

Assimilating Suffering: The Banality of Non-Citizen Subjects in Dramatic Texts and Performance

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis developed from my own experience of performing an undocumented domestic worker, Ana, in the play Living Out by Lisa Loomer as part of the Ohio State University Department of Theatre's Fall 2011 season. This thesis investigates the productive forces at work behind the re-presentation of non-citizen subjects as constructed by the U.S. mainstream institution of theatre, specifically the popular immigrant narrative of the "search for the American Dream". Such re-presentations have a propensity to neutralize, and thereby, assimilate the non-citizen subject's suffering on stage as performed by the actor for the consumption of the American citizen-spectator. In this project, I examine the methods by which the U.S. mainstream institution of theatre utilizes nationalist and affective markers (such as the American Dream and, in the case of Living Out, the supposed shared humanity of mothering and work between an affluent white mother and her undocumented caregiver) to provide the American citizen-spectator with commonplace, recognizable imagery. This imagery works as a signifying function that is implicitly indebted to the organization of laboring bodies implicated by race, class, gender, and citizenship.

My analysis is theoretically situated within textual analysis, theatrical critique, and autoethnography. The first section employs cultural, performance, and political theory to examine the textual production of the ideology of the American Dream and multiculturalism in the play Living Out. I then utilize autoethnography in the second section to interrogate my own staged performance of the undocumented domestic working experience and the ways that my acting body disavows the affective experiences of undocumented domestic workers existing in the U.S. The concluding section

illuminates the methods by which non-traditional Latina/o and “third-world” theatre producers have resisted the onerous influence of the U.S. mainstream institution of theatre on Latina/o re-presentation. With this thesis I hope to contribute to the fields of border, ethnic, and theatre and performance studies as well as expand transnational/migration discourses on the cultural production of the narratives of noncitizen subjects.

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Introduction

The Ohio State University's Department of Theatre staged Living Out by Lisa Loomer as part of an effort to promote "A Conversation On Immigration" (a school wide series on immigration) from October 27th through November 6th, 2011. The play employs the American comedic style of the television sitcom to illustrate the relationship of Nancy Robin, a white entertainment lawyer from the affluent city of Santa Monica, California, and her nanny, Ana Hernandez, who illegally emigrated from El Salvador 8 years ago. Lisa Loomer attempts to portray a "shared humanity" between the characters of Ana and Nancy by demonstrating their supposed relational affective responses to their work and mothering. Unfortunately, Loomer demonstrates her own insensitivity to the crises which undocumented domestic workers experience in the United States by trivializing their suffering. Loomer's use of comedy is problematic because it neutralizes the struggles associated with race, class, and citizenship that accompany the undocumented domestic worker. The result is a portrayal of Nancy's white upper-middle class status that allows for the ideological success of the American Dream, while Ana's race, class, and "alien" status subordinates her into a form of affective labor that reduces her humanity.

The plot begins with Ana looking for work as a nanny in Los Angeles in order to support her trauma-ridden husband, Bobby (who Loomer portrays as consistently drinking beer throughout the play), and her two sons, the older of which lives in El Salvador with his grandmother. Ana's ultimate goal is to bring her older son, Tomas (whose father is not Bobby), from El Salvador to unite the family. After two unsuccessful interviews Ana learns that employers are more favorable to nannies who are

not burdened with the responsibilities of their own children. Situations multiply when Ana stretches the truth and claims that both of her sons are in El Salvador in an interview with Nancy, the high-powered entertainment lawyer, and is hired immediately. As the narrative continues, Loomer's strained portrayal of the supposed shared humanity between Nancy and Ana is overshadowed by Ana's subjugated reality and the resulting death of her son who lives in the U.S. because she was caring for Nancy's daughter.

As a reaction to this play and the performance, this thesis analyzes and critiques the textual production and staged performance of the non-citizen subject in Living Out for American popular audiences and its susceptibility to crises of adverse re-presentation, specifically, the undocumented domestic worker traversing the U.S.-Mexico border. I do not aim to negatively deny the significance of producing plays that incorporate the narratives of non-citizen subjects as characters in theatrical works. Rather, in a broad sense, I expose the ideology of the American Dream, as illustrated in Living Out, as a political framework utilized by mainstream cultural producers in the United States to repress the particularities of the affect experienced by undocumented domestic workers. In short, the re-presentation of undocumented domestic workers is couched within nationalist discourses induced by the historical cultural dissemination of the American Dream.

In thinking about the ambiguous term of “re-presentation”¹ in regards to marginalized subjectivities like that of the undocumented immigrant, I divide the word “presentation” from its adverb to illustrate a discursive reiteration of the presentation of

¹ I am motivated to use this term by Diana Taylor's use of “re-presentation” in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, as well as Edward Said's exploration of the concept in his book *Orientalism*.

the subject, rather than simply illustrating how one observes and considers the subject. In defining his use of the term, Stuart Hall writes:

The term can . . . stand for a very radical displacement of that unproblematic notion of the concept of representation. My own view is that events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive, but that it is only within the discursive, and the subject to its specific conditions, limits, and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed with meaning.²

In short, the discursive realm provides a space to expose the constitutive effects that are a result of the mechanisms of re-presentation. As Hall maintains, dislodging the “expressive” notion of the term and supplanting a “formative” notion that illuminates the construction of ideas, such as the American Dream, can create new meaning. Therefore, invoking Hall, my use of the term demonstrates the institutionalizing process by which mainstream cultural producers portray marginalized subjectivities. Dissimulated conventions can be exposed through investigating the re-presentation of the performance in texts and on stage. The term “re-presentation” becomes a vehicle by which to illustrate the productive forces at work in portraying the generic immigrant narrative of the search for the American Dream in mainstream dramatic texts and performance.

Re-presentations of the undocumented domestic worker, such as that in Living Out, are employed as regulating components in the enactment of neoliberal³ immigration policies by providing audiences with ordinary impressions of the humble, hard-working

² Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995), 224.

³ In “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism is being “equated with a radically free market: maximized competition and free trade achieved through economic de-regulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favorable to business and indifferent toward poverty, social deracination, cultural decimation, long term resource depletion and environmental destruction.” Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy” in *t&e* (7(1), 2003), 1.

undocumented immigrant. The validity of the pain and suffering experienced by undocumented domestic workers is disavowed by U.S. liberalism's obsession with multiculturalism⁴. Therefore, the generic narrative provided de-politicizes immigrant suffering and produces an affect in audiences that becomes a trite universal public feeling that is quickly forgotten once they leave the theatre. The method by which these re-presentations are translated to American popular culture plays a crucial role in the ambivalence felt by American audiences to mobilize for immigrant policy reform.

The first section of this thesis considers the ideology of the American Dream as a reductive apparatus utilized to demystify the undocumented domestic worker's experience in dramatic texts. Neutralizing the affective experience that accompanies the trajectory of undocumented domestic workers through the ideology of the American Dream encourages American audiences to cathect and relate to the popular immigrant narrative of searching for the American Dream and "universal" difficulties, such as mothering, work, and change. I illustrate this process through the analysis of the textual production of the American Dream in the play Living Out by Lisa Loomer. This play stages the American Dream as a performative project that is paradigmatic of the reduced suffering illustrated by non-citizen characters, thereby allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which cultural re-presentations of undocumented immigrants work to de-politicize their struggle. In reformulating the materiality of bodies, Judith Butler maintains that at stake is "the understanding of performativity not as

⁴ Jodi Melamed defines her term "neoliberal multiculturalism" as a notion in which antiracism is employed to deflect from exploitative endeavors in the expansion of capitalism. Melamed maintains, "I refer to the contemporary incorporation of U.S. multiculturalism into the legitimating and operating procedures of neoliberalism, conceived as a world-historic organization of economy, governance, and social and biological life." Jodi Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism" in *Social Text* (Vol. 24, No.4, Winter 2006), 15.

the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates.”⁵ Employing performativity from a re-presentational lens exposes the “reiterative power” of the American Dream as a tool in Living Out that produces the supposed shared humanity illustrated by the characters of Ana and Nancy, thereby disavowing the economic and cultural differences existing between them. The supposed shared humanity between the characters of Ana and Nancy thus aligns with American liberalism’s economic and cultural project of multiculturalism through the discourse of the Dream.

This supposed shared humanity provides the impetus to the second section of this thesis, which examines my own staged performance of the undocumented domestic working experience in the Ohio State University’s production of Living Out. Through the employment of autoethnography, I will interrogate “acts of transfer” from my own performative acts of embodiment to that of my performance of the character of Ana on stage.⁶ The contradictions I experienced from performing *Latinidad*⁷ through the theatrical lens of realism provoked me to resist the normative style of method acting and implicitly use methodologies based on body movements and vibration, also known as the Chekov technique. The Chekov technique and Brechtian epic theatre through the support

⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 2.

⁶ Diana Taylor titles the introduction to her book *The Archive and the Repertoire* as “Acts of Transfer.” Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 1.

⁷ With regards to the concept of *Latinidad*, Alicia Arrizón writes that she is “convinced that the development of Latino and Latina studies within theatre and performance . . . must start with a quest for the pluralism that *necessarily* perpetuates specific cultural practices that challenge both colonial and imperialist discourses and recognize the geopolitical implications of space.” The “pluralism” of *Latinidad* has the ability to contest the productive forces at work in constructing neutralized, homogeneous re-presentations of Latina/o subjects. Alicia Arrizón, *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 2.

of feminist theatre theory provided me with a method by which to subvert and reclaim knowledge on stage as the character of Ana, even as I was directed under realism and the method technique. This section articulates my creative trajectory from my own embodied performance of *Latinidad* to my theatrical performance of *Latinidad* as Ana and the re-presentation that such a performance produces.

The final section will provide a brief discussion of the effects of the U.S. mainstream institution of theatre on Latina/o re-presentation as well as on Latina/o theatre producers. In *The Latino Threat*, Leo Chavez maintains that such re-presentations “emerge from a history of ideas, laws, narratives, myths, and knowledge productions in social sciences, sciences, the media, and the arts.”⁸ In short, the mainstream institution of theatre plays a constitutive role in the reification of the hierarchal racial structure in the U.S. through the concept of re-presentation. Consequently, non-traditional Latina/o and “third-world” theatre producers have turned to problematizing the re-presentation of Latina/o and “third-world” subjects through the concept of *Latinidad*.⁹ *Latinidad* provides a repertoire of heterogeneous Latina/o histories of oppression that can be examined through the employment of different epistemological perspectives and resignified and re-presented to American popular culture. The next section will further interrogate the institution of re-presentation in Living Out. This play provides a repertoire of staged scenarios to interrogate in order to reveal the methods by which the

⁸ Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 22.

⁹ Arrizón, *Latina Performance*, 2.

process of re-presentation works to create banal portrayals of undocumented domestic workers.¹⁰

Biopolitical Banality in Living Out

Today more than ever, as productive forces tend to be completely de-localized, completely universal, they produce not only commodities but also rich and powerful social relationships. These new productive forces have no place, however, because they occupy all places, and they produce and are exploited in this indefinite non-place. The universality of human creativity, the synthesis of freedom, desire, and living labor, is what takes place in the non-place of the postmodern relations of production.

- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
Empire (2000)

In Living Out, Lisa Loomer introduces the audience to the character of Ana by berating her with offensive but supposed comic punch lines from the white bourgeois employer:

WALLACE. ...Where are you from?

ANA. Do you know where is Huntington Park?

WALLACE. No, I meant, where are you – (Gestures.) *from*?

ANA. Oh. I was born in El Salvador.

WALLACE. Good God, everyone is from El Salvador these days! (Laughs.) What happened to all the Mexicans?¹¹

The character of Wallace becomes a caricature of the white bourgeois mother living in Santa Monica, CA, while Ana is portrayed with few words but an obvious accent. The comic punch lines tend to be geared toward a bourgeois audience, as the comical offense is aimed toward the working class and people of color. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks states, “The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial

¹⁰ In defining the matrix of the archive, the repertoire, and the scenario Diana Taylor writes, “The process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within (and in turn helps constitute) specific systems of re-presentation” (21). Expanding this process to the re-presentation of the undocumented immigrant thus provides the means of investigating her/his banal construction within U.S. popular culture.

¹¹ Loomer, Living Out, 1.1.9-13.

differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten.”¹² In short, the other is manipulated and exploited in order to appease the desires of white supremacy and Ana’s narrative is erased and her complexity as an undocumented domestic worker is reduced to a stereotype.

Contemporary re-presentations of Latin American and Mexican migrants serve the biopolitical matrix of preserving life in the name of labor. Foucault maintains that “the investment of the body, its valorization, and the distributive management of its forces” are the mechanisms employed in the production and reproduction of life.¹³ Living Out illustrates the propagation of laboring bodies implicated by markers of race, class, and citizenship. Therefore, the banality associated with the narratives of undocumented domestic workers in theatrical works such as that in Living Out becomes an apparatus utilized to maintain white supremacy through implicitly normalizing the hegemonic arrangement of the U.S. racial structure in order to sustain neoliberal delegations of power. This section unmask the productive forces at work in staging such scenarios.

In the Ohio State University Department of Theatre’s production playbill, the dramaturge, Tony Frank, maintains that Loomer “provides a story about two women striving to obtain the American Dream; that dream which promises us the possibility of prosperity and success regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.”¹⁴ The U.S. will not grant the character of Ana citizenship because she emigrated as an economic

¹² bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 39.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 141.

¹⁴ Loomer, Living Out playbill, October-November 2011.

refugee and not as a political refugee from El Salvador. Moreover, Ana has not seen her 11-year-old son, Tomas, in 8 years and she is unrecognizable to him in a photograph sent to him as illustrated in the play. In comparison to Nancy's less urgent struggle of needing to work at a high paying entertainment law firm in order to afford living in the affluent city of Santa Monica, the dramaturge's assertion of the American Dream illustrates Loomer's ineffectual attempt at portraying a supposed shared humanity between the two women. Ana's affective experience as an undocumented economic refugee is disavowed in an attempt to disguise the raced and classed inequities of Ana and Nancy.

A critical analysis of the ideology of the American Dream is necessary to illustrate Ana and Nancy's disparity within the dominant systems of power in the U.S. The American Dream can be defined as a national philosophy embedded in the United States Declaration of Independence, which claims that "all men are created equal" and that they are "endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights." This produces the illusion of possible prosperity in any individual that resides in the United States even though its ideology is based on the imperial foundations of the U.S. constitution. The writers of the United States constitution were inspired by the ancient imperialist model that believed in the expansion of its borders and the distribution of power into systems.¹⁵ Therefore, the foundational democracy from which the constitution originated worked to economically, politically, and socially disseminate its governing not only within the United States, but beyond its borders to proliferate the ostensibly unfettering values of the constitution.

¹⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xiv.

In their seminal book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri regard this imperial idea as one that “has survived and matured throughout the history of the United States constitution and has emerged now on a global scale in its fully realized form.”¹⁶ In the current era, the ideas of the constitution have erupted globally expanding its influence through Western neoliberal delegations of power. Neoliberalism is most commonly defined as an economic philosophy that opposes government intervention, and thereby, fosters the ideals of the free market. But in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey maintains, “We can . . . interpret neoliberalization either as a *utopian* project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a *political* project to establish the conditions for a capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.”¹⁷ In short, the former provides the hegemonic discourses for the justification of the latter’s endeavor. Government is always already interconnected with knowledge production in neoliberalism and this interconnection implicitly and consistently produces a market-based populist culture substantiated in democracy.

Although neoliberalism’s present powers are not limited to any global geographical region, the American Dream as utilized in the U.S. could be used as a utopian apparatus contained in neoliberalism’s political notion that the object of neoliberal regulation is the propagation of labor for the accumulation of capital, and therefore delivers the prime model form of biopower¹⁸ considering the Dream’s insistence on the prosperous reproduction of life. Furthermore, one gains a sense of

¹⁶ Ibid, xiv.

¹⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19.

¹⁸ In Michael Hardt’s article “Affective Labor” he defines biopower as “the power of the emerging forces of governmentality to create, manage, and control populations – the power to manage life.” Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor” in *boundary 2* (26:2, 1999), 98.

individuality by way of labor resulting in prosperity and comfort through the ideology of the Dream. Considering its effective influence on the population, the positive assumptions of the American Dream can be used as an apparatus to subjugate people into various forms of labor and modes of domination in the neoliberal state.

Examining the ideology of the American Dream from the perspective of neoliberalism places Living Out into a larger context. If taking into account the significance of the effects of neoliberalism on non-citizen subjects for the extraction of their labor, Living Out could epistemically provide the audience with unencumbered portrayals of the candid affect experienced by undocumented immigrants existing on the periphery of the U.S. Therefore, one can consider how the play could be staged as an epic Brechtian piece produced to provoke thought and discussion. Incongruously, the style of Living Out appears to exhibit qualities of a television sitcom as opposed to an epic Brechtian tragicomedy. Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre calls for an analytical observation of the performance of the play rather than the spectators cathecting themselves to the outcome of the dramatic narrative.¹⁹ Loomer instead reinforces the spectator's cultural assumptions and provides them with marketable representations of the immigrant domestic worker and her white bourgeois employer. The actors supply comprehensive characterizations and conventional mannerisms to typecast the characters. Loomer refrains from providing a thought-provoking epic piece for the audience, and instead employs the style of the television sitcom to provide the consumer with the cultural assumptions that they presume regarding the other.

The American television sitcom uses the ideology of the American Dream to further its implication of fantastical situation comedy. Even non-traditional sitcoms such

¹⁹ Paraphrased from *Brecht on Theatre*, (23).

as “Will & Grace” (1998-2006) exhibit what Jasbir Puar calls “homonormative ideologies” that mirror the heteronormative ideals possessing the hierarchal categories that sustain the dominant systems of power. Bodies residing outside of the homo/heteronormative ideals can be considered a threat to national security.²⁰ The undocumented immigrant exists outside homo/heteronormative ideals because they are othered, excluded, and even viewed as terrorists in the post-9/11 decade. Therefore, the character of Ana is an excluded subject in the ideology of the Dream, as she does not possess the ability to enjoy class mobility as a non-citizen of the U.S. From Nancy’s hierarchal position as a citizen and consumer of the Dream, she is able to dominate Ana as her employer. Nancy’s private household becomes a site of governing through conditional, sometimes exploitable policy, as Ana is restricted from worker’s rights as an illegal immigrant. Inserting comedy into the household provokes an absurd setting that would succeed if Loomer were employing the epic epistemological approach of Bertolt Brecht. The sitcom comedy instead demonstrates the contradiction of appropriating the undocumented domestic working experience for situational comedy in Living Out. Moreover, it provides the distinction between Ana and Nancy’s modes of labor.

Michael Hardt’s notion of affective and immaterial labor can be applied to the characters of Ana and Nancy’s divergent emotional responses to their work and mothering in Living Out. As an entertainment lawyer, Nancy’s work is associated with immaterial labor, “the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the

²⁰ See Jasbir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* for more information on her theories of “homonationalism.” I utilize Puar’s theory of homonationalism to illustrate the methods by which the American sitcom comedy uses capitalist ideologies, such as the “American Dream,” to provide a sense of nationalism and citizenship through the innocuous relational expression of laughter.

commodity”.²¹ Nancy’s industry is concentrated on the creation and manipulation of affect, which allows her the capability to dominate others on the hierarchal level of human relations that are dominated by capital. Hardt explains in his article “Affective Labor,” “In the production and reproduction of affects, in those networks of culture and communication, collective subjectivities are produced and sociality is produced – even if those subjectivities and that sociality are directly exploited by capital.”²² Although Hardt perceives an enormous potential in affective labor as enriching production to the level of “complexity of human interaction,” he goes on to claim that there are many divisions that exist within the sphere of immaterial labor due to race, socioeconomic status, and so forth.²³ These divisions disprove Ana and Nancy’s “shared humanity.” Because Ana is an undocumented immigrant caregiver, her affective labor is produced and manipulated by Nancy as the white entertainment lawyer, thereby contradicting their illusory shared affects as mothers and financial supporters.

It is ideologically misleading to represent the characters of Ana and Nancy under uniting signifiers such as “women” and “women’s work.” The affect that is produced by the emblematic power of gendered labor forces itself on the bodies of Ana and Nancy differently. This is exemplified in Living Out after Ana’s son dies as a result of choosing to care for Nancy’s child rather than her own. She exclaims to her husband:

Ana. (*After a beat.*) If I’d picked him up... If I’d been there. Like a mother. Like any mother. (*Starts to break.*) I never saw him play soccer, Bobby! Did he play good? Did he look for me? Tell me, Bobby! ‘Cause I never saw him play!²⁴

²¹ This definition was taken from Maurizio Lazzarato’s article “Immaterial Labor.” <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm> accessed on November 22, 2011.

²² Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor” in *boundary 2* (26:2, 1999), 96.

²³ Ibid, 97.

²⁴ Loomer, Living Out, 2.9.17.

Ana's mothering is directly influenced by whether or not she is needed by Nancy to take care of her daughter. She is financially dependent upon Nancy to bring her son from El Salvador and for the time allotted to care for her own son in the U.S. Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez gives an effective description of the affect experienced by illegal immigrant domestic workers. She states, "The impression of feelings of 'invisibility' and 'worthlessness' are symptomatic of the cultural logic of abjection, evolving within a racializing and feminizing script of power, prescribed migration policies, the coloniality of power and feminization of labor."²⁵ The affect produced by Ana's labor as undocumented caregiver and mother to her children imprints her body and mind with suffering, marking the divided sociality among Ana and Nancy, thus challenging their "shared humanity" imposed by Loomer.

The re-presentation of undocumented domestic workers thus becomes analogous to the transference of the affective commodity of migrant domestic labor as illustrated in Living Out. For instance, in explaining why their undocumented caregivers lie to them, the character of Linda, a white affluent mother, explains to Nancy:

LINDA. (*Sensitively.*) Well ... It's not that they actually lie ... It's a cultural thing, I had a girlfriend who lived in Mexico for a summer and she explained it to me. See, they don't consider it "lying" – they just don't want you to be unhappy! It's easier to say, "My mother is sick in Guatemala" than "I just got a job for a dollar more an hour." The thing is they're just such sweet people. Especially the Mexicans.²⁶

Linda's allusion to her caregiver's "dishonesty" as a "sweet" trait that all undocumented domestic workers possess tacitly implicates the caregiver as an embodied commodity belonging to Linda – one that is defective. The transference from commodity to spectacle provides the spectator, not with the immigrant's own psychic property of

²⁵ Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, "Migration, Domestic Work, and Affect" in *Historical Social Research* (Vol. 33, No. 1, 2008), 4.

²⁶ Loomer, Living Out, 1.10.11-17.

feeling, but with social possessions of neoliberal delegations of power – that delegation being portrayed through the character of Linda. This idea implicates the mainstream institution of theatre to notions of the shifting commodity of capital and power along the U.S.-Mexico border, and thereby, exposes this mainstream institution as an extension of what Gramsci terms “hegemony,” or what Said expands to “cultural hegemony.”

Cultural hegemonic discourses embedded within the text of Living Out serve the ambiguous color-blindness asserted by neoliberal multiculturalism. Jodi Melamed discusses a characteristic of neoliberal multiculturalism as departing from previous racism’s focus on phenotype and positioning human structural inequalities as natural. Melamed writes, “The new racism deploys economic, ideological, cultural, and religious distinctions to produce lesser personhoods, laying these new categories of privilege and stigma across conventional racial categories, fracturing them into differential status groups.”²⁷ The theoretical implications that Melamed proposes elucidate the naturalization of the structural deficiencies associated with the undocumented domestic worker so perpetuated by Loomer in Living Out.

For example, in scene three of Living Out Wallace (the more explicitly privileged white bourgeois mother), Linda (the white bourgeois mother that attempts to show compassion for the undocumented nannies), and Nancy (Ana’s employer) discuss Ana’s employment:

WALLACE. . . . Do you have a good Nanny?
NANCY. Yes, our caretaker – *caregiver* – seems very nice.
LINDA. Great!
WALLACE. How long have you had her?
NANCY. Oh, we just hired her. She officially starts Friday.

²⁷ Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism,” 14.

WALLACE. Well, that's smart, so if it doesn't work out you just call over the weekend. Does she read?

Nancy struggles with labeling Ana's work with a sense of personhood even though Ana's personhood is directly correlated with her labor, while Wallace *explicitly* disavows Ana's personhood by referring to Ana by her commodity of labor as Linda *implicitly* illustrates above. Living Out materializes Melamed's notion of neoliberal multiculturalism through its production on stage and the labored affect produced by the spectators.

Tony Frank (the dramaturge) describes Living Out as "a funny and heart-warming story based upon real people who still believe in the ideology of the American Dream" (Living Out playbill, 10-11/11). This description allows the idea of race-neutrality to intersect with the neoliberal idea of the American Dream, thus constructing the ambiguity of neoliberal multiculturalism. Comparing the undocumented Latina working experience to a white entertainment lawyer from Santa Monica serves as a mode of color-blind racism preserves white supremacy without exposing those that it subjugates and those that it rewards.²⁸ Frank's color-blind assertion reduces Ana's struggle for a bearable life to one of banality. In *The World is a Ghetto*, Howard Winant maintains, "Appeals to white superiority will not serve, as they did in the bad old days. Law, political and human rights, as well as concepts of equality, fairness, and human difference will therefore increasingly be framed in 'race-neutral' terms."²⁹ Frank and Loomer attempt to neutralize the racial conflict in Living Out by conforming them to "real people" who allegedly "share a humanity." It produces a false commonality between Ana and Nancy

²⁸ For more information on color-blind racism see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's book *Racism Without Racists*.

²⁹ Howard Winant, *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 35.

that erases Ana's racialized, subjugated body. The appropriation of illegal immigration for comical, situational content as entertainment demeans the struggle that exists for the immigrant's class mobility, even their survival in the U.S. The next section examines the performance technologies utilized to stage such an appropriation for entertainment purposes.

Realism's Conquest: Performing "Brownness" on the Main Stage

What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely.

– Avery Gordon
Ghostly Matters (1997)

On October 25th, 2012, one year after my performance as "Ana" in the Ohio State University's production of Living Out, Yoselyn Ortega, a fifty year-old "naturalized" U.S. citizen and domestic worker from the Dominican Republic, stabbed and killed Marina Krim's six year-old daughter and two year-old son in Krim's Upper West Side apartment in New York City before stabbing herself in the neck several times.³⁰ Ortega had worked as the family's nanny for two years before this horrendous event.³¹ Many conservative media outlets demonized Ortega as an ungrateful, entitled immigrant that envied Krim's wealthy class status,³² while liberal media outlets portrayed Ortega as a

³⁰ David B. Caruso and Meghan Barr, "Yoselyn Ortega, Alleged Killer Nanny In Krim Children Murders, Case Stuns New York Parents," *Huffington Post*, October 26th, 2012. Accessed on January 1st, 2013 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/27/yoselyn-ortega-alleged-killer-nanny-krim-children-murder-new-york-parents_n_2030183.html.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *FRONTPAGEMAG.COM* published an article describing Yoselyn Ortega as resenting "her employers for living a life that she perceived as luxury, while she struggled to pay her bills." The article further scrutinizes Ortega's status within the dominant systems of power by writing, "Instead of being grateful that they did so much to try to help her, she griped about doing housework, quipping that she's not a maid, but a nanny, which apparently she thought was more

good-natured woman who became pathological because of her struggles with poverty. Both the liberal and conservative media discussed how the Krim family “even” travelled to the Dominican Republic to visit Ortega’s family, therefore assuming a bond between nanny and family. In a conversation with my mother regarding this event, herself a Puerto Rican domestic worker in the affluent city of Northampton, Massachusetts, she disclosed to me her fear of losing the trust of her employers because of the media coverage. My mother’s voice shook as she described to me the embarrassment and disgust she felt as a result of her brown labored body and its depiction on the evening news through Ortega’s re-presentation. Although there exists divergent cultural and political experiences between my mother and Yoselyn Ortega as domestic workers, my mother shamefully related to Ortega’s domestic working experience and subsequent subjugated financial status.

While this unfortunate incident occurred almost exactly a year after the staging of Living Out, I discovered how my enactment of Ana’s supposed desire for the American Dream forced me to disengage from such scenarios as Ortega’s gruesome actions and my mother’s reaction to the media coverage of the incident. Thus, I recognized a correlation between the contemporary bolstering of the Dream in theatrical productions and the obscuring of the affect produced by racialized immigrant labor, such as domestic work. Although liberal media outlets attempted to individualize Ortega’s actions from other domestic workers in New York City, the shame and mental anguish experienced as a result of this incident felt universal to other domestic workers like my mother. It was media-induced scenarios such as these that contradicted my performance of Ana’s desire

dignified.” Accessed at <http://frontpagemag.com/2012/deborah-weiss/when-class-envy-kills/> on January 2, 2013.

for the American Dream and consequent neutralized suffering. Furthermore, the trials and tribulations experienced by my mother as a result of this form of affective labor compelled me to resist my own performance of Ana as directed with the provision of the modernist style of realism and the Stanislavsky Method technique of acting, which I will discuss in greater detail in latter parts of this sections.

While the preceding section examines the political implications of employing the American Dream to neutralize and demystify non-citizen subjects, this section focuses on the active theatrical interpretation of performing the non-citizen subject on stage. Deriving from my own experience of portraying the character of Ana in The Ohio State University's Department of Theatre production of Living Out, I examine my socio-historical position as the speaking subject on stage as the character of Ana. In performing Ana, I discovered my own bordered body, existing within interchangeable performativities – that of a second-generation Puerto Rican lesbian. I came to recognize my own subjectivity functioning as spectacle along side the spectacle induced by the character of Ana. For brown gendered bodies marked by surveillance, the act of performing these subjectivities on stage subjects one to a voyeuristic gaze. This gaze becomes an additional form of violence on bordered bodies that can be consumed as shock and entertainment. Therefore, this section illustrates how conventional styles of mainstream theatre, such as the employment of realism in Living Out, disregard complications associated with race, sexuality, gender, and citizenship. The character of Ana as constructed on stage by the mainstream institution of theatre became a veiled interpretation of immigrant experience focusing on the desire for the American Dream in

order to reduce the racist and classist ideology which caused the revulsion I felt in performing Ana.

In order to further interrogate my performance on stage, an analysis of my character development of Ana is necessary. To transfer the ideological constructs (i.e. the search for the American Dream) from the stage to the spectator of Living Out, or the “super-objective”³³ – the underlying theme that provides the meaning in the play as textually produced by the playwright – the Stanislavsky Method required me to construct an “inner life” for the character of Ana. Stanislavsky created a method of acting which “emphasizes the universality of the laws for any actor building any character in any play.”³⁴ Sonia Moore quotes Stanislavsky as stating, “What I write does not refer to one epoch and its people, but to the organic nature of all artists of all nationalities and of all epochs.”³⁵ Pivoting around essentialist claims about human behavior provides the Stanislavsky student with the ability to assimilate a character’s affective experience, assuming issues of race, gender, sexuality, class, and in the case of the character of Ana, citizenship can be generally portrayed within the context of “human behavior.” Under Stanislavsky’s “natural laws” of acting, I assimilated Ana’s socio-historical position on stage by utilizing his notion of the “universality of human behavior” in attempting to supposedly share a humanity with the employer, Nancy. This method was intended to allow for a “Truthful” performance that American middle-class audiences could relate to, and unfortunately, such an assimilation proved to be detrimental to the re-presentation of the undocumented domestic worker existing in the periphery of the U.S.

³³ Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavsky System: The Professional Training of the Actor* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), pg. 49.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 8-9.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 9.

In Sonia Moore's "simplified guide to Stanislavsky's teachings," *The Stanislavsky System*, she writes, "Assimilation of the profound causes and of the inner reasons for action and expression is decisive in the creative process of the actor."³⁶ Moore goes on to explain, "When the actor, from his own point of view, has a profound understanding of the character's motivations for his actions, as well as an understanding of his own attitude toward the character, then he will understand the subtext."³⁷ In other words, Moore employs "assimilation" to describe the actor's possession of the character's psychic power through artistic production and disregards the socio-historical causes of the character's physical and discursive acts in the theatrical text. The notion of "assimilation" emphasizes the tacit appropriation through performance of a textual character's affective experience. Therefore, an epistemological investigation into the character's socio-historical position in the dramatic text is allocated specifically to the playwright and dramaturge while the actor relies solely on her own subjective inner experience in the creation of the character.

Rather than entrust the historical analysis (if there was one) of the character of Ana to the playwright and dramaturge only, I covertly chose to examine Ana's socio-historical position within the dominant systems of power as a result of her struggles as a non-citizen subject throughout the play. Through the employment of different epistemological perspectives from different disciplines, such as Latin American, Latina/o, cultural, and women's and gender studies, I discovered that the character of Ana's trajectory into the U.S. could have entailed a history of economic and political oppression imposed by the historical endorsement of neocolonial endeavors in Latin America. I

³⁶ Ibid, 68.

³⁷ Moore defines "subtext" as revealing "the character's relationships, his behavior, and the meaning of words and actions." Ibid, 68-69.

came to realize that this larger historical context was neutralized and re-presented through U.S. cultural institutions, such as the mainstream institution of theatre, in an implicit effort to create what Jodi Melamed terms as “multicultural Americans” – “an ideological figure that arises out of neoliberal frameworks.”³⁸ The ethic of multiculturalism bolsters the economic project of neoliberalism through constituting ahistorical individuals that inadvertently labor for the dissemination of power.

As the actor performing the character of Ana, I became cognizant of the constitutive cultural labor I was producing for the mainstream institution of theatre in the U.S. By means of my performance, I disavowed historical meanings associated with the trajectory of undocumented immigrants, thus implicating my self to the cultural matrix of neoliberalism of which I am always already a participant. In short, the suffering associated with the historical subjugation of the undocumented immigrant traversing the U.S.-Mexico border was reduced, and thereby negated as ahistorical in the production of Living Out.

For example, if the character of Ana were historically situated in the context of her economic status as a refugee, her trajectory would entail the consequences of an imposed neoliberalism and the resultant war in El Salvador. After the Salvadoran Civil War (which was partly funded by the United States) ended in 1992 with the Chapultepec Peace Accord, the conservative and elite *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (the Republican Nationalist Alliance or ARENA) candidate, Armando Calderon Sol, won the

³⁸ Jodi Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism To Neoliberal Multiculturalism” in *Social Text* (Winter 2006, 24:4:89),19.

election of 1994.³⁹ He implemented a plan of privatization of several large state enterprises that resulted in a continued oligarchy as ARENA had more to gain from the preservation of the status quo.⁴⁰ Although the Peace Accord allowed for democratic changes in political and military policy, it excluded the nation's economic policy.⁴¹ ARENA maintained an impression of democracy while defending the economic interests of the elite reproducing authoritarian governance through neoliberal policy.

Heidi Rimke writes in *Racism and Border: Representation, Repression, Resistance*, "Psychocentrism or the outlook that all human problems are innate pathologies of the individual mind and/or body, is a chief governing rationality of neoliberal populations."⁴² This rationality leads to the convictions of individualism, productivity, and autonomy that ultimately disregard the impoverished, even working classes of the nation. The policies that were applied by ARENA left more than half of the working-class and indigenous citizens unemployed in El Salvador.⁴³ Poverty and the propagation of guns lead to high homicide rates.⁴⁴ Many fled the violent political and economic strife in their land and migrated north. The character of "Ana" could have been among these migrations. She migrated to the United States in 1995 leaving behind her three-year-old son, Tomas, promising to bring him to the U.S. when she gets her "papers"

³⁹ Paraphrased from Sonia Wolf's article "Subverting Democracy: Elite Rule and the Limit to Political Participation in Post-War El Salvador" from the *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol.41, No. 3, 2009: pg. 429-30.

⁴⁰ Ibid, (429-30).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Heidi Rimke, "Psychocentrism and the Psychopolitics of Neo-liberalism" in *Racism and Borders: Representation, Repression, Resistance*, ed. Jeff Shantz. (New York: Algora Publishing, 2010), 96.

⁴³ Wolf, "Subverting Democracy," 429.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 430.

(citizenship documents).⁴⁵ She might have been oppressed by her own country but also by her “alien” status in the United States, the very country that funded the war resulting in the condition which would have motivated her migration.

Probing deeper into character analysis, I discovered that Ana’s migratory experience could have been death defying. The long journey for many immigrants from El Salvador through Mexico to the United States is a traumatic trip that involves suffering sexual and physical assaults. Some women arrive to the United States pregnant from various rapes inflicted by coyotes or bandits, while others are taken to brothels or become trafficked and never seen again. Cecilia Menjivar writes, “Many of these immigrants’ harrowing experiences during their journeys left them with more or equally severe trauma than the violence in their countries had caused.”⁴⁶ The migratory journey becomes imprinted on the female migrant’s body with trauma while concurrently entering a country that scrutinizes her as a racialized foreigner. The undocumented immigrant finds herself in a double-bind as she came to the U.S. of her own choosing, maybe in search of what Judith Butler terms a “livable life” and, instead, finds herself maneuvering within the confines of the U.S.-Mexico border as an undocumented immigrant.

In *Frames of War*, Butler maintains, “[N]ormative frameworks establish in advance what kind of life will be a life worth living, what life will be a life worth preserving, and what life will become worthy of being mourned.”⁴⁷ Although Butler relates this to the victims of war, one can consider this notion as an expansion of the undocumented immigrant as a victim of the social and political relations of power in the

⁴⁵ Loomer, *Living Out*, 1.2.1-6.

⁴⁶ Cecilia Menjivar, “The Intersection of Work and Gender: Central American Immigrant Women and Employment in California” in *The American Behavioral Scientist* (42:4, 199), 606-607.

⁴⁷ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), 52.

U.S. The undocumented immigrant is only a life worth living for the capitalist productive forces in demand of her labor. The many undocumented immigrants found murdered and dead from hunger or harsh weather conditions in the deserts of the U.S.-Mexico border can be disregarded as either damaged goods or a victory for the “war on terror.” In short, maneuvering the border entails hostility and subjugation by anti-immigrant legislation, and more precariously, death. These historical manifestations of the migratory experience of traversing the U.S.-Mexico border are reduced to banal representations of undocumented immigrants conceptualized by U.S. political discourse and interpreted to American culture through mainstream cultural institutions, specifically visual cultures, through the endorsement of the American Dream.

Considering the extent to which I researched the socio-political history of the female Latin American migrant, the directed style of realism that I was forced to adhere to in the creation of Ana attempted to neutralize this history, thus implicating me – the actor – as the arbiter of ideological meaning. The putative idea driving realism is the candid re-presentation of sociality in familiar and identifiable human conditions.⁴⁸

Indeed, my attempt to utilize realist methods in the artistic construction of the character of Ana was contradicted by my learned histories of Latin American female migrants. In discussing the ways that theatre “reinscribes dominant ideology in its realist form,”

Jeanie Forte states:

If we take as a given the ideological project, the self-perpetuated of the dominant system, then we can see the place of literature (narrative) in subtly reinforcing the discourse of ideology, and the way in which the apparent unity, coherence and seamlessness of the classic realist text covertly subjects (and positions, in terms of subjectivity) the reader within that ideology. However, if a writer . . . aims to reveal and/or subvert the

⁴⁸ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.

dominant ideology, as a feminist writer/text might, strategies must be found within the realm of discourse, particularly *vis à vis* narrative, which can operate to deconstruct the imbedded ideology: in other words, which might construct the reading subject differently.⁴⁹

Although Forte denotes this passage to the subversion of dramatic texts by feminist playwrights, her concern for the supplanting of the reader within implicit ideological constructs within the text is analogous to the production of the performance on stage. Ideological constructs become cloaked under commonsense re-presentations of social experience, which the spectator finds recognizable through my allegedly realistic performance. Employing Forte's claim to "reveal and/or subvert the dominant ideology" performed by the actor within the production on stage could demystify and reclaim knowledge. Unfortunately, I (as the actor) was under the control of the mainstream institution of theatre, which forced me to assimilate Ana's affective experience to this institution on stage and transfer its dominant ideology to its audience.

How does an actor assimilate the performance of the subject on stage when that subject is so haunted by such an immense force of trauma that that force flows through the actor's body and causes feelings of abjection? In the first couple of rehearsals of Living Out, I discovered a profound familiarity to this trauma through my own socio-historical position as a queer Latina maneuvering within the confines of identity as well as through the silent gaps of historically colonized bodies within Latin American and Caribbean diasporic communities in the U.S. My silent gaps were being permeated with my particular transgenerational history of oppression as I physically and emotionally constructed the character of Ana during these first rehearsals. Thus, due to the

⁴⁹ Jeanie Forte, "Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright" in *Feminist Theatre and Theory* ed. Helene Keyssar (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 21.

Stanislavsky Method's insistence on conjuring up inner affective memories, I found my self inundated with familial recollections of sex and violence.

For example, as a result of the Jones Act of 1917 in Puerto Rico,⁵⁰ my *Abuelo* (grandfather), Julio Burgos, was drafted and joined the US military during the Korean War and later went on to serve in World War II. While *Abuelo* was fighting in the war, my mother confessed to me that she witnessed *Abuela* getting raped and brutally beaten in their house by another man from their community in Cayey, Puerto Rico. My mother informed me that this was a regular occurrence for many women whose husbands were overseas. Additionally, *Abuela* had what people called on the island as *la operacion*. She was sterilized as part of the United States' effort to control poverty on the island from overpopulation. In "Puerto Rican Women in Culture, History, and Society," Edna Acosta-Belen states, "Between 1950 and the late 1970s the total fertility rate in Puerto Rico fell by 48 percent – from 5.2 to 2.7 children per woman."⁵¹ An unofficial acceptance of sterilization pushed by both the US government and Puerto Rican government and the failure of the insular government to promote other means of contraception lead to the high rate of sterilization and the decline of fertility.

Abuela's history of sexual oppression by the patriarchal state correlates with my own experiential racialized and sexualized violence as a result of my queer Puerto Rican embodiment and its exclusion from nationalist ideals in the Puerto Rican diaspora.

⁵⁰ The Jones Act of 1917 granted residents of Puerto Rico citizenship in the United States in exchange for conscriptive military service and possession of its bulk exports of sugar, tobacco, and coffee through the use of US government appointed officials on the island. Cesar Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2007.

⁵¹ Edna Acosta-Belen, "Puerto Rican Women in Culture, History, and Society" in *The Puerto Rican Woman: Perspectives on Culture, History, and Society*, ed. Edna Acosta-Belen (New York: Praeger, 1986), 14.

Scenarios such as these produced feelings of ghostly “hauntings” from histories of trauma as I performed the character of Ana on stage. In *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* Grace M. Cho maintains that what is produced by the notion of haunting “is a constellation of affective bodies transmitting and receiving trauma.”⁵² The character of Ana’s unacknowledged trauma as a victim of war and migration haunted my own silent gaps, thereby conjuring up an assembled history of oppression occupied by Yoselyn Ortega, my mother, my grandmother, the character of Ana, and myself. The assimilation of trauma that the mainstream institution of theatre through the style of realism calls for disavows this haunted assemblage in order to produce neutralized, and thereby, marketable re-presentations of the undocumented domestic worker. Even as realism attempts to portray the “truths” of human behavior, it paradoxically cloaks the affective experience of performative hauntings through the employment of commonsense and recognizable human behavior.

Consequently, rather than construct a subjective inner life for the character of Ana, and given the teleological work executed on the character development, I resisted the Stanislavsky Method of acting and turned to the Michel Chekhov technique of imaginative acting and Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre through the epistemic support of feminist theatre theory. The director of *Living Out*, Mo Ryan, made an effort to highlight some of the themes within the text in the production, such as war and neocolonialism,

⁵² In defining her notion of diasporic “haunting,” Grace M. Cho writes, “The bodies of diaspora, and particularly the Korean diaspora, are constituted by unremembered trauma and loss. When an unspeakable or uncertain history, both personal and collective, take the form of a “ghost,” it searches for bodies through which to speak.” I employ the “haunting” (from a performance studies perspective) as an allegorical method by which the reticent histories of characters in theatrical productions affect the subject position of the actor. Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 41.

through the employment of Brechtian epic multi-media and lighting techniques to disrupt the spectator's fixation on the narrative. These disruptions were intended to be *gestus*⁵³ utilized to educate the audience about the contextual causes for the actions of the play. Unfortunately, Living Out's textual narrative does not allow for such *gest* because the play is specifically situated within the style of realism, thus implicating the performance of the play within recognizable human conditions that could easily be part of the audience's world. The use of epic gestic multimedia techniques perplexed the spectator further distancing her/him from the socio-historical contextual causes of the play. Therefore, the spectator ignored the socio-historical position that the characters are shaped by and mundanely related and reacted to the realism and situational comedy that the production evokes.

While observing one of Ryan's tech rehearsals and experiencing the incoherence of the epic multimedia and lighting techniques of Living Out, a memory came to me of the winter of 1997 when I performed the role of "Baal" in Bertolt Brecht's Baal as part of the Holyoke Community College Theatre Department's 97-98 season in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The character of Baal represents an anti-hero – one who denies the standard traits of a protagonist and enjoys the moral deficiencies of an antagonist. He resists bourgeois conventionalities with a disillusioned entitlement to whatever pleasures he desires. In short, Baal is a gluttonous, misogynist alcoholic who roams the

⁵³ In *Brecht on Theatre*, John Willet describes a Brechtian *gestus* as "both *gist* and *gesture*; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words and actions." Conversely, Brecht believes that the "socially significant *gest*" has the capability of portraying human behavior as alterable dependent on external social, political, and economic influences. Professor Mo Ryan used *gest* from the latter's perspective attempting to expose the social, political, and economic position that the characters of Living Out find themselves in. Bertolt Brecht, "The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties" and "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 42.

countryside criminally attacking society's norms as a privileged white man. He murders his friends, rejects his pregnant girlfriend, and propels another woman to drown herself. This portrayal of Baal was produced for a broad audience considering its obvious attempt to educate due to my absurd performance of Baal as played by a woman (myself) provoking the audience to reflect on the message rather than cathecting themselves in the plot.

More than 12 years later, I found myself in a costume of a pink flowered ranchera shirt with exaggeratedly tight jeans looking like I should be working in the fields of central California. In fact, the character of Ana had resided in California undocumented for over 8 years. She taught herself English and successfully maneuvered her way through the oppressive world of domestic work. With the amount of adversity that she had encountered and overcome, her stereotyped re-presentation did not correspond with my characterization of Ana as a female Latin American migrant. I began to analyze and compare my performances of the characters of Ana and Baal. As Ana, I felt like a commodity of the institution of theatre as opposed to performing the exaggeratedly narcissistic and entitled male body of Baal, which allowed me to interact with the spectator in the form of the relationship of teacher/student. There was a scene in the play in which I (Baal) masturbated as a man while singing a song to the audience about my (Baal) apathetic sexual relationships with women:

BAAL (*Sing Softly*): Carousing makes the evening sky
Turn purple, brown, and black.
Spoiling for the fight you lie
Flat upon your back.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "Baal," in *Three Plays: Baal, A Man's Man, The Elephant Calf*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1964), 39.

Baal's freedom to either distance himself or grotesquely interact with the spectator counters Ana's confinement within realist theatre as a Brown non-citizen woman. Her inability to interact with the mostly white audience further accentuated her subject position as "alien other." Thus, realist approaches in representing *Latinidad* provide static depictions rather than illustrating the shifting states of border bodies.

Brechtian theory of historicization provided me with a method by which to challenge Ana's neutralized affective experience in the U.S. as a border body. Brechtian historicization can provide a de-exoticization/eroticization of marginalized or "othered" characters on stage. In *Unmaking Mimesis*, Elin Diamond writes, "[The] performer's body is . . . historicized, loaded with its own history and that of the character, and these histories roughen the smooth edges of the image, of representation . . . [T]his Brechtian-feminist body is paradoxically available for *both* analysis and identification, paradoxically within representation while refusing its fixity."⁵⁵ Diamond effectively describes the historicizing processes that transpired within me as a result of the "haunted assemblages"⁵⁶ previously discussed invoked by incorporeal historical trauma transferred into acts of corporeality through my performing embodiment of the character of Ana.

Thus, as a feminist actor utilizing Brechtian hindsight, I allowed for the re-presentation of Ana as a non-citizen subject to spill over beyond the confinement of realism. My rejection of the Stanislavsky Method of Acting for the Chekhov technique supplied me with more artistic and imaginative ways to create the marginalized characterization of Ana on stage. This technique permits the actor to be free of the limitations of the "subjective personality" and provides boundless opportunities for

⁵⁵ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 52.

⁵⁶ Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, 41.

creativity of the body through external movement techniques.⁵⁷ In discussing Michel Chekhov, Eugene Vakhtangov, and Vsevolod Meyerhold's construction of the technique, Lenard Petit writes, "They developed imaginative methods using psycho-physical techniques, exercises that use the undeniable connection between the body and psychology, movements and principles that generate various sensations and emotions."⁵⁸ In short, the Michel Chekhov Acting technique provided me with the capability to creatively employ my body – my eyes, my mouth, my hips, my breasts, my arms, my legs – as the performing vessel for the character of Ana's re-presentation.

For example, in the last scene of Living Out Ana and her employer, Nancy, engage in a phone call with each other as they share a chair in the middle of the stage with a spotlight highlighting Ana and Nancy's supposed shared mourning of loss – Ana, the loss of her child, and Nancy, the loss of her caretaker. The director demanded that I cry in this hyper-dramatized and hyper-realistic scene. Here I was as the character of Ana, sharing a chair with the woman that Ana despised more than any other because she was caring for Nancy's daughter rather than her own son who dies as a result, and the director assumes that Ana should be crying, not just for the loss of her child, but for the loss of her "friend," her employer, Nancy. Our human connection on that chair was supposed to be one of oppressor and oppressed, eventually lifting this relation to that of kinship – the shared affectivity of motherhood.

Unfortunately, the only idea that came to mind was to slap the actor that portrays Nancy across the face, which, of course, I restrained myself from doing. As I looked deep into the spotlight and imagined myself doing just that, my lips grew into a grimace

⁵⁷ Accessed on March 12, 2013 at <http://www.michelchekhovactingstudio.com/technique.htm>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

and my voice shook with repulsion of this white woman sharing this chair with me. I tensed the muscles in my upper body and legs, which caused a shaking sensation, ultimately creating the emotion of anger within me. Ana would not cry for this white woman; rather, her realist re-presentation was disrupted by my performed embodied anger, which became evident by the audience as told to me by audience members after the productions. The actor that portrayed Nancy would be the one looking into the spotlight, her eyes filled with tears, wishing for relief of her white guilt. This silent resistance was my attempt to embody Ana's status within the dominant systems of power and express allusions which otherwise would have been reduced by the narrative as performed through realism with the support of the Stanislavsky Method of acting.

I discovered an additional space for resistance within the production of the play during a monologue that I performed while alone on stage with the audience, sitting in a chair with a spotlight highlighting my face. Ana has a phone conversation with her son that lives with his great-grandmother in El Salvador:

ANA. Tomás? Soy mami! ... Me puedes oír, mijo? ... Cómo estas? ... Sí? Recibistes el paquete? And the shirt? Does it fit? (*Pronouncing it for him.*) "Hill-finger." (*Laughs.*) I don't know, mijo they like to put their name on everything, quien sabe ... How is school? ... Then you got to study a little harder, Tomás, so when you come here you know your math ... Okay, just spend a little more time ... What are you eating? ... Bueno, Tomás, pero don't eat too much sugar ... Pues, tell me something else – ... (*He's running out of conversation.*) Do you miss me? ... I miss you up to the sky! ... You're going to come real soon, mijo. (*Surprised.*) No, no, not for vacation – you're going to come here to live! ... No, not with abuela. Your great-grandmother don't want to come, mijo, she says she's too old. (*Bobby exits. Pained.*) I know it's hard to leave her. But don't you want be with Mami? ... Oye, did you get the pictures I sent you from the beach? With the rides? (*Laughs.*) *Te gustan?* That's me and my sister-in-law and her friend. (*Pause; fighting tears.*) No, mijo ... I'm the one in the middle. (*She hangs up and walks right into the next scene.*)⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Loomer, Living Out,

This monologue's subtext is a Brechtian historicization of Ana's transnational familial structure, illustrating the geographical and durational distance from her child as a result of her socio-political position as a non-citizen and mother. This monologue provided me with the freedom to create Ana's affective experience throughout the monologue through the employment of imaginative external "psycho-physical techniques" inspired by this historical subtext, which subverted Ana's neutralized re-presentation as well as subverted the spectator's culturally conditioned expectations of Ana's re-presentation.

Furthermore, monologues as expressed through the female character are "reifications of the feminine subject-in-process."⁶⁰ Thus, this monologue is constructed as a gest within the realist style of Living Out and could be considered an attempt to embody the character of Ana.

Reflecting on re-presentation from Brechtian historicization compelled me to explore ways of performing Ana that could provide the spectator with room to discern my ephemerality as the speaking subject on stage. In discussing the feminist performer's objective on stage, Forte states, "By retaining her own historical subject position separate from the character and using gest to 'read' the social attitudes encoded in the play text, the feminist performer enforces an awareness in the spectator of her own temporality."⁶¹ My embodied performance of Ana was one that was envisaged by its disappearance, signifying the necessity of a performance that constitutes meaning, which the spectator takes with her/him when s/he leaves the theatre. The actor's ephemerality on stage as the speaking subject can be exposed through Brechtian historicization as well as through the

⁶⁰ Barbara Freedman, "Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre" in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 170.

⁶¹ Forte, "Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright," 27.

actor's psycho-physical portrayal of the character. Rather than providing the spectator with a realist performance that disguises the processes of theatrical signification and thus produces banal notions of the undocumented immigrant's experience in the U.S., my feminist performing body undertook an ontological integrity inspired by Brechtian hindsight with the support of feminist theatre theory to create a (hopefully) ethical characterization of Ana.

I desired for the character of Ana's socio-historical position as a border body (non-citizen subject) to be exposed and re-presented in Living Out in order to construct new meanings for the audience by way of resisting the realist style of Living Out and the Method. Through my "haunted assemblage"⁶² of histories induced by scenarios such as that of Yoselyn Ortega's and my mother, I hoped the spectator grasped the absurdity of producing this play within the confines of realism and the style of the American sitcom comedy. Unfortunately, such a hope was perhaps lost in the mystification aroused by the modernist style of realism. The next section illuminates complexities associated with producing non-traditional Latina/o theatre and "third-world" theatre, which resist the onerous authority of mainstream theatrical production by inserting counter-narratives into the hegemonic structures of such productions.

Resignifying Suffering: From the Main Stage to the Fringe

To truly communicate with the cultural other is an extremely painful and scary experience. It is like getting lost in a forest of misconceptions or walking on mined territory.

– Guillermo Gómez-Peña
The Multicultural Paradigm (1994)

⁶² Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, 41.

Lisa Loomer produced Living Out with the privileged support of the mainstream institution of theatre in the U.S. The limits of the institution of theatre are especially difficult for “third world” subjects that are bound by racism, gender inequality, and histories of colonialism. Rather than employing a counter-presentation through the concept of *Latinidad*, the character of Ana in Living Out as a subaltern character, relinquishes her language and is forced to adopt Loomer’s Western adaptation in order to entertain and “educate” American audiences about her experience. Linda Alcoff writes, “Though the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, the effects of her discourse is to reinforce racist, imperialist conceptions and perhaps also to further silence the lesser-privileged group’s own ability to speak and be heard.”⁶³ Loomer’s attempt to speak for the undocumented domestic worker from imparts a neutral position on issues of race, class, and citizenship by weakening Ana’s agency and allowing a portrayal of vulnerability to Nancy.

These one-dimensional oppressive re-presentations of Latina/o culture are due to the institutionalization of theatre that supports hierarchal, exploitive, and patriarchal societies. Latina/o and Latin American theatre is critiqued by the mainstream institution of theatre as being amateurish due to their openness to risk-taking methods, and is thereby marginalized and denied the funding needed to support such methods. These methods are more inclusive of issues pertaining to Latina/o narratives of struggle. In *Negotiating Performance*, Diana Taylor explains the obstacle that Latin American and Latina/o communities face in producing theatre by Latina/os for Latina/os:

[M]ost Latin American and Latina/o communities do not have

⁶³ Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others” in *Cultural Critique* (20, 1991), 6.

the economic infrastructure to put our playwrights, productions, and audiences in contact with each other. So while we all know Shakespeare and Ibsen, our populations can seldom name our own playwrights, let alone other Latino or Latin American ones. This economic limitation contributes to the internalization of the feelings of worthlessness and inferiority associated with neocolonialism.⁶⁴

The socioeconomic status of most Latina/o communities fosters a neocolonial⁶⁵ relationship with the institution of theatre that maintains the marginalization of Latina/o and Latin American theatre and re-presentation. Living Out's white washed portrayal of the Latina/o undocumented domestic working experience corresponds with institutional theatre's support of this supremacy by producing comfortable, neutralized entertainment for Western audiences.

White washing has become a commonplace hegemonic method by which to demystify Latina/o re-presentation in the U.S. Cultural specificities for each group within *Latinidad* are neutralized, and thereby, whitened in order to mold into the metaphoric melting pot so lauded by U.S. liberalism. Thus, Latina/o cultural production is always already embedded within Western cultural hegemonic structures, such as the mainstream institution of theatre. Yet, there are spaces where specificities *are* politicized, spaces where racialized and subaltern subjects possess agency over their cultural production. For Latin American and Mexican migrants that space is occupied

⁶⁴ Diana Taylor, "Opening Remarks" in *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, & Theatricality in Latin/o America*, eds. Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 10.

⁶⁵ In *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* Kwame Nkrumah writes, "The struggle against neocolonialism is not aimed at excluding the capital of the developed world from operating in less developed countries. It is aimed at preventing the financial power of the developed countries from being used in such a way as to impoverish the less developed" (ix). I use the term "neocolonialism" here to express the mainstream institution of theatre's arduous effects on Latina/o re-presentations because of the "economic limitations" of most Latina/o communities in the U.S. More radical, non-traditional Latina/o theatres attempt to decolonize their theatre from these mainstream institutions, as Nkrumah advises.

with their psychic power; the oral narratives of their affective experience as racialized migrants. In *Migrant Imaginaries* Alicia Schmidt Camacho discusses psychic resistances found within the narratives told by Latin American migrants traversing the U.S.-Mexico border. She writes, “The narration of migrant sorrows constitutes a political act cast against the prerogatives of neoliberal development and the global division of labor – in particular, the erosion of substantive citizenship and communal belonging but also the resurgent forms of racial governance in both countries.”⁶⁶ In other words, representations of “migrant melancholia” insert a counter-narrative into the neutralizing (white washing) techniques of the popular immigrant narrative of the search for the American Dream. Moreover, “migrant melancholia” illuminates the structural forces at work in its production, such as neoliberalism and globalization.

Within the repertoire of Latina/o theatre production of migrant narratives exists dramatic works that emphasize the melancholic affect of particularized subjective border experiences. *The Girls From the 3.5 Floppies* (2011) by Luis Enriquez Gutiérrez Ortiz Monasterio (LEGOM) is a stylistically non-traditional and Latina/o theatrical text that portrays an unapologetic response to the traditional American Dream narrative associated with Latin American and Mexican migration. Through two sex-working migrant mothers living and working on the U.S.-Mexico border, LEGOM employs morbidly black comedy for the two mothers to narrate rather than portray their grotesque dealings. LEGOM never explicitly portrays their corporeal commodification and the resultant suffering on stage for the audience to disavow through their normative convictions. Ana Elena Puga writes about *Girls*, “The spectacle of suffering bodies in *Girls* is never

⁶⁶ Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 287-288.

depicted on stage; instead its goriness is described in comic grotesqueness or suggested indirectly. Suffering does not circulate in what I have elsewhere called the ‘political economy of suffering,’ in which bodily pain is commodified and exchanged for spectator sympathy.”⁶⁷ The two mothers nonchalantly inject the audience in their perilous and melancholic existences through narrative. They discuss slashed vaginas, violent clients, drowning prostitutes, ignored and missing children, cocaine, etc., consequently providing a space for the spectator to scrutinize the border as a site where women’s bodies are marked as a sexualized commodity. Moreover, the spectator perceives these border bodies as vulnerable subjects to the violence imposed by U.S neocolonial endeavors in Mexico.

Girls could be viewed as a reaction to the suppression of pain and suffering illustrated by mainstream institutional plays such as Living Out as the undocumented sex-working mothers are portrayed with what Gloria Anzaldúa terms *la facultad* – the “capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to the deep structure below the surface” (*Borderlands*, 38). Although these two women have fallen into the most unacceptable form of labor – prostitution – LEGOM developed these two migrant sex-working mothers with this intuitive perception emerging from their experience of surviving volatile conditions on the border. LEGOM provides a space for the characters to affectively experience their dreadful existences as prisoners of the U.S.-Mexico border. At stake with comparing Living Out and The Girls From the 3.5 Floppies is the exposition of the productive forces behind the re-presentation of

⁶⁷ Ana Elena Puga, Introduction to “Spectacular Bodies, Dangerous Borders” in *Spectacular Bodies, Dangerous Borders: Three New Latin American Plays*, ed. Ana Elena Puga (Lawrence, Kansas: LATR Books, 2011), 11.

neutralized suffering and the textual methodology to unmask such re-presentation and contest the productive forces at work.

Non-traditional Latina/o theatrical producers continue to unveil the reductionist methods employed by mainstream theatre producers that create banal re-presentations of non-citizen subjects. Guillermo Gomez-Pena discusses the contradictions of the multicultural shift implemented by the dominant systems of power to defuse ideas of the subjugation of marginalized peoples through his experience as a border artist. He maintains that border culture has taken the role of the dominant culture even though this culture is nevertheless marginalized as objects of desire in mainstream media. In “On the Other Side of the Mexican Mirror” Gómez-Peña writes, “Perhaps the ultimate goal of performance, especially if you are a woman, gay, or a ‘person of color,’ is to decolonize our bodies and make these decolonizing mechanisms apparent to our audience in the hope that they will get inspired to do the same with their own.”⁶⁸ In an effort to deterritorialize⁶⁹ marginalized bodies from such re-presentations, non-traditional Latina/o theatrical producers turn to the particularized subjectivities of non-citizen subjects. Therefore, deterritorializing the re-presentation of non-citizen subjects, such as that of the character of Ana, from Western hegemonic cultural production in the U.S. challenges the ambivalent audience reception induced by such production.

⁶⁸ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “On the Other Side of the Mexican Mirror” in *Ethno-techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy*, Ed. Elaine Peña (New York: Routledge, 2005), 24.

⁶⁹ I employ the term “deterritorialize” to illustrate the act of applying one’s subjective particularities to one’s colonized body and the resignification of self that that entails. Guillermo Gomez-Peña maintains that he deterritorializes himself as an artist and a Mexican-American by applying his border experience, which encompasses specific ideologies and aesthetics. Guillermo Gómez-Peña “The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community” in *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, & Theatricality in Latin/o America*, eds. Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 17-29.

Conclusion

Lisa Loomer states in an interview about Living Out, “We have cultural differences to be sure. And there are inequities in terms of class, race, and power. It would be naive to say these don’t exist. But our basic humanness is the same. For instance, there is nothing ‘illegal’ or ‘alien’ about the need to work and take care of your child.”⁷⁰ Although Loomer is aware of the disproportion of Ana and Nancy’s positions in the dominant systems of power, she denies that this disproportion refutes her reductionist idea of Ana and Nancy “sharing humanity.” Loomer’s careless use of the style of the American sitcom comedy to neutralize the undocumented working experience in order for Ana and Nancy to be relatable to each other and to the audience exhibits color-blind racism and classism at best, and is offensive at worst. Thus, Loomer needed to step back and really examine the undocumented domestic working experience from different epistemological perspectives to portray Ana with an autonomous identity, rather than possessing an autonomy cloaked by the white ideals of the “American Dream.”

⁷⁰ Accessed at <http://rwor.org/a/1227/lisainterview.htm> on November 27th, 2011.

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