

**Masking Intentions: A Presentational Ethnography of El
Gueguense, An Annual Theatrical Production in Nicaragua.**

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ABSTRACT

Masking Intentions: A Presentational Ethnography of *El Gueguense*, An Annual Theatrical Production in Nicaragua.

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This thesis is about exploring behind the masks of personas engaged in performance. It is about contested intentions in cultural productions and intercultural communication in Diriamba, Nicaragua. The ethnographic encounter revolves around the production of *El Gueguense* (a culturally and socially charged ancient Nicaraguan Mestizo play) during Diriamba's patron saint celebrations. The significance of this thesis rests on two dominant issues concerning a socio/cultural analysis (national identity negotiation in Nicaragua) and an experiential/ethnographic one (a presentational ethnography). The presentation of events is offered in the presentational narrational form of theatre, through small scripted scenes.

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THE PROGRAM: A WAY OF INTRODUCING

About the Program: Course of Study

In “traditional” theatre, a program usually introduces the story, its characters, and the artistic profiles of playwrights, actors, directors, designers and others involved in a theatre production. Trying to articulate the theatricality of this undertaking, this program introduces the *El Gueguense* script (dramatis personae and the summary of its first dramatic event), the general problematic of the intended thesis, its argument, as well as the components that constitute its process and its written text. These components are as follows: general problematic (thesis), stage (social and cultural background), setting (theoretical/methodological framework), performers and audiences (the introduction of people involved in the ethnographic encounter as actors and audiences of the performance contexts), performance (the evocation of the ethnographic encounter as a presentational ethnography), and the review or conclusion. The objective of the program is to outline and highlight the main points of the project at its current junctures (intentions and directions) as a general ethnographic (philosophical, academic, cultural and social) problem and process.

Traditional Script of *El Gueguense* or *Macho-Raton*, Study Object

Dramatis Personae

*The **EL Gueguense** is the central figure of the drama, and the personage from whom its name is derived. From the Nahuatl, it may mean honourable elder. He is in fact,*

anything but honourable: he is indifferent to truth, and his cynical licentious jokes are calculated.

*The **Governor Tastuanes** appears in the scene in Spanish costume, with a staff and sable. His name appears to be from the Nahuatl: Tlatoani, meaning chief or lord.*

*The **Alguacil** (Sheriff), the **Secretary** and the **Registrar** appear in full official dress with their staffs of office. They represent the Crown.*

***Don Forsico** and **Don Ambrosio** are the two sons of Gueguense, drawn in as strong a contrast as is possible. The former follows the paternal example faithfully, endorses his father in all his tricks and lies; the latter invariably opposes and exposes the old man's mendacity.*

***Lady Suchi-Malinche** is the daughter of the governor. She enters clothed in a sort of tunic. Chains and other trinkets adorn her beautiful garments. The character is silent.*

*The **Machos** (or Mules) are twelve or more in number. They give the second title to the piece *El Macho Raton*. They dance and are also silent.*

Summary of El Gueguense Script: Event One

The governor Tastuanes and the Chief Alguacil meet and establish a conversation. The governor orders a halt to all entertainment including dancing and singing in the Royal Court. He laments that the Royal coffers are empty and the crown can no longer afford such expense. At the same time, he warns that anybody choosing to enter his domains will need to request permission from the Royal patrol. The Alguacil, in turn,

laments the state of his attire and blames Gueguense for it. The governor orders that Gueguense be brought to him.

(The Alguacil and Governor enter, dancing.)¹

Alg

I pray God to protect you, Governor Tastuanes.

Gov

I pray God to prosper you, my son, Captain Chief Alguacil.

Alg.

... It is a great shame that we have no golden table, no embroidered table-cloth, no golden inkstand, no pen of gold, no golden sand-box, not even white paper, and such like suitable things, for a session of the royal Court.

Gov

My son, Captain Chief Alguacil, put a stop to the music, dances, songs, ballets, and such matters in the quarters of the leading men, unless the patrol gives a permit to enter my royal province

Alg.

Yours to command Governor Tastuanes. I pray God to protect you. The leading men shall give no music, dances, songs, ballets, and such things, without (the permission of) the patrol of Governor Tastuanes. (The patrol is sounded and they dance).

Alg.

Governor Tastuanes, I am here, as is proper, but the patrol is not; their girdles are in rags and tatters, and their hats smashed in from their frays, and we have not a single saddle

*cloth or red cloak better perhaps, than that good for nothing Gueguense, Governor
Tastuanes.*

Gov.

*My son, Captain Chief Alguacil, bring that good- for -nothing Gueguense, either by the
tail, or the legs, or the nose, or by whatever God will help you (to bring him), Captain
Chief Alguacil...*

+++++

Scope and Relevance of the Study

This project, as the title implies, is about exploring behind the masks of personas engaged in performance. It is about contested intentions in cultural productions and intercultural communication. The undertaking is also about the performance of theatre and the theatrics of life and ethnographic work. It is about writing and it is about reading. The significance of this task rests on two dominant issues concerning a socio/cultural analysis (national identity negotiation in Nicaragua) and an experiential/ethnographic one (presentational ethnography).

The endeavour is located in Nicaragua, Central America. First, with a rich history of social and political change, Nicaragua, like most Latin American countries, possesses a fertile tradition of theatre as a tool for social commentary and revolution. In the last decades, its oldest theatre play, *El Gueguense*, has become one of the most recognisable symbols and cultural references in the country. Through its narratives, located inside and outside the theatre/drama, the play has become an important site of identity negotiation,

political and social intention. Despite this national significance, among international academics and cultural Nicaraguan elite, the play of *El Gueguense* remains limited to a circumscribed social trope. For two reasons, I believe that a focused exploration of the play and the politics surrounding its commentaries and performances are now due.

First, I take the relationship between a written discourse (the script of the play and its commentaries by Nicaraguan elite intellectuals) and a performed discourse (a popular production of the play) in a hybridised, socialised and politicised theatrical spectacle, as an important site for cultural and social knowledge in South Western Nicaragua, and by extension in Nicaragua as a whole. This project, then, considers this post-colonial theatre play of *El Gueguense* (which takes place in Diriamba Nicaragua) as one of the most important Nicaraguan cultural and historical, and sometimes political, artefacts. As an artefact the play becomes the site (real and imaginary/creative) where Nicaraguans learn and propose a culture (its history, its political reservations and its social vicissitudes). This is achieved through the participation with others in a contingent and subjective process as performers in and audiences of *El Gueguense*.

Second, through the context of an ethnographic study, the *El Gueguense* play/performance moves beyond its tropological local significance to a more experiential intercultural occurrence. As a cultural site with its own processes, the play (script and performance) presents an opportunity to undertake an ethnographic con-textualization. Whether or not this con-textualization becomes artistically creative (fiction), it should nonetheless lead us to con-textual anthropological and epistemological reflections. The current effort, therefore, concentrates on bringing together text (the ethnographic manuscript as presentational ethnographic scenes) and context (the political, cultural and

social and ethnographic processes) through author and audiences' intentions, within the intimacy of intersubjective and intercultural negotiations. In the performance of *El Gueguense*, the ethnographer is not only a participant of a cultural process, but also a tool for contingent and subjective intercultural intercourse.

General Ethnographic Problem

Both anthropology and literary study—and culture and writing—are alive to their extrinsic and intrinsic contextures; “contexture” being the term Hobbes used to connote both the texture that surrounds and the texture that constitutes (Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck, 1996: 1).

The desire of anthropology has been variously to know, to glance at, to experience, to de-construct, to engage with, to walk a distance with the Other. This has also pushed the anthropological project (intentional or not) to colonize, to conquer, and to reconstruct the Other. Within the seemingly irresistible urge (“knowledge searching voyage”), a historical map of anthropology was drawn. This map had all the colours of scientific positivism “in which reductionist explanations were the be-all and end-all” (Daniel, 1996: 2) in cultural understanding. The intention was to explain (through causal rationalisation) rather than interpreting specific human actions), to find universal laws rather than understand particular contextualized cultural patterns. Thus, the anthropological ethnocentric gaze proceeded under the shadow of detached histories and divided intentions (Ibid).

Still, the power of positivistic science, colonialism,² and racism did not entirely

dominate the agency of the Other. The Other resisted, learned, proposed, became engaged, and sometimes turned into an anthropologist, thus insistently transforming anthropology. The nature of ethnographic research has also changed in response to the new ways people organize social and cultural life in the postcolonial world (Herzfeld, 2001: 6). We can accept that cultural experiences persist in everyday contexts, shaping and transforming localized experiences and sometimes globalizing them. We can determine also that these experiences exist with or without the anthropologist's presence or interference. What has changed, however, is the relationship between cultures: Us (ethnographers, intellectual and social and cultural elites) and Them (the subaltern, the underprivileged, and the colonized), and the way we (ethnographers) share those anthropological experiences. Ethnography, anthropology's "authoritative" voice, thus, has needed some rethinking and some enlivening. As a discipline derived from a general epistemology of curiosity, anthropology retraced its steps and got some needed inspiration. For instance, Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) influenced Geertzian anthropology at a critical moment in the field. These anthropologists "were sympathetic to the turn to discourse and the questioning of all manner of foundationalisms..." (Daniel, 1996: 11). The idea was to understand the intentions of the author of the text and the author of an action. "Truth", was sought after through the human engagement in the world. Dissatisfaction with the 1960s linguistics dominated approaches to culture gave way to a number of humanistic anthropological possibilities such as: phenomenology, theories of experience, performance, and literature to name just a few. The divide between the social sciences and the humanities crumbled. The experimental and the interpretive or the empirical and the symbolic commenced to coexist (Herzfeld, 2001: 21). "Inevitably, then,

anthropology must occupy a middle ground that gives the lie to those who would claim that empirical scholarship and reflexive critique are mutually incompatible” (Ibid).

As the focus of anthropology shifted, performance and phenomenological studies became more significant in ethnography. It became clear that the main anxiety of anthropology had become textual/contextual (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 21).

Consequently, many stratagems were devised. A transition from a story of acculturation to one of ethnic sensibility occurred (Bruner, 1986: 140). Multi-authorship and dialogism became the most adequate epistemological work delineations. Context ceased being thought of as “ a secure epistemic nest in which our knowledge-eggs are to be safely hatched...”(Taussig, 1993: 46). Instead, context became “this other sort of connectedness incongruously spanning times and juxtaposing spaces (Ibid): Experimentations flourished.

The Postmodern Turn and its Meanings

In his influential book, “The Postmodern Condition,” J. F Lyotard (1984) attacked the legitimising myth of the modern era with its grand narrative schemes. These were grand theories, the salvation of humanity through science, and the universality of knowledge and truth (Sarup, 1993: 132). Lyotard’s attack was against the totalising notion of the *grand recit* of modernity: dialectic spirit, worker emancipation, accumulation of wealth and the classless society (1984: 37). Lyotard posited that “[k]nowledge will be the major component in the world-wide competition for power and it is conceivable that nation-states will one day fight for control of information...” (Lyotard, in Sarup, 1993:

133). In short, Lyotard believed that a categorical distinction exists between science or theoretical knowledge and narrative. He argued that:

art, morality and science (the beautiful, the good and the true) have become separated and autonomous. A characteristic of our times is the fragmentation of language games. There is no metalanguage. No one can grasp what is going on in society as a whole. (Sarup, 1993: 145)³

Coming from similar concerns, but nonetheless influenced by “the Postmodern Turn,” a number of very influential works in anthropology subsequently appeared, such as “Writing Culture” by Clifford and Marcus (1986) and “Anthropology and Cultural Critique” by Marcus and Fisher (1986). In these works the re-examination of the role of anthropology became a focus point. The debate was also about the “fictional whole” (Marcus, 1989: 9); it was about rethinking the holistic frame for ethnographic representations that could be more sensitive to local cultural views. Anthropologist Stephen Tyler was outstanding on this debate. He posited that “evocation” rather than “representation” should be the focus of ethnographic writings. Evocation “frees ethnography from mimesis and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails ‘objects,’ ‘facts,’ ‘descriptions’... that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writing of ethnographies” (Tyler, 1986: 130).

Tyler proposed a very radical notion. He believed that the problem of representation lies in representation itself, thus locating the fundamental problem inside

the textual. In his “postmodern ethnographies,” he explained that representation is too limited to evoke experiences. The problem of representation, he thought, lies in the split between orality and literacy (Ibid). For Tyler the so-called ‘crisis of representation’ was about a monolithic past of one perspective (literacy) versus a bifocal, polyvocal present of multi realities (orality). The relationship between object (self) and knower with subject (object) known is always mediated through language. The debate, thus, was about orality versus literacy. It was the confrontation of a world of possibilities (evocation) versus a restricted world (representation). Evocation, dialogization thus became a concerted attempt at the re-oralization of anthropology. It was about a new kind of realism in anthropology. “[A] possible world of reality already known to us in fantasy” (Tyler, 1986: 139).

Tyler’s notion, the re-oralization of anthropology, marked a turning point for ethnographic work. Nonetheless, his work did not adequately re-examine the epistemological system upon which any Western narrative representation or evocation of the Other is built. Timothy Mitchell has since tackled this particular issue (1989). The whole system of representation, he claimed, is built on a vision of the Other that perpetuates itself. He suggested that the construction of the colonial order of the world was related to the modern narrational form of representation (Mitchell, 1998: 293). For Kenneth Little, for example, even though ethnographic narratives can be changed in form, representation remains enveloped in an epistemic system shared by the narratives of tourism writings, the colonizing gaze (Little, 1992: 149). Ethnographic textualizations are stuck in “the visual Western episteme,” and changing form does not solve epistemological, political and ethical problems. In other words, even though one may

change the form, this new form may not escape problematic cultural issues. Were Mitchell and Little challenging anthropological ethnographic intentions?

The issue in ethnographic textual work, even postmodern, remains a reactive affair but nonetheless with overall transformative consequences for ethnographic form(s). The subject matter of anthropology (usually the exotic Other) has changed. The medium of anthropology (usually the monograph) is no longer predominant. Monophony has ceded to polyphony. The method of anthropology (participant observation) has opened itself up to experience and performance. Emphasis is on action and the everyday. The main intention of anthropology is no longer to inform about cultures, but rather to know about cultural practice, the search for a plurality of epistemes (James, Hockey and Dawson, 1997: 2). Consequently, many ethnographic experimentations attempt to bring together text and context, evocation and interpretation in presentation. They seek to fuse form and content by highlighting the ethnographer's and the subjects' motives. They try to bridge the gap between form and content through the order established "in the juxtaposition and reflexivity of emergent discourse and emergent method" (Tyler, 1987: 191). They emphasize the multiplicity of representational textual and non-textual forms, narrational eclecticism, plurality of epistemic forms. "Consciousness of form arises when action produces a substitution of appearance...shape... formula... writing accomplishes this dual constitution of form in a way that speech and hearing cannot..."(Tyler, 1987: 193). I suggest that instead of bringing form and content together, postmodern textualizations have attained a split between form and content. This intention has been highlighted through the postmodernist artistic (and also ethnographic) focus on techniques and rhetorical styles such as paradox, ambiguity, irony, eclectic quotation, anamnesis,

chiasmus, and ellipsis, among others (Krysinski, 1995: 15). The proposition behind such an idea is that form or narrative devices can highlight the need to emphasize intellectual accountability.

Proposition

Tyler's work (and that of like-minded ethnographers) is very important for a humanistic re-focusing of ethnographic work. His main contribution rests on the notion that the problem of intercultural communication lies within its representation. Thus, evocation and interpretation become necessarily linked through its textual forms. I believe that a split between form and content, or the supremacy of text over context, is unnecessarily advanced in this perspective without any major effort to contextualize its links. Tyler posits that "writing is the means for a systematic separation of form and content more persuasive than that conditioned by pictorial representation and more accessible than anything provided by hearing or touch" (1987: 193). He goes on to say that "writing expresses the separation of form and content, produces it visually, and promotes our consciousness of it" (Ibid). He may be right, but what is the point of this emphasis? The recognition of the partiality of anthropological accounts does not mean a distancing of the ethnographer's intentions from context or a distancing of the ethnographic encounter from the textual form. If ethnographic evocation is made available through the absence of what cannot be represented, can this absence also overcome the divide between form and content? No matter how eclectic and metaphorical or poetic the textualization is, it is inextricably tied to a rhetorical authorial intentionality. The view

that form (ethnographic accounts) and content (the Other's story) could be treated as separate entities prevails in the field as though the choice of form does not correspond to contextual imperatives. That which I propose is to move beyond a shift from representation to evocation, by thinking presentationally, as in presentational theatre, instead of representationally. Here I use the term presenting in the sense of enactment of experience as perception, not the presentation of patterns, wholeness, rules and objects. The challenge, for this ethnography, becomes to accept the importance and unbreakable linkage between what one chooses to represent (contexture) and how one chooses to represent it (texture).

Recent ethnographic representations carry on moving away from what George Marcus has called "ethnographic realism" (1986, 23). Such works (Marcus, 1989, 1993, 2000; Jackson, 1996; Rabinow, 1996; Pool, 1991, et al) no longer use a mode of writing (monograph) that tries to represent the whole of societies or an entire way of life. They no longer think of societies as "organic wholes with structures and laws" (Herzfeld, 2001: 47). Some ethnographic representations, nonetheless, treat narrative devices, as matter of style and choice, and separate them from contexts. Fabian (1990: 89), for example, is very critical of the "empiricist's belief that recordings-made-into-text are objective representations of reality..." He is equally critical of the 'formalists' models and logical schemes, which believe that form is the most important part of cultural representation. He implies that there is a middle ground in which form and content should be considered one and the same in an ethnographic process. My concern is that Fabian has not yet attained the balance between form and content (1990, 1996, etc.). His work focuses on the form (See Fabian, 1990, 1996). The problem I have with Fabian is not with his argument

against formalist and empiricist reductionist notions. I am trying to put forth a similarly “pluralist” understanding of form and content that is contingent on practice, rather than depending on form. I agree with Fabian that an ethnographic encounter presentation (its form, its textuality) should be considered a strategy and an attitude linked to the encounter itself. It is an attitude or a strategy “for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye, for purification, propitiation, and de-sanctification, consolidation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instruction of one sort or another” (Burke, 1973: 304). Fabian’s analysis is excellent, but he does not carry through his argument of bringing both form and content together in the actual ethnographic textualization.

Performative anthropology (for example Fabian’s) and phenomenological ethnography (for example Jackson’s and Desjarlais’), both dealt with at length in chapter three, purport that their focus moves away from positivism and mimesis. This is assumed and established by the performative spirit of their ethnographic engagement (in terms of intercultural and intersubjective communication). They consider experience as a base for understanding. They also assume distance from positivism by making visible and contesting “the nature of representational authority”(Clifford, 1995: 208). Totalising theories are considered things of the past. Both perspectives, however, engage in a type of mimesis, which in this anthropological juncture can become a reproduction of a Western allegory. Their claim does not acknowledge correspondence between content (what we say about cultures and its histories), and form (how and what is hinted by its textualization). I am taking the rhetorical notion that assumes a definite link between form and content. How we say or tell a story about a culture (the mode of textualizing it) is

definitely connected to that story. Textualization is connected to a story not only through the theme but also through the shaping of an idealized communicative intercultural territory. For instance, verbatim accounts have the aura of being more “authentic” than most accounts. People want to hear straight from the horse’s mouth. Have we over-exploited that rhetorical device? If one emphasizes a determinate structure through an imagery of “authentic” voices, one may impose a vision of a world, as a strategy “for dealing with situations” (Burke, 1973: 296). In the case of Fabian it is manifested in its con-text. He includes the Other’s voices in his work as verbatim accounts of the performers. The element of “authenticity” through the Other’s “legitimate”(verbatim) voices is emphasized as if this exists at a transcendental level of truth. Even though Fabian warns us about the fact that political, social and cultural asymmetries are not fixed by simply including the Other’s voices (Fabian, 1990: 5) the credibility of this ethnography seems to rest on those “legitimate” voices. In the case of phenomenology, there is an over-emphasis on the centrality of the Other’s experiences making the Other the centre of a cultural universe (Jackson, 1996: 9). That is fine as long as this desire does not take control of the ethnographic experience. Earnestly trying to magnify the subject’s experiences through form in ethnography has the potential to develop into a blunt imitation of those experiences. That is the choice of the ethnographer, not necessarily a local episteme. My point is that both performative anthropology and phenomenological ethnography tend to reproduce the instruments of the anthropological condescending machinery of the past.

Within most contemporary ethnographic theories, such as performative anthropology and phenomenological ethnography, the form and content separation

becomes the pre-text for an overly elaborate quest for social and cultural ethnographic “authenticity.” The need for validating these “anthropological findings” as contributions to bodies of knowledge risks pushing the ethnographic process and its presentation into an exoticizing exercise. Even though this quest is not contextually obvious, its intentions and strategies can be manifested in the ethnographic textual forms and are therefore contextually linked.

Performative anthropology and phenomenological anthropology nonetheless make visible the relationship between form and content in contemporary ethnography. Both these communicative/dialogical approaches allow for interplay between social and cultural systems and subjects/agents. These perspectives pay attention to the way the “native” sees his/her world. Performative anthropology centres itself around the elements of intercultural communication that can only be mediated by localized and contingent performed action. We can call this localized and contingent action, experience. Action or performance is crucial in understanding culture because, first, people enact their culture through performance; and second, action or performance is also a thorough process of producing knowledge about cultures (script, ethnography). Thus, “performance as a contingent and localized action” becomes a more adequate way to describe both the ways people enact their culture and the method by which an ethnographer produces knowledge about that culture. It becomes an approach that has epistemological significance because it is a strategy “appropriate to both the nature of cultural knowledge and the nature of knowledge of cultural knowledge” (Fabian, 1990: 18).

Phenomenological ethnography, concurrently, is pertinent to cultural understandings because of the centrality it grants to subject/object contact.

Phenomenological ethnography moves away from the constraints of some communicative or linguistic-driven ethnographies by converging on the subject's familiarity or closeness with a cultural sphere through an intersubjective communication. This strategy contests those intercultural and intersubjective dialogical or communicative approaches that are not rooted in a multi sensorial cultural experience of the Other (Howes, 1991).

Phenomenology allows the ethnographer to be as close as possible to the Other's subjective world.

These two approaches represent the most humane, sensual, and interesting anthropological way to learn about other cultures and our own. In fact they can be indistinguishably linked in many ethnographies (i.e. Jackson, 1995; Fabian, 1990); However, these standpoints fall short of their ethnographic possibilities. This is because they are limited when addressing ethnographic challenges with respect to social/cultural systems and its agents, in the most intellectual intimacy, (intentions, composition, and historicity). I propose that a revised theory of theatre and rhetoric can assist these approaches, on the one hand, in making the interaction between social and individual systems more visible and, on the other hand, in exposing the intentions of performers and audiences, as social agents in an ethnographic process. This is crucial for any understanding of intercultural communication in its present urgency, wherein there is a need to acknowledge the politics of the fieldwork situation and its contextual/textual politics. Agency edifies, in contrast to a colonial ethnography that saw the colonized subjects as bodies "to be known and controlled" (Dirks, 1996: 292), a contextualized world where history, interpretation, and intentionality interact.

A rhetorical and a theatrical appraisal of ethnography can augment the eloquence of the above ethnographic theories making visible the link between agents and audiences' intentions and choices. As a rhetorical arena, for example, a presentational ethnography, like presentational theatre, can be called upon to stage attitudes and issues that express character and intentions: historicity, persuasion or oppression. These can become tools through which audiences (all involved in the process) make their judgments about actions intended or taken.

Theatricality (theory and practice of theatre) and rhetoric infuse the above perspectives (performance and phenomenology) with the practice of everyday experience and history as a tool for analysis in a theory and method I will call 'presentational ethnography.' Presentational ethnography is the notion that is proposed here that would present ethnographic encounters rather than to represent them.

It has been said I am proposing therefore to move beyond the 'representational ethnography' presently espoused by many ethnographers by making this attempt (my presentational ethnography) experiential/performative, and at the same time, polyvocally creative without the constraints of a context/text divide. This does not mean that we need to move away from our responsibility to conserve the integrity of social and individual "truths" by moving totally into creative writing. It means a commitment to aspire to making ethnographic attempts more a partaker of cultural modes and not reproducers of those cultural modes. It means taking responsibility for our ethnographic actions (contextualization). We should think of context, not only as Dirks put it "as pretext, that is to say, as both the texts that are read before and the conditions of the production, circulation

and consumption of texts” (1996: 292), but also as that historical and perceptual condition of agents/subjects, ethnographers and academic institutions.

Furthermore, even though the dramatist metaphor has been used in anthropology and the social sciences in the past, the notion of “presentational theatre”, as opposed to “representational” (illusionist) theatre has not been explored much in ethnographic forms. I sense that in ethnography we can learn a great deal from the notion of “presentational theatre.”

Presentational and representational plays can also be called dimensional and pictorial respectively. In a presentational play, on the one hand, the performers “recognize the presence of the audience and address it directly” (Albright, Halstead and Mitchell, 1955: 252). Representational plays, on the other hand, are most commonly portrayed as “slice-of-life or realistic drama” (Ibid). Within a framework of perspectives such as phenomenology, performance and rhetoric a mode/notion of “presentational ethnography” can be envisioned. More significantly than other con-textualizations “presentational ethnography” can inspire ethnographic possibilities allowing for interplay within the ambiguous boundaries of the “real” and the “imaginary” which are part of everyday experiences, whether lived, learned through history, or imagined. Presenting ethnographies is presenting process, a discussion in motion. A notion of “presentational ethnography” like “presentational theatre” challenges the concept of representation and reinterprets the concept of “authoring” (Constantinidis, 1993: 15.) Presenting involves a sort of rewriting; “Rewriting involves creative interpretation (poiesis) not... imitation (mimesis)” (Ibid). “Presentational Ethnography” signifies for me a cross-cultural and intersubjective reference where both subject and object can draw from.

This approach is a challenge to the theoretical/methodological constraints of “representational” (in a theatrical sense) performative and phenomenological anthropology. A “presentational ethnography,” thus, like “presentational theatre” attempts a bringing together all involved in a presentation of intercultural experience. The focus is on the possibility of *presenting* ethnographic experiences and comments rather than representing them, trying in a theatrical sense⁴ to move away from the constraints distancing form and content, text and context. These presentations need not pretend that events can be faithfully recreated, legitimised by imitation, or driven by textualizations. They ought to perform and to weave the process, without becoming a systematic whole, in which positions, identities and contradictions become untangled in a cultural or intercultural encounter. In this framework, a presentation of an ethnographic based process becomes our intention (text). The process gives way to a temporal method which in turn “gives form to”⁵ a presentation of the ethnographic experience. Even though the ethnographer has the ultimate authorial voice (one cannot avoid this), he/she is phenomenologically committed to a plurality of senses and knowledges (Howes, 1992; Jackson, 1996), and performatively committed to action and process (Fabian, 1990, 1996; Bauman, 1986). The process promotes the methods (as intercultural/ intersubjective instruments of communication) and the mediums (as presenters of the communicative process in written form) to become a dynamic cultural/intercultural understanding.

Projected Presentation of Dissertation

The organization of this dissertation will be minimalist and unconventional. Going back and forth between descriptive prose and theatrical narratives, it will present the process of knowledge creation (in an ethnographic project) through its different media and unified by the theme and rhyme of the overall ethnographic context. Several components will help identify the different streams of narratives in the work. For example the first narrative (tropological: the metaphorical and metonymic layout) of the work is the *El Gueguense* drama script encountered at the beginning of this introduction and throughout at the beginning of every chapter. This first theatrical narrative, which heads most major sections, contextualizes the script of the Nicaraguan play within the present ethnographic presentation.⁶ The second narrative stream is my own academic interpellation (needed to satisfy academic requirements) that discusses, describes and makes sense of *El Gueguense's* different narratives (in and out of the performance) and the ethnographic encounter. Lastly, the second theatrical narrative is the story of the ethnographic encounter in the form of scripted scenes in chapter five. This narrative is about getting to the field, getting to know informants, getting to know other people in Nicaragua, and even getting to know myself. This theatrical/ethnographical narrative is about interacting at many different levels with the subjects (friends) and the discovery of multiple knowable possibilities. It intends to be self-explanatory (though a simple theatre play, early theatre

script) and self-contained, so as to stand-alone. Interpretation, however, will be part of every chapter.

The written project will be divided into six sections: The program or introduction (this chapter), Stage (Chapter Two), Setting (Chapter Three), Performers and Audiences (Chapter Four), The Performance (Chapter Five) and The Review or Conclusion (Chapter Six). The Stage or Chapter Two sets the historical and poli/theatrical parameters of the work and discusses identity negotiations in Nicaragua through theatre. I use a number of presentational narratives here. Setting or Chapter Three develops the theoretical and methodological arguments. It tries to bring together a reasoned claim so as to why the particular authorial direction. In Performers and Audiences or Chapter Four, some characters involved in the project, such as informants, and some of its environments, such as the Saint Sebastian festival are introduced. This chapter tries to put forth the idea that performers and audiences contest their social situations through *El Gueguense* narratives displayed during the San Sebastian's festival.

Performance or Chapter Five develops the ethnographic encounter into a "presentational ethnography." As a small minimalist play the chapter is divided into two acts and a number of scenes. These acts and scenes are intended to involve the reader in the ethnographic experience, where all the participants present points of view, personal and collective interests and priorities about the cultural experience of *El Gueguense* and the ethnographic encounter is negotiated. As in a theatre play, it is my intention to create an imaginative theatrical and ethnographic world where the audience and performers can interact. The "presentational ethnography" becomes a possible knowable world where object and subject join. Each act is divided into five (scripted) scenes. These scenes are

not intended to be a mirror image of the experience, but an accumulation of views, histories, concerns, and individualities. The intentions are uncomplicated: to try to perform *presentationally*, within a textual evocation and sometimes an invocation of a dialogue, a disruption, and an intercultural and intersubjective negotiation. The Review is the concluding chapter. Chapter five evaluates the project in its totality.

TWO: STAGE

THE HISTORICAL AND THEATRICAL SPACE: HOMOGENIZING RULES AND DESTABILIZING DISSENSION

About Stage

In the theatre the stage means “the acting area of whatever shape and location with the scenery and properties, however related to it” (Albright, Halstead, and Mitchell, 1955: 251). The concept of stage is utilized here as the background of the ethnographic process. Both texture and contexture are intertwined in the process of ethnography emerging through the historical elements in which the play is reconstructed (as a cultural event and as reference). The historical background of the ethnography will become gestures towards several localized possibilities, and other cultural, political and social “points of view.”

Summary of El Gueguense Script: Event Two.

El Gueguense knows all along about his problems with the Royal court. When the Alguacil confronts him, he, who is nearby with his sons (Don Ambrosio and Don Forsico), pretends not to understand what the Alguacil tells him. In this process El Gueguense repeatedly changes the Alguacil's words so as to insult him.

Gueguense. (Who is listening).

Ho, boys! Is it a calf or is it a colt that is to be tied behind by the tail, or the legs, or the nose?

Don Ambrosio.

That's what you deserve, Gueguense, you old humbug.

Gueg.

Do you speak to me, Don Ambrosio?

Don Amb.

Who would speak to you, Gueguense, you old humbug?

Gue.

Why not, you bad breed, you lazy loafer on working days? Who is it now that wants to know my name?

Alg.

A servant of the Governor Tastuanes.

Gue.

What sort of a servant-girl is it, the chocolate maker, the washwoman, or the clothes patcher of the Governor Tastuanes?

Alg.

Neither waiter-girl nor washwoman; a servant of the Governor Tastuanes...

Gue.

Take a seat, friend... and what has Governor Tastuanes to say?

Alg.

That you go to him a-running and a-flying, Gueguense.

Gue.

A-running and a-flying? How does he expect a poor old man, full of pains and aches, to run and fly? Well, then, I will go and see if I can fly.

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Historical and Theatrical Presentational Space

Cultural expressions such as literature, poetry, music and theatre bear the traces of years of political and social history in Nicaragua. Theatre and performance, as discourses, have gone on in festivals, fiestas, and celebrations for many years. Cultural expressions have been the witness and therefore the sites for historical challenges in which a process of inclusion of some groups of people and exclusion of others have taken place. This process can, for didactic purposes, be considered the mediation between conflicting social, cultural, and political forces. Thus, theatrical attempts in today's Nicaragua are informed by an old and emergent history.

This chapter aims to lay down the foundations for a historically and theatrically informed ethnographic presentation. The examination of identity negotiations through theatre and its evocation is presented through a contextualized story of Nicaragua. This section encompasses two points. First, it introduces a chronologically succinct presentation of Nicaraguan history from the 15th century to the present. The presentation of this first part of the chapter will be in the form of a first hand, first person chronicle of Nicaragua during the last five hundred years.

The second part of this chapter contextualizes and analyzes Nicaraguan theatre and *El Gueguense* w/in that history presented in the first half of the chapter. This analysis is an academic treatise that pays attention to existing studies on Nicaraguan nation-building schemes through some narratives about *El Gueguense*. It also re-states the position of this ethnographic project that casts the performance of *El Gueguense* as the principal site for identity negotiation in Nicaragua.

A Presentational Historical Backdrop

This is the story that has come to me through several generations of historians, writers, poets, and politicians. It represents many points of view stylised in the form of a single omnipresent presentational narrative. I have gathered this collection of observations to present them to the reader as my own experiential scenario and realization, as I am the instrument of its presentation. Imagine that I am, as the speaker of the narrative, a witness of five hundred years of history. There it is, today.

This is contemporary Nicaragua. It is Western Nicaragua in the areas between the lake Cocibolca and the Pacific Coast in the picturesque town of Diriamba. Nicaragua, this tiny Central American Republic (the size of the province of New Brunswick, 128,875 Km²)⁷ has been at the centre of geographical, economic, social, and cultural convulsions for hundreds of years. Before the arrival of Europeans in the 1500s, our land was already the meeting place for many pre-Colombian groups from North and South America, the Nahuas, Nicoyas, and others who battled for political and economic hegemony. Situated at the site of several bodies of water and volcanoes, some still active, Nicaragua has been prone to natural disasters: volcanic eruptions, floods, earthquakes, and droughts. These factors, and the subsequent push of European conquistadors on this land, contributed to a condition of permanent ecological, political, and social strife.

Ever since our political, social and economic subjugation, and the subsequent imposition of colonial rule by the Spaniards, political and social upheaval has been constant. In more recent years, military interventions (by the United States), revolutions,

wars, and dictatorships have considered our land and our people as volatile and unstable. Our hopes and doubts, dreams and horrors, victories and defeats, fantasies and realities, were and are drawn from this long historical legacy.

*Let me stir up memories of a long forgotten inventory of this land through the moustachioed figure and, fortune hunter, conquistador **Fernandez de Oviedo**. This is what remains of his memories of my ancestors:⁸*

It's a summer day, one of the hottest ones that I can remember. The sun is red and bright as always in this part of the world: it seems as if it's closer this time. My body armour sticks to my body, like a cumbersome second skin, as I walk the forest... (Sighs). The land is rich and fertile with cornfields, vegetables, beans of different kinds and breathtaking birds and flowers. There is an abundance of honey and beeswax, pigs, deer and other such wild beasts. There is a great deal of cotton, and much good clothing is made from it, spun and woven by Indian women. This is the most enchanting land I've ever seen.

In the land of Nicarao most people govern themselves as communities, they are not ruled by a supreme leader or chief, they have a lot of autonomy and do as they please. Christians need to quickly abolish this practice to bring some order. The inhabitants have books of parchment made of the hides of deer... They have their churches they call Orchilobos, which resemble New Spain's temples. These people of Nicaragua have many rituals like those of New Spain... Those of the Chorotega tongue, who are their enemies, have the same temples; but in language, ritual, ceremonies, and customs they differ so that they do not understand one another. Their markets are exclusive to people who speak the

same dialect, those who breach this rule could be enslaved, sold or worse, eaten...
(Pauses, changes tone). Yes, human sacrifices are common. Oh god, that's evil incarnate.
There are prostitutes who earn their living by doing these abominable activities. Selling
their bodies. The people have many Gods to whom they dedicate elaborate non-Christian
fiestas. They also have several types of marriages but most men have only one wife. They
have all-powerful sorcerers who establish communication with the devil. These are priests
of Satan... (Silence). The land is charming, the food abundant, but Christianity is
desperately needed.

*The **Inhabited (Indian)**⁹ woman remembers in her own way. She is now a scented tree.*
She has re-incarnated as an olden oak many years later. She remembers through five
hundred years of broken bodies and souls, a struggle of a people for survival:

I, here, hidden as I am, can dream, can glimpse conjunctions, the forks in
the roads...

The Spaniards said they had discovered a new world. But our world was
not new to us. Many generations had flourished in these lands since our ancestors,
worshippers of Tamagastad and Cipaltonal, settled here. We were Nahuatls, but we
also spoke Chorotega, and the Niquirana language. We could measure the
movement of the stars and write on strips of deerskin. We cultivated the land, we
lived in great settlements beside the lakes, we hunted and spun, and we had
schools and secret festivals.

Who knows what all this territory would be like now if the Chorotegas, Caribs, Dirians, and Niquiranos had not been killed...?

The Spaniards said that they had to make us “civilized”, make us give up our “barbarism”. Yet they defeated us, they decimated us barbarously.

In just a few years they made more human sacrifices than we had ever made in all our history of our festivals.

This country was the most populated. And yet in the twenty-five years I lived, it lost so many men. They sent them in great ships to build a distant city called Lima. They killed them: the dogs tore them to pieces, they hung them from trees, cut off their heads, shot them, baptized them; they prostituted our women...

The Source

The procurement of this land is closely linked to the geographical and economic advantages it offers to the Spanish conquering forces in 1500s. God-fearing and genocidal conquistador Gil Gonzales and his rugged desperado mercenaries encountered acceptance from some of this people: chief Nicaragua, for example, gave the conquerors many pieces of gold, sacred objects and jewellery. These Indians gladly converted to Christianity. Others were not so obliging. Chief Diriangen, the great old warrior resisted for a long time. In 1523, Gonzales Davila successfully imposed his will over the territory and its spiritually broken inhabitants. Twenty years of war; fire-spitting sticks and the white man’s God, on one side, against bow and arrows and Tamagastad/Cipaltonal, on the

other side. Several generations later, it was not clear to whom of the conquering Spaniards the territory of Nicaragua belonged. Disputes arose over control.¹⁰

From the moment of the conquest on, Nicaragua and its riches, its people, its culture and political life became intertwined with the whim of the different groups of Spaniards seeking personal wealth, glory and also religious converts. During those centuries more than half a million Nicaraguans, almost half of the population, were transported as slaves to Peru, never to return. Only 11,000 men, women and children were left of more than 500,000 to 750,000 inhabitants.¹¹ After depleting the populations and the natural resources of the area, the Europeans lost interest in the land and departed in 1821.

The Age of Social Convulsions in Nicaragua: Political and Military Intervention.

"Men are still running. They are bloodthirsty governors. Flesh is still being torn, they are still fighting..."¹²

Many years after the conquest, the social situation did not improve. Nicaraguans kept dying by the thousands. The constant intervention by powerful colonial nations such as Spain, Great Britain, France, and the United States, was tied to the strategic importance these colonialist states perceived in the region. As some writers of politics and history have said: "The enduring allure of the region derives from its unique geographical position. Spain...Britain and the United States have all come to appreciate its strategic importance for both North and South America."¹³ For more than a century

thereafter, Nicaragua became the region of the Americas where international adventurers, cynical imperialists, despotic oligarchs, brutal dictators, and local revolutionaries sought fame and fortune.

Together with the already formed private states (provinces) of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica, Nicaragua, through its social and economic elite, got rid of Spanish rule in 1821. After a brief period, in which the Central American provinces were part of the Mexican Empire, they formed their own fiefdom (independent country): the United Provinces of Central America. However, the union was short lived and broke off in 1838. Thereof, Nicaragua became, at least nominally, an independent republic. In reality, however, foreign interests controlled the destiny of Nicaragua.¹⁴ As in many Latin American nations with similar histories of colonialism and neo-colonialism, Nicaraguan political life was determined by military, political, and economic contests between two political factions. These two factions, the Liberals and Conservatives, resulted from the split of Creole elite families who had become the new masters of the ancient Nicaraguans. One faction established its headquarters along the humid Pacific Ocean breath, in the city of Leon, the other along the beaches of the lake of Nicaragua, in the city of Granada.

The Liberals in dusty Leon sponsored a type of world capitalism, which encouraged economic investment (local and international), as well a separation between state and church. The conservatives in colonial Granada developed close alliances with the Catholic hierarchy and favoured a policy of social, cultural, and political paternalism. Their political struggles sowed the seeds for many conflicts, death, suffering and foreign interventions that have persisted up until this day. Their political bickering also brought

about, in the 1850's, one of the most curious episodes in the history of this country. William Walker, a swashbuckling filibuster from the United States,¹⁵ was contracted by the liberals to help defeat the conservatives in a civil war. He landed in Nicaragua with 58 men and quickly defeated the conservatives; however, after the liberal victory Walker positioned himself as the head of the army and later as the president of Nicaragua. The adventurer had his own ideas for the already disheartened population. He re-established slavery by changing the constitution in his new Nicaragua. This turn of events discredited the liberals and fortified the conservatives who enlisted the help of Central American conservatives to defeat the daredevil. Walker was deposed and expelled. However, he led several more expeditions to Central America. He was captured and shot dead. As a consequence, the liberals were kept out of power for thirty years.

A liberal revolution in 1893 brought a physically large-framed nationalist Jose Santos Zelaya to the presidency of the republic. With an iron grip he governed the country for the next 16 years. Zelaya brought prosperity to the country, in general economic terms, and managed the modernization of the Nicaraguan economy. His type of government brought about a brand-new type of social and cultural nationalism: national identity based on capital development. Nevertheless, the United States Government condemned his liberal government and its economic nationalist revolution. The "Monroe Doctrine" had set aside the entire Western Hemisphere for the United States' economic and political expansionist, neo-colonialist desires¹⁶. Zelaya was an obstacle to the North Americans. He had refused to grant the United States the rights to built an interoceanic canal in Nicaragua. He also tried to secure help from declining European powers to build

his own canal. The United States had enough from this insolent dictator/president and removed him for good.

By the turn of the century the conservatives returned to power aided by the United States government. This event led to the first U.S. military intervention in the country in 1912. The U.S. marines' presence in Nicaragua was thereafter established. They stayed in the territory until 1925 under the pretext of protecting U.S. lives and property, while governing puppet Adolfo Diaz was placed as the new conservative President of Nicaragua. The real power in Nicaragua was thus, as we could expect, centred in the U.S. "diplomatic mission" in the capital Managua. The U.S. marines left the Nicaraguan territory in 1925, but they were back once again in 1926 after another liberal revolt. This time the military force stayed until 1933.

In order to further their interests in Nicaragua, the United States advanced the Chamorro-Bryant treaty with the conservative government (1916). This treaty conceded to the United States permanent use of Nicaraguan territory. The United States was granted "in perpetuity forever free from all taxation... the exclusive proprietary rights necessary and convenient.... to operate an interoceanic canal...in Nicaragua."¹⁷ The economic and military interests of the U.S. in Nicaragua were guaranteed thereafter. In 1913, Nicaragua got a Bank loan through two New York institutions for 2, 000,000 dollars. In exchange Nicaragua accorded the banks 51% in stocks and control of Nicaraguan railways and 51% of stocks from the Nicaraguan national bank.¹⁸ Military threat plus economic dependency appeared to seal the fate of Nicaragua with the U.S. forever.

Sandino and the Second U.S. Intervention in the 1920's

Following the trend of the previous century, in the twentieth century the country's population continued to sink into social and political strife. With the conservatives in power, and the U.S. marines, and National Guard (a surrogate army created by the U.S.A.) fighting against the liberals, an agreement between the conservatives and the liberals was secured. Signed in 1927, it was to end the hostilities between these two factions once and for all. Yet, a physically small, but charismatic and militarily astute liberal general, Augusto C. Sandino, continued to resist the U.S. military occupation of Nicaragua. Starting around the late 1920s, Sandino resorted to guerrilla warfare to put pressure on the United States to abandon Nicaraguan internal affairs.

Poor People speak about Sandino:

*...Most of them were kids,
with palm hats, with rough leather sandals
or barefoot, with machetes, elderly
with white beards, twelve year old children with their rifles,
Whites, Indians, and Blondes, and Blacks with kinky hair,
with torn pants and without food,
with their pants in shreds,
walking in single file, flag ahead
-a rag high up in the mountain-
silent under the rain, and fatigued,*

splashing their feet in the ponds of the people...¹⁹

Admiral Latimer of the United States Army also speaks:

Conditions in Nicaragua today are better than when the revolution started.

*The recent activity of Sandino has no political bearing or significance,
the bandit will be annihilated.²⁰*

The 2nd of September 1927, Sandino created the “Ejercito Defensor de la Soberania Nacional,” a national army to defend Nicaraguan sovereignty. Sandino’s army was composed of between 2000 to 6000 men. The Sandinista rebels were most active militarily in 1931 and 1932. In spite of the massive build up of U.S. marines (more than 5000) in Nicaragua at the time, Sandino became a great problem for the United States.²¹ Although his military accomplishments were limited, Sandino became a folk hero throughout Latin America and a potent symbol of resistance to the “Colossus of the North.”²²

In the 1932 general elections, sleepy eyed and pushover liberal candidate Juan Bautista Sacasa won the presidency of the republic. The United States withdrew its military force. Subsequently, Sandino signed a peace treaty. His main reason for war was removed as the U.S. marines had withdrawn from Nicaragua. He and his men kept their promise to give up the war, and dedicated themselves instead to working the land. Despite this turn of events, in February of 1934 the new director of the National Guard, thirty something, smiley and slightly obese Anastasio Somoza, ordered Sandino killed. Two years later, Somoza easily ousted president Sacasa and became the new head of

Nicaragua. He and his family would come to represent the most brutal dynastic dictatorship in the history of the Americas.

Dictatorship and Revolution: 1933 to 1979

In 1933 the United States of America withdrew its marines from Nicaragua one more time. They did not abandon Nicaragua before bequeathing the government of Nicaragua plenty of arms, a few million dollars, and to the people the game of baseball to distract themselves from hunger and exploitation. The U.S. secured their continued control from a distance. They created the Guardia Nacional, supposedly to keep the peace. By the time the North Americans were preparing their withdrawal, they had already installed Anastasio Somoza Garcia as the head of that military organization. The Guardia Nacional became the instrument of domination utilized by the Somozas family to keep a hold of power for more than four decades. Somoza Garcia was to become the father of one of the most ruthless dictatorships in the Americas. The long and repressive spell of the Somozas rule was based on its absolute control of the National Guard, the domination of the Liberal party, and close ties with the United States. The Somozas

governed Nicaragua like a private farm, and they were unchallenged until forced out by an insurrection in July 17, 1979.²³

Bad habits died hard and the United States government affirms that:

Somoza has brought peace and political stability to a country that for nearly half a century knew nothing but constant, bloody, political turmoil...This alleged dictator was recently elected to the presidency by an overwhelming majority... Somoza permits a vigorous opposition press to operate, without molestation, and to criticize his government freely. During the past several years, only five men in Nicaragua have been jailed for political reasons—and these were communists... while he has become a wealthy man, he has done so by risking his own money...²⁴

Under the Somozas the economy grew steadily. Agriculture became the most important activity of the economy with industrial enterprises occupying a second place. As the Nicaraguan economy grew, so did the incredible wealth of the Somozas and their friends. They became the greatest landowners and the biggest investors in industry. They came to claim more than half a billion dollars in holdings. These holdings included perhaps more than 20 percent of the best arable land and more than 150 most profitable industries of the country.²⁵ This is not counting the incredible holdings outside Nicaragua in bonds, stocks, and undisclosed bank accounts.²⁶

Nationalist and poet Rigoberto Lopez Perez assassinated Somoza Garcia in 1956. Luis Somoza, easy going, American educated, and the dictator's oldest son, immediately

inherited the presidency. With the help of his brother Anastasio junior, (then the head of the army), Luis governed Nicaragua for the next 10 years. In 1966, after the death of Luis, Anastasio junior occupied the highest office. He and his cohort used the aftermath of the 1972 earthquake that devastated Managua to enrich themselves even further: "For the dictator Anastasio Somoza... it [the quake] was his most bounteous Christmas"²⁷ Even though most of the properties that belonged to the Somozas were destroyed, he forced the National Insurance Company to pay him first. He subsequently bought cotton plantations near Managua for \$300,000. One week later he sold the land to his own government for \$ 3,000,000, supposedly to construct houses for the poor.²⁸ The international community donated millions of dollars to help the residents rebuild their lives, but the dictator and his friends pocketed most of this aid. These factors of total government corruption coupled with the brutal military repression against the political opposition to the dictatorship helped unite the battered population against the dictator.

The Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) or Sandinist Front for National Liberation was the (military) popular organization that put an end to the Somoza tyranny. Adopting the name of the nationalist hero Augusto C. Sandino, this revolutionary front was founded in 1962.²⁹ Popular discontent was already growing among the entire population of our nation. The Somozas' shameless thievery of the international help after the earthquake of 1972 and the total criminal and corporate impunity of those in power galvanized the population against the despot.

By the early 1970s, the Sandinista Front was conducting an open war against Somoza in the cities and the countryside. The government responded by intensifying a campaign of repression against students, workers, and opposition leaders. While the

success of the Sandinistas had at first been minimal, the National Guard's indiscriminate attack on the population served to energize the conviction of the population to resist. In 1978, Somoza's political Conservative opponent, La Prensa Newspaper editor, Pedro Juaquin Chamorro, was assassinated. Somoza claimed innocence in the murder, but nobody believed him. This assassination helped consolidate the opposition against Somoza. A broad coalition of peasantry, workers and political parties, women and children came together to form a solid opposition front against Somoza. Workers, businesspeople, and the general public called a general strike in January 1978.³⁰ In June of 1979 the FSLN launched their last military offensive against Somoza in most important cities of the country. After several months of fighting, these cities fell under the control of the semi- adolescent, idealist Sandinistas, who eventually marched into Managua the 17th of July 1979. Somoza, his family, friends, and a number of the high-ranking officials of the army escaped to Miami, but not before looting the national coffers. The Somoza dictatorship was over. The people's hopes for a better existence became contagious and were expressed on the streets of Nicaragua where song and dance witnessed the joy of mothers' tears and children's enthusiasm.

The Sandinista Revolution and the Post Revolutionary Years 1979 to 2001

The Sandinista revolution that toppled the Somoza regime was possible by means of a national coalition that comprised different social classes, Christian base communities, and several political parties. The first order of business for the Sandinistas was to dismantle Somoza's government apparatus, confiscate its assets, and write a new

constitution. During the first years of the revolution, quantitative and qualitative progress was recorded in many areas, including education, healthcare, and the agrarian sector. National health and literacy campaigns were launched in 1980. Land was distributed to peasants in the country throughout the 1980s. Unfortunately, the honeymoon was short lived. Due in part to U.S. involvement, by 1983 Nicaragua was effectively polarized and facing a devastating civil war. For the next seven years, Nicaragua was plunged into a fratricidal war and into the middle of the East/West confrontation. On the one hand, the United States started supporting the anti-Sandinista factions economically and militarily. On the other hand, the Sandinista government sought help (economic and otherwise) from Cuba and the Soviet Union. In 1990, a coalition of several political sectors of the country, headed by the conservative right, some conservative sectors of the Catholic hierarchy, and aided by the United States government, defeated the Sandinistas in a general election.

At the beginning of the Revolution, the Sandinista's alliance with other political and social sectors of the country was a strategic partnership. This partnership collapsed months after the triumph of the revolution. It was clear from the very beginning that the FSLN needed to consolidate their power in order to advance the principles of its revolution. These principles were seen by some reactionary social, religious, and political sectors as contrary to "democracy," and therefore were strongly opposed by these sectors. Nevertheless, the Sandinistas managed to push forth a number of their revolutionary goals by forging the notion of the FSLN as the political vanguard of the people. This position was impelled through official state organs and the media controlled by the Sandinista government. By the early 1980s, the business organization, COSEP, and some conservative religious and trade union sectors complained that the attitude of the

FSLN was more and more dictatorial. This was exacerbated by the fact that the Sandinistas had planned elections for 1982, but these were postponed for some reason or another to be held in 1984. My opinion is that the Sandinistas had no choice but to try to consolidate power before elections could take place. Whether undemocratic or not, in judging these actions we have to take into consideration the history of Nicaragua. Foreign interests have often been the priority for the ruling classes in the country. The Sandinistas' intentions, I believe, were not to create a dictatorship, but to give political, social, and legal tools to the majority before they could defend their gained rights via universal suffrage.

As the counterrevolution, aided by the U.S., increased its military attacks, the North American nation increased its economic blockade against the Nicaraguan economy. The internal opposition to the Sandinistas grew audacious and sometimes desperate. The government became more impatient, curtailing some democratic assurances, as they became more and more desperate to consolidate power and defend the gains of the revolution. A sense of uneasiness was created in the populace, as these internal and external pressures mounted and the military service, which drafted young men 16 to 35 to fight the counterrevolutionaries, was implemented. By the middle of the 1980s, most of Nicaragua's resources were spent on the military effort against the counterrevolutionaries. This fact was eroding the revolutionary government's credibility that, understandably, no longer prioritized its goal of bringing prosperity to the countryside and the poor barrios. Nicaraguans began to complain about the rationing of food, about the hard economic situation and, of course, about the many dead from the war front.

In 1990, during the second general elections held by the Sandinista government, the FSLN was defeated. A coalition headed by Dona Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, a conservative, and composed by a number of political parties from the extreme left to the extreme right, swept to power. With financial help from the United States and the Nicaraguan exiled community in the U.S, the coalition managed to obtain a narrow victory. The process of dismantling what the revolution had started in 1979, in terms of agrarian reform, healthcare and education, was about to begin. In subsequent elections (1996, 2000) a right wing faction, Partido Liberal Constitucionalista, the Constitutional Liberal Party, took office. This government, presently in power, has come to represent the further erosion of labour rights, student rights, and social peace in Nicaragua.

Today, Nicaragua enjoys a relative peace. For the most part, the war is over and the guns are silent; however, the social and economic problems that are at the root of most political and social problems still persist. The wealth and resources of this impoverished nation remain in the hands of just a few. The majority of the country's peasant and urban populations still struggle to survive. Death and hunger are a reality in many parts of the country. Participatory democracy, as in the time of the Creole elites in the 16th and 17th century, remains an illusion. Elite political and social circles continue to determine the destiny of the majority. The popular social and political gains brought about by the Sandinista Revolution in the 1980s have all but disappeared. The levels of illiteracy, infant and adult mortality rate, for example, are twice as high as they were during the decade of revolution. As the world enters the 21st century, the Nicaraguan majority continue to face a bleak political, social and economic reality.

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History, Culture, Theatre and Politics: The Case of El Gueguense

The plaza begins to fill up, adults and children take their places in the audience. The priest, Rodolfo De Cabalzeta, has assembled the populace for an afternoon of religious celebration. Today's performers are geared up, some masquerading as Roman soldiers, others disguised as Christians. Their masks emphasize the fair skin and the facial accents of Iberian men. It is 1624 and in Nicaragua, colonialism has taken a performative semi-religious tone. The sound of guns has been replaced with religious images. The repetitive sound of the Indian drums and the polytonal flutes mix with the lugubrious resonance of the church's bell. The scent of incense soothes the worn out, semi-naked, sun-darkened Indians' bodies. There is an obvious enthusiasm among performers and audiences. They all embrace the new European powerful God, without overlooking too much Tamagastad/Cipaltonal, their main ancient god/goddess. This performance is very similar to an ancient fertility festival celebrated before. Even the time of the year coincides.

One hundred years earlier in the same site, a small stone temple stood where the Catholic Church now stands. Like its Christian counterpart, this temple of sacrificial gods, mightily dominates the vicinity. In this Nahuatl town, a religious/popular performance is also celebrated during the months of July. This religious spectacle is called the "play of the sticks."³¹ A group of performers in the middle of the plaza occupies stage right while the exceedingly animated dancing audience drinks chicha, the corn-made liquor very popular in the country. Some actors wear elaborate disguises and beautifully detailed wooden and clay masks, others sport casual body paint. The performers commence to dance and to sing to the tun, tun of drums. Simultaneously, another smaller group of performers gather stage left; they also dance. Their outfits are very different to the previous group opposite. These are sporting costumes of different colours, some red, blue and yet others black. These colourful attires

shine in the radiant afternoon sun. The members of this group do not wear masks of any kind. The chief of the first group of masked actors throw some small wooden sticks at them that he had brought with him for that purpose. The victims pretend to be gravely wounded. The chief hits the dancers in their arms, thighs, and other parts of the body, but without harming them. Sometimes he would miss the throw altogether. After a few minutes of this physical foolishness the action stops. The Indians playing the part of aggressors produce bags of cocoa beans and offer them to their victims.

The importance of the performance perhaps resided on its power to communicate war, domination, reciprocity, harvest and submission or simply it could have been the enactment of some historical scene. The power of visual imagery is established as an important aspect of the performance and the history of the performers.

Much of this ancient religious symbolism became mixed with culturally resonant Christian symbolism and mythology. This type of religious syncretism proved convenient for both conquered and conqueror in the struggle for social, cultural, and political accommodation. Around the 17th and 18th centuries, eighty percent of the Indian and Mestizo population in Nicaragua declared themselves Catholic. The syncretic form of Catholicism that developed became a religious, social, cultural, and political reservoir for people's actions manifested in many religious festivals and their everyday lives. These festivals, as their cultural expression, utilized colours, games, dance, elaborate costumes, religious ritual, socio-dramas, and cross-dressing as modes of cultural expressions available to the people (De Costa, 1992, 143).

Syncretism and hybridity in ritual performances was also manifested in Nicaraguan popular and religious theatrical expressions. Two reasons motivated the Spanish to introduce theatre in the new world: evangelization and entertainment. The

Catholic priests dramatized bible passages, doctrines, the Eucharistic and Christmas dramas in Nahuatl, Mangue, and other languages to better assimilate the Indians into the new faith (Willis Kapp, 1956: 24). Some Catholic priests, looking to impress the parishioners, found in theatre an effective tool. Theatre "*lent vividness to their sermon*" (Ibid 16).

The theatricalization of the new faith went hand in hand with the project of colonialism. Throughout colonial America, the Spaniards legitimized their right to rule through language and ceremony. Ceremonies and religious processions provided visual and aural dramas to the societal hierarchical structure. Theatrical public displays were utilized to maintain the social and political roles fixed in the minds of the populace, and to uphold the moral and social values upon which the authority of the powerful rested (Beezley, Martin and French, 1994: xiii). It was in this context of Spanish religious drama and authority that a form of theatre, a site of negotiation, just like the new brand of Catholicism, emerged in Nicaragua, a type of Nicaraguan popular theatre.

The pre-Columbian Nicaraguans connected every activity in their life to beliefs in their Gods, the importance of omens, oracles and the like. Nicaraguans had a God for almost every activity in their life (Zepeda, 1987: 15). Among their most important Gods were Tamagastad and Cipaltonal who were two and the same, female and male, the father and mother of the other minor Gods. Among some of the minor Gods were Mixcoa (god of commerce), Quiateot (god of the waters), Masat (god of the deer hunt), Bisteot (god of hunger), and others. Most important activities such as ritual offerings to their gods were coordinated around the planting or sowing of corn. Every ritual performance offered was somehow connected to their mythological past, which they regarded as proof of their origin and their relationship with superior beings.

The ancient Nicaraguans put important responsibilities in the hands of *Texoxes*, or *brujos* (medicine men and sorcerers.) *Texoxes* preserved the peace among the population. They were revered as well as feared. They comforted the sick and also predicted the future (Zepeda, 1987: 39). *Texoxes* "could transform themselves into alligators, dogs, tigers or any other animal they pleased" (Zepeda, 1987: 39-40.) This element gave them a mythological force and presence, that was manifested in their performances. Nicaraguans could be bewitched through a smell, a sound, through vision, and by ingestion; however, the ancient Nicaraguans believed that every *maleficio* or curse had its antidote. One could always liberate the afflicted person from negative effects of *maleficio*. That is were the *texoxes* were always ready to act (Milagros, 1984: 58).

In pre-Columbian thought, the points of the compass were of extreme importance for ceremonies, rituals, and everyday life. This phenomenon was connected to their religion and mythology. The North used to have a bad connotation. It was associated with dampness, cold, and death. It was sometimes associated with the colour white. The South, however, had an indifferent and neutral nature. It could, at one point or another, become good or bad, and it was sometimes associated with the colour green. The West was associated with paradise, light, heat, humidity, and harvest. The mythic inhabitants of the West were women who had died in childbearing. The East was believed to be the Sun's place of origin, the last resting place for soldiers killed in battle, or in sacrifice, and it was associated with abundance of food. In divination, the North was cursed, the West blessed (Palma, 1984: 94.)

Corn was very important among the Nicaraguans. Besides providing the basis for a variety of foods and drinks, corn was the symbol of life. It was the principal food for the inhabitants of the new world (Maya, Nahuatl, Nahua, Quiche, Inca etc.) and had great relevance in their mythology. The rituals offered to their Gods were always based on food prepared with corn (Tapia, 1981: 26). Nicaraguans' religious beliefs, thus, and their theatricalized fertility ceremonies were interconnected and interdependent. Agricultural and

fertility rites, where most of the population participated, were widely practiced performances. The specialization of this practice led to the development of professional performers in pre-Columbian America. These skilled performers used humour, comedy, mockery, clowning and acrobatics to entertain and to signal harvests, planting and other important historical moments (Weiss, 1993: 30-32). Agricultural rites ranged from the simplest offering (theatrical flagellation) to a more complex festival involving actual human sacrifices such as the *volador*.³² All the non-discursive elements including colours, masks, directions of the compass, and *texoxes*' magic suggest the importance of symbols and non-verbal expressions in pre-Columbian Nicaragua.

In the postcolonial period, Nicaraguan popular performance or theatre took those elements from the ancient ritual/performance *mitotes* or dances that, sometimes, had been suppressed by the conquering authorities, and combined them with Christian dramatic forms. Magic performed by *texoxes*, which played a significant role in the lives of the people, was the target of repression by the Spaniards (Palma, 1984: 31). Magic thus had to be performed clandestinely and was reconstructed from the ashes of the old religion into the syncretic popular theatre. Even though this position can be contested and could be construed as an attestation of a homogeneous hybrid culture, one cannot deny the important presence of elements of the Indigenous religion at a more political and disruptive level. Hence, the new form of theatre was able to incorporate some symbolism, visual, and auditive expressions, to which the majority of the people subscribed, making it a cultural space for moulding and perhaps contesting new ones. In contexts such as these, ritualized theatrical performance could provide a vehicle in which a most fitting world could be envisaged, created and even manipulated (Comaroff, 1985: 196). This is so regardless of the authorship of the performances. This type of theatre came to be known

as Nicaraguan folkloric theatre, *Auto-sacramental*, religious plays and dramas of profane character: *El Gigante*, *La Restauracion del Sacramento*, *La Historia de Sanson*, and *El Gueguense*, among others. These have their origin around the sixteen and seventeen centuries. The *El Gueguense* play is the most critical of all for its apparent political anti-dominant stand. Eduardo Galeano imagines himself in ancient times where the *El Gueguense* was first performed in Nicaragua perhaps in late 17th century:

For a moment, the sun breaks through clouds, then hides again, ashamed or scared by the brilliance of people here below, for the land is lit up with joy: dialogue dance, dance theatre, saucy musical skits: on the verge of intelligibility, "the idiot" directs the fiesta. The characters, wearing masks, Speak a language of their own, neither Nahuatl nor Spanish, a mestizo language that has grown up in Nicaragua.

An ancient Indian, a coarse fast talker, occupies the centre of the stage. It is "the idiot", otherwise known as the Macho Mouse, mocker of prohibitions, who never says what he says or listens to what he hears, and so manages to avoid being crushed by the powerful: When the rogue cannot win the game, he draws; when he can't achieve a draw, he confuses (Galeano, 1985: 250).

When the Mangué Indians (members of the Nahuan linguistic family) on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua began performing the play in the 16th or 17th century, they did not know how significant it would become for Nicaraguans today. They, obviously, considered it significant to their lives then. Today the anonymity of its authorship contributes enormously to its mythological status in Nicaraguan literature and popular

lore. There are many speculative arguments about the origin of its creator, some believing the author to be an oppressed Indian and others to be a Spanish priest. The problem of authority, however, has brought to the fore the problematic of the intentionality of the play (Urbina, 1999: 2). The numerous interpretations and transcriptions of the play have excited a great deal of intellectual debate as well as controversy. Different political and social parties claim the play to be representative of their own history.

For centuries, every year a handful of (non-professional) groups performed this satirical play during folkloric festivals, and other celebrations. Today, it is only occasionally performed in the town of Diriamba in Western Nicaragua around the festivities of San Sebastian, its patron saint. This annual production could be understood as a denunciation of corruption and abuse of power in the post-contact period, but we could read more in the play. The masked characters in *El Gueguense* utilize verbal discourse, but also convey their subversive trickery through dance, music, gesture, and postures. Masks are essential in the staging of the story, and most characters wear one. Something remarkable is that women in the play are not masked. We know that in pre-Columbian theatre acting was the domain of men. Perhaps these characters were meant to be played by masked men only.

The script of the play, the version translated by Daniel Brinton (1969) in the late 1800's, begins as the Spanish governor, *Tastuanes*, greets his constable, the *Alguacil Mayor*. They comment on the insolvent state of the Royal council. The Governor blames this situation on a tax-evading, travelling mestizo merchant, named *Gueguense*. He orders that nobody be allowed to enter or leave the province without his permission and requests that *El Gueguense* be brought to him to respond to the charges. When the *Alguacil*

confronts *El Gueguense*, the latter pretends not to understand what the constable tells him. In this process, *El Gueguense* constantly twists the Alguacil's words so as to insult him. When the governor *Tastuanes* finally re-enters the scene, he demands to know why *El Gueguense* is travelling without permit. *El Gueguense* does not exactly respond to the question, but insinuates that he never needed permit to do anything. He pretends that he is very rich and that he is willing to share his riches with the Governor. *El Gueguense's* son Don Forsico convinces the governor that his father is rich by detailing a number of goods, such as gold, silk and other trinkets.

The governor *Tastuanes* tries to verify Gueguense's wealth by looking into his travelling shop. *El Gueguense* diverts his attention by offering ridiculous things like the morning star. In the end, *El Gueguense* winds up tricking the governor into dancing the bawdy "macho-Raton". As a result the governor is appreciative of the Gueguense for the pleasurable time and enjoyment the dance has given him. *El Gueguense* offers wine to celebrate, but in the end he and his sons do not produce it.

The *El Gueguense* play is a hybrid piece but, as I will argue, its power does not lie in its hybridity. Certainly, when discussing the play, it is unavoidable to talk about its duality. Dramatically speaking, the text of *El Gueguense* reveals elements and influences of both Spanish and Indigenous theatre. Spain could have contributed the theatrical structure (most of the language, dialogical sequence, its time frame). Indigenous Nicaragua may have added magical elements (animal personification, dancing animals), story sequence (the play is not divided into separate scenes as is the characteristic of Pre-Columbian drama), colours (significant in the ancient ceremonies), visuals (importance on non-verbal expressions in ancient performance, emphasis on dance and acrobatics), and

auditive monotonous expressions (drums, pan flutes) (Pena, 1961: 179).

Some scholars believe that perhaps two plays or more were brought together to constitute the *El Gueguense* script. The evidence cited is the abrupt change of language in the script, from Spanish to Nahuatl and vice versa. Regardless of its origin, the play is idiomatically and linguistically a hybrid, (Spanish and Nahuatl), though it is believed to have been originally a Mangue (another Nicaraguan indigenous language) play. It utilizes many parallel elements of both cultural performance influences.

Technically the Spanish influences of the play can be situated in the epoch of the development of professional theatre in the Iberian country (Perez Estrada, 1970: 14). Though influenced by religious dramas, *El Gueguense* is not an “Auto Sacramental” or a biblical play, but some of its elements can be traced to the same period (1700) of the development of the professional theatre there (Perez Estrada, 1970: 13). “The Gueguense is the meeting place of the medieval, minor theatre as in Lope de Rueda, with Mesoamerican *mitotes* (religious performances)” (1997: 4) expresses the Nicaraguan writer Valle Castillo.

Lope de Rueda was considered the first professional playwright for popular audiences in Spain. His plays were of “earthy humour and picturesque dialogue, they resemble medieval farces”. In his *farsas* “fools and simpletons are the most fully developed characters” (in Brockett, 1987: 232). As in pre-Columbian performances, no permanent theatres existed in Lope de Rueda’s epoch. Sometimes he acted in courtyards and city squares. The play on words or “double entendre” can be considered a Spanish element. This element can be attributed to el *gracioso* or simpleton, which was an important part of the Spanish theatre. Attributing the play to De Rueda would be pushing

the Spanish ancestry a bit too far.

The characters of *El Gueguense* represent Pre-Colombian types (animal impersonation in the *machos*) as well as Spanish figures (the Alguacil, the governor, etc.). In the play the use of masks is fundamental, whether they are employed to represent Spanish faces or to give determined expressions to the faces of the Indians. Masks also serve to represent animals, such as the deer-bull, the cow, the *gараñon* (a young horse) and others that are at the core of pre-Columbian cosmology, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. (Pena, 1961: 181). Even though these animals were of Spanish origin, they were adopted for being more acceptable within the new post-colonial reality. Animal personification may come directly out of the indigenous belief in the power of *texoxes* or medicine men that had the magical power to become and incarnate animals such as jaguars, alligators, monkeys, pigs and others (Ibid). Masks are the playful nature of the people's expressions of communion with the Other: gods, *texoxes* and the socially superior Spaniard. Masks are the non-verbally expressed desires to root out evil through the power of enactment and evocation. It is the accessing of historical codes confined in the shapes and colours of the masks. These codes when accessed are, perhaps, a protest. A protest, "which, by virtue of being rooted in a shared structural predicament and experience of dispossession, conveys an unambiguous message" (Comaroff, 1995: 196.) This message can be interpreted as an acceptance of the new order or a contestation of it.

Linguistically and culturally, therefore, the *El Gueguense* is a fusion play. Besides being written in languages, (Spanish and Nahuatl), it is also codified in two or more cultures, two or more classes, and two or more races. At the start of the play script, the dialogue is remarkably Nahuatl (from line 1 to line 206). After line 206, the Nahuatl

language disappears, with exception of some sporadic words, to appear again from line 306 till the end. Perhaps bilingualism became a factor in the piece, because it sought to cater to an increasingly mestizo, bilingual population, or maybe it represents the arbitrary imposition of one language over another through the development of the script. What is most remarkable in this context is not that two cultures meet and disrupt or interact within the play, (this can be seen within the struggle for position of the characters). The importance of the play, I propose, is its position in Nicaraguan culture as an arena that transcends time, and has been transformed into a point of reference for identity negotiation, race and class struggles. The historical, social and cultural elements of the play become valuable not for their association with Pre-Columbian or Spanish performances, but because they are references for social contestation. It is a departure for a new location of reference in history, politics, and culture in Nicaragua. This is not only manifested within the theatre, but goes beyond to other domains of Nicaraguan life. For example, everyday conversations and language are very much influenced by this encounter. I, for example, came across many people in the department of Carazo who cited *El Gueguense* with ease, referring to other domains of political and social discourse, i.e., civic elections. A neighbour commented to me during the municipal elections of the 2000 that one of the politicians running in the municipal elections was *Gueguensiando*, or using deception to convince the electors. This was in clear reference to the main character of *El Gueguense* who deceives Governor *Tastuanes*.

The Gueguense, thus, emerges at a meeting place of two or more cultural worldviews, and within the context of colonialism. As such, the theme of the play deals with the conflict and the contradictions between the colonizers (Spanish authorities) and

the colonized (Mestizo-Indigenous peoples). The Crown's coffers are empty, and the rulers demand more from the impoverished population. The *El Gueguense* is the expression of an inter-cultural clash; it is a polilectical, and perpetual negotiation, and not a finite outcome of such a conflict (Valle Castillo, 1997: 1).

The play has also influenced popular theatre in most recent years. In the 1970's, there was a popular social base for a theatre movement within the Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEB) in Nicaragua. Alan Bolt, a Nicaraguan Sandinista intellectual, organized the (M.T.C) community theatre movement, as part of the C.E.Bs strategies. It was easy to coordinate the theatrical work with this committee. The anti-Somoza struggle had united many people, Christian organizations, revolutionary organizations and artists (De Costa: 132.) In the 1970s and 1980's Alan Bolt's Community Theatre Movement (Movimiento de Teatro Comunitario) developed a Nicaraguan form of theatre based on the Gueguense tradition. This theatre movement utilized especially auditive and visual language charged with popular symbolism to communicate with audiences. Even though the plays communicated verbally as well, speech was not as important as was its visual expression. Dance, poetry, street theatre song and oral history were integrated into the new popular theatre. "Nicaraguan peasant performers focus on the use of body movement to convey action, character, and attitude..." (De Costa, 1992: 141). Bolt tried to tap into the historical references that could be easily understood by the majority.

Passive Written Discourse (*Pathema*) Versus Performed Discourse (*Poiema*).³³

The rhetorical aim of *El Gueguense*'s masked characters is to tell a story of constant oppressive conditions revealing the farcical boundaries imposed by authority. It is about unmasking those other masked characters of social existence in Nicaragua. The story is about scepticism and "living with disjuncture" (Field, 1999: xx). It narrates multiple histories and multiple identities (Ibid). As a rhetorical arena and site of identity negotiation, the theatre of *El Gueguense* stages the objects, attitudes, and issues that would express particular social, political and, cultural situations. These situations become the realm in which actors and audiences make their judgments about actions in the theatre and perhaps in life. The play is important because it becomes a vehicle, place, and agent for cultural (and in the ethnographic case an intercultural) understanding.

The written script (the dramatic theatre piece) of *El Gueguense* has been at the centre of a nationalistic, homogenizing movement, in which elite intellectuals position the written play as the source of a Nicaraguan national identity. These elite intellectuals regard the main character of the play (*El Gueguense*) as the embodiment of Nicaraguanness, and confer upon the play a passive or static characteristic of permanency. This sentiment is well documented in academic, literary, and Nicaraguan popular media such as in the writings by Mantica, (1994), Perez Estrada, (1970), Valle Castillo, (1997), Pablo Antonio Cuadra, (1969), et al. An assumption of cultural homogeneity propels this well propagated notion.

It is my position that a politics of cultural homogeneity excludes many voices and

identities that are in apparent interaction and negotiation in the play's performances today.

Elite intellectuals tend to ignore the play's performers, whose active participation construct and reconstruct many discourses about the play in its performance every year. Thus ignored by previous elite interpretations of *El Gueguense* are the social, cultural, political, and economic conjunctures of that part of Nicaragua.

In his book "The Grimace of Macho Raton" (1999), Les W. Field discusses identity and nation building in late-twentieth century Nicaragua. Field's ethnography challenges a post-Sandinista national conception of identity, one that restricts subaltern Nicaraguans. He draws on the works and words of artisans and *artisanas*, Indians, *Mestizos*, to critique the national ideology of ethnic homogeneity and considers new forms of social movements in Nicaragua. His work focuses on the alternative narratives to Nicaraguan national identities posited by elite Nicaraguan intellectuals.

For Field, elite intellectuals' appropriations of the drama of *El Gueguense* construe it as an allegory of *mestizo* national identity in which *mestizaje* is a product of a national majority. The "elite intellectual narratives" about *El Gueguense* are challenged from without the play's own performance narratives, from the perspective of other cultural sites. Field, for example, employs stories by artisans and *artisanas*, essays by "local intellectuals," and an ethnographic reconstruction of these artisans' lives stories to challenge the elite narratives of a *Mestizo* world built upon the narratives of the play. Field utilizes the play, or rather the notion of the play, as a metaphor for diversity in changing identities of Western Nicaragua.

The author's work is very important for the study of Nicaraguan nationalism and indigenous people's challenges to it; however, his analysis of the play remains on the

outside. In other words, the challenges to nationalizing or homogenizing discourses through the narratives about the *El Gueguense* are directed from outside the narratives of the play itself. As far as the play is concerned, its validity for Field is restricted to an allegory of discontent. Alternatives to national discourses are sought in other narratives sometimes unlinked to the overall problematic of the theatrical performance. My proposition, here, goes beyond this to claim the theatre of *El Gueguense* as the principal site for identity negotiation in Western Nicaragua. Admitting that homogenizing elite intellectual discourses of identity are at play in the script and appropriated by elite intellectuals does not mean that counter discourses are not also present in the play. The fact that *El Gueguense's* narratives are used to legitimate the national project of cultural homogenization does not mean that they go unquestioned within the many rhetorical forms taken within the context of the performance of the play in the process of producing and invoking the (story) play.

Many Nicaraguans invoke the story of *El Gueguense* today. For example, during the last November 2000 municipal elections, the media commented on the public deception of politicians and political parties. The story goes as follows: the population expresses publicly their intention to vote for some political party or politician and when it comes time to vote they cast their ballot for some other political party or another candidate. This phenomenon has gotten to be known in Nicaragua as the *El Gueguense effect* citing the mendacious deceiving nature of the theatre character of *El Gueguense*.

I consider Field's work important because it points to the underestimated identity negotiations in Nicaraguan narratives, however Field's work does not explore sufficiently *the El Gueguense's* performance itself. Field's interpretation of identity negotiation in

Nicaragua is:

shaped by three analytical positions: the exegesis of national identity as a social construction; the link between national identities, and literary discourses, as shaped by state systems of power; and the legitimization of intellectual discourses in subaltern countries, such as Nicaragua, by metropolitan authorities (Field, 1999: 40).

Field's analysis is informed, among others, by Aijaz Ahmad's work on identity that distinguishes ' "retrograde and progressive forms of nationalism with reference to particular histories..." ' (Field, 1999: 41). For Field, Ahmad's analysis helps to differentiate the role "played by elite intellectuals in demarcating and enforcing hegemonic knowledge among Nicaraguan elites" (Ibid 41). This hegemonic knowledge is concerned with "class ethnic, and national identities from the cultural politics of Sandinista Nicaragua, and how *El Gueguense* has been used in both discourses before, during and since the revolutionary period to construct and maintain a nationalist project" (Field, 1999:41). Field discerns that *El Gueguense* is at the centre of these narratives. He focuses on Nicaraguan twentieth century authors such as Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Perez Estrada, Jorge Eduardo Arellano, Jose Coronel Urtecho, who best characterize "the way literature and its discourses about *El Gueguense* in particular, build national culture and identity" (Field, 1999: 42). Chronologically, he traces the parameters of a Nicaraguan culture by means of the discourses of the play through a number of commentaries and studies of *El Gueguense* by these, and to a lesser extent to other counter literary narratives of the play: Carlos Mantica and Davila Bolaños.

The emergence of the script of *El Gueguense* at the end of the nineteenth century

gave way to two types of literary narratives, dominant (Cuadra and Urtecho) and alternative (Bolaños, Mantica) modes of constructing cultural identity in the country. Both these narratives, though contrasting, advanced the politics of a national cultural identity in Nicaragua during the twentieth century (Field, 1999: 42). Basing their arguments on the narratives of the script, these authors legitimized each other's authoritative claims in this manner demarcating a national identity for Nicaragua manifested in the play. Their authority is based on "the authority of metropolitan and colonial authors as the final word" (Field, 1999: 43,) such as Oviedo y Valdes (1971), and Brinton (1969). For these elite intellectuals the *El Gueguense* drama provided a national formula for mestizaje.

Before the 1900's, there was not much theatre, except folkloric dramas, that could be qualified as national. These situations changed after the 1920s, as political theatre became a means for Nicaraguan intellectuals to design and sustain a national culture. The degree of political and aesthetic success for these works was varied. Some of these attempts were a type of response against Somozista monopoly in the social, political, and cultural life of the country. For example, the humorist Gerardo Rivas Navoa published a political literary comedy in the 1940's, and Francisco Perez Estrada also published (1942-1951) a number of political satires (Willis Kapp, 1956: 141-142). These plays had a limited reach among the literary minority or the Nicaraguan anti-dictator elite. More successful was "Por los Senderos van los Campesinos" (or The Path of the Peasants). Written in 1937 as street theatre and aiming to carry a message of rebellion against the politics imposed on peasants by the liberal and conservative oligarchies, some considered this work a true national play. "This powerful and thoroughly national play is made universal in its expression of

bitterness and hopes of simple people,” expressed theatre historian Willis Kapp (1956: 420.) Rolando Steiner (1935) also produced a very nationalistic play, the "Angel Extraviado de Judith" dealing with a man who cannot separate dreams from reality (Ibid: 42), this seemed to be a blunt allusion to the dictators increased dreams of domination. Joaquín Pasos and Coronel Urtecho wrote "*Chinfonya Burguesa*," Bourgeoisie Symphony, based in popular rhymes (Ibid). This symphony is a creative recount of the history of Nicaragua during the late 1800's and early 1900's.

A more effective theatrical approach as a form of resistance was the use of children's games and popular fables to illustrate the political, social and economic state of the country in the 70's. Through the incorporation of Nicaraguan children's games, Octavio Robleto, for example, transformed the protagonists of popular legend (usually animals) into human characters. Consequently, he effectively dramatized and put a painful twist to stories well known by most Nicaraguans of every class and creed. Among these plays are "The Fierce War Between Uncle Rabbit and Uncle Coyote," "The Blind Hem," "A Garden to be Happy in," and "The Soldier of Lead (Robleto, 1984). Most of these plays were charged with ironic and comic imagination. In the 1970's they embodied a satire against the corruption and oppression of a decadent political system (Robleto, 1984: 7) The visual imagination of children as well as popular songs and instruments were introduced to popular theatre by Robleto, making the message of malicious resistance more effective. The elements of everyday life that derive from a history of colonialism, music, dances and popular language expressions gained symbolic meaning when represented on stage. Uncle coyote in the play "The fierce War Between uncle Rabbit and Uncle Coyote" is a symbol of oppression. As a character, the coyote intimidates other animals, and was effective in

representing the most despotic of dictators.

From the early to mid 1990s thus, many more political plays were produced and published. Nonetheless, these political plays lacked the vitality and the outreach that the folkloric theatre commanded among the illiterate, poor, and highly religious Nicaraguan majority. This is observed for two principal reasons. First of all, the non-folkloric types of theatre were too elitist. Even though the themes were about Nicaraguan historical and, sometimes, folkloric themes, they lacked perhaps a visual, or more general sensual appeal among the great majorities. In Nicaragua the great majority of the population, even today, subscribes to a more subconscious visual and auditive code of communication that can be traced to Indigenous rituals and performances, like the play of the sticks we discussed before.

Second, these plays, structurally speaking (plot, act, structure, language), had all the elements of conventional European or North American theatre. This is in term of plot, scene, and act structure. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people found them unappealing. Thus, it was the *El Gueguense* play that represented the most appealing symbol of a national character among these intellectuals seeking a literary national figure. The appealing formula was therefore those elements that appeared to be homogenised pre-Colombian components.

The elite Nicaraguan authors, not surprisingly, were primarily drawn from the social Nicaraguan elite of Leon and Granada. It had been their task, I would say, to design a national identity catapulted by an essentialising and homogenizing Mestizo character. They took for granted conclusive conjectures about the character of Nicaraguan Indigenous peoples. Their view is that the Nicaraguan identity “was and has been... inherently and overwhelmingly mestizo” (Field, 1999: 44). For these authors, thus, demarcating Indianness

was similar to designating Indians as a character that is resistant to change. That means, “that Indians are always tragic and doomed” (Ibid).

This means, therefore, that intellectuals’ comprehension of indigenous identity denied Indians the possibility of dynamism after the Spaniards arrived. Change of any substantive nature spelled death for indigenous cultural identities. By contrast Nicaraguan intellectuals ascribed precisely these qualities of cultural and technological dynamism to the mestizo whose identity they viewed as still in formation, still acquiring traits and generating new and unique ones, and irrevocably linked to the rise of Nicaraguan national identity (Ibid).

It is not surprising that the nationalistic attempts of Zelaya’s liberal government in the 1800s coincided with the emergence of an intelligentsia in Nicaragua (Field, 1999: 510). Furthermore, Sandino’s projected nationalistic revolution found echo in the intellectual environment of the 1930s as well. This was the period where *Vanguardia*, a literary movement fomented by Cuadra among others, was created. It is Cuadra who first associated the character of *El Gueguense* personage with a proto-type of Nicaraguanness (Field, 1999: 55). This association, found in his book titled “*El Nicaraguense*”, stems from the “satirical farce, sexual burlesque...” (Ibid) characterized by the *El Gueguense*.

Without a doubt, Pablo Antonio Cuadra is an outstanding Nicaraguan man of letters. Together with Jose Coronel Urtecho he founded the literary magazine *Vanguardia* in 1929. In 1940, he also initiated *Los Cuadros del Taller San Lucas*, and later on the literary Journal *El Pez y la Serpiente*. In his book “*El Nicaraguense*” (Cuadra, 1969), he proposes the mestizo character of the Nicaraguan man. He posits that being Nicaraguan is the result of a cultural shock, a fusion, and a duality.

Throughout his work he searches for the tools to narrate a mestizo culture that would help produce and feed the notion of a Nicaraguan literature (Cuadra, 1969: 9).

Through a number of small essays with a variety of themes from poetry to the *El Gueguense* play, he explores the origins of a Nicaraguan duality. He associates the features of *El Gueguense* character (burlesque, satirical, and vagabond) with a prototypical and stereotypical Nicaraguan national character.

I have come to the conclusion that this play is alive, not because of irrationality and traditionalism, but because its main character is a character that the people in Nicaragua carry in their blood (My translation, Cuadra, 1969: 73).

The *El Gueguense* or *Macho Raton*, he posits, is the first character of the Nicaraguan imagination. He proposes that the play's appearance marked the emergence of a perfect mestizaje in Nicaragua (Cuadra, 1969: 74).

According to Cuadra, the *El Gueguense* character comes to the play from our indigenous past and from the people. "He is probably an old character from the Indigenous theatre" he explains. "He came to the new theatre to become bilingual, once he started acting, he became mestizo" (My translation, Cuadra, 1969: 75). He is, Cuadra insists, the first mestizo character of the Nicaraguan literature. It marked the disappearance of the Indigenous and the appearance of the mestizo in Nicaragua.

Perez Estrada's notion of the *El Gueguense*, another member of Vanguardia circle, further illustrates the above position. He exalts the *El Gueguense* in literary qualifications that confers it a static notion of a Nicaraguan mestizo world. He also embellishes the attributes of a theatre with a national character in the context of Spanish-language literature. Perez Estrada, for instance, claims that, "the play's

existence meant that for Nicaraguans there “is nothing to envy from the best Castilian writers” (in Field, 1999: 56). His claim is, therefore, a remark that there is a conclusive hispanified, mestizo nature of the play (Ibid).

There are intellectual literary counter narratives to this mestizo perfect world envisaged by the *Vanguardia* movement. The prominent folklorist Dr. Davila Bolaños (1974) espoused the view that the *El Gueguense* is about indigenous protest. He claimed that an outraged Indian might have written the play. Many dismissed this counter narrative as left wing propaganda. Carlos Mantica, a Nicaraguan linguist has expressed also a different view of *El Gueguense*'s dramatic script. For him it represents “[a] very long-term accretion of oral, textual, and performance-based transformations, all of which remain within the manuscripts at hand” (Mantica in Field, 1999: 59). What is important in Mantica's analysis is that he takes time to include several points of view found in the language of the script itself. This position is very similar to Fields's own, whose analysis is based on the narratives of the script and not its performance.

Thus, it is apparent that the construction of a Nicaraguan National identity for these intellectuals is propelled by the need for self-legitimation. It is the intellectual counterpart of Zelaya's political nationalism. Nicaraguan intelligentsia, with *El Gueguense* character as its cultural mestizo symbol, means the maintenance of elite politics. It is a national culture that legitimizes each other's colonial authority. It is about the politics of demarcating hegemonic knowledge among Nicaraguan elites. It is about class and ethnicity. The Sandinista government, in trying to push the revolutionary spirit of Nicaragua, used this literary politic also.

Recognizing an alternative dimension to Field's account of *El Gueguense*, I

consider the role of the play's performance itself. In the current effort, I take *El Gueguense* as being more than a tool for the Nicaraguan elite-homogenizing project. The play represents the scatological enactment of distinction and opposition, of compliance, and also of defiance. *El Gueguense's* rhetorical irony catapults the performance of the play to its own game-experience. Nicaraguan elite intellectuals' project through the use of *El Gueguense* script, in my context, becomes productive only if juxtaposed to the performance. Furthermore, the performance only makes sense in relation to the festival of San Sebastian where it is performed within a local project.

The Social, Cultural and Politics in the Performance of El Gueguense

An aim of this thesis is also to contribute to the discussion of Nicaraguan identity negotiation, through the examination of active Vs passive voices in the production of the play of *El Gueguense*. Identity, whether collective or individual, is a problematic notion and it is a difficult task to try and find agreement in literature (sociology, anthropology and political science, and others) concerning this concept (Schlesinger, 1992:152). Some efforts have been made to review some notions, in order to come to some sort of conceptualization. Most writings, unfortunately, deal mainly with the relations between the individual and society exclusively, and are "continuous with the preoccupations of different and earlier conceptual languages, with individual character and personality formation" (Ibid). There is a need to move away from these character and personality conceptualizations to discuss identity at the level of collectivities, which is more productive for our project. Schlesinger (Ibid) proposes to reverse the way in which these

arguments have proceeded. Even though there is no clear conceptualization of what identity is many concepts can be adapted according to particular conjunctural specificities of a given study. In the study of identity, therefore, there is an emphasis on the relations of these concepts and the general structures and discourses of nation, citizenship, culture, art, media and other social and cultural structures. These concepts of identity are analyzed within social, cultural and political spaces of articulation, within temporal narratives articulated in the narratives of the mass media, government organs and the arts (including popular).

Recent developments in social studies “have provoked a demand for a theoretical grasp of the question of collective identity” that seize the idea of contestation (Schlesinger, 1991: 173). Most relevant works, however, “...have failed to conceptualize national identity as opposed to the identities of emergent collectivities within established nation-states” (Schlesinger, 1991: 172). Given this background, a need to avoid taking for granted the parameters of the nation-state (Ibid), an imposition of a vision of a world (governments) on people. Field has certainly attempted this type of analysis and I retake it here inside the performance of the play itself. This is important as I stated before, because the negotiation of identity happens at a contingent performative level.

National identity is to be understood as a particular kind of collective identity constructed within a defined ‘social space’. A national culture is synonymous with a national cultural space (Ibid). “In other words, it is an identity constituted at a given strategic level of society” (Schlesinger, 1991: 173). In the present study, to talk of a national identity will imply the analysis of “processes of inclusion and exclusion” (Ibid) and of spheres of social and political powers. These challenges or accommodations are

played out within the site of media/art, for example in popular performances. Media/artist sites are therefore spaces where national and collective official identities are contested, constructed, and reconstructed. What is the role of performance within identity contestations then? How does it become significant in light of identity negotiations? An appropriate cultural popular national symbol such as *El Gueguense* is not a univocal symbol. It is constructed and reconstructed in its performances.

The notion of Tango in the neo/post colonial world, as described by Marta Savigliano, appears as a national cultural symbol, as an elite as well as a low class cultural manifestation, illustrating national identity contestation. Even though Tango is discussed here as a core-peripheral situation, i.e. imperial consumption vs. commoditized colonials, and *El Gueguense* is restricted to the Nicaraguan local context, there are some useful parallels worth sharing. For Savigliano:

The national identity of the neo/post-colonials is that of a permanent search for identity. The tango saga displays this process and its protagonists: *Criollos, chinas, mulatos, pardos, mestizos, franchutas, gaitas, tanos, rusitas, turcos...* immigrants, exiles... a nation of hybrids and borderlines with an identity in permanent displacement, longing for identity...(Savigliano, 1995: 167)

In her book “Tango: and the Political Economy of Passion,” Marta Savigliano discusses “a system of exotic representation, a system that commoditized the colonials in order to suit imperial consumption” (1995: 2). She suggests that: “Peripheral - ‘exotic’ passion is

moulded in the shape of the world's core unfulfillable desire" (Ibid), manifested through the elite classes. Tango, she posits, in a political economy of passion, "has been juxtaposed and intertwined with the economies usually described on materialist and ideological grounds" (1995:1). International recognition of statehood and territoriality is extended to areas such as the economy and culture. National Independence, therefore, is more than just a territorial independency (1995: 2). Exercising given boundaries requires a national identity; if there is none, one has to be demarcated.

In those terms, Savigliano proposes that: "the passion of exotic others confirm the shape of the Imperialist One, but it overflows the borders of the one's desire; conversely, Imperial Desire legitimates the passionateness of the other and naturalizes the Other's rebelliousness" (1995: 2-3). For the author, Tango represents not only a "cultural" product but also a "popular" product. She suggests that what Tango represents is a rich environment for political contestations. As Savigliano postulates, "Authorship and ownership of popular culture are inherently very hard to establish and the content itself is incessantly re-created" (1995: 5). The very fact that these contestations exist implies that popular culture (in this case Tango) has a lot to do with identity. "Tango, as a popular culture, is thus the battlefield/dance-floor and weapon/dance-step in and by which Argentinean identity is continuously redefined" (Ibid). It will depend, thus, who the dancers are, who their audiences are, and where they perform. Ethnicity, race and class also play a part in this redefinition of the Tango.

Savigliano traces the history of Argentinean nationalism and the emergence of the Tango as a deliberately accommodated sign of the new brand of nationalism: "... The exotic tango was added to the exotic *criollo*." The gaucho of the pampas, under the threat

of extinction by the British railroads and fences, turned out to be as suitable to ‘nativist’ manipulations as the tango of the brothels and tenements was to ‘nationalist’ manipulations” (1995: 165).

The tango as an artistic medium in which identity is contested, constructed, and re-constructed cannot be homogenised. On the contrary it is a pluralistic site. Each performance speaks its own particular or collective intention. At the same time it is a renegotiation of an official top down concept of what it means to be an Argentinean. Power relations thus in this example are played out at all levels of culture, media and art. As Schlesinger points out, “To talk of collective identity requires the continuous action of an agent within a determinate set of social relations” (Schlesinger, 1991: 173). This implies, as in Savigliano’s example that the contestation rests on the performance of tango, and on the relationship of audience, performers, and the dance. These works, within the social site of art (performance, dance. etc.) as a cultural and political medium, represent a negotiation in progress, a social collectivity in movement.

Savigliano’s assertion of identity negotiation resonates in some aspects with the identity negotiation one can discern in the play of *El Gueguense*. The tango works at least at two levels. First, as an economy of passion it is moulded to suit the imperialist world’s core unfulfilled desired. It is juxtaposed and intertwined with other economies. Second, it represents a rich environment for popular and political contestations. That is where identity contestations are located. *The El Gueguense* in the context of Nicaragua is similarly moulded and shaped (Cuadra’s example) to suit the homogenizing elite desire for a national legitimate culture. At the same time, it is also the rich environment for cultural, social, and political contestation from lower classes and marginalized ethnic

groups. This is manifested in the contested authorship of *El Gueguense*, and in its popular claims by the local dancers and audiences. These claims are predicated on the mischievous rebelliousness of another universe marred by a top down oppressiveness. Unlike Field's study of defiance, Savigliano's contestation of dominant discourses is challenged from within the narratives of Tango performances.

Conclusion of Chapter Two

The roles of cultural sites such as Tango and *El Gueguense*, in these identity negotiations, become valuable because of the cultural insights revealed through their performances, in the interaction of performances with its social/cultural situations and performers. For Julian Hilton, for instance, the deliberate breach of generic norm cannot be taken as the intrinsic measurable value of a performance. The answer, says Hilton, "lies in what the German philosopher Habermas calls the process of legitimation" (Hilton, 1993: 10). This concept is intrinsically bound up with the concept of rehearsal. "What this means in essence is that the process whereby a given society makes decisions about itself, about its laws, its politics, applies equally to performance" (Ibid). Therefore, each step of a performance "is legitimized if under prevailing conditions it appears successfully to mediate between competing understandings of what the problem is and how to solve it" (Ibid) Rehearsal is thus the process of legitimization where judgments are taken on a temporary basis, tried and explored, then taken in permanently or rejected (Hilton, 1993:10). Identity negotiations through performance can locate the particular vicissitudes in the social, cultural and political positioning of those involved.

The theatre performance is the mediating space that opens up collective and individual experiences and its own conjunctural accommodations. The Nicaraguan *El Gueguense* play is not only a literary piece, or script. When accessed by local performers and transformed by the immediacy of particularities, it becomes a space for conflict and perhaps resolution. The theatre of *El Gueguense* is the space that mediates competing understandings and experiences of Nicaragua. Within this understanding, I take the *El Gueguense* as the main trope for my own ethnographic encounter with the actors, informants, and other Nicaraguans. I articulate the forces and influences at play in the relationship of the rhetorical (subjects, characters, intentions, and identity), and the dramatic performance (history, authority, social structures, etc.) with relationship to audiences, inside the text (playscript), and outside the text (rehearsal, performance).

It is not surprising that two broad basic notions of the theatre play *El Gueguense* have arisen in Nicaragua in the last century. On the one hand, there is a national ideology of ethnic homogeneity, which articulates the theatre play as an allegory of mestizo identity. This notion is based on the assumed *El Gueguense*'s mestizo character. *El Gueguense* nearly always has a selfish purpose or intention. This can be evidenced by the way he deceives (through false ethos and pathos) and gets away with almost anything (Lines: 48-100). His purpose is to take advantage of his adversary (the Alguacil, the Governor and others) by way of jokes, pretending ignorance, or by deceit. In the end he comes victorious using these tactics. This mestizo character utilizes a bilingual dialect, which is full of sexual innuendoes, and vulgar phallic references. This is integrated to a syntactic (system), which marks the Spanish as a dominant language (Arellano, 1969: 25). At the same time, the *El Gueguense* character designs his strategies for revenge. A cultural

reversion occurs. He renders his oppressors a dose of their own medicine. His rhetoric is deceiving. The *El Gueguense* promises gold, fancy goods, wine, even fantastic objects like the morning star. The colonial authorities fall for this trickery. *El Gueguense* wins through his treachery; he ends up gaining the daughter of the governor, Suchi--Malinche for his son, Don Forsico. The Spanish authorities, thus, have been convinced to go along with the truant's story. The Colonial authorities have made their own judgements as to what was appropriated for them through the trickster's performance.

As a performance, the play has become the metaphorical cultural artefact *par excellence* in Nicaragua. It invokes the eternal divisions between the haves and have-nots of Nicaraguan society. It also invokes and evokes the cultural, social and religious divide (church of the poor and church for the rich) permanently inscribed in the life of the majority. The *El Gueguense* stands for the political stalemate that the Nicaraguan political system is going through today. It stands for the constant identity negotiations everywhere in Nicaragua. It stands for the divide between the corruption of the governor above and the misery of the people below. The *El Gueguense* also stands for the ethnographic journey we (informants and ethnographer) have gone through during these months. Our negotiation and strategies are palpable reminders that *El Gueguense's* rhetoric is also with us.

The *El Gueguense* play articulates different points of view that are made visible when we lay open the relationship between the characters in the play and the audiences of the performance today. The *Gueguense* as a persona becomes not a symbol of the perfect Nicaraguan character type, as most elite intellectuals have articulated for hundreds of years. Rather, it presents the constant, never-ending negotiation for cultural

accommodation in an otherwise imposed “perfect” *Mestizo*, national, catholic world. Old indigenous elements such as magic, the gesture, the mask, the presence of *texoxes*, or witches (by way of animal impersonation), music, dance, become rhetorical elements that communicate a certain desire to influence and change a world of domination and exploitation for a better alternative. One example of this in the script presents itself when the governor *Tastuanes*, who forbids dancing in public, ends up dancing himself (line. 170-187). In a sense he has been persuaded, or perhaps deceived, by *El Gueguense* that dancing can be pleasurable after all. Furthermore, in more practical terms, in Diriamba, for example, the jurisdiction of the play rests on non-elite towns people who are most of the time illiterate. They are sought after by intellectuals and others elite townspeople to talk about the drama, to help produce the play, and to participate as performers. For this non-elite people, the *El Gueguense* perhaps means a way of life, a source of income, and a vehicle to fulfil a religious vow, a place to stage discontent, or a reaffirmation of difference. It is a strategy for life.

THREE: SETTING

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Summary of El Gueguense Script: Event Three

After accepting to learn some etiquette to greet the Governor from the Alguacil, Gueguense pretends not to hear about the fee demanded by the Alguacil. The Alguacil teaches Gueguense the usual royal salute. Gueguense is finally brought in front of the Governor.

When the governor Tastuanes re-enters the scene, he demands to know why El Gueguense is travelling without a permit. Gueguense does not exactly respond to the question but insinuates that he is very rich and that he is willing to share his riches with the Governor. Gueguense's son Don Forsico convinces the governor that his father is rich by detailing a number of goods, such as gold, silk and other trinkets.

[The Governor enters abruptly.]

Gue.

I pray God to protect you, Governor Tastuanes.

Gov.

...Well, Gueguense, who has given you a permit to enter this royal province?

Gue.

God bless me, Governor Tastuanes, what is it to need a permit?

Gov.

A permit is necessary.

Gue.

O! God bless me, Governor Tastuanes; when I was travelling up country, on the road to Mexico, through Vera Cruz, and Vera Paz, and Antepeque, driving my mules, leading my boys, twice Don Forsico comes across a constable innkeeper who brings us a dozen eggs; and we go on eating and unloading, and we load up again, and I go right along, and there is no need of a permit for it, Governor Tastuanes.

Gov.

Well, here there is need of a permit, Gueguense.

Gue.

God bless me, Governor Tastuanes, as I was coming up a straight street, a girl who was sitting in a golden window descried me, and says to me: "What a fine fellow is Gueguense; how gallant is Gueguense; here's the shop for you, Gueguense; come in, Gueguense; sit down, Gueguense; there's sweets, meats here, Gueguense; there's a lemon here. And, as I am such a funny fellow, I jumped off, with my riding cloak on, so full of ornaments that you could not tell what it was, covered with gold and silver to the ground; and that's the way a girl gave me a permit, Governor Tastuanes.

Gov.

Well, a girl can't give a permit [here], Gueguense.

Gue.

O! God bless me, Governor Tastuanes, we won't be fools, no, we will be friends, and we will bargain about my packs of goods. In the first place, chests of gold, chests of silver,

cloth of Spain, cloth from smugglers, vests, feather skirts, silk stockings, golden shoes, beaver hats, stirrup straps of gold and silver lace, as may satisfy the clever Governor Tastuanes...

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About Setting

In a theatrical context, the setting can position the play's inner workings in terms of movement of characters, scenic possibilities, and theatrical interpretations (styles). In other words, the setting organizes the theatre piece in its range of prospects, potentialities, and dramatic directions. In the context of this dissertation, the setting (or chapter Three) represents the theoretical influences, the emerging methodologies, and the historical and political contexts that surround the proposed 'presentational ethnography.' The aim of the setting is to establish a common link between several postmodern narrational currents in theatre and ethnography that will convey the intentions behind the ethnographic narrative proposed here.

The content of the chapter is twofold. First, it provides an overview of the notion of postmodernism and its consequences with respect to postmodern theatre, rhetoric, and ethnography. By looking at postmodern origins and dynamics, it looks behind political, social, and cultural underpinnings. The aims of this overview are:

1. To examine the fundamentals behind the cultural manifestations of postmodernism (its form(s) as the rhetorical consequence of political, social, and ethical ideologies (contexts).

2. To find useful links between Postmodern theatre such as the Phenomenological theatre of Lepage and Beckett's Absurdist theatre with Postmodern ethnography such as Fabian's Performative ethnography and Desjarlais' Phenomenological anthropology in order to further our understanding of the rhetorical implications of their textual form(s).
3. To map these examples onto the analysis of the proposed presentational ethnography about the rhetorical situation of the theatre play of *El Gueguense* and the ethnographic project in Nicaragua.
4. To recognize presentational ethnography as a valid critique of contemporary ethnography.

Second, the subsequent section of the chapter spells out the method/theory of the proposed 'presentational ethnography' in practical methodological terms. This component will conceptualize the theoretical/methodological analysis with respect to the materialization of a presentational ethnography about a cultural manifestation in Nicaragua (The *El Gueguense* performance). The conjunctural situation of the play, its performativity, its agency (from participants: performers, audiences) makes the play a historical, linguistic, artistic, subversive, and rhetorical artefact. As an artefact the play becomes, depending on the angle, a "social frame", in which social, political, and cultural positions are articulated. Following Randy Martin's lead, I take theatre as a frame that conjoins experience and its organization across the divide of self and other (Martin, 1994: 17). Theatre is the vehicle that I utilize to reach an intercultural, and intersubjective communicative knowledge in Nicaragua. As a mediating social/cultural frame, presentational theatre will achieve the following: 1. Present alternative ways of seeing the

world within the context of a national project in Nicaragua (Gueguense performance). 2. Facilitate the ethnographic project with the evocative tools for its own textualization. Context/form, thus, emerges in the intentionality of the intersubjective and the intercultural negotiations and authorship.

The Ethnographic Context for a Presentational Ethnography

The dissertation's main theoretical/methodological currents, as was hinted in the introduction, can be located within performance studies, phenomenological anthropology, and the theory of theatre and rhetoric in the postmodern world. The inspiration for the philosophy behind this endeavour comes from recent scholarly developments taking place in ethnographic textuality. The history of ethnographic writing, for example, can be seen as an all-encompassing search for solutions to the problem of knowing and writing about others (Dauber, 1995: 85). Thus, the recent interest in inventive ways of "writing culture" is consistent with this history. As the emphasis on the ethnographic writing has become the focus in ethnography, the individual (author and subject) in the text also has become important. This development has given ethnography some room for innovation, at the same time, it has brought upon it many new and old epistemological, political, and ethical challenges.

Critiques of recent ethnographic innovations state that the "postmodernists' conflation of ethnography and fiction in their critique of realism and their conceptualization of dialogic writing has resulted in a preoccupation with genres of representation to the

detriment of the social, the political, and the cultural” (Polier and Rodeberry, 1989). It is argued that the postmodern concern with genres of representation has removed the consideration of contexts in which ethnographic knowledge is assembled and consumed (Ibid). This contention promotes the notion that content (the political, the cultural, and the social) is detached from the form (the textual). However, if we consider the choice of form as social, political, or cultural intentions, one cannot afford separating form and content in ethnographic accounts. As long as one considers the relationship between context and text or/and content and form as an ethnographic quandary, or as separate entities, one risks missing the main point of ethnography, its *raison d’être*: knowing through anthropological experience. The nature of anthropological and ethnographic research is such that its forms; story telling, description, and contexts, manifest the cultural and social as inseparable. The context determines the textual form of a particular ethnographic representation.

In order to fence off the critique of a socially and politically detached textual representation, most anthropological ethnographic perspectives, including those engaged in epistemological critique (Marcus and Fisher, 1986), have focused their efforts in demonstrating the authority of the pre-textual (social and cultural ‘reality’) through verbatim transcriptions, data made into dialogues, novels and the like. These ethnographic forms are nonetheless vested with political, cultural, and social conceptuality. As textual choices, they carry a particular significance and authority. It is my observation that this pre-textual authority, as the raw material for the text, has become the technology that “allows ethnographers to speak in defensible ways about something like ‘culture’ and ‘social structure’” (Dauber, 1995: 93). The problem I see, thus, is that within these

ethnographic alternatives, the idea that text presupposes context is tacitly endorsed. Form, therefore, is not performatively, contextually, or contingently emergent. It is considered as a matter of style, or detached personal choice, with little or no bearing in the overall matter. A dualist notion of narrative, which espouses that different narrational styles can convey the same content, is hard-pressed. For the dualists, form and content are two separate issues.

This takes us to explore, rather briefly, the long-held debate about narrational styles in fiction. The debate sets in direct opposition two viewpoints: Dualism and Monism³⁴. Dualism implies that style is a manner of expression. For *dualists* there are different ways (styles) of conveying the same content (Leech and Short, 1981: 20). The opposite of dualism is *monism*, advocating that if one alters the form one alters the content. In other words, choices of expression are choices of content (Ibid).

The *dualist's* strength resides in the notion of paraphrase, which assumes that there is a basic sense that can be preserved regardless of the rendering. Thus the dualist approach presumes that there are alternative ways (literary forms) of saying the same thing.

“*Dualism* assumes that one can paraphrase the *sense* of a text, and that there is a valid separation of *sense* from significance” (Leech and Short, 1981: 24). To a certain extent, it is possible to translate a novel and transcribe a film. But are we rendering the same content? How would a *monist* argue with that? *Monists* have pointed out that language expressions such as metaphors cannot be paraphrased. To illustrate this point they use poetry and its non-transferability of meaning. The example in this instance is that in poetry the repetition of words is no mere repetition but “a progression implying

implicit...qualities” (Leech and Short, 1981: 17). Thus *monists* believe that an elaboration of form unavoidably brings an elaboration of meaning (Ibid). Furthermore, paraphrasing metaphors implies finding meaning beyond the literal term captured by a phrase (Ibid, 25), which sometimes rests on the choice of form. This may have changed the intention or functionality of the content. As D Lodge argues, “If a novel is no more or no less than a verbal artefact, there can be no separation of the author’s creation... fiction or plot... and social and moral life...” (in Leech and Short, 1981: 25).

Both approaches appear to operate in different narrational fields: *dualism* thrives in prose whereas *monism* flourishes in poetry (Leech and Short, 1981: 28). The debate comes down to the choice of media according to the particular intentions of the author. There is no discontinuity between the way language is used in prose and poetry (Ibid, 26). Thus, for most narrational works, neither the dualist nor the monist doctrine will be entirely satisfactory. As indicated by Leech and Short there is a more pragmatic alternative. The pluralist approach, for example, takes into consideration both doctrines and accommodates them to specific narrational cases. Thus:

Accordingly it is supposed that any piece of language performs a number of different functions, and any piece of language is likely to be the result of choices made on different functional levels. Hence, the pluralist is not content with the dualist’s division between ‘expressions’ and ‘content’ (Ibid, 26).

It is appropriate to distinguish various strands of meaning according to the various functions (Ibid: 30). I would add that these functions could be the result of authorial intentions in terms of content. Some pieces of language are more functional in terms of persuasiveness (advertisement) or social function (casual conversations). But we have to take into consideration that language is inherently multifunctional. The Dualist is incorrect to think that there is a unitary conceptual content in every piece of language (Ibid: 30). The Monist is also wrong to assume that language cannot be multifunctional. In some instances, such as in ethnographic narratives, the context is tied to the form. It is in the politics of representation where the function of the language has to be evaluated and assessed.

Now, I take issue with postmodern and other like-minded ethnographers who claim that anthropology should be re-imagined by focusing on the textual politics (just form) rather than on the politics surrounding the production of texts (the over all relationship and connection between form and content in ethnography) (Escobar, 1993). I propose, as Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck (1996: 1) have done, that con-texture should be both the texture that surrounds and the texture that constitutes. Con-texture is thus both the form and the context. As such the ethnographic encounter should certainly be considered as pre-text that “gives form to” textual and the textual presentation through performance. The politics surrounding the performative/experiential instance, in this model, gives way to the emerging text and its form(s). That is to say, choices and intention are exposed through form. My objective in this chapter, therefore, is to demonstrate through a number of postmodern theatrical and ethnographic examples that context and text become one

through authoritative political, cultural and ethical intention.

Towards An Understanding Of Presentational Ethnography

Unlike literature, film, painting, or the popular mass media, the theatre must show its physical, bodily existence and its “liveness,” the volatile progress of its human labour, the contingencies of the space in which it labours, and its schizophrenic awareness of its own unreality (Berringer, 1991: 3).

Drama is often written language. It is:

the words ascribed to the characters which in the theatre are spoken by actors, as a written form drama is easily appropriated by literary theory; it is understandable in the same general terms as fiction, poetry or any other form of letters³⁵ (Fortier, 1997: 4).

Justifiably, there is an affinity between drama and literature. This affinity has produced a tendency in literary studies that considers theatrical activity as drama rather than theatre. Unlike drama, theatre does not constitute words on a page ready to be interpreted. Though often theatre is the performance of a dramatic text, theatre is also

performance, the summons of a number of social, cultural, and aesthetic utterances. Often, the theatre does not entail only words but also space, actors, props, audience and the elaborate intercourse between these elements. Literary theory has often reduced theatre to drama. Language structures have, at times, been imposed in one way or another onto the analysis of theatre. Theatre thus becomes “a system of non-verbal signs, non-verbal languages, non-verbal writing, yet dominated still by the hegemony of language and letters as master-patterns for the working of the non-verbal” (Fortier, 1997: 4). In order to understand theatrical cultural events like the *El Gueguense*, one has to go beyond the dramatic text and examine the “performance text in relation to the conditions of its production and reception” (De Marinis, 1993: 3). This approach positions the *El Gueguense* theatre within a communicative process, within a contingent, social experiential production, and analyses it contextually and co-textually. ³⁶

I see some useful parallels between theatre, as a performance of a dramatic text (and its social context), and ethnography as the performance of a contingent cultural text. The ethnographic endeavour can be seen as a performance because it becomes involved in the action of all. The contextual and co-textual examination of a postmodern rhetorical and presentational theatre, its foundations and consequences, could yield interesting details for explaining the rhetorical implications of ethnographic textual form(s). The task of this first section of the chapter is twofold. First, to trace postmodernism in theatre and performance (including ethnography) in order to identify a number of postmodern assertions that hinge on social, cultural, political, and aesthetic utterances. This measure will pay attention to the implications and consequences of these political, social, cultural

and aesthetic utterances in terms of form/content in the theatrical and performative.

Second, by way of juxtaposing two postmodern theatre performances and two postmodern ethnographic works (phenomenological and performative), I will try to make evident that postmodernist disruptions in theatre and ethnography depend on political, cultural, aesthetic, and social understandings of intention and accountability. Concepts such as identity negotiation, as well as political and social agency, will be analysed within temporal narrative representations. As a problem of definition may be said to be constituted of the postmodern and performance, I propose, following Nike Kaye's assertion (1994: 4), a reading of the postmodern in performance (theatre and ethnography) and the performative in postmodernism in their examination of rhetorical assertions in the space of social, cultural, and political representation. This is in order to look at both the postmodern theatre and ethnography, as a series of disruptions occurring at the level of representation. In order to tackle this inquiry, I establish a common site where both performance and the postmodern rejoin: their disruptive platform. For my notion of 'presentational ethnography,' the proposed analysis represents a similar disruptive social, cultural and political narrational space.

Postmodernism, its con-textures and contexts

Any categorical definition of postmodernism is dubious, to say the least. For Gianni Vattimo and J. F Lyotard, postmodernism is a way of thinking, "weak thought,

provisional and ongoing, without foundation in universal or transhistorical truth” (Fortier, 1997: 118). In ‘The End of Modernity’ (1988, 1991) Vattimo introduces the term ‘postmodernity’ by considering the significance of the prefix ‘post-’. He reiterates:

The ‘post-’ in the term ‘postmodern’ indicates in fact a taking leave of modernity. In its search to free itself from the logic of development inherent in modernity... (Vattimo, 1988: 3).

The condition of modernity, he maintains, is dominated by the idea that the history of thought is a progressive enlightenment “which develops toward an ever more complete appropriation and re-appropriation of its own “foundations” (Kaye, 1994: 1). Modernity, thus, is characterized by an awareness of “an ‘overcoming’ in the name of a deeper recognition of that which is fundamentally legitimating and ‘true’, whether this is within science, the arts, morality or any other realm of thought or practice” (Ibid). In this instance, however, the term ‘postmodernity’ becomes problematic. By trying to abandon modernity, Vattimo argues, “postmodernity is marked by a departure from the very process of overcoming that the prefix ‘post’ would seem to suggest” (Ibid). Thus, to use the term ‘postmodernity’ to indicate a moving away from modernity would be to continue “precisely that which one would define a departure from” (Kaye, 1994:1). From this perspective, it is almost unnecessary to begin this exercise by establishing a prescription or an exact method of what a postmodern theatre or a postmodern ethnography is or should be like. The only thing one can do is to trace the emergence of the postmodern conditions in general, these having been manifested in theatre and ethnography. “This

‘postmodern’ evasion of definition and category draws the critic too across disciplines and categories” (Kaye: 1994: 3). Correspondingly, this dissertation draws from several disciplines: anthropology, theatre performance and rhetoric.

Paolo Portoghesi’s *Strada Novissima*, exhibition of facades designed by about 30 architects and presented for the first time in 1980 at the Venice Biannual, can be considered a turning point against the values of modernity (Kaye, 1994: 5). Kaye suggests that:

Paolo Portoghesi describes a turning against the values and stylizations of modern architecture... Portoghesi describes a new ‘architecture of communication’, ‘an architecture of the image’, characterized by ironic plays with conventions and styles from the past. Observing the loss of faith in the modernist tenets of ‘useful’ = ‘beautiful’, ‘structural truth’ = ‘aesthetic prestige’, forms follow function...’ ‘ornament is crime,’ and so on...(Ibid).

Furthermore, for Portoghesi “the Strata Novissima speaks of a widespread attack on the modernist aspiration to a ‘pure language’ of form” (Ibid). Portoghesi “takes this ‘Postmodern’ design to be ‘a refusal, a rupture, and a renouncement of fundamental assumptions legitimating the modernist rejection of the past” (Kaye, 1994: 5). This disturbance of the modern has two inter-related origins. First of all, it can be considered a loss of faith in the ‘narratives’ of modernity. Secondly it attacks modernity’s legitimating movement, especially, “ the practical verification of modern buildings by their

users...”(Ibid).

In opposition to the ‘modern’ aspiration to simplicity and a universally valid geometrical form, the postmodern “plays with familiar languages and conventions which serves to disarm and disrupt particular readings of style, figure and form” (Kaye, 1994: 7). Most widespread, Kaye argues, is “a ‘double coding, use of irony, ambiguity and contradiction.” A variety of related techniques and rhetorical figures that are important to the style, are “paradox, oxymoron, ambiguity... disharmonious harmony, amplification, complexity and contradiction, irony, eclectic quotation anamnesis, anastrophe, chiasmus, ellipsis, elision and erosion” (Kaye, 1994: 8). Postmodernist analysis hinges “on a demonstration that draws upon a great number of examples of postmodern constructions, suggests that, with regard to architecture, postmodernism is a polyvalent, polysemic, and multi-coded-style” (Krysinski, 1995: 15).

Furthermore, the prefix ‘post’ “is a marker of the composite, syncretic and even eclectic stylistic concreteness” (Krysinski, 1995: 15). For Wladimir Krysinski the ‘post’ “also marks a hybrid semiotic dynamic that brands Postmodern architecture with the evolutionary mark of diverse architectural styles ranging from the classical to the modern” (Ibid). Thus, as analysed by Vattimo, the ‘post’ “is an icon that represents both a distancing from, and an appropriation or a manipulation of modernism” (Ibid). The “icon signifies both a recapturing and a relativisation of the modern. Understood as a sign, it refers to the different adjacent styles encoded by the imitative, parodic, citational, and ironic attitudes of postmodernism” (Ibid). The intention thus becomes inscribed in the form as a rhetorical device.

Postmodernism: Political, Social, Cultural and Ethical Implications

A continuing point of debate in Modern Theatre (MT) has been over whether the theatre should be viewed primarily as an engaged social phenomenon or as a politically indifferent aesthetic artefact (Carlson 1993: 454).

How and what is thus the connection between postmodern architecture and other types of narratives? The social, cultural, political, and aesthetic elements associated with postmodernism can be found in theatre and in ethnography. Cultural manifestations are more subscribed to political, cultural, ethical and social contexts than not. Performance (theatre and ethnography), rhetorically speaking, encodes meaning not only in its overt utterances, its content, but also in its form(s) (Counsell, 1996: 9). On the stage, the performance/theatre context (discourses and ideologies) becomes theatricalized or physicalized in the action (Ibid). In other words, discourses and ideologies become action in front of an audience. Similarly, in an ethnographic context, discourses and ideologies become apparent in action, the shaping of textualization in its form/content.

In “Empty Space” Peter Brook stresses that a director must deal with a play according to the demands of his own time and his own audience (Carlson, 1993: 464).

As Colin Counsell remarks, ideology and discourse, when physicalized in the performance/theatre, become aesthetics (1996: 9). Aesthetics can be “styles and genres, techniques and practices, designs for sets, costumes, and the hypothetical ‘individuals’ that are the characters” (Ibid). Consequently the interjection of elements in the theatre and also in ethnography comprises the many ways of “presenting” the world, as a form of discourse that offers a locale from which to construct reality (Ibid). As stressed by Dilthey, the historical dimension of discourse is a way of obtaining ‘objectivity’ and is bound up with the notion of *Erlebnis*, or ‘lived experience’. Developed by Schleiermacher and the Romantic writers, *Erlebnis*, “was not simply ‘experience’, but the conscious grasp of it by a creative imagination in an aesthetic form capable of expressing its precise nature...” (Shafter, 1993: 126). From this perspective of the *Erlebnis*, every life situation corresponds to an art form. This became known as ‘immanent form’ (Ibid). Thus the “representation” of the world with its cultural, political, historical, and social dimensions becomes the theatricalization of experience/process in textual and non-textual form(s). Theatrical and ethnographic presentations can be conceived as the expression of ideologies through their rhetorical form(s).³⁷

For Fredric Jameson, “postmodernism is the cultural predicament brought about by late capitalism’s extension of commodification into virtually all aspects of social and cultural life” (in Fortier, 1997: 119). Similarly, Wladimir Krysin considers postmodernism as the commutative effect of a variety of issues: economic, political, artistic, and socio-cultural (1995: 10). Distancing himself somewhat from what Fredric

Jameson calls the “cultural logic of late capitalism”, Krysiniski argues instead that postmodernism “is an epiphenomenon of capitalism without logic, unless that logic can be seen metaphorically as being synonymous with the finality of capitalist accumulation” (Krysiniski, 1995: 13). Thus, the chief characteristic of postmodernism as a “form” or “style” can be considered a manifestation of an ideology (Krysiniski, 1995: 14). For Krysiniski, the expansion of a trans-national economic system or globalization has given rise to an ideological discourse mediated by a postmodernist narrative in mass communication and the arts. He reiterates that, “The idea of a global village seems to promote what I would call a forever mobile and undetermined pan-spatial area of mediated perception of the globe” (Krysiniski, 1995: 10).

Seen in this light, postmodernist theatre, experimental performance and ethnography can be understood, in the sense of its production and reception, in terms of the interaction between audience and authority (actor, writer, ethnographer and the like). These narratives (theatrical and ethnographic) can be seen as the corporeality or theatricality of the shift of the sign (Erickson, 1995: 7). In other words, the key to understand them can be found in the authorial and audiences’ intentionalities. The sign in postmodernism “is moving from ‘expressive labour’ –parallel with capitalist production economy---to ‘conceptual investment’—cognate with the shift to fiscal capitalism and a so-called post-industrial information society” (Ibid).

Krysiniski stresses that, unquestionably, postmodernism has many things in common with the process of the globalization of capitalism (1995: 19). One of these commonalities is a self-legitimizing agency. Both systems tend “to engender phenomena

that endorse their social and cultural function through self-legitimization” (Ibid). One of the consequences of this uncritical use of the concept is the imposition of it onto other cultural systems (Krysinski, 1995: 19). Krysinski gives us examples of this “contamination of ideology,” in which postmodernism has been uncritically imposed onto Latin American literature and art.³⁸

I agree with Krysinski *et al* about the fundamentals of the critique of cover-all postmodernism; however, I would like to, reaching into the anthropological bag, propose a qualification of this assumption. One does not have to throw the baby (postmodernism as a tool) out with the bath water (the uncritical imposition of it). I am referring here to the notion of the “phenomenon of ideological contamination that occurs in various discourses” (Krysinski, 1995: 20). I would like to propose that we should not dismiss postmodernism because it is the self-legitimizing paradigm of an ideology. On the contrary, we should embrace it, if not only as a heuristic tool, as a space available for discussing colonized, third world, minorities, and marginalized positions.

For Johannes Fabian, one of the main guiding ideas of his “performative ethnography” is that performative models of one culture should not be imposed onto other cultures. In his work “Power of Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theatre in Shaba Zaire” (Fabian, 1990), he tackles some of the concerns that have arisen in the euphoria of postmodernism. The excesses of communicative and dialogical approaches, he warns, can become “a dangerous concept if merely to assert it is believed to guarantee power-free interaction on equal terms”(Fabian, 1990: 6). Power relations and asymmetries are always present in ethnographic encounters.

The abuse of the all-encompassing eclecticism, dialogism, and the heterogeneity of epistemes have created the illusion that intersubjective communication can be free from power relations. Levelling the playing fields of intercultural communications remains a fantasy.³⁹

Nonetheless, postmodernists' narrational forms are powerful tools. Many of these tools have been around even before the whole notion of postmodernism arrived. It is important to recognise that theatre performances, whether postmodernist, modernist, or even classic and popular, have always been the embodiment and the physicalization of ideologies, histories, and political struggles on the stage. Theatre and performance, has always played with disruption and the boundaries of form and style. We can say with certainty that no matter what type of theatre or performance one experiences, one witnesses extra-textual cultural, ideological, epistemic, and axiological codes that become part of the general performance of life in a culture. In terms of the 'presentational ethnography' I propose in this dissertation, a postmodernist open textual tactic perhaps can help us breach the divide in intercultural communication.

The Phenomenological Theatre (Lepage) and the Phenomenological Ethnography (Desjarlais)

The following examples of Lepage's theatrical narrative and Desjarlais' ethnographic narrative illuminate the way in which postmodernist narrative(s) are engaged in social, cultural, and political interplay. "The Dragon's Trilogy," on the one hand,

becomes the physicalized and theatricalized process that constructs and presents a world. Robert Lepage's *The Dragons' Trilogy* is a postmodern theatre performance that puts into question languages, styles, figures, forms, history, reality and fictionality. The play traces the interweaving histories of a group of individuals and families who lived in Canada from 1910 and 1985. In "Body and Emotion" Desjarlais, on the other hand, conveys the complementarity and the proximity of phenomenology and the postmodern as methods in the ethnographic enterprise. In his account of the Yolmo life-world, the author renders the experiential account of a particular concern of a people.

Theoretical/methodological Orientations and the "Dragon's Trilogy"

Tout notre passé est comme ça. On ajoute ou on enlève des couleurs, des personnes, tout à fait inconsciemment. Ma mère a créé toute une mythologie de cette manière. Quand j'étais petit, elle pouvait reconstituer toute la Deuxième Guerre mondiale pour moi, à partir de ses carnets de CWAC—les Canadian Women's Army Corps—et de quelques photos. Peut-être qu'elle en inventait. Peut-être que sa mémoire était inexacte, que de vrais événements côtoyaient les faux, mais ce qui compte, c'est que c'était suffisant pour faire resurgir toute la guerre. Les gens se plaignent de cette infidélité de la mémoire, mais il faut en jouir, l'utiliser comme outil créateur (Lepage, in Charest, 1995: 21).

The Dragons' Trilogy opened for the first time in Quebec City in the mid 1980's. The scenery consisted, among other things, of a sand-filled parking lot in the former Chinatown. The site was presided over by the dragon-like figure of a parking attendant (Garner, 1994: 226). Garner describes the play as:

a theatrical excavation of this buried past and its individuals,
with their dreams and disappointments and the destinies
that would carry them and their descendants on a temporal
journey Westward, to Toronto and Vancouver... (Ibid).

Lepage's theatre, *Repère*, creates an unusual and heterogeneous theatrical presentation. As the play itself moves from event, dreams, memories, history, and rituals, the performance presentation shifts effortlessly from one theatrical style and temperament to another. It borrows eclectically "from sources as varied as cabaret, pantomime, Asian shadow theatre, Chinese festival, and theatrical expressionism" (Garner, 1994: 227). This eclecticism and pastiche in the use of styles and theatrical forms are juxtaposed in single scenes.

Moments of tender realism were played against other visual
modes, within a stage that was continually being recast and
reimagined, broken up into the different and the new...

The frequent overlap of... fictional spaces and their interference
with each other created a powerful sensory and emotional

montage (Ibid).

These scenic transformations and juxtapositions are further paired with contrasting acting styles from presentational to representational. Nonetheless, in spite of the heterogeneity of the action, the play moves sinuously. This flexibility is most evident in the changing of styles by actors from moment to moment in a single role. “The play’s characters became richly layered: at once personal and stylized, continually being recast, they became shifting emblems in a surrealist tableau” (Garner, 1994: 227).

In his article “Phenomenology and the Social Sciences” (1973: 47) Merleau-Ponty posits that phenomenology is at the centre of the problem of our times, is the crisis in philosophy and crisis in the sciences of man. For Merleau-Ponty, this crisis has been brought about by the notion of scientific inquiry that reduces truth to external causes. At the same time, phenomenology aspires to counter “logism” which attempts to access truth from within the person without “any contact with contingent experience” (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: 57). The challenge is to create a rational middle ground in which the external and the internal conditions of knowledge are experienced. The phenomenological method is a useful point of reflection for meeting this challenge, because it brings the philosopher “back into the presence of the world as we lived it before our reflection began” (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: 54). This is what Edmund Husserl called *Lebenswelt*. The phenomenological theory of performance is thus a good starting point to discuss a postmodernist play such as “The Dragons’ Trilogy”. If presence is always a trace of the past, “it is also true that traces are themselves ghosts of presence, as an echo is both the absence of sound and its

retention, a kind of acoustic afterimage” (Garner, 1994: 230).

The process of *Verstehen* (‘understanding’), then, is a continuous cycle, intersubjectivity between whole and part, which can never be completed. In short, theatre, or performance, can be, of all art forms, the one that comes closest to the conditions under which we could understand our own experience, which begins to escape us even as it takes place. The problem of a phenomenology of performance resides in the location of the subject in an ephemeral, fleeting presentation. For Garner the answer to this problem is located in the theatrical disruptions themselves.

As the Husserlian tradition relinquishes its hold on the stable subject, bound in ideal self-givenness, it opens its domain to experience as we are learning to see it, in its dislocations and ambiguities, its variable modes of embodiment, its traces (Garner, 1994: 230).

One is now faced with another problem, which is inherent in postmodernism. A reading of the play in this light undermines the oppositions “such a privileging of medium and form would rest upon....” (Kaye, 1994: 23). Furthermore, “in so far as they ‘are’ postmodern, these presentations are disruptive and evasive, occurring as questioning of limits and boundaries, as threats, even, to the terms by which they themselves invite definition” (Ibid). The postmodern, from this perspective, can only be read as the:

making visible of contingencies or instabilities, as a fostering of differences and disagreements, as transgressions of that upon which the promise of the

work itself depends and so a disruption of the move toward containment and stability (Kaye, 1994: Ibid).

Understood as such, the postmodern does not belong to a particular form or vocabulary. It is constituted in many forms. But is not this eclecticism of forms and styles a form itself? If the postmodern in theatre were identified with unstable events provoked by a constant questioning, “then one characteristic of the postmodern would be its resistance to any simple circumscription of its means and forms” (Kaye, 1994: 144). As such, “this postmodernism is best thought of as an effect of particular strategies played out in response to certain expectations” (Ibid). The Dragons’ Trilogy’s scenery, as we observed above, consists, among other physical elements, of a sand-filled box, which represents a parking lot in the former Chinatown of Quebec City. This physical site and its interlocutors become the theatricalized, physicalized excavation or revision of a past and its individual contexts. Thus, this journey into the individual and collective Canadian past represents a dialogue, a re-negotiation of an idealized past for an alternative idealized present. This physicalized interaction exists between social agents and history. The context is its text (performance); its text is its context. By juxtaposing this analysis with a postmodern ethnography, similar narrational strategies will be exposed.

Theoretical/methodological Orientations in the Phenomenological Ethnography of Desjarlais

Phenomenological anthropology has its roots in the philosophy of phenomenology

of Edmund Husserl. Perhaps the most influential anthropological contemporary practitioner of the phenomenological perspectives is Michael Jackson who has published a manifesto on the merits of phenomenology in “Minima Ethnographica” (1998). The origin and development of Husserl’s phenomenology points to a gradual understanding (or discovery) of a method which he thought would solve epistemological problems (mainly in mathematics and logic). By 1907, Husserl defined phenomenology as a critical part of philosophy. In Husserl’s posthumously published work, *The crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental phenomenology*, he introduced the concept of the *Lebenswelt*, which paved the way for an eventual reconciliation of phenomenology, the historical and the cultural sciences.⁴⁰

According to David Bidney, that which connects anthropology to phenomenology is Husserl’s notion of the “*lebenswelt*” or life-world. The *Lebenswelt* is the world of human existence, a world experienced by man who lives in a social ecological environment. The *Lebenswelt* is the world of immediate experience as given to unreflective consciousness; it is the world of common sense and common experience (Bidney, 1973: 128). Thus, the culture as recorded by the anthropologist in his presented analysis is an abstraction from the lived experiences and life-styles of the subjects of a particular culture. Bidney also emphasizes that:

if there is to be a science of cultural anthropology, then the anthropologists must refer to the existential or experience of the people who live by, and for, their cultural norms as the ground of reference by which to judge the truth or falsity of the cultural constructs (Bidney,

1973: 134).

Accordingly, the cultural life-world is “the ground or basis for the cultural abstractions or conceptualizations of the anthropologist. The life-world of a given society must be taken as empirically given; it is not a construct of the anthropologist” (Ibid). The question is, how do we separate the subjects’ life-worlds from our own?⁴¹

Since the life-world of each society is subjective, in the sense that it is relative to the cultural and historical experience of each, the task of the cultural anthropologist requires him/her to employ ‘the method of cultural relativism. That is, “he must describe and intuit each life-world from the perspective of the subjects of that culture rather than from the perspective of some alien culture, such as his own” (Bidney, 1973: 136). This, of course, is easier said than done. The struggle in ethnographic accounts has been to attain a sort of ethnocentric *epoche*,⁴² so that our own analysis does not interfere too much with the life-world of the people studied. To attain an ethnocentric *epoche* is, of course, impossible, but it is a good beginning for self-reflection.

Since the concern of ethnocentrism was raised in ethnographic accounts, there has been an effort to include the voices or points of view of the subjects in ethnographic accounts. The interpretive or humanistic anthropology of Geertz is an example of this effort. In more recent years it has been the task of phenomenological anthropology to attempt the construction of ethnographic presentations built from the experience and life-worlds of the people themselves.

The phenomenological method calls for dialogue between subjects and in between subjects, as being at the root of ethnographic inquiry. In order to learn from experience,

one has to converse with other people's experiences, with other points of view, and other life-worlds as intersubjective and cross-cultural knowledge. This is at the core of phenomenology, and the aspect that I take to the ethnographic encounter and its presentation. Intersubjectivity enriches my project by humanizing the ethnographic encounter.

In recent years, Michael Jackson has tackled the same problems as his predecessors whilst trying to put to rest the commonly-held assumption that phenomenology is a philosophy incapable or unwilling to being "scientific." Trying to equate ethnographic work with scientism perhaps is a matter of politics rather than a matter of epistemology. By delineating the phenomenological trajectory within ethnography, Jackson projects a method that is pragmatic yet, as he says, "scientific."

The phenomenological method is above all one of direct understanding and in-depth description—a way of according equal weight to all modalities of human experience, however they are named, and deconstructing the ideological trappings they take on when they are theorized . . . (Jackson, M. 1996: 2).

He posits that in the phenomenological method no domain of "truth" is privileged over another. The method democratizes, so to speak, the playing fields of knowledge inquiry by putting local knowledge on the same footing with the alien knowledge introduced by the ethnographer. This democratization and empiricism might render the method scientific,

but what does anthropology gain with this claim?

The phenomenological idea of local knowledge is very similar to the notion of cultural particularism and interpretive anthropology. The difference is that the phenomenological method attempts to suspend intellectual knowledge to sympathize with what is experienced and therefore learned by subjects. This “intellectual epoche”, as we posited, is illusory but important for self-reflexivity. If ethnographic inquiries should be treated as conversations, as has been the consensus of latest ethnographies (Jackson, 1996; Rabinow, 1996; Marcus, 1986, 1989, 1993, 2000; Desjarlais, 1992; Fabian, 1990, 1997; et al), what is behind the claim of scientific validity manifested in the apparent symmetry of contribution from those involved? There is a need to do away with the “longstanding division in Western discourse between the knowledge of philosophers and scientists and the opinion of ordinary mortals” (Jackson, M. 1996: 7). However, can we in fact put the local knowledge on equal footing with the ethnographer’s knowledge? Or is this claim just helping to legitimize ethnographic “truths”? No matter how innovative and creative the reportage of ethnographic stories has been, the form takes the tone of its cultural, social and aesthetic epoch. In terms of phenomenology, it is at times a Western tone. Motives and intentions are shaped in the form of textual choice: plot, story telling, dialogue, and story development. Robert Desjarlais, for example, acknowledges this problem in his phenomenological study of healing among the Yolmo Sherpa in Tibet. He says that:

If either shaman or writer has any chance of succeeding, they must draw on the sensibilities and rudiments of form that give life to personal

experience. Sensations are basic to ritual healing, but those experiences only make sense to participants through the values and grammars specific to a people (Desjarlais, 1992: 197).

Desjarlais thus tries to understand the Yolmo's universe in healing by trying to experience it himself. His phenomenological approach allows him to attempt an understanding of the Other's subjective world by sensing, within the constraints of his otherness, that alien world. To do this he attempts to suspend his own subjective world. By suspending we cannot mean shutting it, as Merleau-Ponty put it, this would put the ethnographer out of business. Rather, Desjarlais intends a dialogue between both subjective worlds, his and the subject's. Through, this method, he aims to suspend his own pre-conceived notions of the Yolmo. In this case, a phenomenological ethnographic approach about healing in Tibet becomes a constant dialogue between reader and writer, culture and social actor/audience.

This ethnographic rendition becomes, as in the postmodern theatre of Lepage in Quebec, the physicalized and theatricalized performance of that ethnographic encounter. It becomes the revelation of an idealized experience and negotiation of a past. It becomes the rendition of an idealized present where audiences (readers and others) become also involved. The context becomes the text; the text is the form. For audiences reading Desjarlais' piece means stopping and making sense of the sensations experienced and acknowledged by minds and bodies. The inexhaustible instantaneous emotions, smells, shapes, and pains evoked by the dealings within the piece invade bodies and minds. The

audiences' minds stop for a moment to problematize and to re-invent the author's claim through their own knowledges and experiences. As in Robert Lepage's play, *Desjarlais* invites the audiences (readers) to look at characters and plot in a certain way by self-consciously manipulating the narrative elements. He is careful not to frame all these ethnographic elements into a unified whole. He resists wholeness by moving from form to form, and by juxtaposing elements: dialogue, description, verbatim translation, and monologue.⁴³

The difference between the postmodern in the theatre of Lepage and the postmodern in the ethnography of *Desjarlais* resides in the authorial intentions and motives, their narratives' rhetoric. For Lepage, his theatrical claim to social, cultural, and individual "truth" is a self-reflexive acknowledgement of the impossibility of "truth" itself. For *Desjarlais*, on the other hand, the claim to cultural, social, and individual "truth" becomes validated by the politics surrounding the text production (ethnographic pre-textual authority). In both instances one learns about cultural process, but only one is amenable and sincerely open.

My 'presentational ethnography' is thus closer to Lepage's postmodern phenomenological performance. The claim of a 'presentational ethnography' to ethical, cultural, political and social integrity inhabits the self-reflexive, intersubjective, and inter-cultural recognition of process. Its integrity, as an acceptable presentation of a cultural manifestation, does not reside in the citationality of validity (quotation, paraphrasing, anthropological genealogy). Its authority becomes in the performance of cultural understanding and process.

The Rhetorical Dimensions of Theatre and Ethnography.

By looking at the rhetorical dimensions of theatre and ethnography, one can further highlight the political, social, cultural and ethical motives in the theatrical and ethnographic postmodern narratives stated above. The validity of an interpretation of theatre and ethnographic performances, through the study of their rhetorical forms rests upon the opportunity to: First of all, identify both narratives as rhetorical and intellectual positions. These positions, like many other rhetorical forms (courtrooms, political assemblies or the media), can reveal the interstices of social, cultural and political productivity in human communication. Secondly, this analysis is important to understand how a theatrical space makes ethnographic, social, cultural, and political questions visible, as the inner workings of subjects' positionality and as rhetorical consequences or effects (Charland, 1985; Drew-Bear, 1973).

This component, as way of introduction, will explore the links between theatre and rhetoric in order to facilitate an understanding of the rhetorical dimension of theatrical forms. By way of juxtaposing a theatre piece and an ethnographic text I will then assert that both narratives are structured according to strategic enactments of social, cultural, ethical, and political intention. Both Beckett's Absurdist theatre "Waiting for Godot" and Fabian's performative ethnography "Power and Performance" can help us understand the rhetorical implications of textual forms. Through this analysis, I claim that my 'presentational ethnography,' in its rhetorical forms, has "eminently political and practical

effects” (Charland, 1987: 148).

The link: Theatre and Rhetoric

The theatre works to claim a certain kind of meaning for the drama by claiming— even legitimating--- a certain kind of experience for the audience as significant. The rhetoric of theatre, that is, frames a relationship between drama, stage, production, and audience interpretation, and it is within that relationship that our experience as an audience takes place (Worthen, 1992: 1).

The link between theatre and rhetoric has long been established in Western thought. From ancient times to our present era, rhetoric and theatre have had a parallel trajectory. In other words, the theatre has always had rhetorical dimensions, and rhetoric has always been built upon theatrical expressiveness. As a persuasive, practical, social and political tool, rhetoric shares with theatre in its development as a political and social agent. The same can be said of ethnographic work. As Hariman puts it, “all action is structured according to the essential ingredients of drama. Meaning is created through staged performances of conflict and resolution before an audience...” (1995: 178); however, we should be aware of the contingency of the performativity in communication. ‘Understanding performativity as a renewable action without clear origin or end suggests

that speech is finally constructed neither by its specific speaker nor its originating text” (Butler, 1997: 40).

If we can place the emergence of a systematized rhetorical and/or oratory practice⁴⁴ within the Sophist (or even the Pre-Socratic) philosophers of ancient Greece, we can also situate the development of institutionalized Western theatre at the same time and with almost the same social actors (Guthrie, 1971; Martin, 1991).⁴⁵ The Sophists (as orators, rhetoricians or teachers) eagerly supplied the demand for education and instruction on the fine art of speaking. Rhetoric, it appears, was “concerned entirely with means, not ends, and the teaching of it had different effects on pupils according to their character” (Guthrie, 1971: 181). In ancient Greece public instruction was the main function of the poet, and consequently Sophists and playwrights were considered teachers (1971: 29). The great dramatists of the era (tragic and comic) similarly regarded themselves as teachers: For comic and tragic poets such as Aristophanes and Sophocles, the dramatic preoccupation was about universal and local laws, unwritten and written laws, and the same arguments that dominated the discussions of most Sophists. The discussions and debates among philosophers and poets, rhetoricians, or theatre writers were mainly about ethical and moral issues, rather than aesthetic ones (Guthrie, 1971: 29). An attack on the Sophists by Plato in *Gorgias*, *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus* demonstrates that what was at issue was morality and ethics. Rhetorical arguments are different from other type of arguments essentially because they are ethical (Garver, 1994: 77). Thus, the issues and concerns of philosophy, whether manifested in the theatre of Sophocles or the lectures of Protagoras, are essentially akin.

The principles of effective speech on stage originated with Aristotle. His *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* laid the basis for a form and function of tragedy (Martin, 1991). The basic elements of rhetoric were present in the way the chorus was organized in his plays. Finding a suitable verbal form through rhetoric was the concern of actors. “An appropriate vocal delivery for an actor stemmed from rhetoric’s *actio*, which demanded that voice, facial expression, gestures and posture should be in harmony with text and lift out its content and character” (Martin, 1991: 2). The actor performs different physical activities on stage that invites the audience to read behaviours in certain kinds of ways (Worthen 1992: 2). Acting does not only convey ideas of action, character and meaning, but also requires different kinds of involvement from the audience. “The rhetoric of acting frames our reading of the actor’s performance, and so the kind of ‘character’ we can discover there” (Worthen, 1992: 3).

This connection between rhetoric and theatre has continued uninterrupted since antiquity. In the Elizabethan (Sixteenth Century) theatre, for example, rhetoric was a tool utilised by playwrights in the construction of characters. The persuasive arts of Ben Jonson’s orators and his portrayal of their characters in *The Alchemist*, for instance, illustrate the use of rhetoric in this period as a persuasive tool. The main characters of the play all assume ‘faces’; they are all actors and their ‘faces’ are akin to the ethos which the orator cultivates in order to persuade, change minds, enchant and perhaps manipulate (Drew-Bear, 1973: 231; Brockett, 1987: 146).

In more recent time, rhetorical performance in the form of modern theatre, (realistic, poetic and political) embraces staging texts with the rhetorical being priority

(Worthen, 1992: 5). The scene of modern drama is a rhetorical arena in which “texts are staged as theatre, in which individuals are cast as spectators” (Ibid). Some of the strategies of this modern drama “have framed our modes of perception and experience... ” (1992: 11) to shape the ways in which we discover the drama and see our selves in the discourse of the stage. This assertion echoes most rhetorical theoreticians who posit that the positions agents embody are ultimately the effects of rhetoric (Charland, 1987, 1999; Hariman, 1995; Farrell, 1999). Kenneth Burke’s range of social identifications, for example, also includes all primary means playwrights, directors, designers, and actors use to involve and persuade their audiences of the legitimacy of certain kinds of actions (Worthen, 1992: 2).

A situation can be considered rhetorical when at least two factors are present. These factors are: “1. The indeterminacy of the outcome of the situation; i.e., it must always be possible for the audience to refrain from acting in the recommended manner; and (2) the exigency of a situation must be amenable to resolution by an audience’s action” (Farrell, 1999: 145). Here, we are going back to the same ethical divide between universal laws versus particular laws. That is: what is good for me versus what is good in general (Garver, 1994; 59). In other words, rhetoric is about audience judgments. “We make judgements about speakers and can be persuaded by them” (Ibid). Rhetoric can facilitate seeing both sides, and many sides, of an argument, or situation and thereby audience and speaker can recognize the “real” state of things in a communicative community. Audiences think very well of speeches and texts that reflect their character. These become rhetorical proofs. The orator must know a whole range of human characters

in order to understand human motivation, or at least to understand what is prone to cultural categorization (Drew-Bear, 1973: 19).

Cultural categories suggest “ideographies.” The term “ideograph” refers to, according to Michael McGee, “a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment... to a normative goal” (199: 15). An “ideograph” has meaning only when it means a particular thing to a collective community as social knowledge. The notion of “social knowledge” is a type of social grammar to which a particular communicative community (cultural, social or political) will belong. As a minimum condition for understanding this structure or “social knowledge,” it is assumed that “persons will regularly respond to problems in similar ways and attach their own human interests to purposes in some recognizable fashion” (Farrell, 1999: 143).⁴⁶ Thus, rhetoric appears to be a function of phronesis, or good practical reason and communal decisions (Lucaites et al, 1999: 20). Aristotle, for example, suggests in *Rhetoric* (I. 9.) that ethos or moral character originates in the virtues and that it comprises a number of these. This knowledge of the various types of human characters in relation to their emotions (pathos) contributes to the knowledge of the orator (Aristotle, 1954: II.12). Thus, the way we make the hearer view our own character is an important tool of persuasion. For Aristotle, rhetoric⁴⁷ is the effect of dialectics and politics. Rhetorical arguments, it follows, will be dialectical and political at the same time. These arguments are located at the intersection of dialectics and politics. These phenomena will make rhetoric responsive to two types of standards. “Non independent standards: arguments must be in the form of ethos but on the other hand, ethos is revealed and manifested primarily through the articulation of arguments” (Garver,

1994; 7).

Rhetoric, thus, can be understood as a communicative situation or performance, which corresponds to the following conditions: first, it has an indeterminacy of outcome, contingency of outcome on orators and audience's actions, as well as "social knowledge" competence. Second, audience's actions ultimately determine outcome. In this sense rhetoric is "both a power of proving opposites and an intellectual virtue oriented toward good ends" (Garver, 1994; 16). The idea is that audiences can be exposed to more than one side of an argument. Persuasion is supposed to lead to good ethical and moral actions.

Postmodern theatre, in its disruptive rhetoricity, is no different in many aspects to other types of theatre and ethnographic texts. The same principle can be applied to the postmodern theatre and postmodern ethnography. Both these narratives, as we have seen in the previous section (pp. 91-103), are disruptive of canons and forms, that are also the particular conditions and circumstances in which both communicative forums can be considered rhetorical. Let us then analyse a postmodern theatre piece and then juxtapose it to a postmodern (performative) theatre action.

The Rhetorical in Beckett's Absurdist Theatre and in Fabian's Performative Ethnography.

Training and technique provide the performer with a paradigm both for interpreting the role (discovering how it is "actable") and for representing

it as theatre (Worthen, 1992: 3).

Under what circumstances can theatre and postmodern ethnography be understood as rhetorical? This question is important because it helps us identify action in the verbal and non-verbal theatrical and ethnographic discourses vested of intentions and motivations. As we continue with this analysis, it is my intention to show that it is in the actors' actions in these narratives (and in the actions of all those involved in my 'presentational ethnography'), and the theatricalized activities surrounding the text that invites the audience or reader to read a kind of meaning. Thus, it is the rhetoric of action that will also frame the reading of those involved in my 'presentational ethnography.'

In theatre and ethnography rhetoricity can be assessed, by pointing to the same conditions in which any type of communicative and collective social arena, can be considered rhetorical. The problem, however, is that because "postmodern theatre" and "postmodern ethnography" are unstable in form, trying to categorize a general principle of their rhetoricity may prove elusive. Nonetheless, one can approach the question by articulating the rhetorical within, or as the disrupting effect of form. What I mean by this is that one can see the whole incident of the destabilization of form in "postmodern theatre" and ethnography as a political effect of rhetoric and/or as an aesthetic effect. As Eagleton puts it, "the aesthetic... is from the beginning a contradictory, double-edged concept. On the one hand, it figures as a genuinely emancipatory force... while bound at the same time into social harmony" (Eagleton, 1990: 28). As Burke has posited, each poetic form emphasises its own way of "building the mental equipment by which one

handles the significant factors of one's time" (1994: 34). The rhetorical effect is thus transformation and change.

Theoretical/methodological Orientations in "Waiting for Godot"

Samuel Beckett's play "Waiting for Godot," for example, is characteristically transformative of modernist attitudes. The characters of the play, for the most part, are trapped into a modernist desire for truths and the meta-narrative that legitimises it (Nealon, 1992: 52). Nonetheless, the characters attempt at breaking through this structure by forging new ways of thinking about things (Nealon, 1992: 50). This forging of new ways of thinking is what I would call the rhetorical dimension of the postmodern play. Beckett puts into question humanities very existence. "Beckett is no so much concerned with man as a social and political creature as with the human condition in a metaphysical sense" (Brockett, 1968: 647).

To begin with, we can notice that the characters Vladimir and Estragon try to maintain a transcendental principle through their discussions or speeches, that of man's capacity to understand his world. They try to find meaning through this principle for their lives. All of this has one principle or reference for them, that of "Waiting for Godot". This principle we can call (echoing Lyotard) "a grand narrative", a way of looking at life (Nealon, 1992: 45). Within this structured language game limitations are established:

Estragon: Let's go

Vladimir: We can't

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot (Beckett, 1970: 32).

Once this "language game" is established it is played during most of the play.

Vladimir appeals to reason through the invocation of the universal law, reason, "We're waiting for Godot", he reiterates. The characters play easily within the limits of a static, universal metagame until they are questioned by another character's rhetoric. "They never attempt to transgress or disrupt it; in short, they play modern language games, not postmodern ones" (Nealon, 1992: 46). But there is a transgression to this meta-narrative some time during the play and this point is what becomes significant. Beckett challenges the modern narrative by activating the character Lucky as a disruptive agent. As the characters torture and console each other they raise questions which cannot be answered. They struggle in a world that seems to disintegrate around them (Brockett, 1968: 647). Lucky's gibberish seems to exacerbate the impossibility of their questioning and their universe. It is in the impossibility and unintelligibility of Lucky's disquisition where Beckett's rhetoricity seems to reside. He speaks against the popular notion of the time that purported philosophy's absolute role in human historical transcendence:

Lucky: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher
 and Wattmann of a personal God... with a white beard quaquaququa
 outside time without extension who from the highest of divine apathia

divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions
for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine
Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell...
(Beckett, 1970: 29).

Even though Lucky's gibberish has no obvious rhetorical intention towards Vladimir and Estragon, it is capable of moving both characters and the audience beyond their structure by questioning their own way of thinking.

Estragon: ...Let's go far away from here.

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We have to come back tomorrow.

Estragon: What for?

Vladimir: To wait for Godot.

Estragon: ...And if we dropped him...

Vladimir: He will punish us (Beckett, 1970: 60).

Even though Lucky's monologue does not convince them to change attitude they have started to have doubts about their capacity to understand their world. This does not mean that rhetorical tools are not in operation here. As Farrell tells us, a situation can be considered rhetorical when the outcome of the situation is indeterminate, and action rests

on the audience (1999: 145). In this case the audience is not only Vladimir and Estragon but also the reader of the play and the theatre spectators. A rhetorical situation must be amenable to resolution by an audience's action. In this case, the action taken by the audience is to question their narrative through their speech. Again the discussion turns into a questioning of universal versus particular laws. That is: what is good versus what is good for me (Garver, 1994: 59).

Estragon and Vladimir have made their judgement, and their reflection becomes exposed through their speeches or rhetorical proofs. The orator, in this case, Beckett (through Lucky,) knows a whole range of human characters; he understands human motivation (Drew-Bear, 1973: 19). Beckett expresses "the post-war doubts about man's capacity to understand and control his world (Brockett, 1968: 647). It seems that Beckett in this play critiques the worldview of the modernist world. At a simple reading it seems as though Beckett is clamouring for the return of a grand narrative, or that he believes that there is no escape from narratives. This has been the interpretation rendered by a number of scholars reading Beckett (Nealon, 1992: 51). "...Many interpreters allow for a cosy marriage between Beckett's drama and modernism, reading "Waiting for ... " as, in essence, a lament for the lost grand narrative" (Ibid). However, Beckett's apparent problem may be his "strategy of indirection, to this reversal of expectations, to the suggestion that an exercise in fictionality may prove real sentiments..." (Seery, 1990: 3).

The speech by Lucky, it seems, is out of place in the logic of feeling a loss for grand narratives. The reading of irony begins here with an awareness that something is out of place (Seery, 1990: 172). "... [I]rony begins with a signal of sorts, leading to an

awareness of textual oppositions, contradictions, incongruity...” (Ibid) Irony removes the security “that words mean only what they say... and that is why the ethical and the political are never far beneath the surface of discussions of the use of and responses to irony” (Hutcheon, 1995: 14). In the case of Lucky’s speech, does Beckett mean what his character is saying or not? Though Lucky’s speech is not violent he is met with violence. Lucky has disrupted Vladimir’s and Estragon’s way and form of existence: Waiting for Godot.

Irony happens as part of a communicative process; it is not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but itself comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between intentions and interpretations (Hutcheon, 1995: 13).

The character who breaks with a structure in the play (Lucky) is a slave (to Pozzo). In the play he manages to liberate his intellect from a meta-narrative, but he, in terms of his body, is still a slave. In a way all characters are trapped: Lucky bodily, and the others intellectually. The context in which the characters find themselves renders them ironic (Booth, 1974).

As a rhetorical arena, the theatre thus stages the objects, attitudes and issues so that audiences make their own judgments about what sort of action to take (Garver, 1994: 21).

The Estragons and Vladimirs in the world make their judgements base on parameters established by an absurd rhetoric:

Pause

Estragon: What do we know?

Vladimir: I don't know.

Estragon: Let's go

Vladimir: We can't.

Estragon: Why not?

Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot (Beckett, 1970: 32).

Theoretical/methodological Orientations in Performative Ethnography

Now, let us consider our last ethnographic example. Postmodern ethnography exhibits the same rhetorical principles as are present in postmodern theatre. It becomes clear in this analysis that “Persuasion is the strategic enactment of motives in discourse to induce cooperation” (Hariman, 1995: 178).

Rhetorical forms in “postmodern theatre” reveal that “discourse has eminently political and practical effects” (Charland, 1987: 148). Similarly the “postmodern ethnography”, in this case performative, can be recognized as a forum where the social, cultural and political is contingent, and the position the subject embodies is a rhetorical effect (Ibid). Performative ethnography is derived from a social, cultural and political practice similar to the aesthetical/social practice of theatre. The performative ethnography of Johannes Fabian, for example, falls within the disruptive rhetorical forms of the postmodern theatre. Emphasis on performance and process as well as the contingent nature of its forms are essential ingredients of both theatre and ethnographic postmodern

discourses. The emphasis on the multiplicity of representational forms such as scripted dialogue, dialogism, rhetorical styles of irony, and eclectic quotation (verbatim monologues and dialogue) is also at the core of both discursive manifestations.

First, a succinct overview of performative ethnography will be imperative to understand its theoretical underpinnings. The linking of theatrical or performance processes with sociology (Goffman) and anthropology (Turner) in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s created the conditions for a contextual analysis of theatre and performance (Carlson, 1993: 509). Consequently, intellectuals in most disciplines started to treat performance and theatre as social practices. As a social practice, performance is contingent as well as circumscribed (bound) and autonomous (free) (Reinelt, 1996:11). It can be momentarily structuring. Thus, performance and theatre became a central object of contextual investigation. When treated as a process, theatre and performance can be “part determined and part accident” (Ibid).

Victor Turner’s idea of social drama starts from the assumption that people seek ceremonialized and performative ways to solve social/cultural problems. “... I regard the social drama as the empirical unit of social processes from which has been derived... the various genres of cultural performance” (Turner, 1974: 93). Social drama becomes a special aspect of inquiry for anthropologists. For example, “the ceremonial mask may be odd, out-of-the-ordinary and worn only on special occasions” (Parkin, 1996: xix). When it is placed in a wider context of struggle and resolution, “it may tell us more about those who wear it in terms of their interrelationships than a study rigorously focused on their everyday, regular activities” (Parkin, 1996: xxviii). As a social practice, performance

appears when many diverse aspects of a situation or context coalesce to produce a situation in which performances play a central role for the anthropological inquiry (Reinelt, 1996:11). Performance can be “one specific (rather than general) mode of human communication and action, distinguishing itself from ‘mere’ description in a ‘normal or everyday’ manner”(Finnegan, 1992: 91). Particular acts of communication are somehow “marked out as ‘performance’ by a heightened and framed quality” (Ibid).

Richard Schechner’s notion of “performative text” expands on Turner’s conceptualization of social drama. For Schechner “performative text” is what happens during a performance both on the stage and off stage involving both audience and performers (1985: 22). Applied to social drama, the performance text makes the context surrounding the social drama more visible and important. Theatre people, Schechner emphasizes, “have investigated training, rehearsals, and performances but have slighted workshops, warm-up, cool-down, and aftermath” (1985: 16). Just as all the phases of the public performance make a system, “...so the whole ‘performance sequence’ makes a larger, more inclusive system...”(Ibid).

Johannes Fabian (1990) in the last decade has tapped into a type of social performance (drama), which he calls performative ethnography. In his anthropological investigations of performance and theatre, he uses “performance” in a sense that is at once more literal and methodologically more diffuse, and closer to the overall anthropological view of performance. Fabian’s ethnography, like Turner’s, takes spectacular ritual, social drama, and theatricality in general as its point of departure. “‘Experience’ (rather than communication or speaking), ‘symbols’, and ‘interpretation’ or ‘hermeneutics’ (rather

than text, speech events, and rules) are the keywords of its discourse” (Fabian, 1990: 10). For Fabian, Turner’s notion of reflexivity, which he ties to performative acts, has epistemological significance. For Turner, performance is reflexive. This is because performance is always a critique, direct or not, of social life that grows out of evaluation of agents in history (Turner, 1988, 22). At the same time, this notion of performance can be connected to other theatrical theories of “production and perception”. As Julian Hilton puts it, “in the theatre any plot or action exists only in the moment of performance and has no stable meaning or identity outside the performance process” (1993: 7). He further states that:

this means that there is not a single definition of what plot or action is, even in the case of the play with an authoritative source ‘text’, for every performance redefines, however marginally, the nature of the performed (Ibid).

Within this interpretation, the actions of all involved and the reflexive traces of the performers become points of departure for the analysis of the performance in a broad ethnographic context. Within this notion of performance, the purpose of performing “becomes one of the generating and intensifying experiences for all who participate in it rather than the representation of some pre-existing action or state of feeling according to some immanent ideal located in its poetic, textual source” (Hilton, 1993: 7

Fabian's "performative ethnography"⁴⁸ is the kind "where the ethnographer does not call the tunes but plays along" (1990: 19). "Performance", he maintains, is a more adequate description both of the ways people enact their culture and of the method by which an ethnographer produces knowledge about that culture.

By examining a traditional proverb about power, in the Zairian performance of the play *Le Pouvoir se Mange Entier*, Fabian posits that "performance is appropriate to both the nature of cultural knowledge and the nature of knowledge of cultural knowledge" (1990: 18). Thus he proposes some ideas that guided his ethnographic study. These ideas identify a process that is not pre-determined by social systems but becomes in the action. The tricky part is, however, the representation of that process. First, his study is above all epistemological (trying to find conditions that enable us to know) as opposed to ontological (trying to find and name existing things). His aim is to abandon hierarchical positions in which the ethnographer occupies a more privileged position than his "informants". He tries, similarly to Beckett's rhetorical disposition in "Waiting for Godot", to free his characters from the ethnographic hierarchical narrative structure. Second, as in the rhetorical postmodern theatre, he believes in the importance of process. Audience's actions ultimately determine outcome.

The third guiding idea refers to performance as an action that is contingent on a number of situations and actors, as opposed to the enactment of a pre-existing social script. In other words, particular processes happening at particular times determine actions. As in *Waiting for Godot's* rhetoric, performative ethnography provides the audience with opposite points of view. This is evident through the different forms that

shape the ethnography (description, dialogue, monologue, verbatim translation, etc).

Audiences or those involved can be exposed to more than one side of an argument. One can see the traces of persuasion to favour a point of view or not. This can perhaps lead the audience to moral or other actions.

The fourth idea guiding Fabian's study deals with the cultural form and content of reporting the process of the performance (i.e. the form of the ethnographic representation) (1990: 15). Here Fabian points out that the writing of ethnography needs to give accounts and interpretation of process and action. For Fabian the writing of ethnographies needs to give accounts and interpretation of the actions. However, the action of representation, he believes, is destined, inevitably, regardless of which formal device we use, to present the ethnographic experience, to "tell baroque and tortuous tales" (1990: 15). He posits that this is so because one cannot have a "perfect match of content and form between text and translation... covering, and only covering the announced subject of research" (Ibid). The ethnographer, he maintains, "differs from the writer of fiction, not in that he presents, but in that he needs to justify his presentations as contributions to a body of knowledge" (1990: 87). Yet, rendering of experience through the "native's" point of view (verbatim accounts) can be a tacit claim to the scientific credibility of the ethnography.

As in the rhetoric of "Waiting for Godot" where Beckett raises questions about the capacity of men to control meaning and the transcendence of humanity. Fabian's performative ethnography appeals to the historical transcendence of ethnographic "truth" (verbatim made into text). I believe that Fabian's presentation is a tentative attempt at bringing process and textualization together. Fabian's performative ethnography is

“representational” in the theatrical sense, which means a reproduction of an illusionist “truth” on the ethnographic stage. The actual textual form of his performative ethnography disagrees with the spirit of openness of performance. His form highlights verbatim accounts of the rehearsals and performances in both languages (Swahili and English). I am not trying to say that verbatim accounts are less honest than other narratives, they cannot, however, be used to mask Western epistemological problems (social science versus humanities or empiricism versus fiction). These examples are relevant in light of my own dealings with my presentational ethnography. What does it mean in ethnographic terms to put on an *El Gueguense* play in Diriamba for the actors and audiences?

Genesis: A “Presentational Ethnography”

As in “Waiting for Godot”, “The Dragon Trilogy”, “Body and Emotion,” and “Power and Performance”, the *El Gueguense* play in Nicaragua stages and theatricalizes objects, attitudes, and issues that articulate historical, collective, individual, and political positions. These rhetorical tools become the realm for their audiences’ judgments. The practice of producing (in the theatrical sense) this play becomes formal, personal, social and aesthetic and the choices, besides being part of historical and social structure, have rhetorical dimensions as well (Worthen, 1994: 1). Rhetoric, whether in play or “real life,” is about social systems, where it is assumed everybody has an opinion and agency to act (Garver, 1994: 21).

In our case, the rhetorical dimensions of the *El Gueguense* theatre can situate the

intention of the ethnographer, audiences, and their strategies for living. I have read the ethnographic encounter (performance) as disruptive of current ethnographic attitudes, a transition play or “performance” between a “natural attitude” and a “philosophical attitude”. As in the play “Waiting for Godot”, for example, characters in the ethnographic performance are trapped in a modernist desire for “truth”, for resolution, for knowledge, for freedom, and for the meta-narrative that legitimizes that “truth”. The character most trapped in this desire in our case is the ethnographer himself, who has to satisfy not only his yearning for resolution and do justice to this Nicaraguan story, but also has to acquiesce to academic expectations (pushing in the direction of meta-narrative) sometimes contrary to his own wishes. Nonetheless, the ethnographer and those involved in the presentation of this ethnography attempt at breaking through this structure by forging new ways of understanding each other, their roles in the study and in the world, and their particular predicaments. The ethnographer tries to break through the structure by bringing context and text, content and form together in different types of narratives. In the ethnographic context, it is a new way of thinking about things (Nealon, 1992: 50). The rhetorical dimension of this presentational ethnography is what one can denominate the rhetorical dimension of the postmodern ethnography.

This claim is obviously in need of being framed within a theatrical space. Performers within the context of the ethnographic encounter can construct this frame as a performance of Nicaraguan identities. A conceptualization of this analysis within ethnographic works fosters the current study of cultural negotiations by locating it within the experience of ethnographic work and its con-textual politics.

In this first main section of chapter three, it has been my intention to create the basis for an articulation of a ‘presentational ethnography.’ By over-viewing postmodern narratives and their consequences, we looked at the way in which form and content become one only through the authorial intention. By way of linking postmodern theatre and postmodern ethnography, we were able to make visible the politics surrounding social and cultural action and process. Through the analysis of rhetorical forms in these two narratives, we also exposed that the actions of actors and audiences and the processes (in theatrical and ethnographic forms) are constituted as persuasive communication. “Discourses both structure our perceptions and are structured by situations in which they are used” (Hariman, 1995: 178).

“Presentational Ethnography:” A Proposition

In this concluding section, I will present an articulation of the method/theory of my ‘presentational ethnography.’ Its actual materialization will take place in Chapter Five. Theatre (both the subject of research, the *El Gueguense* play and presentational theatre) is a model for the articulating of a contingent, disruptive, and social/cultural ethnographic textual frame.

Della Pollock’s notion of “performative writing” is similar to Fabian’s performative ethnography in its emphasis on action and performance. Nonetheless, the former goes beyond the latter’s circumscribed definition of performance in its projected potential for contingent presentational action. For Pollock, performative writing is not a matter of formal

style. It is both a means and an effect of conflict. It is particularly (paradoxically) 'effective.'

It forms itself in the act of speaking/writing. It reflects in its own forms, in its own fulfilment of forms, in what amounts to its performance of itself, a particular, historical relation (agonistic, dialogic, erotic) between author-subjects, readers, subjects, and subjects written/read (Pollock, 1998: 79).

For Pollock, performative writing⁴⁹ is a break with structures of true and false, reality and fiction, real and imagined. It is a flexible space that takes shape as interaction, action, and performance occur. Performative writing can be characterized by its postmodernist anti-mimetic stand. It does not follow canonical circumscriptions, and is formally free. The presentational ethnography I am proposing here is very similar to Pollock's idea. Nonetheless, like performative ethnography, performative writing is oblivious of subjects' and agents' intentionalities. Without highlighting performers' social, cultural, political motives, and failing to explore the politics behind performance and its evocation, these efforts remain superficially oriented. However, one can tap into the spirit of self-consciousness, reflexivity, and disruption to access circumscribed structures and the exploration of knowable systems that performative ethnography and writing offer. Theatre is, in my view, the tool most capable of making available to audiences and readers the intimacy of subject and agents of communication. Theatre is capable of framing, be it contingently and temporally, social and cultural processes.

Most theatrical expression (modern, postmodern, phenomenological, presentational, representational, epic and other) shares with performative writing,

performative ethnography and phenomenological ethnography an anti-structural and anti-mimetic stand. For example, the basic feature of the modern in the theatre can be summed up as:

an aesthetic self-consciousness and reflexivity; a rejection of narrative structure in favour of simultaneity and montage; an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain, open-ended nature of reality; and the rejection of the notion of an integrated personality in favour of an emphasis upon the Freudian 'split' subject" (Sarup, 1993: 131).

These characteristics have been associated also with postmodernism. This tends to create confusion, but nonetheless helps us locate the main idea behind the disruptive patterns of performance (Ibid). More than a hundred years ago Richard Wagner (1813-1883), for example, rejected the "contemporary" trend toward realism. He argued, "that the dramatist should be a myth-maker rather than a recorder of domestic affairs" (Brockett, 1987: 543). The boundaries between the real and the imagined were thus broken in theatre. At the end of the 18th century, any departure from realism was labelled "expressionism". "An anthropomorphic view of existence led expressionists to project human emotions and attitudes into inanimate objects, and to seek truth in humanity's spiritual qualities rather than external appearances" (Brockett, 1987: 598). Expressionists opposed realism and naturalism because these were centred on locating a fixed "truth" of society (Ibid). The first expressionist play was *The Beggar* by Sorge published in 1912. Other playwrights,

like Walden (1878-1941), Kaiser (1978-1945), and Toller (1893-1939), followed Sorge's lead (Brockett, 1987: 600-601). As expressionism declined, "Epic Theatre" arose, of which Piscator (1893-1966) and Brecht (1891-1956) were the most significant practitioners (Ibid, 600). Presentational theatre is a theatrical form (in acting and playwriting) that draws closer to the anti-mimetic desire in expressionism, epic theatre, and more recently in the postmodern theatre.

Presentational theatre⁵⁰ aims at telling a story and posing a question, or devising a plot, by many (sometimes fantastical) means. Presentational plays "*present* (my emphasis) a dramatic action or theatrical performance; they are primarily audience-centered" (Albright, Halstead and Mitchell, 1955: 136). In a presentational scene or play, it is obvious that an actor is an actor and the stage is a stage. Thus, there is not an intention of pretending at an illusionary "real" universe. Molière and Brecht represent this type of style. In a presentational theatrical action, "performers recognize the presence of the audience and address it directly and move towards and among the spectators" (Ibid: 252). The director or the actor does not concern him/herself with a realistic portrayal of life. S/he could very well use parody, comedy, mime, exaggeration, or even animal personae or objects to present movements and voices as a form of expression. This theatre style allows fantasy and poetry to speak with many voices (styles and frames) without forgoing the subject matter. Stefan Brecht, for instance, while observing and studying Vermont's "Bread and Puppet Theatre," noted that, "Presentational theatre-acting, for example, is presenting a character in movement or speech in movement without attempt at psychological indications or at creating an illusion of identification..."(1988: 280). Within

this view, an experience does not have to be enacted as such. For example, the presentation of a blood transfusion does not have to be a real-life blood transfusion as was seen necessary at one point in the theatre. It does not need to use props identical to real syringes, tubes, or needles. Objects acquire tropological characteristics, allowing the audiences to take a big leap of imagination.

Presentational theatre can thus mediate real life through non-realistic, even fantastic, elements. It can construct characters by portraying these non-realistically, non-mimetically, and even fantastically. This type of theatre metaphorizes “real-life” characters and in some cases makes them more accessible for an audience than strategies identifying real “characters.” This has been my experience while doing theatre in Nicaragua. People were more interested in participating with us when we used fantastic characterizations, as in a theatre of extraordinary reality.⁵¹ It seems that any identification with characters rested on a subjective idea of reality.

The antagonist of presentational theatre is representational theatre. It was born as an attempt to recreate reality as found in the “real world”, and aims at portraying it as closely as possible without deviation and contamination. Although its origins can be traced further back, this European movement for a greater “truth” on the stage stemmed from Victor Hugo’s famous 1827 manifesto. He proclaimed that life, and life alone was the only model for the stage:

Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. Let us throw down the old plastering that conceals the façade of art. There are neither

rules nor models; or, rather, there are no other rules than the general rules of nature which soar above the whole field of art, and the special rules which result from the conditions appropriate to the subject of each composition (in Roose-Evans, 1973: 17).

In the nineteenth century, the ideal was a theatre larger than life (Roose-Evans, 1973: 155) which could capture reality as it was, producing a type of theatrical reality. This ideal was not only represented through the costumes, setting, and the stage, but also through acting. Subsequently, this need for realism has taken theatrical experimentation from “external, or photographic realism to a search for inner realism” (Roose-Evans, 1973: 18). Stanislavsky, for instance, was instrumental in implementing this transition at the beginning of this century (Brockett, 1987). Representational theatre represents “an image of life that may seem to exist at times independent of the theatre.” It is primarily “stage-centered”(Albright, Halstead, Mitchell, 1955: 135-36). The representational theatre is the type of action where performers “maintain an actual separation between themselves and the audience and pretend to be unaware of the presence of the spectators” (Ibid: 252). This is the so-called “fourth wall.” They literally try to recreate “real life” characters, environments, and circumstances and also their inner motivations. Through a representational realistic theatrical technique and philosophy the actor and director attempt to recreate what is observed, lived, and experienced, with attention to details such as inner feelings, motivations, senses, hunger, fear, etc. This type of theatre is mimicry of sorts.

I consider that most ethnographic efforts being carried out today, even those claiming postmodern, intercultural, and intersubjective communication (anti-positivist performative and phenomenological ethnographies in this case), have remained *representational* in the theatrical sense. Such efforts try earnestly to imitate realistic happenings in narrative forms using (through the voice of the Other or verbatim accounts) textual forms that amplify the truthful nature of their representations at every opportunity. Rhetorically these narrative forms end up as attempts to represent “truth”, or accurate way of life, ritual, or performance.

As a guiding temporal ethnographic frame (that brings together performative, phenomenological, rhetoric and theatre theories into a single site), my proposed *presentational ethnography* attempts to evoke dialogue, disruption, intersubjectivity and the intercultural through small scripted scenes, and delivers them in the “presentational theatrical mode.” The polyvocal interpretation of the performers in such becoming could be revealed textually through conversations. Within this dialogue, the conversations and negotiations are about the intersubjective and intercultural accommodations of all involved in the project, no matter how creative they may seem. It is through the phenomenological negotiation and transformation of primary genres (real pain, misunderstanding, different political and class positions) into secondary genres (the interpretations in scripted scenes) (Bakhtin, 1986: 98) that the story suggests communication, disruption. It becomes an attempt to collectivize experiences in writing.

Presentational scripted scenes thus present happenings of the ethnographic experience (its priorities, strategies and intentions) in its form, by highlighting evocative

events using description of emotions and sensual human states activated by the encounter. This is textualized through stage directions, monologues, and dialogues. As in theatre, stage directions and dialogues help locate the experience within an event, its priorities, sensual state of participants, and epistemological concerns, through commentary. The exchanges that can be presented in this form are not only those between the subjects and ethnographer, but also between cultures and methods of negotiation. In this manner, presentational scripted scenes can highlight epistemological issues in the field of inquiry, while simultaneously bringing to the fore local concerns precipitated by events in their particular contexts. A presentational ethnography does not necessarily get closer to reality. It is a locus of temporal discussions, the intersubjective, and the presentation of the inter-cultural anthropological knowledge.

Methodological/Empirical Strategy

The methodology guiding this project emanates from the re-articulation of the theoretical positions discussed above. The audiences of the play are politically and socially diverse. The critique of “realist ethnographies”, which is the fundamental question of this endeavour, still needs to be grounded, articulated, and negotiated within the context of experience. By experience, I am referring to the happenings in the context of cultural and intercultural encounters, memories of those encounters, history and the evocation and presentation of them. One has to take into consideration broader cultural and epistemological assumptions upon which cultural “knowledge”(the one I am seeking or

trying to make sense of) rests. The main concern here, thus, is the fundamental relationship of my thesis statement to the specific practice of fieldwork (intercultural and intersubjective understanding through my dialogue with informants). My intellectual, emotional, and cultural condition as a Nicaraguan, theatre worker, and a Native ethnographer, as well as the *El Gueguense* theatre group's own condition, situates the dialogue within the ethnographic process. The actors (members of the *El Gueguense* theatre group) do not come to the encounter in a vacuum. They bring their own emotional, cultural, political, personal and rhetorical baggage. This baggage is their life-worlds that can also assume the form of knowledges. We interact, and negotiate from the perspective of those cultural and social baggages. How I position them and myself, and how they will position me and themselves within the rendering of this experience will generate a type of knowledge. This knowledge, not static and always negotiated, is about the group, the particular cultural production (the theatre play) and to a larger extent is a knowledge about Nicaraguan political, social, and popular culture.

I joined an *El Gueguense* group in Western Nicaragua in the town of Diriamba during five months at the end of 2000 and the beginning of the year 2001. I took part in the activities of this group through preparations, rehearsals, and performances of the play. While the *El Gueguense* participants knew of my academic project, I was to them also a dancer/actor. As I participated in the lives of the town's people, the lives of the actors, and organizers of the St. Sebastian fiestas in which the play has an important role, I was able to interject (with my body and thought) into the cultural forms developing around the performance of *El Gueguense*. This ethnographic encounter provided me with first hand

experience in the life-world of the performers and their audiences, as well with a chance to contextualize the literary analysis of the play completed to date. It was a chance to look at the differences between the *El Gueguense* drama text and its performance text, trying to perform within these pages a dialogical evocation of disruption as an intercultural and intersubjective negotiation to my multiple audiences (the Nicaraguan informants, academic, and myself).

With this presentational ethnography, I intend to trace conversations between cultures, ethnographers, audiences and performers located within a temporal frame. The conjunctural citationality of each scene, its performativity, its agency (from participants; performers, audiences and ethnographer) set up a historical, linguistic, artistic, rhetorical “social frame”: a story, in which social, political utterances occurred and continue to occur. As Cynthia Ozick beautifully recites: “A story is known to reflect in its ‘attitudes’ the concrete particularities of its invention. Every story is its own idiosyncratic occasion, and each occasion governs tone, point of view, conclusion” (Ozick, 1989: ix). Thus, I do not pretend to be neutral in my orchestrated attempt. I am not phenomenologically distant or anthropologically detached. This story I regard, “as an ad hoc contrivance, and if it is called a witness, it is in the court of the conditional, the subjective, the provisional, even the lyrical” (Ibid).

FOUR: PERFORMERS AND AUDIENCES
RITUALS AND MASKS: PRESENTING PROTAGONISTS AND THE SAN
SEBASTIAN'S CELEBRATION

Summary of (Gueguense) Event Four

After demonstrating (through pretence) that he is rich, Gueguense adjusts his tactic rather drastically. He insinuates to the governor that his son Don Forsico is a fine Dancer. The governor shows interest, and requests Don Forsico to Dance. They all perform several dances, including the St. Martin and the Macho Raton.

(First ballet with the running dance.)...

Gue.

Governor Tastuanes, now you are certainly satisfied that they have dances... to amuse the Royal Court.

Gov.

No, I am not satisfied, Gueguense.

Gue.

Governor Tastuanes may certainly know that Don Forsico and Don Ambrosio have dances to amuse the Royal Court.

Gov.

I certainly don't know it. My son, Captain Chief Alguacil, put a stop to the music of the leading men, so that this good-for-nothing Gueguense may amuse the Royal Court to the

tune of St. Martin.

(The tune of St. Martin is played with guitar, violin and small drum, and they all dance around.)...

Gov.

Now, Gueguense, I am satisfied.

Gue.

But I'm not Governor Tastuanes, for some go from behind and others from in front.

Gov.

I know nothing about that, Gueguense. Now, Gueguense do you have dances like the macho-Raton, to amuse the Royal Court?

Gue.

Governor Tastuanes, and good friend Captain Chief Alguacil, put a stop to the music, dances and songs, in order that we may amuse the Royal Court with the macho-Raton. Ho, boys! Where are the mules?

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About Performers and Audiences

In chapter four, the protagonists of the 'presentational ethnographic' project are introduced to the reader in the context of the San Sebastian celebration, the patron saint of Diriamba. In our ethnographic story, the protagonists are all those involved in the

ethnographic encounter. These include performers of *El Gueguense*, the organizers of this play, their audiences, town's people, and the ethnographer. The protagonists of this presentational ethnography will be brought out in different narrational presentations. Some characters will be presented conversing about the San Sebastian's experience in the main narrative, while others will be introduced as theatrical *Dramatis Personae*.

This chapter is purpose-oriented and is threefold. First, as in theatrical *dramatis personae*, it acquaints us with the characters in the presentational ethnographic project. These are the protagonists in the staging of the *El Gueguense* play this year within the context of Diriamba's San Sebastian celebration. Second, it will establish the San Sebastian celebration as the social, political, and cultural setting for the performance of the *El Gueguense* play. This is in order to understand the social/cultural and even political contexts in which the play is performed. It is also to grasp the roles of some of the protagonists not only in the theatrical context, but also in their social and cultural situations. Third, the chapter will comment on the significance of the play in the San Sebastian. I will argue that the *El Gueguense* play is, within the context of religious festivity, a scene of contradiction, contestation, and religiosity. Besides being the site for contesting hegemonic and homogenizing narratives, the play is also an instrument of power.

Dramatis Personae

The characters that will follow are the main participants in the ethnography. The names and locations have been changed to protect the privacy of the informants as much as possible. These are the participants that I encountered before, during and after the rehearsals of the play. As seen, heard and experienced by the ethnographer.

Doctor Luis Gallardo is a Lawyer, a cultural writer, and a horse enthusiast. He was the sponsor (Padrino) of the production of the El Gueguense dance, during the fiestas of Saint Sebastian of the year 2001. His house is a small palace, with colossal corridors and an enormous patio that could contain a small forest, but is barren. His law office at the south corner of his house doubles as the headquarters for cultural activities. He is always ready to proclaim himself, with little or no reservation, as the saviour of Diriamban culture. His political affiliations are not at all clear. One deduces he leans toward Nicaraguan conservatism but many people insist he had been a Sandinista supporter in the past.

Gallardo has all the airs of a well to do fellow. He is always meticulously well dressed, sporting long sleeved shirts and very clean blue pants. He is of medium height, above average for Nicaraguan standards. In his mid-fifties, Gallardo has a spherical face, small protruding white teeth, scrupulous eyes and his egregious smile can hardly formulate the impression of a trustful character. Nonetheless, Doctor Gallardo manages to

be soft spoken and confident, he has the social backing of the Diriamban Middle class. As the (Padrino) sponsor of the Gueguense he is to provide the music, which implies paying the musicians, and the coordination of the dance for the San Sebastian celebration. At the end of the dance he will offer refreshments to the participants (performers).

***Don Cristobal Potosme** is a knowledgeable elder in the community, an indigenous historian, and a traditional folkloric musician. He is a San Sebastian devotee, and is sought after to direct performances such as El Gigante, and El Gueguense. This year, he is responsible for the direction of the performance of the Gueguense and is also Doctor Gallardo's, the sponsor of the play's, resource person.*

He is notably a man of Indian ancestry. He is approximately 73 years of age. His small ebony physique, diminutive brown eyes, fast walking body and his enormous bare feet render him a mysterious yet disheartened personage. Sometimes, he converses with the solemnity of a prophet, or witty elder, but his cynical tone can contradict this impression. Perhaps he knows something he will never reveal to strangers. His eternal blue shirt makes him visually appealing; nevertheless, it signals the sombre state of his wealth. He lives in an extended household with many relations. In his niece's humble dwelling, many generations share in the deplorable sheltering situation. Don Cristobal earns some income sharing his knowledge of Nicaraguan folklore, but he can never make a living from it. Still, Don Cristobal likes to talk about his accomplishments and he is proud of the community's recognition of his cultural work. He never forgets to remind his interlocutor that he has accomplished all this even though he does not know how to read and write.

Don Jesus Molina a retired construction worker and an El Gueguense enthusiast. He plays the main character of the play also called Gueguense. He is physically frail, and has a small boned Indian face. Age and sun have worn out his olive skin. In spite of his age (he is about 75), he seems agile and attentive. His snake like sudden corporeal movements and his constant hand gesturing give the impression that he speaks with his body. In his impoverished household, human flesh is constantly tormented by the innumerable infestations of fleas and other indiscreet parasites. Don Jesus often finds refuge from the crumbling Nicaraguan social structure in alcohol. He came to the play rehearsals inebriated many times. It was in this semi-intoxicated state that he was more verbal in our conversations. He always found time to talk about the El Gueguense play, which pleased him, as it was a proud accomplishment in which he has participated as the main character. His mouth is regularly silent. Don Jesus cannot read or write and he stressed that point in every conversation.

Doña Maria Campos' long, flying, silvery hair speaks of a long gone but palpable beauty. Now in her sixties she has preserved a gracious youthful mannerism. Her toothless smile reveals the affinities of her decaying body with the non-existing health care system in her country. Dona Maria is very opinionated about the St Sebastian celebrations and the production of El Gueguense. She knows very well about sponsoring El Gueguense. In the past, when her family was more affluent, they had been involved with the production of the drama. She is Don Jesus' wife, a hard-working woman: she operates a small-scale fireworks factory.

Antonio Salazar is the ethnographer and a Doctoral student in his mid thirties. He plays the character of Chief Alguacil in the play. Originally from Nicaragua, he has lived in North America for the last 15 years. Although he has family in Nicaragua, his life is now in Canada where he lives with his wife. A so-called "native anthropologist," Antonio refuses to subscribe to any label. His interest in Nicaraguan research stems from an academic curiosity and past theatrical experiences in and outside Nicaragua.

Audiences are the neighbours, citizens, and devotees of St Sebastian, Nicaraguans attending the festivities.

El Gueguense play, Audiences and Town's People in the San Sebastian Celebrations

The play⁵² of El Gueguense and other Nicaraguan folkloric dances (*El Toro, Guaco, Los Diablitos, El Gigante*, etc.) have been performed around the festivities of the patron saints of numerous Nicaraguan urban centres. For perhaps more than 150 years *El Gueguense* has been consistently presented on the occasion of Masaya's St. Jeronimo festival (in September) and in Diriamba's St. Sebastian festivities (in January). During the 1960's, the play stopped being performed altogether in the celebrations of San Jeronimo in Masaya. There are some professional folkloric groups that have adapted the play in contemporary dance choreography, and these organizations do, from time to time, perform the Gueguense around Nicaragua. Many reasons are offered as the basis for the

play's demise as in its popular forum. One of these is the fact that the accoutrements for the dance/play are too elaborate and costly. Each dancer has traditionally been responsible for furnishing these; many cannot afford this financial commitment. The economic argument for the Gueguense's decline is not new, and was observed by early folklorist Daniel Brinton almost 100 years ago referring to the play in Masaya (1968: xli). In Diriamba the costumes for the *El Gueguense* belong to the sponsor of the dance/play. Given the current economic situation of Nicaragua today, there is not enough money for every dancer to own them.

The "*Cabildo Real Indigena de Nuestra Santa Madre Iglesia*," a religious committee to promote the popular religiosity of Diriamba, has been instrumental in keeping the *El Gueguense* alive (Arellano, 1991: 21). Diriamba, a small town (approximately 10,000 inhabitants) in Western Nicaragua, has become the only locality to successfully preserve the dance to date as part of the many activities that encompass the festivities of its town's patron saint San Sebastian. The *El Gueguense* is occasionally acted as fulfilment of a religious vow or strictly as a voluntary deed during this period. Thus, appreciation of the performance of *El Gueguense* is intricately linked to a grasp of the Festivities of San Sebastian in Diriamba.

The religious festival of San Sebastian can be traced to the year 1752 (Mojica, 1997: 23). According to traditional wisdom, the saint's statuette appeared floating on the Pacific Coast a few kilometres from the city of Diriamba on a beach called *La Boquita*. The native inhabitants of the Boquita found two wooden boxes floating on the water. In

one box they found San Sebastian and in the other San Santiago, which was destined for the town of Jinotepe (Mojica, 1997: 23). Jinotepe is the capital of the department of Carazo to which Diriamba, San Marcos, and the town of Dolores belong as well. Another version places the religious images at another beach close to Diriamba in Huehueté, and yet a third, purports that the Spaniards brought these images to the towns. Diriambans generally subscribe to either of the two first versions of the saint's appearance.

These legends are perpetuated by local people and are passed on orally at every opportunity from generation to generation. In fact, nobody knows if the image appeared on the coast, or was brought by the Spaniards, but it does not matter to Diriambans because San Sebastian is considered a miracle saint, who is at the service of the people. Every year, thousands of inhabitants pay respect to this image by fulfilling religious vows. Some walk on their knees on the streets or they perform one of the dances mentioned above during the processions. Others help to organize the festivities, as *Prioste: Teniente, Alfez, Alfez mayor, Mayordomo* and *Patrona*. These people fulfil religious vows or are *Promesantes*, with the *Mayordomo* as the ultimate leader of the fiesta. This festival honouring San Sebastian begins the 17th of January with fireworks displays and exhilarating nocturnal serenades. It ends around the end of February with similar popular displays. People carry the saint in procession twice during the long two weeks celebration, the 20th of January and the 27th of the same month. The 20th, the saint leaves Diriamba's church to join the statuettes of San Santiago and San Marcos in the town of Dolores. The 27th it returns to Diriamba.

For the people of Diriamba, the San Sebastian's celebrations represent more than a religious fling. They are very proud of the event, as it brings people of all social and economic levels physically together. My local dentist in Diriamba around the time of these celebrations recapitulated this to me:

(His client on the dentist chair agonizes with pain as he listens attentively to Doctor Miranda's tale. In his mid fifties and obviously greying, he speaks with a certain air of authority about the celebration). I believe in the power of San Sebastian. My mother told me a story that I think presents clear evidence of San Sebastian's incredible wisdom and omnipotence. One year, when my mother was young, she attended the take off of the festivities of Washan (another way of referring to the Saint) in front of the Basilica. This was in the 1930s. There were thousands of people there. The saint bearers took the saint down from the tower's pinnacle of the Basilica to cloth him and beatify him. They needed to present him to the devotees in the church, as this is done before the main communion preceding the procession. As a tradition this act goes back more than 100 years. But anyway, the four bearers deposited San Sebastian on the wooden pedestal and prepared themselves to begin the relocation. At that particular moment a very diminutive old man appeared among the crowds with a pito, a flute. He played his pito and danced with tremendous fervour while the people observed him with religious devotion. The new priest in town, a very strict fellow, became very livid and came immediately to put an end to the old man's spectacle. With an authoritative voice, he

said, "I will not permit this show of total disrespect for San Sebastian. Everything we do here should be an organized act of devotion." The old man said nothing but was obviously saddened by the prohibition: he packed his flute and left. The priest ordered the saint to be brought inside the church, and instructed everyone to follow.

(He pauses for a second and asks the patient). Are you in pain? (The patient moves his eyes to his left side. This gesture is taken as a negative response, which it is not). Anyway, you could not believe it. The bearers could not move the saint. It was as though they were trying to haul a mountain. They could not drag the saint away. They tried and tried and nothing. They asked people to help but nothing. Even the priest prayed a few orations but nothing, the saint would not move. People started to wonder about the significance of this display of power from San Sebastian. Some people hurriedly went to look for the old man who was found a few kilometres away. They asked him to play and dance for Washan. They understood that the saint was not happy about the excesses of authority that the priest had demonstrated. When the old man came back and did his thing, the bearers had no problem lifting the saint. The old man was able to fulfil his vow, the saint became content and everybody understood his power. I will never forget that story. It tells me that San Sebastian is not pleased with too much control from the organizers of the fiesta; I mean the priest and the Mayordomo⁵³. (He proceeds to work in the client's mouth and says). You got to believe in Washan. Are you in pain? (The patient moves his eyes to his right side.)

Dona Maria Talks About San Sebastian

For Nicaraguan standards her family is very, very poor. Through her work, and that of her son and daughter-in-law who manufacture fireworks, she manages to keep her family afloat. On the many times I came to visit Don Jesus, she was very generous with her time. She loved to talk about the play, a topic that filled her with joy and nostalgia. At the beginning of my research I came in search of her husband's insights, to chat or just visit him. Her outgoing personality proved too difficult to ignore. The *El Gueguense* is a play about men, but her memories were always there, every time I was at her house. She made her way into this ethnography:

(Her firm, yet delicate voice shoots up through the walls of her house). I'm old but I still participate in the festival. When I was young, my mother and father made great sacrifices to sponsor an El Gueguense performance to honour Washan. In those days our house was full of costumes, props, dancers and refreshments. We used to kill at least two big fat pigs every year. These animals were kept the entire year and fattened to be made in Picadillo (a typical plate which base ingredients are corn and pork), Nacatamales, (steamed banana leaf wrapped corn delight), and Indio Viejo (similar to Picadillo but with a solid consistency). Many years ago my parents died and we became very poor and we stopped sponsoring El Gueguense. The tradition lives in the family because Jesus, my husband, performs in the play every year. We fulfil our promises to the saint through him. People come here to ask him to perform in the play. This year, he is going to play the

main character. El Macho Mayor or El Gueguense. I help him arrange his costume, to learn his lines, and things like that. This is the way I serve San Sebastian (Washan) during the festival.

(She drags her tresses, looking into the distance as though enveloped in fantasy). Washan, he is powerful and generous. Many years ago my neighbour made a vow to the saint. The vow consisted in that he would slaughter all the pigs for Washan fiesta's food that year. From early in the morning, he went to several houses carrying out his promise. Around three a clock he went to a cantina to have some drinks with some friends, even though he knew there was one more slaughter to be done. They drank, ate and had a good time for about two hours. About five a clock a small girl came to look for him to go slaughter a pig at her parent's house. The neighbour told the child to tell her father to look for someone else, because he was very tired. So, the girl left, but about 10 minutes later my neighbour started to feel sick. He was not feeling well. He could not control his muscles any longer; he had become paralysed. His wife who had been notified, and his friends started to become very worried. They implored Washan to forgive him, to give him a second chance. They cried, and cried but that man was like a stone, totally numbed. A few hours later in the hospital he came back from that condition and became well again to the relief of wife and friends. That man told me later that he had learned a valuable lesson that day. He told me that he had witnessed the power and benevolence of Washan in his own flesh and blood. That's why I believe in the power of Washansito (diminutive of Washan).

On Festival Day

The church is crowded with deities, devotees, spectators, performers and the odd tourist. The deities (San Sebastian, the virgin Marry, and Jesus Christ), the popular performers (in their guises), devotees and spectators mix in a collective communion of happiness, devotion and godly pleasure. Today San Sebastian is king. Before the saint bearers carry him off, he is clothed in the finest satins, silks, and linens. He is placed on display in the Cathedral for the adoring devotees, who kiss him, ask for miracles, toss money at him, and cry out, in absolute magical adoration. When the Catholic Eucharist is concluded and Washan is carried to the street by adoring multitudes, dance and music breaks in boisterous carnival inside and outside the church. Bells ring, firecrackers go off, balloons and confetti fill the sky, and music and dance blend in a communal ecstasy. Dancers, performers, spectators, and the religious image create a world that is both fictitious and real, raucous and articulate, blasphemous and worshipful, eclectic and unified.

The Gueguense performance, as well as the other dances of *El Toro Guaco*, *Los Diablos*, *El Gigante*, and *El Viejo y la Vieja*, mingle with the people in the procession escorting the saint through the streets of Diriamba towards the town of Dolores, 4 kilometres north. Once in Dolores, San Sebastian clashes amicably with the two other religious images, the patron saints of San Marcos (San Marcos) and Jinotepe (Santiago).

In the main street of that town the crowds accompanying the three religious images celebrate once more with additional firecrackers, music and dance. In the afternoon the celebrants will slowly make their way back to Diriamba. The few kilometres of road between the two towns are filled with dozens of music bands, improvised bars, and dancing inebriated devotees. San Sebastian will stay in the Town of Dolores; he will be brought back the 27th of January by a similar procession. Once they are back in Diriamba, dancers and devotees make their way to the *enramadas* (a makeshift wooden structure built on the street) of the *Mayordomo* and the dance sponsor's. There they will eat and drink and dance one more time.

Don Cristobal Muses over the San Sebastian:

(Walking to his house with the ethnographer). I started participating in these activities when I was very young, I was twelve or thirteen, I'm not sure. Diriamba was a busy town back then. Every year people rushed into the city to celebrate the fiestas. The streets became dotted with folks arriving to town by foot, oxen pulled carts, mules, horses, donkeys and any other motorized vehicle they could find. In those few days of fiesta the smell of the town was transformed from an insipid everyday ambience to a fiesta blend of aromas, flower, fruits, perfumes and the sharp smell of gunpowder. The scent of people's perfumes mingled with the smells of dazzling fruits, flavourful foods and the comforting

aroma of wet hearth. Mangos, papayas, Yerba buena, coriander, and nysperos spotted the city with spontaneous whiffs of life.

Diriamba was beautiful in those days, with its narrow streets and colonial houses that appeared in the morning light as miniature castles in the shadows of the daybreak sun. At nightfall they seemed like small caves with the opposite effect of the fleeting sun. For me it was a breathtaking experience, I had grown up in the bush not so far from here. When my family and I moved to Diriamba, that's how the town was like, and that's what I remember the San Sebastian celebration being about in those days.

One day, when I was still a boy, I went to the street where a group of performers was rehearsing the dance of El Gigante. I was fascinated with the movements of the dancers' bodies, and their costumes' breathtaking colours. I was moved by the sound of the ancient instruments, the flute and the tambour (drum). That moment something came to me, from that moment on I wanted to become a performer of the Gigante play and dance for San Sebastian. I went home and with a little flute I managed to get, I started to practice intensely. A few weeks later I went back to the rehearsal, I showed them what I had learned. The older boys looked as though they wanted to laugh at me, I was only a chavalo, a boy, but the old man ignored them and said: "from now on you will be the pitero". That meant I would be the flute player. "I am old," he said. "A young lad should take the tradition," he concluded. That's how I started serving Washan. That's how I became involved with the celebrations. Now people come to see me when they want to put on an El

Gueguense or an El Gigante. After so many years I have become somebody respected. I have been doing El Gueguense for twenty years. This is how I am involved with El Gueguense this year.

The El Gueguense in the Festival

The performers of the *El Gueguense* dramatize their play's characters in the church and on the streets. Their characters' dialogues have been modified from the original script. Some dialogues are selected and others are dropped. The performance takes the characteristic of a theatre/dance with emphasis put on the physicality and gestures of the characters. Costumes are elaborate and intricate affairs. The silky and satiny vests are adorned with multicoloured sequins and silver and gold like metal pendants. Their hats are similarly adorned with trinkets, rendering them visually impressive. The masked characters emphasize their Spanish and animal- (mule)- like personas. As they go about dancing in the procession, each dancer has a helper, usually a family member, who is in charge of taking care of the dancer's costume and general well being.

The procession usually follows a route. This includes a stop at the house of the *Mayordomo* of the fiesta. As the procession winds its way through the narrow streets of Diriamba, people are amazed and amused by the dance. They are mystified by the displays of colours and sounds, while they try to make sense of the performers' spectacle

purported attitudes. There is a point in the procession where dancers and adherents blend in an organized chaos, giving the dancers very little space to perform. They, however, continue uninterrupted. They all dance, they all sing in dedicated rowdiness. The sounds of the procession' murmurs and the dancers' *chischils* (rattles) encompasses all. As the music and the noise envelop everyone, the movement of the dancers, their comic exaggerated steps and their body postures endure.

The *El Gueguense*, as a peoples' spectacle, is the sum of a scenic language from the colonized past, Spanish faces, dancing animals, defiance, and the present situations, local social politics. The main *macho* (or mule) is the *El Gueguense* or main character whose imposing licentious behaviour conveys "as much or more than words" (De Costa, 1992: 141) the contradictions of colonizer and colonized offering a moment for reflection in game. Gestures and body movements projected by these masked impostors thus recreate the eternal cultural, social, and political accommodation in Nicaragua.

The performers of *El Gueguense* come mainly from the working class of Diriamba. They are from several generations. Some of them are as old as 70, others as young as 7 years of age. They get involved in the dance for many reasons, including religiosity or fun. And others, especially kids, are pressured to do it by their parents. I interviewed a boy who simply told me that he came because his father asked him to. Others, especially the older ones, told me that it was a tradition in their families that they were continuing. Whatever the reason, all come to dance. I do not believe that there is a conscious intention from their part to participate in the evocation of rebelliousness in the

play at the beginning. However, it is my view that as they participate in the play, the majority realizes the importance of it in their lives and the community. Performers and audiences, the most common people in town, really admire the *El Gueguense* dance/performance. In Diriamba, it is not uncommon for most townspeople to express sadness for the apparent decline of the play. While I talked to people about the *El Gueguense*, they spoke very proudly of its representation. “It is about protesting injustices”, some said in my interviews, while others said it was about preserving history. No matter what the answer was, they all had a certain respect for the piece. There was also a sense that they wanted more control in the staging of the play. Needless to say, it was money that kept them from obtaining that control. The local politics of the town of Diriamba has had an impact in this sense as well. Many elite people gain notoriety by sponsoring the festivities or a dance. These figures later run for political office. The politics behind the organization of the fiesta is linked to the politics of running the town.

Commentary on the Performance and the Festival of San Sebastian

Bakhtin and El Gueguense

One may think that the carnivalesque atmosphere of the *El Gueguense* performance in the context of the San Sebastian festival could be assisted by a Bakhtinian carnival analysis. As Field sees it, the play can be “a carnival not of play but of power, and of the history of social and individual identities” that disrupts each other across time

(1999: 46). For Bakhtin, carnival is a site where people work out “in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-acted form, *a new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life” in a carnival attitude (Bakhtin, 1984, 123). A carnival attitude, thus, liberates man from hierarchical positions, as s/he perceives the world with new eyes. Laughter, street comedy, and tragedy are the ingredients that characterize this space (Bakhtin, 1984: 134–135). Furthermore, carnival creates a space where performers and spectators join as one. “In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communicates in the carnival act...” (Bakhtin, 1984: 122). Therefore, “[...] because carnivalistic life is life being drawn out of its usual rut, it is to some extent ‘life turned upside down’, ‘the reverse side of the world’...” (Ibid).

The San Sebastian’s *El Gueguense* performance has some of the characteristics that Bakhtin attributes to a carnival attitude. Within the context of a wider historical situation, the performance in the festival “may shape interpretations of the society’s past, mask social divisions by seeming to unite disparate groups in shared ritual, and provide opportunities for popular revelry...” (Beezley, Martin and French, 1994: xiii). The performers of the *El Gueguense* dress as Spanish types, and also as animals (mules). They behave in a disrespectful, rude and cynical manner towards the Spanish governor. Disrespect of the authorities in the play is part of a carnivalistic attitude. *El Gueguense*’s scatological humour deviates from the acceptable norms of behaviour in front of superior beings. In the presentation, a complete reverse of hierarchical positions does not exist but the conditions are set for defiance with the enlisted help of laughter and comedic

commentary.

There is another element in the performance that can be considered carnivalistic in the Bakhtinian sense. In the context of a macho culture, the fact that the dancers are mostly men is also worth noticing as a reversal of social positions. In Nicaragua, women or “gay men” have done most folkloric dancing. A total reversal of roles occurs in this context. It is known that pre-Columbian performances were the domain of males. Is this a continuation of this trend or the beginning of another? I can only speculate, here, that both systems, the pre-Columbian and the Spanish, were male dominated and thus excluded women. Thus this exclusion can perhaps be an extension of this pro-male bias. This exclusion is worth exploring, but I can only touch upon it here.

The play’s popular performance employs laughter, absurdity, and the farcical to tease out the absurdities of power structures for the public to see on the open. The gestures of the *El Gueguense* that indicate that he cannot hear the orders of the authorities make people laugh but also make them think about their own ways of defiance. “*Pues, hábleme recio, que, Como soy viejo y sordo no oigo lo wue me dicen...*” “Speak up, because, you know, I am deaf and old, I can’t hear what you are saying...” (Line 80 in Brinton, 1968, 23). It is not surprising that this element of revealed intention is kept in the danced performance, during the festivities, where the dialogue is reduced to a few lines. Thus, the theatre performance in the festival becomes the place where rulers and ruled negotiate a kind of ‘emancipation’ where “[T]he behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions...” (Bakhtin, 1984: 123).

State power, however imposed through narratives of rule, homogeneity, and

national identity, becomes an instrument of self-domination and also appear in the play as narratives. It is in the challenge to these discourses in the performances that “rituals represent and reinforce both the solidarity and contention found there” (Beezley, Martin and French, 1994: xxi). At the level of interaction between performers and the script in the public performance, the relationship does not yield a clear-cut understanding of rebelliousness. I believe that the level of defiance come across only tacitly in the enactment of the play. It is manifested in the recognition, by most, of the importance of the play as historically significant for lower classes, Indians and mestizo community. Thus, the *El Gueguense* performance cannot be considered a straightforward carnival that liberates people from hierarchical positions, as they perceive the world with new eyes. Even though laughter, street comedy and tragedy are the ingredients of the performance, not everyone is an active participant in the carnival act of defiance.

Unsettling Narratives

The relationship between power structures (government, media, and art), culture, and identity negotiations yield a certain cultural field (narrative and its consequences). This cultural field is manifested as interventions into the production and circulation of "cultural material", arts, institutions, communication agencies, and the like (Allor and Gagnon, 1996: 8). The articulation of a public discourse, like a play, a speech, is centred on many elements that make visible the relationship between the aesthetic, the political

and the social (Ibid). It follows that the contestations of homogenizing discourses about *El Gueguense* are manifested in the performances of the play as well.

When there is a certain national (government or elite) vision of a national identity articulated through the cultural field, the cultural field itself becomes a site to reject those imposed discourses. In our Nicaraguan case, for example, it is within the context of celebration that these contradictory discourses emerge. On the one hand, (through the elite narratives of national identity) the *El Gueguense play (its script)* becomes a marker of a national Mestizo identity. Politics in general is played within these accounts. On the other hand, *El Gueguense's* performance, in the religious festival, contests these narratives by the contours of localized histories and contingencies of everyday life and situations of the performers. The performance contradicts the official narratives that confer the play the image of the perfect Nicaraguan type. The performance deals, even in its short version, with defiance to power characterized in the nationalizing narratives. It is about discontent with the situations of absurd power, still present in Nicaragua today, in the form of an unjust and corrupt government. The performance of *El Gueguense* is the non-verbal expression of that discontent.

All of the performers I encountered belong to the most underprivileged and marginal sectors of Diriamba. Furthermore they are illiterate in the Western and elite sense. They know the performance for what they feel when they perform it, through what they experience in the performance, not through what they read about it. Their performance becomes a response, a performative discourse that contradicts the official one perpetuated by government officials. Oddly, the control of the performance still

resides in the powerful and elitist of Diriamba. These people are in a position to sponsor or cancel a performance at anytime.

The *El Gueguense* performance within the context of the San Sebastian Festivities has, besides the role of fulfilling religious vows for the participants, thus its own disrupting narratives. As will be seen, during the Festival, the rehearsals and performances disrupt and expose the contradictions of a narrative of order and power, homogeneity and rationality. The performance stands for questioning the morality and ethics of the government (government taxes, imposition of will) in the drama. This disruption allows an opening up of a space where those hidden tensions and contradictions become apparent to the actors and their audiences today. The performance forces these contradictions out into the open for everybody to see every year. Through the performance's discourses, the participants collectively and individually expose elite discourses that have little do with the everyday reality of the participants.

FIVE: THE PERFORMANCE

A PRESENTATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY, PERFORMING EL GUEGUENSE

Summary of (Gueguense) Event Five

As they all dance El Macho Raton, Gueguense takes the opportunity to ask for the hand of the governor's daughter, Lady Suchi-Malinche for his son Don Forsico. The governor agrees to their marriage for no apparent reason and they all dance one more time.

Gue.

Governor Tastuanes, you are certainly satisfied that my son has dances, finishing touches and caperings like the macho-Raton.

Gov.

No, I am not satisfied, Gueguense.

Gue.

Well, then, Governor Tastuanes, shall we not make a trade and a treaty between him, without a folly or a gift-tree, and the lady Suchi-Malinche?

Gov.

Do you not know of it already, Gueguense?

Gue.

I do not know it, Governor Tastuanes.

Gov.

My son, Captain Chief Alguacil, put a stop to labouring in the quarters of the Royal Secretary, and let him obey our order to enter my royal presence, with the lady Suchi-Malinche.

(The Alguacil goes to speak with the Royal Secretary.)...

Sec.

...Governor Tastuanes, let the bargain be for clothing, a petticoat from China, vest, feather skirt, silk stockings, shoes of gold, a beaver hat, for a son-in-law of Governor Tastuanes.

(The Secretary returns to his place, dancing with the Alguacil.)...

(The marriage takes place.)

Gov.

My son, Captain Chief Alguacil, let it be known in the quarters of my Royal Province that this good-for-nothing Gueguense is going to treat the Royal Court to a yoke of jars of Spanish wine...

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Setting up Ethnographic Scripted Scenes

This chapter is about “giving form to” an ethnographic experience through the contextual (historical, social and cultural) conjunctures and specificities of an intercultural and an intersubjective encounter. It is in the relationship between art (the performance) and audiences (actors, performers, and the ethnographer) where a way of being in the world is devised. The notion that art reflects or informs audiences about socio-cultural systems is valid, but most importantly, a cultural study should point to the relationship between art (whatever type) and audience, its presentation and evocation beyond the boundaries of our present conceptualisation of cultural knowledge. Thus, it is in the relationship of art (*Gueguense*) and audiences that the tools for inspiration of cultural selves or identities are evoked in the individual and collectivity within his/her social specificities (Miller, 1993: 49). This interaction or experiential moment creates possibilities that are beyond reproduction or reflection; it strikes the imagination of a universe contingently internal and external to the self. The prospects for a collective evocation of our ethnographic experience can be located in these same junctions. Cultural knowledge is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual, it is activated among people in the process of dialogic interactions (Bakhtin, 1984: 110).

The performance of *El Gueguense* in this chapter is important in two ways. Firstly, through the preparations, rehearsals, and the performance of the play, I had the opportunity to experience a theatrical and social negotiated existence in Nicaragua. I enacted those

experiences by way of theatrical workshops. By theatrical workshops I mean the communicative exchanges of worldviews between the participants and the ethnographer presented in these following scenes. In the field, I followed the activities of the members of the troupe in and out of the production of the play itself. I was able to assemble visual, audio, and written impressions of the ethnographic encounter. I utilized this ensemble of impressions and my own memory to outline an enactment of the ethnographic story. This enactment, as my point of views of the event discussed with all involved in the ethnographic process (the members of the group as audiences) is an exchange of ideas, point of views and other considerations. The answers to my rendition of events through these scripted scenes are thus challenged and negotiated.

The presentation that follows, loosely structured as a heteronomous⁵⁴ and an autonomous theatre play,⁵⁵ will be composed of a prologue, two acts with a number of scenes each, and an epilogue. These acts and scenes are intended to engage the reader in the process of the ethnographic experience where all the people involved present points of view, personal and collective interests, and priorities about the cultural experience revolving around *El Gueguense* and the ethnographic encounter. Each act will be divided into five scenes. These (scripted) scenes, dialogues, naive and sophisticated soliloquies⁵⁶ are not intended to be a mirror image of the experience, as we posited before, but an accumulation of views, and a rendition of them. It does not intend to be creative fiction either. If we need to label this, it is similar to what filmmaker Loni Ding has called *documemoir*. His work is about historical research with fictive storytelling; mine is empirical ethnographic and literary research with some fictive storytelling. It is the

betweenness of profane and sacred in the “pilgrimage as method” (Taussig, 1997: 198) where the contemporary can be illuminated.

Act One: (a prologue and five scenes). These scenes try to evoke the process of ethnographic first contact, and they are about the vicissitudes of ethnographic fieldwork and about overcoming problems. They illuminate the process of accommodating worldviews into a more or less academic and non-academic grammatical language. They introduce the characters in their immediate social and cultural positions. These scenes evoke accommodating worldviews in the process of intersubjective /intercultural communication.

Act Two (Five scenes and the epilogue). In these scenes the re-articulation of method and theory and the process of identity negotiation, underway in other domains of Nicaragua society, becomes visible. This is to present the viewer or reader with a negotiated process at two levels, that of the actors and the ethnographer and that of Nicaraguan identities underway in the play and the country as a whole. Without developing into a well-orchestrated theatrical plot, these scenes will enact the interstices of cultural negotiation and ethnographic intervention. The intention is not to come to a kind of resolution to the discussions underway but to evoke the spirit of human communication under particular contexts.

Through this practice I accept and interpret the challenges of my own and my informants’ own interpretations of the events because performance permits an enactment of experience (Paget, 1990: 143).

As method of reporting social knowledge, performance is complex, subtle, provocative, and dialogical. I call it a concretion (rather than an abstraction) of experience... Concretions hug the natural world, but not as exact equivalencies of natural form. They display movement, process, change and transformation. They are expressive, sensitive, and experience near. They resonate, they seem strangely familiar, and yet they are not (Paget, 1990:151).

The practice of interaction and of understanding each other will require the paraphrasing of utterances (enactments, questions, and the like). As Ott posited, decades ago, referring to the phenomenology of dialogue, “understanding demands a paraphrase” (Ott, 1967: 23). Once a dialogue partner paraphrases the thought process that meets him/her there is a good indication that s/he has understood. However, I would not pretend that this presentational ethnography was collectively written, as is the trend nowadays (Marcus, 1986, 1990; Field, 1999). I would propose, instead, that the presentation was collectively conceived, and phenomenologically committed to present various points of views. I worked through or discussed many of these ideas with those involved in the process. As further workshops are needed, my proposition is contingent and provisional. It is like an early draft of a play. This presentational ethnography, thus, tries to present the story as an open-ended proposition for not only the Nicaraguan “informants” and the ethnographer, but also the larger audience in the academic

community.

Following the performance, a section entitled “Making sense of the Presentation” will conclude the chapter. In this section I will try to analyse what we learned through the process and perhaps assess the risks and revelations of this approach.

Dancing with the Other: El Gueguense is Dead

Short Hand to Other Characters in the Presentational Ethnography

Practico and Romantico are two of the internal sides of Antonio, the ethnographer. These fictional characters wrestle for supremacy in his beleaguered subconscious.

The Intellectuals are: Solorzano, Cuadra, Mantica and Bolanos. They are all middleclass in their mid 60s.

Other dancers are kids and young men who also participate in the play.

Prologue

Ethnographer Self Positioning⁵⁷

Practico and Romantico

It is midnight and humid. In a small but comfortable room, the researcher (Antonio) appears

immobilized by his thoughts. He ponders the challenges ahead, the difficulty of ethnographic practice and the socio-cultural imperatives that impel it, and the internal contradictions of the endeavour. What are his intentions behind this project: is it a nihilistic undertaking? Is it productive to contemplate the parallels between his own intellectual ideas and those he aspires to study?⁵⁸ He does not know the answer. But he needs to go into a process that is mysterious without predictable outcome.

The room is almost dark with a small ray of light flooding in from the outside illuminating the ethnographer's head. Practico and Romantico, his internal voices enter the scene:

Romantico: *(He comes into the study and speaks loudly) Are you listening to me? Have you looked at Malinowski's diaries? Do they say something to you? What is it that you do? Do you do ethnography or is it something else? Does something else have a name? Do we know the name? Who cares about El Gueguense? Do you care? Does anybody care? Is it cultural difference what you are looking for? Or is it the exotic Other? What's the matter? Do you have many audiences? Do you have no audience? Who cares about the audience? Do you believe in Artaud's theatre and its double? Do you believe in theatre at all? Does rhetoric accommodate you? Do you have motives? What is your motivation? Do you question those motives? Do you believe in justice? Have you thought about justice? Is your role to care?*

Do you care? Have you read the newspapers today? Do they talk about violence? Is it violence against women? Kids? Do they talk about hunger? Are the poor eating well? Are they eating at all? What's the price of beans today? Do you think about those things? (With more intensity) Are you listening to me? Are you a good listener? Are you a good talker? Do you have a perspective? Do you know about any perspective? Did Taussig influence you? Or was it Brecht or Diane Taylor? Do you believe in the anthropology of nothingness?⁵⁹ Are you here to entertain? Do you know how? Do you have a role? Have you confused your roles? What is your role?

Practico: (Confused) Oh please, who are you, what do you want?

Romantico: I'm neither here nor there; I'm everywhere you are. I'm you and I'm not. I speak with many voices; I speak with no voice. I'm your other side or your others' sides. I'm here to keep you straight or to help you cheat a little. I'm here to keep you honest; I'm here to make you laugh. I'm everybody. I'm nobody. I came to talk. (Pause) Can we talk?

Practico: (Annoyed and half sleep) Is this a type of joke? And be quiet please. You're going to wake up the neighbourhood. There is nothing to talk about right now, or ever. Go away.

Romantico: (Whispering) I wanted to know your feelings about the script.

Practico: What script? (Silence). Why do you ask me that foolishness? Aren't

you the one who thinks like a playwright? You think too highly of fiction, content and form, or who knows what other nonsense. The dualists are correct, there are concurrent elements in the content. There are different ways of conveying the same content. To do otherwise is to neglect contextualization and analysis. Please...

Do you think this ethnographic work can be fictionalized in one of you silly scripts? What about people's realities? What about their human dimension eclipsed into unidimensional and monovocal mockeries? What about their realities being reduced to caricatures? Do you think this notion of yours can do justice to their 'real' story? (Pause). Do you still want to talk? Do you?

Romantico: (Unmoved). The issue is not about dualism or monism. It's about form/content in terms of its function, its intention. I should say the ethnographer's... or your intention... The dramaturgical workshops can help us make this a collective creation, a truly dialogical and polyphonic account. The power of mimesis goes beyond simple reflection of a superficial world. This has been proven and is an honest approach in the theatre. As Taussig has put it " understanding mimesis as both the faculty of imitation and the deployment of that faculty in sensuous knowing, sensuous Othering"⁶⁰ is what lies behind the understanding of the plurality of knowledges. You owe these people to be fair, I understand. I know they had their share of problems. But, remember "...cultural fictions are based

on systematic, and contestable, exclusions. These may involve silencing incongruent voices... or deploying a consistent manner of quoting, 'speaking for,' translating the reality of others".⁶¹ This is the way for us to get involved. We ought to get involved.

Practico: *(Expressive) Want my opinion? Don't get too involved; you are not working for the United Nations, nor are you Madre Teresa. Be objective, try to get the readings done, write like other successful anthropologists do. Play the game. Play it fair, play it fast. I'm not too interested in who did what to whom and why and when if it is not relevant to our story. Stick to the relevant content. The form, you know, will follow; it's your choice.*

Romantico: *(Sarcastic) Relevance. Ha, interesting. Maybe we could... just... I don't know ignore all "irrelevant" material, oh yes the text will be about nothing. The anthropological scientific authority of the West will legitimize it with its logic that transcends common sense. Ha, I know. Why not look for the most exotic feature here? Maybe we can talk about the high level of incest in Nicaragua, or the belligerent nature of these people, or what about their crazy diet of beans and rice. (Laughs) Perhaps that will fly well with you in your scholarly world.*

Practico: *You're not serious... (He shakes his head with disgust). What are you talking about? Incest, beans? Be serious.*

Romantico: What I'm talking about is that the aim of my enterprise, I mean your... I mean our enterprise, the ethnographic work, as Robothan has posited, should, "in addition to represent the people of a community, destabilize certain principles and anthropological concepts."⁶² These principles are predicated on a scientific authority "claimed by our academic discipline and ultimately derived from the political and academic supremacy of the West."⁶³ I'm talking about the self-reflective nature of ethnography moving beyond speech and into action.

Practico: You're complicating things, isn't that what we are doing, though? We are trying to present a story from the point of view of those involved; this is a matter of form, or narrational eclecticism⁶⁴ but also a matter of content, an intersubjective and intercultural presentation of a local way of seeing the world, a total different rationale. This way of seeing the world may be, or perhaps not a departure from Western rationality. But, can there be different rationales in a post-colonial world? I believe that at a very abstract level there aren't, I disagree with that assumption. The point is that there are different ways of seeing the world. To present that is our business.

Romantico: *(Conciliatory). Yes, I think I'm with you here, as long as the departure from the Western rationale is not only a rhetorical device utilized by the anthropologist to convince his/her readers. You agree then that there are not many problems with a presentational approach to ethnographic writings. The development of a cultural manifestation such as the performance of El Gueguense gives form to a presentation of our ethnographic encounter which is a local way of understanding the world, the people's localized problematic world.*

Practico: *(Excited). Yes, yes. But the problem is that the presentation is necessarily a textual one. And that is also part of a Western Rationale. I see the issue as a means of working within the ethnographic account rather than displacing it altogether. Intercultural communication means an agreed upon language. The point is to make the ethnographic account more into a general instrument of the intercultural and inter rational encounter. (Over excited). We're both right.*

Romantico: *Relax, don't get too excited. Remember one thing, no matter how different we are, we're still just two voices in the mind of the researcher at this moment. And whether we like it or not, we sometimes speak as one. I'm glad we agree. Do you agree then?*

Practico: (Unconvinced). I guess you exist to complicate my life. It was confusing enough the way it was before you came to talk about plays, scripts, rationale, and anthropological philosophical nonsense. I had it all figured it out. Description and interpretation is what propels ethnography. I want to keep it simple. Please go away!

Romantico: I can't do that. I have to bother you, it's my job (Laughs)

The researcher comes back to his previous state of mind unable to write or sleep. He stands up and walks to the desk. The ray of light follows him.

Lights off

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Doctor Gallardo Establishes his Credentials

Doctor Gallardo: (His luxurious house as backdrop. To the audience). You're different. You and I are different fellows. You and I know what culture is, we appreciate it. We preserve it. As you should understand, it has been a struggle for me to preserve El Gueguense. To preserve it from obliviousness, from the gutter.

I've made numerous phone calls, I've talked to people, and I've made an attempt to... I've also spent my own money. I've written on the subject, you know? I'd give you a copy of my book but I don't have any left. Sorry. You can buy it at the bookstore; it is only 20 Cordobas. I appreciate your interest in the play. Do you know that ordinary people do not appreciate El Gueguense? When it comes to cultural imperatives they are absent-minded. I invite them to participate in the revival of their own history, their own past. What do they do? They ignore the call. They come drunk. They demand money. They question my intentions. To get into this mess it means to get disappointed, to lose sleep. It means to waste time. (He puts his hands in his trousers front pockets.) Nobody is interested, this is a solitary effort. Nobody helps, not economically, nor in any way. I'm sorry to tell you this, but you should know. Don't expect to see a smooth road towards a well-defined and well-performed play in January. You won't see a great performance here. Get that into your head. Perhaps many years ago that was the case. I think people have lost interest and those who participate are ignorant of the importance of the piece. Do you know that this is one of the most important plays of Nicaragua? (His voice intensifies). Do you know that there have been numerous studies about it? It tells about our

Nicaraguanness. It tells something about us that is very important to preserve for future generations. (Disappointed). But you will see, it will be a struggle to even put some people together to rehearse. That is my experience, I don't want to disappoint you, but you should know. I'm warning you. (Doctor Miranda lets a little smile fall through his lips as he exits.) You are warned.

Lights go off.

Scene 2: First Rehearsal: Diriamba

Doctor Gallardo, Antonio and Don Cristobal.

One block west of the cathedral, on a dusty road in front of Doctor Gallardo's house, the first rehearsal is about to take place. On one side of the road, houses of multiple colours and shapes emerge. Some are red and blue or grey with big doorframes, high ceilings, and oversized sidewalks. Others are white, green, and rose with elegant structures and amusing minute verandas. On the other side of the road, the houses are similarly colourful and shapely. The light is cherry colour. The street at this time of the afternoon, (it is five a clock), is notably noisy. The sound of dogs barking, children playing, and the dancers' chischils (rattles) rattling encompass people, animals, and musical instruments into an unusual congregation. The young and old dancers come from many barrios of Diriamba. Their humble attires contrast neatly with the opulence of Doctor Gallardo,

who from the high sidewalk of his house looks on attentively. The names of the performers are checked off a list that Doctor Gallardo holds in his hands. Don Cristobal, in his usual attire, directs the small crowd of performers/dancers to form one big circle on the street. He indicates to others including Antonio the ethnographer, who seems a bit lost, to go inside the circle.

Doctor Gallardo: (He shouts) Roberto Rosales, Ramon Ruiz....

Public: Presente, Presente...

Antonio: (Walks towards the rehearsal site. To the audience). As I go to Doctor Gallardo's house to rehearse El Gueguense, that old play that has occupied my time for a while, a mixture of excitement and trepidation threatens to invade me. I'm finally going to experience the play first hand. At last, I'm going to meet face to face the play's protagonists. I invent heroes in my head, I think of colours, costumes, and beautiful masks. I also imagine possible problems. This is the first time I will see these people. I had been in town for almost two months waiting for the group to rehearse. My moment has arrived.

As he walks, he expects to see an organized forum with a stage instructor or a director arranging the play with some theatrical precision. After all, this is a play that has been around for some time now. However, when he arrives to the stage, which is the street in front of Doctor Gallardo's house, he encounters a disorganized group of kids blasting

the rattles.

Antonio: (Surprised). These kids are about 10 to 13 years of age. What's this interest in the dance from these kids? What's in it for them? Where are the adults? What is going on?

Don Cristobal: (To Doctor Gallardo) The (viejos) adults haven't come yet. (Pensive) I think I have too many kids. (Pause) We should wait.

Doctor Gallardo: (Consternated) It's the same problem every year: they say they'll come and they don't show up. We cannot do things like that; if they don't show up twice in a row they are out. Out! Do you hear me? Out. (Firmly) I don't want drunks either.

Don Cristobal. (Not showing any sign of concern). They'll show up. This is as important to them as it is for all of us. At least we have all the musicians here. They're very responsible people. (He glances at the guitar player who flashes his teeth). I think we could do a good job for Washan this year.

Doctor Gallardo: See what can you do with the people you have. There is that new person there. (Pointing to Antonio). Give him a

character; he seems okay.

Don Cristobal: Okay. (To Antonio without introducing himself) You should play one of the principals (inside of the circle), like the Alguacil. Those from the inside are the Spanish characters. They have a lot of responsibility, they have more speeches. Go to the inside next to that kid wearing the green hat. (To everyone) Okay Machos, a bailar, dance. (A tremendous roar interrupts Don Cristobal for a few seconds. (The group responds: yea, vamos, and a bailar). Musicians play.

The circle of dancers with four characters inside is completed; the musicians start to play music of violin, guitar and indigenous drum. The melody is soft, and a little out of tune. The music is monotone and tedious; it is called La Accion (or the action). Spectators gather around the messy spectacle. Screams, voices that are barely intelligible blend with the already noisy cacophony of sounds.

Don Cristobal: (He starts to dance to indicate how it is done to the new recruits) Vamos machos. Go mules, dance! Like this, asi, vamos asi, like this.

During the rehearsal the young men and some of the adolescent boys accost each other with sexual innuendoes such as “cuidado se te va” “be careful it could go up your...” or “que paso Playo” “what’s going on, homosexual” and the like. But this is

done in a friendly manner. Such verbal insinuations definitely contrast with the soft movements of the dance. As this behaviour increases, the music and the dance are not disturbed. This verbal act is not at all bodily violent; it is a battle of words.

*Don Cristobal: (Shouting to two girls in the audience). You girls come in.
(To the rest). Don't stop; keep it up.*

Ten minutes into the dance three teenage boys and two adults incorporate themselves into the dance. Don Cristobal has decided on a place for Antonio inside the circle who thinks about the gaffes of ethnographic endeavours as he stumbles on his own feet. Everybody else seems to know what do. Even the little ones are dancing with poise.

Antonio: (To Audience, excited). As the musicians gather their instruments we start to rattle the chischils in unison. The sound of chischils is discomfoting but at the same time contagious. The vibrations of the metallic rudimentary instruments penetrate every part of one's body in a monotonous Hiss, Swish, shh, shh. Every time, the Swish penetrates deeper and deeper. Swish, swish, and swish. The dance steps are very simple, one step forward and one step backward, and they have to be coordinated with the music. For a moment I think I follow them acceptably, but in the middle of my confusion, I realize I follow no one. I sense that I'm the only one not moving in correspondence with the music. Everybody is going in a different direction than me. They seem very

happy as a flash of light illuminates their faces. They are in their environment expressing themselves in front of an impromptu audience.

Two girls are incorporated into the circle for the last two songs, St Martin and Retirada. The two small girls focus very hard on the feet of the other dancers. They seemed transported into another physical plain. This first rehearsal seems to me a bit disorganized but encouraging. This ensemble of people from different generations performs and rehearses. It resembles a type of a communal ritual. Those of us dancing inside the circle gradually slow our tempo to a minimum. (He does some steps) The dancing starts to feel enjoyable, physically comforting, emotionally charged.

Once the songs are finished the two girls reintegrate into the audience. The music ends, the people stop dancing, the rehearsal is over. Everybody disbands. They all promise they will come next week at the same time.

Lights off

Scene 3: Can I Dance with You? Antonio's Monologue

The city of Diriamba is calm and clean. It's symmetrically well delineated with imposing colonial houses of many colours and shapes in attractive little streets. The narrow and

breezy lanes channel the chilly winter wind into the crisp night. These houses were erected when the town saw more affluent days. Diriamba and the whole department of Jinotepe as a whole was the coffee growing capital of Nicaragua up until the 1970's. Today Diriamba conserves its ancient charm. As Antonio walks the streets, he tries to make sense of the research and its conjunctures. The stars appear in the sky to define the night, beautiful and clear.

Antonio: (To audience). I wasn't accepted right away by most of the performers. They looked at me with suspicion. I could see it in their eyes and in the way they ignored me most of the time I asked a question or intended to make eye contact. As you could see I'm obviously not from here. (He looks at himself). Yes I'm Nicaraguan, but I'm from the North: different way of speaking, walking, different mannerisms. I'm also influenced by 15 years of living in North America. Is my attitude the right one? Am I doing things right? This is different. Perhaps I'm trying too hard, or not hard enough. What is the right approach? I don't know. Should I care at this point? Perhaps it's my way of dressing? Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. They are nice people, I'm sure, but they are not willing to open up to me, not even a smile. Yesterday, I was finally able to talk a bit with a young guy; he is maybe 21 or 30 it's difficult to tell the age. This is progressing slowly. Rehearsal,

rehearsal, rehearsal, talk, talk, talks. Now I remember, I have to visit some informants in their homes tomorrow. Anyways the conversation with the youth was trivial, mostly about the steps of the dance. We talked about this and that. We talked about the municipal elections that are coming soon. I'm going home frustrated, feeling that perhaps they will never open up to me, or not soon enough. But something else tells me that they eventually will tell me all. They'll also tell me unsolicited information. Things I could definitely do without. About their parents, their brothers and sisters about their economic problems, about how poor they are, how gossipy their neighbours are, and how hard life is in Nicaragua. I'm sure about that. I 'm going home to my little apartment with a few questions in my mind. What does it mean to perform El Gueguense for them? What do they understand about El Gueguense performance in contrast to the notion of it believed by elite Nicaraguan intellectuals? What goes through the mind of each of the dancers while performing? Is it similar to what I feel? Do they even care about these questions?

There are aspects about this rehearsal that have started to speak to me. There are, I think, common cultural traits that can be found anywhere. A performance, whether as an organized one (such as this), or an impromptu one (such as a political gathering), seems

to enact cultural forms. In that sense, all performances are similar regardless of the culture. As Julie Stone Peters said referring to theatre productions: “the critique of productions with universalistic overtones fails to acknowledge that inter-cultural communication relies on recognition of difference as well as sameness”.⁶⁵ The things that strike me about the actors of the El Gueguense are very similar to things that strike me about actors anywhere. They all want to communicate but the way they do it is perhaps different.

Movie scenes of past ethnographic experiences lived by different generations of anthropologists and ethnographers in different countries are projected on the walls of the city. Clifford Geertz places his bets as a spectator in a Balinese cockfight, Nancy Scheper- Hughes witnesses death without weeping in Brazil, Steven Feld performs sounds of birds while the Kaluli watch him curiously. Taussig plays the role of the ethnographer in the Power of the State.

End of scene.

Scene 4: Talking to Don Cristobal

Antonio and Don Cristobal

Don Cristobal’s house is small for so many people; there is a table in the northeast side

of the main room that is also a living room during the day and bedroom at night. On the southeast corner of the room there are two beds with people still sleeping. The two beds are spilling over with several kids each. On the northwest there is a small plastic wall that divides from the main room a tiny chamber. Broken ceramic tiles on some parts of the floor reveal the exquisiteness of previously enjoyed Italian stoneware. The walls of the house are crumbling. A wide striking but now dilapidated wooden door indicates a more economically endowed past. The same wooden door that leads to the noisy street bangs a few times with the strong wind typical of the afternoons of Diriamba. There is a small door that leads to a patio where there are many fruit trees: mango, lemon and Maranon. A delicious aroma emanates from its mix. This little patio is perhaps the real living room. It is equipped with chairs and medium sized stones that are utilized to sit on and an outdoor wood-burning stove. The two men converse animatedly.

Don Cristobal: (Sitting at the table, he looks around and gathers a couple of plastic bags containing blue, red and yellow silk and other objects. Out of the bag he takes thread and silver and gold trinkets of many shapes. He also takes out old coins and a faded manuscript. He places the bags on the table, his working place. His eyes are attentively fixed on the objects. A piece of silk is in his hands. He sighs with a wide smile on his face). I always loved to travel but I've never been far away. I was on the Atlantic Coast once with a group of dancers. That was a beautiful trip. I'll never forget the

Atlantic Coast, it's different than here. But that was before. My pension from the municipal government is too small to do anything but eat very badly. I live here (pointing to the four walls of the house). No point talking about it; everybody is in the same situation in Nicaragua, we are poor. You aren't asking me, but this is not my house, this is my daughter's house. We are about 10 people living here. I worked for the municipal government for over forty years; I cleaned the streets of Diriamba. What did I get for that, you would ask? Everyday very early in the morning I cleaned, I swept, I mopped, I washed, I did everything. And because I don't know how to read or write that's what I did. They said I was a good worker. Today I get 200 Cordobas (20 dollars) a month pension. (His voice changes from an expository tone to an inquisitorial one). Is that the way it should be?

I do dance El Gueguense or El Gigante out of pure devotion. I do not charge anything for helping people organize these plays. That's the difference between working for people and working for Washan. Things have changed nowadays.

Antonio:

(He conceals his excitement through a casual tone). That's very interesting. Don Cristobal what does El Gueguense mean

to you?

Don Cristobal: (He avoids the question. We don't know if it is on purpose or not, it is not clear) Most Mayordomos (sponsors of the fiestas) and Padrinos (sponsors of the dance) assisted the dance in the past as it should be. I mean they provided support for the dance, things like food; nacatamalitos, platanitos, rosquillitas. Everyone was well fed and happy. The Mayordomo and Padrino were not allowed to take money from the dancers because both the sponsors and the dancers had a vow with the saint. The dancers had to buy their own adornments and costumes, and the sponsors had to pay for the musicians. It was understood.

Antonio: That explains then the decline of the Gueguense even though some believe it represents Nicaragua?

Don Cristobal: When I learned about El Gueguense I was just a boy.

Antonio: Was it a religious vow?

Don Cristobal: Yes and no, but even if you are not fulfilling a religious vow, you have a commitment to perform.

Antonio: (Extends his hand with a cigarette). Do you want one?

Don Cristobal: (Takes it and puts it in his shirt pocket). The commitment to participate is what's important.

Antonio: You should light up, they are mild, Canadians. Some people participate to entertain themselves then?

Don Cristobal: They have their personal reasons. Everyone has a different relationship with the play. This depends on the relationship of the person with Washan. You see?

Antonio: Yes, I see. Why do you do it then? What does it tell you? What do you feel?

Don Cristobal: Well, it's...

Antonio: (Over anxious) The Gueguense, what does it mean for you?

Don Cristobal: (With a dubious half- laugh he proceeds). To dance El Gueguense is about tradition. It's to know who is who in the San Sebastian and the dance. I'm happy, they are happy that person is a dancer or that person is the Padrino. They say, you see, so and so is going to sponsor El Gueguense, or so and so is dancing this year. So they feel happy that they have continued their devotion or their tradition. (Nostalgic). But, this dance is falling down, it is dying. It's not the same; it's not like before. The old dancers don't dance anymore. The new people, forgive me, don't engage anybody.

Antonio: That's sad, the Gueguense is dying.

Don Cristobal: The new people don't know much about it, the dance and the fiesta.

Antonio: That could be a problem. Are you talking about the performers or the organizer, when you say the people don't know much about the fiesta?

Don Cristobal: (He continues.) The spirit of the dance is being lost. (A radio next door plays some Cumbia music as the bells of the Basilica announce something, a mass, a funeral, or a celebration). The Gueguense was one of the most beautiful dances around. People loved to hear the characters speak their speech. They paid attention to the words, the mannerism of the characters, and the vivid colours of the attires. That means something to them. I was always happy to participate in the dance.

Antonio: But Don Cristobal, I don't understand why you talk about El Gueguense as though it's already dead. We are still rehearsing every Sunday. The costumes are there; the dance is still beautiful. I've been reading about it for so many years. I'm very happy to participate. The kids I see rehearsing seem very happy also. They're proud of what they do. Do you agree?

Don Cristobal: (He totally ignores Antonio's remarks) When I was a sponsor I accommodated everyone. I was not rich, I did it modestly of course, but it was a real communal experience. Even today people tell me that I was fair with everything. I fed everyone and didn't complain.

I even fed the cuidadores, those people who take care of the dancers. Things are supposed to be like that. To put on a good performance of El Gueguense one has to feed everyone, make everyone feel at home.

Antonio: Yes, yes, but...

Don Cristobal: (Interrupting). This should be like that, the cuidadores are important too. During the dance and the procession they take care of the performers. Things are very tough nowadays. Thieves may be tempted to steal something from the dancers. The cuidadores protect the dancers. Years ago there was this dancer who had a costume adorned with hundreds of silver coins. I don't know if he still has it. That wouldn't be possible today.

Antonio: Care for another? (Offers Don Cristobal another cigarette, Don Cristobal takes it but saves it for later once again).

Don Cristobal: (He proceeds) El Gueguense was a beautiful dance. In the past the costumes were exquisite. They were adorned as in ancient times. The vests were embellished with hummingbird plumes. The hats sported real silver trinkets and roses, and the masks were of cedar, carefully detailed. Everyone took pleasure in getting his or her costumes ready each year. Today all the costumes are owned or are at the charge of the Padrino of the dance. Doctor Gallardo for

example is in charge of that today. These were passed on to him from the previous Padrino and to that Padrino from the previous one, and so on. Every dancer knew how to make them before.

Antonio: Do you still make these costumes then?

Don Cristobal: I make them all myself. I 'm also employed to fix them every year. Doctor Gallardo asked me. "Do you fix Gueguense adornments, the hats for example?" How many hats are there? I said. "There are twelve," He said. And I gave him my price. I'll charge only for my work. I don't charge for my expertise. I said to him 800 Cordobas (about 80 dollars). "That's okay." He replied.

Both men become silent for a moment. They look at each other. Don Cristobal goes to the little room and comes back with a little wooden flute. He starts to play the indigenous melodies of El Gigante. Lights die down. Pi pi ri pi pi. Pi pi ri pi pi. Pi pi ri pi pi.

Scene 5: Don Jesus House

Dangerous Explosives

The road that goes to Don Jesus' house extends a few blocks West of the Basilica of San Sebastian, the main Catholic Church in Diriamba. His small house is located one block before the local cemetery on the right side of the street. The paved street in front of his

*dwelling is at the same level as the house's windows. This house and many others on this side of the street are poorly built on a rocky hill. We see a small sign outside the front door that reads: **NO SMOKING. DANGER, WORKING WITH EXPLOSIVES.** Inside the tiny house, there are two big plastic containers; one has gunpowder, the other has paper strips, ropes, and small wooden sticks. Flanking the containers, on the left, there is a table with all kinds of objects, knives, strips of papers, and pieces of cardboard. On the West side of the room, there is a small newspaper and wooden frame that divides the room in two. This improvised space serves as Don Jesus and Doña Maria's bedroom. Everyone else sleeps in the main area. There are two small beds opposite to the patio door. The ceiling of the house is very low that once inside one feels as in a small cave. The dirt floors are bumpy. Don Jesus is laying down on one of the beds. Doña Maria, her son and daughter in law work at the table preparing firecrackers. A small child cries in the patio.*

Doña Maria: (Excited) Get up Jesus, Get up, that's why you went to get drunk again?

Quickly get up he is coming. He is outside.

Don Jesus: (Asleep) What?

Doña Maria: Pero hombre, the man is coming. Do you want him to see you like that?

Don Jesus: Okay, okay, I'm fine (He stumbles towards the working table). Oops, where is he? (Everybody at the table looks at him with disdain. A combination of gunpowder and alcohol odour invades the air.) Okay. I'm

up. Where is he? (Antonio enters carrying a knapsack with a tape recorder, books and other personal things).

*Antonio: (The room is very dark, at this point we hear only voices) !Hola! is this the house of Don Jesus, the man who dances El Gueguense?
(Total silence. Doña Maria comes to the door with a candle)*

Doña Maria: Yes, yes entre. Es usted El muchacho que quiere aprender a bailar? (She illuminates his face, they both smile)

Antonio: Gracias, yes I'm the one who wants to learn to dance El Gueguense.

Don Jesus: (His voice coming from a corner of the room where he is sitting on the bed). It's easy; it'll take you no time at all. You are young.

Antonio: Is that Don Jesus?

Doña Maria: Yes, come here. I will give you some light. (To Antonio whispering) He went for a drink or two. This man is ruined.

Don Jesus: Come on in sit here next to me (At this point he is acting very sober, you can see that he is making an extra effort to maintain his composure). I'm glad you came to visit. I'll tell you... The difference between today's Gueguense and the one we left behind is simple. We abandoned it, most people left; it's not the same. For me El Gueguense is a big thing (he gestures with his trembling hands) it is always something big. My desire to help in the celebration of Washan and to put on an El Gueguense is always

there. Not with money, of course, I am very poor, you know. I never do it for money. I do it for love, for respect to my patron saint San Sebastian. It's like when one is a little kid, one wants to play with other kids. One feels part of something big. That's the way I feel about the performance.

Antonio: You probably have been doing it for a long time, haven't you?

Don Jesus: About fifty years. At the beginning I was interested in participating in the El Gigante, or even the El Toro Guaco. El Gueguense was the one that captivated me. I was young, and even though I don't know how to read and write my memory never fails me. I had to learn the lines, my wife would read them to me, and I would memorize them. While performing my part I've come to be aware of my lines very carefully. I take my turn as we proceed dancing. You've to be aware and very attentive when your turn comes, even though it's very noisy. There are seven characters trying to speak. The heavy roles are El Gueguense, The Governor, Don Forsico, Don Ambrosio, and The Alguacil. There is also music going on.

Antonio: Very engaging. (Enthused).

Don Jesus: (Don Jesus' family continues working but they pay attention to his performance. He gets up and assumes a dramatized position: Hands extended, and chin upright. He starts to move up and down, his voice drops some lines in a native language). Pues sí cana amigo capitan alguacil, somocague nistipanpa, Sres. Principales, sones, mudanzas,

*velancicos, necana, y palperesia D. Forsico timaguas y verdad, tin
hermosura, tin bellezas tumiles mo Cabildo Real...⁶⁶*

Antonio: You know the entire play in Nahuatl then?

Don Jesus: Yes, I used to have the original book but the rats ate it. (He grabs a plastic bag and takes out some loose pages which he shows to Antonio) This is the only thing left.

Antonio: Why do you think the dance is changing?

Doña Maria: (Interrupts the dialogue from her working table) Most of the old dancers are dead.

Don Jesus: That's true, others converted to another religion. They are Bible people now.

Dona Rosa: It's against their religion to participate in things like these for them. Before, there used to be two Gueguense performances per festival. There were competitions between the performances. Once our family won for putting on the best one. My mother was a very good Madrina. She sponsored the dance for many years. Lack of money forced her to stop. The music is very expensive. 1000 to 2000 Cordobas per festival. My husband (she looks at Don Jesus) tried to put it on some years ago but it was impossible. The economic situation has taken the Gueguense from us.

Antonio: That's sad. Can you put on a modest one?

Doña Maria: The problem is that there is only one group of musicians, who know the music of El Gueguense.

Don Jesus: Yes, there are only a couple of musicians who play that music. There is one violinist in town who knows the music for the play. There are seven songs in the play. Actually there are fourteen but they only play half for the performance in the festival. You have to learn them from someone. They are passed on. (He starts to dance to a non-existing music) You dance this music slowly. The music leads you, slowly, like this, like this. Some songs are faster (he picks up his tempo). The songs of the Machos (mules) are fastest. The characters from inside the circle are smooth, gracious with their bodies. Slowly like this. One doesn't need to jump, let the hips do their job. Like this, like this. (Everybody in the room starts to follow him). Yes like that. With your right hand playing the chischill (rattle). Like that, slowly.

The candle lights start to go off one by one until only one is left dimly illuminating Don Jesus dancing. His moving body disappears into the darkness of the room. Silence.

End of Act One

Scene 1: Mondongo Soup and Intellectual Talk

The patrons move around with difficulty in the midst of tables. The members of the staff come and go from the kitchen, just in front of the patio- restaurant, to serve the clients. The patio fills up rapidly as the murmur of people, the smell of Mondongo, (a Nicaraguan soup consisting of tripe and yucca roots,) is served. It is Sunday morning and both sides of the street outside the picturesque restaurant are packed with cars that barely leave room for anything to pass through. The tables are all arranged in neat rows under higeras, mahoganies, madronos, and other trees. Colourful and fleshy fruit hangs everywhere. Today Doña Coco's restaurant, at the outskirts of Diriamba's neighbouring town of San Marcos, has special guests. These illustrious men come here occasionally to eat Mondongo, drink rum and discuss; politics, cultural issues, and other literary stuff. The sky is clear. It's a perfect Nicaraguan day. At a table just in front of some coffee bushes Cuadra (literary Vanguardia movement founder), Solorzano (a fictional Nicaraguan intellectual), and Mantica (a Nicaraguan linguist) prepare to have a pleasant Sunday morning Nicaraguan style. They are later joined by Bolaños, a Nicaraguan Marxist literary critic and Indian advocate, assassinated by the Somoza's National Guard in 1978. Only the intellectuals can see Bolaños. The three impatiently wait for their giant bowls of soup, shifting their feet under the table in silence. Cuadra interrupts their silence.

Cuadra: (He looks attentively at people sitting around, enjoying their meal and chatting away. He moves his head slightly towards the others. His voice is calm, profound, intentionally marked.) Gentlemen... I fought with Don Gil in the first Nicaraguan war. As a young boy I was an Indian and a Spaniard, they wounded me in unison. Bilingual my war cry was. They gave me bow and arrow on my white side and bullets on my brown pain.⁶⁷ (Silence).

Solorzano: (He raises his glass). Salud. Very beautiful, indeed. (Smiling). This business of being Nicaraguan is not very complicated for you Cuadra. Is it? We are dual, hybrids aren't we? Our duality is in our blood.

Mantica: (To Cuadra with frankness). There is certain truth about that but without diminishing your poetic prowess, I think there's more to it than mere dualism. (With a more serious voice). However, let me be categorical, if I may, we are not Nicaraguans because we love rum, eat Mondongo, or indulge in... you know, gossip.

Solorzano: (Trying to create a rift between Mantica and Cuadra) (With an alarmed voice). You mean that the fact that we're mischievous, insolent, rebellious and passionate doesn't have anything to do with our mestizaje? What then? We are the product of both Iberians and Indians. We are

*Gueguenses, aren't we? We are not Chinese. (He takes the physical postures of the Gueguense dance, chischil in hand)(They laugh).
Seriously, where is the soup? They are very slow today.*

Doña Coco, the owner of the establishment, walks to the intellectuals' table followed by two waitresses with two bowls of soup each. The three men look at her attentively as she clears the table of an empty bottle of rum and proceeds to place the silverware on a pile at the centre of the table. She then places four bowls of soup, one at each place of the table.

Dona Coco: (Without looking at them). As usual, four soups, eh? One for Señor Cuadra, one for Señor Solorzano, one for Senor Mantica and the last one for Señor Bolaños. (She looks at them and smiles)

Cuadra: Thank you Coco..

They proceed to eat their soup interrupting occasionally to serve and to drink glasses of rum and to comment on the deliciousness of the meal. A mist of grease emanates from their table. The smell of sweet, minted beef, lemon washed tripe and the earthy tinge of boiled vegetables combines the air with the fresh wind blown by the trees above. Their feeding is interrupted by Bolaños who approaches the table.

Bolanos: Sorry. I'm late as usual.

*Solorzano: It's okay. We know you are very busy organizing unions up there.
(Laughs).*

Bolanos: Yes, there is no democracy up there. Anyways what's up?

Mantica: We ordered soup for you. It's getting cold. (Points to it).

Bolanos: I'm sorry, forgot to let you know. We don't eat regular food up there. We lack the sense of smell and the sense of taste.

Mantica: And I would add the sense of humour. That's too bad. (They laugh again, with the exception of Bolaños).

Bolanos: So, what are you discussing today?

Mantica: I was telling my friends here that there is more to being Nicaraguan than the so-called dualism of mestizaje or the hybridity of colonialism, notwithstanding its importance. Let's, for instance, bring the example of el Gueguense which for hundreds of years has been rooted in both Iberian and indigenous historical outcomes. These

consequences nonetheless are the outcome not of a perfect mestizaje but are the effect of a political economy of conquest. The secret of understanding the dialogics of these historical consequences of conquest lies in understanding the language behind the Gueguense manuscript.

Bolanos: But why complicate things. It's clear to me what the Gueguense is all about. I agree with Mantica. The play does not narrate a decisive sociocultural victory of one group over another. To me, it tells about the struggle of one group trying to get rid of another's oppressive power. It's about resistance. It's that simple.

Cuadra: Things aren't as simple as that. The fact that El Gueguense play is still alive is not due to simple resistance or an irrational or superstitious popular mentality. It is because its main protagonist is a character that any Nicaraguan carries in his/her blood. The El Gueguense is more than our first theatre piece. Its bilingualism and its simple plot is true, it is the critique of authority. Its social burlesque is still clear even today. The El Gueguense is without a doubt the first character of Nicaraguan literature. It's in this character that one can summarize the characteristics of Nicaraguans. It's the first satire of a people who is satirist; the El Gueguense is the testimony of the personality of a people that produced

him.

Mantica: But your notion implies a definite victor. The victory of Mestizaje implies a victory of Spanish over Nahuatl, Iberianism over Indianness and so on. I have a problem with that. According to my studies of El Gueguense script, semantically speaking the Spanish tongue never totally dominated the Nahuatl language. On the contrary, the characters in the play speak in what appears to be Spanish but the construction of the language, I mean, the order of words of the Nicaraguan Spanish is Nahuatl. In this sense, the Spanish is apparently dominating over Nahuatl but the Nahuatl resists. You see, I think we can extend this understanding to the el “Habla Nicaraguense”. I mean Nicaraguan speech.

Bolanos: I do agree with you. However, in practical terms, we need to move beyond its semantics. The Gueguense character is expressing class solidarity. It’s about trying to persuade his fellow Mestizos and Indians that it was necessary to overthrow the oppressors. I believe that the play was written by a self educated Indian. One of those who could not stand the suffering of his social class. An Indian Che Guevara.

Cuadra: Now, that’s ridiculous. An Indian could not have written the play. However,

that is not the point here. What does the play mean to Nicaragua? What does the script, the character, and what it implies, mean to us?

Solorzano: (Conciliatory). I think it means many things. It means different things to different people. It means different things to the Indians, to the Mestizos, to the neo-colonialists, to the peasants, to the workers. It means different things to you and to me. (Silence).

Cuadra: (He interrupts the silence by continuing with his poem). Later, on the 21st, my two fertile halves fought in my dream: Because of our King's order I was hanged; Because of adventure, democracy, and happiness I was shot dead. ...

Bolanos gets up and leaves the room without saying goodbye. A little girl in rags, one eye missing, comes from the street and goes to the intellectual's table. She gestures to the uneaten soup.

Solorzano: (He points to it, indicating to her that she can have it). What's your name? How are you girl? How old are you?

Girl: Thirteen, I'm thirteen. (She looks six at the most. She eats with tremendous aggressiveness only stopping to comment on the deliciousness of the soup).

End of Scene

Scene 2: On the Eve of Celebration

A few days, weeks, month and several rehearsals later, everybody is ready for the San Sebastian celebrations. The streets are filling with anticipation. Street vendors, musicians, and festive life spill over from the houses onto the cleaned sidewalks. People find no other topic of conversation than the celebration. In this atmosphere of fiesta and gaiety, Doctor Gallardo sends notice to Don Cristobal; he wants to meet with him. It is a Friday, twelve hours before the performance. Don Cristobal enters Doctor Gallardo's house, agitated.

Don Cristobal: Did you call for me Doctor? I heard that you have a surprise for me. Let's hear it then. I'm ready for the performance, I sent notice to everyone. They are ready. There is excitement among the dancers. Let's hear it then.

Doctor Gallardo: You are ready then? I have to tell you that....

Don Cristobal: (Outside the sound of firecrackers and the music of the local brass bands (chicheros) is contagious). We all are, doctor.

Doctor Gallardo: The El Gueguense will not play, it is cancelled.

Don Cristobal: (In his usual mannerism, he doesn't show any signs of being upset,

but he is shocked) Okay. Have you told everyone?

*Doctor Gallardo: No, that will be your job. Please let them know right away.
(Pause) It was nice working with you. Let's do it next year.
We'll start earlier then.*

Don Cristobal: Okay, you are the boss. I'll go then, see you around.

*Don Cristobal exits the house from one door; Antonio enters from another door,
ignorant of the problem.*

Antonio: Hi.

Doctor Gallardo: Hi, enjoying the festivities?

Antonio: Yes, of course.

*Doctor Gallardo: I'm glad you came. There will be no Gueguense this year.
There is no money, and there are not enough participants.
The money is definitely a factor; there is no time to collect
it. (Pause) Time is against us. More importantly, there are
not enough performers, you see?*

*Antonio: (Incredulous) But, I understand that the dance can be put on even
with less characters, if need be?*

*Doctor Gallardo: I don't think so. This is the only dance that needs to have a
complete cast. Let it be a lesson. I have done the
impossible to have enough people for the performance. I*

placed four ads on public speakers reasoning with people to register and participate, but nothing. (With anguish in his voice) Nothing, nobody responded. I have hopes for the future, now that we know who the new municipal authorities will be, everything will change. We need the state, the new administration to get involved. I talked to the new mayor, he will assist us, and he assured me. The municipality will take an active role to preserve the dance. They will start a special program to educate people and ensure people's participation.

Antonio: Yes, but, should the initiative come from the government, and not from the people? I think they want to put on the play. They want control of the play.

Doctor Gallardo: This is something everybody should be interested in. It is about our past, our ancestors, and our culture. One should feel sorry to lose such a tradition; one should feel proud of participating in such a thing. But, life is like that.

Antonio: It's too bad, I didn't take any pictures or videos of the rehearsals. That's too bad. I'll leave the country missing that experience.

Doctor Gallardo: That's too bad indeed. But you will see other dances in the procession tomorrow. They are beautiful: El Gigante, El

Toro Guaco and the others.

Antonio: Those dances are insightful... (Changing topic) Why did you need money at the last minute, didn't you know of the cost?

Doctor Gallardo: The musicians are very expensive and they did not want to give me a break with the price. I have given enough to this thing. I cannot pay for the musicians as well. I thought that at the last minute someone would help me but nothing, not even a Cordoba.

Antonio: Did you pay for everything last year?

Doctor Gallardo: Yes, I assumed all the costs. This year I sent letters to powerful people in the community, but to no avail.

Antonio: (Disappointed) I see.

Doctor Gallardo: I don't think this should be a big problem for you. You should come back next year. Keep in touch; I'll let you know what's going on.

Antonio: Thank you. The most important thing at this point for me is the fact of the absence of the performance from the festival.

Doctor Gallardo: Many people will notice the absence of the El Gueguense. But, what one cannot do, one cannot do.

Antonio: Thank you anyway.

Doctor Gallardo: Thank you for being interested and if you see anyone out there, tell them that this year, no Gueguense.

Antonio exits as the music and noise from the streets intensifies. In front of the Basilica many people are gathering. Impromptu street Marimba dances animate the day. On the Basilica's amphitheatre, Don Jesus and Dona Maria prepare for the dress rehearsal. They are oblivious of the turn of events.

End of Scene

Scene 3: A Theoretical/methodological Discussion

Practico versus Romantico

What a mess. It's raining today. The streets are wet and deserted. It's time to stay in, to read a good book, to reflect, to take stock on the work concluded thus far. Antonio closes his eyes. As Antonio's universe is enveloped in darkness two familiar voices start to resonate in his head. Practico and Romantico take on a familiar discussion.

Practico: (Very calm). Do you really believe in what you say in this dissertation? I mean the theory or method you're proposing, is that what you really believe? Why do you think your proposition is different than any other

proposition out there? They are all the same. Nothing changes. What can be claimed today can be disclaimed tomorrow. Besides what's your proposition about anyways? There are so many things you are trying to say or trying to present? Are you saying anything at all? Is your position about form connecting to content? Is the story you are presenting about the function of language?

Romantico: That's important but isn't everything we are trying to say. In the case of ethnography I think that the reductionist positions of both the dualist and the monist do not necessarily apply. What I mean is that different types of languages or discourses have their own functions. Ethnography has its own.

Practico: What?

Romantico: You know... I mean ethnography is about trying to communicate points of view. I would say it tries to communicate many points of view from the perceptual lenses of the object and ethnographer.

Practico: I've heard that before.

Romantico: Thank you for your confidence. But, think about it. Our proposition tries to address the problems that become apparent in light of texts structuring context. I think it tries to overcome the excessive search for social/cultural and therefore ethnographic "authenticity" exemplified in some textual driven ethnographies. The need for

textual justification or validation of “anthropological findings” as bodies of knowledge is one thing. Pushing for or adopting the “native’s point of view” for example, as a stylistic narrative is another. As in the ethnographic anthropological past, but in a less blatant fashion in postmodern writings, the Other’s words, deeds, movements are still equated (mostly tacitly) with the elusive “authentic” Other. And, as we all know there cannot be a systematic totalization through textualizations. This is more than clear, whether we claim it or not in our emphasis on quotation, paraphrasing, verbatim speech, faithfully reconstructed environments, and the like.

Practico: Do you really believe that this ethnography challenges social, aesthetic, cultural and political canons in ethnography? Somehow I’m not...

Romantico: The presentational ethnographic text we present here seeks to make theatrical events and exchanges of ideas disruptive, without a sense of “a unique and exclusive terms”⁶⁸

Practico: (Agreeing a little). I see. But remember what Castelvetro once said: “The poet’s function is after consideration to give a semblance of truth to the happenings that come upon men through fortune, and by means of this semblance to give the light to his readers; he should leave the discovery of the truth hidden in natural or accidental things to the philosopher and the

scientist, who have their own way of pleasing or giving profit which is very remote from that of the poet.”⁶⁹

*Romantico: (Smiling) but remember what Cynthia Ozick also said:
“Essays are expected to take a ‘position’, to show a consistency of temperament, a stability of viewpoint. Essays are expected to make the writer’s case. Sometimes, of course, they do.... Yet most essays, like stories, are not designed to stand still in this way. A story is a hypothesis, a tryout of human nature under the impingement of certain given materials; so is an essay”⁷⁰*

It appears to be a resolution in the head of Antonio. But what about the performance?

End of Scene

Scene 4: Breaking the News

Don Jesus is sporting his best Sunday attire. His white long sleeved shirt, brown pants and cowboy’s buckle belt are impeccably clean. He is sobered up, not a hint of alcohol on his breath. He is prepared for the last practice with his script in the plastic bag. Doña Maria is at his side. Antonio meets them there. He communicates something to them that the audience does not hear.

Antonio: I’m very sorry. Was it a religious vow for you?

Don Jesus: (Saddened). No it wasn't. I was ready.

Antonio: (Moved) Me too. I just came back from Doctor Miranda's house, he told me the bad news. We have to wait for next year.

Dona Maria: (Not surprised about the turn of events). If you want to put it on, we can help you. We have done it before.

Antonio: (Enthused) Do you think? How much would it cost?

Dona Maria: I don't know exactly. People don't do this with devotion like before. If there is no money, they are not motivated.

Antonio: Have the other dancers lost interest?

Doña Maria; I'm not talking about the dancers. People do it so that they can have something for themselves. The idea that there are not enough dancers is bullshit.

Don Jesus: We can do it if you want.

Antonio: I'll think about it, but...

Don Jesus: (Interrupting with excitement). I mean let's do it now. Let's go on the procession ourselves.

Antonio: You mean, just you and me performing El Gueguense?

Don Jesus: Aha. That's right.

Antonio: Would we get the priest's permission? (Silence).

Doña Maria: Do you know that one year, there was only one character participating in the procession? It was the old Macho. The character was, of course, El Gueguense. People know it very well. The old man was the only one dancing.

Antonio: I don't know why our friend Doctor Miranda cancelled for lack of dancers.

Doña Maria: I'm telling you, devotion for the dance has been lost. Economic and social interests come in between. If there is no money there is nothing. That person has money, he is a businessman. That's what I think.

Antonio: (To Don Jesus). Do you have your costumes?

Don Jesus: I can borrow one.

Antonio: You wait for me here. I'll talk to Don Cristobal about the music. We'll pull it off. (Both Doña Maria and Don Jesus stay while Antonio exits).

End of Scene

Scene 5: To Perform or Not to Perform

Don Cristobal is not at home. Antonio waits for him while one of Don Cristobal's grandsons goes to looking for him in the neighbourhood. (Total silence envelops the

The streets are empty. We see that the festivities have come and gone. There are mountains of paper particles from the firecrackers, empty bottles; the normal aroma of ordinary Diriamba commences to settle in. This year the Gueguense is dead.

Epilogue

Ethnographer Re-self-positioning

Romantico:

This is another midnight in another of those winter nights of Nicaragua. In a small but comfortable room the researcher appears immobilized by yet more of his thoughts. The room is almost dark with a small ray of light coming from the outside that illuminates the ethnographer's lower body. Romantico enters the scene:

Romantico: *(To the audience) Are you listening to me? Have you looked at Malinowski's diaries? Do they say something to you? What's it that you do? Do you do ethnography or is it something else? Does something else have a name? Do we know the name? Who cares about El Gueguense? Is it cultural difference that matters? Is it the exotic that matters to you? What's the matter? Do you have many audiences? Do you have any audience? Who cares about the audience? Do you believe in Artaud's*

theatre and its double? Do you believe in theatre at all? Does rhetoric accommodate you? What is your motivation? Do you have motives? Do you questions those motives? Do you believe in justice? Have you thought about justice? Is your role to care? Do you care? Have you read the Newspapers today? Do they talk about violence? Is the violence about women? Kids? Do they talk about hunger? Are the poor eating well? Are they eating at all? What's the price of beans today? Do you think about those things? (With more intensity) Are you listening to me? Are you a good listener? Are you a good talker? Do you have a perspective? Do you know about any perspective? Did Taussig influence you? Or was it Brecht or Diane Taylor? Do you believe in the anthropology of nothingness? Are you here to entertain? Do you know how? Have you confused your role? Do you have a role? What is your role?

Curtain

Making Sense of the Performance

Simon Frith's article, "Music and Identity", is concerned with exploring the limitations of an academic study of music as a reflector of people's socio-cultural contexts. His assertion prompts me to examine the quest for cultural authenticity implied in ethnographic works. A reflection on the limitations of academic studies, Simon believes, is rooted in the connections advanced "from the work (the score, the song, the beat) to social groups who produce and consume it" (1996: 108). By examining the aesthetics of popular music, Frith is not interested in how a particular piece of music reflects the people, but rather how it produces people. He is concerned with how the music creates and constructs an experience as a subjective and collective identity (1996: 109).

Similarly, in my case, it is in the performance, through first trying to put on the *El Gueguense* play, and second through the enactment of the "presentational ethnography" in chapter five, that process produces us as audiences (collective and individual, cultural and social). Frith sees identity in movement, as "a process not a thing, becoming not being" (Ibid). He sees the experience of music (listening and making it) as an "experience of the self in progress" (Ibid). Music performance and our "presentational ethnographic" text can be appraised with audience (and their identities) in movement. Different experiences of music, performance, and ethnography will produce different forms of audiences (identities).

Frith, furthermore, posits that the crisis of a “decentered subject” and of a signification system brought upon by postmodernism has threatened the sense of self (1996: 110). He sees, then, a “problem of process--not the positioning of the subject as such, but the experience of the movement between positions” (Ibid). Music, he believes, like identity, is a matter of ethics and aesthetics. The self is an imagined self within the particularities of the socio-cultural forces where it is in movement (Ibid).

Frith gives us two examples to illustrate his musical proposition. One is Frank Kogan’s writings on popular music about Spoonie Gee, and the other is Gregory Sadow’s work on Milton Babbitt’s classical music. Frith conceives both analyses as similar social reviews. They are moves “from describing the music to describing the listener’s response to music to considering the relationship of feeling identity” (1996: 113). In other words, music gives the composer, the performer and the audience “a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it” (1996: 114). Music constructs our sense of identity; it allows us to locate ourselves in different narrative arenas (1996: 124). Similarly, the performance (in this case the rehearsal) of the *El Gueguense*, on the one hand, and the enactment of the “presentational ethnography”, on the other, constructs our sense of ourselves as audiences, performers, readers, and writers. These performances allow us to position ourselves in the different narrative arenas. For the performers of *El Gueguense*, the narrative arenas are conflict-ridden. On the one hand, the other actors reject elite notions of Nicaragua as a homogeneous nation proposed by Doctor Gallardo. The actors make their positions clear through the rehearsals and the discussions about the performance and the San Sebastian celebrations. In the case of the

“presentational ethnographic” text in this chapter, the positions of the writers and readers become enactments of a process of cultural understanding.

For Frith, the aesthetico-ethical relationship is very important in understanding the experiential moment of musical activity:

From this perspective, pop music becomes the more valuable aesthetically the more independent it is of the social forces that organize it, and one way of reading this is to suggest that pop value is thus dependent on something outside pop, is rooted in the person, the actor, the community or the subculture that lies behind it (1996: 120-121).

With this assertion, Frith moves beyond simple reflectionism and Romantic criticism by positioning the centrality of the self and the cultural manifestation in the experience of music itself. It is in the interaction and experiential moment that possibilities are created. It is in the intimate encounter of art and audience that the dynamics of self-formation and self-identification and self-positioning and interpretation come to the fore. Likewise, “presentational ethnography,” is a performative, phenomenological, theatrical and rhetorical encounter between audiences, actors, readers, writers and the performances (the rehearsal and this ethnography) that produces an important dialogue. This dialogue makes the experience of the ethnographic encounter “a way of seeing one part of the world from the vantage point of another (Jackson, 1996: 9). The experience itself moves

the analysis beyond a simple reflection of the Other's world frozen in a particular historical time and space. It is not enough to assert that experience and subjectivity are socially and culturally constructed, "for the life-world is never a seamless unitary domain in which social relations remain constant and the experience of self remains stable" (1996: 27). The self arises in social experience. That is why "one's sense of self is unstable and varies from context to context" (1996: 126).

For ethnographers such as Geertz, 1980, 1983, 1988; Desjarlais, 1992; Clifford, 1986, 1988; Jackson, 1989, 1996; and others, a critique of the totalizing concepts of culture and its theoretical and methodological frameworks is seen as a very productive proposition. A response to the problems and constraints in ethnography, embedded in the critique of positivistic, structuralistic and post-Marxist approaches is to look at the experience of ethnography itself. It is to look at the experiential encounter in the world outside the simple dichotomy of self-Other, and also to look beyond the simple divide of "true" and "false" and/or "real" and "fiction". The practice, meaning, intentionality, consciousness, worldview, life-world in the context of everyday life is what excites contingent knowledges.

Anthropologist Edward L. Schieffelin, while doing fieldwork among the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea, explored the process of a dialogic interaction between medium and the participants in the Seance performance. He posits that meaning and reality in ritual performances are produced also in the interaction of the performances themselves. Rituals and their symbols are effective less because they communicate meaning (though that is also important) than because, in performances, meanings are socially created and

maintained (1985: 710). It is in the expedience of inconclusiveness and imbalances where the Kaluli people construct their reality (1985: 721). Looking at ethnographic encounters in this light reinforces experience, not the socio-cultural context, as central to cultural knowledge

For anthropology, ethnography remains vital, not because ethnographic methods guarantee certain knowledge of others but because ethnographic fieldwork brings us into direct dialogue with others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truth but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground (Jackson, 1996: 8).

SIX, REVIEW

THE BEGINNING OF REFLECTION, A "CONCLUSION"

Summary of Gueguense Event Six

El Gueguense has argued his case very well. The mules are arranged with merchandise ready for travelling. Gueguense offers wine to celebrate the wedding, but in the end he and his sons don't produce it.

Alg.

Hurry up, Gueguense.

Gue.

What for you take me up friend Captain Chief Alguacil?

Alg.

I mean hurry up.

Gue.

Let me recall old times, that I may console myself with that. Say, boys, do we go in front or behind?

Don For.

In front, little papa.

Gue.

Then go ahead, boys. (The boys mount the mules).

Gue.

Boys, isn't there a cheeky fellow to toast the Royal Court of the Governor Tastuanes?

Don For.

Yes, there is little papa.

Gue.

Governor Tastuanes let me offer you some Spanish wine, as a treat...

(They all go ahead)

Gue.

... we'll get it for nothing, and drink it ourselves.

End

+ +

Reviewing the Presentation or Presenting the Review

This section will constitute the conclusion of the process and lead into a consideration of some important questions. It will examine the process from epistemological, ontological and ethical perspectives. Throughout this ethnographic exploration I have shared with the participants, not only their theatrical work, but also

personal and social lives. As they bring social and personal issues of marginality to their interpretations, they tell multiple stories of their characters; they present to us their own stories of marginality. They are unemployed, poor, and ethnically different.

Given the enthusiastic participation of all those present at the rehearsals' performances, and the wealth of their ideas and proposals, the events taught me many things. The value of the theatrical intervention cannot be measured by whether propositions are put into practice or not, but by how theatre and performance can reveal the situatedness of actors and audiences in ethnography. The presentational nature of the *El Gueguense's* performances inspired a way of presenting, a way of being in the world by a group of social and cultural actors in Nicaragua. This enactment encompassed form and content, also text and context as it linked the written work and the experience itself. The theatrical imagination utilised by *the Gueguenses* to communicate a way of being in Western Nicaragua was simple and uncomplicated. In this fashion the content or the subject matter being addressed by *the performers* was connected to the form they used to implement their action.

I set out to write an ethnographic account of the theatrical process, a polyphonic and dialogic performative ethnography phenomenologically committed and aided by theatre and rhetoric. This seemed like an appropriate way to enact such a production. As the process of production "gave form to" ethnographic knowledge (the intricacies of the story), it became clear that a simple verbatim reproduction of the theatrical process (rehearsals and final theatrical presentation) would not be adequate. This did not mean that the overall underpinning of the account would not be grounded in circumstances that took

place in shared space and time by all participants in the production. The narrative form utilised had to present the content of the ethnography by way of its intention in form in which it was being produced. To closely evoke the dynamic of the theatre production, I believe that, the most appropriate way to share the process with a larger audience is to present (in a theatrical sense) the process of that production in a presentational form.

The ethnographic writing came as co-operative efforts from all involved. “The point is that questions of form are not prior, the form itself should emerge out of the joint work of ethnographer and his native partners’ (Tyler: 127 in Clifford and Marcus 1986). Even though the ultimate impulse to textualize this way was mine, I consider it a co-operative effort. It was through the process and the discussions with the members of the theatre group that this approach became a good attempt at working through theoretical issues about performance and ethnographic writing. It became a textualization that permitted my partners in the theatre group to offer their point of views and present them to you through me. They understood the form; they were working with it.

When it comes to writing ethnographies there is “no real answer.” If there is no real answer to the problems of authorship, authority and writing, my effort can only bring different insights to advance the debate on these issues. For example, even though I made efforts in this ethnographic writing to be more inclusive of the other members of the theatre group, I made the final decisions about the (provisional) outcome. The other people involved have been given a lot of credit, but the shortcomings are all mine. The authority, as the writer, still rests on me no matter how polyphonic and dialogical the process is.

Like any form of ethnographic writing, presentational ethnography has its merits and limitations. The merits are that through a presentation of experience, evocation and enactment, one can shape an idealised communicative possible world. Idealised because we are aware of its fragility. It depends on the willingness of the performers and audiences to participate. Our intentions have to join somehow. Presentational ethnography becomes a contingent method for producing utterances in kind, exploring the ethnography of theatre through theatre, and answering form with form.

The limitations exist on two planes. On the one hand, the human aspects and/or the ethical imperatives of human life can easily be trivialised. Even though I do not believe that fictionalising real human beings' actions reduces them to caricatures, there is always a risk. One has to be attentive and strike a balance between two poles: the material that makes good reading and the material that does justice to subject's points of view. One cannot thicken the plot for the sake of a few laughs only. At times, these two poles cannot coincide. Thus, my ethnography is a committed one. I do not shy away from a political position. I only hope that the aspirations and feelings of these courageous people's lives are evident in the work. On the other hand, these concerns lead to some practical risks while assembling narratives.

There are limitations as to how creative you can be when writing ethnographies in a presentational theatrical manner. Life as presented in the theatre is more vivid and more coherent than in "real life". It is arranged in a way that the characterization of persons shows no major contradictions. There is a coherent fluidity to story, action and character's development. "Real people" are not as coherent and interesting sometimes. The

formalities of compositions, or the variety of artistic devices employed by the playwright to give form to the mimetic presentation of life “creates life with a greater definiteness of form” (Albright, Halstead and Mitchell, 1955: 10). Unifying devices (i.e. restriction of drama to a single occurrence or singularity of locale), increasing impact devices (i.e. interlined dialogue),⁷¹ and economising exposition devices (i.e. compressing a life-time history in a two-hour play), are designed to render the story with a definite sense of order (Albright, Halstead, and Mitchell, 1955: 11-13). “Life itself contains much that is tedious and repetitive and much that is chaotic and meaningless” (Ibid). The task of the ethnographer trying to present is thus a compromise between the two extremes; trying to be creative while not ignoring the perceived problems of ethnographic processes.

Characterization in the stricter sense of theatre helps us, but only to a certain extent. Characterization (and plot) is action that shows a progression of logical events. Characterization shows why a particular character does what s/he does. It shows a consistency in those actions and their emotions. In “real life” situations some characters are contradictory. Even though contradictions occur these are sometimes necessary for the ethnography but may not be necessary for the development of good drama.

Lights Off

NOTES

¹ Daniel G. Brinton translated this script from the Spanish/Nahuatl “original” in the late 1800's.

² Edward Said (1989) can be acknowledged as pointing out interstices of colonialism in anthropology and its effects, however he is a little bit pessimistic in the outcome of that experience.

³ Sarup believes that there are rightwing parallels with these ideas. She equates them with Hayek's who would argue that society works in terms of micro events. “[A] society that is left to market forces,” she says, “is better than a consciously planned society” (Sarup, 1993: 145). A discussion of Lyotard's implications, however, surpasses the scope of this project. It is sufficient to say that this modern thinker impacted anthropology in a very profound manner.

⁴ I am using the notion of presentational theatre as an anti-realistic anti-representational theatre.

⁵ As in Fabian's famous notion “to give form to” (1990).

⁶ I urge the reader to treat this narrative as the skin of the thesis. I mean you can read it at the beginning of each chapter or leave it to the end if you wish.

⁷ In 1995 Nicaraguan population was estimated at between 3 to four million people.

⁸ My composition from several historical documents.

⁹ From “Mujer Habitada” Novel by Nicaraguan novelist Gioconda Belly, (1989, 106-107).

¹⁰ (Fernández De Oviedo, Gonzalo y Otros: 1971, Rodriguez, 16-17: 1984, Wheelock, 1981: 24-27.)

¹¹ (Leiken and Rubin, 1987: 38).

¹² From “Mujer Habitada” Novel by Gioconda Belly, (1989, 106-107).

¹³ (Leiken and Rubin, 1987:39).

¹⁴ (Schroeder, 1987: 7).

¹⁵ At that time “Central America was the target of bands of “filibusters” from New York, Baltimore and new Orleans who rented themselves out to different political factions for military action” (Schroeder, 1987: 7).

¹⁶ The Western Hemisphere was not to be considered a territory for future colonization by any colonial power.

¹⁷ (Schroeder, 1987: 8).

¹⁸ (Rodriguez, 1984: 39).

¹⁹ My translation. (Ernesto Cardenal, 1986:114).

²⁰ (Bain, 1987: 24).

²¹ (Schroeder, 1987: 10).

²² (Leiken and Rubin, 1987: 41).

²³ (Kimmens: 1987, Rodriguez: 1984, Leiken and Rubin: 1987, Wheelock: 1981 et al).

²⁴ (McMahon in Leiken and Ruby, 1987: 100).

²⁵ (Rodriguez, 1984: 105-106).

²⁶ (Kimmens, 1987: 11).

²⁷ (Anderson, 1987: 141).

²⁸ (Ibid).

²⁹ (Kimmens, 1987: 11).

³⁰ (Schroeder, 1987:12).

³¹ (Leon Portilla, 1972; 57).

³² This ritual performance was held outside in an open field where there was a kind of a game. This game consisted of a big tall post from which four or six participants turned suspended from a rope. This ritual is very similar to the "volador" ritual performed in central Mexico. The end of a productive season was signalled with this ceremony.

³³ I am using the idea of pathema and its dialectical opposite poiema to buttress a generalized knowledge (a form of mathema) of a socio-cultural manifestation (Burke, 39, 41: 1965).

³⁴ I am choosing to use the term monism as opposed to monoism adopted by the author.

³⁵ This is in relation to the differences between drama and theatre. Drama as "to do" and theatre as "to see" (Fortier, 1997: 4).

³⁶ "Co-textual analysis is concerned with the 'internal' regularities of the performance text. Contextual analysis deals with the 'external aspects of the performance text" (De Marinis, 1993: 3).

³⁷ The debate about how art (in this case poetry, theatre) relates to the world is ancient and could be applied to ethnographic textual forms. In *Frogs* (405 BC), for example, Aristophanes attempts to judge between Aeschylean and Euripidean styles of tragedy. On the one hand, Aeschylus takes the position that the poet is a moral teacher and that his labour must achieve a moral aim. Euripides, on the other hand, takes the position that art's function is the revelation of reality, aside from moral and ethical questions (Carlson, 1993: 15). Plato's famous denunciation of art in the *Republic* as deficient can be seen as an extension of the debate commenced in the *Frogs*. The first complaint that we can notice in the *Republic* closely parallels Aristophanes' critique of Euripides: "poets tell corrupting lies about both men and gods (books Two and Three)" (Carlson, 1993: 16). Furthermore, Carlson notes, "in book ten Plato accuses poetry of feeding and watering the passions instead of discouraging them, and explains the particular deficiency of poetry that his system of philosophy implies" (Ibid) The study of theatre has therefore been concerned with this double functionality of how poetry relates to the world and how it relates to value since antiquity.

³⁸ This is accomplished by "attributing postmodern qualities to them" (Ibid). We cannot use (postmodernist) conjunctural histories, or epistemological categories to explain the specific social, historic, and artistic struggles of Latin America (Ibid). Different social and cultural realities necessitate different tools of analysis.

³⁹ Similar to Fabian's concerns are those espoused by Krysiniski when he talks about

“ideological contamination”, with respect to Argentinean and Brazilian literature (1995). In this instance, he rejects the imposition of the notion of postmodernism onto Latin American cultures. This imposition serves, as in the logic common with the process of globalization of capitalism, to convert postmodernism into a self-legitimizing discourse. “We cannot help but believe that the concept of postmodernism, in that it represents the end of modernity, fulfils only a negative and imitative role” (1995: 22).

⁴⁰ Phenomenology was developed as a rigorous science that exposed a seemingly internal contradiction. On the one hand, Husserl objected to any form of naturalism and scientism (natural attitude) claiming that philosophy and social science (philosophical attitude) are fundamentally different. On the other hand, he argued for a philosophy, which is a rigorous science. (Kockelmans, 1994: 12). This argument can still be experienced in contemporary phenomenology. Husserl saw the starting point of philosophy not in a single basic point or principle but in the entire field of original experiences (Kockelmans, 1994: 14). His phenomenology tries to find all knowledge on apodictic evidence, or the evidence that proceeds other evidence and is unquestionable, and is rooted in intuition. Transcendental reduction discloses a field of transcendental experiences that are given with this type of evidence (Kockelmans, 1994: 18-19).

⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty as we saw before is also very influential in the development of a conceptualization of phenomenology and discourse.

⁴² The idea of ethnocentric epoch is to suspend our own pre-conceived notions about the people we study.

⁴³ The notion of a dialogical space where utterances, voices, and points of view come together to dialogue implies a homogenization of space that follows certain canons and structural rules of narrative. “Narratology has its roots in structuralism it has largely shared the latter’s strength and weakness. The weaknesses include an overly geometric schematization of text: a drive to universalize and essentialize the structural phenomena supposedly uncovered; and a tendency to conceive of ‘universal’ or ‘essential’ forms in geometric terms” (Gibson, 5). Gibson asserts that narrative theory has repeatedly constructed the space of the text as “ a unitary, homogenous space, determined and organized within a given sets of constants” (Gibson, 7) Therefore, “narratological space has seldom been disturbed by blurring, troubling ambivalence.... In it boundaries are clearly defined and categories clearly distinguished” (Ibid).

⁴⁴ According to Guthrie (1971: 178) the invention of rhetoric can be attributed to “two Sicilians Corax and Tisias with the introduction of appeal to probability instead of fact.

⁴⁵ I am aware of the argument about who influenced whom with respect to some currents of Presocratic philosophy and some Sophist. As discussed by Guthrie (1971) the important thing is that no other philosophical current of ancient Greece (including some of the Presocratic philosophies) left an important impact in Western thought, as

did the Sophists. I consider this point relevant but too vast to articulate within the present work.

⁴⁶ Farrell, however, qualifies the idea of “social knowledge” by asserting that this knowledge rests upon a peculiar type of consensus. This consensus “is attributed to an audience rather than concretely shared” (1999: 144). It means that this knowledge does not rest upon agreement “which is both fact and known to be fact” (Ibid)

⁴⁷There are three kinds of rhetoric. They are deliberative, judicial and apidectic (Garver, 1994: 59).

The end (telos) of deliberative rhetoric, the useful, is defined relative to happiness; the end of forensic rhetoric, the just, is defined through along discussion of the principal cause of injustice, pleasure. The end of epideixis, the noble, requires an understanding of virtue, and these three are independent enough sometimes to conflict (Garver, 1994: 65). I will obviously, not go into details about each of them. Suffice is for me to point out that in the theatre they appear to be a combination of the attributes of all three kinds. Rhetorical arguments differ from other types of arguments in that rhetorical arguments are essentially ethical (Garver, 1994: 77).

⁴⁸ He contrasted this notion with what he called “informative ethnography” (Fabian, 1990).

⁴⁹ For Pollock, to write performatively “is an inquiry into the limits and possibilities of the intersections between speech and writing”(Phelan, 1998: 13). It is the evocation of a territory yet not seen. “The ability to realize that that is not otherwise manifested. Performative writing seeks to extend the oxymoronic possibilities of animating the un-lived that lies at the heart of performance as a making” (Ibid).

⁵⁰ For a comprehensive discussion of presentational and representational see Brecht and Stanislavsky in Brockett,

24. Extraordinary reality is the term used by Nicaraguan playwright Alan Bolt when referring to a type of Nicaraguan Magical Realism.

⁵² I will refer to the Gueguense as a play and as a dance interchangeably.

⁵³The Mayordomo of the fiesta is a leading citizen of Diriamba who is in charge of the day-to-day organization of the fiesta.

⁵⁴When a drama aims primarily toward persuasion, demonstration, instruction and other ends which are equally achievable by other means than drama (Albright, Halstead and Mitchell, 1955: 8).

⁵⁵ A self-governing drama (Ibid).

⁵⁶ The naive kind primary purpose is to give facts to the audience about some action or characters. The sophisticated one main purpose is the description of thought or feeling.

⁵⁷ Due to the fact that we (in anthropology) write about the supposedly unfamiliar and distant a self-critique or a reflexive tone may not be the right one. However, giving the circumstances of this ethnographic encounter self-examination may be beneficial to situate the ethnographer. “[T] he most useful kind of reflexivity is not that of pure self-examination, but the kind that places the cultural assumptions of the ethnographer in question – that clarifies the ethnographic encounter and its limitations as predicated upon the imperfect meshing of two different codes, with its multiplicity of divergent identities

and presuppositions” (Herzfeld, 2001: 45-46).

⁵⁸ (Herzfeld, 2001: 47).

⁵⁹ Ron Burnett’s discussion of euthanasia and discourse boundaries, he talks about disease and death (in George Marcus Zeroing In on the Year 2000... 2000: 89).

⁶⁰ Taussig, 1993: 68).

⁶¹ (Clifford, 1986: 6-7).

⁶² In Herzfeld, 2001: 43).

⁶³ (Herzfeld, Ibid)

⁶⁴ Rapport, 1997:183).

⁶⁵ 1995: 207).

⁶⁶ Don Jesus performs for us some of the original Nahuatl/Spanish lines he has learned.

⁶⁷ My translation from Cuadra’s El Nicaraguense (1969: 2).

⁶⁸ (Kaye, 1994: 3)

⁶⁹ (In Alan H. Gilbert, 1967: 307)

⁷⁰ (1989: X).

⁷¹ “In this a sequence of short speeches is linked together by successive repetitions of phrase or thought” (Alright, Halstead and Mitchell, 1955: 13).

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