to Miriam “Ma” Ferguson, who was serving her second term as governor of Texas when the dialogue was recorded. The piece ignores Ferguson's actions and policies, highlighting her gender and presenting her high office as a final victory in the battle of the sexes.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| J: Tienes razón. Aquí las mujeres son las poderosas. | You're right. Women are the powerful ones here. |
| N: Y las únicas que trabajamos. | And the only ones who work. |
| J: Es cierto. Las costureras, las pureras, <i>laundreras</i> , y hasta las nueceras. | That's true. The garment workers the cigar-rollers the <i>laundry workers</i> and even the pecan- |

shellers (*ibid.*).

Here the effects of the geographic displacement and economic crisis are interpreted as gender trouble. The dialogue contrasts a supposed abundance of opportunities for women with a scarcity of opportunities for men and concretizes that disparity in the contrast between doña Julia's comfort don Melquiades' poverty. As the dialogue ends, however, it becomes clear that neither immigrant's story is really what it seems at first glance. Responding to Don Melquiades' questions, doña Julia relates how her husband reacted to her decision to leave by escorting her to the train station and marrying one of her cousins three days later. Clearly he was glad to be rid of her, and it becomes clear that she is less than a sympathetic character. In the end, neither is don Melquiades, who reveals through a series of subtle insinuations that he killed his wife after catching her cheating on him with their comadre. The dialogue's message is complex and multivalent, but it is clear that the primary issue is the characters' gendered experiences of migration. The female governor of Texas is not hero or villain, but a symptom of an American social malady that has turned family values upside-down.

Although Mexican politics receive a slightly more specific treatment in the dialogues, Netty and Jesús Rodríguez do not appear to have sought to advance the agenda of any one political figure or faction in their recordings. Although a dialogue recorded in 1930 ridicules the ex-dictator Porfirio Díaz by placing praise for him in the mouth of an ignorant, lying braggart soldier character, the couple generally treats the Revolution that ousted him as so much needless fratricide. The song “*El adiós del emigrado*” [“The immigrant's farewell”] (Anonymous 1929-1930c), seems to express subtle sympathy

with the embattled Mexican Catholic Church, calling for a peace in which “... cada quién que pueda tener su religión” (“Each one can have his/her religion”). Then two dialogues, recorded in 1935 and 1936 respectively, contain disparaging references to former president and political boss Plutarco Elías Calles. In one, Calles is mentioned in the same breath as Benito Mussolini (Rodríguez-Valero 1936d), while in the other, “el santo señor de Cuernavaca” (“The Holy Lord of Cuernavaca” is confused with a laxative called “don Pluto” that appears to have come in a bottle bearing a picture of the Devil (Anonymous 1935e). This latter joke, of course, implies a clever nation-as-body metaphor, with immigration to the United States understood as the result of “don Pluto’s” unique effect. However, a *corrido* the couple recorded in 1930 about an attempt on the life of Pascual Ortiz-Rubio, a Calles crony who was elected president of Mexico in that year, brims with sycophantic praise (Sandoval 1929-1930). Interestingly enough, neither the Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas nor his policies are mentioned in the dialogues recorded between 1934 and 1937. Mexican *diputados* (“legislators”) as a general category are disparaged in the dialogues as corrupt and incompetent but never mentioned specifically by name (Anonymous 1935l).

What remain unambiguous in the early Rodríguez recordings are expressions of Mexican nationalism, of a desire for peace and reconciliation in the homeland, and a concern for that land’s image abroad. Perhaps the clearest statement of these sentiments appears in the aforementioned *corrido* about Ortiz-Rubio.

Y si todos nos armamos
De un revólver homicida
En el suelo mexicano

And if we all arm ourselves
With a murderous revolver,
In all of the Mexican soil

Nadie quedará con vida.

Hay que demostrar nobleza
Delante de las naciones,
Que piensan que nuestra patria
Es un pueblo de matones.

¡Que se acaben los rencores!
Hay que unirnos mano a mano,
Y proteger los colores
Del pabellón mexicano.

There'll be no one left alive.

We all must show nobility
To the nations of the globe.
Who believe that our country
Is a land of murderous thugs.

Let's put an end to the grudges!
We must unite hand in hand,
And protect the colors
Of the Mexican flag (Sandoval
1929-1930).

When the word “patriota” (“patriot”) occurs in the Rodríguez dialogues, it always refers to a loyal Mexican, never to a U.S. citizen. In a patriotic dialogue recorded in 1928, a character representing the soul of the Mexican flag itself declares itself to have united fifteen million valiant hearts in one (Anonymous 1928e), but all these calls for unity are not calls for collective action, but rather for an end to fighting.

The absence of calls to collective action is particularly noticeable in those dialogues that deal with labor. As we have seen, the popular theater in which Netty and Jesús Rodríguez made their careers enjoyed a substantial working-class audience, and in early dialogues such as “El rielero” [“The railroad worker”] (1928f), “La canción del pizcador” [“The cotton-picker’s song”] (1929-1930e), the couple seems to be reaching out to specific occupational groups within their audience. These dialogues present what seem to be the couple’s ideal working-class male and female protagonists. In both, an aggressive and witty but amiable male worker woos a sharp-tongued woman who works as a laundress, winning her love only when he promises to marry her and provide for her. In “La canción del pizcador” the male suitor, Toribio, offers his beloved a two-career

marriage, and she refuses, saying that if she marries it will be to escape getting pawed by “todos los jefecitos y de todos los chulos que explotan nuestro trabajo” (“all of the little bosses and all of the pretty boys who exploit our labor”). He replies that a poor person has to put up with a lot, and her response is sharp and unequivocal.

Si uno es pobre y además sinvergüenza, se las aguanta. Pero él que tiene un poco de delicadeza, primero se muere de hambre que dar su brazo a torcer.	If you’re poor and shameless to boot, you put up with it. But a man who has a little refinement, would die of hunger before offering his arm to be twisted (<i>ibid.</i>).
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Here the condemnation of the injustices faced by women in the workplace is strong, and the proposed solution to the problem is marriage, not organizing. The dialogue suggests that the deserving poor, those who are not *sinvergüenzas* (“shameless”) but rather have “a little refinement” will find their own individual ways out of their predicaments. In the Rodríguez dialogues, the workplace injustices always occur outside of the characters’ interaction, and the bosses do not appear themselves. In this, the recordings differ from the writings of Los Angeles’s Daniel Venegas, who recounts the travails of Mexican laborers quite vividly and directly. Discussion of labor organizing is noticeably absent in the recordings. The disparaging references to communism we have seen already suggest that the couple had little sympathy for radical politics, while political movements with less radical aspirations receive no mention whatsoever. In general, the solution presented to the Mexican immigrant’s problems is: get married, keep your nose clean, work hard, and don’t lose your culture. All of these imperatives appear in the dialogues as individual responsibilities, and the characters that live up to them do so as much in love as in work.

Mexican Love and its Discontents

Although the greater Mexican comic dialogue and sketch range and ranged over a wide variety of themes, love was by far the most important of these. Of the fifty-two dialogues recorded by Netty and Rodríguez, for example, thirty-seven feature a man and a woman who are either negotiating the beginning of a romantic or sexual partnership or have already established such a partnership. In thirty-six of the dialogues, a change in the relationship between the man and woman drives the plot, and nine of the remaining dialogues feature one character who reveals details of his or her sexual, amorous, or conjugal life to another character. In all, love and sexuality are central to forty-four of the fifty-two Rodríguez dialogues, and three of the eight songs the duo recorded also center on these themes. It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that love's prominence in the Rodríguez recordings indicates a lack of attention to supposedly larger issues. Like the *canción ranchera*, in which the theme of love serves as a sounding board for "gender relations, sexual relations, and broader human relations" (Broyles-González 2001:198), the Rodríguez dialogues used love and sexuality to bring more abstract issues home to the lived reality of the body and daily life. The theme of love, in other words, becomes a sort of master-language that takes the contradictions of Mexican immigrant life in the Texas modern and renders them comprehensible in concrete and personal terms.

The couple's first dialogue, titled "Pecaditos" ["Little Sins"], details an argument between a husband and a wife. He is angry because she has given herself over to a life of

hedonism, riding around in a car and dallying with other men at all hours of the night.

She defends herself, arguing that she is simply enjoying newfound freedoms.

Que así se estila aquí en los United States.

No como allí en Cadereyta
que no me dejabas salir más que con
tu mamá.

Aquí vas a saber que yo tengo el
alma en el cuerpo

Y que no es lo mismo hacer ...
a que lo hagan a uno.

That's how they do things in the United States.

Not like back in Cadereyta¹²⁹
where you didn't let me go out with
anybody but your mom.

Here you're going to learn that I have a
soul in my body

And it's not the same thing to do ...
as to have them do it to you (Anonymous
1928b).

She continues by criticizing him for being lazy and refusing to work and notes that her “paseaditas” (“little excursions”) are their only source of income, clearly implying that she is engaging in prostitution and giving a hollow note to her claim to freedom. In his defense, her husband replies he has failed to earn money because his job was to lie like an awning over the stands in the Plaza del Zacate, and that since they now come with awning and all, he is out of a job. His predicament, clearly a contrived excuse for laziness, is a parody of the situation of workers replaced by machines—here the husband has invented for himself a task never performed by a human being. The dialogue ends in a lively song that presents a collection of *coplas* about love, jealousy, and women who dare to wear makeup. Although the spousal argument remains unresolved and the couple’s future unclear, the situation suggests an association between life in the United States and the unraveling of traditional expectations surrounding masculinity, femininity, and family life. Mexico appears as the land of love, while the United States is the land of

¹²⁹ Cadereyta, Tamaulipas is a small town on the road between Monterrey and the border city of Matamoros.

money, and the dialogue sets the relationship between Mexico and the United States as an opposition analogous to the opposition between love and money.

This opposition is equally clear in “Los cuatitos,” (“The twins,”), another early dialogue. It opens with actor Roberto Escalera (E), who joins the Rodríguez duo in several of their early recordings, delivering a soliloquy expressing the bewilderment of a rustic lost in the big city. His pronunciation and his slow, measured tones immediately mark his character, Toribio, as a *ranchero* (“peasant”) and suggest that the character might be indigenous. Certain nonstandard pronunciations of Spanish words, italicized below, complete these impressions.

<i>Pos la verdad que hay cosas de techula.</i>	<i>Why there shore are party things here.</i>
Palacios de fierro.	Iron palaces.
Palacios de mármol.	Marble palaces.
Cada casa es un palacio.	Every house is a palace.
Lo que no ‘stá <i>güieno</i> es que no <i>sabi</i> uno ni dónde quedan las casas ni las calles.	What ain’t no good is that a fella don’t know where the houses or the streets are.
A mí que ya me lleva el diablo por abrazar a mi novia Sebastiana.	I swear I want to hug my sweetheart Sebastiana so bad the devil could take me now.
No puedo dar con la casa.	I cain’t find the house.
Aquí tengo la <i>direición</i> Calle equis norte número ocho cuatro cinco ocho ocho cuatro.	I got the address here North X street number eight-four- five-eight-eight-four.
¡Uve! He andado tantas calles del norte que por poco llego hasta donde están los “estamos sumidos” y no la <i>jallo</i> .	Land! I’ve walked so many streets in the north that I finally get to where the “Benighted States” are ¹³⁰ and I cain’t find ‘er (1929-1930a) ¹³¹

¹³⁰ The phrase “estamos sumidos” (“we’re sunk”) sounds like “Estados unidos” (“United States”).

The alienation of the rural Mexican surrounded by the palatial iron buildings and numbered streets of modern Texas here condenses itself in symbol of the beloved's absence. Toribio's longing for his Chana is in part a longing for home, and unlike most of his countrymen, he has come to the land of money looking for love. The next voice heard on the recording is that of Netty Rodríguez (N), in the role of Sebastiana ("Chana" for short), who also begins with a soliloquy.

¡Válgame Dios!	Dear Lord!
¡Cuánto lío la casa ' <i>onde</i> trabajo!	What a load of headaches in the house where I work.
Que si me dijo.	"Did she tell me?"
Que si le dije.	"Did I tell her?"
Que si Ud. primero.	"After you."
Que si Ud. después.	"No, after you."
'Ora sí que estoy aburrida.	I shore am sick of it.
¿Cuándo vendrá mi Toribio pa' que me saque de aquí?	When will my Toribio come get me out of here?
Parece que aquél es.	Looks like that's him over there.
¡Toribio!	Toribio (<i>ibid.</i>)!

The situation of the separated lovers is an inversion of traditional gender expectations: it is Chana, not her man, who is in the United States working for a wage. The audience does not have to wait long for a resolution, however, for Toribio has come to set things right and do the honorable thing by his sweetheart. Netty could have played Chana's lines for a laugh, exaggerating the heroine's desperation and then calling attention to the overly quick resolution of her predicament ("Oh where oh where could my true love be—oh, there he is"). Instead, she delivers the passage in a deadpan fashion, without pause, almost as if she is in a hurry to segue from soliloquy into dialogue.

¹³¹ This dialogue is not listed in Spotswood. I thank Stephen Davison of UCLA's online *Frontera* archiving project for granting me access to it.

Joyously reunited, the couple embraces, but as he begins to praise her beauty, she resists, coyly declaring that he is making her blush. He replies that she could not be blushing, for her lovely cheeks are as white as eggs, and after a very brief duel back and forth, he offers to return to his hacienda and ask his *amo* (“master”) to marry them, if she will have him. Chana says her “I do” with another embrace, and as a piano begins to play a sprightly march-like tune, the couple sings of their future matrimony and its joys. At first glance, it would seem that the ideological message is clear and unequivocal. The dialogue opens with a situation of lack: both characters find themselves alone in the United States and trapped in alienating situations. Their problems are solved when they meet and decide to return together to their rightful country, where as husband and wife they will restore a proper gendered division of labor and live in their proper places under the thumb of Toribio’s master. The return to Mexico, in other words, is a liquidation of lack (Propp1988[1968]:53), a triumph of love over money and a renunciation of free wage labor in favor of two more personalistic forms of domination: heterosexual marriage and the patron-client relationship. Although the latter relation certainly existed in Porfirian Mexico and continued after the revolution, it is safe to say that the countryside was more complex in 1928 than it appears in this dialogue.

However, an examination of the song that Toribio and Chana sing reveals that the recording itself is far from simple. At first, nothing troubles the surface of the normative gender expectations presented in the dialogue as the bride- and groom-to-be pledge their fidelity to one another.

E: Yo seré tu fiel marido. I will be your faithful husband.

N:	Yo seré tu fiel mujer.	I will be your faithful wife.
E:	Los dos seres muy unidos.	Both of us so very close
N:	¡Qué ventura! ¡Qué placer!	What good fortune! What a joy!
		(Anonymous 1929-1930a)

But then the song's accompaniment switches from a major key to its relative minor, and a note of grotesque realism begins to appear.

E:	Cuando tengas dos cuatitos	When you have two little twins
N:	¡No me hagas ruborizar!	Don't you go and make me blush!
E:	Ni uno ni otro serán criados.	Neither one will be a servant.
N&E:	Ambos tienen que mandar.	Both have to be in charge (<i>ibid.</i>).

Note that this expansive forecast of the marriage's physiological consequences is accompanied by a questioning of established social hierarchies, in sharp contrast to the deference toward authority expressed in the dialogue. Then, in the final lines, a double entendre brings the grotesque to the forefront, when the couple says of the children:

N:	Feliz mi harán	They will make me happy.
E:	Mi harán ... feliz.	They will m...ake me happy (<i>ibid.</i>)

The words “mi harán” (“they will make me”) suggest the tabooed phrase “mearán” (“they will piss”), and with this punch line, the dialogue ends. It is possible to merely laugh at this acknowledgement of the physical realities of raising a child, but half a second’s thought will lead the listener to ask why this acknowledgement so disrupts the image of marriage presented in the dialogue that it elicits laughter. The song, in other words, places the dialogue that precedes it in an ironic light. Although the dominant ideological message does not find itself erased in the song, neither does it remain intact.

Part of the “happiness” of the ending of *Los cuatitos* lies in the fact that the couple has resolved to return to Mexico, the land of love where men are men and women are

women. This theme of the return to an idealized Mexico recurs frequently in the dialogues. In *Me voy para México* ("I'm going to Mexico"), a couple in the United States argues in rhymed *coplas* about whether or not to return to the Mexico. The husband is anxious to go but the wife refuses to lose the freedom and consumer pleasures she has become used to in her adopted country. After a long argument, the husband becomes disgusted and decides to go on his own into Mexico in search of a real woman who knows how to love him back, upbraiding his wife for her selfish individualism.

¿Para qué su amor tirano
Si está lleno de interés?
Si no es puro ni está sano
Ni prometo honradez

What good's your tyrant love to me
If it's full of self-interest?
If it is not pure or it's not well
I'll promise you no honor.

Porque en el pecho me hiere
Voyme a México y verás
Que el amor que aquí se muere
Allí vive hasta demás.

Because it wounds me in my breast
I'll go to Mexico you'll see
That the love that dies here in this land
Still lives there more and more.

Sí a México querido
Donde amar es un honor
Donde el amor ha vivido
Sin más precio que otro amor.

Yes to my beloved Mexico
Where loving is an honor.
Where love has always lived
With no price but another love
(Anonymous 1935g).

The love that the dialogue associate with Mexico is an *eros* shrouded in the spiritual aroma of *agape* and suffused with personal and family honor. It acquires its character not through any positive features of its own but through a series of contrasts with negative examples, and the picture that emerges is contradictory. In the second line of the first *copla* quoted above, love is contrasted with self-interest, suggesting an ideal of selfless, unconditional devotion that makes no demands of the beloved. The final *copla*, however, characterizes Mexican love as asking no price but another love. Love, then, is a relation

of mutual obligation that can only exist if the beloved returns the favor. This second version of love, in other words, imposes obligations on the beloved, and though it is contrasted with a purely economic relation of mutual self-interest, it is not priceless.

In *Me voy para méxico*, this ideal touches the wife's heart in spite of its contradictions, and she ultimately gives up on her materialism.

¡Ay, Panchito de mi vida.
Ya no puedo resistir!
Triunfó mi patria querida,
y yo también me quero ir.

Ay, Panchito, my true love,
I can't resist you anymore.
My beloved country's triumphed,
and I wanna to go there too (*ibid.*).

Unlike the couple in *Pecaditos*, the husband and wife here reconcile, in what seems intended to be a happy ending. The difference is that in *Pecaditos*, the couple remains in the United States. Note that although the woman eventually yields here, she does so in spite of an initially materialistic and selfish reaction. It is the man who is the champion of interpersonal love, love of country, and reciprocity. The idea that women are particularly more susceptible than men to the allure of material things comes through frequently in the dialogues. In "Ah pos allí 'stá," ("Oh, well there y'go"), for example, Netty Rodríguez's character, Conchita, responds to the advances of don Aniceto, Roberto Escalera's love-struck suitor, with a steely pragmatism.

E: No, Conchita.
Pide lo que queras.
Tu boca es la medida.
Mi amor
mis besos
mis abrazos.

No, Conchita.
Ask for whatever you want.
The sky's the limit.¹³²
My love
my kisses
my hugs.

N: No quiero eso.

I don't want all that.

¹³² In the Spanish original the phrase is "tu boca es la medida," (lit. "your mouth is the measure.")

Adelánteme un besito y treinta pesos. Why don't you advance me a kiss and thirty bucks
(Anonymous 1928h)?

The dialogue is in part a celebration of sentimentalized peasant love, and the humor here derives in part from the contrast between that ideal and Conchita's materialism. At the same time, there is an element of virtue to her putting up a fight, and the joke invites a certain identification with her practicality. It is, of course, incumbent on don Aniceto to prove that he is an *hombre formal* ("man of good intentions"), and he does so by enumerating, in stylized rural Spanish, the list of commodities that will be the story of their love.

- | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| E: | ¿Quién le va a mercar su cama de resorte para que rebote como una pelota su plancha eléctrica su fontóngrafo Y su refregeradora?
¿Quén? | Who's gonna buy you yer bed with springs
so you can bounce like a ball
yer electric arn,
yer phontograph.
and yer ree-frigerator?
Who? |
| N: | ¿Quén? Pos Asté | Who? Well you. |
| E: | Ah pos allí 'stá. | Oh well there y'go (<i>ibid.</i>). |

Although for a moment it appears that Conchita's allegiance is to the Chinese laundry owner for whom she works, she relents at the last moment, declaring her love for broad-trousered Mexican men "de la tierra de María Santísima" ("from the land of the Blessed Mary"). It is not the only dialogue of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez in which nationalism wraps itself in the language of religion.

The female characters' about-faces in these dialogues may seem and jarring or contrived to readers accustomed to psychological realism, but they are typical of the

dialogues whose plots center on love. Such reversals are especially common in the twelve dialogues that revolve around successful courtships. In these, a man makes advances and a woman resists, often insulting him quite harshly, and a verbal duel ensues in which she finally capitulates and agrees to return his love. Like fairy tales, these dialogues of successful courtship begin with a lack (i.e. the characters are single) and end with a marriage (Propp 1988[1968]:63). One dialogue that particularly resembles a fairy tale in this respect is *Amor del bueno*, (“The Good One’s Love”), in which Netty plays a *tamal*-vendor named María Nieves on the streets of “the capital” (Mexico City? Austin? Washington?). María clashes with a male street vendor played by Jesús who is interrupting her sales pitch by countering her every cry about tamales with one about ice cream. As they argue, he begins to woo her, in a series of double entendres about buying her pot of tamales, and she resists. Finally, she admits he is handsome, but points out that if he is as poor as she, then she will gain nothing by marrying him. He asks her name, she answers, and when she asks his, he reveals that he is a rich hacendado from Zacatecas. Having fallen in love with her at first sight, he has contrived the disguise of a street vendor to get near her and get her attention—a modern Haroun al Raschid. At this, their prose dialogue begins to drift into verse as the crucial moment arrives.

J: Con que ¿qué dice, mi vida? Well then, what do you say, my dear?

¿Me corresponde? Will you love me back?

N: Bueno,
sí lo quiero.
Pero con la condición
de que cuando se case
conmigo

Well,
yes, I do love you.
But with just one condition
that when you tie the knot with me

no le atole al vacilón.

you won't go out carousing
(Rodríguez-Valero 1930c).

María's response to her rich young gallant is less a confession of an emotional state than a performative act, the establishment of a relationship. Her "I love you" is an "I do," bound up in a heightened sense of personal honor and taking pains to distinguish itself from the hedonistic world of "el vacilón" ("good times," "carousing"). Like "La canción del pizcador" discussed above and like its fairy-tale predecessors, this dialogue offers love and marriage as individualized cures for the injuries of class. The handsome prince must disguise himself as a pauper both to judge his beloved's womanly virtue and to be judged himself apart from base material considerations.

But there is one material consideration left. As the couple sets off for Zacatecas, María remembers her merchandise. What to do with the pot of tamales? Her beloved responds with the dialogue's last words, "¡al diablo con ella! Al fin ya te tengo a tí, vida mía" ["The devil with it! After all, I've finally got you now, my dear"] (*ibid.*). It is the person, not the thing that is important, and after all, he is rich, and what is his is hers and vice versa. Here, in fact, we see him in his husbandly role, making a decision based on his own needs about property that had once been hers to sell. María's tamales and her life in the world of money remain behind, as she goes to live in the world of love with a man who deserves his wealth because he knows how to own it in a human way (Kracauer 1995:301). But this parting reference to the pot also reminds the listener of the earlier double entendres, which equate it with the lower stratum of her body, and this adds a potentially subversive note to the fairy tale. The pot now represents the world of buying

and selling, and if María has left that life behind, it is because she has made the sale of her life. Once a thing of value, the pot is now rubbish, its transformation the inverse of her suitor's transformation from pauper to prince. But in the background of this storybook romance, almost hidden to the distracted listener, it subtly threatens to break down the opposition between love and money that structures the dialogue in the first place. As in *Los cuatitos*, grotesque realism undermines the dialogue's dominant ideological message, preventing authoritarian rhetorical closure.

Although Netty and Jesús Rodríguez's first non-musical recording portrayed an unresolved argument, the formulaic plots of the successful courtship and the resolved conjugal argument dominate their early recording sessions from 1928 through 1930. Beginning in 1931, other less optimistic plot types, logically opposed to these two, begin to gain prominence. To understand this trend, it is necessary to look systematically at the dialogues by plot type. The following chart categorizes the thirty-five dialogues in which there is a plot driven by a romantic or conjugal relationship between the characters.

COURTSHIP----	legitimate-----	successful: 11 dialogues ¹³³	1928 (4), 1929-1930 (1), 1930 (4), 1935 (2).
		vs.	
	Illegitimate-----	unsuccessful: 4 ¹³⁴ vs. successful: 5 ¹³⁵	1935 (4) 1928, 1930, 1935 (2), 1937

¹³³ These include *Los Cuatitos* (1928), *Mi reputación* (1928), *El Rielero* (1928), *Ah Pos Allí Está* (1928), *La Canción del Pizcador* (1929-1930), *El santo del comisario* (1930), *Amor del Bueno* (1930), *La Soldadera* (1930), *El Soldado Porfirista* (1930), *The Mexican From New York* (1935), and *Chata Preciosa* (1935).

¹³⁴ These include *La Fritangera* (1935), *Pollo de Estaca* (1935), *Pos no le atino* (1935), and *El Chino* (1935).

	vs.		vs.	
		unsuccessful:	0	
CONJUGAL ----- LIFE	legitimate----- - vs. Illegitimate -----	argument resolved: 4 vs. argument unresolved: 7 ¹³⁷ argument resolved: 2 ¹³⁸ vs.	1930, 1934, 1935, 1936 1928, 1931, 1935 (3), 1936 (2). 1936 (2)	
		argument unresolved: 0		

The division above is interesting partly for what does not occur. We do not, for example, see unresolved arguments among unmarried couples or unsuccessful courtships outside the bounds of marriage. Unsuccessful courtships aimed at marriage are rare, appearing only in three dialogues recorded in 1935. In all of these, the male suitor's failure to get the girl is always due to some stigmatizing detail or personal failing on his part. In "La fritangera" (Anonymous 1935d), for example, the suitor is a flirtatious communist who preaches class struggle to a street vendor while trying to get out of paying for the meal she serves him. In "Pollo de estaca" ["A Rooster in his Prime"] the suitor is a *viejo rabo verde* ("dirty old man") after a young girl (Anonymous 1935m), while the Chinese suitor in "El Chino" ("The Chinaman") fails to show the jealousy and force of personality that his beloved expects of a real man (Rodríguez-Valero 1936a).

¹³⁵ These include Los Compadritos (1928), La receta del doctor (1930), Mexican Kiss (1935), Mi real gana (1935), and Pos ni me cuadra (1937).

¹³⁶ These include Es mi hombre (1930), Los mojados (1934), Me voy para México (1935), and Tres por tres son tres (1936).

¹³⁷ These include Pecaditos (1928), Aires matrimoniales (1931), El Sancho (1935), El ficha lisa (1935), Cosas a medias (1935), El condenado (1936), and Me cai gordo (1936).

¹³⁸ These include La Chava (1936) and La arrejuntada (1936).

It is worth noting that female suitors actively seeking male marriage partners are even less common than unsuccessful male suitors. Such characters occur only in *Pos no le atino* [“Well I don’t get it”] (1935f) and *Mi real gana* [“My Bet Wins”] (1936b). In the former, a woman uses none-too-subtle hints and insinuations to indicate interest in a man, and he responds with a series of florid verses describing but not naming his beloved.

Even when it becomes obvious that he is describing his addressee, she feigns incomprehension (“I don’t get it”), until finally he exposes her pretense by using hints of gossip to provoke an angry reaction. The female suitor of *Mi real gana* [“My Bet Wins”] fares somewhat better, although she is a less sympathetic character. This dialogue presents a situation that is the exact reverse of every normative expectation as a symptom of the breakdown of family values in the United States: a wily middle-aged woman named Dolores Panza (“Pains Belly”), played by Netty, has had a baby out of wedlock with a young teenager named Canuto Paloseco (“Tube Drystick”), and she uses reverse psychology to convince don Severo (“Mr. Severe”), the boy’s father played by Jesús, to consent to their marriage. This is the only dialogue in which a woman makes the first move to obtain a male partner, and it makes much of the symbolic inversion and the disparity in the couple’s ages. In the dialogue’s punch line sequence, don Severo worries aloud about the fact that his future daughter-in-law will have to change her name to “Dolores Panza de Paloseco” (“Belly-Pains from a Drystick”). Dolores suggests that “como estamos en los United States … me quito la panza” (“since we’re in the United States, I’ll get rid of the belly”). Unfortunately, this would make her name “Miz Dolores de Paloseco” (“My pains from a drystick”)! The joke is impossible to translate

comfortably, but the satirical barb against a social system that still makes it difficult for immigrants from the Spanish-speaking world to retain their system of naming, is clearly evident. But the great irony of the dialogue is that it was released under the names “Netty y Jesús Rodríguez,” rearranged according to the very system it sought to satirize, “como se estila en los United Estates.”

Although the dialogues featuring successful courtships and resolved conjugal arguments account for almost half of these dialogues, most of them occur in 1930 or earlier. By contrast, the dialogues featuring unsuccessful courtships and unresolved arguments begin to predominate in 1931. Courtships and conjugal arguments that occur outside the bounds of officially sanctioned marriage are even more rare before 1931, but after that year, they become increasingly prominent. Many of the dialogues centering on successful illegitimate courtships revolve around sexual tensions between a *compadre* and his comadre, but toward the end of their recording career, Netty and Jesús Rodríguez began to portray couples who were living together outside matrimony entirely (e.g. “La arrejuntada” [“The Shacked-Up Woman”], Rodríguez-Valero 1936h).

As I have suggested, the eighteen dialogues that do not involve the negotiation of a romantic relationship between the two characters develop a theme, rather than a plot by gradually revealing some aspect of one of the characters’ lives. These dialogues, all but five of which were recorded between 1934 and 1937, may be divided as follows:

	Mutual-----	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alma tricolor 1928 2. Comunista en San Antonio 1930 3. La historia 1930 4. Vacilando en San Antonio 1934 5. La Pecadora, 1935 6. El turista, 1937
Thematic-	M reveals self to F-----	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tu la traes 1936 2. Cabrestea o se ahorca 1936 3. Mis veinte Mujeres, 1937
	F reveals self to M-----	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. La póliza de a daime 1931 2. Doña Apolonia la bruja 1934 3. Por culpa de una trucha 1934 4. Una mula de tantas 1935 5. La ponchada, 1935 6. La viuda 1936 7. La arrepentida 1936 8. La payasa, 1937 9. Señora Vaca, 1937

In the dialogues I am calling “asymmetrical,” one character plays the role of “cómplice/o” (“comedian”) while the other is a “serio/o” (“straight woman/man”). In those I call symmetrical, both characters reveal something of themselves, and the “laugh lines” are more or less evenly shared. This dynamic is not exclusive to the dialogues in which the characters do not negotiate a romantic partnership. In “El Chino” and “Pollo de estaca,” for example, the stigmatized male who fails to get the girl is a comedian while his beloved is the “serio.” However, in the absence of a love relationship to create a sense of plot, it is the comedian/straight dynamic that lends a motive force to the dialogue.

Of the asymmetrical dialogues, the vast majority (nine of twelve) feature the female character as the comic, and in these, the characteristic that she reveals is generally a stigma of some sort. In some cases, the stigma is somewhat fanciful and the dialogue is

light-hearted, but in many others a serious moral message seems to be intended. This is especially true of those dialogues in which the female character reveals herself to be sexually promiscuous by relating a list of her sexual misadventures. This theme occurs both in dialogues that involve a romantic negotiation and those that do not: its first occurrence is in “Mi reputación,” [“My Reputation”] (Anonymous 1929-1930b), in which the male character don Chano, played by Roberto Escalera, elicits from a woman who remains nameless the story of her long and fickle love life. She ends each episode, by saying, “pero en nada he perdido mi reputación, ¿verdad?” (“but I haven’t lost my reputation, have I?”). Finally, he proposes to her, exhorting her to reform herself at his side.

E:	Yo le enseñaré a formar un hogar honrado. Seré su marido. Eso es la verdadera reputación. Un hombre pobre sí. Pero que sea su verdadero amparo.	I’ll teach you to form an honorable home. I’ll be your husband. That’s the real reputation. A poor man yes But one who will be your genuine helpmate.
N:	Gracias don Chano. Eso será mi verdadera reputación.	Thank you don Chano. That’ll be my real reputation (ibid.).

In this dialogue, the two live happily ever after, but in later dialogues, the element of romantic negotiation between the characters is removed, and the male character ends the dialogue not by proposing but by passing judgment on the woman.

One situation that lends itself to this theme is the dialogue between a woman and a priest, which occurs in “La pecadora” [“The sinner woman”] (Anonymous 1935i) and “La arrepentida” [“The repentant woman”] (Rodríguez-Valero 1936d). In the first, the

priest is an alcoholic, and he hiccups loudly as his parishioner confesses to a series of sexual misadventures, each of which he summarizes with a one-liner. In the second, a woman who has dedicated her youth to “el vacilón” and who wishes to become a nun tells a priest of her past. Before she takes her vows, he has assigned her the penitence of going to the parties and nightspots she used to frequent and flirting with all the men there. She reveals that when she complied with his instructions, all the men laughed at her. The priest ends the dialogue by pronouncing his judgment on her situation.

Entonces convéncete Adelita de que no eres tú la que quiere dejar el mundo, sino que el mundo ya te dejó por vieja anciana portamoneda ¡por no decirte, vieja bolsa!	So convince yourself Adelita that it isn't you who wants to leave the world. but the world that's left you 'cause your so old an ancient money-carrier so as not to say an old bag (<i>ibid.</i>)!
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Unlike many of the Rodríguez recordings, the moral message of this dialogue appears relatively straight, without ironies or complications aside from the element of voyeurism that accompanies any detailed denunciation of sin.

Although no male character in any of the dialogues is ever made to confess his sexual history to a woman who passes judgment on him, male characters do face women's judgment in several of the dialogues. Over and over, both in dialogues that involve romantic negotiation and in those that do not, the *vago mantenido* who is too lazy to work, allows his woman to take care of him, and fails to police her sexuality returns to face the reproach of a woman who represents the conscience of the gender system. The *mantenido* figure, who resembles the parasite of Roman comedy, stands in opposition

both to the honorable, honest worker that we have seen in such dialogues as “Mi reputación,” “La canción del pizcador,” and “El rielero” and to the love-struck humanitarian capitalist in “Amor del bueno.” What distinguishes him is his abandonment of the male responsibility to provide for a family. In some recordings, he appears as a harmless drunken layabout. In others, he is an aggressive and abusive brute, beating his wife to salvage his self-esteem when she brings in money by dallying with other men. Every bad quality ascribed to the Mexican *pelado* or *lépero* by foreign visitors and elite authors appears in the unsympathetic male characters of the Rodríguez dialogues.

In those recordings made during the depth of the Depression, the economic crisis itself becomes but another weapon in these characters’ arsenals of excuses for not working. In “El Sancho” for example, the *mantenido* played by Jesús cites the economic crisis as the cause of his downfall, but as his comadre, played by Netty, interrogates him, his true nature comes to the surface. She reminds him that his wife lights a candle every day so that he will find work, and when he asserts that he lights two per day, she sees right through him—he lights the candles in the hope of not finding work (Anonymous 1935j)! This dialogue exemplifies a strong moralizing current in the Rodríguez recordings that celebrates hard work as a value in its own sake and interprets abject poverty as a character defect. Proper masculinity is here linked with the man’s ability to properly fulfill his role in the class system. If the dialogues recorded in 1928 and 1929 focus on the positive examples of the virtuous, ‘deserving’ poor, those recorded between 1934 and 1937 focus overwhelmingly on the negative examples of those who are *pobres y además sin vergüenzas* (“poor and also shameless”). Although a moralizing current

predominates, there is nevertheless something charming about the tirade of excuses that the *mantenido* characters use to lend dignity to their lives of vice and sloth. In some cases, the shameless poor with their endless stratagems become almost sympathetic trickster figures, embodying the near-universal need to get as much value as possible for as little effort as possible.

Discussion

In the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, we see a mass-mediated theatrical manifestation of a satirical aesthetic that was central to prewar ethnic Mexican public culture quite generally. Throughout the dialogues, there are running tensions between elitism and populism and between heavy-handed moralistic satire and light-hearted carnivalesque humor, and no one tendency ever dominates for very long. The dialogues present the experience of Mexican immigration to the United States through the lens of love and conjugal life, and the nostalgic sense of Mexican identity that they evoke is intimately tied with conformity to normative expectations in the realm of heterosexual love, family, and gender. Through a nostalgic construction of Mexico as a morally upright land of love, contrasted with the United States as a vice-ridden land of money, the dialogues symbolically erase the trauma of the Mexican Revolution. They offer hope for redemption from the inequities of the racialized U.S. labor system through individual virtue, humanity, and return to Mexico rather than collective action. Likely influenced by the elite nationalism of the Mexican exile community but addressing a broad working class audience, the Rodríguez duo presented *agringamiento* rather than the labor

exploitation as the key evil facing ethnic Mexicans in the United States. Although this view represents a challenge to the received gospel of the American Success Story, it was not in itself politically radical.

For Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, as for many ethnic Mexicans who came to the United States to escape the turmoil of the Revolution, a growing level of intimacy with the dominant culture of the United States coincided with the anti-immigrant backlash and economic hardships of the Depression. By 1931, the Spanish-language theater industry that had been their life had begun losing a significant portion of its audience to deportations and competition from film was beginning to erode its market share. In this context, the happy marriages and pleasant peasants began to disappear from the Rodríguez dialogues, replaced more and more by dark, even morbid humor and plots revolving around marital discontent, immorality, betrayal, and hedonistic individualism. *Agringamiento* and moral decline appear in the dialogues as simultaneous and inseparable phenomena, all linked to the increasing involvement of ethnic Mexicans in free labor and consumerism. Although negative examples provide comic relief from the beginning of the couple's *oeuvre*, there is a concentration of more or less optimistic and light-hearted dialogues in the early years of the couple's recording career, from 1928 to 1930. In the dialogues recorded in 1931 and afterward, the characters and situations show increasing stupidity, hypocrisy, selfishness, and amoral hedonism. Although the dialogues never lose a certain whimsical humor, they seem to become increasingly moralistic over time and tend to associate moral failings with ethnic Mexicans' adoption of Anglo-American customs and norms. The irony of all this is that Netty and Jesús

Rodríguez's dialogues were themselves consumer items, and the critique of agringamiento they presented was largely the product of institutions of public discussion that were themselves inherently commodified. Furthermore, for all the vigor with which they championed the idea of returning to Mexico, Netty and Jesús both died in San Antonio after a joint artistic career that spanned at least thirty-five years.

CHAPTER 6. BILINGUAL THEATER, LANGUAGE PURISM, AND THE GENDERED CONTRADICTIONS OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM

Introduction

Before my 1990 interview with Leonardo (“Lalo”) García-Astol, I met the noted San Antonio actor in the lobby of his downtown apartment building. there, I found him engaged in a conversation with a fiftyish man whose name I never learned, and the two included me in their conversation, apparently unaware at first that I was the young man who had come to do an interview. The other man was enthusiastically praising Mr. Astol’s skills as a performer and status as a role model for ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio, while the actor waved the flattery away with a self-parodic air of false modesty. As the conversation progressed, the topic of language came to dominate. Astol claimed to have avoided learning English, and stated that he had instead dedicated himself to providing a public model of correct Spanish from which the mexicanas/os of San Antonio, especially the poor and uneducated, could improve their own speech. At this point, his companion chimed in, declaring “¡Ud. habla el español mejor que Henry Cisneros, Daniel Bustamante, Henry B. González o cualquiera de esos!” (“You speak Spanish better than Henry Cisneros, Daniel Bustamante, Henry B. González, or any of those guys!”)¹³⁹ Astol’s concern for the integrity of standard Spanish continued to show itself during our interview as he corrected nonstandard forms I had learned from interviews with *carpa* performers, such as “ecsenario” instead of “escenario” for “stage.”

¹³⁹ I reproduce this sentence from memory. These names were mentioned, but I cannot guarantee the accuracy of the wording.

Astol's attitudes toward language intrigued me, for I had found very different views during my initial forays into the city's Chicano arts community, especially among the performers affiliated with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. At that time, the Guadalupe maintained a resident company dedicated to staging plays in the local West Side vernacular, proudly calling such performances bilingual theater. This term, which has become almost synonymous with "Chicana/o theater" in the Southwestern United States following the Chicano movement, highlights the self-conscious mingling of English and Spanish in theatrical writing and performance.¹⁴⁰ As Jorge Huerta has noted, *teatristas* since 1965 have used various combinations of the two languages not only to accommodate linguistically diverse audiences, but also to serve those audiences' need to see their everyday ways of speaking reflected and celebrated on stage (1982:6). Furthermore, many contemporary Chicana/o playwrights, poets, critics, and cultural activists, inspired by the movement's populism, have come to question received ideas about correct and pure language. Rather than urging their communities to live up to externally imposed linguistic standards, these intellectuals have sought to change or dispense with such standards. Many authors see the simultaneous use of two languages within an utterance as a creative act of resistance against an oppressive monolingual national imaginary (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987; Tafolla 1992:21-23). In these accounts,

¹⁴⁰ During a public presentation of this paper in San Antonio, which was sponsored by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, some audience members reacted with surprise to this sentence, for they had assumed that the two terms were indeed synonymous. This is true in part because "bilingual" has become a shorthand among ethnic Mexicans in southern Texas for what some linguists (e.g. Lambert 1978) have called "compound bilingualism," with "bilingual theater" referring to activity that brings some version of the area's language-mixing vernacular to the stage. Although much contemporary Chicana/o theater mingles and juxtaposes English and Spanish in this way, not all "Chicana/o" theater is "bilingual," and most importantly, not all "bilingual" theater in the world is Chicana/o.

bilingualism seems to begin as a symbol of Chicano ethnicity and move toward an ethics of linguistic and cultural diversity. The sentiments behind these contemporary efforts to name and valorize the mixing of languages contrast sharply with attitudes that were prominent in commercial popular theater of the early twentieth century.

Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, whose work we have examined in the previous chapter, ridiculed the mixing of English and Spanish in their recordings. Holding to the “Mexico:United States::Love:Money” thesis outlined in the previous chapter, they portrayed language-mixing¹⁴¹ as cultural treason, as a symptom of the breakdown of consensus in mexicana/o communities, and as a transgression of traditional mexicana/o family values and gender roles. The dialogues present men who mix English and Spanish as dandies who overzealously and reprehensibly embrace U.S. customs. By contrast, women who do the same appear as rebellious upstarts, rejecting Mexico entirely and seeking to become foreigners. Through this asymmetrically gendered evaluation of language-mixing, the dialogues attribute naturalized “ethnic essences … to ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ behavior,” thus ethnicizing gender (Wong 1992:112-113).

¹⁴¹ Because there is no agreement on terms in the vast and growing literature on bilingualism, code-switching, and other language contact phenomena, some initial clarification of terminology is required. I here use “language-mixing” as an umbrella term for various practices that have been observed in areas where linguistic varieties that are widely constructed as distinct “languages” meet and mingle. I am using “language-mixing” to encompass what is often called “borrowing” (the adaptation of vocabulary from one ‘language’ into another), “code-switching” (the alternation between two ostensibly distinct ‘languages’ in a single stretch of discourse), and “interference” (the influence of one language on another, and the blurring of the boundaries between the languages). I have chosen this broad term both because of the fuzziness and overlapping of the more specific categories and because of the fact that the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez foreground linguistic phenomena that fit into all three of the more specific categories without distinguishing among them. For a discussion of the fuzziness of the term “code-switching” see Gardner-Chloros 1995:70.

This gendered ideology of linguistic purism appears to have been common in ethnic Mexican public discourse on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border since the U.S. invasion of 1848. In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, popular songs in interior Mexico used English to satirize women who spoke that language and consorted with the Anglo-American invaders (Hernández 1991:12). Twentieth-century Mexican immigrants to the United States further developed the ideology both in popular song (Herrera-Sobek 1993:288; Paredes 1995:151-169) and Spanish-language journalistic writing. In these institutions of public discussion, the figure of the English-speaking *mexicana* emerged as a sort of reincarnation of Malintzin Tenepal, the indigenous woman who served as concubine and translator to conquistador Hernán Cortés. As literary critic Norma Alarcón has noted, Malintzin, often known by the epithet “Malinche,” has acquired an Eve-like status in Mexican nationalism, becoming both a symbol of treachery and the mother of a “fallen” people (1989:58). In this secular but religiously informed mythology, “those who use the oppressor’s language are viewed as outside of the community … but, paradoxically, they also help to constitute the community” (Alarcón 1989:59-60).

This paradox is clearly visible in the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. In spite of their ostensible purism, the dialogues contain jokes that play with the boundaries between English and Spanish and presume knowledge of both languages, suggesting a move toward the celebration of linguistic and cultural hybridity. Furthermore, my own interviews with entertainers born in San Antonio who were active during the same period suggest that these performers mixed English and Spanish in ways that further advanced

the celebratory tendency. All of the performers were participants in a larger process of public metalinguistic reflection by which ethnic Mexicans negotiated an ambiguous and troubled sense of cultural citizenship in San Antonio between the two World Wars. This process, I suggest, was related to the deeply gendered reactions of *mexicanas/os* both to the U.S. state and to U.S. consumer culture.

By linking language mixing to these social processes, the dialogues parallel the intellectual concerns of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology in interesting ways. I here use *language mixing* as an umbrella term for various practices that have been observed in areas where linguistic varieties that are widely constructed as distinct “languages” meet and mingle. These include what are often called *borrowing* (the adaptation of vocabulary from one “language” into another), *codeswitching* (the alternation between two ostensibly distinct “languages” in a single stretch of discourse), and *interference* (the influence of one language on another, and the blurring of the boundaries between languages). I have chosen this broad term both because of the fuzziness and overlapping of the more specific categories (Gardner-Chloros 1995:70), and because the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez foreground all of these linguistic phenomena without distinguishing among them. The sorts of speech that the dialogues satirize are the very ones that sociolinguists, operating from an implicit normative monolingualism, have seen as anomalies “in need of explanation” (Woolard 1999:3; see also Milroy and Muysken 1995:3). Furthermore, the dialogues mix languages in ways that parallel the tidy but now discredited predictions of early research on what has been called codeswitching. Recent studies based on close analyses of naturally occurring talk

have clearly shown that in multilingual situations, language choice does not follow mechanically from specific activity types, the social identities of speakers and hearers, or specific interactional goals (Auer 1995:118). In the Rodríguez dialogues, however, we shall see that English occurs in a more or less predictable array of semantic domains and interactional moments.

It is partly this predictability that makes the language-mixing in the dialogues a negative example intended to police the boundaries of the languages in question. Because they involve “critical and evaluative reflection on language and verbal behavior,” the dialogues may be seen as advancing a form of what Deborah Cameron calls verbal hygiene (Cameron 1995:9). As Cameron has noted, such reflections are necessary and ubiquitous phenomena, essential parts of the ways social actors make sense of the world. In arguing that these performances of verbal hygiene were involved in the construction of cultural citizenship, I mean that they were part of a community wide process of subject formation in which ethnic Mexicans negotiated “ambivalent and contested relations with the state” and debated senses of national belonging (Ong 1996:738). The following selection from “Cabrestea o se ahorca” (“Bend or Break”), a dialogue in which a monolingual Spanish-speaking woman played by Netty Rodríguez upbraids a codeswitching Texas Mexican played by Jesús, illustrates the explicit links the dialogues draw between language and citizenship.

N:	Recuerde que el deber de todo ciudadano honrado y decente es perfeccionar su vocabulario para que se le tome como	Remember that the duty of every honorable and decent citizen is to perfect their vocabulary in order to be taken for an
----	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

persona educada.	educated/well-mannered person.
No hay que corromper con disparates nuestro precioso idioma.	There's no need to corrupt our beautiful language with nonsense.
Así es que una de dos.	So one way or the other.
O se corrige o se devuelve.	Either correct yourself, or go back.
Porque aquí estamos completos.	Because here, we're complete

(Rodríguez-Valero 1936b).¹⁴²

Set in Mexico, the dialogue does not specify what country the “honorable and decent citizen” is supposed to be a citizen of, a significant and telling ambiguity. Although citizenship is usually discussed in relation to ideas of inclusion and political participation (e.g., Flores and Benmayor 1997:9; Rosaldo 1997:38), the “othering” of the assimilated Mexican in these dialogues highlights the fact that citizenship only becomes intelligible through the exclusion of some alien.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, this chapter draws in part on feedback interviews, in which I elicited exegeses of the four of the Rodríguez dialogues from my consultants. Although my approach here was influenced by the standard questions used in matched guise studies (e.g. Lambert et. al. 1960; Bilaniuk 1996), my feedback interviews were longer and less structured than is usually the case with such tests, and the

¹⁴² In this transcription, line breaks separate phrases defined by pausing and intonation. Audible pauses occur at the end of each printed line. Ellipses (...) denote audible pauses within a phrase that seems united by intonation. Periods, question marks, and exclamation points denote the discursive functions of sentences, not intonation contours. Elongation of sounds is marked with a colon, while cut off words are marked with a long dash. Periods and question marks are used in their traditional way, but they also tend to mark rising and falling intonation. Boldface type indicates emphasis on the speaker's part. Underlining is used for features that I, the author, wish to single out for special attention. English words and English loanwords are italicized, both in the transcription and the translation.

number of interviewees much smaller. Furthermore, in asking for my consultants' impressions of the characters, I used terms for personality traits that had emerged as culturally salient in earlier, less structured interviews (e.g. "*presumido/a*" or "boastfully presumptuous"), rather than relying exclusively on *a priori* categories. I was only able to conduct feedback interviews with Normalinda Monsiváis of the Carpa Monsiváis, Raymundo García of the Carpa García and Mr. García's wife Virginia, largely because I found it difficult to interest many of my other consultants in the recordings. These individuals, quite understandably, seemed to see interviews with me as a way of seeking out a new audience, and most preferred discussing their own memories to reflecting on the work of others. Although my feedback interviews do not represent a systematic sampling of audience reaction to the recordings, they do add depth and complexity to my own analyses, suggesting that Texas-born bilinguals may have interpreted the dialogues in ways that diverged from immigrant purism.

The Mexican Precursors of Bilingual Theater

Having drawn a contrast between the "bilingual theater" of the early twentieth century and that of the last thirty years, a question arises: by what right do we include these two expressive forms, separated in time, in the same story? Could they not be two different phenomena entirely? Would all theatrical performances by or for ethnic Mexicans that mixed or juxtaposed English and Spanish be admissible in this narrative? This is no trivial question, for the long and turbulent history usually understood as 'relations' between 'the United States' and 'Mexico' has led to mixtures of the two

languages well outside the generally acknowledged contact zone in what is now the southwestern section of the former country and the northern section of the latter. The widespread “mock” or “junk Spanish” used by monolingual English speakers all over the United States (e.g. “no problemo”) is only the most recent example (Hill 1993). A pertinent example of this problem is to be found in the contrast among *Chin Chun-Chan* (1904), *El país de la metralla* (1913) and *The Land of Joy* (1917), three works by the Mexican playwright and lyricist José F. Elizondo. Widely acclaimed as a key figure in the development of the *zarzuela* and *revista* in Mexico, Elizondo appears not to have lived or spent much time in the border region, although he seems to have maintained cordial relations with the editors of *La prensa* and even published a book of verse with Lozano’s press (Elizondo 1925). In spite of this fact, and in spite of the predominance of Spanish among Mexico City audiences, humor involving the use of English appears in some of his most prominent works.

The zarzuela *Chin Chun Chan*, a fast-paced farce that Elizondo co-authored with Rafael Medina, centers on the misadventures of don Columbo, an unfaithful husband who disguises himself as a Chinese man to escape from his tyrannical and vengeful wife. Columbo happens on a luxury hotel where the owners, who are frantically preparing for the rival of rich Mandarin named Chin Chun-Chan, mistake him for their honored guest. Since its debut at Mexico City’s Teatro Principal, this zarzuela has been performed thousands of times all over the Republic and has been called the best-known Mexican theatrical work (Reyes de la Maza 1985:340). Indeed, some commentators credit *Chin Chun Chan* with establishing the key elements that would come to characterize the later

political musical theater of the Revolution by rejecting imported Spanish formulas in favor of broadly-drawn Mexican national types and customs (Morales et. al. 1984:18).

As we have seen, San Antonio's Carpa Guzmani offered at least one performance of the zarzuela in 1917.

English appears with surprising frequency in *Chin Chun-Chan*, always in the context of a discussion of U.S. hegemony in Mexico. In Scene V, Columbo, disguised as Chinese man, is having trouble maintaining the appearance of speaking Chinese and tries to convince Borbolla, a hotel employee, that his time in Mexico is confusing him. Borbolla replies that this confusion is nothing compared to that of seeing poor indigenous peasants speaking English because the country is so full of "gringos" who do not know Spanish. The disguised Columbo replies, "Que lo aplendan! ¿Quién les manda habel venilo?" (Ret them realn it. Who to'd dem to come?). In Scene VI, there follows a song on this theme, perhaps the most widely excerpted of the work's songs.

Como el yanqui nos invade
El inglés hay que aprender
para que con nuestros primos
nos podamos entender
Mi vender el *charamusco*
en la lengua del *Tío Sam*.
Mucho *güeno* palanquetas,
piloncillos *veri fain*.

Since the yankee is invading us
English we will have to learn
so that we and our cousins
can understand each other
Me sell the charamusco
in the language of *Uncle Sam*
Very good palanquetas
Piloncillo *very fine*. (Medina and Elizondo 1904:27-28,)¹⁴³

As we will see, the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez also show the pattern that appears here of referring to commodities and money in English.

¹⁴³ The italics of the Spanish text reproduced here are present in the original script. Medina and Elizondo use italics, sometimes a little haphazardly, to mark English words and non-standard Spanish. The italics in my English translation mark words that are in English in the original.

Later in the song, after a spoken interlude meant to mimic a vendor speaking English to an American buyer, there is an encounter between a Mexican woman and a rich American man who offers her a large sum of money in exchange for her favors.

De momento, la muchacha
no le supo contestar;
pero viendo que él tenía
muchos *american bank*
le dijo luego muy resuelta
very guel ol rait.

For a moment the girl
did not know what to say
but seeing that he had
much *American bank*
she told him resolutely,
“*Very well, all right*” (28).

This theme of the Mexican woman giving in to the advances of the alien gringo in exchange for money and adopting his language was not original to Elizondo. Hernández notes its occurrence much earlier in a popular song called “La Pasadita,” which appears to have been performed in interior Mexico in the wake of the U.S. invasion of 1848.

Ya las Margaritas
hablan el inglés
les dicen: me quieres
y responden: yes.
mi entiende mucho de monis
mucho güieno está (443)

Today Margaritas
speak English
they are told: Do you love me?
and they say: “yes
Me understand about moneys
is much good.” (García Cubas, cited
in Hernández 1991:12, translation
by Hernández.)

As in Elizondo’s song, a lower-class woman—identified as a peasant by her dialect—consorts with the invader, symbolizing the vulnerability of the nation to treason. A similar class dynamic is present in the song from *Chin Chun Chan*, which focuses in the final lines on the incongruity of a rich “*dandy*” courting a “*gata very gut*” (Medina and Elizondo 1904:28). *Gata* (lit. “female cat”), of course, is a derogatory term for a domestic servant. At the end of the song, however, the *gringo*’s inability to speak English does him in. When he asks the *gata* “*¿Yu spic inglés?*” she interprets his

question as a bald-faced offer of sexual penetration (“picarle los ingles”) and responds in anger, “*Osté no pica á mí esas cosas/ ni me pica ná*” [You won’t poke those things/ and you won’t poke any part of me!] (28-29).

In 1913, recently exiled *Huertistas* from Matamoros staged a benefit performance in Brownsville featuring their own adaptation of *Chin Chun Chan* (Paredes 1995:155). Although the libretto appears not to have survived, Américo Paredes has collected a version of a famous song sequence from the zarzuela that has circulated orally in the lower Rio Grande Valley (165-167).¹⁴⁴ This Valley text of the song preserves the vast majority of Elizondo’s wording, but the few differences are noteworthy. Where Elizondo’s song begins by referring to the U.S. invasion of Mexico, the Brownsville version changes the first line to “Como estamos en Texas...” (“Since we are in Texas...”) (165). Paredes interprets this as the sentiment of middle-class refugees resigned to assimilation (i.e. we *must* learn English), apparently unaware that those refugees were adapting a satire of U.S. imperialism. These lines could just as easily be read as a wry commentary on the cultural pressures of exile and enclavement, with “nuestros primos” (“our cousins”) now referring to established Mexican Americans. Another interesting difference is the absence of the final twenty lines of the original, which describe the meetings between poor Mexican women and their Yankee suitors.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in the

¹⁴⁴ It is Guillermo Hernández (1991:121, n32) who deserves the credit for having discovered the source of this text; Paredes attributes the zarzuela to the Matamorenses themselves. Of the differences between the Valley version and Elizondo’s original, it is difficult to determine which were introduced by the Matamorenses and which by subsequent generations of singers.

¹⁴⁵ The reason for this absence is impossible to know. The song stands on its own without the final four lines, and oral transmission is known for winnowing songs down to certain core sentiments. It is also

Brownsville zarzuela documented by Paredes, this English-speaking “Malinche” figure seems to have made one of her earliest appearances as a symbol of cultural assimilation in the U.S. rather than accommodation imperialism in Mexico.

In May of 1913, a sort of reverse-image of the Malinche figure appeared in another Mexico City *revista* by Elizondo, *El pais de la metralleta* (“Land of the machine gun”) (Morales et. al. 1984:128). This work was a loose collection of allegorical sketches, songs, and dances about the events of the *decena trágica*, the bloody ten-day rebellion in February of that year in which conservative forces overthrew and assassinated Francisco Madero, the first Revolutionary president. The United States ambassador played a pivotal role in the rebellion fomenting an alliance between the rebels under Porfirio Díaz’s son Félix and the federal army commanded by General Victoriano Huerta. Not surprisingly, Elizondo’s play is full of references to U.S. intervention in Mexico, and comic uses of English appear frequently, usually italicized in the script. In one scene, a mother and her daughter, Magdalena, who is dressed in the producers’ idea of Yaqui garb, approach a photographer’s studio along with an aggressively amorous *gringo* named “Mister Sam” who tries to woo Magdalena with his money.

¡Oh Magdalena! *Preti miss*
mí quiere darle pronto un *kis*.

Oh Magdalena, *Pretty miss*
Me want to give you soon a *kiss*
(Elizondo 1913:11)

possible that the Mexican American singers who sang and transmitted this song in Brownsville were less sympathetic than Elizondo to the class prejudices implied in the original song.

Both women resist his advances, speaking English only to satirize his mixture of English and ‘broken’ Spanish.

¡Qué risa! ¡Qué risa!
da ver el gringo así,
corriendo tras de mí!
¡No mister! ¡No mister!
y el fin de su ambición
será la intervención!

¡What laughter! ¡What laughter!
it gives me when I see
this gringo running after me!
No, mister! No, mister!
and the end of your ambition
will be the intervention (12)!

A later scene consisted entirely of a group of eight dancers dressed in Uncle Sam suits, wearing baldhead wigs. On top of each dancer’s head was painted one letter in the group’s name—”THE MEICS”—to be revealed when indicated by music.¹⁴⁶ After showing this, the group was to rearrange itself and bow heads again to reveal the word “METICHES” (“BUSYBODIES”). There followed a song, almost entirely in English that ended as follows:

Si mi mete di jand. (Si = “if”; mete = “to stick”)
In bisnes mexican.
Ai can, ai can
Only mai protecshion is ol rait
bicos ai am «The Meics».
Di neim is in mai jed
Ol rait. —Ol rait.
Ol rait. —Gud bai. —Gud bai. —Ol rait.
¡Yes! (28)¹⁴⁷

Here the repetition of certain stock phrases in English (e.g. “ol rait”) seems to be intended to have a humorous effect in itself. Although clearly nationalist and anti-interventionist in its orientation, *El pais de la metralla* spared none of the various revolutionary factions in its critiques. There were passages that were widely understood as supporting the

¹⁴⁶ This name is probably a play on English “makes” and the common abbreviation of “Mexico” as “mex.”

¹⁴⁷ The orthography here, of course, is Elizondo’s, designed to be readable by performers used to Spanish.

usurper Huerta, and after the general's assassination, the musical generated such animosity among partisans that Elizondo was forced into exile in Havana, where he spent five years before returning to Mexico (Morales et. al. 1984:20).

While in Cuba, Elizondo collaborated with Eulogio Velasco and Quinito Valverde on a musical (also called a 'zarzuela hispano-yankee') that used English extensively and might have been the first theatrical work written by an ethnic Mexican to reach Broadway. Titled *The Land of Joy*, it follows a group of English-speaking Euro-American Hispanophiles as they travel to Spain and find love, in a series of scenes designed to evoke a romanticized fantasy image of that country. Originally written entirely in Spanish in collaboration with the noted Spanish zarzuela composer Joaquín Valverde, the work premiered in Havana's Teatro Nacional on October 6th, 1917 and then made its New York debut at the Park Theater, under the management of the composer's Valverde Musical Enterprises. The artistic success of a Mexican-authored work on Broadway was not lost on *La prensa*, which published an enthusiastic report anticipating *The Land of Joy*'s opening in New York¹⁴⁸ and an equally enthusiastic summary of favorable reactions to the musical in that city's press—these favorable reviews were themselves news for an exile community anxious to see one of its own triumph in the United States.

The newspaper quotes an un-named English-language journalistic source that described *The Land of Joy* as follows:

"Naturalmente una obra de esta "Naturally a work of this nature

¹⁴⁸ *La prensa*, 29 October, 1917.

naturaleza para ser presentada ante un público de habla inglesa, tenía que ser adaptada a esa lengua, para lo cual se dió una sección americana, resultando la obra bilingüe, pero de tal manera arreglada que es perfectamente inteligible para un público americano, como español”

to be presented before an English-speaking audience had to be adapted to that language, for which an American section was given, rendering the work bilingual, but arranged in such a way that it is perfectly intelligible for an American public, as for a Spanish one.¹⁴⁹

In fact, *Land of Joy* is, from a textual perspective, two musicals for two audiences. The musical begins in New York, and songs from the scenes located there are entirely in English, with lyrics by Ruth Boyd Ober, who also appeared in the production. Beginning in the latter half of Act I and through almost all of Act II, most songs have two sets of lyrics, one predominantly English and the other predominantly Spanish. Although some of the English lyrics are translations of the Spanish, most are loosely related at best to the Spanish text. *The Land of Joy* was Elizondo’s only Broadway work, and it appears to be his only collaboration with Anglophone North American performers and writers. Although it may resemble later Chicano theater in its need to accommodate a linguistically diverse audience, that need comes from very different social circumstances and artistic ambitions.¹⁵⁰ In general, English seems to have appeared in Elizondo’s work to satirize the speech of the American imperialist or to poke fun at uneducated people who adopted terms from that imperialist’s language. This pattern develops further in

¹⁴⁹ *La prensa*, 6 November 1917. Translation mine from the Spanish.

¹⁵⁰ Songs from *The Land of Joy* survive on sound recordings made in New York during its run at that city’s Park Theater. The Orquesta Española de José Lacalle recorded one disc in 1917 in the wake of the staging of *The Land of Joy*, featuring the songs “Alegrias” and “Los crótalos” (Columbia C3173, A2475). Soon afterward, the soprano María Marco, a member of the show’s original Broadway cast, recorded “La maja de goya-Trípili” and “Compañero de mi vida,” (Columbia 3164). Baritone Manuel Villa, also an original cast member, recorded “Sultana—Serenata,” “Achores,” and “Molinos de viento” in January of 1918 (Columbia 3166) (Spottsworth 1990: pp 1996; 2059; 2394).

the public discourse of Mexican immigrants in the United States and in the recorded dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez.

Language Purism and English Use in Mexican Immigrant Public Culture

As post-revolutionary Mexican immigrants formed institutions of public discussion and reflection in the United States, they sought to use those institutions to preserve a sense of Mexican identity against the alien influence of U.S. culture and values. The promotion of normative ideas about the Spanish language was an important focus of these efforts. As early as 1904, for example, the newspaper *El regidor* published a long list of non-standard Spanish forms (e.g. “ansina” instead “así” or “thus”), which it called “cacografías” and “disparates” (“cacographies” and “nonsense”), each one paired with the standard form.¹⁵¹ The same issue included a quote from the Monterrey newspaper *Renacimiento*, which had run an article praising *El regidor’s* work and urging ethnic Mexicans residing in the United States to buy the paper and study its articles carefully to preserve their Spanish. Language, the newspaper added, “is like nationality; he who loses it betrays his country.”¹⁵² Whatever its ideological orientation, *Renacimiento* would have found much agreement on this point among San Antonio’s exiled Huertista elite. According to Richard García, this group saw the Spanish language as a key to this identity, and like *El Regidor*, they sought to provide the Mexican colony with “an example of correct diction and language that promoted, within itself, an ideology of formalism and elitism” (1991:104). This ideology involved stigmatizing both

¹⁵¹ *El regidor* December 1, 1904, p.3.

¹⁵² Ibid. “...pues el idioma es como la nacionalidad; el que lo pierde traiciona a su patria.”

nonstandard Spanish and the mingling of Spanish and English. In one 1930 article, for example, Miguel de Uranga praised the local caricaturist Mauro González, citing among González's good qualities the fact that he did not mix English and Spanish when he spoke. Uranga noted that this purism is “una virtud rara en los nuestros educados en Estados Unidos” (“a rare virtue among those of our people who have been educated in the United States.”)¹⁵³

In spite of its editors' concern for the purity of Spanish, however, *La prensa* did use English and Anglicisms within its pages. For the most part, English and English-derived words are set apart from the surrounding text by quotation marks, as in the following headlines from 1917:

POR LOS “DANCING HALLS” DEJO A SUS HIJOS.
(SHE LEFT HER CHILDREN FOR THE ‘DANDING HALLS.’)¹⁵⁴

SURPRISSE PARTY [sic]

Un grupo de señoritas amigas de la señorita Guadalupe Maldonado, que vive en la casa 709 de la avenida E., le dieron el último domingo un “surprise Party” que resultó muy animado.

(“A group of young lady friends of Miss Guadalupe Maldonado, who lives at 709 Avenue E, gave her a ‘surprise Party’ [sic] which was very lively.”)¹⁵⁵

FUERON APREHENDIDOS DIEZ “SLACKERS”
 (“TEN ‘SLACKERS’ [i.e. WWI draft dodgers] WERE APPREHENDED”)¹⁵⁶

OCHO MIL PESOS CUESTA UN “FLIRT” A UN FLIRTEADOR.
Otra demanda curiosa presentada por una Miss aprensiva

¹⁵³ *La Prensa*, June 1, 1930. This article is cited and slightly mistranslated in García 1991:120.

¹⁵⁴ September 1, 1917

¹⁵⁵ Oct. 9, 1917

¹⁵⁶ Oct. 11, 1917

(“A ‘FLIRT’ COSTS A FLIRTER EIGHT THOUSAND DOLLARS.
Another curious lawsuit presented by an apprehensive Miss”)¹⁵⁷

In the above examples, quotation marks police the boundary between Spanish and English (except in the case of the word “Miss”), but they fail to prevent the playful morphological integration of the English word “flirt” into the Spanish neologism “flirteador.” In general, these examples seem to reflect efforts on the part of journalists to evoke everyday life in the United States by referring to practices, places, and things that were commonly named with English words. In some cases, as in the “flirt” story, there is clearly an element of humor and novelty in such usages.

Such humorous use of English also appears to have been common in short satirical essays called “crónicas” and in satirical poetry. The humorists of the Spanish-language press in the early twentieth-century United States, in San Antonio and elsewhere, often published disparaging commentaries on Mexican Americanisms (“pochismos”) and on the foibles of assimilated Mexicans, in which English words and English loans appear with the ostensible purpose of defending the purity of Spanish. Perhaps the most famous of these humorists is the California-based Julio Arce (“Jorge Ulica”), who published essays with titles like “No hay que hablar in pocho” (“It’s not necessary to speak in Pocho”) throughout the decade of the 1920s (Ulica 1982). Interestingly enough, the English-speaking “Malinche” figure frequently appears in these commentaries. In addition to the occasional prescriptive column on language, *La prensa* included the work of the pseudonymous editorial poet “Chantecler” in a regular column

¹⁵⁷ Oct. 17, 1917

called “Tiros al blanco” (“sharp-shots”), which we have already heard from in Chapters 1 and 3. In his work, “Chantecler” used occasional English phrases and words for humorous effect, often putting these in the mouths of female characters who uncritically embraced the ‘American Way of Life.’ Although this theme appears much less frequently in “Chantecler’s” poetry than anti-Carrancista harangues, its continuous re-appearance suggests that it was a significant preoccupation both of the poet and of the publications.

In 1916, for example, a poem titled “Al aire libre” (“In the fresh air”) describes a romantic young man approaching a fashionably dressed young woman at night and propositioning her in a flood of flowery language. Deaf to his flattery, she continuously answers, “Mí no entiende” (“Me no understand”), that is until he happens to mention that he is extremely wealthy, at which point she interrupts him, saying “Mí ya entiende” (“Me understand now”) and then “Mí te quiere” (“Me love you”).¹⁵⁸ In a later poem, titled “La ‘profesión’ del día” (“The ‘Profession’ of the Day”), Chantecler complains that the honorable female poor are no longer to be found in San Antonio, because poor young women have left honest toil for an easy life of vice as “Dancing girls.” This term is not defined in the poem, but it probably refers to women who danced with men for tips in bars and public dance halls, a form of borderline prostitution.¹⁵⁹ Toward the end of the poem, the author repeats the theme, that we have seen in Elizondo and elsewhere, of the woman using English to accept a romantic proposition.

Y es que el oficio es muy fácil

And the thing is the trade's quite easy

¹⁵⁸ June 23, 1916

¹⁵⁹ Peña (1985:48-50) describes the *baile de negocio* (“business dance”) in the Rio Grande Valley during this period as involving just such arrangements.

a juzgar según se ve:
Cualquier muchachita cursi
que nunca ha sabido hacer
nada de las muchas cosas
que en la mujer están bien,
se compra una falda corta
y un par de choclos de a diez
reales, se unta los carrillos
de carmín y de colcré,¹⁶⁰
se pinta ojeras, se peina
como lo juzga más bien,
se va a la calle de “Jiuston”,
y se hace su entrada en cualquier
sala de baile, la invitan
a bailar, constesta: “yes”...
y ya tiene profesión
porque es una “dancing girl”.

or at least so it would seem:
Any cheap little girl
who has never known how to do
any of the many things
that are well in a woman
buys herself a short skirt,
and a ten-*real* pair of heels,
greases up her cheeks
with rouge or with cold cream,
puts on eyeshadow, combs her hair,
however she judges best,
she goes to “Houston” street,
and makes her entrance into
any dance hall, they invite her
up to dance, she answers: “yes”...
and then she has a profession
for she is a “dancing girl”.¹⁶¹

Slightly more than a week later, an insubordinate woman who uses English loan-words appears in a poem decrying the work of suffragist Hermila Galindo to establish the vote for women on the local level in Guanajuato.

Si la costumbre se extiende
poco más de lo indebido
¡Pobre de cualquier marido
que política no entiende!
va a ser en su casa un ... duende
un quidam, un ... desdichado.
—Petronila, no he cenado...
y, francamente “ya me anda,”
me hace falta alguna vianda;
por Dios, ¿no me estás oyendo?
—Cállate que estoy haciendo
mi “espiche” de propaganda!

If this custom is extended
a little further than it should
Pity then the poor husband
who doesn't understand politics!
he will be in his house a ... goblin
a quidam, a ... sad figure.
“Petronila, I haven’t had dinner ...
and, frankly, ‘I’m about ready,’
I could use a little food here;
my God are you not listening?”
“Shut up, I’m busy making out
my propaganda “espiche”.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ “Colcré” (“cold cream”) might be seen as an example of the use of English-influenced vocabulary to refer to consumer goods, money, and the domain of commodities and the market. It is worth noting, however, that the word is not enclosed in quotes. It is not clear to me whether the author had the consciousness of the English origin of this word that he had of, “Dancing girl.”

161 *La Prensa*. August 30, 1917.

162 *La Prensa*. September 8, 1917.

In addition to using English to symbolize female immorality and insubordination, “Chantecler’s” poetry also uses the language when discussing money, business, and commodities, as we saw in the song from *Chin Chun-Chan*. In a populist poem attributing a rise in rental prices to the influx of soldiers into the city, for example, he refers to money using the English word “cash.” In a poem published November of 1917, the poet drew his audience’s attention to political comments by a man who “en las finanzas/ mira sus “bisness” major que con todos los productos/ de nuestra rica nación ...” (“in finances/ sees his better ‘business’/ than with all the products/ of our rich nation...”).¹⁶³ Another poem, published ten days later, was titled “How much I owe you?”¹⁶⁴

Between 1900 and 1940, *mexicanas/os* reflected on their ethnolinguistic identity in song as well as newsprint. Américo Paredes, in the *Texas Mexican Cancionero*, cites a number of examples of songs from this period that satirized the linguistic habits of *pochos* or *agringados* (“Americanized Mexicanas/os”), noting “it was always the other fellow who was an *agringado*” (1995:154). As Limón has observed, *mexicanas/os* in south Texas have long policed the boundaries of their identity through jokes about those who adopt Anglo-American ways (33). Some of the songs in Paredes's compilation reserve special attention for the *agringada* (“Americanized Mexicana”). One of these is “*Los Mexicanos que hablan inglés*” (“The Mexicans who Speak English”), in which the

¹⁶³ *La prensa*. Nov. 12, 1917

¹⁶⁴ November 22, 1917. The microfilm of this poem is difficult to read, and it is difficult to determine the poem’s overall theme, criticism of Venustiano Carranza, a favorite topic of Chantecler’s, seems to be an important element.

speaker, an ethnic Mexican man, reflects on his inability to communicate with U.S.-born women.

Enarmoré otra catrina
de esas de garsolé
le dije: —¿Te vas conmigo?—
y me dijo: —¿huachu sei?—

I made love to another fashionable lady
one of those with a garsolé.
I said to her, “Will you go along with me?”
and she told me, “What you say?”
(164; translation by Paredes)

Paredes characterizes this song as “a vivid picture of the Mexican-American girl who puts on airs and refuses to speak Spanish,” a type which is also evident in the Rodríguez dialogues (155). María Herrera-Sobek cites similar examples in her anthology of songs about the Mexican immigrant experience. She notes the emergence in songs about acculturation of two stereotyped protagonists, “the male … who objects to the woman’s behavior and attempts to impose his standards,” and “the aggressive and defiant woman” (1993:288).¹⁶⁵

These examples can suggest that the gendered critique of code switching observed in the dialogues was related to a broader gendered critique of agringamiento that circulated in the prewar *mexicana/o* public sphere and still continues to circulate to a degree. In what follows, I will present early bilingual theater as a special case of this generalized effort by San Antonio’s *mexicana/o* community to impose order on its own process of identity formation. Like the newspapers and other organs of public discussion, the theater and the tent shows provided venues in which ethnic Mexicans symbolically negotiated and reflected on the distinctions that were emerging within their

¹⁶⁵ Although Herrera-Sobek argues that the Mexicano song tradition is “democratic” about assimilation (280), dishing out equal doses of satire to men and women, she only cites one example of a song about an agringado man, next to some ten to twelve songs critical of agringadas! My own findings would cast doubt on her assertion.

community and sought to make sense of their citizenship status with respect to the Mexican and U.S. states. In this sense, the linguistic purism that seems to have been hegemonic in the 1930s and the counter-discourse of hybridity that emerged from marginal sectors of the theater may be seen as competing projects of moral regulation.

Overview of the Dialogues

Although the majority of the Rodríguez duo's recorded work is entirely in Spanish, switches to English and uses of English borrowings occur in twenty-one of the extant recordings, about a third of the couple's surviving output. In twelve dialogues, a few words or a couple of stock phrases in English occur, amounting to less than 2% of each recording's total words.¹⁶⁶ Eight of the dialogues and one song, however, extensively mix English and Spanish in a highly marked way and can be seen at least in part as theatrical reflections on language-mixing itself. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez themselves were both raised speaking Spanish, and neither appears to have had anything like native competence in English at the time of the recordings. Reflecting on his family's linguistic background, brother Enrique Valero recalled that when they arrived at San Antonio, “ni siquiera sabíamos decir ‘whatsamatter,’” (“we didn’t even know how to say ‘whatsamatter’”).¹⁶⁷ It is likely that his sister-in-law was similarly situated. Although the performers demonstrate an ample vocabulary in English and command of

¹⁶⁶ The dialogues and songs with minimal use of English include “La canción del pizcador” (Anonymous 1929-1930e), “Comunista en San Antonio” (Rodríguez-Valero 1930a), “La póliza de a daime,” (1931b), “Vacilando en San Antonio” (Anonymous 1934a), “Los mojados” (1934d), “El turismo (1935b), “La ponchada” (1935c), “Me voy para México” (1935g), “La pecadora” (1935i), “La viuda” (1936a), “Mi real gana” (1936b), “El ficha lisa” (1936c), and “La arrepentida” (Rodríguez-Valero 1936d)..

¹⁶⁷ Mr. Valero made this statement in a meeting with me on November 6, 1999. The statement was not electronically recorded.

some idiomatic expressions (e.g., “nothing doing”), they tend not to switch phonologically when using English. When English loan words and switches to English occur, they are always highly marked and symbolically charged.

In the 12 dialogues that make minimal use of English, those English-derived words that do appear all come from semantic domains associated with settings distant from the *mexicana/o* family home and close to the dominant U.S. culture and the market. These include references to the workplace:

“...estoy trabajando en el *laundry*” [“I’m working in the *laundry*”] (Anonymous 1929-1930c);

the nation-state:

“...como estamos en los *United States*” [“...since we’re in the *United States*”] (1936b);

U.S. consumer culture and mass media:

“... me fui a ver si trabajaba en los *moving pictures*”

[“I went to see if I could work in the *moving pictures*”] (1935i);

money:

“La póliza de a *daime*” [“The Dime Policy”] (Rodríguez-Valero 1931b);

organized crime:

“Yo he sido el alta escuela *gangster*” [“I’ve been a *gangster* of the high school] (Anonymous 1936c);

recreational dating:

“... todos mis *boyfriends* me decían que parezco a Mae West”

[“... all my *boyfriends* said I look like Mae West”] (1935i); and flirtation:

“Hello big boy” (Rodríguez-Valero 1930a).

Interestingly enough, these English or English-derived words appear more than twice as often in the speech of the female character as in that of the male (34 times versus 14). Furthermore, in many of the dialogues, characters switch from Spanish to English or use English loanwords when they become aggressive.

One dramatic example this last function of English appears in “Los Mojados” (“The Wetbacks”), a dialogue recorded in 1934 about the consequences of repatriation, and this example illustrates another dimension of the use of English in the dialogues. In “Los Mojados,” a husband and wife find themselves adrift on the Mexican side of “the” border, having just been deported. Overjoyed, the man sings the praises of his homeland, while his disgruntled wife insists on crossing back to the United States. In the ensuing verbal duel, she demands that he find them a hotel room instead of a cheap hostel, even though they are penniless. He refuses, arguing that in the U.S., where women run everything, she has gotten used to “wearing the pants” in the house and demanding unnecessary luxuries. He blames the situation on harsh U.S. laws against domestic violence, explicitly linking the breakdown of family consensus to the Anglo-controlled interventionist state. As the couple’s argument reaches a boiling point, the husband switches to English:

J: ¡Cállate o te rompo el *loudspeaker*!
(Shut up or I’ll break your loudspeaker!)

N: Oh yeah?

J: Yeah! You try to [vacile] myself I kill you! (Anonymous 1934d)¹⁶⁸

Suddenly, the wife gives in and switches back to Spanish, crying “¡No, viejito! No, vámonos pa'l mesón. Allá me pegas.” (“No, honey! No, let's go to the hostel. You can hit me there.”) In this exchange, English seems to index the husband's claim of dominance and emotional distance, which the wife initially challenges by speaking English herself. Then, the wife's switch to Spanish indexes her stance of deference and familiarity. Such uses of English as a language for asserting authority and claiming prestige and interpersonal power have been observed in everyday interaction among contemporary bilingual Chicanos (R. Sánchez, 1994[1984]:171), although none of the examples cited are as dramatic as this fictional one.

These functions of English and Spanish as markers of social asymmetry vs. equality, dominant out-group vs. subaltern in-group identities, intimate vs. public space, and use-value vs. exchange-value have parallels in other bilingual communities. Hill, for example, has found that Nahuatl-speaking villagers in a community in Central Mexico have developed a similar set of associations for their language and Spanish.

Spanish is the language of money and the market, of the city, of evil personages in myths, and of social distance. To speak Spanish to a fellow townsman can be an aggressive denial of intimacy ... (1995:401).

The villagers also refunctionalize Spanish loan words in Náhuatl, creating a register that is used to mark utterances as “profound and authoritative” (*ibid.*). By contrast, Náhuatl

¹⁶⁸ The brackets around [vacile] indicate doubt about the accuracy of the transcription. I have, as yet, been unable to find anyone who can understand this word. It could be a rendering of the Spanish word “vacilar” (“to play, joke around, have a good time, vacillate”) without a Spanish verb ending, meant to render a sort of pseudo-English (such as the creation of pseudo Spanish by adding the vowel “o” to the end of an English word).

serves as a language of “intimacy, solidarity, mutual respect, and identity as a *campesino*” (*ibid.*). Similarly, Jaffe’s recent ethnography of language politics on Corsica has demonstrated that Corsican is strongly associated with the “inner” sphere of home and village while French is associated with the “outer” sphere of work, government, and public life (1999:92). Importantly, Jaffe notes that the boundary between “outer” and “inner” spheres, while clear and neat on the level of metalinguistic discourse, is often fuzzy in everyday practice (103). She argues that the metadiscourse is best seen not as an adequate description of actual usage, but as a symbolic resource that speakers draw on when framing their talk (103). For example, a switch to French in a Corsican conversation can constitute a “claim for authority/status/expertise or sophistication, or establish distance” (109). These examples suggest that the metadiscursive functions and valuations attributed to English in the examples above are probably common in situations in which “a subordinate lingual-national minority” coexists with “a politically, economically and linguistically dominant majority” within a capitalist political economy (R. Sánchez 1994[1984]:139).

In general, then, this selective use of English and Anglicisms in particular interactional contexts and semantic domains advances a gendered critique of *agringamiento* (“cultural assimilation”) and maps the oppositions of interpersonal distance vs. closeness, aggression vs. solidarity, out-group vs. in-group, mutual disrespect vs. respect onto the opposition English vs. Spanish. But “Los mojados” may set up this neat ideological formation only to call it into question. At the end of the dialogue, the female character changes to a fawning toady a little too abruptly, interpreting her

husband's promises of future beatings as signs of his love for her in a tone of voice that seems to invite a sense that she is enacting a parody. Of course, we have already seen that such a sudden change of heart on the female character's part is a common device in these dialogues. But what to make of the verses with which the now-harmonious couple addresses the listening audience at the dialogue's end?

J:	Parece mentira, pero es la verdad. Si quieres que te quieran, este consejo les voy a dar. Besos y palos les han de dar.	It seems like a lie, but it's the truth. If you want them to love you, I'll give you this bit of advice. Kisses and beatings you'll have to give them.
N:	Y si a alguno de Uds. les toca suerte que los llegan a deportar, ¡alérgense, paisanos! Que en nuestra tierra, los pantalones han de mandar.	And if one of you is lucky enough that they end up deporting you rejoice, countrymen! For in our homeland, the pants have to be in charge (Anonymous 1934d)

I would submit that to take these pronouncements at face value would be to underestimate the popular theater's capacity for irony. Many members of San Antonio's exiled elite might well have viewed deportation back to Mexico as the best thing for the masses. Indeed, this was even the view of the Cárdenas administration in Mexico, which included assistance for repatriates in its party platform (Balderrama and Rodríguez 1995:144). But in another dialogue from the same recording session, titled "Por culpa de una trucha" ("It Was a Slick Woman's Fault"), Netty and Jesús Rodríguez dramatize the hardship of deportation and offer advice to Mexican immigrants about how to keep out of trouble in the United States (Anonymous 1934c). If the characters in the dialogue are to

be seen as speaking ironically about the ‘good luck’ of being deported, then I suspect the same must be said of the following assertion that in Mexico the “pants” must rule. In “Los mojados,” then, the performers seem to be reducing the gender ideologies of Mexican exile nationalism to absurdity and questioning the links between the use of English, cultural treason, and the failure to meet gender expectations. This dialogue may be seen as a moment in which the Rodríguez duo reached the point of challenging some of the fundamental assumptions that informed their work.

Although it is impossible to see their work as an ideological monolith, it seems that the moment of candid questioning represented by “Los mojados” was fleeting. The dialogues that make more extensive (6% or greater) use of English tend to link language-mixing with the collapse of traditional family and morality, the confusion of gender roles, the embrace of materialism and the market, and the failure of mexicanas/os to communicate intelligibly with one another. Of these recordings, most of which were recorded after “Los mojados,” four present encounters between monolingual Spanish-speakers from Mexico and U.S.-born or identified bilinguals; three depict the marital or amorous lives of code-switching U.S.-identified couples; and one involves an amorous encounter between a bilingual mexicano man and an Anglo prostitute. To examine the gendered asymmetry of the dialogues’ critique of language-mixing, we may compare “The Mexican From New York” and “Una mula de tantas” (“One of so many she-mules”) two contrastive examples, both recorded during a January 31, 1935 session. In the first, a language-mixing agringado (“assimilated ethnic Mexican man”) visits a monolingual Spanish-speaking woman in Mexico. In the second, a monolingual Spanish-

speaking tourist from Mexico encounters a language-mixing agringada (“assimilated ethnic Mexican woman”) who is selling tamales on the streets of San Antonio. Although neither agringada/o character appears in a positive light, and although the two characters share many important faults, the differences are instructive.

In “Una mula,” the agringada (N) is a tamal-vendor, a fact that highlights both her low socioeconomic status and her Mexican identity. Her exchange with a wealthy Mexican tourist (J) begins with a series of cross-linguistic misunderstandings.

J:	<u>¿Qué tal, paisanita?</u>	How are you, countrywoman?
	<u>¿Cómo le va?</u>	How's it going?
N:	<u>What you say?</u>	
J:	<u>¿Juan José?</u> No vino.	Juan José? He didn't come.
N:	<u>Whatsumatta?</u>	
J:	<u>¡Qué mara ni qué mara!</u> Yo soy Chema. José María.	Don't give me this “mara” I'm Chema José María.
N:	<u>Me don't understand.</u>	
J:	<u>¡Mire ésta!</u> Pos yo ¿qué sé dónde están?	Look at this woman! Well how am I supposed to know where they are (Anonymous 1935e)?

In the conversation that ensues, the female character, who identifies herself as “Mary Lou Taguada,” speaks in the same register of Spanish that Elizondo and others use to satirize the “*español mocho*” (“broken Spanish”) of Anglos and other foreigners.¹⁶⁹ Among the principal features of this register as it appears in the dialogues is the misuse of the English “me” (or the Spanish “mí”) in subject position and by ungrammatically deleted,

¹⁶⁹ “Taguada” is probably a joke, sounding as it does like the Spanish phrase “Tá aguada” (“She's sloppily fat”) I thank Norma Mendoza-Denton for pointing this joke out to me.

unconjugated or incorrectly conjugated verbs, as in the following example, also from

“Una mula”: ¹⁷⁰

J:	Pues, ¿que Ud. no conoce México?	Well, aren't you familiar with Mexico?
N:	Oh, no. <u>Me ser</u> American girl.	Oh, no. <u>Me to be</u> American girl (<i>ibid.</i>).

Interestingly enough, this register also appears in the speech of an Anglo prostitute in “Mexican Kiss,” as in the following example.

N:	O:h, me siendo besos Meksicanos, gustarme todos. Porque Uds. los Meksicanos, ser muy <u>hot!</u> y poner todo el alma cuando besan	O:h, being Meksicano kisses Me to like them all. Because you Meksicanos to be really <u>hot!</u> and to put all your soul into it when you kiss (1935k) ¹⁷¹
----	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Note that the humor of the use of “me” in subject position derives from the hearer's knowledge of English. It would be possible to describe this register in more detail, but for our purposes it is sufficient to note that its use in these dialogues seems to equate the agringada with the foreigner, presenting her as deficient in both English and Spanish. This character recalls one of José Limón's early examples of agringada/o joking; a joke

¹⁷⁰ This is one of many examples in the dialogues in which the status of a word as an English loan or code-switch is unclear. In Mexican *revistas* featuring Anglo-American characters, the word is written as “mí.” However, in “El Chino” (Rodríguez-Valero 1936a), a character who speaks Spanish with a “Chinese accent” does not use “mí” in subject position, suggesting that a reference to the English “me” is intended. Interestingly enough, the Chinese character is able to conjugate his verbs. The “broken Spanish” register also occurs in the speech of a stereotypical “Indian Chief” from the United States who rescues María Elena Velasco’s “India María” in the 1979 film *Okey Mister Pancho* (Gilberto Martínez-Solares, dir.).

¹⁷¹ Note here that the Anglo prostitute, in spite of being unable to conjugate her verbs, uses the Spanish verb “gustar” (“to like”) correctly, with “kisses” as the subject and attaching the indirect object pronoun “me” to the infinitive. This example underscores the fact that the “español mocho” register is not a grammatically accurate portrait of the Spanish of second-language Anglophone learners. Rather, the failure to conjugate verbs seems to stand in for incorrectness as such, while such other grammatical features, which are further from the performers' metasyntactic focus, go unaltered.

in a Laredo newspaper about a *tamalera* who marries an Anglo-American and, when she deigns to attend mexicana/o social gatherings, eats tamales husk and all as if she does not know to take them off. Of particular interest is the woman's reported reaction when presented with a plate of tamales: “¿Qué este?” (“What this?”) (1978:37).

A version of this dialogue also appears among Carlos Monsiváis' manuscripts, under the title, “Hot Tamales,” which is taken from the female character's opening soliloquy. This soliloquy is shorter in the Monsiváis version, however, and the male character is not a rich Mexican tourist but an immigrant who intends to return to Mexico and pretends to be able to read in order to impress the *agringada*. Furthermore, unlike “Mary Lou Taguada” of “Una mula de tantas,” the female character of “Hot Tamales” relents in the end and expresses a desire to return to Mexico, resulting in a ‘happy’ ending very close to that of “Amor del bueno,” which we examined in the previous chapter.

<u>ELLA</u>	lleveme papasito lindo	<u>SHE</u>	take me there sweet baby
<u>EL</u>	mire para hir uno para su patri necesita bajarse las faldas quitarse el colorete dela cara dejar el chiqle j ser mejicana pura como antes lo hera	<u>HE</u>	look to go to your homeland you have to lower your skirts wipe the rouge off your face leave the chewing gum behind and be a pure true mexicana like you were before
<u>ELLA</u>	pos todo lo are portal deque me lleve	<u>SHE</u>	well I'll do it all if you'll just take me with you
<u>EL</u>	Bueno pos tire eso cochinos tamales j Bamonos para esa tierra querida donde aj trabajo patodo donde nos esperan nuestros hermanos ¹⁷² queridos ademas ya Save loque nos espera tambien nuestro pabellon mejicano j nuestra madre morena La Birjen de guadalupe	<u>HE</u>	All right then throw away those filthy tamales and Let's go to that beloved land where there's work for all where our dear brothers and sisters are waiting for us and what's more you already Know what else is waiting for us our Mexican flag and our dusky mother The Virgin of guadalupe

Unlike the recording of “Una mula de tantas” the Monsiváis version offers a neat aesthetic resolution by returning, with a change, to the tamal motif that opens the dialogue. Furthermore, it offers a little more hope for redemption of the “renegada.” Nevertheless, the basic theme and ideological thrust remain the same as those of the recording.

In interviews with me, Raymond García and Normalinda Monsiváis, both members of carpa families, described the agringada of “Una mula...” as “presumida” and “smart-alecky.” In Normalinda Monsiváis’ words, “she’s trying to discriminate [against

¹⁷² Here I reproduce my reading of Mr. Monsiváis’s orthography, punctuation, and capitalization without attempting to regularize it. The translation is mine. Mr. Monsiváis uses underlining as punctuation, and I have tried to reproduce that in this transcription. Compare this ending to lines 90-108 of “Una mula.”

ethnic Mexicans] there and she's one of them.”¹⁷³ Normalinda Monsiváis was receptive to the message of the dialogue and even hypothesized that some agringadas might in fact have spoken like “Mary Lou Taguada.” Raymond García, however, reacted with some degree of disgust to the dialogue, declaring, “Taban ‘taban relajando al la A las ...A los tejanos, ves. Porque ... es casi todo lo que que hacían.” (“They were making fun of the Of the ... Of the tejanas/os, see. Because ... that’s about all they did”).¹⁷⁴ By “they,” Mr. García refers both to Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and to Mexican-born *artistas* in general, whom he criticizes as follows:

Y los que vienen de allá
'¡Ey vendidos!
¡Muertos de hambre!' que quién
sabe qué.
Y los muertos de hambre no somos
nosotros. Son ellos. Los que
vienen de allá a querer trabajar
aquí ves.

And the ones who come from
there [Mexico]
[say] ‘hey sellouts!
Starvelings’ and who knows what
else.
And we aren’t the starvelings.
They are. The ones who come
from there wanting to get work
here see.¹⁷⁵

In Mr. García’s view, then, many Mexican-born performers engaged in mean-spirited and even hypocritical satire of ethnic Mexicans born in the United States. I had, in fact, expected this sort of offended reaction from U.S.-born performers, which is why Normalinda Monsiváis’ sympathy with the dialogue’s message surprised me. In spite of

¹⁷³ From NM9.21.2000-1:1, recorded in Universal City, Texas.

¹⁷⁴ From RVG7-07-2000-1:1.

¹⁷⁵ From RVG7-07-2000-1:1. Here, and in other transcriptions of interview discourse I employ somewhat different transcription conventions from those used in the dialogues. As in the dialogues, line breaks separate discourse units defined by intonation and pausing, and line-internal pauses are marked with ellipsis. Elongation of sounds is marked with a colon, while cut off words are marked with a long dash. Periods and question marks are used in their traditional way, but they also tend to mark rising and falling intonation. Boldface type indicates emphasis. The interviewer’s backchannel cues are inserted in brackets when they occur.

this difference in reaction, neither performer evaluated the agringada character favorably or found her language realistic.

By contrast, the code-switching dandy in “The Mexican from New York” is at least fluent in the variety of Spanish that he speaks. A fashionable agringado named Juan Palomares (J) whose visit to New York City has gone to his head; he returns to Mexico and tries to impress a naïve ranchera (“country woman”) named Dominga Luz (N) with his sharp clothes and his command of English. As in the encounter between Mexican and Mexican American in “Una mula,” the agringado’s use of English leads to difficulties in communication.

J: Y como vengo de New York [nuw yɔrk]	And since I come from <u>New York</u>
N: ¿De dónde?	From where?
J: New York. “New York” se dice dándole la vuelta a la lengua y luego un pajuelazo “ <u>New</u> <u>York.</u> ”	You say “ <u>New York</u> ” by twisting back your tongue and then letting it fly “ <u>New</u> <u>York.</u> ”
N: Ah. ¿Así? <u>New York?</u> [nuw yɔrk ^h]	Oh. Like this? <u>New York?</u>
J: ‘Stá güeno comadre pero no me escupa	All right comadre but don’t spit on me (Anonymous 1935h). ¹⁷⁶

Here the actors emphasize the English retroflex [r] which Spanish speakers usually render as a trill, and the word-final [k] which Spanish speakers usually delete, for comic effect. Netty’s hypercorrect aspiration of the word-final [k] and Jesus’ response draw added

¹⁷⁶ I have transcribed “stá güeno” with what I understand to be an orthographic convention used to represent the stylized “costumbrista” form of peasant speech that the couple repeatedly uses in this and other dialogues. These orthographic conventions represent condescending attitudes toward peasant speech, many of which seem to be present in the dialogues.

attention to English's difference from Spanish as they highlight her ignorance of the language and the unnecessary extra effort she is making to speak it. Mr. Palomares is enthusiastic about the United States, even when he recounts humiliating experiences at the hands of the U.S. Border Patrol.

J:	La última vez que yo pasé los empleados del puente los de inmigración y sanidad con el sombrero en la mano me decían “Pase Ud.” “Pase Ud.” ¡Y reata! Al baño.	The last time I crossed the employees at the bridge the ones from immigration and health with their hats in their hands told me “Right this way sir.” “Right this way sir.” And boom! Into the bath. They gave you a bath compadre? And with gasoline which was the worst part. And how did you end up?
N:	¿Lo bañaron compadre?	
J:	Y con gasolina que fue lo peor.	

N:	¿Y cómo quedó?	
J:	Pos todito arrugado y apestoso a <u>garage</u> .	Why all wrinkled up and smelling like a <u>garage</u> (<i>ibid.</i>).

Nevertheless, Dominga falls for his line and proposes marriage. As they prepare to leave for New York, she asks what his name is there. He replies that the translation of his name is “John Pigeonhouse.” As his wife, she will be “Miss Sunday *Light* de Pigeonhouse.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ “Sunday Light” refers to the Sunday edition of the now defunct English-language newspaper, the San Antonio *Light*. The “John Pigeonhouse” joke was probably old when Netty and Jesús recorded it. Ybarra-Frausto (1984:50) also refers to it. Other similar jokes refer, for example, to a man named Pedro Meza who becomes Peter Table. Perhaps the most famous such joke is the song “Natalio Reyes-Colás” written and performed by Juan “El Piporro” González, in which a bracero by that name immigrates to the United States and becomes “Nat ‘King’ Cole.”

My original impression of “The Mexican from New York” was that it was meant to present the code-switching character in an unfavorable light, as a sort of buffoon who was trying to put on airs and speak a language he barely knew. For this reason, I was surprised by an exegesis that Normalinda Monsiváis, who remembers seeing her parents perform the dialogue in their carpa, provided in an interview. Asked to characterize Juan Palomares, she interpreted him as a sort of evangelist, spreading the good news about America and teaching English to the ignorant ranchera. His description of his experience at the border prompted her to recall being punished for speaking Spanish in school as a child in Kenedy, a practice that she attributed to “ignorance” on the part of the teachers. Asked whether “Juan Palomares” seemed smart or stupid, she replied that he seemed smart, expanding on her ideas as follows.

He's using his little knowledge to ...get himself the **lady** and you know I thin— yeah I think he's a little smart there.
Probably hasn't gon:e to **school** but he's picked up [P: Mhm]
That's the way my parents learned. They didn't go to school.¹⁷⁸

In her interpretation, Mr. Palomares' use of his “little knowledge” of Spanish recalls the everyday struggles of people without education to survive by their wits and pick up what knowledge they can, a struggle she witnessed directly in the lives of her parents, who taught her to read and write Spanish before she entered school. Asked to contrast Juan Palomares with Mary Lou Taguada, the agringada of the previous dialogue, she replied that “in her very small words she [Mary Lou Taguada] put down … Mexico, you know

¹⁷⁸ From NM9-21-2000-1:1, recorded in Universal City, Texas.

... while this guy is building up [America].”¹⁷⁹ In saying this, she hit on a key asymmetry in the dialogues. While men are satirized for accepting English and U.S. values, they are not, as women are, shown angrily rejecting Mexico and *lo mexicano*. Ms. Monsiváis' positive evaluation of Juan Palomares, which is firmly grounded in her own sense of belonging in the United States, reminds us that these dialogues can be read ‘against the grain,’ regardless of their appearance of ideological closure.¹⁸⁰

Of course, male code-switchers do not always get off the hook so easily in the Rodríguez dialogues. As I have suggested before, “The Mexican from New York” forms a neat contrast with “Cabrestea o se ahorca” (“Bend or Break”), which features a similar situation with very different characters. Where the “Juan Palomares” of the former dialogue uses a few words of English here and there as a sign of sophistication, the male protagonist of the latter employs an eclectic mixture of English loan words, rural archaisms, and border slang. To Normalinda Monsiváis, he seemed “smart alecky,” the same word she used to describe the agringada in “Una mula...”¹⁸¹ The dialogue centers on his visit to an educated comadre in Mexico, and in a long narrative, he describes the difficulties of his journey and finally, speculates on the possibility of dating local women. Like “Juan Palomares,” he is materialistic and impressed with his own fashion sense.

Mire, comadre,
con este tipo,
con estos calcos,

Look, comadre
with these threads,
with these shoes

¹⁷⁹ From NM9-21-2000-1:1, recorded in Universal City, Texas.

¹⁸⁰ Alicia Gaspar de Alba's adaptation of Stuart Hall's theory of cultural reception is relevant here. Ms. Monsiváis's exegesis of the dialogue would, in these terms, be a negotiated reading (Gaspar de Alba 1998:162).

¹⁸¹ From NM9-21-2000-1:1, recorded in Universal City, Texas.

y con esta sweater,
le aseguro que más de
cuatro
¡se van a quedar pica'os!
and with this sweater
I bet you that more than four of
'em
are going to lose it for me.

The dialogue ends with the comadre's reply, a long harangue. In contrast to the naïve, uneducated "Dominga Luz," she commands her compadre from Texas to speak correct Spanish, saying she has not understood a word of his story. Asking "¿qué rayos quiere decir con eso del gasoline, la chava, la huercia, y las chanzas?" ("what the devil do you mean to day with all this about the 'gasoline,' 'the babe,' 'the girl,' and 'the chances?'") she criticizes not only his use of English (e.g. "gasoline"), but also his use of informal and colloquial Spanish. Unlike "The Mexican from New York," which ends in plans for a wedding, "Cabrestea" appears to end in rupture. The two characters are simply unable to communicate.

All of the agringada/o characters in the "encounter dialogues" are shown as boastful, ignorant, excessively motivated by fashion and prestige, and overly enamored of the United States and its consumer culture. But where the agringado is shown embracing "Americanness," the agringada is shown explicitly, even rudely rejecting "Mexicanness." The contrast between these two characters is perhaps the clearest sign of a gendered asymmetry in the dialogues' critique of code switching and agringamiento. Of course, the dialogues draw on a long tradition of similar gendered asymmetries in many varieties of European and Euro-American popular entertainment. English-language minstrel shows in the nineteenth century United States, for example, satirized foppishness and dilettantism in both genders but were especially critical of women (Toll 1974:184; Evans

1978:174-178).¹⁸² In our San Antonio examples, as in their Mexican precursors, this class-valence remains. Note that the only monolingual character in the dialogues ever to respond favorably to a character who mixes English and Spanish, Dominga Luz of “The Mexican From New York,” is portrayed as an ignorant peasant. By contrast, a code-switching tejano dandy in “Cabrestea o te ahorcas” receives a tongue-lashing from an educated Mexican woman. In the San Antonio context, of course, these class-based criticisms are mapped onto ethnic hierarchies and the hierarchical relationship between English and Spanish, such that an ethnic Mexican who seeks to speak English and pass for Anglo is seen as “presumida/o.” Here the code-switching tejana becomes the butt of the harshest jokes.

In the remaining dialogues that use English extensively, the male and female characters are both bilingual, and both speak English and Spanish with equal fluency, not using the caricatured “Anglo Spanish” register of “Una mula.” These dialogues, however, show an added dimension of the gendering of code switching, because the bilingual agringadas/os appear as transgressors of the conjugal home and of accepted ideas of masculinity and femininity. In “Es mi hombre,” we find a husband waiting for his wife (“mi honey”) to return home at three o’clock in the morning. Although her absence bothers him, he demonstrates little resolve about the matter. His wife then waltzes casually into the house and explains her lateness.

Nothing wrong, Fred.

¹⁸² I thank Richard Bauman for pointing out these parallels between Mexican American vaudeville and Anglo American minstrel shows. Although my analysis is keyed to the dialogues’ relationship to their specific local setting and historical circumstances, they are part of a widespread tradition of popular comedy and may echo themes found in similar entertainments in other times and places.

Hoy fue el birthday del manager,
Y dio un party.
Y todo los empleados asisitieron
al dance.
And you?

Today was the manager's
birthday
And he gave a party.
And all the employees went to
the dance.
And you?

Jealous of “el manager,” the husband protests, and an argument ensues, peppered with English, which finally leads him to ask for a divorce and announce that he will leave the house immediately. Furthermore, he acknowledges responsibility for the whole situation, saying that the whole problem stems from the fact that he has granted his wife’s every whim since they were married.

At this demonstration of resolve his wife reveals, almost entirely in Spanish, a complex deception which is typical of comic afterpieces of the Spanish-language stage (Ramírez 1990:39). “El manager” is, in fact, her brother, and the two have conspired to make her appear to be a defiant uncontrolled libertine, in order to force “Fred” to recover his proper masculine authority in the home. Now that he has demonstrated himself a worthy husband, there is a job waiting for him as his brother-in-law’s business partner. The couple’s reconciliation and the ostensible restoration of the home’s structure of authority coincide with an almost complete abandonment of English by the characters, what Auer and others have called a “second-order” shift from a mixed to an unmixed variety (1998:16). If the linguistic message of the dialogue is clear, the overall message about male vs. female authority, in which the wife must defy her husband to restore him to his position at the head of the household, remains an unresolved paradox.

At the end of the dialogue, a relieved “Fred” compliments his wife, saying “Y yo que te creía de estay” (“And here I thought you were estay”). She responds, “él que iba al estay eras tú, pero te he salvado” (“The one who was going into estay was you, but I’ve saved you”). The word “estay” also occurs in “La canción del pizcador” (“The Cotton-Picker’s Song”) (1930, Vo. 8360) in a similar context.¹⁸³ In interviews, some former tent show performers have suggested to me that the Rodríguez duo is using the English word “style” here. Raymond García and his wife Virginia interpreted this word as related to the phrase “*entrar al estilo*” (lit. to “enter into the style”). For the Garcías, the phrase refers not to becoming fashionable (i.e., adopting a style of dress), but rather to adopting a style of life outside of the conjugal family, “la moda de que todas las mujeres hacen que se divorcian y luego les hacen que le den dinero” (“the fashion that all of the women do in which they get divorced and they make them [their ex-husbands] give them money”).¹⁸⁴ To enter into “style,” then, is to abandon family life, and the security of patriarchal gender norms, embracing instead “*el vacilón*” (“good times”), the domain of recreational sexuality and hedonistic consumption of commodities. In greater Mexican tradition, *el vacilón* is somewhat more accessible to “respectable” men than to “respectable” women, but in the dialogues, “style” refers both to men and to women.

The phrase “*entrar al estilo*,” interestingly enough, also occurs in another recorded dialogue, “La Póliza de a daime” (“The Dime Policy”) (1931, Vo 8448). In this piece, a

¹⁸³ In that dialogue, a farmworker proposes to a woman, and when she hesitates, afraid to lose her job, he suggests that they both work. She refuses, saying, “*¡Qué pronto se ha vuelto al estay, Toribio,*” (“How quickly you’ve turned into an estay, Toribio”), and arguing that the man she marries must be her sole provider.

¹⁸⁴ From Interview # RVG7-07-2000-1:1, recorded in San Antonio, Texas. The speaker is Virginia García.

naïve ranchero played by Jesús pays a visit to his comadre (the mother of his godson), played by Netty, only to find her appearance completely changed. Astonished, he asks what happened, and she replies,

Pos ya ve. Entré al estilo.

Well just look. I entered into
the style.

Me corté el pelo
me rizaron a la
permanente
me masajaron las arrugas
y aquí me tiene
peor que nueva.

I cut my hair
they gave me a permanent
they massaged my wrinkles
and here you have me
Worse than new.

The intonation with which Netty Rodríguez delivers the last line, “peor que nueva” suggests a certain ironic self-deprecation on her character’s part. The listener, in other words, is led to assume that the character is making a joke, and that in reality she feels that her appearance is much improved. When the compadre (fictive co-parent) asks where the money for all these improvements came from, she replies, “De la póliza de a daime” (“From the dime policy.”) As the discussion continues, it is revealed that “Doña Póliza” (“Miss Polissy”) is not a person, as the compadre initially thinks, but an insurance policy that provides money when one’s relatives die. Suddenly concerned, the compadre asks where his *ahijado* (“godson”) is, and the comadre reveals a gruesome story. The *ahijado* is dead, and when the family received the insurance payment, her husband decided to quit work and strangle one of their eighteen children every twenty days to make ends meet. When he finally turned on his wife, she managed to kill him before he killed her, collecting a handsome check in the process. The dialogue presents this nightmarish situation as a caricature of life in the United “Estates” where, in the

comadre's words, "todo es dinero" ("everything is money"). The protagonists of this last group of bilingual dialogues inhabit this same world of anomie and hedonistic individualism. Unlike the wife of "Es mi hombre," who in the end is only faking, most of the characters in these recordings have entered into the style. They have been seduced by the allure of American consumerism, and lacing their speech with English, they leave family and national identity behind in the amoral, individualistic pursuit of commercialized pleasures.

The relationship between the ideological formation presented in the dialogues and the sociolinguistic situation of their audience is difficult to determine. Were we to take the dialogues as transparent reflections of social reality, we might infer that mexicanas in the San Antonio of the 1920s and 1930s were more motivated by prestige, more attracted to the dominant language and culture, more inclined to reject their Mexican heritage, and more likely to mix English and Spanish than their male counterparts.¹⁸⁵ Although I have little historical information about gender differences in language use among mexicanas/os in San Antonio specifically, one survey conducted in 1921 in Los Angeles actually found that a larger percentage of Mexican men than women were able to speak English (cited in G. Sánchez 1990:256). The dialogues, in other words, may show the reverse of the actual sociolinguistic situation of their audience. The critical question of the effects of gender on access to English among mexicanas/os during the period in question remains to be investigated and is beyond the scope of the present study. The key issue for interpreting

¹⁸⁵ Jaffe (107) notes a similar common-sense idea on Corsica, which blames women for the shift to French and views men as more likely to conserve Corsican values and customs.

the dialogues is the symbolic weight ascribed to women's, as opposed to men's, mixing of English and Spanish.

The gendered asymmetry in the dialogues' evaluations of male and female speech may be related to disturbances of mexicana/o gender norms and family life occasioned by adaptation to the socioeconomic reality of the early twentieth-century United States.

Both ethnic Mexicans and those Anglo reformers who hoped to 'Americanize' them during this period saw women as "the 'glue' that [kept] ... the Chicano family together," and therefore "responsible for the maintenance of Mexican tradition" (251). Sánchez notes that the pressures of acculturation on children born and raised in the United States often led young women to run away from home to escape the discipline of their Mexican-born parents (260). In a similar vein, Richard García observes that in San Antonio, increased access to extradomestic wage labor and home production led to "[a]n intellectual pattern of independence ... in young single women and in widowed and divorced ones" (1991:124). This pattern led to clashes within families over standards of comportment that linked ethnic solidarity to the fulfillment of proper gender norms. As one father related to a local schoolteacher, "I follow my Mexican customs and I won't change them for anything in the world. I haven't let my sisters cut their hair nor go around like the [non-Mexican] girls here ... with all kinds of boys" (cited in García 1990:134). Such sentiments were partly a reaction to the growing involvement of ethnic Mexican women on both sides of the border in an increasingly libertine youth culture. As historian Vicki Ruiz has noted, ethnic Mexican women in the United States of the 1920s and 1930s faced contradictory pressures from their families' traditional expectations

regarding their behavior, from the economic need to support those families through wage labor, and from the allure of the U.S. mass media and commodified fashion (1993:123). The ideological formation observed in the dialogues, then, can be related to the disruptions arising from the Mexicana/o community's experience of changes in gender norms occasioned by a new socioeconomic reality in the United States (cf. Hondagneau-Sotelo 1994 for an insightful account of similar dynamics among contemporary Mexican immigrants). In this environment, previously naturalized expectations regarding gender were brought into question, leading "ethnic traits" to be "attached to gender terms" (Wong 1992:117).

Contestation and Contradiction

As I have suggested, neither this critique of language-mixing nor its accompanying ideology of gender were without ambiguities and contradictions, and neither went uncontested, either in the work of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez or in the theatrical scene of which they were a part. In Bakhtin's terms (1981:342), the authoritative discourses I have described here was in constant dialogic struggle with an internally persuasive discourse that celebrated the mixing of languages.¹⁸⁶ One of the most important contradictions lies in the use of jokes and puns based on misunderstandings of English and mistranslations of Spanish. Jokes such as the naïvely literal translation of the name "Juan Palomares" as "John Pigeonhouse" or the

¹⁸⁶ For Bakhtin, an authoritative discourse is "a privileged language that approaches us from without; it is distanced, taboo, and permits no play with its framing context." By contrast, an internally persuasive discourse is "more akin to retelling a text in one's own words, with one's own accents, gestures, and modifications" (Bakhtin 1981:424).

misunderstandings between the interlocutors in “Una mula de tantas” (cf. Example 2, above) presuppose at least some knowledge of both English and Spanish and direct the attention of audiences toward this presupposition. Quite apart from their referential content, then, these jokes amount to acknowledgements of the co-existence of English and Spanish among speakers and hearers. As José Reyna has noted, they allow “the Chicano [sic] to exalt his [sic] own position over the Anglo and the Mexican, neither of whom understands both languages” (1980:38, quoted in Ybarra-Frausto 1984:50-51). Their presence is thus somewhat anomalous in dialogues whose primary point is the condemnation of language-mixing. I think it is fair to see these bilingual jokes as moments when the dominant discourse of purity enters into tension with a translinguistic creativity that confounds any movement towards rhetorical and ideological closure.

Another important countercurrent in the dialogues may be seen in the numerous references to U.S. films and celebrities, which seem to compromise the overall message of Mexicanist cultural purism. In one particularly ironic example, the rich Mexican tourist in “Una mula de tantas” (cf. Example 2, above) ends the dialogue by declaring to the agringada that he plans to take her to Mexico, and that where he plans to exhibit her

... por vieja fea ridícula mexicana renegada es en un circo como animal raro diciendo que es Ud. la mujer del chango King Kong.	... as an ugly ridiculous woman as a mexicana in denial is in a circus like a strange animal saying you're the mate of King Kong, the ape (Anonymous 1935e).
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

That a dialogue like this should be able to presuppose knowledge of the film “King Kong” shows the degree to which U.S. popular culture influenced even those who sought

consciously to distance themselves from it, perhaps on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. Here, U.S. consumer culture appears not as the Other against which an enclaved mexicana/o identity could be defined, but as an unmarked part of the audience's frame of reference.

A further counter-voice within the dialogues themselves comes from their critique of domestic violence. In many of the bilingual dialogues, as I have already noted, the commodified, libertine, agringado world of *el vacilón* appears as a negative example that presupposes a more or less unified, harmonious Mexican family in which the husband is in charge and the wife knows her place. Some of the dialogues, however, examine the contradictions of that home, turning their critical gaze on abusive husbands. In some of these examples, unfaithful wives turn out to be almost sympathetic figures, and in quite a few of them, the husband is portrayed as ultimately venal, allowing his wife to be unfaithful in exchange for the money her lovers leave and beating her to salvage his self-esteem. In others, he is simply stupid. In either case, the unfaithful wife emerges as a trickster figure of sorts. One example of this pattern is “Tres por tres son tres” (“Three times three is three”). In this dialogue, a language-mixing husband exhorts his wife to hurry up and follow him to San Antonio’s “St. Peter’s Park” so that they can see a Cinco de Mayo celebration (Rodríguez-Valero 1936h).¹⁸⁷ She is nine months pregnant and protests that she does not want to walk. An argument ensues, and finally, the husband threatens her, saying “soy capaz de matarla hasta con mi sombra, ¿l’oye?” (“I’m capable

¹⁸⁷ As far as I know, nobody has ever seriously called San Pedro Park, which is named for the San Pedro Springs, “St. Peter’s Park.”

of killing you even with my shadow, y'hear?”) At this point it comes out that he is angry because the two have only been married three months, and he suspects his wife's baby is by another man. She responds by explaining that the three months she has known him plus the three months he has known her, plus the three months they have been married add up to nine; “Believe it or not, tú eres el papá” (“Believe it or not, you're the father.”) At first suspicious, he finally accepts her arithmetic. Most of the dialogues that feature abusive or threatening husbands seem to reserve fates like this for them.¹⁸⁸

A final rupture in the discourse of purity comes not from within Netty and Jesús Rodríguez's oeuvre, but from outside it, in the repertoire of the Carpa García. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Texas-born sons and daughters of Manuel García and Teresa González de García had become the principal figures in their family's carpa. In tours through southern Texas and the neighborhoods of San Antonio, they experienced firsthand the linguistic diversification that was underway among ethnic Mexicans in the state. Perhaps for these reasons, the bilingual jokes and sketches that the Garcías have related to me in interviews do not seem to stigmatize bilingualism or language-mixing. Furthermore, although patriarchal, normative portrayals of gender and family life do occur in the García family's repertoire, these portrayals are not linked to language use. In one dialogue described in an interview by Rodolfo García, which also appears among Carlos Monsiváis's manuscripts, a city man and a ranchera are on their way to the city,

¹⁸⁸ These include “Los Compadritos” (Anonymous 1928g) and “Me Cai Gordo” (1937a). The one exception may be “Los mojados” (1934d), which ends with a verse declaration that a man who wants his wife to love her must give her kisses and blows, and that deportees should rejoice at their fate because they are being sent back to the land where the “pants” are in charge. I suspect that these statements are intended to be ironic.

and the woman announces her intention to take her shoes off. Disgusted, the man upbraids her for her display of countrified manners.

Le digo “tanto tiempo fuera
del rancho
y lo: ...zurumbato nada que se
le quita.”
le digo “Acuérdese que
estamos a este lado del
charco.
Y si no platica como aquí se
acostumbra, len— le
dicen: eh
que no sabe hablar inglés que
es pura mexicana del
otro lado.”

I say so much time away from
the countryside
and you can’t seem to shake
yo:ur ...stupidity.
I say “Remember that we’re on
this side of the puddle.”

And if you don’t talk like people
do here the— they tel:l you
eh
that you don’t know how to
speak English that you’re
just a Mexican from the
other side.”¹⁸⁹

The woman takes this as a challenge, and the two begin an exchange in which each tries to match the other’s ability to alternate between Spanish and English.

Entonces me dice ella
“¿Adónde vamos a dar el ride? ”
Entonces digo yo
“Oh, pos come on.
Caminamos cuatro cinco blocks.
Llegamos hasta 'ónde está la
house de la court.
[P: Mhm] Y allí stópete
Hasta que llegue el car.”

So she says to me
“Where are we going to go for a
ride? ”
So I say
“Oh, well come on.
We’ll walk four five blocks
We’ll go to where the house of
the court is.
[P: Mhm] And there stop
Until the car arrives.”

After a series of exchanges like this, the man asks, in English, if the woman would like to dance. She replies, “Yeah,” and the two end the dialogue with a song and dance. Here

¹⁸⁹ From interview PH90-1-1:2. Interview with Rodolfo García, conducted in San Antonio, TX. On file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio. Italics are used for English words and underlining for English loans. My own backchannel cues are inserted in brackets as they occur. In other interviews, Mr. García and his relatives have replaced the phrase “mexicana del otro lado” (“Mexican woman from the other side”) with “Mexican grease,” although Mr. García appears to have balked at using that phrase in the 1990 interview quoted above.

the motif of the *mexicana* who uses English to accept an invitation to dance, which we have seen in numerous post-1848 songs, poems, and dialogues, comes full circle after almost a century. In the Carpa García dialogue, the *pocha*'s response displays communicative competence, not cultural disloyalty.

In the Monsiváis version, the woman expresses her desire to give the man as “kiss,” and he replies that it is not possible, because there (i.e., in the carpa), there are too many people watching. She is not to be deterred, and pushes further.

Ella pos les desimos quenos esquiusme	She well we'll tell them to “excuse me”
El y si no quieren esquius miarnos mejor alla cuando estemos en el home	He and if they don't want to “excuse me” us better we do it when we're in the home (Monsiváis, N.D.)

Here, the English phrase “excuse me” gets a Spanish infinitive ending, making it sound like the Spanish “mear” (“to piss”). In this example, like the Rodríguez dialogues, many of the uses of English relate to commercialized recreation and the institutions of the dominant society. Here, however, the display of competence with this vocabulary is seen not as cultural treason but as a sign of sophistication. In other words, the Garcías’ dialogue maintains the valuation of English and Spanish as “out-group” and “in-group” varieties but approaches the dichotomy from a different direction, with different rhetorical ends, and without the gendered critique. Indeed, it is hard to escape the sense that in the mixed English/Spanish variety itself has become a sort of in-group solidarity code of its own, not perhaps not “unmarked” in Myers-Scotton’s (1988) sense, but nevertheless a “norm.”

In another Carpa García piece, a monologue performed by Manolo and narrated in an interview by brother Raymundo, jokes based on the misunderstanding of English occur, as they do in the initial exchange in “Una mula ...,” but with an entirely different effect. In the monologue, Manolo portrayed a naïve *ranchero*, recently arrived in the United States, describing a baseball game to the audience...

Que eran “unos ... unos hombres grandes que traían pantalones de de chamaquito” porque ...	He said there were “some ... some grown men in little kids’ uh pants” because ...
Tú sabes el uniform de [P: Mhm.] los baseball players. [P: Sí.]	You know the uniform of [P: Mhm.] the baseball players [P: Yes.]
“Y 'staba uno para'o en una ... “en en una... “en una bolsa de ... de de de lona.” [Mhm.]	“And one of them was standing at a... “at at a ... “at a canvas ... bag.”

Here the meticulousness of the ranchero’s description makes it clear that he has no understanding of the events he describes. This impression is confirmed when he reports that the batter misses the first pitch and that somebody yells “Strike One!” But the ranchero hears “¿Está ahí Juan?” (“Is Juan there?”) and replies, “No, Juan no está” (“No, Juan’s not here.”) After the second pitch, the same scenario repeats itself, only this time the ranchero hears, “¿Estás tú?” (“Are you there?”) and replies, “Aquí estoy” (“Here I am.”) At the next pitch, the batter hits the ball out of the park.

R:	Y entonces La gente toda: toda la gente gritaba “¡Con ron! ¡Con ron!”	And then The people al:1 all the people yelled “¡Con ron! ¡ Con ron!” (“With rum!”)
Tú sabes		You know
P:	“Home run” le dice =“Home run.”	“Home run” he says =“Home run.”

R: =Pero ... como era rancherito
no sabía hablar y dice
“¡Con ron!”

“¡Con ron!”
“Entonces me levanté yo”
dice el cómico 'tá
diciendo el cómico
“Me levanté yo” dice ...
“Con vinagre pa' que no le
arda al desgraciado”
porque se habían
rompido todas las jetas
(se rie)

[P: (riéndose) O:h]
'onde se resbaló a b— a base
a ... a home base.

=But ... since he was a little
ranchero he didn't know
how to talk and he says
“¡Con ron!”

“¡Con ron!”
“So then I got up” says the
comedian the comedian
is saying
“I got up” he says ...
“With vinegar so it won't burn
the poor slob” because he
had busted up his lips
(laughs).

[P: (laughing) O:h]
'where he slid into b— a base a
... a home base.

Of course, the comic effect of this piece derives from irony of point of view, the disjuncture between the audience's understanding of what is going on, and the ranchero character's misunderstanding. Here linguistic knowledge articulates with cultural knowledge, and the “mexicano del otro lado” (“Mexican from the other side”) appears as a country bumpkin lacking in both. But like the Rodríguez dialogues, this very Mexican “American” joke escapes being entirely univocal in its “American ness.” This is because the innocent observations of the rancherito, exacting descriptions of a play of signifiers without recourse to their signifieds, invites the audience to identify with the de-naturalizing freshness of his perspective. The description of baseball pants as “pantalones de chamaquito” (“little boys pants”), for example, inspires laughter not only because it is mistaken but also because it is, on another level, so deadly accurate. By exposing the arbitrariness of the national pastime's conventions, the ranchero's observations bring a smug nativism into dialogue with a more searching, critical

identification with the alien. In doing so, they highlight the ambiguities and contradictions of ethnic Mexicans' senses of citizenship in the United States. If we look to the prewar bilingual theater for the seed of a contemporary Chicana/o sensibility, I think it is in examples like these, and in the bilingual jokes from the Rodríguez dialogues discussed above that we may find it.

Conclusions

To summarize, these Depression-era dialogues were part of a widely circulating authoritative discourse that equated language-mixing with surrender to a set of alien, encompassing values and gender norms that, it was believed, threatened to send the Mexican colony into a state of anomie. Although it was not necessarily politically radical, this ideological formation defined itself against U.S. laws, customs, and authorities, blaming these institutions for exacerbating the tensions in *mexicana/o* families. Furthermore, it demonstrated a profound and visceral distrust of the commodified logic of U.S. society, even as it used the circuits of U.S. consumer culture to propagate its own message. Indeed, we might see a homology between the paradox of using consumer culture to advocate a return to use-value and the paradox of performing code switching in order to discourage it. These examples support Woolard and Schieffelin's observation that language ideology should be understood less as a "homogeneous cultural template" than "as a process involving struggles among multiple conceptualizations and demanding the recognition of variation and contestation within a community ..." (1994:71).

By presenting bilingual Mexican Americans as failing to communicate with monolingual Mexicans and descending into amoral, individualistic lives of consumption, the dialogues warned of fragmentation within the *mexicana/o* community. Deborah Cameron's observations about the social implications of linguistic purism are highly applicable here.

... the anxiety that gets expressed as 'if we don't obey the rules we won't be able to communicate' might equally be defined as an anxiety about moral relativism or social fragmentation. ... [M]ost forms of verbal hygiene are practiced in order to ward off the threat, by making language a fixed and certain reference point (25).

Netty and Jesús Rodríguez's dialogues sought that fixed reference point in a "pure" standard Spanish, which itself became intelligible by virtue of its difference with the supposedly corrupt varieties that the performers sought to stigmatize. Perhaps the greatest irony of this project of verbal hygiene is that it not only failed to prevent the development of a mixed English/Spanish vernacular, but also may have contributed to the formation of a hybridized bilingual aesthetic. This may be attributed in part to the ruptures within the authoritative discourse noted above. I would suggest, however, that the very existence of these ruptures attests to the overwhelming influence of the social and economic processes of which language-mixing was a part. During the early twentieth century, ethnic Mexicans in the United States mingled and juxtaposed English and Spanish as they adapted to rapid social change "marked by a great deal of mobility, geographical and social, where role differentiation and appropriation prepare[d] the ground for assimilation and language loss" (R. Sánchez 1994:139).

The gendered language ideology presented in the dialogues and other *mexicana/o* public discourse before World War II has not gone away. Traces of it appear today in the

music of San Antonio's Nick Villareal, whose humorous *conjunto* songs are populated with amoral, materialistic women known only by nicknames like "La 'I gotta go'" [Miss 'I gotta go'], "La 'Not to Worry'" [Miss 'Not to worry'] (1991), and "La Happy Hour" [Miss 'Happy Hour'] (n.d.). Similarly, McAllen-based novelty accordionist Wally González enjoyed a statewide hit with "Que me entierren en Wal Mart/Bury Me at Wal-Mart," in which the singer asks in both English and Spanish to be buried at Wal-Mart so that his wife will visit his grave (1997). Significantly, serious songs that mix English and Spanish are rare in Tejano and *conjunto* music today. In the poetry and theater that emerged from the Chicano Movement, however, the mixed code has come to be understood as a social 'language' and a symbol of ethnic identity in its own right. The beginnings of this objectification of the mixture of Spanish and English are certainly present in the prewar popular theater, but the earlier theater seems to have associated the influence of English with the encompassing nation-state, stigmatized cultural innovation, and unmarked abstraction. A supposedly pure, normative Spanish in the earlier theater seems to have stood for home, family, tradition, and marked cultural particularity. The language ideology of Chicano nationalism after 1965 has maintained the opposition between a language associated with particularity and a language associated with abstraction. However, the newer ideology has moved the mixed code into the marked position and relocated both the standard nation-state languages into the unmarked position. These two ideologies of language coexist uneasily today among people of Mexican heritage in the United States, and further investigation may well show them to have distinct constituencies. Nevertheless, both the purist ideology and the emergent

hybrid aesthetic of the bilingual jokes may be seen as resources that ordinary *mexicanas/os* continue to use to make sense of the contradictions of the world in which they have to survive.

CHAPTER 7: UNA MIRADA QUE MATA

Introduction

Thus far, we have seen the strength in the popular theater of a moralizing exile nationalism that urged audience members to hold on to an imagined Mexican tradition, speak “pure” Spanish, and conform to normative expectations of marriage, family, and gendered behavior. Comic dialogues and sketches used both positive examples and negative counterexamples to define the boundaries of desirable femininity and tended to suggest that the maintenance of Mexican identity depended on policing those boundaries. Favorable female characters, particularly in the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, appear as loyal and deferential to masculine authority within the legitimate conjugal home, but quick-witted and sharp-tongued in defense of their sexual honor and reputation outside of it. Such characters also exhibit a clear allegiance to a Mexican culture supposedly free of foreign influences. In the words of the husband in “Me voy para México,” which was first discussed in Chapter 4, this ideal woman was

Una mexicana pura
que no cambie de opinión,
Y no deje las tortillas

Por hotcaques y jamón

A Mexican woman pure and true
Who won’t change her opinion,
And who won’t leave tortillas
behind
For hotcakes and ham
(Anonymous 1935g).

Although negative examples, of course, made better theater than positive ones, and even in sketches and dialogues featuring characters who approximate those ideals, the suggestion remained that women might be essentially fickle, treacherous, and susceptible to the crass materialism and the alien values of the United States. In the song parodies of

Rodolfo García, this image of women became a central metaphor for the lack of reciprocity underlying class distinctions among ethnic Mexicans and the frustrations of consumer culture's impossible promises. Whether decrying women's selfish infatuation with money and the encompassing Anglo order or praising their attachment to home, family, and Mexican tradition, these theatrical representations were haunted by the twin specters of the hybrid and the commodity.

This chapter examines such portrayals of femininity in the popular stage and the ways in which these portrayals intersected with the tension between didactic normativity and carnivalesque titillation that seems to have pervaded all aspects of that stage. We have also seen that the popular theater was never univocal or unambiguous in its portrayals. Authoritative messages usually found themselves relativized by some counter-current that called their presuppositions into question. Still, we have not yet touched on one of the popular theater's most important features. The spectacles that warned their audiences away from the anomic *gringa/o* world of commodified pleasures and recreationalized sexuality were able to fill seats because they offered male audiences a glimpse of female legs for the price of a ticket. As Tomás Ybarra-Frausto has observed, the social dislocations suffered by an audience recently moved to U.S. cities created a demand for "evocations of an edenic agrarian past" (1984:57) on the stage, including stylized *ranchero* characters, folkloric dances, and songs ridiculing women who bobbed their hair, as in the following excerpt from "El turismo," a song recorded by Netty Rodríguez.

Ya toditas la muchachas

Now every one of the girls

andan güeras y pelonas	Runs around all bleached and bobbed.
y hasta las chinas poblanas dicen que son chi-cagonas	And even the Chinas Poblanas ¹⁹⁰ Say that they're "chi ...cagonas" (1935b) ¹⁹¹

On these same stages, however, the very audiences that hungered for these representations of Mexican tradition and nodded their heads at criticism of the *pelonas* also thrilled to the antics of bobbed chorines whose risqué dances were understood to be the height of a modernity that was sometimes identified with the United States and sometimes not identified with any particular place. This chapter will examine the ways in which female singers, dancers, and comedians played with these tensions, bringing the nostalgic *costumbrista* aesthetic that we have seen in our discussion of the sound recordings into a discordant dialogue with flashy, consumer-oriented sexuality and bawdy physical comedy. By juxtaposing these elements, the performers negotiated their way through discourses of nationalism, sexuality, fashion, beauty, and shame that exerted both constraining and generative influences on their lives and those of women in the audience.

The *vedette* and the *bataclán*

During several of our interviews, Esther Robinson thought she had a photograph someplace that was taken of her when she was eight years old, in about 1929. It should

¹⁹⁰ A *china poblana* is a female type symbolic of a colorful, rural Mexican femininity, distinguished by a long sequined skirt, often embroidered with the emblem of the Mexican eagle and serpent. Although the history of this type and the reasons for the name are disputed, it is often associated with the state of Jalisco.

¹⁹¹ "Chi-cagonas" is a clever bilingual play on words. The pause suggests the word "Chicano" and then resolves to a word that resembles the name of the city of Chicago. The word "cagona" means "big shitter" in Spanish.

have been in the hard-shell suitcase where she kept all her old show business pictures, and it may be that she showed it to me once. I think I remember seeing that the photograph was partly torn and deciding not to have it copied. Mrs. Robinson spoke of having one of her daughters-in-law, restore it for her on a home computer. But the memory of the picture and the memory of the act it was meant to commemorate remain. In the picture, “La estrellita” (“The Little Star”), as Esther’s parents used to call her when she was a girl, appears dressed as a flapper, holding a lit cigarette in her hand, leaning against a wall and looking provocatively at the camera. This was the costume she used to sing the Spanish tango “fumando espero” (“I wait, smoking”), which was two years younger than she, in her parents’ *carpa*.¹⁹²

Fumar es un placer, genial, sensual.	Smoking is a genial, sensuous pleasure.
Fumando espero al hombre a quien yo quiero	Smoking, I wait for the man that I adore.
Tras los cristales de alegres ventanales	Behind the glass of joyous windows,
Y mientras fumo mi vida no consumo,	And while I smoke I don’t consume my life,
Porque mirando el humo me siento adormecer...	For as I watch the smoke, I feel myself drift off... (Romano 1989:47)

The song’s speaker lolls on an easy chair, smoking through a daydream and calling on her lover to come and let smoke pass from his mouth to hers. Esther remembers that people loved the act. After all, she was just a little girl, but there she was with her cigarette, acting all grown up and worldly and singing about a world of decadent, forbidden luxuries, her sexual immaturity clashing with the song’s evocation of sensuous

¹⁹² “Fumando espero,” written by Juan Villadomat-Masanas, debuted in Madrid in 1923 as part of a commercially unsuccessful musical revue titled “La nueva España.” First recorded in 1928, it is one of the most popular of the tangos written in Spain. The song’s lyrics suggest that the cigarette it alludes to is spiked with cocaine (Barreiro 2003).

transgression. Kids always steal the show, especially when the play adults, and such symbolic inversion was common enough in the *carpa*, where the appearance of children offered audiences a comforting reminder that this was a family putting on the show, not just some group of bohemian actors whose relationship to one another was purely economic.

Nevertheless, in parts of Mexican American south Texas, the sight of a child smoking in front of adults was no small matter. We are told, for example, that before the 1920s at least, a mexicano man in the lower Valley would go to great lengths to avoid being seen smoking in front of his father, for fear of not showing him the proper respect (Paredes 1958:11). It seems unlikely that the adults who saw the show in small towns and in San Antonio's urban neighborhoods would have been amused to see their own daughters taking in real life the sorts of liberties that Mrs. Robinson took on stage. And what of a family who allowed their daughter to behave so shamelessly in front of total strangers—or even to appear on stage at all? For these audiences, the young girl playing a grown woman was a paradoxical image that generated laughter by provoking shock. With or without the photograph, this image exposed the tensions within and among the discourses of gender, family, and reputation that structured the viewers' lives. Furthermore, it modeled their increasing participation in the culture industry in both its Anglophone and Hispanophone incarnations.

As Mrs. Robinson grew up and learned to perform to adult standards as a singer, dancer, and acrobat, she further developed the coquettish style of self-presentation on stage that she had begun with *Fumando espero*. As a teenager, she sang *couplets* to the

audience in the *carpa*. These songs presented an enticing “come-hither” image of the female singer, who often interacted with men in the audience using props. For *El verde balón* (“The Green Ball”), Mrs. Robinson would enter the stage wearing a bathing suit, carrying a green beach ball, and announce that she was looking for a young man to play with her ball. As she tossed the ball back and forth with men in the audience, she would sing, “¡Ahí va! / ¡Ahí va! / ¡El verde balón ahí va! / No lo vayas a romper/ porque el juego acabará” (“There it goes! / There it goes! / There goes the green ball! / Don’t you go and break it/ Or the game will end/”). Among her most popular *couplets* was “Mírame” (“Look at Me”) which was also a favorite of the Mendoza family’s repertoire. Wearing a sparkling, sequined dress on a stage lit by a single spotlight, Esther sang, while holding a mirror in her hand.

Como el cielo de mi patria
que está cubierto de azul
Por eso las mexicanas
tienen la gracia de Jesús.

Like the sky of my homeland
which is all covered with blue.
That’s why the Mexican girls
have the grace of Jesus.

Una mirada que mata
un corazón que ama mucho
unos ojos que enamoran
y unos labios que enamoran.

A glance that kills
a heart that loves a lot
some eyes that fall in love
and lips that fall in love.

Mírame, mírame, mírame,
mírame
Mírame con tus ojitos.

Look at me, look at me, look
at me, look at me
look at me with your little
eyes.

Porque si tú no me miras

Amor, me voy de fijo.

Because if you don’t look at
me,
Love, I’m leaving for sure.

Me canso de estar soltera
y he decidido casarme.

I’m tired of being single,
and I have decided to get
married.

Pero tengo mucho miedo
pues pudiera equivocarme.

Joven me gusta Ud. mucho.
¿Me quisiera hacer feliz?

No se ponga colorado,
que lo quiero hacer reír.

Mírame, mírame, mírame,
mírame
Mírame con tus ojitos.

Porque si tú no me miras
Amor, me voy de fijo.

Me gustan mucho los viejos
de veritas se lo digo
porque son muy consecuentes
y muy blandos para el castigo.

Aquí estoy viendo a uno
tiene cara de bendito.
Y si no se me enojara
le diría más bajito:

Mírame, mírame, mírame,
mírame
Mírame con tus ojitos.

Porque si tú no me miras
Amor, me voy de fijo.

But I'm real scared,
well, I could make a mistake.

Young man, I like you a lot.
Do you wish to make me
happy?
Don't you blush,
because I just want to make
you laugh.

Look at me, look at me, look
at me, look at me
look at me with your little
eyes.
Because if you don't look at
me,
Love, I'm leaving for sure.

I like old men a lot,
truly, I tell you,
because they always spoil me
and they don't get rough with
me.

I'm looking at one here,
he looks like a sweet man.
If he weren't getting mad at
me
I would tell him more softly:

Look at me, look at me, look
at me, look at me
look at me with your little
eyes.
Because if you don't look at
me,
Love, I'm leaving for sure.
(Mendoza, Strachwitz and
Nicolopolous 1993:113-
115, trans. by
Nicolopolous)

When she reached the verse addressing a young man, she would find such a man in the audience and reflect the blinding light of the spotlight onto his face with the mirror, rendering the command “look at me!” impossible for him to obey. As the song progressed, she would shift the light to an older man’s face, directing the crowd’s laughing attention at him and reflecting back the tactility of his longing gaze. After offering the expected sexualized female stage presence, “Mírame” turned the situation upside-down, refusing male audience members the luxury of belonging to an invisible group of spectators and forcing them to live through the singer’s experience of being observed.¹⁹³

Such reversals were potentially subversive, but in the variety shows that flourished in tents and theaters from Mexico City to Los Angeles to San Antonio during in the 1920s, they were comic exceptions made intelligible by the predominance of the female body as mass spectacle. Although this spectacle was in part a capitulation to the tastes of the *palomilla* and its desire for gratification, it was also a manifestation of a new wave of public feminine audacity that gathered strength in the decades following the Revolution and World War I. During this time, both Mexico and the United States experienced a crisis in gender roles in which suffragists increased their demands for political equality while “flappers” or “pelonas” (lit. “bald women”) as they were known in Mexico, pushed the limits that the late nineteenth century had been set on women’s social and sexual autonomy in both countries (Monsiváis 1980:38). Writing about

¹⁹³Ybarra-Frausto (1984:46) includes an audience member's description of a similar act performed by another show.

Mexico City, Pilcher argues that the participation of women and the Revolution, the proliferation of labor-saving technologies such as the mechanical corn mill, and the influence of foreign popular culture led the daughters of the urban middle class to aspire to new styles of life centered on consumption.

Not content with the limitations of traditional womanhood, the *chica moderna* [“modern girl”] maintained an independent, exciting lifestyle, filled with the latest gadgets, cars, and radios purchased with her own earnings. She attracted men with stylish makeup and clothes, despite her unconventional ideas about women’s liberation and compassionate marriage (21).

In the United States, *mexicanas* of more modest means danced to the same tune as best they could, struggling with economic limitations and clashing with their parents’ senses of family honor and cultural identity. As Vicki Ruiz has noted, these women typically found themselves caught between the strict supervision of parents and a culture industry that, in both English and Spanish urged them to seek freedom in clothing, hair care, personal hygiene products, and recreational dating (1998:56).

Although these women were often inspired by the success in Hollywood of such performers as Lupe Velez and Dolores del Río, they also found such inspiration closer to home. During this time, when the idea of the massified “sex symbol” was in the process of coalescing (Monsiváis 1980:35), both male desires for sexual gratification and female desires for personal autonomy found their spectacular expression in the singer, dancer, and stage idol known as the *vedette*. The *vedette* was a public female presence, and it was this public character that made her novel. Although she remained the reified object of voyeuristic contemplation, she carved out a status for herself within those limitations

that fit none of the existing models of femininity. She was neither fallen whore, nor blessed virgin, nor suffering mother, but “the inaccessible woman for those who lack money and power, whom they entrust with playing the Accessible and Dazzling Woman” (42, translation mine). Her public presence lived in stage performances and inscribed itself indelibly on the public consciousness through such mechanically reproduced forms as photographs and picture postcards (39). This photographic existence was a type of “writing” which, importantly, was accessible to the non-literate. As the *vedette* rose to prominence in Mexico, foreign performers who visited the country contributed to the newfound aesthetic of female exhibitionism. In 1925, the company of Madame Berthe Rassimí debuted in Mexico City with “*Voilá le Ba-ta-clán*” a musical revue featuring “a company of Parisian showgirls, strutting about in plumes and glitter and little else, leaving local men dazed and helpless” (Pilcher 2001:20).

Similar movements occurred during the same period in ethnic Mexican popular theater in the United States, where the *bataclán* and its imitators generated a mixture of enthusiasm and moral panic. In the mid 1920s, the Italian *tiple cómica* (“comic soprano”) Dorita Ceprano of the Hermanos Areu troupe performed in San Antonio wearing only a string of bananas (Ybarra-Frausto 1983:44), in an imitation of the famous routine by Josephine Baker.¹⁹⁴ Smith notes that Ceprano and Noloesca both danced a “number” called the *bataclán*, wearing clothes that left their shoulders and legs bare while holding large heart-shapes in front of their bodies, giving the appearance that they

¹⁹⁴ Kanellos maintains that Ceprano was Italian (1990:93), while Ybarra-Frausto characterizes her as Spanish (1983:44).

were naked (Smith 1991:45). Although Ybarra-Frausto suggests that these acts were for late night “adults only” shows, Smith disputes this claim. These dances and their skimpy costumes attracted audiences to the popular theater, but some performers, especially those who traveled outside of San Antonio to rural parts of Texas found themselves forced to accommodate more conservative tastes. Esther Robinson recalls that in many towns, the chorus girls in the *carpas* reached a peculiar compromise.

In the old days they used to wear just stockings
and they would not even stretch
because in the old days they had nothing like that.
But in the old days
they had to cover up because of these families.
They wouldn't go and see the show.
The Carpa Cubana
they used to cover their stomach with a cloth the color of the skin.
But my sister
when the time came that we had to change
my sister says “That's it.
The stockings have to go.
We're going to have to make my own makeup.”

At some point during the 1930s, as much as a decade after much more scandalous acts on the stage of the Nacional had become commonplace, the Carpa García moved to replace wrinkly, restrictive *mallas* (“stockings”) with a pigment made from *albayalde* (white lead) and *carmín* (cochineal).

Then the Carpa Cubana
they took their stockings off also.
The owner did not like it
because she was a very strict lady.
She didn't like obscene
things you know.
It was the old days.
But my sisters would go out and work in their show
and they would come out without stockings

and she would go like this you know. [crosses herself].

Mrs. Robinson recalls that these changes met with enthusiastic approval, at least from the *palomilla*.

They [the *público*] would applaud them because they looked so modern.
Their legs looked like doll's you know.

And then they [the Carpa Cubana's dancers] would come out with the
wrinkled knees and all that
and they "Bo:o" to them.¹⁹⁵

Of course, Mrs. Robinson's account of the Carpa Cubana may be colored by professional jealousy and competition, but her recollections parallel other sources that describe a movement away from sexual restraint on stage and toward the open sexualization of the female body.

This movement was not without its trade-offs for the performers. Indeed, the widespread fear of "bad influences" caused hostility, both toward the popular theater and toward its practitioners, in some of the small towns that the Carpa García visited. In the case of the *carpa*, this stigma was due both to the venue's association with the working class and to the fact that some tent shows did indeed present raunchy, ribald entertainments for male audiences without regard for the standards of 'decent' families. Criticism of the *carpa* and the theater both focused particularly on female performers, as we saw in Chapter 1. But the distinction between "a quiet, family show business" and one that presented "bad influences" was sometimes lost on towns who had been "burned" by rowdy *artistas*. What is most interesting about Mrs. Robinson's narrative is that she celebrates a certain level of sexual libertinage onstage but still sees the behavior of

¹⁹⁵ibid.

women as constitutive of a given troupe's moral caliber. In the early twentieth century, female performers, both *caperas* and *artistas de teatro*, faced a special stigma both in their relations with audiences and with the Anglo authorities. As Belia Camargo observed in an interview with Smith, “they didn't think a lot of people in show business. They thought that a woman who wore little clothes couldn't be a good wife and mother” (1991:44). Some similar anecdotes appear in Manuel Gamio's collection of Mexican immigrant self-narratives from the period. Elena Torres de Acosta, a singer from Jalisco whose life history forms part Gamio's famous study, mentioned to an interviewer that when she wrote her family to let them know that she was working in the theater, they were “very much displeased” (Gamio 1931:240). Anxious to distinguish herself from more libertine *artistas*, Ms. Torres criticized a fellow performer: “although she says that she is a lady, [she] likes to show her legs a lot” (241).

These statements are clearly reactions to the damning double bind that Mexican-American female *artistas* faced. On the one hand, they were required to be beautiful and to display their bodies as objects of desire on stage. On the other hand, they were expected be “respectable” and were reviled for going too far in their self-display. Belia Camargo, in her discussions with Pamela Smith, recalls an incident from her childhood which illustrates this point:

I remembers that I had a picture of my mother [“La Chata” Noloesca], you know, with a little tight, with her legs showing. And I put it over there in the Ursulinus, at the academy, and they tear it up! The nuns! (Smith 1991:43).

Mrs. Robinson, however, presents such Puritanism as an “old fashioned” value and increasingly eroticized presentations of women’s bodies as signs of modernization and innovation. Belia Camargo, in a similar vein, has commented to interviewers that her mother’s *bataclán* number was an “advanced” spectacle, “desnudo artístico para familias” (‘artistic nudity for families’) (45).

Some ethnic Mexican social critics of the time dismissed the supposedly emancipatory movement toward sexual license among youth and on the stage as so much anomic frivolity. Los Angeles-based Daniel Venegas seems to have taken such a position in *Las aventuras de don Chipote*, even though he himself organized such performances (Kanellos 1990:66-67). This attitude also appears in the writings of a “P. Viola,” who published an article on the subject titled “Las Enseñanzas del Teatro” (“The Teachings of the Theater”) in *El Fandango*, a weekly humor publication that was active during the 1920s in San Antonio (Viola 1927)¹⁹⁶. The story revolves around “Ginoveva” and “Chucha,” the daughters of “Don Ulalio,” a hard-working barber who, having read somewhere that the theater is “una escuela de grandes enseñanzas para la humanidad” (“a school of great teachings for humanity”), insists that his children never miss a night. His wife, Doña Gertrudis, objects, warning that “esas muchachas van a aprender allí cosas que no saben” (“those girls are going to learn things there that they don’t know”), but he dismisses these concerns as old-fashioned. However, since he does not have enough money for the first-class theaters, he sends his two daughters to the Zaragoza, where they

¹⁹⁶ The story has no byline, but Mr. Viola is listed as the publication’s editor. I have only been able to find one issue of this newspaper, among documents in the Manuel Gamio collection at the Bancroft library at the University of California, Berkeley. It is unclear whether this San Antonio publication was related to a similar publication by the same name in Mexico City.

can see films and variety shows until midnight on one ticket. Accompanied by two “jellybeans”¹⁹⁷ who appear to rival their girlfriends in lascivious, empty-headed frivolity, the girls sit in the back of the theater gawking at the actors on stage and, as Kanellos has noted, discussing “the physical attributes and relative attractiveness of the actors in a combination working class and teenage dialect” (1990:79). The article satirizes the exaggerated acting style of Juanito Suárez and “La Carcachas” (María Luisa García) as they perform scenes from *La Flor de un Día*, probably a melodrama, on the Zaragoza’s dusty stage. Finally, as the lights go down and the curtain falls on the actors, Ginoveva snuggles up close to her “jellybean,” whispering “Po mengache con chu mamachita!” (“Now come to mama!”). Her sister follows suit with her young gallant, and in the ensuing “vacilón” (“good time”), it becomes clear that after three months of constant attendance at the theater, “saben mil veces mas de lo que les han enseñado” (“they know a thousand times more than what they have been taught”).

In this piece the satirist’s pen leaves no element of the community unscathed. As Kanellos has noted, it was the author’s role to lampoon “both the ignorance of the common folk and the pretensions of the elite while also satirizing the artlessness of the actors and the physical conditions … of the Zaragoza as a second-class theater” (1990:79). The story’s central irony derives from the juxtaposition of two distinct senses of “learning” and “knowing.” One the one hand, there is the established idea in the community that the theater should teach good morals. By sending his daughters there regularly, the well intentioned but ignorant Don Ulalio follows to the letter the

¹⁹⁷ “Jellybean,” of course, is another synonym for “fifí,” “gomoso,” “roto,” “lagartijo,” etc.

instructions of newspaper commentators who urged *mexicanas/os* to attend the theater as their patriotic duty. On the other hand, there is the idea that for youth, ignorance of sex equals innocence and is therefore desirable, while knowledge equals immorality. This view finds itself reduced to absurdity in the Doña Gertrudis's tautological objections to her daughters' trips to the theater.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the theatrical spectacle proves the mother right.¹⁹⁹ It seems not to teach good morals but sexual precocity, and the daughters, whose comments about the spectacle reveal them to be absolutely empty-headed, appear to have learned their lesson well. Although the piece does place the idea of the theater as didactic spectacle in satirical relief, it nevertheless relies on this view for its impact and, ultimately, reinforces it. The ultimate object of the critique seems to be the "frivolous" theater itself, which is shown as having abandoned its didactic mission. Furthermore, the idea of a hierarchy of prestige among theatrical spaces is never questioned.

Ironically enough, this portrait of frivolous youth given over to the irresponsible pursuit of cheap amusements and sexual pleasures also appeared in the popular theater itself. For all of the allure of their sensuous and frivolous aspects, it is clear that the variety shows that flourished at the Zaragoza and Nacional never abandoned the idea of teaching good morals. Characters like "Ginoveva" and "Chucha" appear as negative

¹⁹⁸ In my conversations with elderly Mexican Americans in San Antonio, the idea that young children today "know more" than young adults did fifty years ago is a reoccurring theme. My interviewees seem to feel that this is an undesirable state of affairs, that there are things (especially in the area of sex) that children should not know. This use of the verb "saber" ("to know" to refer elliptically to "knowing" about sex seems to be at play in Viola's article.

¹⁹⁹ This pairing of a befuddled but good-hearted father with a shrewish and ignorant but clear-headed mother resembles nothing so much as the characters of don Chipote and doña Chipota in Venegas' novel.

examples in the dialogues of Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, for example, particularly in the dialogues mentioned in Chapter 4 that revolve around a confession scenario. In “La Arrepentida” (“The Repentant Woman”), Netty Rodríguez appears in the role of “Adelita,” a woman who was once expelled from the Teatro Zaragoza for immorality and who has decided to leave the world of parties and boyfriends behind to become a nun. As the priest, played by Jesús, reviews Adelita’s past, going to the movies appears in the catalogue of her weaknesses.

J:	¿Qué me cuentas de eso de ir a los cines y sentarse en lugares más oscuros y sin darse cuenta de las películas?	What can you tell me about this business of going to the movies and sitting in the darkest spots and without paying attention to the films?
N:	¡Ay, padre! ¿Pero quién se va a ocupar en estos tiempos de ver películas?	Ay, father! Well who's going to bother watching films in this day and age? (Rodríguez-Valero 1936d)

Note that here, as in the “Enseñanzas” article, young peoples’ surrender to commodified amusements and sexual libertinage is seen as a problem of modernity and change. In the newspaper article, for example the poor deluded father dismissed the mother’s objections to her daughters’ nights on the town were dismissed as old-fashioned. In both cases, the freedom of young people to seek commodified amusements outside of adult supervision is portrayed as a historically recent phenomenon, as a characteristic of some “moment” in which characters and readers are living.

Folklórico Dance and the Frigidity of Nationalism

Such risqué, cosmopolitan spectacles as the *bataclán* and such female public figures as the *vedette* and the emancipated *chica moderna* found themselves counterbalanced in the greater Mexican public sphere by the desexualized, pastoralism of folkloric dance spectacles that promised a retreat from modernity in the innocence of national tradition. In her discussion of “distressed,” or artificially antiqued genres, Stewart mentions that such forms often appear in “periods when nostalgia is juxtaposed with upheaval, revolution, and cultural distress” (Stewart 1991:25), a phrase that aptly describes Mexico in the late 1910s 1920s. Most authors agree that the systematic study, collection and presentation of folkloric dances by the Mexican state and academy is largely a post-Revolutionary phenomenon (Muzquiz 1988; Nájera 1989). In this context, the administrators of the educational and cultural arms of the fledgling Revolutionary government felt an urgent need for aesthetic practices that would unify the consciousness of the nation, consolidate the state's hegemony, and counter both the European-centered vision of the Porfirian regime and the cultural imperialism of the United States (Vaughan 1994). To this end, the SEP under the direction of the nationalist philosopher and aesthetician José Vasconcelos, initiated some of the first systematic attempts to collect and present folkloric dances. The collection was largely carried out by functionaries of the SEP's *misiones culturales*, traveling groups of consultants whose primary function was to provide training and assistance to Federal teachers in rural areas. In doing so, they spread the new Mexican nationalism and populism in a manner that “resonated strongly with the practices of colonial evangelization” (Van Young 1994:364). By 1928, folklore collection had become an important part of their mission, and they carried it out with

varying degrees of professionalism (Nájera 1989:19). Once collected, the dances were often presented in Mexico City as part of large-scale festivals to mark special occasions, inaugurate public works, and draw attention to immunization campaigns.

The earliest stage performance of such dances to which I have found reference is the 1919 ballet titled *Fantasía mexicana*, which was choreographed and danced in Mexico City by Anna Pavlova, a Polish artist who, like many European Modernist intellectuals, visited Mexico after the Revolution. This performance, which is almost always described as highly stylized and refined, had an enormous impact on subsequent staged presentations of folkloric dance. According to Saldívar, the version of the Jarabe danced by Pavlova had the China dance to the air “El Palomo” with one foot in and one out of the charro's hat.²⁰⁰ This practice, never seen in Guadalajara or anywhere in Jalisco would become standardized in the official version of the so-called Jarabe tapatío (Saldívar 1989:14). In fact, within four years, Vasconcelos would, in his capacity as the head of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), designate the *Jarabe* (complete with many of Pavlova's elaborations) as the official national dance of Mexico (Mendoza 1992:21-22). In spite of, or perhaps because of its impact, Saldívar, Mendoza and others criticize Pavlova's dance as an “*ultraje*” (“an outrage,” “a violation”) whose decorativism reduced the elements of “popular” art to exotic and picturesque details (Mendoza 1992:22; Saldívar op. cit.). This performance and the criticism it has attracted exemplify

²⁰⁰A charro is a stereotypical Mexican cowboy figure. The gaudy suit worn by charros in films and rodeo-type performances is inspired by the dress of 19th century rural landowners. The china is a female type identified by a particular costume, often assumed to be from Jalisco, which in fact was distributed among several states of Mexico. It consists of a long red skirt embroidered with decorative designs, and embroidered blouse, a silk scarf called a zaguejo.

the dialectic of representation and recrimination that has characterized the folklórico phenomenon since its inception. The collection and staging of folkloric dances has always gone hand in hand with critiques of such stagings for their inauthenticity and “pintoresquismo.”²⁰¹ Indeed, many of the figures who have been the most central to the folklórico phenomenon have been the harshest critics of “hybrid” and “adulterated” forms that have resulted from their own efforts.²⁰² In this search for pure forms that would display the authentic essence of *lo mexicana/o*, and testify to the existence of the same, practitioners’ awareness of the political contradictions that arose from that search chafed constantly against the nationalist sentiments that drove them onward.

Like the European painters and dancers of the day who drew inspiration from African, Native American, and Asian art that they saw as ‘primitive,’ Mexican modernists in search of a truly national art found inspiration in their own ‘primitives,’ the indigenous peoples and provincial *mestizas/os*, right at home. In the revolutionary project of the collection and staging of folk dances, primitivism fused with antiquarian condescension and nostalgic nationalism, as “folk culture” came to be seen as a treasure trove of cultural forms—in this case dances—that were independent of and separable from their contexts, at the same time as they stood metonymically for the same. In the

²⁰¹This is a word English ought to have. The translation “picturesque-ism” provides a sense of its meaning. Monsiváis has noted that the adjective “pintoresco” is most often used as a “paternalist adjective which converts popular life into local color and [over]determines the evocation in a classist manner” (Monsiváis 1980:25)

²⁰²Usually, of course, collectors, artists, and folk-dance scholars involved in the folklórico enterprise have criticized dances staged by other people, rather than their own. What I wish to highlight in this sentence is the fact that most of those who have contributed to the creation of the corpus of dances that has now become standardized among folklórico companies were aware some of the problems and contradictions involved in taking a dance from a village context and transferring it to the stage or official celebration.

discourse of state dance collectors and promoters, the practices of the “folk” became fetishized, converted into artifacts, collectible items—indeed, into commodities—while the “folk” themselves were reified, reduced to mannequins for brightly colored costumes. This process of commodification remains evident in the collection and re-presentation of folklore carried out by the Mexican state from the post-revolutionary period to this day. Folklórico remains an important part of a national spectacle that has come to serve as an “instrument of pacification and control” (Ybarra-Frausto 1983:49).

The folk dance projects of the SEP and other agencies were, in a sense, a mining operation. The agencies sought to extract interesting fragments from various choreographic sign systems from diverse areas of the Republic united by their difference from the Capital, and then convert them into a single complex and colorful system of signifiers with a single referent: *lo mexicana/o*.²⁰³ In the process of appropriation and 'refinement,' the dances and costumes selected were stripped of their unique and distinct use values (e.g., the expression of religious devotion, healing the sick, diversion, divination, seduction) and homogenized as symbols of national uniqueness and distinctiveness. Like all commodities, they became equivalent to one another and interchangeable, a common currency of nationalist discourse. In the U.S. context, however, folklórico dance took on an entirely different valence. Here, folklórico dance's role in a hegemonic project of state and nation building disappeared, leaving only its aspect as a cultural bulwark against foreign influence. Like so many other aspects of

²⁰³Cantwell, in his study of the Festival of American Folklife, makes a similar observation (Cantwell 1993: 44)

Mexico's official culture, folklórico dance and the costumes associated with it become symbols of a *mexicana/o* identity defined in opposition to the dominant Anglo-American culture, albeit in purely culturalist terms. Wherever folkloric dance was performed, female dancers with fixed smiles, heavy flowing skirts, and hair in tight buns stood as chaste emblems of the authentic Mexican woman.

From *Rataplán* to *Fantasía*

Given the juxtaposition in the greater Mexican public sphere of images of sexualized cosmopolitan femininity on the one hand and frigid nationalist femininity on the other, it was perhaps inevitable that artists would begin to explore the boundaries between these discourses and produce hybrid forms. The *teatro de revista* was one of the first sites of such experimentation. Faced with the immense commercial success of Mme. Rasimí's *ba-ta-clán* company, Mexican arists were forced to create local imitations and parodies (Pilcher 2001:20), and these act came to inspire both moral panics and enthusiastic attendance in theaters catering to Mexican audiences from Mexico City to Los Angeles to San Antonio. In particular, nationalist parodies of the *bataclán* helped spur a current of "Mexicanization of what was foreign, and experimentation with what was native" on both sides of "the" border (Morales et. al. 1984:61, translation mine). Prominent among these parodies was "Mexican rataplán," a revue that included chorus girls in revealing costumes made from props that evoked the domestic material culture of rural Mexico. In the words of Morales and his collaborators, these dance numbers staged a rebellion of "typical" objects.

These things had turned suffragist, and they clamored to vote and to leave their domestic confinement to taste the glow of the footlights, to hear the orders of the director instead of domestic clatter. In this way, *jícaras*, spoons, ladles, *escobetillas*, *sopladores* and *aventadores*, passed to the conquest of the surface of the female body, which now covered its gifts, passing through it all from head to toe with nothing but vernacular instruments, in a theatrical proposal that was conceived as anti-colonialist from the beginning (Morales et.al. 1984:63-64, translation mine).

Barely covering the bodies of the chorus girls, these fetishized traces of rural lifeways offered the same sexual titillation as the *bataclán*, at the same time inviting multiple and contradictory interpretations. Available as nationalist symbols for those who wished to see them as a form of import-substitution, they also called such nationalism into question by finding non-traditional uses for traditional objects, emphasizing play and innovation over continuity. If the fetishism of the costume in folklóric dance was naturalized and repressed, this fetishism announced itself loudly in *Rataplán*, demanding to be acknowledged. Surviving early photographs of Beatriz “La Chata” Noloesca show the famous vaudevillian in costumes that used traditional Mexican garments in much the same way. In one of these, Noloesca sports a bikini top and a large straw hat, with a *serape* worn around like a sarong, her midriff bare (Smith 1991:88).

In the Carpa García, such non-traditional uses of traditional garments acquired the label “fantasía.” In Spanish, this word can denote fantasy, vanity, imagination, a whim, a caprice or costume jewelry, and in the *carpa*, it referred to a style of clothing that emerged when performers playfully manipulated the “traditional” women's costumes associated with Mexican *folklórico* dances, giving them a gaudy, sexy, and irreverent flair. *Fantasía* costumes formed an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983)

that reveled in its own glittery inventedness. As hybrids of *folklórico* and burlesque, they were prime examples of the flamboyant aesthetic of bricolage that Ybarra-Frausto (1991) has called *rascuachismo*. The performers who used *fantasía* costumes were conscious of mixing genres, and they did so in a way that highlighted this transgression. Importantly, my consultants have explained this transgression to me not as a kind of “Americanizing,” but as the “modernizing” of a Mexican tradition.

Above all, promoters of *folklórico* have understood themselves as purists in search of the national soul's unsullied essence, and in their writings, they have seldom used the word “*híbrido*” with positive connotations. For example, Carlos Mérida, in a discussion of the mixing of Spanish and Indigenous traditions in Mexican dance, refers to this mixture as “fecund—never hybrid” (Mérida 1990:181, translation mine). Although Mérida does not develop this distinction in a rigorous way, it is clear that a “hybrid” mixture is a sterile and stigmatized one, more pollution than enrichment. Of course, this strategy of purity is partly informed by Mexico's geopolitical position. While *folklórico* dance has served as a hegemonic tool for Mexico's ruling class, it has also formed part of a counter-hegemony in its role as a buffer against the cultural imperialism of the United States. This latter function remains especially important in the Mexican American context, in which *folklórico*, like so many other aspects of Mexico's official culture, has helped to bolster an enclaved *mexicano* identity defined in opposition to the dominant Anglo-American society (Nájera 1989:28).

In addition to their official uses, official folk-dances found wide audiences in the greater Mexican popular theater, and the *carpas* (20), but in these settings the dances

shed the seriousness of the state-sponsored festivals. Adherence to strictly defined forms was simply not in the character of the popular stage. Juxtaposed with ribald jokes and political asides, the prettified pastoralism of *folklórico* dance reduced itself to cheerful absurdity. In some cases, the result was a saccharine tourist spectacle whose appeal to Mexican audiences was short-lived. As Covarrubias has noted, “the possibilities of the denatured folklore music and dances were quickly played out and the public very soon grew tired of nationalism” (1939:22). In other cases, such as that of the *carpa*, the dances gained back some of the carnivalesque character that official stagings had bled out of them. Whatever the result, purist critics and academics warned against “the danger of this picturesque-ism which cheapens the national culture by selling a hybrid and embarrassing product” (Mendoza 1990:23, translation mine). Even María y Campos, the frivolous theater’s most important chronicler, saw the hybridity of this theater as its mortal flaw. Where “pure” tragedies and comedies would never die, he argued, “fundamentally hybrid genres, formed of disparate elements, are condemned irremissibly to die . . .” because “their life must be as brief and fleeting as the fashion that created them” (1989:379, translation mine). There is no denying, of course, that the “product” was unashamedly commercial and tied to fashion. The popular theater was show business, after all. There, commodified, distressed “folk-dances” found a home in which their commodification could be frankly and gracefully acknowledged—and sometimes subverted. These stagings drew attention to the mass character of official folk-dance and the blurring and interpenetration of cultural levels that Canclini (1992) sees as a defining feature of Latin American modernity.

This was also the case in San Antonio's Carpa García. Like many other tent shows, the Garcías used *folklórico* extensively, often opening their shows with chorus lines based on such dances. But, like their contemporaries in Mexico, they found their audiences losing interest in the genre. The Garcías' response was *fantasía*. In a 1990 interview, Mrs. Robinson drew an analogy for me between *fantasía* and the parodies of popular songs that her brother Rodolfo, a comedian, used to end his stage act. "From a real, single song," she stated, "they make a *parodia*. . . . then, from a real outfit, we go into modern and change it around."²⁰⁴ Unlike parodies, however, the costumes were not seen as making fun of "traditional" ones so much as elaborating on them and "modernizing" them. Nevertheless, some of the features Mrs. Robinson describes as *fantasía* exaggerate and relativize the picturesque quaintness of *folklórico*, giving the costumes a self-satirical edge.

In her narrative, Mrs. Robinson portrayed her older sister Consuelo, who made the costumes for the *carpa*, as an innovator who experimented with "traditional" forms and created new designs. She claimed that Consuelo concentrated primarily on altering the women's costumes rather than the men's, usually by making them more revealing: shortening the skirts, tucking in the blouses so as to emphasize the breasts, and cutting out the parts of the costumes that covered the back, thighs, shoulders and midriff. In figure 1, for example, Consuelo García appears in a *china poblana* costume, together with her husband Pilar, who is dressed as a *charro*. Unlike the standardized *china* outfit,

²⁰⁴from tape PH90-3-1:3, on file at the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

Ms. García's costume leaves the midriff partly exposed. A more radical example of *fantasía* occurs in another surviving photograph of the García sisters posed in costumes used to dance *el jarabe tapatío* in a chorus line (cf. Kanellos 1990: plate 16; Ybarra-Frausto 1984:49). The first and third dancers from the left appear in wide-brimmed hats, bikini-like tops, and embroidered vests whose black color and ornamentation recall the standardized *charro* suit. A strip of brocaded black cloth along the sides of the dancers' legs alludes to the rows of silver or gold buttons that run up the legs of 'traditional' charro outfits.²⁰⁵ Together with these "charros" are two "chinas" (second and fourth from the left) who are hatless and vestless, with short, brocaded skirts and bare legs. 'Original' *chinas* wear long flowing skirts which they flourish and undulate back and forth to the rhythm of the music, a technique which defines the *folklórico* genre. These Carpa García choristers coquettishly imitated this technique with skirts almost as short as those of twenty-first century cheerleaders. Mrs. Robinson remembered that the audiences, especially male audiences, reacted with enthusiastic approval to these innovations.

A key aspect of Mrs. Robinson's narrative of *fantasía* is her valorization of novelty and individual authorship. All of my consultants maintain that the *carpas* faced pressures to innovate and change with the times, to incorporate the latest new thing. As Susan Buck-Morss has noted, such pressures are fundamental to the logic of fashion under capitalism. Fashion "identifies generational cohorts, whose dress symbolizes . . . entry into their own collective role as historical actors" (Buck-Morss 1989:97). Like

²⁰⁵The original rural costumes that served as the inspiration for the *charro* suits that mariachi musicians wear varied considerably, and that many of them lacked the feature of the buttons on the legs. *Fantasia* alludes to and elaborates on standardized costume types.

many other companies, the Carpa García responded to these drives by constantly incorporating influences from the mass media of both Mexico and the United States. *Carpa* performances often included staged versions of the latest dance crazes from American popular culture as well as *folklórico* dance. Members of the García family recall dancing the Charleston in the carpa during the 1920s, and phonograph records by La Chata Noloesca also allude to this dance. In the late 1940s, many *carpa* companies included the jitterbug in their repertoire of dances.²⁰⁶ All of these changes on the part of the *carperos* were related to the growing involvement of their audiences in U.S. and Mexican mass culture.

Fantasía, then, emerged as an aesthetic of self-conscious simulation which reworked what was received as old in light of the new. This is precisely the kind of combination of stylistic universes that Bakhtin considers an intentional hybrid: one in which “only one language” is “rendered in the light of another language” (1981:362). The intentional hybrid is thus an asymmetrical mixing of two social language varieties, one which preserves—indeed, highlights—the distinction between those languages even as it combines them. Perhaps the best example of such an intentional hybrid is parody, in which one ironically foregrounded language becomes “the object of representation” (1981:51) while a second matrix language remains partially outside the utterance but “invisibly present” nevertheless (1981:61). Mrs. Robinson's astute comparison of *fantasía* to parody takes on a particular importance in light of Bakhtin's theory, for she

²⁰⁶During my fieldwork in 1990, Carlos Monsiváis and the late Amada Monsiváis provided me with a photograph of their children dancing the jitterbug on the stage of the Carpa Monsiváis. I have not included it with this article for space reasons, but a copy negative (#90-571) is on file in the photographic archive of the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.

herself seems to be arguing that a model based on verbal art (the song parody) can be applied to non-verbal signs (the costumes and dances). As Kapchan notes in her study of the oratory of Moroccan market women, this understanding of hybridity opens up the possibility of accounting for the socially situated choices of performers.

This act is not appropriation pure and simple. The vendor did not erase the tradition from this phrase in her revoicing of it; rather, she deliberately drew upon all of the meanings inherent in it, while adding another important semantic 'tone' of her own—one that jarringly reversed the usual hierarchy of meanings present therein (1993:316).

It is in this sense that I apply the term hybridity to *fantasía*. As in the above example, *fantasía* did not erase the nationalism of *folklórico*. Instead it gave this nationalism a “modern” accent by revoicing it in terms of an eclectic *mexicano* popular theater which drew inspiration from similar forms all over the industrialized world. Thus, *fantasía* was one of many responses to a modernist and capitalist drive for innovation. It answered this drive by interpreting *folklórico* dance according to the logic of fashion and embracing the commodity form in all its transitoriness.

By revealing their bodies on stage and talking back to their audiences, artists like Esther Robinson and her sisters asserted ownership of those bodies, “taking charge of their beauty and talents” and often confronting the jealousy and paternalism of their male partners and collaborators (Smith 1991:50). In the process, they mounted a challenge to received élite standards of decency and *respeto*. By openly sexualizing *folklórico* costumes, the *carperas* found illegitimate uses for these commodified tools of legitimization (Hebdige 1979:18). For all this, they were both loved and reviled, portrayed as demonesses of sin and “goddesses of a religion no one ever bothered to name”

(Monsiváis 1980:42-43, translation mine). By playing and experimenting with received 'folkloric' forms while incorporating influences from European, Mexican and Anglo-American vaudeville and cinema, they asserted their identity as *mexicanas* in an Anglo-dominated world while relativizing the very idea of pure genres, insular identities, and sacrosanct cultural patrimonies.

La Chata Noloesca

For all their diversity and complexity, the solo song and dance of the *vedette*, the libertine cosmopolitanism of the *bataclanas*, the virginal nationalism of *folklórico* and such parodic hybrids as *fantasía* and *rataplán* all shared a focus on the nubile woman who met male-centered heteronormative standards of sexual desirability. With that desirability came anonymity for all but a select few, especially in San Antonio. Although the names of such famous *vedettes* as Celia Montalván and Dora Ceprano are remembered in Mexico, the women whose names have come up most often in my interviews with San Antonio performers are those of comedians. Like their male counterparts, women comedians on San Antonio's ethnic Mexican stage had to achieve success by developing memorable, broadly drawn personae on stage. These characters, each with her identifying flaws and peculiarities of mannerism and costume, made it impossible for female comedians to melt into the background. If chorus girls presented themselves as part of a collectivity by coordinating movement and costumes, female comedians presented individualized takes on such *tipos populares* as the mischevious daughter, the love-struck maiden, the shrewish wife, and the downtrodden drunken hag.

Characters like these were both the female counterparts of the *peladito* and the grotesque doubles of more conventionally sexualized figures like the *vedette*. Where these last presented an image of femininity frozen in the rigor mortis of eternal youth, the comedians represented the stages of the human life cycle in all its variability.

Not all female comedians chose their calling. Many aspired to other sorts of work but found themselves pushed toward comedy, and pulled in that direction by audience reactions by male colleagues, if they were not considered beautiful or ceased to be so. Nevertheless, once established as *cómicas*, some women found opportunities for creativity, artistic license, and professional autonomy that were not available to supposedly more desirable women. Some even came to overshadow the vedettes and male comedians in the eyes of audiences. For female comedians whose appearance and behavior met normative gender expectations of femininity, the license to play male characters or embody stigmatized femininities on stage could be daunting at first. Delia Magaña, the wife and partner of the famous Mexico City comedian Roberto Soto, recalled in an interview with researcher Miguel Angel Morales how older male colleagues initiated her into this role.

Me llevaron a ese barrio a estudiar a los teporochos, a los mariguanos, a esa clase de personas. Y empiezo a notar que mi papel sería uno de esos: de teporocha. Comencé a llorar: ¡No quiero interpretar eso, porque no me quiero ver fea, ni mugrosa, yo quiero estar bonita! ... Bueno, era yo muy niña. En esa época si una mujer tenía 20 años todavía una niña, ahora una niña de

They took me to that neighborhood to study the derelicts and potheads, that kind of people. And I start to notice that my role would be one of those, of a derelict. I started to cry: I don't want to play that, because I don't want to look ugly or dirty, I want to be pretty! ... Well I was just a kid then. In those days if a woman was 20 years old she was still a kid. Now a girl who's one

un año sabe mucho.

year old knows a lot (1987:84) .

Like many of the era's ethnic Mexican performers in Mexico and the United States, Magaña described her highly stylized characterizations as interpretations of people she observed in real life.

By all accounts, the most prominent female comedian, and perhaps the most important artist in San Antonio's popular stage was Beatriz Escalona-Pérez (1903-1979), who came to be known on stage as "La Chata" Noloesca. In an artistic career spanning some fifty years, she displayed a remarkable and probably unparalleled combination of artistic originality, effervescent stage presence, entrepreneurial spirit, and managerial acumen. There are essentially three available studies of Noloesca's career, all of which draw on interviews that the artist's only daughter, the late Belia Areu Camargo, granted to researchers between 1981 and 1991 and documents in the Mrs. Camargo's personal collection and in scrapbooks at the San Antonio Conservation Society.²⁰⁷ Of all these accounts, Ybarra-Frausto's elegant biographical article, which introduced Noloesca to the academy through a thickly descriptive and interpretive account of her life and art, remains the fundamental starting point (1983). Kanellos's study of Hispanic theater in the United States offers a condensed summary of the comedian's career, with additional information about the background of the Areu troupe, where Noloesca got her start (1990:93-95). Finally, Pamela Ann Smith's unpublished Master's thesis uses long quotes

²⁰⁷ Elizabeth Ramírez's history of Chicana and Latina theater (2002) offers a summary of Noloesca's career that draws on her and Smith's article for the *Handbook of Texas* (Smith and Ramírez 1996). Alicia Arrizón's study of U.S. Latina performance also includes a discussion of La Chata Noloesca that revisits what has already been written about the artist and seeks, not entirely successfully, to draw parallels between her career and that of the playwright Josefina Niggli, who was also from San Antonio. Kanellos has also written an encyclopedia entry for the Gale Encyclopedia of Popular Culture (2002).

from an extensive series of interviews with Mrs. Camargo to tell Noloesca's story (1991).

Smith's study is important both because it addresses the class- and gender-based contradictions of San Antonio's *mexicana/o* community and the ways that these tensions manifested themselves both in "La Chata's" career and in Mrs. Camargo's narrative.

Herself a performer and a *veterana* of her mother's troupe, Mrs. Camargo narrated her mother's story as a sort of tragicomedy in which a love of the theater leads her from poverty and obscurity in San Antonio to the heights of glory and notoriety on the stage of New York's Teatro Hispano, and then back to relative obscurity as Spanish-language theater ceases to exist commercially in the United States. In Ybarra-Frausto's summary of Noloesca's childhood, he makes it clear that her life was shaped from the beginning by the changes that the Texas Modern brought to San Antonio's landscape.

La Chata Noloesca was born ... in a small house on Medina Street near the Missouri Pacific railroad depot in San Antonio. Her father died while Beatriz was quite young and, to make ends meet, her widowed mother established a thriving business providing hot food for train passengers passing through the city. Intermingling with this diverse clientele served as Beatriz's first encounter with the public (1983:41).

In part because of the railroad, Escalona's family was able to maintain contact with relatives in Monterrey, where the young Beatriz spent considerable time as a little girl, and where she was entranced by theatrical spectacles at the Teatro Independencia (42; Smith 1991:34). This early experience would set a pattern for the most active phases of Noloesca's career, in which she performed more extensively in Mexico than any other San Antonio *teatrista* of the day.

The three secondary accounts of Noloesca's career agree that she got her start in theater by working as an usher in the Teatro Nacional, although they differ as to whether she was thirteen or fifteen. In an interview with Smith, Mrs. Camargo made a point of mentioning that her mother "used to get Dr. Urrutia and others and make a mess" (Smith 1991:36), clearly taking some pride in the fact that her mother, a woman of humble means and origin, had served as an usher to the cream of San Antonio's *mexicana/o* society. After moving from ushering to taking tickets, by all accounts, Noloesca fell in love with actor José Areu of the Hermanos Areu and left San Antonio to tour with the troupe throughout Mexico and the southwestern United States. The Areus, a zarzuela and variety company centered around the Spanish-born actor, violinist, and librettist Manuel Areu and his sons, had been active first in Cuba during the late nineteenth century and then in Mexico and Guatemala from 1905 until 1914 (University of New Mexico 2000). Driven from Mexico after the Revolution the troupe first arrived in San Antonio in 1917 (Kanellos 1990:94), where they seem to have performed frequently. According to Mrs. Camargo, Noloesca left San Antonio with the company when she was sixteen and her future husband was in his forties (Smith 1991:39). She debuted with the groups in 1920 in El Paso's Teatro Colón (Kanellos 1990:93). Soon after this, she and José Areu married, and Mrs. Camargo was born in 1921 in Mexico City (Smith 1991:42). During the entire decade of the 1920s, Noloesca toured with the Areus throughout the 1920s, spending considerable time in Los Angeles, where she and the Areus made many of their recordings.

In her discussions with Smith, Mrs. Camargo made it clear that the *mexicana/o* audience's racialized perceptions of her mother's phenotype—not to mention the perceptions of her Spanish husband and in-laws— influenced her career decisively.

her body was beautiful, but her face was an Indian face. And my father used to tell her, ‘Look Beatriz you should be a comedienne because you have that charisma for the audience, for the public’ (1991:39).

Although her initial role model was Dora Ceprano, the company's glamorous *vedette* and her sister-in-law, Noloesca moved toward comedy as she developed as a performer. Over time, she came to take an increasingly prominent role in the company. All sources agree that it was her husband José who suggested that Beatriz use an anagram of her surname as a stage name, they differ as to the reason. Ybarra-Frausto suggests that “Noloesca” had a more dramatic sound than “Escalona” (1983:44), while Smith hypothesizes that the existence of a circus named Escalona in Mexico may have led the Areus to wish to avoid using the name to avoid associating themselves with the circus (1991:42). Kanellos, however, notes that while Noloesca was with the Areus, the family was associated with Mexico's most famous circus family, the Bells, as well as the companies of Guz Aguila and the Pirríns (1990:94). In any case, as Beatriz took an ever-larger role in the Areu's affairs and increased her earning power, she came into conflict with Ceprano and husband Enrique. In 1926, the two separated from the Areu troupe and went their own way (Kanellos 1990:94; Smith 1991:49). In that same year, Noloesca entered and won a “sexy legs” contest sponsored by Kaiser Stockings, earning a \$1,000 prize and serving as a model for the stockings, all without her husband's knowledge or authorization. According to Mrs. Camargo, Areu saw this move as insubordination on his wife's part

and reacted with anger (Smith 1991:50). Ultimately tensions between the couple grew insurmountable, and they divorced in roughly 1930. By this time, Beatriz had gained enough weight that the option of being a *vedette* was closed to her, but as a comedian she continued to shine.

On her own, Beatriz started her own variety company, “Atracciones Noloesca,” and alternated between performing on her own and touring with other companies both in Mexico and the southwestern United States, including the company of Eusebio “Don Catarino” Pirrín. (61). Although this was an important stage in her career, it is poorly documented, in part because Mrs. Camargo lived with her father during this time (51-52). It was at this point that she began to develop the character that came to be known as “La Chata” (51). In the sound recordings made during the 1920s in Los Angeles, while she was with the Areu troupe, Beatriz tends to play a wife, often a shrewish one, and although it is her name (“Noloesca,”) that appears on the record label, she tends to serve as a semiserious foil for male comic actors. The character she developed after her split from the Areu troupe, by contrast, was more autonomous, defined not by any durable kinship relation with any onstage character but by clashing signifiers of class, age, and gender. Ybarra-Frausto, perhaps, describes her appearance best.

“La Chata” pranced on stage wearing a ruffled print dress, oxford shoes with gaudy rolled-down socks, her hair parted at the center and combed into a pair of tight *chongos* over the ears. Two saucy *moños* of colored ribbon accented her vivacity. Wide-open expectant eyes emphasized by false eyelashes were a dominant feature of her makeup. The overall impression was of a pert, clever, yet vulnerable maiden (46).

Ybarra-Frausto characterizes Noloesca's onstage persona as a variant of the *peladita* types developed by such Mexican comic actors as Lupe Inclán and Amelia Wilhelmy, arguing that what made Noloesca unique was her "distinctly feminine comic style" (45). Unlike her predecessors, who portrayed bawdy and aggressive lumpenproletarian 'teporochas,' Noloesca gave her lower class female persona "an overlay of sweetness and grace" and an air of childlike mischief to the *peladita* type (45), projecting a personality that was "at once innocent and savvy, sweet and strong" (Smith 1991:58). Mrs. Camargo, predictably enough, rejected the *peladita* label entirely in her interviews with Smith, arguing that her mother was a *criadita*: "She was like the maid of a house. She had an apron, wore pigtails and big bows like they did in the thirties ..." (Smith 1991: 55). "La Chata," in other words, was a domestic who refused to be domesticated, a *mexicana* adaptation of the venerable Clever Slave stereotype that was as common in Roman comedy as in English-language minstrel shows in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States.

In 1938, after returning to San Antonio, Noloesca formed a new company, "Beatriz Noloesca 'La Chata' Compañía Mexicana," featuring several hired local performers, her daughter, and her new husband, José de la Torre, a former immigration officer whom she had met in Tijuana who went by the name of "Mister Seven Up" (Smith and Ramírez 2002; Smith 1991:51; Ybarra-Frausto 1983:49). With the audience for vaudeville dwindling in San Antonio, the company began to travel, first to West Texas and the lower Rio Grande Valley, then to locations as far afield as Havana, Cuba, and New York City. There, the company enjoyed considerable success and ended up

staying for the entire decade of the 1940s, offering *mexicana/o*-themed variety acts to a heterogeneous audience with roots in many different parts of the Spanish-speaking world. Noloesca proved to be both a charismatic performer and a hard-nosed, effective manager (Smith 1991:59). Mrs. Camargo appears to have seen this time in New York as the greatest success of her and her mother's career (68), and members of the company included Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and Ramiro González-González (later known as "Pedro" after his break in Hollywood) (Kanellos 1990:95). Photographs of the company in New York also show González-González's wife Leandra Aguirre and Rolando Morales as part of the company. Importantly, dancers in these pictures appear in *fantasía* charro costumes similar to those in the Carpa García photograph discussed above.

Noloesca's troupe remained in New York until the early 1950s, when she returned to San Antonio. There she had a variety show on local television and acted in *radionovelas* on radio station KCOR, along with Lalo Astol, Susie Mijares, Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, and other veterans of the local theater scene. In 1975, after more than fifty years of performance, she received an award from the Mexican National Association of Actors at a ceremony attended by friends who had shared the stage with her through the years. In subsequent years, Noloesca planned a comeback and received the attention of the English-language press, but appears never to have managed to renew her career in a sustained way. When she died in 1979, the City Council of San Antonio closed city offices for a day (Smith 1991:73). To my knowledge, no *vedette* has been so honored.

Mimi Reyes – La Pachuca del West Side

If “La Chata,” Noloesca was the most prominent female comic to come out of San Antonio’s Spanish-language theater industry, Mimi Reyes may have been the runner-up for this title. During our interviews in the summer of 1997, Ms. Reyes decided to show me the sort of costume she had once used in theaters, *carpas*, and burlesque clubs from San Antonio to Los Angeles and Tijuana; from New Orleans to New York City. After leaving the room and fumbling around in a suitcase, she came out in a brown and white plaid apron, apparently a model of domesticity. She then lifted up the apron to reveal a knee-length stuffed phallus, made of the same checkered fabric and tipped with a bright, red glans. Grinning, she asked me, “Would you like something to eat?” Ms. Reyes’s career has received no attention in the literature on Spanish-language popular theater in the United States, partly, I suspect, because of her secondary status and partly because there are aspects of her career and art that are difficult to discuss in a celebratory, framework.

Unlike many other *artistas* of her generation (but like Noloesca), Ms. Reyes she did not come from a family of performers. Where many of her contemporaries began learning their performance skills from parents and older siblings quite early in life, Ms. Reyes’s was introduced to the stage at Lanier High School on San Antonio’s West Side. Furthermore, unlike many performers who identified as *artistas de teatro*, Ms. Reyes unashamedly admitted in interviews with me that she had worked in *carpas*. More than many of her contemporaries, she used English extensively in her acts and frequently worked for English-speaking audiences. Finally, Ms. Reyes seems to have challenged mexicana/o ideologies of domesticity and femininity both in her comedy and in her life.

Although she did not play male characters like her Mexican predecessor Amelia Wilhelmy, she created a series of rough, tough stage personae that some of her male contemporaries that I have spoken to consider masculine.²⁰⁸ If the comedy of immigrant vaudevillians like Netty and Jesús Rodríguez was haunted by the figure of the *pocha* who betrayed her *mexicanidad* by ceasing to be a normative woman, Mimi Reyes's act centered on such figures, adapting the popular theater's stock *borrachita* ("drunkard lady") and *peladita* figures to her native West Side. Where "La Chata" Noloesca is remembered for the sweetness and grace of her *peladita/criadita*, Ms. Reyes played marginalized women with boundless energy and a bawdy, earthy flair.

Like Beatriz Noloesca, Manuela "Mimi" Reyes early life seems to have been decisively influenced by the institutions of the Texas Modern. She was born in San Antonio, Texas on January 14, 1912, the daughter of Pascual Reyes, a railroad employee from Runge, Texas, and Cesaria Ríos, a native of Monterrey, Nuevo León, who ran a rooming house in San Antonio. As mentioned above, Ms. Reyes began performing at Lanier High School, signing in a choral group and doing comic imitations of her teachers during school-sponsored *fiestas*. In this, she began a practice of parodying other performers that would remain a mainstay of her act as a comedian. During her time at Lanier, at age fourteen, Ms. Reyes won two amateur talent contests: one at the Teatro Nacional with Dora Ceprano (cf. Kanellos 1990:84-85 for a discussion of this contest), and another at the old Majestic theater with Ginger Rogers. The prize for the Teatro

²⁰⁸Ms. Reyes has never characterized herself as masculine to me, but some male performers, including Pedro González-González and Rolando Morales, ascribe this characteristic to her.

Nacional contest was a week's work with Ceprano's company, and Ms. Reyes considers this week to have been the beginning of her career as an entertainer. After graduating from Lanier, she briefly attended a business college in San Antonio for a time but soon chose to devote herself entirely to the theater. She claims that to this date, she has never accepted employment that did not involve performing for an audience or for the camera, aside from a brief stint as the owner of a small restaurant and bar in San Antonio.

After her initial success with the amateur contests, Ms. Reyes found work with a traveling variety company from Mexico whose comedian had not been allowed to cross the border. After touring with this group, she began performing regularly at San Antonio's Teatro Nacional and Zaragoza. In the middle 1930s, she traveled to Los Angeles with the Pirrín family. She stayed in Los Angeles after the company left and formed a partnership with Rolando Morales, a high school friend who had also found his way to California, and whose dignified bearing and handsome features made him a natural straight man. Morales was the son of the well-known violinist Santiago Morales, and his primary talents lay in dancing, costuming, and song. The two had actually begun performing together as the duo "Rolando y Mimi" in San Antonio, and after reuniting in Los Angeles the two performers worked in theaters, nightclubs, and special gatherings in both cities, breaking up and getting back together again several times until the late 1950s. It is perhaps as Mr. Morales's partner that Ms. Reyes is best remembered. Ms. Reyes

has told me that their comic material was entirely improvised. Mr. Morales, on the other hand, claims that they improvised based on scripts that he wrote himself.²⁰⁹

In the late 1930s, Ms. Reyes returned to San Antonio, but work for comedians was scarce there, and the pay was low when it was available. This situation soon drove her to seek employment in other cities, and a San Antonio booker landed Ms. Reyes a job with Pete Herman's Club in New Orleans. Ms. Reyes soon began commuting regularly to New Orleans and performing at Herman's and other burlesque clubs, where she worked with such well-known strippers as Gypsy Rose Lee and Lily St. Cyr. When Lee was not in the house, Ms. Reyes did her own version of Lee's act.

- P: How did you do the imitation of (.) of of Gypsy Rose Lee
M: Well uh (.) I would have on (.) those old-fashioned long pants that
 men's (.) underwear
P: Oh men's underwear
M: Yes
 And then I would have
 A big flower in front ((*voice breaks*)) [Mhm]
 And then in the back I would have (.) a sartén=
P: =Oh yeah
M: A cooking (.) frying pan in the back
P: Oh yeah (.) hanging hanging over your=
M: =hooked it up I sewed it or hooked it up
 And when I would go this way the ((*shakes herself*)) sartén would go this
 way and hit me in the nalgas
P: Oh yeah ((*both laugh*))
M: And then (.)
 Here ((*gestures towards chest*)) in front I would put two funnels
 That was my breast
 ...
P: And would you have this under your clothes and then take them off to
 reveal it

²⁰⁹Such claims to authorship are difficult to evaluate, for a small measure of resentment seems to remain between the two performers, and each one might have a motivation for downplaying the other's creative involvement.

M: Well I wou—I would take the funnels off you know
And then I would have tassels like the strippers use [Oh yeah]
And then I would move one then the other one then both of them like (.)
she did²¹⁰

When she imitated Lee and other strippers, audiences hooted for her to take everything off, but she scornfully shook her fist at them with the thumb and little finger extended, a defiant and mildly obscene gesture. For some of her parody strip acts, Ms. Reyes painted an image of this gesture on her stomach, revealing it and rapidly rippling her stomach at the audience. Yes you have to know this for the test.

In New Orleans, Ms. Reyes learned an act that later became a staple of her work for both *mexicano* and Anglo American audiences. On the street, she saw an old man who had worked as a comedian playing music for passers-by on a washtub bass made from a chamber pot. Fascinated by the instrument, Ms. Reyes assembled her own version and found that nightclub audiences responded well to it. Her version consisted of a porcelain chamber pot with a broom handle fixed to it and a single, long string running from the pot to the end of the handle. At the top of the broom handle was a board with bent nails sticking out of it, from which she hung such items as a brassiere, a douche bag, and other ‘intimate’ feminine articles. As she played “The Twelfth Street Rag” on her instrument with a stick, these items flapped back and forth, creating a comical spectacle. Ms. Reyes also learned to play the washboard in New Orleans and sometimes used this instrument in shows for *mexicano* audiences later.

After the war started, Ms. Reyes’s work in New Orleans brought her to the attention of the U.S. Army, and she ended up touring the country, entertaining soldiers for the U.S.O. She recalls being the only Mexican American in her particular touring

²¹⁰from tape R5.28.97-1:1, side 1. Text in brackets represents the interviewer's backchannel cues. Ms. Reyes preferred to use English in speaking with me, although it was clear that I understood Spanish. For this reason, many of the quotes in this section will be in English. In the transcripts from the interviews, I am “P,” Mrs. Reyes is “M” and Esther Robinson is “E”.

company, which included various song and dance acts, and a pair of performers who did what they called Apache dances on roller skates. Ms. Reyes's act often came last on the program, and the M.C. would give her a buildup as if she were a beauty queen. Once he had the soldiers whipped up with expectation, Ms Reyes would come out in her mismatched rags, and the soldiers would shout and laugh as they realized they had been fooled. After singing “Allá en el rancho grande” and other songs, she would dance the rumba or a polka with a man from the audience, much as she had done in the burlesque clubs. Although she was offered a contract to perform in Europe with the U.S.O., Ms. Reyes decided to return to San Antonio, partly because her daughter, Yolanda, was still young and needed looking after.²¹¹ In San Antonio, Ms. Reyes continued to perform as a comedian and frequently attracted large audiences at the Teatro Alameda. She also traveled briefly to New York, where she appeared at the Teatro Hispano alongside such performers as crooner Bobby Capó and Mercedes Bazán, a singer known as “La Bomba Atómica.”

At one point during the 1940s, Ms. Reyes went on tour with a small variety company of her own, which was composed of singers and dancers that she had recruited from various San Antonio nightclubs such as the King of Clubs, the Blue Star and the Dude Ranch. Her company included Antonio de Sevilla, who performed Spanish dances, a singer named Beatriz Llamas (“La Paloma”), dancers Juan and José Mireles, a chorister named Rosita Candela, and “Maracalú,” a dancer who did Afro-Cuban numbers. Esther García Robinson, who was a singer, dancer, acrobat, and *cupletista*, was also a member of this company. Ms. Reyes appears to have developed a working relationship with the

²¹¹Ms. Reyes was reluctant to divulge information about her various marriages (In a candid moment, she told me, “I got Liz Taylor beat.”) and about her relationships with her children. Out of respect for this reluctance, I am confining my discussion to her work as a performer. This, it seems, is what she wishes to be remembered for.

Carpa García during the 1930s and 1940s, and Consuelo García, who was the Carpa García's costumer, made many of her costumes. During this time, and also later in the 1950s, Ms. Reyes formed a comic partnership with Dolores "Dolly" Martínez, a singer of *boleros*. On a tour of the Valley, Ms. Reyes encountered singer Chelo Silva in Brownsville, and the two performers worked together in Corpus Christi and later in San Antonio. Ms Reyes also worked at the Nacional and Zaragoza theaters with singer Lydia Mendoza and with Willie and Teresa Champion, two performers who now run a dance studio in San Antonio. In the late 1940s, Ms. Reyes's company seems to have concentrated on *mexicano* communities in West and South Texas, working Lubbock's Teatro El Capitán and moving on Littlefield, Crystal City, and various border towns.

In the 1950s, Ms. Reyes continued to work the Alameda and also spent considerable time in Los Angeles. At this time she seems to have performed with Rolando Morales once again, both at the Million Dollar Theater and at smaller venues in southern and central California towns like Bakersfield and Fresno. She also appeared, alone and with Mr. Morales, on programs at the Alameda and other theaters that were centered on musical and screen stars from Mexico such as Pedro Infante, "Tongolele," Miguel Aceves Mejía, Pedro Vargas, and Lucha Villa. In 1957, Ms. Reyes obtained a bit part in Michael Curtiz's *The Helen Morgan Story* (Gidding et. al. 1957), an accomplishment that seems to give her more pride than any other. Not credited in the picture, she makes a short appearance in a scene in which star Ann Blyth's Helen Morgan is jailed following a prohibition raid. In jail for the first time, Morgan encounters a fast-talking Mexican American bag lady named Flossie (Reyes) who convinces the jail's guard to help her find an attorney. Ms. Reyes's character in this film is similar in many ways to her on-stage *borrachita* persona, although all of the dialogue is in English. Although the film as a whole did not enjoy critical acclaim, the jail scene is lively and

amusing, thanks entirely to Ms. Reyes's performance. She continue to perform at nightclubs and theaters in Tijuana, Mexico, Chicago, Illinois, and occasionally in San Antonio through the 1970s and is now largely retired.

Like many comedians, Mimi Reyes acted in sketches and comic dialogues, but she was best known for interpreting various stock personae on stage, usually in dialogue with a *seria* or *serio*. Each of her three major characters was identifiable by attributes of costuming, habits of speech, theme songs, and thematic content, all of which remained consistent with minor changes from performance to performance. All of the types Ms. Reyes chose to portray were rough, rebellious, unruly women-of-the-street, defined in opposition to the glamorous *tiples* and *vedettes* that populated the Spanish-language stage. Like many Mexican and Mexican American female comedians, Ms. Reyes frequently made her entrance from the back of the theater, stumbling down the aisles and fooling the uninitiated into thinking that a real intruder was disrupting the performance. Ms. Reyes gave this device a personal touch by shouting “*/Silencio, sapos, que va a cantar la rana!*” (“Quiet, frogs, because the lady frog is going to sing!”) as she made her way towards the stage. This expression was one of her trademarks.²¹² As Ms. Reyes's character approached the Master of Ceremonies, a real policeman who was keeping watch in the theater would come to try to “arrest” her. After a few verbal barbs and some reassurances on the M.C.'s part that it was all part of the act, the comic dialogue would begin. Working-class Mexican American audiences were used to this kind of entry and

²¹²This English translation is Ms Reyes's. In some varieties of Spanish, “sapo” and “rana” denote “toad” and “frog” respectively. Although the first is masculine-gendered and the second is feminine gendered, the genders of the words do not necessarily fix the genders of the animals they refer to. In standard Spanish this problem, which is present in many animal-words, is solved by the addition of “macho” or “hembra” to the word (i.e. “sapo hembra” = female toad). I have used Ms. Reyes's translation here because it seems that she is making playful use of grammatical gender.

even expected it. But when Ms. Reyes used it with other audiences, it sometimes got her into trouble.

M: Like I told you once
I worked in a very exclusive club
out in the country [Mhm]
And the ladies they wanted to throw me out They got scared
[Yeah]
They says “Who invited this (.) lady She doesn’t belong in our
club She’s not in our society” [Mhm]
And I had a hard time there They wanted to send me to jail [Yeah]
And I would explain you know
“No lady I’m in a show
They’re giving you a show:”
“No no no no
Get out of here” [Mhm]
I had a hard time in that (.) town (.)
They were high society ladies you know²¹³

Perhaps the most well-known of Ms. Reyes's characterizations was “La Borracha” (“The Drunken Lady”), a ragged, marginalized alcoholic woman who alternately mourned her mistreatment at the hands of a cruel man and delighted in creating mayhem for the “seria/o” figure. “As the *Borracha*,” stated Ms. Reyes in an interview, “you know I come out with a shawl, like if I’m . . . all pissed and everything and a bottle in my hand, dragging the bottle.”²¹⁴ By “All pissed” Ms. Reyes meant that her character was drunk the point of incontinence, so completely soused that she could not tell the difference between urinating and spilling her liquor-bottle.²¹⁵ “La Borracha” also had a theme song, which was used to end comic dialogues:

¡Ay ay ay ay!
¡Que cosas más horribles del mareo!
from

¡Ay ay ay ay!
What horrible things come
drunkenness!

²¹³From tape R6.6.97-1:2, side 1

²¹⁴From tape R5.30.97-1:1, side 1

²¹⁵The dialogue reproduced in Appendix E uses this joke.

¡Ay ay ay ay!	¡Ay ay ay ay!
Que parece que te miro y no te veo.	For it seems that I look at you and can't see you.
¡Ay ay ay ay!	¡Ay ay ay ay!
¿De que color serán los indios verdes? Indians? ²¹⁶	What color are the Green
(El/la serio/a grita, “¡Señora, son verdes GREEN GREEN”)	(Straight man or woman shouts “Ma'am they're green GREEN GREEN”)
Hermano, yo quiero recostarme. You quiero recostarme (hipo) A ver si se me va.	Brother. I want to lie down. I want to lie down (hic) To try to sleep it off. ²¹⁷

Besides the song and the bottle, other common attributes of this character include a rumpled polka-dot dress with a fur stole or shawl pinned to the lower back area and dragging behind, a hat with a droopy flower, torn nylons, and a missing shoe. Beneath her skirt, Ms. Reyes often wore joke pants made from a 25-pound flour sacks. One of her pairs of pants used material from a Pioneer flour sack, arranged such that the Carranza-like face of the “Viejo” that appears on this package was located squarely on her posterior. The face was embellished with a hanging corn-husk beard and plastic goggle-eyes that would move when Ms. Reyes shook her buttocks. Another pair of pants used a brand of flour called “La Campana,” which had a picture of a bell. From this bell hung a ball of yarn, suggesting a clapper, that would move back and forth as Ms. Reyes moved just as the beard and goggle-eyes did. Although she mentions these pants specifically in relation to La Borracha, they may have been used for other characters.

As we have already noted, the “borrachita” was a common stock type in Mexico's *Teatro de Revista* and vaudeville. Ms. Reyes, however, shares with other performers the idea that this stylized and exaggerated figure was first and foremost an accurate

²¹⁶The “Green Indians” are a reference to moss-covered indigenous statues in Mexico.

²¹⁷Ms. Reyes did not remember this song. The text is taken from RM8.3.97-3;4. side 1.

representation of reality. When asked about the inspiration for this character, Ms. Reyes referred not to her artistic precursors but to people she had seen on the street

- M: Well (.) the Borracha act I started because (.)
I wanted to do something different you kno:w [Mhm]
So (.) I woul—I would see in California
There's a lot of ladies that are (.) alcoholics you know there on the street
(Mhm)
With their pants hanging do:wn
and their stockings out to the floor
And their [Mhm] shoes on crooked or one shoe of one kind or tennis shoe
on another
So I started using a tennis shoe
an—and a soldier's (.) boot [Mhm]
And at first I would use the flour pants and I would pick up my skirt you
know
P: Ha—had you ever seen anybody else do an act like that
M: Well just the drunken people (.) you know
That's why I got the thing²¹⁸

And at some points in Ms Reyes's career, the line between her on-stage and offstage personae sometimes became ambiguous. In an interview about her collection of photographs, Ms. Reyes cheerfully related escapades from her own off-stage life that were worthy of La Borracha.

- P: ((referring to photograph)) And (.) and you've got rubbing alcohol
here
((M laughs)) Is this rubbing alcohol
M: You know what I used to do
P: What
M: I used to rub it on my legs (.)
And he would say “What do you want that for?” I says “Well I’m
tired of drinking it so I’m going to put it to good use” ((P laughs))
I would drink (.) raw alcohol
P: Uh-huh On stage
M: On stage
P: Would it be real raw alcohol or would it just be water=

²¹⁸From R6.7.97-1:2, side 1.

M: The REAL (.) sometimes the real and he says “You use water
Lady” 'cause I would get drunk ((*P and M laugh*))
Don't you see one time [Uh-huh]
We were on the show in the (.) Alameda Theater [Mhm]
In (.) Los Angeles
No (.) and she— I didn't show up for the show²¹⁹
Cause we had three tandas you know like three shows [Right]
And he went to look for me
And there was a little bar about two blocks from there
And he found me on the sidewalk
I was sitting down their biding my time
Like a bag lady
He says “Mimi for Christ sakes what are you doing here”
“I'm having a little dri—” “GET UP
Let's go
We've got a show to do”
So he got me up and he passed by the cafeteria and got a big jar of coffee and says
“DRINK it”

So I started to drink coffee and
We went on the show and he made me sit down and drink water
and sodas
and everything and I was ready for (.)
But like I played a (.) a drunkard see
He didn't mind too much²²⁰

Another of Ms. Reyes's characters was “La Pachuca” or “La Pachuquita del West Side.” In this role, she appeared in loud, clashing outfits, often mixing bold stripes and plaid, with short skirts. The primary identifying characteristic of “La Pachuca,” of course, was her skillful deployment of the Pachuco argot. Ms. Reyes recalls performing this routine with *seria* Dolores Martínez, whose elegant stage presence contrasted sharply with the comedian's unruly, fast-talking hipster.

M: Well (.) She would come out and uh: (.)

²¹⁹The Alameda Theater was in San Antonio. I take her “No” to Ms. Reyes's aborted attempt at repair. She may have begun to correct either the city or the name of the theater, but she appears to have decided to go on with the story rather than continuing her repair.

²²⁰From Tape 5.30.97-1:2, side 2

She used to sing boleros you know [Yeah]
She was such a beautiful girl
She would sing bole:ros and all that
And then (.) she would say “And our next act is (.) a comedian
from San Antonio Mimi Reyes and I would come out

“ORALE ESA:

POS QUE TRA:E”²²¹

And I would talk to her and she says
“Scuse me but I don't understand your language
What are you talking about”

P: She'd say that in English or Spanish

M: In Spanish

P: Cómo lo decía

M: Ella me decía “Un momentito perdóname (.) Señora
pero you no sé de qué me está hablando Usted Yo no entiendo ese
lenguaje”

And I would say “Oh yeah” very sarcastic “Then you're a high
society lady”

And she says “No but I don't speak that language”

And I says well “CÁLMATE CARNALA:²²²

SABE QUÉ then I would speak all Pachuco to her

P: So like give me an example eh

Un ejemplo de ese=

M: Eh “Sabe qué Carnala:

AGUÁNTALE ÉSA:

Pos lo 'stoy explicoteando

O no APAÑAS lo que yo te 'stoy explicoteando²²³

At one point in a dialogue, the *seria* accuses the Pachuca of having no education, to which the Pachuca responds, “Pos ¡Cómo que no tenga educación? ¡Yo fui a Lanier!” (“What do you mean I'm not educated? I went to Lanier”)! This reference to her alma mater, which remains predominantly Mexican American and retains an “inner city” reputation to this day, always met with enthusiastic laughter. Ms. Reyes used the same

²²¹This might be translated as “ALL RIGHT ESA: WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?”

²²²This might be translated as “CHILL OUT, SISTER. YOU KNOW WHAT?” The habit of beginning a sentence with “Sabes qué?” appears to have been associated with the pachucos. I have heard it used in much this same way in contemporary theatrical representations of gang members, both in work by Chicano playwrights and in performances by Victory Outreach, an organization which converts *mexicano* gang members and drug addicts to fundamentalist Protestantism.

²²³This might be translated as “DEAL WITH IT, ESA: I'm explaining it to you. Or don't you GET what I'm explaining to you?” The whole quote is from R5.39.97:-2, Side 1.

joke in California, changing the name of the school to fit the town she was performing in. Although La Pachuca appears not to have had a theme song like that of La Borracha, Ms. Reyes often used the song “Serían Las Dos” to end a dialogue featuring this character. Asked about the inspiration for this character, Ms. Reyes once again spoke of the people she saw around her neighborhood growing up. Although many other female comedians in greater Mexican popular theater interpreted streetwise types, I am not aware of any other who specifically used the Pachuco argot. In contrast, most male comedians I have encountered at least alluded to the Pachuco phenomenon in some way, and many celebrated figures such as Tin Tan became famous by interpreting this figure.

Ms. Reyes's third enduring comic persona was “La Loca Zurumata” (“The Crazy Woman”), who embodied insane, unruly behavior. This character appears to have been common in mexicana/o popular theater in South Texas. Amparo Webber recalled that the González family troupe used this character, and a version of “La Loca’s” theme song appears in Carlos Monsiváis’s manuscript collecton. It is not clear from my interviews whether this character was identified by distinct attributes of costume, but she did have a theme song.

La Loca Zurumata	“La Loca Zurumata”
Me dicen los muchachos,	the boys call me.
Pero es que están borrachos,	But they're just drunk
Y no saben distinguir.	and can't tell the difference.
La gente inteligente	The intelligent people
Que se sabe vestir	who know how to dress
Ha ha:	Ha ha:
Ho ho:	Ho ho:
Loca me dicen. Me dicen	They call me crazy. Crazy
loca.	they
	call me.
Yo no sé por qué.	I don't know why.
Ha ha:	Ha ha:
Ho ho:	Ho ho:

Loca me dicen. Me dicen
loca.
(hablado) pero ¡tenga de
loca!

They call me crazy. Crazy
they call me.
(spoken) but crazy this!²²⁴

With the exclamation “tenga,” Ms. Reyes would brandish her clenched right fist with the thumb and little finger extended in front of her chest as discussed before. The characterization of “La Loca” that has emerged from our interviews is not as clear as that of the other two characters. It is clear, however, that as “La Loca” as well as in the other roles, Ms. Reyes frequently performed the dance routine to “*Serían las dos*” and other songs in a manner similar to that described in the above section on New Orleans. As “La Loca,” Ms. Reyes would make non-traditional use of items of traditional Mexican costume to accentuate her broadly physical mode of comedy,

As she did “bumps” to the accompaniment of the orchestra, she would flip the rebozo up and down so that it would fly over her shoulder and sometimes hit her in the face. This

²²⁴From tape R5.26.97-2:3, side 1

²²⁵From tape 5.26.97-1:3, side 1.

routine sometimes became something of a duel with the orchestra, as the drummers produced complex rhythms and she followed along with her pelvic thrusts. Ms. Reyes did this routine not only as “La Loca,” but also in her other comic personae.

All of Ms. Reyes's characterizations depended heavily on physical action and details of costuming in this way. In all of these personae, Ms. Reyes practiced a carnivalesque brand of comedy, with double entendres and inversions of the ‘treacherous woman’ stereotype. The Pachuca, for example, would complain that her “ruco” left her for another “ruca . . . y 'staba chavalona la ruca.”²²⁶ And La Borracha, of course, was drunk because her man left her.

M: And then I'd say that I was drunk because my husband had left me
And that I had a lot of children and that I was expecting and I
would puff my belly out this way [Mhm] ((*puffs stomach out and undulates it*)) and they would laugh you know

P: So you=

M: =I say I'm expecting but I'm expecting a Christmas gift [Oh yeah]
or anything you know

P: So you would puff your stomach out and=

M: =I would move it around
And I say tha— I say my husband left me in this condition

P: A:h (.) I see

So why (.) why did you always talk about your husband leaving
you? Why is that?

M: Because (.) it would go over [Mhm]
In those days there were a lot of— well they still do
A lot of husbands leave their wives while they're pregnant
But now they have welfare. We didn't have welfare than [Mhm]

In addition to these comic personae, Ms. Reyes did comic imitations of other female performers. Any other singer, dancer, or actress who came into contact with Ms. Reyes eventually received this treatment, and according to Ms. Reyes, most considered it a compliment.

²²⁶“My old man left me for another broad . . . and that broad was a fox.”

In all of these ways, Ms. Reyes converted the fears and foibles of her audience into a frank, gruff, and earthy style of comedy. Although she is mostly retired today, Ms. Reyes has continued to perform for senior citizen benefits and even make occasional nightclub appearances in her hometown of San Antonio, where the people who remember her more active days still show up to see her. During our interviews, she was planning a performance that ended up not taking place, in which a comic partner dressed as a nurse would push her onto the stage in a wheelchair. The partner would then help her to stand up, and Ms. Reyes would stand, shakily at first and leaning on a cane, and then throw away the cane and start dancing. In response to questions like “Aren’t you embarrassed to be dancing like that at your age,” she would snap back with a retort that was always her trademark: “*/Viejos los cerros y todavía soplan!*”²²⁷

CONCLUSION

Coquettish *cupletistas*, virginal *folklórico* dancers, clever *criaditas*, and bawdy *borrachitas* might at first seem to occupy different spheres of activity and deserve consideration in isolation from one another. But as this chapter has shown, the first half of the twentieth century saw these figures sharing the stages of theaters and tent shows throughout Mexico and those parts of the United States where ethnic Mexicans lived. Both the social revolution that occurred in Mexico during this time and the socioeconomic transition that occurred in the United States involved the rethinking of received expectations about masculine and feminine behavior. Gender identities were in

²²⁷This literally means “The hills are old, and they still blow.” “To blow” here means to be able or potent.

flux, and the popular theater was both a space of public reflection about these changes and an agent of change in its own right. Although theater offered women new opportunities for personal and professional autonomy, it would be a mistake to assume it provided female performers with a source of unqualified agency. In reality, their actions were never outside of power. Even as they deployed discourses of female beauty and fashion against their elders and class enemies, female performers also “became caught up in the new forms of subjection” that these discourses implied (Abu-Lughod 1990:52). For the body of the *vedette*, like that of the cover girl, was ultimately “is no one's body” (Barthes 1983:259), a *parole* to the *langue* of a reified but constantly changing masculinist ideal. Mrs. Robinson's comment that the audiences cheered the García sisters because their legs looked like dolls' legs reveals the degree to which an inanimate, mechanized standard of beauty had become the norm for women (Buck-Morss 1989:365). Caught between the Scylla of nationalism's retrograde gender politics and the Charybdis of fashion's false promises of freedom, the comedians offered a sort of “third way.” Of course, the aesthetic of parody that we can see in *rataplán*, *fantasía*, and the work of comedians like “La Chata” Noloesca and Mimi Reyes depended on its serious objects for its effect. Nevertheless, as they played with the tensions arising from clashing ideologies of gender, they offered the possibility of critical reflection on social change as well as entertainment.

This chapter has considered theatrical images of femininity in relation to one another and in isolation from the masculine images and character types discussed in Chapter 3. If we now compare these sets of stereotypes, it becomes clear that there is

considerable parallelism between them. In particular, the relationship between the *pelado/peladito* and the *catrín* seems analogous to that between the *peladita/criadita/borrachita* and the *pelona/agringada*. In both cases, we have a character that embodied self-destruction, destitution, and national particularity opposed to one that embodied self-care, wealth or pretensions to wealth, and the aspiration to transcend local and national identity through style. In both cases, the opposed characters embodied distinct sides of consumer life. The grotesque *peladito* and *peladita*, whose lives alternated between absolute deprivation and opportunistic excess as the characters scammed for food, tobacco, or alcohol, highlighted the consumer's dependence on and penetrability by the commodity. The visibly hand-to-mouth existence of these characters, in other words, highlighted the predicament of the consumer whose existence rides on having at least one end of his or her gut tied to a distribution system whose true extent and complexity escape the senses.²²⁸ By contrast, the *catrín* and the *pelona* figures were defined by a consumption that was external rather than internal to the body. These characters performed the growing need of even the most impoverished audience members to cobble together selves through commodities. Indeed, these characters seem to be most compelling when they display an ironic gap between evident intention and actual effect (Arbus 1972:2). When audiences saw holes in the dandy's white gloves and dark roots showing in the *pelona*'s bleached hair, they saw their own foibles, or those of others, depicted in sharp, concrete terms.

²²⁸ For this insight I am indebted to a discussion of composting toilets given by the Mexican academic and activist Gustavo Esteva in Austin in early 2001.

In spite of these parallels between the masculine and feminine stereotypes, there were clearly differences. The moral panic and controversy associated with the *pelado* character seem to have revolved around defects that were attributed to Mexican national character itself. The *pelona*, by contrast, inspired outrage not because she embodied Mexican character but because she sought to abandon it. Although the *peladitas* and *borrachitas* may have inspired similar moral panics, we seem to hear less about them than about the flapper, just as we seem to hear less about the *catrín* than about the *pelado*. My argument up to this point has been that greater Mexican popular theater offered audiences a gendered reflection on national identity and its contradictions, sometimes portraying national belonging as constituted by normative ways of being male and female within normative kinship structures, other times dwelling on the desires and practices that this ideology repressed. We have also seen the asymmetry in gendered critiques of ethnic Mexican consumer behavior and language mixing in the popular theater. The differential weighting of the analogous terms in the oppositions “*pelado—catrín*” and “*peladita—pelona/agringada*” provide yet another example of this asymmetry. It appears that the portrayals of masculine and feminine stereotypes in relation to the contradictions of national identity were mirror images of one another.

CHAPTER 8. THE RESTORATION OF CHICANO THEATER

Introduction

It has become a truism in anthropological studies of social memory that history is always the history of the present. This usually means that human beings define our senses of the past in the light of contemporary social and political concerns that offer problems in need of explanation or situations in need of justification. In the case of *mexicana/o* theater history in the United States, the truism seems to work. The most cursory review of the literature on that subject must lead to the conclusion that the emergence of a new ethnic Mexican theater after 1965 in an explicitly activist and non-profit mode created the conditions that made the historical work seem necessary and desirable. For non-participant outsiders, Chicano Theater²²⁹ was a problem to be explained; for activist Chicana/o and Latina/o scholars, it was a symbol of community pride whose roots needed to be described and affirmed. Both groups sought to provide some answer to the question of where the suddenly prominent theatrical culture associated with the Chicano Movement had came from. In response to this question, I could claim scholarly expertise, offer a definitive answer, and tell everybody to go home because the discussion is over. Instead, I choose to analyze the answers as metacultural discourse and offer my own metacultural discourse as one among many possible explanations, each of which highlights some aspects of the reality to be explained and

²²⁹ The term “Chicano Theater” is not gender inclusive, but it was the term that was used to refer to the movement theater of the 1960s and 1970s. I use it here in this historical sense, in part because I do not wish to whitewash the male domination that so many feminist commentators have criticized in that theater.

obscures others. My hope is to renew dialogue on the subject in part by drawing attention to the discussion's preconceptions.

My argument, in brief, is that explanations of the relationship between Chicano Theater (so named), which occur both in the explicit metacultural discourse of critics and historians and in the metacultural discourse and practice of actors, directors, playwrights, and other artists, fall within four basic camps. What I call the diffusionist view interprets Chicano Theater as the product of outside influences. Although non-Chicana/o critics tend to gravitate toward this view, they are not its only advocates. Diffusionist commentators tend to use horizontal spatial metaphors to describe the influences that they perceive. Logically opposed to the diffusionist view is the traditionalist view, which is popular with Chicana/o performers, critics, and historians. This view interprets Chicano Theater as the outgrowth of a long and more or less continuous history of ethnic Mexican performance in what is now the United States. Proponents of this view, as we saw in the Introduction, tend to rely on vertical metaphors of depth and 'roots.' A third, interpretation is what I call the autochthonous view, which understands Chicano Theater as the spontaneous response of ethnic Mexicans in the United States to the social and political conjuncture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This view shares a 'horizontal' orientation with the diffusionist view, and the two are often combined.

A final view, is the understanding of Chicano Theater as cultural revivalism, or more precisely, as a restored tradition. This understanding is present to some degree in many academic accounts of Chicano Theater but it is nowhere fully elaborated. In a sense the difference between understanding Chicano theater as restored tradition and

understanding it a tradition pure and simple is one of emphasis. The former view, which is closest to my own, highlights the willful creation of a meaningful connection with the past even in the face of observable historical discontinuities of practice. After reviewing the first three views, this chapter will outline the ways in which *mexicana/o* theater groups on both sides of “the” border have claimed the legacy of the earlier theater, especially *carpa* and other popular genres, since the late 1960s. This bi-national theatrical dialogue, I will argue, has centered on a cultural nationalist effort to restore and revalue a form that the commercial entertainment industry had discarded, and convert that form into tool for social change.²³⁰

This impossibility of engaging the history of ethnic Mexican performance in San Antonio without focusing on contemporary discourses of tradition became apparent to me in 1990, when I first came to San Antonio with the idea of studying the *carpas*. When I began to seek out contacts in San Antonio’s Chicana/o arts community, I was surprised, perhaps too surprised, to discover that someone with motivations similar to my own had already undertaken such a project. A Mexican-born playwright named José Manuel Galván-Leguizamo, on commission from the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, had just written and directed the play *Las tandas de San Cuilmas (los carperos)* ("The variety shows of 'San Cuilmas' (The *Carperos*)").²³¹ This work was based on material he had

²³⁰ This typology of metacultural views of theater is derived in part from Urban (1993).

²³¹ Cf. Haney 1999b for an analysis of “Las Tandas” which is basically sound but is marred by a few errors of fact. “San Cuilmas” is a vernacular nickname for San Antonio. “Cuilmas” is often used as a generic nickname for a dead-end town, so “San Cuilmas,” by a kind of ironic, affectionate extension, becomes San Antonio. According to Galván, residents of San Antonio were once stereotypically assumed to be moochers who would ask to borrow one cigarette and then ask for another to put behind their ears. This idea led to San Antonio being jokingly called “San Cuilmas el Orejón” (Saint Cuilmas of the Big Ears).

obtained from interviews with performers who had been active in theater and tent shows during the 1930s and 1940s, many of whom I would later consult myself. Although his end product was a play, Galván used expressly ethnographic methods to gather his material. Although I was pleased to see such a work undertaken, I admit to worrying that that it might render my own project redundant. After all, if Mexican Americans in San Antonio had already hired Galván to document their history through a play, what possible use could they have for a twenty-year old Kansan who was just leaning what it meant to be “Anglo” in Texas? That question, perhaps, can never be fully answered. Instead, I will use this final chapter to outline the discursive field of which my own study is part and the social conditions that have made it possible (Bourdieu 1977:4). This discursive production has involved the re-valuation of the earlier commercial popular theater, accomplished by the re-deployment of selected stylistic elements of that theater in new symbolic fields. This process is fundamentally linked to the complex intersections of race and class among ethnic Mexican in the United States and to related processes in Mexico.

Somewhere Between Brecht and Cantinflas

Most accounts of theater in the Chicano Movement as such begin in California with the Delano Grape Strike of 1965, when El Teatro Campesino was formed as an artistic and educational arm of César Chávez’s United Farm Workers’ Organizing Committee. This group inspired a vigorous, widespread grassroots artistic current among ethnic Mexicans in the United States (Huerta 1973:13). Between 1965 and 1980, over

one hundred Chicano Theater troupes of various sizes were formed in what *Caracol* magazine called a “creative explosion” (Garza 1978). Like other communities with large ethnic Mexican populations, San Antonio had its share of such groups, most notably Teatro de los Barrios (ca. 1969-ca. 1977) and the Chicano Arts Theater. Although Chicano Theater groups differed in their levels of experience and formality, they tended to share a non-profit orientation, a populist ethnic nationalism, a critique of U.S. imperialism, and a commitment to the struggle for Chicana/o civil rights and cultural autonomy. In addition to rallying support for that struggle among ethnic Mexicans, the *teatros* projected an image outward, attracting unprecedented attention from U.S. and European critics and forging ties with activist theater groups all over Latin America. *Teatro* thus became a “public face” (Urban 1993) for the community that it sought to bring together and represent.

On the metacultural level, Chicano Theater asserted its community’s historical existence within and difference from the encompassing nation-state. This forceful assertion might best be summarized with a phrase that remains popular with veterans of the *movimiento*: “*Aquí estamos y no nos vamos*” (“Here we are, and we’re not going anywhere”). In making this statement, *teatros* sought to situate themselves in relation to their audiences’ Indigenous, Mexican, and Spanish heritages. As Worthen has noted, a thematic preoccupation with the politics of history and community memory is evident from the beginnings of the Chicano Theater movement to the present day (1997:101). I would add that Chicano Theater groups have sought to invoke history through performance style itself. Luis Valdez’s early argument that Chicanismo demanded a

theater that was “revolutionary in technique as well as content” (1994 [1971]:7) shows how important the politics of style was to the movement. Through referential content, style, and explicit metacultural discourse, the *teatristas* who emerged from the movement have framed their actions as part of a long history of ethnic Mexican performance in what is now the southwestern United States. Research on this tradition has added weight and force to this assertion, as I have already detailed in the Introduction.

Non-Chicana/o commentators have often been slow to respond to this current of traditionalization in Chicano Theater, however. Even the more sympathetic mainstream coverage of the early days of the Chicano Theater movement, for example, tried to make sense of its object by linking it with performance traditions that were more familiar to and valued by non-Chicana/o audiences. For *Newsweek* (1967:79) and the *Wall Street Journal* (O'Connor 1967:12), for example, El Teatro Campesino and its progeny represented a revival of agitprop and of the American “living newspapers” of the 1930s. Other journalistic accounts explained *teatro chicano* as an outgrowth of U.S. avant-garde political theater of the time. *Time*, for example, noted the links between El Teatro Campesino and such groups as the San Francisco Mime Troupe and New York’s Bread and Puppets Theater (1968:72). In an article published in *Vogue*, of all places, Stan Steiner referred to El Teatro Campesino as “The Farmworkers’ Commedia Dell’Arte,” both by way of explanation and as an acknowledgement of Luis Valdez’s early work with that genre as part of the San Francisco Mime Troupe (1969:112). The work and theories of Berthold Brecht were and are often cited as possible sources of the style of Chicano Theater, and many Chicana/o groups themselves have claimed Brecht as an influence.

Other commentators, however, have suggested that much Chicano Theater is Brechtian “more in spirit than in specifics” (Goldsmith 1979:174), noting the Chicana/o groups’ emphasis on cultural nationalism, their emphasis on the emotional appeal of sound and movement, their use of forms drawn from Mexican tradition, their lack of an explicit dialectical analysis, and their tendency to offer solutions to problems presented on stage (172-173). Broyles-González notes that many of the members of El Teatro Campesino were unfamiliar with Brecht and that Brecht himself drew on traditions of people’s theater that bear some similarities across cultures (1994:247n3, 247-248n4).

Although none of the above attempts to explain Chicano Theater by reference to non-Chicana/o sources is necessarily wrong, taken as a group they tend to symbolically erase the ethnic Mexican antecedents of *teatro chicano*, either out of ignorance or out of willful neglect (3-4). By themselves, these accounts would have given the impression that *teatro chicano* was the product of diffusion from sources outside the *mexicana/o* community. In its most reductive form, the diffusionist view is analogous to the writings of those European and Euro-American cranks who find it easier to believe that aliens from outer space built the Maya pyramids than to accept that Maya people themselves were capable of doing so. It is important to recognize, however, that adherence to the diffusionist view does not necessarily imply rejection of the other possible views. Indeed, many of the fiercest proponents of the traditionalist view have their diffusionist moments.

As non-Chicana/o journalists and critics grappled with the emergence of Chicano Theater in the early 1960s, there was some question as to whether that performance even

belonged on the same metacultural plane as other theatrical activity. It is in part this confusion that has given rise to what I call the autochthonous view. Some of this ambiguity may have come from Luis Valdez himself, who is quoted in *Newsweek* as saying that El Teatro Campesino “shouldn’t be judged as theater, we’re really part of a cause” (1967:79). Chicano Theater, in other words, belonged not to the domain of theater but to that of politics. The same article notes that El Teatro Campesino performed that year at the Newport Folk Festival, suggesting a different but related interpretation: Chicano Theater as folklore or folk-theater. This idea has enjoyed a vigorous life, because it has appealed both to the populist nationalism of the *movimiento* and to Anglo stereotypes of the *mexicana/o* as peon.

As Jorge Huerta notes, these divergent understandings about the domain to which Chicano Theater belonged had advantages and disadvantages for the *teatristas* themselves.

There is a certain luxury in being a worker's theater, purposely didactic and admittedly unsophisticated. When Valdez's original troupe toured the United States denouncing wealthy growers and upholding the admirable cause of the defenseless farmworkers, the Teatro Campesino ... was not compared to regional theater, professional productions, or even to the evolving street theaters of the late sixties. ... When the Teatro Campesino left the ranks of the union to seek its own identity and to nourish its artistic vision and craft, it entered the mainstream of most theatrical activity in this country ... Teatro Campesino was professional and could be judged alongside any professional theater company in the nation (41)

Although El Teatro Campesino continues to retain its early association with the farmworkers' struggle as a badge of honor, its separation from that struggle cleared up

any doubts about the frame in which its actions were to be understood. The group, in other words, belonged to the metacultural plane of ‘art’ rather than that of ‘politics.’

Note that Huerta’s passage ends with a somewhat buried metaphor, in which different theater companies stand ‘alongside’ one another on a horizontal plane. A similar metaphor is implicit in Valdez’s oft-quoted assertion that El Teatro Campesino was “somewhere between Brecht and Cantinflas” (Goldsmith 1979:173). These statements imagine the relationship between artistic styles in spatial terms, with specific artists, companies, and theoretical currents represented as positions in synchronic fields of cultural production. At the time that the statements were made, El Teatro Campesino was a phenomenon to be explained, not a signpost in the symbolic field that could be used to explain something else. Such metaphors highlight the ahistorical character of the diffusionist and autochthonous interpretations of Chicano Theater, as well as their folklorizing variant. Both interpretations focus on Chicano Theater as part of a contemporary milieu without regard for its historical precedents within the Chicana/o community itself.

To Make Whole What has been Smashed

As we have seen, Chicana/o critics and performers have not been uniformly averse to the folkloristic and diffusionist interpretations; most have incorporated some version of these into their analyses. Their preference, however, has been to see Chicano Theater as the outgrowth of a long tradition of ethnic Mexican performance in the United States. The research that backs up this view, as outlined in the Introduction to this study,

has articulated a coherent challenge to existing understandings of U.S. literary and cultural history. Nevertheless applying the idea of tradition to Chicano Theater in relation to its pre World War II precursors is not a simple matter. Scholarship growing out of Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) critique of "invented" traditions has come around to seeing "tradition" itself not as a given but as an achievement, a continuous process of invention and re-invention (e.g. Bauman 1993; Dorst 1989). The facts reported in the academic literature on Chicano Theater since 1965 suggest that its practitioners have self-consciously and selectively re-imagined their community's history of performance. Of course, this work resonated with the current of folk revivalism that was everywhere present in the cultural production of the anti-war, student, and ethnic nationalist movements of the 1960s. Although such revivalism was by definition a traditionalizing discourse, it also, paradoxically enough, acknowledged breaks in tradition in its search for threatened artistic practices that needed be rescued from oblivion. I have chosen the term "restoration" rather than "revivalism" to characterize this current of metacultural thought and practice in Chicano Theater because of its resonance with contemporary theories of performance in which the idea of "restored behavior" is fundamental.

In characterizing Chicano Theater as a restored tradition, I draw in part on two theories of performance that, despite their differences in emphasis, remain more or less complementary. The first of these is Bauman's well-known formulation of performance as a mode of communication that "consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" (1978:11). In this view, the essence of performance lies in the fact that the performer offers the form of his or her

message to an audience for evaluation, leading to “special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression” (11). Richard Schechner’s less language-centered view of performance as restored or “twice behaved behavior” similarly hinges on the self-reflexive dimension of performance (1986:36). For Schechner, restoring behavior involves treating it

as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behavior can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. . . . restored behavior is the main characteristic of performance (35).

In other words, performance necessarily reifies and fetishizes behavior, abstracting it from its context, making it alien to the performer, yet subject to manipulation, and circulation. Both authors see performance as an emergent quality of all human action that acquires special salience in aesthetically and ritually heightened settings. But where Bauman emphasizes the synchronic “in the moment” quality of performance, Schechner draws attention to the importance of memory and a sense of the past in performance, noting that attempts to restore past events through performance are unstable and tend to slide into the restoration of an imagined past (38-39). What Bauman has called traditionalization is another example of this phenomenon (1993:131).

But if discourses of tradition are always acts of restoration, always enmeshed in contemporary senses of the past, who needs to recognize or name the “restored” quality of Chicano Theater? Does this move not undermine the claims to historical authority of the traditionalist literature and the memories of activists in the name of outsider privilege? That danger is always present, but to foreground the element of restoration in

Chicano Theater is also to recognize Chicana/o resilience in the face of a social order that offered and continues to offer marginalization and homogenization as mutually exclusive options. To give proper credit to the Chicana/o will to difference, we must acknowledge the magnitude of those forces and of the changes they wrought in ethnic Mexican communities in the United States after the second World War. Furthermore, it should be clear that the elements of Mexican identity that the Chicano Movement made into a heritage were themselves products of the long, conflictive history that the previous chapters of this dissertation have outlined. By acknowledging the historicity of the traditionalized art forms and the creativity of the act of recovery, we complete the work of restoration rather than undermining it.

Of course, such a move requires us to abandon the idea of Mexican tradition as a static, homogeneous, and bounded reserve of cultural goods that Chicano activists could draw upon or return to in a simple way. As we have seen in previous chapters, the invention of Mexican tradition was as much a characteristic of the commercial pre-World War II theater as it was of the activist theater of the 1960s. Chicano Theater, in other words, might be seen as the latest development in a tradition of traditionalization. It is a historical irony that the prewar popular theater, which was itself the vehicle of a sort of folk revivalism in the form of *costumbrismo*, should have become the object of such revivalism after 1965. Furthermore, the idea common in movement circles that Mexican culture in the United States was a leaky vessel that needed to be filled through art and performance may itself be seen as a continuity with the concerns of Mexican immigrant actors and newspaper reporters. What seems to distinguish the Chicano Theater

movement's efforts to restore the *carpa* and other forms of popular theater is that residual status of theater itself in the new social and technological conjuncture of the 1960s and 1970s.

The shift in productive relations in Texas that followed the Second World War made possible such welcome developments as greater social and economic mobility, increased political participation, and the end of *de iure* segregation for ethnic Mexicans (Montejano 1987:262-263). Nevertheless, that shift also coincided with the virtual collapse the *mexicana/o* theater industry in San Antonio. For many of my consultants, this time of community progress was a time of personal disaster. I have already mentioned how competition from national and Mexican films eroded local theater's commercial viability all over the southwestern United States. It is worth adding that neither the film industry in Hollywood nor its Mexico City counterpart appears to have offered many opportunities for U.S.-born or identified *mexicana/o* performers in spite of the ostensible social 'progress' in other areas. Of all the artists who worked San Antonio's *carpas* and *teatros* before World War II, only Ramiro "Pedro" González-González appears to have enjoyed significant success in Hollywood.²³² None of the San Antonio performers appears to have made any inroads in the film industry in Mexico, which might have been marginally more hospitable to their language and acting style.²³³ Furthermore, as time went on, audiences faced with novel opportunities to participate in

²³² Both Mimi Reyes and Rolando Morales appear to have landed a few small roles, but Mr. González is undoubtedly the only well-known U.S. film personality to have emerged from Spanish-language vaudeville in San Antonio.

²³³ San Antonio performers, however, have often expressed concern about the reaction of Mexican audiences to their Texas Spanish.

the mainstream turned their back to a certain extent on the ethnically marked forms that had spoken to them before war. In 1959, the Lucchese family built the Teatro Alameda on Houston Street. The inauguration of this building with its large capacity, sumptuous furnishings, and impressive Art Deco marquee marked the entry into political maturity of the city's Mexican American middle class. Largely dedicated to the showing of films, especially films from Mexico, the Alameda Theater was also the site of the occasional live performance.²³⁴ Not far down the street, at the corner of Commerce and Santa Rosa, the Teatro Nacional was also dedicated mainly to films, although some musical acts such as Elvis impersonations by local singer Antonio de Sevilla's occasionally found their way onto the bill.²³⁵

The Alameda's building housed the offices of KCOR, San Antonio's first Spanish-language radio station, and KWEX, a Spanish-language television station. We have already described how local electronic media provided career opportunities for some former vaudevillians during the 1950s and 1960s. Lalo Astol, to cite a prominent example, continued to work as an announcer and well-known local radio personality well into the 1980s. The vast majority of performers, however, found no work in the electronic media. Some enjoyed stints with the USO during World War II, and after the war, many were forced to tour South and West Texas, where the market for live theatrical entertainment appears to have lasted longer, to leave for such cities as New York and Los

²³⁴ For this all-too-brief account of the Alameda, I draw on conversations Sam Gorena of San Antonio's Centro Alameda as well as Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Rose Catácalos, both of whom were conducting research for a monograph on the Alameda during the time I was doing fieldwork from 1999 to 2000. As a field assistant for this project, I benefited from exposure to their interviews.

²³⁵ My source for this is Esther Robinson, who participated in some musical shows at the Nacional during this period. El Vez, it seems, was not the first.

Angeles, to find work in nightclubs and strip shows, or to leave the performing arts altogether. Some, of course, took the supposedly honorable route of finding more legitimized day jobs, performing in community theaters and church halls when they found the opportunity. Kanellos notes that such community theater survived “well into the 1950s” (1990:90). Nevertheless, the obvious economic hardships occasioned by these developments took their toll, and many performers have recalled in interviews that they felt abandoned by the public they had entertained for so long.

The end of the live entertainment for ethnic Mexicans as a commercial enterprise took a particular toll on extended families like the Monsiváis brothers and the Garcías for whom theater was not a job but a business. Kinship relations that had once been relations of production now found themselves strained. The Monsiváis family settled in the small town of Kenedy in the early years of the war and made a living afterward by showing Mexican films to the locals. Carlos Monsiváis’s daughter Normalinda recalls that the reception was sometimes rough. Local children at school taunted her and her sister, calling them “húngaras” (“Gypsies”) and “botas miadas” (“pissboots”) because of their association with the tent show.²³⁶ Although the locals in Kenedy eventually warmed to the Monsiváis family, economic realities made it impossible for the five brothers and their families to continue working as an economic unit. Daniel left in the 1940s for Ontario, California, and after many years stopped writing to Kenedy. Some of the family remained in the small town, while others moved to the San Antonio area. The Garcías experienced economic stress and family discord in the years following World War II as

²³⁶ NM9.21.2000-1:1

doña Teresa's health declined and the men of the family found themselves obliged to work as laborers. Manolo continued to play piano and eventually landed a job in law enforcement and made extra money by playing with his *orquesta* at military bases on weekends. Brothers Rodolfo and Raymundo found jobs with the custodial staff at City Hall, and Raymundo also played drums with his brother's group. Rodolfo eventually became a foreman, Raymundo a supervisor. At this time we can only guess about the Abreus' situation.

Many of these individuals who had been involved in commercial popular theater before World War II in San Antonio were around during the Chicano Movement, but they seem not to have had much contact with activists who formed theater groups there in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As the movement progressed, some Chicano *teatristas* did make contact with Rodolfo García, in part because of his sons' political and cultural activity. Inspired by Mr. García's *pelado* character, these performers appear to have developed with him the sort of relationship that some rock musicians of the period developed with elderly bluesmen. These contacts continued through the decade of the 1970s, and in 1979 a Festival of Chicano Theater honored the Carpa García and included versions of *carpa* sketches. Although members of the García family participated in occasional church fundraisers from the 1950s to the early 1970s, they seem not to have taken part in any performances related to the Chicano Movement during that time. As far as I have been able to determine, the Garcías were the only group of artists from the prewar *farándula* to have had even this level of extensive contact with the next generation of performers. San Antonio is not the world, of course. As in the prewar

years, it was California, not Texas that became the key center of theatrical energy during the *movimiento*. In other parts of the country, the gulf between Chicano Theater and its commercial precursors may not have been so stark, and the revivalist interaction with *carpa* performers may not have been occurred. What is clear is that Chicano *teatristas*, like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, were facing backwards as they moved forward, striving to create something new out of the cultural rubble of the segregated social order they were helping to finish off (1969:257).

Restored Tradition and the Politics of Style in Chicano Theater

In San Antonio in the 1960s, the signs of the city's theatrical past were there for those who knew where to look. Most of the theater houses had been converted into cinemas or other uses, but the occasional live show still occurred, and a few lucky veterans of the city's old theater industry still worked in Spanish-language television and radio. It seems likely that the occasional Mexican circus still visited town. Nevertheless, Jorge Piña, the current director of San Antonio's Urban 15 Dance Troupe and a former Theater Arts Director at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, related to me that in his early days he was unprepared for the community's response when he and other teenaged activists performed topical sketches in public places during the beginnings of the *movimiento*.

I remember una viejita [“a little old lady”] just hugging me
and I had never had a stranger give me a hug.
And here I was sixteen and she says “¡Ustedes son como los carperos!”
[“Y'all are like the carperos!”]

I didn't know who they were.²³⁷

If Piña's anecdote is representative, it suggests a paradoxical combination of overt cultural amnesia and covert cultural persistence. If the *viejita* did see something familiar in the young men's act, it was probably not language per se—Piña recalls that his ears “weren't sharp at that point with the Spanish”—but rather an irreverent attitude and a broad slapstick style of movement, aspects of body hexis that could survive language shift. During the late 1960s and early 1970s performers like Piña came to realize that they were not the first ethnic Mexicans in the city to perform in front of an audience, and this discovery led them to seek to rediscover the history that their parents had not passed on to them. It is this process that I call restoration.

It is worth noting that the beginnings of an understanding of Chicano Theater as restored tradition are already present in the literature. For example, in an article on the folkloric character of Chicano Theater, Kanellos notes that El Teatro Campesino had “carefully selected and elaborated Mexican folk motifs” in a self-conscious attempt to educate its audience about Chicana/o culture, please that audience by presenting familiar materials, and “purposefully create a type of theater that [was] consistent with Mexican-American tradition” (1987:17-18). Here Kanellos intends to contrast El Teatro Campesino with groups that were less “professional” and less self-conscious and selective about their approach to tradition, suggesting that such groups were somehow more genuinely “folkloric.” Kanellos takes El Teatro Campesino's folk revivalism as central to the whole Chicano Theater aesthetic.

²³⁷ JP8.11.1999-1:1

El Teatro Campesino acknowledged a deep-rooted tradition in the Southwest. And El Teatro Campesino took the lead, not only in reviving the neighborhood parishes' Guadalupe plays, but also in fashioning its performance style after the Mexican tent theaters. These traveling circus theaters were commonly known as *carpas* or *maromas*. El Teatro Campesino developed one-act plays modeled on the *revistas* or revues that were performed in these *carpas* and also incorporated into their works the beloved, comic character of that tradition: that *pelado* (87-88).

According to Broyles-González, Valdez himself recalls having seen the Circo Hermanos Escalante as a child in California (1994:10). She notes that Felipe Cantú, an older farmworker who was steeped in the tradition of greater Mexican vernacular humor and who performed with the group before it separated from the union, was particularly influential in transmitting the working-class Mexican aesthetic represented by the *carpa* to the group (13-15). These statements suggest that the direct influence of the *carpa* on the Teatro Campesino comes through their memories as audience members, rather than the process by which earlier *carpa* performers had passed their performance skills on to their children.

Many commentators see the influence of the *carpa* in El Teatro Campesino's early *actos*, because of the group's broad, bawdy, intensely physical style of acting, the use of larger-than-life stock characters, the importance of improvisation, and the *sketch* format (e.g. Ybarra-Frausto 1971:52; Cárdenas de Dwyer 1979:161).²³⁸ While this may well have been true, it seems that the group did not seek in its public statements to draw attention to the heritage of its performance style in its early years, when it was focused on the specific concerns of the farm labor movement. In an interview published in *Tulane*

²³⁸ These commentators tend to use the term 'improvisation' rather loosely. Greater attention to what was planned and what was unplanned in Chicano Theater would be welcome.

Drama Review, for example, Valdez comments extensively on his recent work with the San Francisco Mime Troupe but does not mention the Mexican antecedents of El Teatro Campesino at all (Bagby 1967). Indeed, most of his public statements that I have found about the group's work during this early (pre-1970) period give a sense of forging a new performance style through a process of experimentation using actors who were not familiar with theater. Self-conscious proclamations about tradition do not yet seem to appear.

Part of this sense of newness comes from the group's decision to coin a new name, the *acto*, for the short, comic pieces that it created. In his early writings, Valdez portrays the adoption of this name as a casual choice, the result of pressing need and expediency.

We could have called them ‘skits,’ but we lived and talked in San Joaquín Valley Spanish (with a strong Tejano influence), so we needed a name that made sense to the raza. Cuadros, pasquines, autos, entremeses all seemed too highly intellectualized. We began to call them actos for lack of a better word, lack of time and lack of interest in trying to sound like classical Spanish scholars. De todos modos éramos raza, (quién se iba a fijar?) (1994 [1971]:12).

In this oft-quoted but seldom analyzed passage, Valdez does not mention the possibility of using “*sketch*,” the term that was known and used among *carperos*. Indeed, Chicano Theater seems to have dispensed with the generic classifications that were salient in the earlier popular theater. Together with the novel name, the characterization of the *acto* as the result of a process of experimentation gives a sense of a break with the past. For Valdez, the most important break, of course, is with the tradition of “white western European (gabacho) proscenium theater” (11), but the focus of the metacultural discourse

that was contemporary with the early *actos* is their novelty rather than their links to the past. Nevertheless, the similarity between the *acto* its precursors is inescapable. “La quinta temporada” (“The Fifth Season”), for example, clearly echoes the *teatro de revista* in its use of allegorical characters to represent the seasons.

There is also an added metacultural dimension, a populist, nationalist sentiment implicit in Valdez’s suggestion that the name “acto” was a hastily conceived, ad-hoc solution: “After all, we were Raza. Who was going to care?” This sentiment draws on a current of ironic self-deprecation that is common in greater Mexican vernacular humor (Paredes 1993:60). In movement theater, performers and audiences often valued political commitment, sincerity, spontaneity, and enthusiasm over technical brilliance and expressed an appreciation, sometimes tinged with gentle irony, for performances in which the rough edges showed. For playwright and critic Carlos Morton, this was a theater “as homegrown as chile and frijoles” (1975:74). His review of a mid-1970s performance by a group called Teatro Latino at a Midwestern festival exemplifies these values.

Admitting, quite frankly, that ‘they knew little about harmony’ and other such tricks of the trade, they sang for the pure joy of it and invited anyone to join in. It worked. The audience appreciated their rasquachiness and it was evident later on, after the crowd had gone home, and they and Chuy Negrete were jamming—that Grupo Latino is better appreciated in informal and more intimate surroundings (1976:96).

Here “rasquachi” seems to refer to the unpolished nature of the performance, but for other commentators, its meaning is more complex. Ybarra-Frausto (and, following him, Broyles-González) sees the term as denoting an aesthetic that unites a taste for

flamboyant bricolage with a witty, impertinent optimism in the face of oppression. It is the sensibility of those who are down, but not out, of those who manage to survive elegantly on the margins (1990:156).

Ybarra-Frausto maintains that “newly anointed” middle-class Chicanas/os have a tendency

to deny a connection with anything remotely rasquache. Hints of such association too readily invoke the rough-and-tumble slapdash vitality of barrio life-styles recently abandoned in the quest for social mobility (1990:156).

Yet many Chicano Theater groups other than El Teatro Campesino were university-affiliated (Huerta 1973:14). Although the actors came from various walks of life, many were students whose claims to middle class status were recent and uncertain and whose memories of working class upbringings and contact with relatives who had not “made it” fed a sense of populism. They instinctively rejected the norms and techniques of what Valdez called the “limp, superficial gringo seco productions” of the professional and academic theater (1994[1971]:6). Associating these artistic tools with institutions that were set up to marginalize them, many performers sought refuge in a slapped-together, self-consciously amateurish aesthetic, celebrating their very lack of technique as a sign of intimacy, sincerity, and authenticity. Like Chicana/o visual artists of the time, *teatristas* sought to “provoke the accepted ‘superior’ norms of the Anglo-American with the everyday reality of Chicano cultural practices” (Mesa-Bains 2002).

Theresa Mason, in an unpublished thesis on *teatro chicano* in Texas, notes a similar “anti-aesthetic” at work in the performances of San Antonio’s Teatro de los

Barrios and a group at the University of Texas at Austin called Carnales en Espíritu (“Brothers in Spirit”) (1977:24). Indeed, she suggests that the sensibility of these groups poses a challenge to Bauman’s conception of performance as a display of communicative competence. If performance is to be understood in this way, then surely Morton’s review of Grupo Latino above, which praises their technical failings, is anomalous. Note, however, that Bauman’s theory assumes that the evaluative criteria by which an audience will evaluate a communicative act cannot be known in advance, but must rather be investigated empirically. Mason’s own study shows quite clearly that for the *teatros* she worked with and their audiences, the anti-aesthetic was based clearly defined set of principles. “Anything goes” was not the order of the day for *teatros chicanos* and their audiences. Rather, these groups elaborated an explicit metadiscourse that emphasized referential (political/ideological) content and artistic accessibility, this last criterion usually phrased as providing something audiences could “relate to”(Mason 1977:25). Performers “real” identities and attitudes were understood to be visible on stage and clearly distinguished from those of the characters they played (71). Although those characters were broadly drawn and stereotypical, played without regard for psychological realism (28), the performers’ own emotional attitudes toward the characters and belief in the messages of the *actos* were nevertheless on display and subject to evaluation in their own right (25). Mason’s interviewees described this aesthetic of enthusiasm, urgency, and emotional authenticity, which is also notable in Morton’s review quoted above, in terms of “energy” or the lack thereof (*ibid.*).

As *teatro* came to occupy increasingly prominent place in the artistic life of the movement during the early 1970s, an explicitly revivalist interest increased in both the *carpa* aesthetic and a reconstructed form of indigenous Mesoamerican religious practice whose most common variety is known as *danza azteca*. I have as yet found no evidence that acrobatic feats or such performance genres as contortionist acts, ventriloquism, magic shows, and mentalist acts, all of which played an important role in *carpa*, became objects of restoration during the Chicano theater movement. Rather, the movement seems to have zeroed in on the *sketch* and the *pelado*-comedian as key resources for making political theater. The increasingly overt restorationist discourse coincided with, and may have been inspired by increasing contact between Chicano Theater groups with avant-garde political theater groups in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

Although restoration of the *carpa* was never controversial in these exchanges, the mythico-religious elements generated considerable controversy, as we will see. The dialogue between Chicano Theater groups and their Latin American counterparts never led to the level of integration and collaboration that many had originally hoped, but it did establish cross-border social networks among performers and create conditions for mutual influence.

This was important for *carpa* restoration because in Mexico, the form had survived commercially roughly a decade longer than it had in the United States. Furthermore, unlike the United States, where racial typecasting limited the opportunities for *carpa* performers in the film and television industries, the *carpa* in Mexico was a significant source of talent for the national media industry. For this reason, politically

radical theater groups who sought to adapt the aesthetic of the popular theater had a richer set of living examples and more recent memories to draw upon than did their counterparts in the United States. One of the first and most prominent Mexican theater groups to take an interest in cross-border dialogue was El Grupo Mascarones. Established in 1962 in Mexico City, Mascarones was one of fifteen Latin American theater groups invited to the 1970 Chicano theater festival in San José California. There, artistic director Mariano Leyva, emerged as “a leading director and spokesperson among Chicano theaters for the struggles in his country and in all of Latin America” (Huerta 1983:70). The group drew on the *carpa* tradition in its work, as well as adapting the plots of *corridos* as stage productions. Mascarones was particularly noted for a form of choral poetry that Huerta has described as “disciplined and effective,” and which made a great impression on the Chicano groups, so much so that Teatro de los Barrios adapted it for their most successful piece, “El otro lado del Alamo” (*ibid.*).

This technique was partly inspired by the Greek chorus, something that would have been anathema to the populist Chicana/o groups, as Huerta notes.

During the early period in the development of the teatro movement, it would have been useless for a director from the traditional commodity theater to proclaim that the Chicanos should or could get anything out of the Greeks and their theater. But coming from a man like Leyva, whose commitment to a popular theater was evident, the suggestion could be taken seriously and with respect (71).

Although Mascarones was at this time strongly identified with the downtrodden elements of Mexican society—many of its members came from the *preparatoria popular*, a high school run by radical students for those who were not served by the education system—it

did not share the Chicana/o experience of racial enclavement. Perhaps for that reason, it was more inclined to see a prestigious and supposedly universal form like Greek theater as a resource than its Chicana/o counterparts, for whom classical European antiquity had become a symbol of the society that excluded them.

Mascarones continued to participate in *encuentros* in the United States, and two years later it took part in the 1972 World Fair in Nancy, France, collaborating with El Teatro Campesino on a performance against the war in Vietnam.²³⁹ The work was also a comment on the Paris peace talks, which were then in progress. In Mexico, the group performed frequently in rural areas, traveling by burro to remote indigenous communities and using interpreters to present works of political theater. Recovery of the *carpa* aesthetic was an important aspect of Mascarones's style, as evidenced in their play *Don Cacamáfer*, a study of agrarian problems in rural Mexico that was featured alongside El Teatro Campesino's *La frontera* in the 1973 film "Somos uno" (Treviño 1973). The artistic similarities between these pieces clearly show that the restoration of the *carpa* was both the medium and the object of a binational dialogue among radical *mexicana/o* theater groups who saw the form as the embodiment of their own populist sensibility.

In the case of El Teatro Campesino, the self-conscious exploration of the *carpa* style was accompanied by a turn away from a purely agit-prop approach towards a nationalist mysticism inspired by Valdez's interpretations of Pre-Colombian indigenous thought and its intersections with Catholicism. The key genre of this tendency was the

²³⁹ JMG7.16.97-1:1. Cf. Broyles-González 1994:243 for a timeline of El Teatro Campesino's activity that mentions the World's Fair in Nancy, but not the collaboration with Mascarones.

mito (“myth”), a ritualistic dramatic form designed to communicate the group’s emerging philosophy. Broyles-González and others note that this move was partly the result the influence of the Conchero dancer Andrés Segura, who first visited El Teatro Campesino in 1970, and of the philosopher Domingo Martínez-Paredez (1994:85). Carlos Morton has noted that the group’s newfound mysticism was also a reaction to political events.

... the era of Valdez’s direct influence in the old *Movimiento* ended with the 1970 Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles, which resulted in several deaths and a bloody riot. Valdez never envisioned violence. There is a saying around San Juan Bautista that goes: ‘Think up a monster and it will come to your door.’ So the Teatro began to work more and more on *corridos* ... and *mitos* (religious re-enactments of life), which dealt more with the Chicano as a universal/cosmic entity (1974:73).

Although the demonstrations and organizing continued, the repressive law enforcement response to the popular uprisings of which the Chicano Movement and its theater were a part took its toll. For many, it was becoming clear that the revolution that many activists and artists had envisioned was not coming any time soon, and that the “establishment” was riding out the crisis more or less intact. In 1971, El Teatro Campesino moved to the forty-acre plot of land in San Juan Bautista, California that it still occupies, to grow corn and beans, learn the language that academics call “Náhuatl,” develop new theatrical productions, and exhume “the spirits of [its]... *indio* past” (71).²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Some speakers of the language often called Náhuatl reject that label in favor of such labels as “Mexicano” (Hill 1986). The idea of the “Indio” as “past” is itself controversial. Broyles-González, for example, argues forcefully against Marxist critics of El Teatro Campesino who, in her view, sought to construct indigenous culture as “a static thing of the ‘remote’ or ‘mythical’ past. El Teatro Campesino, she argues, saw indigenous “knowledge and science as something pertaining equally to past, present, and future” (1994:121). It is worth noting however, that in most of his *movimiento*-era pronouncements about the Teatro’s mythico-religious turn, Valdez speaks of the Mexica and Maya in the past tense and links these cultures squarely with the past. This is even true in relation to the Teatro’s staging of the Yukatek Mayan ‘*Baile de los gigantes*,’ which El Teatro Campesino adapted from ethnographic accounts (Shank 1975:62), in spite of Valdez’s admonition in *Pensamiento serpentino*: DO NOT GO TO THE MAYAS/ TO ANY OF

It was during this time that, influenced by Segura and Paredez, the group developed a mode of performance training called the Theater of the Sphere, which sought to unify the actor with the broader cosmos according to an interpretation of Mayan thought (Broyles-González 1994:79-127). Although this philosophical system sought to cultivate ways of living and performing that were opposed to the norms of the U.S. “mainstream,” it bore more than a passing resemblance to currents that were becoming prominent in some sectors of the White counterculture of the time and have generated what is now called “New Age” spirituality. In performances inspired by this vision, the group faced a considerable challenge, not the least of which was the fact that many Chicanas/os were unfamiliar with and did not necessarily identify with the mythology that informed the Theater of the Sphere (Huerta 2000:19). For El Teatro Campesino, however, performing the *mito* and learning its accompanying disciplines were as much a process of self-exploration as an effort to reach out to an audience (Morton 1975:75; Yarbro-Bejarano 1979:181). For Valdez, this turn was partly a matter of *zeitgeist*: “the Sixties was a time of outward explosion, while the Seventies is a time of inward explosion” (Morton 1974:75).

One of the most prominent outward theatrical manifestations of this “inward explosion” was *La gran carpa de la familia Rasquachi*. This piece, which was El Teatro Campesino’s first full-length collective work, has enjoyed a long life. After its premiere in 1973 at the fourth annual Festival de los Teatros Chicanos in San Jose, it became a

OUR INDIGENA FOREFATHERS/ WITH ANTHROPOLOGY IN YOUR MIND (1994:186, capital letters in original). In many ways, El Teatro Campesino seems to have unwittingly participated in the dynamic of Mexican nationalism that values dead Indians over living ones.

standard of sorts, which the group carried to Mexico, to various locations in the United States, on two European tours in the late 1970s, and even to U.S. public television. Recently, a younger generation of *Campesino* performers, many of them Luis Valdez's children, has revived the work. *La gran carpa* fused the *acto* and *mito* genres, combining the buffoonery and sociopolitical commentary of the former with an extravagant, solemn ritualism and characters representing divine figures and elemental forces of nature. To this mixture, the group added a *corrido* about the protagonist, thus uniting in one production an eclectic collection of aesthetic forms and that had become important for twentieth-century Mexican nationalism.

In its initial 1973 incarnation, the play was a triptych, consisting of an *acto* flanked by two *mitos* (Yarbro-Bejarano 1979:177). Huerta describes a performance in 1974 at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angles, the first performance by a Chicana/o troupe at that venue, as consisting of four parts (1982:199-205). In all of the plays various incarnations, the central character was Jesús Pelado Rasquachi, an example of the *pelado* figure so central to the *carpas*. In the play, he is a Mexican immigrant everyman whose poverty forces him to cross the border into the United States. There, he is ruthlessly exploited in his job and takes his frustrations out on his family. Throughout the play, a devil figure representing the U.S. social order torments him in such socially dominant roles as boss and priest. After Jesús Pelado dies, his two sons become important men obsessed with power: one a politician the other a drug dealer. They die in a final, fratricidal conflict (Huerta 1982:201). The final scene is an enactment of the Aztec myth of Quetzalcóatl, in which *indígena* spirituality is presented as the solution to the problems

just presented. According to Huerta, the 1974 version at the Mark Taper Forum ended with the cast chanting “In lak’ech,” a saying from a Mayan language often translated into Spanish as “Tú eres mi otro yo” and into English as “You are my other self” which became a catch-phrase of the *indigenista* current of the Chicana/o movement (202).

Much has been written about the controversy that El Teatro Campesino’s mythico-religious turn attracted, especially from Marxist elements in the movement (Huerta 1982:203; Broyles-González 1994:120-122). Mason notes that Teatro de los Barrios was among the critics of El Teatro Campesino’s new mysticism (1977:25-26). When *La gran carpa* was performed in Mexico City at the 1974 Quinto Festival de Teatros Chicanos/Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano, the gathering was divided along much the same lines. The event was hosted by Mascarones and CLETA, the Centro de Experimentación Teatral y Artística (“Center for Theatrical and Artistic Experimentation), two groups that were already at odds over the issue of political collaboration with the Mexican regime after the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco (Marrero 2002:42-43). Leyva, who was by then a *diputado* (“Federal Congressman”), exercised his influence with the Mexican president to secure entry and transportation for the Chicano groups, bringing them together with New Popular Theater organizations from all over Latin America. The gathering was titled “Un continente, una cultura” (“One continent, one culture”), but according to most accounts, a tense atmosphere of ideological wrangling pervaded the event in spite of a number of extraordinary performances. According to Castillo, this was the result of both the idealized view that the hundreds of Chicana/o participants had of Latin America and the Latin American

groups' relative ignorance of the Chicana/o reality (1974:75). Valdez himself has expressed the opinion that the event was premature and would have been more successful if it had occurred later (personal communication 2003).

El Teatro Campesino's performance of *La gran carpa* and of the Chortí Mayan "Baile de los gigantes" were extremely controversial, eliciting polemics from such prominent figures as Enrique Buenaventura of the Teatro Experimental de Cali and the Brazilian Augusto Boal. These luminaries criticized Valdez for advocating religiosity and nationalism rather than atheism and proletarian internationalism (Yarbro-Bejarano 1979:179-181; Castillo 1974:75). Although these critiques never led El Teatro Campesino to abandon its search for redemption in Aztec and Mayan philosophy and ritual, they did seem to have an effect on subsequent versions of *La gran carpa*. Yarbro-Bejarano notes that this is particularly evident in the televised version of the play, which opened not with a mythologized historical progression but a group of farmworkers in a truck singing the *corrido* of Jesús Pelado Rasquachi. She argues that this change was an effort "to place cultural and mythical content in the social and historical context of Chicanos today," an effort symbolized by the change of the work's name from "La gran carpa de la familia Rasquachi" to "El *corrido* de los Rasquachis" (1979:184). Note that for the public television audience, the "*carpa*," a term no doubt unfamiliar to non-*mexicanas/os* is replaced by the "*corrido*." In this version, folk song appears to have trumped folk theater as the premier symbol of *lo mexicana/o*. With this change the group may have signaled a move away from the aesthetic of the earlier popular theater, although one could argue that the later *Zoot Suit* echoes the revolutionary *revista* in many

ways and continues the group's practice of using residual expressive styles as dramatic resources.²⁴¹

The Restoration Goes On

In 1993, I had the good fortune to attend the TENAZ (Teatros Nacionales de Aztlán) festival, a Chicana and Chicano Theater festival that had been happening since the 1970s, in San Antonio together with Rodolfo García. I took him to see a comedy troupe from out of town, thinking that as a former comedian, he would particularly appreciate the work of his successors. Once the show began in the restored Guadalupe theater, however, I quickly realized that the actors' heavy reliance on English would make their performance difficult for him to follow. The comedians, a small group of college-educated men in their early- to mid-twenties, delivered an enthusiastic barrage of jokes, sometimes speaking so quickly that I myself had trouble understanding them. Their performance was heartfelt and theme-driven, with more focus on the jokes themselves and their political implications than on the niceties of technique and theatrical language. Many of the jokes were clever, and I found something appealing about the unpolished, rough-and-ready character of the performance. Mr. García sat quietly and politely through the show, seldom laughing, and I began to wish I had taken him to one of the more technically sophisticated works on the program, perhaps to El Teatro Experimental de Cali's *Crónica*, Su Teatro's *Ludlow: El grito de las minas* (García 1994), or the surreal masked comedy of a reconstituted Grupo Cultural Zero. As I drove

²⁴¹ Broyles-González's account of *Zoot Suit* is unexcelled, and I have little to add to it here (1993:177-214).

him home from the theater afterwards, I asked his opinion of the younger comedians.

“Mira,” he replied, weighing his words carefully, knowing I might spread them, “lo que hacen los del Teatro Guadalupe lo hacen por amor al arte. Nosotros d’eso vivíamos” (“Look, what the people from the Guadalupe Theater do, they do for the love of art. We [in my family] had to make a living at that.”)

For many of the Chicana and Chicano actors present at the festival, this was true, but the self-consciously amateurish comedy troupe was more the exception than the rule at the festival, however much it may have resembled Grupo Latino as described by Morton. In the years since the end of the charismatic phase of the Chicano Movement, Chicana/o Theater in the United States has created an increasingly firm institutional base in the form of non-profit organizations that derive support from a mixture of grants, governmental arts funding, and membership. A drive to professionalize the field that began in the late 1970s, has led to a greater sophistication in presentation. Furthermore, many individuals with university training in theater are now active in *teatro chicana/o*, and some noted directors and playwrights have found secure “gigs” in the academy. Many of the non-profit organizations, such as the Theater Arts program at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, Dever’s Su Teatro, and others, depend on actors who maintain day jobs and rehearse and perform on evenings and weekends (Martínez 2002:18). Although numerous recent anthologies of Chicana and Chicano plays attest to the vitality of ethnic Mexican dramatic literature in the United States, Martínez notes that opportunities for ethnic Mexican actors and directors remain scarce at ‘mainstream’ theater institutions.

This situation continues to create a paradoxical mixture of chronic underemployment for *mexicana/o* actors and a scarcity of professional performers (*ibid.*).

Since the early 1980s, Chicana/o theater groups, actors, and playwrights have continued to returned to the legacy of *carpas* (“tent shows”) and other forms of popular theater, alluding to their memory in the titles of their works, thematic material, program notes, publicity materials, and perhaps most importantly, in their performance styles and practices. The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, which is housed in the old Guadalupe Theater, has taken this aesthetic of recovery as central not only to performance but to the organization’s physical presence. The physical restoration of the Guadalupe, which had fallen into disrepair and was being used as a flea market in the late 1970s, was central to the activists’ vision of the arts as a force for neighborhood development.²⁴² The 1989 and 1991 productions of *Las tandas de San Cuilmas* focused particular attention on the *carpas*. In recent years, El Teatro Campesino’s *La gran carpa de la familia Rasquachi*, which premiered in 1973, has recently been revived by the troupe’s younger generation of actors. In 2001, University of Texas theater professor Amparo García Crow wrote and directed *La Carpa García*, an “American musical of Mexican descent” on the rise and fall of LULAC co-founder Gus García, in a style meant to evoke that of the *carpas*. This work continues to evolve and promises to reappear. Some two years earlier, Su Teatro in Denver, Colorado staged a work by their director, Tony García, titled *La Carpa Aztlán Presents ‘I Don’t Speak English—Only,’* in which a

²⁴² A full discussion of the renovation of the Guadalupe Theater and the work of the Avenida Guadalupe Association since 1981 would require a book in itself.

carpa is the source of memory and identity for ethnic Mexicans in a homogenized, dystopian future (Wiley 1998). Comedians like the members of Culture Clash, one of the few professional theater groups to identify as Chicano, and performers such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1993) have all claimed in one way or another to be rooted in the *carpa* aesthetic.

I would suggest that these discourses have proliferated in part because they appeal to a more or less politically liberal *mexicana/o* professional and managerial class that made up the audience for many of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center's theatrical productions during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This ethnically marked class fraction looks nostalgically to the *barrio* and the small south Texas town for a source of authenticity and cultural identity, and its self-conscious interest in documenting its roots may be seen as one localized example of the aesthetic of self-ethnography that, according to John Dorst, characterizes late capitalism (1989). The *carpa*, in this analysis, would be one of many cultural practices that have been converted into signifiers of themselves in the current social and political juncture.

Of course, the desires that animate attempts to re-construct the *carpa* also have deeper historical roots. As part of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism, due in part to the influence of Herder, the idea of folklore itself involved the construction of an internal Other, usually the peasantry, in which the true, authentic national identity of the bourgeois self was thought to lie. In James Fernández's terms, nationalistic folklore studies provided the European bourgeoisie with a way of achieving mastery by predicating the distinctiveness of the "national" peasantry onto its emerging, inchoate

sense of self (Fernandez 1986:36). This peasantry was understood as representing the past of the bourgeois self, mapping a sentimental temporality onto social hierarchy. Although such identification with "the folk" has always had a "downward" motion, it has also re-valorized that motion, leading paradoxically to a simultaneous adornment and disparagement of the bourgeois self with the trappings of peasant identity. This predication has always been incomplete and unstable, resulting in a quest for a communion with a national soul that has always seemed to have disappeared just yesterday. National identification has thus been based on a paradox of identification and estrangement.

These dynamics have continued to inform twentieth-century nationalisms, including that of the Chicano movement. Nevertheless, I would suggest that critiques of European nationalism cannot be easily mapped onto Chicanismo without attention to the historical and social circumstances of the movement. In Chicano nationalism, such differently marginalized figures as the farmworker, the pachuco, the Indian, and the undocumented immigrant have all served in one way or another as foils for a politically radical middle-class sense of ethnic belonging (cf. Peña 1999:265 for a cogent discussion of the contradictions of Chicana/o middle-class identity as realized in the *orquesta* music of the 1970s). Even after the end of the movement's charismatic phase, the *carpa*, because of its association with the rural farmworker and its importance for Mexican remains a potent symbol of identity.

Documentation of the *carpa* and other aspects of San Antonio's *mexicana/o* theatrical past may be seen as part of a project in which a minoritized middle class seeks

to publicly ground its identity in historical narrative and maintain public visibility. This nationalism is linked to “a process of interior decolonization” which “has affected ethnic minorities, families, and groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital” (Nora 1989:7). My application of Nora's statement to Chicano nationalism and its uses of history should not be interpreted as assertion that *mexicanas/os* in the United States have no history, of course. Rather, I argue that before the movement, they lacked access to a public identity grounded in a publicly valorized, celebratory history. In postwar San Antonio, where a virulently racist Anglo-Texan nationalism had deeply invested itself in public history productions around such key symbols as the Alamo (Flores 2002), this fact took on a special salience. By converting cultural practices like the *carpa* into symbols, the populist nationalism of the Chicano movement provided a counter-discourse to the dominant accounts of Texas history. This counter discourse was grounded in very concrete memories of a racially stigmatized population whose access to middle-class status was often quite recent and incomplete.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS

Imagine two hundred farm laborers fresh off the south Texas onion fields crowding onto a tent show's narrow, wooden bleachers, laughing and shouting while a ragged comedian sings a topical parody. Picture a small circus parading with dogs and ponies through a segregated Texas farm town, throwing pencils to *mexicana/o* children who have to attend substandard schools. Imagine the folks who live on the "other" side of the tracks in that town coming together in that circus to raise money for a park in their neighborhood. Picture the flash of sequins as a line of chorus girls kicks and gyrates on the stage of a plush theater on downtown San Antonio's western edge. Imagine a rush of tuneful songs and madcap comedy in two languages whipping the audience into a state of collective effervescence. Imagine a local playwright dramatizing the plight of a Mexican man sentenced to death by an all-Anglo jury based on dubious evidence. Imagine a network of mutual aid societies pitching in to raise money for the man's defense through a theatrical benefit. Picture a handful of dedicated old troupers bringing classics of the Spanish and Mexican stages to life for audiences in church halls long after the commercial theater owners have carted out the stage lights and pianos.

Now imagine a plush theater for ethnic Mexican audiences built with money made from a business that supplied boots to local military bases that were involved, among other things, in the pacification of southern Texas. Imagine the theater's Sicilian-born owner recruiting talent from Mexico and putting local artists second on the bill. Imagine an ethnic Mexican father ogling bobbed chorus girls in that theater and then

punishing his daughters for cutting off their *trenzas* (“braids”). Imagine young couples in the theater trying to duck their chaperones. Imagine the residents of a segregated south Texas farm town refusing to patronize a small circus because the show has women dancing immodestly on the stage. Picture that small circus’ patriarch prowling his company’s tents and house trailers with a whip to keep his sons, hired performers, and roustabouts in line. Imagine a poor family that aspires to respectability crowded onto a tent show’s narrow wooden bleachers next to rough, single men who want something very different from the night’s entertainment. Imagine Dr. Urrutia and his cronies sitting back in their exclusive theater boxes, far above the crowds in the pit.

I have assembled these kinds of stories, anecdotes, textual artifacts, and other documents in an effort to understand ethnic Mexican theatrical life in San Antonio and southern Texas as an object of social memory and a site for the making of social life. To conceive of that theatrical activity in the distinct, perhaps incompatible ways that the images above suggest is to begin to appreciate the contradictions of the social order that produced it and to whose production it contributed. The first paragraph’s examples of happy social cohesion in the face of an oppressive, encompassing, and alien order are not wrong or misleading, and those from the second paragraph do not necessarily give us the “whole” picture, even though they highlight the elements of coercion, oppression, and contradiction underlying that cohesion in ways that may feel ‘realistic.’ There is surely much that is missing from both views, and this study is not intended to be the last word. Nevertheless, it seems that any study of theater and performance among ethnic Mexicans in the United States must wrestle with what Miranda Joseph has called the romance of

community. Joseph notes that although cultural criticism in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s has abounded with examples of the violence involved in the constitution of communities, “a celebratory discourse of community relentlessly returns” in those same accounts (2002:viii). Performance genres like theater are particularly susceptible to this fetishism of community, both because of their difference from the electronic media that saturate our lives and because those of us who write about aesthetics are all looking for a way out of the world of alienated labor whether we admit it or not. However sophisticated our understandings may be, we can never fully escape the dream of art as a non-utilitarian remainder, a realm of pure value external to reified social relations.

If the search for a ground of community outside capital has proven seductive to contemporary cultural critics in the U.S. academy, it appears to have been equally so for ethnic Mexicans in southern Texas during the early twentieth century. In the wake of the social changes that uprooted the earlier agrarian order, and the dislocations occasioned by migration from interior Mexico, a romantic discourse of community came to pervade both theatrical entertainment and the theater criticism of newspapers and other *mexicana/o* institutions of public discourse. In different ways, elites, and workers both coalesced around an ethic of mutual support based on common ethnicity, even as Anglo-dominated capitalism made Mexican ethnicity into a racialized marker of subordination within each class grouping (Barrera 1979:212). In this they shared a situation common to members of categories “disadvantaged by the symbolic order” who, according to Pierre Bourdieu, have no choice but to submit to that order’s classifications “in order to make use of them” (1979:164-165). The legal and workplace-level measures that accomplished

these classifications of ethnic Mexicans were accompanied by ideological discourse identifying them as a source of dirt and contamination (Montejano 1987:225). In films and mass culture, such figures as the *pelado* and the monstrous Santa Anna of the Alamo myth offered unfavorable synecdoches linking ethnic Mexicans with danger, political despotism, and violent sexual depravity in the consciousness of those who experienced themselves as the ‘general’ public (Flores 2002:103). In this environment ‘Mexican-ness’ became a marked category, a particularity opposed to and separated from an overarching, undifferentiated humanity identified with the dominant culture. Nevertheless, the individuals assigned to the racialized category of “Mexican” experienced the self-abstraction that accompanies wage labor and consumer life at any economic level together with the force of these particularizing discourses. In response to this paradoxical reality, *mexicana/o* performers created social synecdoches of their own, not the least of which was theatrical space itself.

As we have seen, *teatros* in San Antonio served as outward-looking signs of ethnic Mexican presence and access to prestigious and supposedly universal art. Through these structures the Mexican colony affirmed its participation in modernity and conspicuously displayed the “proportion of surplus to ‘socially necessary’ activity” in its residents’ daily lives (Beasley-Murray 2000:112). At the same time, by virtue of their physical qualities and their proximity to city’s economic center the theaters symbolized and helped to constitute class differentiation within the Mexican colony in contrast to the *carpas* that periodically sprang up in vacant lots deeper into the neighborhoods they served. There were also status distinctions among both theaters and tent shows, of

course, and neither set of venues could be seen as a monolith. Furthermore, ethnic Mexicans in San Antonio and elsewhere in southern Texas appear to have been highly conscious of the symbolic power of theatrical space. This consciousness manifested itself in publicly articulated concern both for the content of theatrical entertainment, and for the norms of audience behavior. Both of these issues were subtly, and sometimes unsubtly, linked to the politics of class. The embarrassment of *La prensa*'s theater critics at the community's response to the unassigned seating on the Teatro Nacional's opening night is an excellent example of this.

First and foremost, the theaters and tent shows were sites in which people formed themselves into shifting social groupings that included strangers and were mediated by co-presence before and shared attention to discourse. Theatergoers in San Antonio, in other words, formed a public, probably many publics (Warner 2002:90). Although they drew on talent and human traffic that developed in the open arenas of the plazas and streets, theaters and tent shows were enclosed, privatized spaces, and participation in the publics created inside depended on cash payment. Audience members approached the theaters and tent shows as consumers, and their consumption activities there contributed to the production of ideas, social networks, and value. Benevolent activities showed the productivity of *mexicana/o* consumption, and the discourse surrounding those activities offered audiences the dream of non-reified social relations through an ethnic solidarity conceived as prior to exile and racial subordination. Some of these activities were genuine examples of worker mutual aid and self-organization. Others, such as *La prensa*'s Christmas benefit at the Teatro Nacional, looked more like elite charity catering

to an aestheticized “cult of disinterest” (Beasley-Murray 2000:106). Nevertheless such campaigns seem to have mobilized large numbers of people, and the performances at the Teatro Nacional were often the culminations of long newspaper drives that brought together the resources of large numbers of dispersed *mexicanas/os* who never met face-to-face. As institutions, of course, the theaters filled a market vacuum created by the culture of segregation (Rosales 1984:19), as do the ethnically marked pizza chains that dare to deliver to redlined *mexicana/o* neighborhoods in the southwestern United States today. In this sense, the theater was, in Joseph’s terms, supplementary to capital (2002:2), part of a set of mediating institutions through which the Mexican colony articulated itself with the larger political economy.

If the theaters, both the physical buildings and the social institutions housed by them, functioned as public synecdoches, parts symbolic of the quality of the social whole, then the same could be said of many of the characters and situations that populated the entertainment that appeared in those spaces. These characters, which embodied specific forms of marked personhood, offered a reverse image of the early bourgeois public sphere’s dynamic, in which the value of discourse bore a negative relation to the identity of the speaker (Warner 1992:382). In the popular theater, what allegorical characters said was primarily a reflection on the type itself, and the issues and moral lessons that the type stood for. Although didacticism informed even the most frivolous productions, clear-cut moral closure was rare, sometimes in spite of the apparent intentions of performers. If the popular theater was the conscience of the community, it was also a vehicle for temptation and titillation, and its characters, were open to varying interpretations in spite

of and because of their stylization. Broadly-drawn *rancheros* and *rancheras*, for example, could stand as bucolic foils for one audience member's aspirations to urban cosmopolitanism (abstraction) while confirming self-identity for another who experienced him- or herself as country to the core and *mexicana/o hasta las cachas* (particularity). It is hard to imagine that many audience members' reactions were confined one of these two interpretive moves, and other moves were likely possible. Ramón Saldívar has suggested that more recent Chicano narrative has opted "for open over closed forms, for conflict over resolution and synthesis" in order to "produce creative structures of knowledge to allow its readers to see, to feel, and to understand their social reality" (Saldívar 1990: 7). Much the same could be said for *mexicana/o* show business before 1950.

The symbolic struggle over the *pelado* described in Chapter 3 illustrates this same flexibility and openness of these stereotypical characters. This 'wild man' figure that tourists, conquerors, and elite social critics found so useful for distinguishing themselves from the national rabble became threatening and scandalous to them once it came to life on the stage. Similarly, comedians like La Chata Noloesca and Mimi Reyes, with their liminal personae and outré antics offered both lightning rods for the stigma attached to female performers in general and models of independent, emancipated subjectivity for women in the audience. As I have suggested the culturally traitorous and materialistic *pocha*, who later resurfaces as Miss JIM-inez in El Teatro Campesino's "*Los Vendidos*," seems to have been the only figure that embodied anything like ideological closure. Nevertheless, dialogues and sketches that placed a mixture of English and Spanish in her

mouth appear to have given rise to what has come to be called bilingual theater precisely through their attempts to purify ethnic Mexican language. All of these characters were social synecdoches and examples of the dangerous power of that trope to ascribe qualities to whole societies or social groupings through allegorical individuals (Friedrich 1991:36). In *mexicana/o* show business, the open quality of these allegories detained their authoritarian potential. That potential was clearly present in moralizing expressions of nationalism such as *folklórico* dance and other forms that appealed to a spurious ruralism and a sense of community understood not as a set of social relations but as private, personal virtue (Joseph 2002:10). At the same time, these manifestations shared the *mexicana/o* stage with appeals to emancipation through the embrace of the commodity, all presented in deeply gendered terms.

The discussion of these stock types leads to the question of whether ethnic Mexican show business in Texas could be seen as having a single defining aesthetic that separated it from similar performance traditions elsewhere. I hesitate to offer an answer to this question. To do so is to risk both reifying an evolving and historically contingent set of social actions and projecting my own theoretical preoccupations onto those actions. Furthermore, although I have identified certain rhetorical strategies that recur in a number of different forms, those strategies in themselves are not necessarily distinctive of the *mexicana/o* popular stage. One useful characterization of that discourse is that of Kanellos, who called this show business a “sounding board for … cultural conflict” related to language, assimilation, “discrimination in the United States, and *pocho*-status in Mexico” (1986; 1987:81). The ‘sounding board’ metaphor usefully draws attention to

the reflexive and open-ended nature of this theatrical spectacle. If the textual artifacts that this study has presented are representative, then that spectacle operated by juxtaposing incongruous stylistic elements, either generic markers or stock characters, to symbolize social contradictions. This sort rhetorical move seems to account for the comic effects of Rodolfo García's parodies, for the situations presented in the dialogues analyzed in Chapters 4 and 5, and for the appeal of *fantasia* costumes and the recontextualization of 'traditional' objects in *rataplán*. These generic markers and allegorical characters themselves were synecdoches, what Friedrich calls "tropes of contiguity" (1991:34-37), and therefore indexical in character.

The incongruous juxtaposition of such indexes, however, amounted to an irony, a modal trope in Friedrich's terms (30). In the type of irony that seems to have predominated in *mexicana/o* show business, two incompatible social languages coexist in the same utterance, pointing to incompatible ideological stances that deconstruct each other. For Friedrich, irony necessarily "involves awareness of difference, of a second reality, with its action and reaction, effect and resistance, ego and non-ego" (32). For all its potentially radical self-criticism, irony is widely seen as purely negative, corroding "all belief in the possibility of positive political actions" and inspiring "disdain for those seeking to grasp the nature of reality" (White 1973:38). Coming as it did after the final defeat of the last military expressions of ethnic Mexican resistance in the southwestern United States and the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution, this irony may well have represented "the passage of the age of heroes and the capacity to believe in heroism" (232). Nevertheless, the sort of irony that appears to have dominated ethnic

Mexican show business in Texas before World War II, was itself a metaphor that rendered social contradictions in stark, concrete, and sensible terms. As such it represented not disdain for attempts to understand social reality but an effort to drive to delineate that reality by juxtaposing clashing indexicalities and their associations in what Steven Feld calls the “iconicity of style” (Feld 1994:149-150).

Frequently, the attention-getting, ambivalent element that accomplished this juxtaposition was a reference to what Bakhtin calls the material bodily lower stratum (1984:22). We need not imagine the carnivalesque to be a timeless ground of common humanity to recognize some similarity between the way that *mexicana/o* show people in Texas deployed these references and the similar effects of similar references in parodies and mock epics in other times and places (309). The exposed *agarraderas* of dancers in *fantasía* costumes, the anatomically specific dismemberment in the *pachuco* parody of *El hijo desobediente*, the Utopian scatological humor of the Carpa García’s “cow and birds” parable, and the double entendres in the Rodríguez dialogues all helped to ward off irony’s paralyzing and negative effects with earthy good humor. In all these cases, the grotesque uncrowned, renewed, and relativized an authoritative discourse or absolute value. Furthermore, when carnivalesque humor occurred in the form of *doble sentido*, it had the power to disrupt metacommunicative frames and discursively construct a listening public of adults “in the know.” Nevertheless, this sort of humor was also the object of a contentious politics of aesthetics, and performers who used it walked a sociolinguistic tightrope. The care that performers exercised in repeating bawdy humor to me in interviews shows that the class-bound discourses of *respeto* placed and continue

to place limits on the carnivalesque for these individuals. In spite of this, carnivalesque humor in *mexicana/o* show business used the grotesque as a tool for breaking down socially salient oppositions by creating hybrid forms (Stallybrass and White 1986:43-44). Furthermore, carnivalesque humor provided a momentary antidote to the self-abstraction and disembodiment that was necessarily involved in the formation of any public (Warner 1992:381). The genuine grotesque also called into question discourses that interpreted the contradictions of Mexican identity in the United States in terms of the ethics of family, sexuality, and gendered behavior.

And that reminds me of a joke. In Carlos Monsiváis's manuscripts, there's one that goes something like this. A man and his wife are walking home when a robber surprises them and, threatening them with his gun, shouts “¡tu dinero o tu vida!” (“your money or your life!”). The man thinks about it for a minute, and then says, “Ah pos el dinero no. Vete con él, mi vida.” (“Oh, well not the money. Go with him my life/love.”). The punch line, of course, revolves not only around the ambiguous referent of “mi vida,” but also around the opposition between the transcendent, non-utilitarian value believed to reside in interpersonal love and the fallen, worldly alienated form of value embodied in money. When I read this joke to ethnic Mexican friends in San Antonio, it reminded them of *Sábado gigante*, a Miami-based variety show that comes on Univisión stations every Saturday night and refuses to go away (Dávila 2001:159). If appearances are any indication, the show's chorus girls have access to surgical interventions that their prewar San Antonio precursors hardly dreamed of. Bobbed hair seems tame in comparison, or at least less disturbing. Between comic sketches, contests,

and musical numbers, the show's smug Chilean-born host hawks everything from automobiles to household detergents, blurring the lines between advertising and entertainment just as his predecessors in the *carpas* and *teatros* did, though perhaps with more gusto. Sábado Gigante does not aspire to the homespun, folksy quality that is usually attributed to the *carpas*, but then the *carpas'* relation to discourses of homespun folksiness was anything but simple. If anything, the move toward a massified pan-Latino identity that we saw in the New York-based variety shows of La Chata Noloesca is more fully developed in this and other programs of today's Spanish-language electronic media (163). As Rosales has noted, the "direct physical contact of earlier entertainment is not there" in those media (1984:22). Nevertheless, any listener to call-in programs on U.S. Spanish language radio will notice that the audiences for those programs seem to use the radio to communicate with one another across long distances in ways that would not have been possible through theater. I wonder if Rosales's argument that contemporary electronic media "cannot deal with issues and problems which at one time were addressed" through the theater (*ibid.*) might not be premature. Further research is necessary to decide the question, of course, and I hope this study has delivered a level of textual specificity and descriptive detail sufficient to make such comparisons meaningful.

This latter contribution—the recovery of concrete texts—is one of many I have sought to make through this study, which also engages discussions in such fields as the anthropology of discourse, performance and verbal art; Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural studies and historiography; and oral history. To the first of these areas, this dissertation is intended to offer a detailed case study of the theatrical life of a particular group of people,

describing their performance practices in their social and historical contexts. The description is broadly informed by the idea that verbal art must be understood as social practice, and the description moves between the formal features of the textual artifacts it presents and significant aspects of their social and historical surround, examining the way “macro”-level processes are manifest on the “micro-”level of discourse. This study also contributes to ongoing discussions of the electronic mediation of and commodification of discourse, particularly studies of the reception of such discourse. In doing so, I seek to avoid attributing to ethnic Mexicans in the United States or anywhere else a fundamental use-value orientation²⁴³. Instead, I have sought to situate show business within the development of Mexican American consumerism in San Antonio. In this I follow the important examples of George J. Sánchez (1993), Vicki Ruiz (1998) in history and Arlene Dávila (2001) in anthropology.

Finally, this study’s contribution to the field of oral history is perhaps its most unique, although it seems unlikely that practitioners in that field will show interest in it. I have sought to find a way of doing oral history in ways that take into account the epistemological and political critiques of ethnography that rose to prominence during the 1980s (e.g. Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986). I have sought to present the voices of the individuals interviewed during the course of this study in relatively long stretches, integrating them into the surrounding prose to show how they inspired the theoretical conclusions of the study, rather than presenting them after those conclusions as mere supporting matter after those conclusions have been stated (Tedlock 1995:261).

²⁴³ cf. Nugent 1996:262-263 for a critique of such an approach

Furthermore, I have sought to eschew the untheorized ‘self-reflexive’ confessional mode that has become so common in anthropology, opting instead for a rigorous attention to the ways in which the social and situational context of my research has influenced my consultants’ narratives. The case in point, of course, is Rodolfo García’s ongoing set of autobiographical recordings. By attending both to the social context of those recordings and to their rhetorical organization, I have sought to bring out the ways in which my consultants’ agency has shaped this study. Furthermore, by focusing on Mr. García’s use of popular song, this study offers uniquely detailed example of a very common phenomenon in late capitalist society: the use of mass-mediated art and tools of mechanical reproduction of sound and image as prosthetic technologies for the elaboration of a sense of self. In all of this, I have endeavored to balance a genuine interest in and respect for the context of my consultants’ storied with a recognition that the larger politics of culture that inform those stories and the ways that I transcribe and quote them cannot be ignored. If there is a message from my example it is that a genuinely reflexive and dialogic oral history need not sacrifice a loving attention to the past in a quest to attend to the politics of memory in the present.

APPENDIX. LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND SELF-RECORDINGS BY PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY

Recorded Interviews

1990 interviews were recorded on audio cassette with poor equipment and are not broadcast-quality. 1997 interviews with Mimi Reyes were recorded with a Sony WMD3 cassette recorder and a bad microphone. Middling sound quality. 1997 interviews with Pedro González-González were recorded with a Sony WMD3 and a much better microphone. They are broadcast-quality, as are the 1999-2000 interviews, which were recorded on Minidisc. The numbering system for the 1990 interviews is that of the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio and follow this syntax: **interviewer's initials,year,number-tape number:number of tapes in interview**. Thus, the first tape of my first interview is numbered PH90-1-1:2, while the second tape of that same interview is numbered PH90-1-2:2. The original tapes of the 1990 interviews are on file in the library of the Institute of Texan Cultures, along with catalogues. Interviews conducted in 1997 and 1999-2000 are numbered according to a modified version of this syntax: **Interviewee's initials.date-number of tape or disc:number of tapes or discs in interview**. Thus, my first interview in 1997 with Mimi Reyes is numbered R5.26.97-1:1 (there is no second tape). These interviews are in my personal collection. Summaries of those interviews follow.

Number, Person, Place, Language.	Description
1. PH90-1-1:2, 2:2. 7/17/90, Rodolfo García, San Antonio. Mostly Spn.	Interview in which Mr. García discusses his career as a comedian and describes the Carpa García. His son, Rudy García Jr., is also present. Mr. García has been my most important consultant over the years. He was a comedian with the Carpa García. Unlike his brothers and sisters, he resisted performing until adulthood, and so he only had one act, relatively late in the Carpa's history. Nevertheless, he achieved a degree of success with the carpa's audiences. In this interview, he discusses in depth the family history of the Garcías. Interview includes performances of several songs and jokes.
2. PH90-2-1:2, 2:2 7/21/90, Esther Robinson, San Antonio. Spn./Eng.	ER, Mr. García's sister and a former acrobat with the Carpa García, describes her work in the carpa, the dynamics of family life on the road, her move to the Cole Brothers' Circus and marriage to acrobat Don Robinson, and return to San Antonio. Stories about ghosts and supernatural occurrences also appear on the tape.
3. PH90-3-1:2,2:2	Continuation of the discussion begun on 7/21. Includes

7/28/20. Esther Robinson. San Antonio. Spn./Eng.	narrations of sketches and pantomimes from the Carpa García.
4. PH90-4-1:1 7/31/90. Carlos and Amada Monsiváis. SA. Spn.	Don Carlos and Doña Amada, a comic duo who performed in the Carpa Monsiváis, during the 1930s and early 1940s, describe the carpa Monsiváis and their own act. They perform the dialogue “Preguntas callejeras”
5. PH90-5-1:1 8/6/90. Rodolfo García. SA. Mostly Spn.	Discussion of Mr. García’s parodies. PH asks textual questions, and Mr. García tries to answer.
6. PH90-6-1:1. 8/7/90. Rodolfo García. SA. Mostly Spn.	Continued discussion of Mr. García’s parodies.
7. PH90-7-1:1 8/8/90. Lalo Astol and Susie Mijares. SA. Spn.	Lalo Astol discusses his career, focusing on the differences between carpa and teatro. He is at pains to distinguish himself from the carperos. Susie Mijares, his wife, who worked as an acrobat in the Carpa Cubana and as a dancer and actor in San Antonio’s theaters, describes the Carpa Cubana.
8. R5.26.97-1:1. Mimi Reyes. SA. English.Spanish.	Mimi Reyes describes her career as a vaudevillian in San Antonio, including descriptions of her various characters (a streetwise pachuca, a <i>borracha</i> (drunkard lady), and a character called <i>la loca zurumata</i> (roughly translatable as “the crazy moron lady”). In our four interviews, Ms. Reyes describes performing in cabarets in New Orleans, theaters in San Antonio, USO shows in various parts of the country during World War II, and at the Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles in the 1950s. She describes her work with Rolando Morales.
9. R5.28.97-1:1. Mimi Reyes. SA. English.Spanish.	Continued discussion of Mimi Reyes’s career.
10. R5.30.97-1:1. Mimi Reyes. SA. English.Spanish.	Continued discussion of Mimi Reyes’s career.
11. R6.5.97-1:1. Mimi Reyes. SA. English.Spanish.	Continued discussion of Mimi Reyes’s career.
12. JMG7.17.97-1:1. Interview with José Manuel Galván Leguizamo. Los	Mr. Galván is an actor and playwright, currently residing in Mexico City, and a veteran of the avant-garde popular theater movement that emerged along with the Mexican student movement of 1968 and began forming ties with

Angeles. Spn.	<p>Chicano groups in the early 1970s. Mr. Galván has directed a number of Chicano plays in the U.S., including <i>Soldier Boy</i> at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. In 1988, he was commissioned to interview former vaudevillians and write <i>Las Tandas de San Cuilmas</i> based on those interviews for the Guadalupe. Mr. Galván discusses his artistic formation and the process of writing and directing <i>Las tandas</i>. In particular, he reflects on language issues, the issue of carpa vs. teatro, the issue of audience participation, the sketch titled “Los mil modos de cruzar el río,” and a sketch about the devil.</p>
13. PGG7.21.97-1:2, 2:2. Pedro González-González. English predominant. Some Spanish. Culver City, CA. English.	<p>Mr. González tells the story of his life and his rags-to-riches climb to stardom. In this interview, I ask relatively few questions, and those questions I do ask are mainly for clarification. His wife periodically enters into the conversation to show awards he has won or fan mail, and he responds to those.</p>
14. PGG7.24.97-1:1. Pedro González-González. Culver City, CA. Eng.	<p>Follow-up to previous interview. PGG shows PH some posters from his family's show and describes the family (note: his sister later saw the poster and claimed he had faked it). He describes his military service, his work with “Don Suave” in SA. He talks about the way his accent and mispronunciations of English were useful to him in Hollywood. He also returns to the discussion of his work in New York (begun 7.21). There is clarification of the fact that he went twice. Some discussion of Mr. González's musical act (frying pans and bottles) is also here.</p>
15. PGG7.31.90-1:1. Pedro González-González. Culver City, CA. Eng	<p>More discussion of musical act and Mr. González's work in San Antonio, West Texas, and elsewhere. He tells a story of being denied work in a bar in San Antonio just before he made it big. He also discusses working for San Antonio TV station KMOL as a maintenance man and driver.</p>
16. JMG8.1.97-1:1 José Manuel Galván. Spn. LA.	<p>Further discussion of <i>Las tandas de San Cuilmas</i>. Includes further discussion of the border-crossing skit and the devil skit, a discussion of a dramatization of a local legend about the ghosts of children who died in a school bus accident, and discussion of a dramatization of the Tierra Tejana song <i>Las hijas de don Simón</i>. There is also a discussion of what was cut from the play.</p>
17. PGG8.2.97-1:1. Pedro González-	<p>PGG describes his trials in New York when he was invited to perform there by La Chata Noloesca. Paints an</p>

González. Culver City. CA. Eng	extremely unfavorable picture of La Chata. He describes a mysterious illness he contracted while in the army and the cure. He also describes his actions in support of efforts to suppress the movie “Salt of the Earth.” He claims that while he was working for John Wayne, the famous actor forbade him from taking literacy classes or English classes for fear he would “lose his touch.” PGG claims not to be able to read to this day. His sister, in a later interview, will deny all this.
18. RM8.3.97-1:3, 2:3, 3:3. Very long interview with Rolando Morales, Los Angeles, CA. Spn..Eng.	Rolando Morales discusses at length (3 90-minute tapes) his career as a vaudevillian, mostly in San Antonio, Los Angeles, and the midwest. Among other things, he discusses forming his own company, traveling through Missouri and elsewhere. He claims to have worked with the famous “Tongolele,” with Mimi Reyes, and with many notable artists. He also discusses his violinist father’s musical career in San Antonio. He describes as a crowning achievement a leading role he took in organizing festivities for a celebration of the anniversary of the Good Neighbor Policy in Los Angeles during the Johnson administration. In some places he rambles and becomes difficult to understand. Throughout the interview, he expresses a feeling of not having been given credit for what he has done.
19. RG2.4.99-1:2, 2:2. Rodolfo García. SA. Spn.	Interview with Rodolfo García. Some discussion of the parody “A medias copas” (“A media luz”) and other song parodies.
20. RG6.9.99-1:2,2:2. Rodolfo García. SA. Spn.	PH tries to discuss an article he has submitted for publication with RG and goes over it, asking for feedback on various assertions made in the piece. RG tells stories about his career in response. Discussion of Mr. García’s parody of “El hijo desobediente” and of police brutality in the Coastal Bend area related to the parody is also present.
21. ER10.04.99-1:2, 2:2. Esther Robinson. SA. Eng..Spn	ER discusses a song she recorded called “La borracha” that was popular in San Antonio during the 1950s or 1960s (unclear). She also describes touring with Mimi Reyes and working with other San Antonio artists. Some discussion of the Alameda theater. She describes performances with Mimi’s group in which she (Esther) stole the show and caused resentment among other artists. She describes an incident in which was bewitched. Asked about her work in Anglo circuses, she describes moving to the Cole Brothers from her parents’ show, then the Ringling Brothers. She

	tells the story of becoming the primadonna of the Cole Brothers' show, then of meeting her future husband and of the births of her children. There is some discussion of the effect of the wartime draft on the carpa. She also describes her mother's death and the end of the carpa, and family information, esp. about the marriages of the García brothers and sisters.
22. ER10.11.99-1:2, 2:2. Esther Robinson. SA. Eng.Spn.	Interview begins with a discussion of Stout Jackson's carpas. She tells a story about Lydian Mendoza performing in the carpa Garcia during a storm. She describes the physical space of the carpa. She describes meeting Mimi Reyes and vaudeville acts she was involved in with Mimi during the 1950s. One of these included an Elvis impersonator, Antonio de Sevilla (El Vez is not the first). The discussion moves to musicians from San Antonio that ER worked with. She discusses her post-show business work as a counselor. There is comparison between Mimi and La Chata Noloesca (ER dislikes La Chata). She then goes on to describe visiting bars with Mimi to do publicity for their nightclub appearances. The discussion returns to the song "La borracha." ER then describes performing for political candidates' fundraisers, including Henry B. González. There is also some discussion of the Alameda Theater, the Teatro Nacional, and the Plaza del Zacate. There is considerable discussion of Lydia Mendoza and Netty and Jesús Rodríguez.
23. JP8.11.99-1:1. Interview with Jorge Piña. San Antonio. Mostly English.	Jorge Piña, the former Theater Arts Director at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, discusses his career in Chicano theater and the Guadalupe's production of "Las Tandas de San Cuilmas" in 1989 and 1991.
24. AA9.21.99-1:2, 2:2. Alex Aguilar. SA. English dominant.	A former cultural specialist with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, Alex Aguilar saw carpas as a child. He begins by briefly describing the Carpa Garcia. More extensive descriptions follow, including narrated versions of comedy routines as recollected by the young Mr. Aguilar. There is a nice description of the Plaza del Zacate in English. He also describes the Progreso, an early Movie theater on the West Side. He also describes some of the Garcías' acts, musical numbers, and problems with lights.
25. CM8.24.99-1:2. 2:2. Carlos Monsiváis, SA. Spn.	CM describes the break-up of the Carpa Monsiváis and the government's recruiting of the Monsiváis men to work in defense industries during World War II. CM enumerates his brothers and their wives and describes their acts. He

	also discusses a brief marriage of his that happened before he married Amada Monsiváis—to Feliz González, a niece of the González family (of Pedro GG and Amparo, cousins of the Garcías). He also briefly discusses some of the sketches dialogues he wrote out in his manuscripts. CM doesn't remember the last name of a "Tanacio" or "Atanacio" to whom some of the manuscripts are attributed.
26. RG10.12.99-1:2, 2:2. Rodolfo García. SA. Spn.	Attempt at a feedback interview with RG. I had hoped he would be able to help me with passages in a recorded song that were difficult to understand. For the most part, he seems to have had the same problems as I. Discussion of Mexican comedians Don Catarino, Manuel Medel, and Cantinflas. He tells a story about dancing the tango in a Corpus Christi nightclub called the Chinese Palace and of an autobiographical tape Mr. García has recorded in which he describes this performance. RG sings "Vamos al baile" and a dialogue-song that begins "Voy a cantar a los rayos de la luna." Repetition of "El Charro Ponciano." RG tells his joke about crossing the border. RG discusses police brutality in the Coastal Bend area and the pachucos.
27. SM8.14.99-1:1. Susie Mijares. SA. Spn.	The interview begins with a discussion of dance costumes. SM recalls using outfits similar to those discussed in my <i>fantasia</i> article. This moves into a discussion of the Bataclán and other dance numbers that were common on San Antonio's Mexican American stage (including an "Arab" number called "La Odalisca" and a "Hawaiian" number). SM shows me photographs of her late husband and of the cast of a radionovela from KCOR. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez are pictured. I then try to get her to identify people in photographs of the Carpa Cubana. I was trying to identify two youths who are frequently pictured with Virgilio and Federica Abreu, but she was unable to do so. We discuss the size of the Carpa Cubana. She mentions that a son of Joe Abreu (the son of Virgilio and Federica), whose name is Alfred, lives in Pasadena, CA. She also describes an dance number from the theater called "Los Dorados de Villa." We discuss the genre of the pantomima, taking a flyer of the Carpa Cubana as a point of departure. SM describes a pantomima she remembers, but not in much detail. She describes certain pantomimas as more "modern" than others. Asked what this means, she says they had racier vocabulary.

28. NM8.10.99-1:1. Normalinda Monsiváis, SA. Eng.	<p>NM describes her work in the carpa as a child (she was born in 1935, and the carpa ended in about 1942). She describes her trapeze act and songs she used to sing. She also reflects on what life was like growing up in the carpa and not being accepted by town kids at school (they called her a gypsy). She also describes attending schools in which mexicana/o kids were treated differently from the Anglo kids. She also describes meeting children of artists who came to work for her family, the roles of her different relatives, and how they dealt with rationing during the war. She mentions that after the war, her family did benefit performances in Kenedy, TX for the American G.I. Forum. She talks about how people in Kenedy and the surrounding area remember the Carpa Monsiváis. She describes her parents' style of acting, contrasting it to the sexual explicitness of today. There is some discussion of Carlos Monsiváis's act (Don Chema), his trademark fluttering moustache, and of other folks who worked with the carpa. We go over several photographs and NM talks about them and identifying people in them, fleshing out the family tree. Then, we discuss her childhood and the end of the carpa. She talks about how after she married, her husband didn't want her to perform.</p>
29. CM8.10.99-1:1. SA. Spn. Carlos Monsiváis.	<p>Discussion of the Carpa Monsivais. Difficult conversation. There are a few interesting anecdotes and a lot of trying to get Mr. Monsiváis to understand the questions. Among other things, he describes his mother's act, which involved bending hot iron bars with her feet. She put some sort of white preparation on them before doing this.</p>
30. SM8.6.99-1:1. Susie Mijares. Spn. SA.	<p>SM discusses her family and its roots in the circus. She started out in Monterrey in the Circo Fernandi at 9 years of age. Her parents and grandparents were all involved with Mexican circuses, and her brother Frank worked with the Shriners in the U.S. She describes the way in which her family became involved with the Carpa Cubana. She describes her two marriages and enumerates her children. She also describes how her grandfather founded the Circo Modelo in San Antonio in around 1923. SM retired from the circus and worked only in San Antonio once she had her children. Her late husband, Lalo Astol, was half-brother of the famous Mexican comedian "Mantequilla," and there is some discussion of this. This leads to discussion of artists who were involved with the Carpa</p>

	Cubana. There is some discussion of the Pirrín family. She describes a musical clown act by her uncle Andrés Rosales, who played a set of aluminum tubes that he stroked with tar-coated gloves and produced notes. Another novelty instrument seems to have had faucet-like attachments. There is some discussion of “La Rana,” a contortionist for the Carpa Cubana, but little new information. SM describes her work dancing in theaters in San Antonio and touring with a medicine show and working with famous Mexican performers in SA. Regarding Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, SM states that Netty had a drinking problem, but that she was good at putting together groups to work on stage. SM also discusses Rolando Morales and Mimi Reyes. There is a discussion of the theatrical spaces, and SM shows PH photos of Sam Lucchese with theater folks.
31. RG7.29.99-1:2, 2:2. Rodolfo García. Spn. SA.	RG begins by discussing a group of tent-show performers from Mexico that he had seen years ago in Laredo whose obvious poverty made him feel pity. He maintains his family never went so low. He describes his brother-in-law Pilar’s high wire act and time when he and his cousin, Pedro GG, visited Mexico. There follows a discussion of the border and the reasons why his family performed mainly in the United States. There is discussion of the Mexican perception that Chicanos speak poorly and of some words that RG believes to be incorrect in Spanish. It moves on to picaresque language and bar conversations, Mr. García’s performances in nightclubs for fun, and night spots in 1940s San Antonio and Corpus Christi. The Garcías worked in some of these. PH asks about benefit performances, and RG describes a few. RG tells a joke about the church. He then passes to the subject of his father’s show touring on the Tex-Mex train in south Texas. He tells a vivid story about a musician who was bitten by a black widow spider while using the outhouse at a train stop. He then repeats a story he had heard his parents tell of traveling in Mexico during the revolution and being stopped by soldiers, then a story about an encounter between the García show and group of Indians, in which the Indians wanted to trade horses for his sister Aída.
32. RG7.8.99-1:1. Rodolfo García. Spn. SA.	RG discusses his solo recordings and the relajo in them. Much discussion of Agustín Lara and his songs, as well as Mr. García’s parodies of them. RG tells a joke from WWII

	<p>era. He discusses the audience reaction to his parody “Chencha” and an incident in which the song was mistakenly construed as referring to an audience member. He sings the song “El Charro Ponciano” that was used in the carpa. He describes his start as a comedian in his father’s show and in the Teatro Venus. There is some discussion of the Teatro Venus and of the Plaza del Zacate, a market area in downtown San Antonio.</p>
33. RVG7.12.99-1:2, 2:2. Raymond and Virginia García. SA. Spn., Eng.	<p>RaG discusses his work in the Carpa García. Virginia also talks about her experiences as a performer—he played drums and did maintenance for the show. She danced. (some of her in-laws dispute her claims to having performed). He lists night clubs he worked in after the end of the carpa when he played in dance bands with his brother Manolo. VG discusses the Carpa Cubana and her work dancing in the Teatro Zaragoza. She claims that ER saw her dance and recruited her to dance in the carpa. RaG describes the Carpa García’s touring through South Texas and wintering in SA. There is some comparison of the two carpas. RaG describes a Carpa García act called “El General Tamales.” He then describes a pantomima called “El Carnaval de Venecia.” He also describes his uncle Miguel’s ventriloquist act, which involved two African-American looking dummies (one lighter than the other), Paco and Cipriano. Miguel also had a clairvoyant act. RaG narrates several sketches. Finally RaG describes the miniature carpa he made.</p>
34. RFRA10.15.99-1:1. Rosita Fernández and Raul Almaguer. SA. Spn.	<p>Rosita Fernández and her late husband Raul describe her career as a singer in San Antonio and elsewhere and discusses the Teatro Alameda, the carpas of Thomas Jefferson Jackson, and other venues. She also describes how her family arrived in San Anotnio, including an amusing story about their renting a house in what turned out to be the city’s red light district.</p>
35. EVAV11-13-99-1:1. Enrique Valero and Aurora Valero. Mostly Spn. SA.	<p>Enrique Valero, the brother of Jesús Rodríguez, describes his family’s situation in Concepción de Oro, Zacatecas, their emigration to the United States. He discusses his stepfather, Raimundo Heredia, who was a businessman and the theatrical work of Netty and Jesús. He also talks about his own work as an M.C. at the Teatro Nacional during the 1930s, as well as other jobs he has had. He tells a vivid story about discrimination he faced while in high school, which led him to leave high school without finishing. This</p>

	interview has been my primary source of information about the Rodríguez-Valero family.
36. NM2-17-2000-1:1. Normalinda Monsiváis, SA. English predominant.	Normalinda Monsiváis is the daughter of Carlos Monsiváis, a comedian with the Carpa Monsiváis. She grew up in the tent show and briefly performed as an acrobat in her youth. In this interview, she responds to textual questions about two of the items in her father's collection of manuscripts (a dialogue titled "Ora sí jaló" and a poem titled "El ajo"). She also describes her grandfather's clown act and tells how her family made a living by showing films and occasionally booking performers in a tin barn they owned in Kenedy, TX in the late 1940s
37. RVG3.26.00-1:1. Interview with Raymond García, SA., Spanish, English	In this interview, Mr. García narrates more or less completely the plots of four pantomimas performed in the carpa and fragments of several others, as well as an entrada de payaso in which children were called from the audience to play musical chairs. He also describes how the carpa dealt with hecklers, recalls the places in San Antonio where the family put up its tent, and describes his father's and his brother Manolo's troubles with alcoholism.
38. RG5-04-2000-1:2, 2:2. Interview with Rodolfo García, SA. Spanish	I had not interviewed Mr. García in some time, partly because our discussions were becoming repetitive, but this interview provided considerable new information. Mr. García also discusses his family's experiences of Anglo racial hostility during their tours through certain parts of south-central Texas, including a vivid incident in which an Anglo gas station owner pulled a gun on him and his brother Manolo and ordered them dance.
39. HMDM5-16-2000-1:1. Interview with Domingo Monsiváis and Herminia Monsiváis, Kenedy, TX. Mostly Spanish. Domingo speaks mostly in English.	Herminia Monsiváis was the daughter of a magician who had a small carpa in the teens and 1920s. His company combined with the Carpa Monsiváis during the 1920s, and Herminia married Juan Monsiváis, the show's manager and the oldest of the five brothers that formed the core of the show. She later stayed with the Monsiváis show when her father went on his own, primarily working as a cook. Domingo Monsiváis is her son. Ms. Monsiváis discusses her family's history and her memories of the carpa. She mentions a period of time in the 1920s in which the González family traveled and performed with her family's carpa. In that time, Carlos Monsiváis became a compadre of José and Michaela González. Mr. Monsiváis discusses

	his memories of performing as a young child in his family's carpa and narrates the text of a dialogue he did with his cousin Belia (sister to Normalinda) under the names "Don Dominguín y la Madre de más de cuatro."
40. MB5-22-2000-1:1. Interview with Marieta Batilla, SA. Mostly Spanish.	Ms. Batilla started dancing at the Teatro Zaragoza during the 1930s at the age of 13 in amateur shows and soon joined Rolando Morales's company. She continued to perform at the Teatro Zaragoza through the 1940s. She married Carlos Rodríguez Valero (Don Suave), a well-known comedian and the brother of Jesús Rodríguez. In the interview she discusses her career as a dancer and her memories of the theaters and nightclubs of San Antonio. She also discusses Don Suave and his career and his work with Lalo Astol. She also describes an incident that occurred in the Teatro Alameda in 1950 in which Jorge Negrete insulted the Texas Mexican public and people threw tomatoes at him.
41. NMCM6-22-2000-1:1. Interview with Normalinda Monsiváis and Carlos Monsiváis, SA. Normalinda speaks mainly English. Her father speaks mostly Spanish.	In this interview, NM discusses some aspects of the Monsiváis family's history, including her mother's decision to leave home and go with the carpa at age 17. She also discusses some of the tensions that existed between the families of the five brothers, a brother and sister named Avalos who worked with the Carpa Monsiváis and married into the family, and her memories of settling down in Kenedy. She then brings her father out. He describes the family's move to South Texas from the El Paso area and their joining with the Martínez family. He also describes quite vividly the end of the carpa and the experiences he had when he and his brothers were drafted into war industries in South Texas. He discusses the military service of his sons and son-in-law and then moves on into religious visions he has had, a story about a strange sickness that fell on the Carpa when it was on tour trying to reach California. He also discusses some aspects of his family's history in Mexico. Note: Mr. Monsiváis is mostly deaf and is, for the most part, not responding to questions.
42. RVG7-07-2000-1:1. Interview with Raymond and Virginia García, SA. Mostly Spn.	This is primarily a feedback interview, dealing with two of the dialogues by Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, "Es mi hombre" and "Una mula de tantas." Mr. García also narrates a couple of sketches and entradas de payaso, as well as some riddles that his brother Manolo used while working as a clown. Some of these he has trouble remembering. He gives some comments on the dialogues

	and also describes his father's early tours in Texas, which he did by train.
43. AW7-12-2000-1:1. Interview with Amparo Webber and Walter Webber, Big Bear Lake, CA. Mostly Eng.	Amparo Webber is an older sister of Pedro González-González, the daughter of José González and Michaela González and a cousin of the García family. She danced and acted with her family's company, Las Perlitas and although she admits to having worked in carpas, she identifies as an artista de teatro. Her husband, Walter Webber owned tent shows in West Texas during the 1930s and entered into a business arrangement with the González family, in which Las Perlitas would tour in one of his tents and he would accompany them in a management position. He later ended up marrying Amparo, the daughter of his business partner. The interview focuses on the González family's career, how the family met up with Mr. Webber, and the career of Pedro González-González. Mrs. Webber's story about this last topic is considerably different from that of her brother, whom I interviewed in 1997. She maintains that he is lying. I feel that more research will be necessary to determine how to use that material.
44. AW7-18-2000-1:1. Interview with Amparo Webber and Walter Webber, Big Bear Lake, CA. Mostly Eng.	. Sandra (Escamilla) Dixon is a dancer and actor from San Antonio who currently resides in Los Angeles. She is also the daughter of the late Felipe Escamilla, a comedian who left his native Sanderson, Texas, to perform with a carpa, possibly the Carpa Cubana, and then worked during the late 1930s on the stage of the Teatro Zaragoza with Rolando Morales's company. Audrey Aiena is Mr. Escamilla's widow and Ms. Dixon's mother. Our interview focuses on Mr. Escamilla's career and Ms. Dixon's performances as a child at the Teatro Alameda in the 1950s.
45. SDA7-18-2000-1:2, 2:2. Interview with Sandra Dixon and Audrey Aiena Escamilla, Shadow Hills, CA. English.	Mr. Alex, a multi-talented performer from Michoacán is a veteran of carpas in Mexico City and has toured much of South America in circuses. His acts include a rare form of top juggling, clowning, unicycle tricks, magic, dance, and comedy, and he known for his imitations of Resortes, Clavillazo, and Charles Chaplin. He currently resides in Los Angeles where he continues to perform in nightclubs and for children's birthday parties. In this interview, we

	discuss his career and a nightclub performance of his with a group of comedians that I observed and recorded while in Los Angeles.
46. MA7-24-2000-1:2, 2:2. Interview with Alfonso Vega Villamar ("Mr. Alex"), Los Angeles, CA. Spanish.	This is mostly a feedback interview with comic dialogues recorded by Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. This interview covers the dialogue titled "The Mexican from New York". Other discussion of the Carpa García is interspersed with discussion of the recordings. The discussion touches on Mr. García's maternal uncle, Miguel González and his performances as a mentalist, magician, ventriloquist, and fortune teller. There is also further discussion of the family history of the Garcías. Mr. García also narrates a comic monologue about baseball and a "truco," a very short, sketch-like comic piece.
47. RVG8-11-2000-1:1. Interview with Raymond García, SA. Mostly Spn.	This is mostly a feedback interview with comic dialogues recorded by Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. This interview covers the dialogue titled "The Mexican from New York". Other discussion of the Carpa García is interspersed with discussion of the recordings. The discussion touches on Mr. García's maternal uncle, Miguel González and his performances as a mentalist, magician, ventriloquist, and fortune teller. There is also further discussion of the family history of the Garcías. Mr. García also narrates a comic monologue about baseball and a "truco," a very short, sketch-like comic piece.
48. SO8-29-2000-1:2, 2:2. Interview with Steven Ortíz, Albuquerque, NM. Mostly English.	Singer and comedian Steven Ortíz was a member of the Ortíz Brothers Circus, an extremely small circus from New Mexico that toured throughout New Mexico and to Texas. In the first interview, Mr. Ortíz discusses his family's show, its history, and his own experiences as an entertainer.
49. SO8-30-2000-1:1. Interview with Steven Ortíz, Albuquerque, NM. Mostly English.	In this interview, the discussion of the Ortíz circus continues. Mr. Ortíz also discusses his subsequent career as an entertainer in other parts of the country. We also go over several photographs he has given me copies of, getting information about each. There is also some discussion of the planned revival of the Ortíz Brothers Circus at the opening of the National Hispanic Cultural Center in October. He also discusses racial discrimination that his family faced in Texas.

50. SO9-01-2000-1:1. Interview with Steven Ortíz, Albuquerque, NM. Mostly English.	This interview continues and concludes our discussion of the Ortíz Brothers Circus. Mr. Ortíz also mentions his family's tour through Texas, in which they performed at the Teatro Zaragoza. He also discusses their experiences in the Valley and in the carpa of Stout Jackson in the Coastal Bend area.
51. NM9-21-2000-1:1. Interview with Normalinda Monsiváis. Mostly English. SA.	Feedback interview with Normalinda Monsiváis about the Netty and Jesús recordings.

SOLO AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY.

I. Rodolfo García (on home tape recorder, San Antonio).

PH90-8-1:1 (contains two recordings made on separate occasions in 1990).

RGSOLO4.12.97-1:1

RGSOLO10-12-99-1:1.

RGSOLO5.4.2000-1:2, 2:2.

II. Steve Ortiz. Mr. Ortiz has recorded a CD of a one-man musical he has written and continues to perform from his home in Florida. It was produced by his wife, Carmen Guzmán Ortiz. Ortiz, Steven. *The Library of My Life*. Cat. #LI1932. Naples, FL: Big City Records. It should be available from the record company (9 Lake Diane Drive, Naples, FL 34114. ph (239) 793-6336.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17(41): 41-55.
- Acuña, Rodolfo. 1981. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Alarcón, Norma. 1989. "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism." *Cultural Critique* 13: 57-87.
- Álvarez, Luis. 2001. *The Power of the Zoot: Race, Community, and Resistance in American Youth Culture, 1940-1945*. Doctoral Dissertation, History. Austin: University of Texas at Austin: 340 pp.
- Alvarez Quintero, Serafín and Joaquín Alvarez Quintero. 1912. *Malvaloca, Drama En Tres Actos Inspirado En Un Copla Andaluza*. Madrid,: Impr. de R. Velasco.
- Anonymous. 1906a. Casamiento De Indios, Ptes 1 Y 2. Phonograph Recording featuring Maximiliano Rosales and Rafael Robinson. Cat. # 5598, C150, Matrix #5598. New York: Columbia Records, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1906b. Gran Tapada De Gallos En Aguascalientes. Phonograph Recording featuring Maximiliano Rosales and Rafael Robinson. Cat. # 5642, C195, Matrix #5642. New York: Columbia Records, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1906c. Pleito De Borrachos En Una Pulquería. Phonograph Recording featuring Maximiliano Rosales and Rafael Robinson. Cat. # Co 5568, C 196, Matrix #5567. New York: Columbia Records, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1923a. Chistes De Ricardo Bell--Acto Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Julio Ayala and Brass Band. Cat. #C2115 , Matrix #13825. Los Angeles: Columbia Records, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1923b. Chistes De Ricardo Bell--Acto De La Cafatera [Sic]. Phonograph Recording featuring Julio Ayala and Brass Band. Cat. #C2115 , Matrix #13827-1. Los Angeles: Columbia Records, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.

- 1923c. Chistes De Ricardo Bell--En El Circo--Cómico Descriptivo No.1. Phonograph Recording featuring Julio Ayala and Brass Band. Cat. #C2116 , Matrix #13826. Los Angeles: Columbia Records, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1923d. Chistes De Ricardo Bell--En El Circo--Cómico Descriptivo No.2. Phonograph Recording featuring Julio Ayala and Brass Band. Cat. #C2116 , Matrix #13828. Los Angeles: Columbia Records, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1926a. Chistes De Ricardo Bell--Acto Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Eduardo Pastor, Roberto Guzmán and Brass Band. Cat. #40170, Matrix #4278W. Los Angeles: Brunswick, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1926b. Chistes De Ricardo Bell - Acto Musical. Phonograph Recording featuring Eduardo Pastor, Roberto Guzmán and Brass Band. Cat. #40170, Matrix #4279W. Los Angeles: Brunswick, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1926c. Chistes De Ricardo Bell - Acto Del Caballo Y Entr'acte Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Eduardo Pastor, Roberto Guzmán and Brass Band. Cat. #40171, Matrix #4280W. Los Angeles: Brunswick, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1926d. Chistes De Ricardo Bell - Acto De La Cafetera. Phonograph Recording featuring Eduardo Pastor, Roberto Guzmán and Brass Band. Cat. #40171, Matrix #4281W. Los Angeles: Brunswick, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- 1928a. Paleta-Corrido. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and orquesta típica. Cat # 8212, Matrix #SA 147-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1928b. Pecaditos--Diálogo Canción. featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and orquesta típica. Cat #8212, Matrix #SA 149-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1928c. Mañana Triste--Canción. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and orquesta típica. Cat #8242. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.

- 1928d. Lupe, Lupe--Canción. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and orquesta típica. Cat #8242. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1928e. Alma Tricolor--Diálogo Patriótico. Phonograph Recording featuring Roberto Escalera and Netty Rodríguez. Cat #8218, Matrix #SA 189-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1928f. El Rielero--Diálogo Cómico Con Canción. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, Roberto Escalera and E.G. Sandoval (piano). Cat #8218, Matrix #SA 190-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1928g. Los Compadritos--Canción. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and Roberto Escalera. Cat #8243, Matrix SA 191-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1928h. Ah Pos Allí Está--Diálogo Cómico Con Canción. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez, Roberto Escalera and E.G. Sandoval (piano). Cat #8218, Matrix #SA 192-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1929-1930a. Los Cuatitos, Diálogo Cómico Con Canción. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty Rodríguez, Roberto Escalera and E.G. Sandoval (piano). Cat #8261. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Frontera Collection, UCLA.
- 1929-1930b. Mi Reputación. Phonograph Recording featuring Roberto Escalera and Netty Rodríguez. Cat #8261. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Frontera Collection, UCLA.
- 1929-1930c. El Adios Del Emigrado--Corrido. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodrgíguez and orquesta típica. Cat #8214. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Frontera Collection, UCLA.
- 1929-1930d. En Donde Estas Prietita Mia. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez and orquesta típica. Cat #8214. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Frontera Collection, UCLA.
- 1929-1930e. La Canción Del Pizcador. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodrgíguez and orquesta típica. Cat #8360. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.

- 1929-1930f. La Receta Del Doctor--Diálogo Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty Rodríguez, Roberto Escalera and orquesta típica. Cat #8360. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1934a. Vacilando En San Antonio. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2276, Matrix #BVE 83954-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1934b. Doña Apolonia La Bruja--Diálogo Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2276, Matrix #BVE 83955-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1934c. Por Culpa De Una Trucha--Diálogo Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2255, Matrix #BVE 83956-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1934d. Los Mojados--Diálogo Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2255, Matrix #BVE 83957-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935a. El Rico Pobre--Canción Corrido. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty Edgel de Rodríguez, unk. pianist. Cat #B-2328, Matrix #BVE 87805-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935b. El Turismo--Canción Corrido. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty Edgel de Rodríguez, unk. pianist. Cat #B-2328, Matrix #BVE 87806-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935c. La Ponchada. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2308, Matrix #BVE 87807-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935d. La Fritangera. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2308, Matrix #BVE 87808-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935e. Una Mula De Tantas. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2308, Matrix #BVE 87809-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935f. Pos No Le Atino. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2333, Matrix #BVE 87810-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.

- 1935g. Me Voy Para México. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2333, Matrix #BVE 87811-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935h. The Mexican from New York. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2344, Matrix #BVE 87812-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935i. La Pecadora. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2420, Matrix #BVE 94571-1R. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935j. El Sancho. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2420, Matrix #BVE 94573-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935k. Mexican Kiss. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2508, Matrix #BVE 94574-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935l. Chata Preciosa. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2373, Matrix #BVE 94575-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1935m. Pollo De Estaca. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2373, Matrix #BVE 94576-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936a. La Viuda. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2988, Matrix #BS02838-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936b. Mi Real Gana. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-2988, Matrix #BS02839-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936c. El Ficha Lisa. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3018, Matrix #BS02840-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.

- .
- . 1936c. Señora Vaca. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3121, Matrix #BS014224-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- .
- . 1936d. Cosas a Medias. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3018, Matrix #BS02841-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- .
- . 1936d. Pos Ni Me Cuadra. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3121, Matrix #BS014225-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- .
- . 1936f. Mis Veinte Mujeres. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3115, Matrix #BS014227-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- .
- . 1937a. Me Cai Gordo. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3113, Matrix #BS014222-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- .
- . 1937b. La Payasa. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3113, Matrix #BS014223-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- .
- . 1937e. El Turista. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #B-3115, Matrix #BS014226-1. San Antonio: Blue Bird, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- .
- . 1967. "New Grapes; El Teatro Campesino Performs for Migrant Farmworkers." *Newsweek*: p. 79.
- .
- . 1968. "Guerrilla Drama; Productions of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Bread and Puppet, and California's Teatro Campesino." *Time*: p. 72.
- .
- . n.d. *El Pueblo Mexicano. Personal collection of Carlos Monsiváis*. Universal City, Texas.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Arbus, Diane. 1972. *Diane Arbus*. Millerton, N.Y.: Aperture.

- Auer, Peter. 1995. The Pragmatics of Code-Switching: A Sequential Approach. *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching*. Lesley and Pieter Muysken Milroy, Ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 115-133.
- , 1998. Introduction: Bilingual Conversation Revisited. *Code-Switching in Conversation*. Peter Auer, Ed. New York: Routledge: 1-24.
- Bagby, Beth. 1967. "El Teatro Campesino: Interview with Luis Valdez." *Tulane Drama Review* 11: 70-80.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Trans., Caryl and Michael Holquist Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. and Hélène Iswolsky. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.
- Balderrama, Francisco E. and Raymond Rodriguez. 1995. *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Barker, George Carpenter. 1970[1958]. *Pachuco, an American-Spanish Argot and Its Social Functions in Tucson, Arizona*. Tucson,: University of Arizona Press.
- Barrera, Mario. 1979. *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1983. *The Fashion System*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bauman. 1993. Disclaimers of Performance. *Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse*. Jane and Judith Irvine Hill, Ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 182-196.
- Bauman, Richard. 1978. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers.
- , 1992. Contextualization, Tradition, and the Dialogue of Genres: Icelandic Legends of the Kraftaskáld. *Rethinking Context*. Alessandro and Charles Goodwin Duranti, Ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 125-147.
- Bauman, Richard and Charles Briggs. 1990. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59-88.

- Beasley-Murray, Jon. 1999. Value and Capital in Bourdieu and Marx. *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*. Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman, Ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 100-119.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1968. *Illuminations*. New York,: Harcourt.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Biart, Lucien. 1959. *La Tierra Templada: Escenas De La Vida Mexicana, 1846-1855*. México, D.F.: Jus.
- Bilaniuk, Laada. 1997. "Matching Guises and Mapping Language Ideologies in Ukraine." *Texas Linguistic Forum* (37): 298-310.
- Bollaert, William, W. Eugene Hollon, et al. 1956. *William Bollaert's Texas*. Norman,: Published in co-operation with the Newberry Library, Chicago.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge, UK Oxford, UK: Polity Press:
B. Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and John B. Thompson. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Brandt, Brandt, Floyd S. Larry Secrest. 1971. *The Lucchese Boot Company. Transcribed Interviews with Mr. Sam Lucchese*. Austin: Graduate School of Business. University of Texas at Austin.
- Briggs, Charles L. 1988. *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Briggs, Charles L. and Richard Bauman. 1992. "Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2(2): 131-172.
- Brokaw, John. 1974. "The Repertory of a Mexican-American Theatrical Troupe: 1849-1924." *Latin American Theater Review* 8: 25-35.

- 1975. "A Mexican-American Acting Company, 1849-1924." *Educational Theater Journal* 17: 23-29.
- 1977. "Teatro Chicano: Some Reflections." *Educational Theater Journal* 29: 535-544.
- Broyles-González, Yolanda. 1994. *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Broyles-González, Yolanda and Lydia Mendoza. 2001. Lydia Mendoza's Life in Music: Norteño Tejano Legacies = La Historia De Lydia Mendoza. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. 1989. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Calderón, Roberto and Emilio Zamora. 1993[1986]. Manuela Solis Sager and Emma Tenayuca: A Tribute. *Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender*. Teresa Córdova, National Association for Chicano Studies., Ed. Alburquerque: University of New Mexico Press: 20-41.
- Cameron, Deborah. 1995. *Verbal Hygiene*. London: Routledge.
- Cárdenas de Dwyer, Carlota. 1979. The Development of Chicano Drama and Luis Valdez's Actos. *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Joseph and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto Sommers, Ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc.: 160-167.
- Castillo, Susana D. 1974. "Festivales De Teatro En América." *Latin American Theater Review* 8(1): 75-78.
- Chávez, Denise. 1986. *The Last of the Menu Girls*. Houston: Arte Público Press.
- Cisneros, René. 1975. "Los Actos: A Study in Metacommunication." *Tejidos* 2: 2-13.
- Covarrubias, Miguel. 1939. "Slapstick and Venom: Politics, Tent Shows, and Comedians." *Mexican Life* 15(10): 57-58.
- Cox, Bertha Mae. 1965. *Our Texas; Explorers, Heroes, Battles, Founders, Makers*. Dallas: Turner Co.

- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1996. 'Self'-Centering Narratives. *Natural Histories of Discourse*. Michael and Greg Urban Silverstein, Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 106-130.
- De León, Arnoldo. 1983. *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Díaz-Barriga, Miguel. 1997. "The Culture of Poverty as *Relajo*." *Aztlán* 22(2): 43-66.
- Donecker, Frances and Ralph W. Steen. 1948. *Our Texas*. Austin: Steck Co.
- Dorst, John. 1989. *The Written Suburb*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Dueñas-Herrera, Pablo. 1994. *La Divas En El Teatro De Revista Mexicano*. México, D.F.: Asociacion Mexicana de Estudios Fonograficos: Dirección General de Culturas Populares.
- Elizondo, José F. 1913. *El País De La Metralla: Revista En Un Acto, Dividio En Cinco Cuadros Y Un Apoteosis*. México, D.F.: Talleres de imprenta y fotograbado "Novedades".
- , 1918. *The Land of Joy; in a Prologue and Two Acts*. New York: Schirmer.
- Elizondo, José F. 1926. *Cosas Bellas En Palabras Ingenuas: Prosas Y Versos*. San Antonio: Editorial Lozano.
- Evans, Henry B. 1978. 1978 Meriky; or the Old Time Religion. An Ethiopian Farce, in One Scene. *This Grotesque Essence: Plays from the American Minstrel Stage*. Gary D. Engle, Ed. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press: 173-178.
- Everett, Donald E. 1975. *San Antonio: The Flavor of Its Past, 1845-1898*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press.
- Feld, Steven. 1994. Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style (Uptown Title) or, (Downtown Title) "Lift-up-over Sounding": Getting into the Kaluli Groove. *Music Grooves*. Charles and Steven Feld Keil, Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 109-150.
- Fernandez, James W. 1986. *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- , 1991. *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

- Flores, Richard R. 1995. *Los Pastores: History and Performance in the Mexican Shepherds' Play of South Texas*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- 1998. Mexicans, Modernity, and *Martyrs of the Alamo*. *Reflexiones* 1998. Victor J. Guerra, Ed. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies: 1-20.
- 2002. *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Flores, William Vincent and Rina Benmayor. 1997. Identity, Conflict, and Evolving Latino Communities: Cultural Citizenship in San Jose, California. *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*. William Vincent Flores and Rina Benmayor, Ed. Boston: Beacon Press: 57-96.
- Foppa, Alaide. 1993. Todo Lo Que Usted Queria Saber Sobre Agustin Lara. David Rodriguez, Ed. México, D.F.: Editorial Contenido: 121-142.
- Freeman, Martha Doty. 1972. *A History and Chronology of Public Markets in San Antonio*. San Antonio, San Antonio Development Agency.
- Friedrich, Paul. 1991. Polytropy. *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*. James W. Fernandez, Ed. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press: 17-55.
- Galván-Leguizamo, José Manuel. 1989. *Las Tandas De San Cuilmas: Los Carperos. Personal collection of author*. San Antonio.
- Gamio, Manuel. 1931. *The Mexican Immigrant: His Life-Story: Autobiographic Documents*. Chicago, Ill.,: The University of Chicago Press.
- 1971. *Mexican Immigration to the United States; a Study of Human Migration and Adjustment*. New York,: Dover Publications.
- García, Anthony J. 1994. Ludlow: El Grito De Las Minas. *Su Teatro 20 Years: Selected Plays*. Anthony J. García, Ed. Devner: Su Teatro: 156-230.
- Garcia, Richard A. 1991. *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class: San Antonio, 1929- 1941*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- García-Arellano, Ricardo. 1926a. Mi Compadre En Santa Anita, Ptes 1 Y 2. Phonograph Recording featuring Beatriz Nolesca, y Hermanos Areu. Cat. #8102, Matrix # 4292& 4293. Los Angeles: Vocalion, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.

- 1926b. Chismitos De Vecindad, Ptes 1 Y 2. Phonograph Recording featuring Beatriz Nolesca, Angélica Chacel, y Hermanos Areu. Cat. #40179, Matrix #4317W. Los Angeles: Brunswick, courtesy of Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican American Music, UCLA.
- García-Canclini, Néstor. 1992. *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias Para Entrar Y Salir De La Modernidad*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana.
- 1995. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gardner-Chloros, Penelope. 1995. Code-Switching in Community, Regional, and National Repertoires: The Myth of the Discreteness of Linguistic Systems. *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching*. Lesley and Pieter Muysken Milroy, Ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 68-89.
- Garza Guajardo, Celso. 1990. *Tello Mantecón En La Cultura Popular*. Monterrey, Nuevo Leon: Archivo General del Estado de Nuevo Leon.
- Gaspar de Alba, Alicia. 1998. *Chicano Art inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the Cara Exhibition*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Gidding, Nelson, Stephen Longstreet, et.al. 1957. The Helen Morgan Story. Film. featuring Paul Newman et.al. Ann Blyth. Los Angeles: Warner Brothers.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 1981. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goldsmith, Barclay. 1979. Brecht and Chicano Theater. *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Joseph and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto Sommers, Ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc.: 167-175.
- Gómez-Gil, Orlando. 1968. *Historia Crítica De La Literatura Hispanoamericana, Desde Los Orígenes Hasta El Momento Actual*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Gómez-Landero, Humberto. 1945. El Hijo Desobediente. VHS Cassette. featuring German and Marcelo Chávez Valdés. México, D.F.: Colección de lujo.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. 1993. *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts, and Poetry*. St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press.

- González, Jennifer. 1997. Autotopographies. *Prosthetic Territories: Politics and Hypertechnologies*. G. Jr. and M. Driscoll. Brahm, Ed. Boulder: Westview Press: 133-150.
- González, Wally. 1997. Que Me Entierren En Wal-Mart (Bury Me at Wal-Mart). Compact Disc featuring Wally González. Brownwood: Roysales.
- Goody, Jack. 1977. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Granados, Pedro. 1984. *Carpas De México: Leyendas, Anécdotas E Historia Del Teatro Popular*. México, D.F.: Editorial Universo.
- Gronow, Pekka. 1982. Ethnic Recordings: An Introduction. *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, Ed. Washington, DC: American Folklife Center: 1-50.
- Gronow, Pekka and Ilpo Saunio. 1998. *An International History of the Recording Industry*. London ; New York: Cassell.
- Gutiérrez, David. 1995. *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*. Berkeley,: University of California Press.
- Gutmann, Matthew C. 1996. *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Haggard, Merle. 1966. Someone Told My Story. Cat. # 5803, B-side. Capitol.
- Hall, Stuart. 1986. "Gramsci's Relevance to the Study of Race and Ethnicity." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10(2): 5-27.
- Haney, Peter C. 1996. Me Hago La...Ilusión: Genre Play and Status Consciousness in the Mexican American Carpa. First annual International Conference on the Emerging Literature of the Southwest Culture, El Paso, Texas, University of Texas at El Paso.
- 1997. *Carpa Y Teatro, Sol Y Sombra: The Carpa in Mexican American Society and History*. Master's Report, Anthropology. Austin: University of Texas at Austinpp.
- 1999a. "Fantasía and Disobedient Daughters: Undistressing Genres and Reinventing Traditions in the Mexican American *Carpa*." *Journal of American Folklore* 112(445): 437-449.

- 1999b. "Singing to the Machine: Rodolfo García's Autobiographical Report." *Texas Linguistic Forum* 41: 133-144.
- 2000. "Sol, Sombra, Y Media Luz: Parody, Genre Play, and Identity Formation in the Mexican American Carpa." *Pragmatics* 10(1): 99-124.
- Hanks, William. 1993. The Indexical Ground of Deictic Reference. *Rethinking Context*. Alessandro and Charles Goodwin Duranti, Ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univesity Press: 43-76.
- Haviland, John. 1991. ""That Was the Last Time I Seen Them and No More": Voices through Time in Australian Aboriginal Autobiography." *American Ethnologist* 18(2): 331-362.
- Hebdige, Dick. 1979. *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.
- Hernández, Guillermo. 1991. *Chicano Satire: A Study in Literary Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Herrera-Sobek, María. 1993. *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hill, Jane. 1993. " Is It Really "No Problemo?" Junk Spanish and Anglo-Racism." *Texas Linguistic Forum* (33): 1-12.
- 1995. 1995 the Grammar of Consciousness and the Consciousness of Grammar. *Language, Culture and Society: A Book of Readings*. Benjamin G. Blount, Ed. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press: 398-414.
- Hill, Jane and Ofelia Zepeda. 1993. Mrs. Patricio's Trouble. *Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse*. Jane and Judith Irvine Hill, Ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 197-225.
- Hill, Jane H. and Kenneth C. Hill. 1986. *Speaking Mexicano: Dynamics of Syncretic Language in Central Mexico*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. Introduction. *The Invention of Tradition*. Eric J. and Terence Ranger Hobsbawm, Ed. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press: 1-14.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Terence O. Ranger. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. 1994. *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- House, Boyce. 1949. *City of Flaming Adventure; the Chronicle of San Antonio*. San Antonio,: Naylor Co.
- Huerta, Jorge A. 1971. "Chicano Theater: A Background." *Aztlán* 2(2): 63-78.
- 1973. "Concerning Teatro Chicano." *Latin American Theater Review* 6(2): 13-20.
- 1982. *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms*. Ypsilanti, Mich.: Bilingual Press.
- 1983. The Influences of Latin American Theater on Teatro Chicano. *Mexican American Theater: Then and Now*. Nicolás Kanellos, Ed. Houston: Arte Público Press: 64-77.
- 2000. *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society, and Myth*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jaffe, Alexandra M. 1999. *Ideologies in Action: Language Politics on Corsica*. Berlin ;: New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Joseph, Miranda. 2002. *Against the Romance of Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kanellos, Nicolás. 1973. "Mexican Community Theater in a Midwestern City." *Latin American Theater Review* 7(1): 43-48.
- 1986. The Mexican Stage in the Southwestern United States as a Sounding Board for Cultural Conflict. *Missions in Conflict: Essays on U.S.-Mexican Relations and Chicano Culture*. Dietrich Briesemeister Renate von Bardeleben, and Juan Bruce-Novoa, Ed. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag: 83-90.
- 1990. *A History of Hispanic Theater in the United States: Origins to 1940*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Kanellos, Nicolás, Kenya Dworkin y Méndez, et al. 2002a. *En Otra Voz: Antología De La Literatura Hispana De Los Estados Unidos*. Houston, Tex.: Arte Publico Press.
- 2002b. *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

- Kanellos, Nicolás and Yvette E. Miller. 1987. *Mexican American Theater: Legacy and Reality*. Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press.
- Kapchan, Deborah A. 1993. "Hybridity and the Marketplace: Two Emerging Paradigms in Folkloristics." *Western Folklore* (52): 303-326.
- , 1996. *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Keil, Charles. 1994. Music Mediated and Live in Japan. *Music Grooves*. Charles and Steven Feld Keil, Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 247-256.
- King, Ben. 1981. "Awakening Guadalupe's Ghost." *San Antonio Express-News*,: p. 8.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. 1995. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Trans., Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Labov, William. 1972. The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax. *Language in the Inner City*, Ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 353-405.
- Lambert, Wallace. 1978. Some Cognitive and Sociocultural Consequences of Being Bilingual. *International Dimensions of Bilingual Education*. James E. Alatis, Ed. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press: 214-229.
- Lambert, Wallace, R Hodgson, R.Gardner, and S. Fillenbaum. 1960. "Evaluative Reactions to Spoken Language." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (60): 44-51.
- Lara, Agustín. 1991[1953a]. Farolito. Compact Disc featuring Agustín Lara. CDM-3352. México, D.F.: Bertelsmann de México, S.A. de C.V.
- , 1991[1953b]. María Bonita. Compact Disc featuring Agustín Lara. CDM-3352. México, D.F.: Bertelsmann de México, S.A. de C.V., courtesy of Agustín Lara: 20 Éxitos.
- , 1991[1960]. Escarcha. Compact Disc featuring Agustín Lara. CDM-3352. México, D.F.: Bertelsmann de México, S.A. de C.V., courtesy of Agustín Lara: 20 Éxitos.
- Leal, Luis. 1996. El Pachuco: De La Realidad Al Mito. First International Conference on the Emerging Literature of the Southwest Culture, El Paso, Texas, University of Texas at El Paso.

- Levine, Lawrence W. 1988. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Levinson, Steven. 1989. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Limón, José Eduardo. 1978. Agradingo Joking in Texas Mexican Society: Folklore and Differential Identity. *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship*. Ricardo and Raymund Paredes Romo, Ed. La Jolla: University of California Press: 33-50.
- , 1992. *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1994. *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.
- , 1998. *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lucchese, Sam, with Tad Mizwa. 1980. *A Lifetime with Boots*. Houston: Cordovan Corp.
- María y Campos, Armando de. 1939. *Los Payasos, Poetas Del Pueblo*. México, D.F.: Ediciones Botas.
- , 1956. *El Teatro De Género Chico En La Revolución Mexicana*. México,.
- , 1989. *Las Tandas Del Principal*. México, D.F.: Editorial Diana.
- Marrero, María Teresa. 2002. From El Teatro Campesino to the Gay 1990s: Transformations and Fragments in the Evolution in Chicana/O Latina/O Theater and Performance. *The State of Latino Theater in the United States*. Luis Ramos-García, Ed. New York: Routledge: 39-66.
- Martínez, Marcos. 2002. Still Treading Water: Recent Currents in Chicano Theater. *The State of Latino Theater in the United States*. Luis Ramos-García, Ed. New York: Routledge: 15-29.
- Martínez-Solares, Gilberto. 1999[1979]. Okey Mister Pancho. VHS Cassette. featuring María Eugenia Velasco et. al. Van Nuys, CA: Laguna Films.
- Mason, Theresa. 1977. *Teatro Chicano and Mexicano Identity: The Case of Two Texas Teatros*. Master's Report, Anthropology. Austin: University of Texas at Austinpp.

- Mazón, Mauricio. 1984. *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Medina, Rafael and José F. Elizondo. 1904. *Chin Chun-Chan: Conflicto Chino, En Un Acto Y Tres Cuadros*. México, D.F.: Mexico, Medina y Co.
- Mendoza, Cristina. 1990. Introducción. *Escritos De Carlos Mérida Sobre El Arte: La Danza*. Cristina Mendoza, Ed. México, D.F.: Segunda Época: 13-37.
- Mendoza, Lydia, Chris Strachwitz, et al. 1993. *Lydia Mendoza: A Family Autobiography*. Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press.
- Mérida. 1990. La Danza En México. *Escritos De Carlos Mérida Sobre El Arte: La Danza*. Cristina Mendoza, Ed. México, D.F.: Segunda Época: 177-189.
- Merino-Lanzilotti, Ignacio Cristóbal. 1967. *El Teatro De Revista Política En México (Estudio De Tres Obras De Pablo Prida Y Carlos M. Ortega)*. Licenciatura, Letras Españolas. México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: 53 pp.
- Merlín, Socorro. 1995. *Vida Y Milagros De Las Carpas: La Carpa En México, 1930-1950*. México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Centro Nacional de Investigación y Documentación Teatral Rodolfo Usigli.
- Mesa-Bains, Amalia. 2002. "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquache". <http://www.csupomona.edu/plin/ews410/rasquache.html> 2002.
- Mexico, University of New. 2000. "Biography, Manuel Areu Collection of Nineteenth Century Zarzuelas", University of New Mexico, Center for Southwest Research. http://elibrary.unm.edu/oanm/NmU/nmu1%23mss516bc/nmu1%23mss516bc_m4.html
- Milroy, Lesley and Pieter Muysken. 1995. Introduction. *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching*. Lesley and Pieter Muysken Milroy, Ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Universrity Press: 1-15.
- Monsiváis, Carlos. 1981. *Escenas De Pudor Y Liviandad*. México, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo.
- , 1984. "La Agonía Interminable De La Canción Romántica." *Comunicación y Cultura* 12: 2-39.

- , n.d. *Untitled Dialogue. Personal Collection of Normalinda Monsiváis*. Universal City.
- Montejano, David. 1987. *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Morales, Alfonso et. al. 1986. *El País De Las Tandas: Teatro De Revista 1900-1940*. México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares.
- Morales, Miguel Angel. 1987. *Cómicos De México*. México, D.F.: Panorama Editorial.
- Morton, Carlos. 1974. "The Teatro Campesino." *The Drama Review* 18: 71-76.
- , 1976. "El Mito Del Midwest." *Latin American Theater Review* 9(2): 94-98.
- Muzquiz, Rodolfo. 1988. *Bailes Y Danzas Tradicionales*. México, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social.
- Myers Scotton, Carol. 1988. Code Switching and Types of Multilingual Communities. *Georgetown University Round Table 1987: Language Spread and Language Policy*. Peter Lowenberg, Ed. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press: 61-79.
- Nájera-Ramírez, Olga. 1989. "Social and Political Dimensions of Folklórico Dance." *Western Folklore* (48): 15-32.
- Negt, Oskar and Alexander Kluge. 1993. *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Noonan Guerra, Mary Ann. 1988. *The History of San Antonio's Market Square*. San Antonio: Alamo Press.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations* (26): 7-25.
- O'Banion, John D. 1992. *Reorienting Rhetoric: The Dialectic of List and Story*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- O'Connor, John J. 1967. "The Theater: Shades of the '30s." *Wall Street Journal*: p. 12.

- Ong, Aihwa. 1996. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States." *Current Anthropology* (37): 737-762.
- Padilla, Genaro M. 1993. *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.
- Palomo Acosta, Teresa. 2002. "Cruz Azul Mexicana", Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/CC/sbc4.html> 2004.
- Paredes, Américo. 1958. *"with His Pistol in His Hand," a Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin,: University of Texas Press.
- , 1995. *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Paredes, Américo and Richard Bauman. 1993. *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexican Border*. Austin, Tex.: CMAS Books, Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas at Austin.
- Peña, Manuel H. 1982. "Folksong and Social Change: Two Corridos as Interpretive Sources." *Aztlán* (13): 13-42.
- , 1985. *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- , 1999. *The Mexican American Orquesta: Music, Culture, and the Dialectic of Conflict*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Peyton, Green. 1946. *San Antonio, City in the Sun*. New York, London,: Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Peza, Juan de Dios and Luis Arcaraz. n.d. *Una Fiesta En Santa Anita*. México, D.F.: Casa del Maestro.
- Pilcher, Jeffrey M. 2001. *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity*. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources.
- Portilla, Jorge. 1986. *Fenomenología Del Relajo, Y Otros Ensayos*. México, D.F.: Fondo de cultura económica.

- Poyo, Gerald Eugene, Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa, et al. 1991. *Tejano Origins in Eighteenth-Century San Antonio*. Austin: Published by the University of Texas Press for the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.
- Prieto Hernández, Ana María. 2001. *Acerca De La Pendenciera E Indisciplinada Vida De Los Léperos Capitalinos*. México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Dirección General de Culturas Populares e Indígenas.
- Propp, Vladimir. 1988[1968]. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans., Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ramírez, Elizabeth C. 1990. *Footlights across the Border: A History of Spanish-Language Professional Theater on the Texas Stage*. New York: P. Lang.
- 2000. *Chicanas/Latinas in American Theater: A History of Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ramos, Samuel. 1962. *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*. [Austin]: University of Texas Press.
- Ramos-García, Luis. 2002. *The State of Latino Theater in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Reyes de la Maza, Luis. 1985. *Circo, Maroma Y Teatro, 1819-1910*. México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Impr. Universitaria.
- Reyna, José Reynaldo. 1980. *Raza Humor: Chicano Joke Tradition in Texas*. San Antonio, Tex.: Penca Books.
- Riddle, Abrahams Roger D (ed.) and Almeda. 1970. *A Singer and Her Songs: Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Rodríguez, José María. 1961. *Rodriguez Memoirs of Early Texas*. San Antonio: Standard Printing Company.
- Rodríguez-Valero, Jesús. 1930a. Comunista En San Antonio--Diálogo. Phonograph Recording featuring unk. harmonica and guitar players. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8395, Matrix #SA 7022-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1930b. El Soldado Porfirista--Diálogo. Phonograph Recording featuring unk. harmonica and guitar players. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8395, Matrix #SA 7023-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.

- 1930c. Amor Del Bueno--Diálogo. Phonograph Recording featuring unk. harmonica and guitar players. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8412, Matrix #SA 7024-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1930d. Es Mi Hombre--Diálogo. Phonograph Recording featuring unk. harmonica and guitar players. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8412, Matrix #SA 7025-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1930e. La Historia--Diálogo. Phonograph Recording featuring unk. harmonica and guitar players. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8417, Matrix #SA 7026-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1930f. La Soldadera--Diálogo. Phonograph Recording featuring unk. harmonica and guitar players. Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8417, Matrix #SA 7027-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1931a. Aires Matrimoniales--Diálogo Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8448, Matrix #SA 8014-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1931b. La Póliza De a Daime--Diálogo Cómico. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8448, Matrix #SA 8015-. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936a. El Chino. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8917, Matrix #SA2434. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936b. Cabrestea O Se Ahorca. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8917, Matrix #SA 2435. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936c. Tu La Traes. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #89992, Matrix #SA 2436. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936d. La Arrepentida. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8992, Matrix #SA 2437-1. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.

- 1936e. El Condenado. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8980, Matrix #SA 2438-1. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936f. La Chava. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8980, Matrix #SA 2439-1. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936g. La Arrejuntada. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8956, Matrix #SA 2440-1. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- 1936h. Tres Por Tres Son Tres. Phonograph Recording featuring Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8956, Matrix #SA 2441-1. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.

Romano, Eduardo, Ed. 1989. *Las Letras Del Tango: Antología Cronológica 1900-1980*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Ross.

Rosaldo, Renato. 1997. Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism. *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*. William Vincent Flores and Rina Benmayor, Ed. Boston: Beacon Press: 27-38.

Rosales, F. Arturo. 1984. Spanish-Language Theater and Early Mexican Immigration. *Hispanic Theater in the United States*. Nicolás Kanellos, Ed. Houston: Arte Público Press: 15-23.

Ruiz, Vicki. 1993. Star Struck: Acculturation, Adolescence, and the Mexican American Woman, 1920-1950. *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*. Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera, Ed. Berkeley: University of California Press: 109-129.

Ruiz, Vicki. 1998. *From out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Saldívar, Gabriel. 1989[1937]. *El Jarabe (Con Prólogo E Manuel Ponce)*. Guadalajara, Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco.

Saldívar, Ramón. 1990. *Chicano Literature: The Dialectics of Difference*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Sánchez, George. 1990. "Go after the Women": Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929. *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S.*

- Women's History*. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki Ruíz, Ed. New York: Routledge: 250-263.
- Sánchez, Rosaura. 1994[1983]. *Chicano Discourse: Socio-Historic Perspectives*. Houston: Arte Público Press.
- , 1995. *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sandoval, E.G. 1929-1930. Ortiz-Rubio, Pts. 1&2. Phonograph Recording featuring orquesta típica Netty and Jesús Rodríguez. Cat #8325 (Sides A&B). San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation.
- , 1930a. El Santo Del Comisario, Ptes 1 Y 2--Escena Descriptiva Cómica. featuring Ernestina Edgel de Rodríguez Jesús Rodríguez-Valero, Val Martínez, Sara Villegas, Rocha y Martínez, Salas y Herrera, Trío Crudo. Catalog #8371. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation, El Cerrito, CA.
- , 1930b. Una Boda De Medio Pelo, Ptes 1 Y 2--Escena Descriptiva Cómica. featuring Ernestina Edgel de Rodríguez Jesús Rodríguez-Valero, Val Martínez, Sara Villegas, Rocha y Martínez, Salas y Herrera, Trío Crudo. Catalog #8317. San Antonio: Vocalion, courtesy of Arhoolie Foundation, El Cerrito, CA.
- Sareli, Jorge. 1977. *El Tango En México*. México, D.F.: Editorial Diana.
- Savigliano, Marta. 1995. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Schechner, Richard. 1985. *Between Theater & Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shank, Theodore. 1974. "A Return to Aztec and Maya Roots." *The Drama Review* 18: 56-70.
- Smith, Pamela Ann. 1991. *Beatriz Nolesca "La Chata": An Oral History*. Master's, Anthropology. Austin: University of Texas at Austin: 110 pp.
- Spottswood, Richard K. 1990. *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893 to 1942*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. 1986. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen.

- Steiner, Stan. 1969. "Cultural Schizophrenia of Luis Valdez." *Vogue*: p. 112-113.
- Sterne, Jonathan. 2003. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Stewart, Susan. 1991. "Notes on Distressed Genres." *Journal of American Folklore* 104(411): 5-31.
- Stone, Vernon and Ruth Stone. 1981. "Event, Feedback and Analysis." *Ethnomusicology* 25(2): 215-225.
- Tafolla, Carmen. 1992. *Sonnets to Human Beings and Other Selected Works*. Santa Monica: Lalo Press.
- Toll, Robert C. 1974. *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Treviño, Jesús. 1973. Somos Uno. featuring Grupo Mascarones El Teatro Campesino.
- Ulica, Jorge and Juan Rodríguez. 1982. *Crónicas Diabólicas (1916-1926) De "Jorge Ulica"*. San Diego, Ca.: Maize Press.
- University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio. 1987. *The Italian Texans*. San Antonio: University of Texas, Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio.
- Urban, Greg. 1993. "Culture's Public Face." *Public Culture* (5): 213-238.
- Valdez, Luis. 1971. "Notes on Chicano Theater." *Latin American Theater Review* 4(2): 52-55.
- Valdez, Luis and Teatro Campesino (Organization). 1990. *Luis Valdez--Early Works: Actos, Bernabé, and Pensamiento Serpentino*. Houston, Tex.: Arte Publico Press.
- Van Young, Eric. 1994. Conclusion: The State as Vampire-Hegemonic Projects, Public Ritual, and Popular Culture in Mexico, 1600-1990. *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*. William H. Beezley, Cheryl E. Martin, and William E. French, Ed. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc.
- Vaughan, Mary Kay. 1994. The Construction of the Patriotic Festival in Tecamachalco, Puebla, 1900-1946. *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations*

- and Popular Culture in Mexico.* William H. Beezley, Cheryl E. Martin, and William E. French, Ed. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc.
- Venegas, Daniel. 1999. *Las Aventuras De Don Chipote, O, Cuando Los Pericos Mamen.* Houston, TX: Arte Público Press.
- Villarreal, Nick. 1991. Puros Éxitos. Cassette Recording featuring Nick Villarreal and conjunto. 9021. San Antonio: Discos Joey.
- , n.d. La Lotería. Cassette Recording featuring Nick Villarreal and conjunto. TMS-6109. San Antonio: Discos Joey.
- Viola, P. 1927. "Las Enseñanzas Del Teatro." *El Fandango*: p.
- Warner, Michael. 1992. The Mass Public and the Mass Subject. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Craig Calhoun, Ed. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press: 359-376.
- , 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Book.
- Weiss, Judith A. 1993. *Latin American Popular Theater: The First Five Centuries*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- White, Hayden V. 1973. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore,: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. 1992. Ethnicizing Gender: An Exploration of Sexuality as Sign in Chinese Immigrant Literature. *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*. Shirley Lim and Amy Ling, Ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 111-129.
- Woolard, Kathryn A., and Bambi B. Schieffelin. 1994. "Language Ideology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* (23): 55-82.
- Woolard, Kathryn A. 1999. "Simultaneity and Bivalence as Strategies in Bilingualism." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 8(1): 3-29.
- Worthen, W.B. 1997. "Staging América: The Subject of History in Chicano/a Theater." *Theater Journal* (49): 101-120.
- Yarbro-Bejarano, Yvonne. 1979. From Acto to Mito: A Critical Appraisal of the Teatro Campesino. *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Joseph and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto Sommers, Ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc.: 176-185.

- Ybarra-Frausto, Tomás. 1971. "Teatro Chicano: Two Reports. Punto De Partida." *Latin American Theater Review* 4(2): 51-52.
- , 1983. La Chata Noloesca: Figura Del Donaire. *Mexican American Theater: Then and Now*. Nicolás Kanellos, Ed. Houston: Arte Público Press: 41-51.
- , 1984. I Can Still Hear the Applause. La Farándula Chicana: Carpas Y Tandas De Variedad. *Hispanic Theater in the United States*. Nicolás Kanellos, Ed. Houston: Arte Público Press: 45-60.
- , 1991. Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility. *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery. and CARA National Advisory Committee., Ed. Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles: 155-160.
- Zamora, Emilio. 1993. *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Vita

Peter Clair Haney was born in Lawrence Kansas on March 16, 1969, the son of Bernard and Carlena Haney. He received a B.A. in Spanish with departmental honors from Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa in May of 1991. For the next eighteen months he worked in Harlingen Texas as a paralegal with Proyecto Libertad, a nonprofit organization that provides free legal services to immigrants and refugees in INS detention. In October of 1992 he took a job in San Antonio as a Community Outreach and Education Specialist with Motivation, Education and Training, Inc. and was terminated one day before the end of his three-month probationary period. He then returned to his previous position with Proyecto Libertad, where he worked for six months before taking a position as an announcer for KMBH/KHID-FM, the local public radio station. In September of 1994, he entered graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin.

Permanent address: 609 N. 1180 Rd., Lawrence, KS 66047

This dissertation was typed by the author.