

EN CARNE PROPIA: EMBODIED IDENTITIES IN  
CUBAN AND MEXICAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

BY

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In twentieth-century Cuba and Mexico, each post-revolutionary state consolidated power through cultural production, especially film and literature, by funding national cinema and institutions such as the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists. This project examines the ways in which contemporary writers, filmmakers, and performance artists (1980-2006) emphasize personal, embodied experience to examine and frequently contest the generalized and overarching identity constructs propagated as part of an explicitly national post-revolutionary culture in Cuba and Mexico. Writers such as Ena Lucía Portela, Abilio Estévez, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Antonio José Ponte, Jorge Volpi, Federico Campbell, performance artist Astrid Hadad, and filmmakers Tommy Lee Jones, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Alfonso Cuarón explore how the destabilization of revolutionary ideology and increasing economic and political changes in each country affects the daily lives of artistic subjects, thereby underscoring the social role of art and the tensions between art and commerce in contemporary Cuba and Mexico.

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## Introduction

### It's What's inside that Matters: Re-imagining Corporeality in Recent Cuban and Mexican Cultural Production (1980s to 2006)

When one thinks of the stereotypes of Cuban and Mexican popular cultures, they tend to include images of various kinds of bodies: grinning skeletons, sleeping peasants, dancing couples, or Che Guevara's iconic face. These images point to the ways in which Cuban and Mexican culture is offered as a consumer product, but they are also the sorts of clichés implicitly addressed by the films, novels, performances, and stories in this study. In twentieth-century Cuba and Mexico, each revolutionary state consolidated power with recourse to cultural production, especially film and literature, through the funding of national cinema and institutions like the Casa de las Américas in Cuba.<sup>1</sup> These initiatives often capitalized on artistic or literary trends that used bodies and their imagery to represent the nation, such as those exemplified by writers José Vasconcelos in La raza cósmica (1925), Octavio Paz in El laberinto de la soledad (1950), Fernando Ortiz in Contrapunteo cubano (1940), or Roberto Fernández Retamar in Calibán (1971). Because these efforts were, in large part, aimed at constructing a sense of collective identity, they privileged overarching depictions of bodies that often lead to stereotypes. Even when writers, artists, and filmmakers actively opposed the sorts of imagery with which I begin this study, as with the Cuban socialist state's desire to move away from tropicalist images of the island as a vacation paradise, they also frequently appropriated the body imagery of marginalized groups to write a narrative of the nation, a tactic I call disembodiment.

In contrast, the films, novels, and performances in this study deliberately emphasize the particular, embodied experiences of artistic subjects as a means of responding to and challenging these previous, generalizing artistic, political, and cultural discourses, an artistic strategy I refer to as strategic displacement.

The artistic works in this study portray physical experiences to contest the essentialized body imagery that is a legacy of revolutionary cultural institutions in Cuba and Mexico. Whereas artists such as Diego Rivera and writers such as Miguel Barnet turned bodies into a trope to support authoritative concepts of nation and culture, resulting in disembodiment, Cuban writers Abilio Estévez (1954- ), Ena Lucía Portela (1972- ), Antonio José Ponte (1964- ), and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez (1950- ) and Mexican writers Federico Campbell (1941- ) and Jorge Volpi (1968- ) use physical bodies to explore the ways in which these concepts are lived on a daily basis. These writers, along with Mexican performance artist Astrid Hadad (1957- ) and director Alfonso Cuarón (1961- ), North American director and actor Tommy Lee Jones (1946- ), and Cuban filmmakers Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996) and Juan Carlos Tabío create artistic depictions of bodies that contest disembodied generalizations through a focus on the specific, the ordinary, and the lived. This artistic practice, which depends upon a strategic displacement of these earlier, stereotypical representations, acquires particular significance in Cuba and Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s. Produced in a context defined in each country by economic and political instability, the films, narrative fiction, and performance art in my study examine the topics of clandestine abortion, domestic violence, prostitution, race, and

death to convey the contradictory ways in which elusive concepts of politics and identity become real in the daily lives of their artistic subjects. Instead of creating concepts of identity that buttress abstract ideas about the nation, this recent cultural production focuses on how artistic subjects experience and respond to the material and ideological elements that shape their lives.

In these works, the personal is, if not always explicitly political, certainly contestatory. This artistic use of bodies parallels the destabilization of national ideologies that characterizes 1980s and 1990s Cuba and Mexico, as well as shifts in cultural and literary studies that foreground other forms of knowledge production. Rather like the way in which cultural studies asks more questions about how a text creates meaning than about what the definitive meaning of a text might be, the art in this study uses bodies to emphasize how political, cultural, and literary discourses become real by focusing on the experience of these concepts at an individual, embodied level. My use of the term “experience” draws on Joan Scott’s analysis of the concept. She describes experience as “a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is ‘unassailable,’” yet argues that we must also analyze how this knowledge comes to be (797). Critical concepts of experience can challenge naturalized categories of identity by offering another means of knowing. This idea resonates with Kathleen Stewart’s concept of the ordinary as a bridging of the public and the private. Stewart describes “ordinary affects” as “public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they’re also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of” (2). Similarly, Scott argues that



experience is a “linguistic event” that is by definition both collective and individual (793). The artistic subjects in the texts I study connect art to life and language to bodies by illustrating that public discourse—literary, cultural, historical—affects their concepts of self and how they go about their daily activities. Instead of using the public space of artistic expression to speak on behalf of others, the subjects in these works place their own wounded bodies on display as evidence of the harsh conditions under which concepts of identity, culture, and nation play out in Cuban and Mexican societies facing economic globalization and profound political change.

Despite the fact that they unfolded in different historical contexts, the Cuban and the Mexican revolutions shared structural similarities that affected subsequent cultural production. As the revolutionary governments consolidated state power, each bolstered legitimacy by insisting that its political efforts were carried out on behalf of marginalized groups, primarily the working class. This factor contributed to a paternalistic dynamic between each state and its citizens that, while it reiterated pre-revolutionary patterns of elitist privilege, acquired extra force with state funding of artistic, cinematic, and literary production. Through cinema, especially, the state could have a say in how the nation was depicted, and movies were a crucial component of each revolutionary project. In terms of Mexico, Andrea Noble argues that, by the mid-1930s, Mexican film, magazines, and radio offered examples of the way in which culture projected a sense of national identity, as “a series of disparate stereotypes started to coalesce around notions of lo mexicano” (11). In Cuba, following the 1959 revolution, the state recognized film’s pedagogical potential with

projects such as Mobile Cinema, which took movies to new spectators in the countryside. Influential in the New Latin American Cinema movement, Cuban filmmakers experimented with film as an anti-imperial tool. Although many of these films focused on the effects of racism or economic exploitation, they tended to use bodies and their representations to tell the tale of collective struggle on behalf of a national or cultural group. This collectivist rubric had worn thin in both countries by the late twentieth century, however, as Mexico's ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was ethically defunct and the country faced serious economic and political instability in the 1980s. In contrast, 1990s Cuba was wracked by the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Designated by Fidel Castro as the "Special Period in Times of Peace," the decade was marked by severe material shortages as well as a lack of ideological clarity.

The films, narrative fiction, and performance art examined in this study contest these nationalizing narratives by emphasizing the embodied experiences of artistic subjects. Their creative use of bodies undermines a historical tradition of disembodied portrayals by questioning the ways in which concepts of identity and nation are taken to be self-evident. These works argue that bodies belong not to the nation but to particular subjects who live in precarious economic situations, who face domestic or state violence, and who suffer discrimination. Each of these novels, films, and performance pieces asks questions about who may legitimately represent whom, and what shape that representation should take. The use of strategic displacement in these works thus corresponds to more general trends in literary and

cultural studies that explore ways of representing marginalized or exploited groups without reiterating discriminatory patterns. Scott, for example, argues that historians must “take as their project not the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience, but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself” (797, original). Whereas disembodiment tends toward generalization, displacement makes a case for the particular, especially as it is lived on a corporeal level. Similarly, Doris Sommer advocates particularism as a critical practice that allows readers to listen for the checks in communication, the fissures that mark information withheld by an author or speaker in the name of autonomy. Not unlike the way in which strategic displacement contests essentialization, Sommer’s boundary to readerly acquisition reminds us that we, as educated readers, are not authorized to know all secrets and should not “reduc[e] real external others into functions of a totalizing self” (3). The artistic subjects in the Cuban and Mexican texts studied here narrate their intimate experience of racism, sexual abuse, and physical violence not to reveal their secrets, but instead to remind readers and viewers to pay attention to how the story is told.

These films, novels, and performance art emphasize that art does indeed have a social role to play, and my analysis centers on the ways in which specifically artistic portrayals of bodies in these turn-of-the-millennium texts counter previous literary and cinematic traditions in Cuba and Mexico. They underscore the social role of art by depicting bodies in such a way as to bring lived experiences to the fore. Artistic renderings of bodies have conventionally been important to concepts of cultural

identity in Cuba and Mexico, and this bodily imagery in the contemporary texts I study draws on history in the form of what Joseph Roach might call the “kinesthetic imagination” (27). He uses this phenomenon to think about how bodies and movements call forth memory by re-enacting cultural habits and social norms (27). My focus in this study on the representation of embodied experience underscores how art, through concepts of genre and norms of taste, works as a repository for memory. As with Roach’s concept of the kinesthetic imagination, the artistic subjects in the works I study use bodies to challenge the connotations of shame, privilege, and cultural legitimacy attached to their bodies. For these subjects, art is a tool with which they may gain agency. With it, they can do things denied to them in the “real” world, as when Melquiades in Tommy Lee Jones’s The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2005) and Zeta, the narrator in Ena Lucía Portela’s Cien botellas en una pared (2002), contest racialized and gendered violence through storytelling. Art transforms the deliberately sexy body of Mexican performance artist Hadad into a strategically displaced allegory of the prostituted nation, while storytelling in Jorge Volpi’s La paz de los sepulcros (1995), Pedro Juan Gutiérrez’s Trilogía sucia de La Habana (1994), and Campbell’s Todo lo de las focas allows the characters to elude political repression, to make sense of a contradictory world, and to process grief and personal loss. These texts employ creative representations of bodies to respond to various forms of social and artistic control, many of which are rooted in the disembodied artistic patterns prevalent well into the twentieth century.

The works in this also study challenge the ways in which Mexican and Cuban writers and filmmakers have historically positioned themselves with regard to Western concepts of reason, especially the role of bodies within this philosophical vein. Rather than view the body as material to be overcome, as in the Christian tradition, the artistic subjects in these texts validate embodied experience as a means of resistance to essentialized generalizations; they likewise use the body to examine how these norms are constructed and maintained over time. In the early twentieth century, concepts of racial and cultural hybridity began to influence ideas about the nation. Exemplified by the concepts of mestizaje in Mexico and transculturación in Cuba, for example, hybridity was held to express something fundamental about Latin American identity in contrast to Europe and the United States. It has given artists, writers, and filmmakers a visual language that uses images of marginalized bodies to represent national identities. The texts I examine break with the disembodied way in which the Latin American cultural tradition has employed bodies to talk about identity through such concepts of essentialized hybridity. They also participate in a larger conversation about the role of bodies in Western thought, especially the black and brown bodies that, during the twentieth century, came to represent Cuban and Mexican cultural identities. Elizabeth Grosz notes that the mind has conventionally been the privileged entity, which leads to a desire to transcend the body through ostensibly universal ideals of reason or intelligence (3).<sup>2</sup> The hierarchical relationship between mind and body facilitates disembodiment by downplaying the role of materiality. By locating subjectivity or identity primarily within the realm of the

mind—that is, of the abstract—it is far easier to overlook the effects of these abstractions on the daily lives of individual subjects, a quality addressed by the emphasis on embodied experience by the works in this study.

The texts I study place physicality at the fore to examine the signifiers of affect and privilege that are grafted onto specific bodies, as well as the ways in which this experience elicits a sense of belonging to or exclusion from political projects, social classes, or cultural institutions. Even seemingly self-evident categories as biological sex and the physical body are socially defined, a characteristic that conditions how subjects operate within a given context. Anne Fausto-Sterling thus argues that to label “someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender—not science—can define our sex” (3).<sup>3</sup> Her analysis points to the ways in which social norms and cultural practices—including art—are tasked with making sense of the body’s matter. Judith Butler similarly contends that the body is “not a ‘being,’ but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality” (419). Bodily signs demarcate membership within social groups, a process often tied to painful histories of racism, sexism, and class privilege. In light of this, subjects may be forgiven their desire to avoid linking identity to bodies. As in the phrase, “it’s what’s inside that counts,” the appeal to “interior,” or more abstract, values is a defensive posture that stems from a reluctance to associate with the sort of brute physicality conventionally linked to negative images of women, of animals, or

of slaves (Price 2). Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price argue, for example, that feminism has been concerned with “the cultural take-up of the mind/body split, and the enduring association of the devalued term with the feminine” (2). By portraying Mexico and Cuba through discourses of hybridity, the early twentieth-century writers I have mentioned countered European and North American notions of race-based superiority. Because these portrayals were placed in the service of overarching concepts of national and cultural identities, however, they tended to be disembodied.

The use of imagery associated with explicitly racialized and gendered bodies to represent national culture breaks with Western conventions, but the way in which these corporeal portrayals are used often only reiterates power hierarchies. Not unlike disembodiment, then, the appeal to intellectual parity among socially disparate groups overlooks the historical and cultural meanings ascribed to bodies and the ways in which these are lived on a daily basis. It also stymies analysis of the ways in which discourses of order and reason have been used to justify various forms of violence, particularly that wrought by the state. This makes disembodiment part of a tradition in which, as Kathleen Hayles notes, the universality of rational intellect trumped the embodiment of physical reality, thereby silencing various unruly “others,” not the least of these, women and colonial subjects (4). The situation of feminist thought is similar to that faced by marginalized ethnic or racial groups as they articulate their relationship to the dominant culture. Coco Fusco analyzes this trap as she recounts family stories that focus on her great-great-grandmother’s buying her freedom from slavery (xiv). She points out that her mother’s insistence on the

superiority of being descended from freed slaves reiterates social inequalities, arguing that “[t]hough designed to defend us against the dehumanizing objectification that lies at the core of racism by providing an invisible distinction which would make us see ourselves as ‘other than the other,’ [these myths] are disheartening examples of how we internalized the racist logic against which we claimed to fight” (xiv). Similarly, concepts of essentialized hybridity allowed Cuban and Mexican writers and artists to express Latin American difference, but the manner in which they portray bodies in the world frequently reveals a profoundly ambivalent sense of how their association with that difference might characterize their own sense of identity.

The concept of strategic displacement, because it is anchored in considerations of specific physical bodies, sidesteps some of the essentializing tendencies within discourses of hybridity, particularly as regards the historical uses of the concept in Cuba and Mexico. José E. Muñoz argues that hybridity has the “capacity to flatten difference in the name of coalition” (“The Autoethnographic Performance” 114). Rather than subscribe either to previous models of cultural mixing, such as those of mestizaje or transculturación, or to recent theoretical analysis of hybridity, the artistic subjects in the contemporary texts I study regard this literary, intellectual heritage warily through the process of strategic displacement. In contrast to their earlier counterparts, they are reluctant to write totalizing narratives of identity. Their emphasis on physical bodies and their experiences both counters and analyzes the normative social patterns that structure their daily lives, while their meta-literary tendencies ask readers and viewers to pay attention to how art operates in the world.



Hybridity, while often touted as a means of overcoming binary oppositions and cultural inequalities, is frequently little more than an amalgamation of identities, and can function as a disembodied discourse. Especially in popular parlance, it becomes a means of appropriating and accommodating difference and can be employed for hegemonic as well as subversive ends. As understood in the early twentieth century models, cultural, biological, and artistic hybridity was to set Cuba and Mexico apart from North American or European models and was embraced in rhetoric. Citizens who embodied this condition—such as Afro-Cubans or indigenous Mexicans—were often simultaneously excluded from positions of political and cultural power.

Critical attention to the concept of strategic displacement as an artistic practice illuminates the ways in which subjects borrow from, re-work, and explore damaging or discriminatory cultural patterns. This focus likewise points to the ways in which art can do something in the world, whether in the form of the stubborn reiteration of disembodied stereotypes or, more optimistically, by offering another perspective and a small space for agency. Although artistic subjects are in many ways confined by the same boundaries imposed upon subjects in the “real” world, art provides a space in which the rules of identity can be bent, stretched, and made evident. From this vantage point, Butler’s analysis of gender performativity only tells part of the story. She argues that “Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms” (22). Art allows for the creative re-configuration of these gender and social norms, and

literary analysis lets us take seriously the possibilities this process offers. This is precisely what Scott suggests when she advocates reading for “the literary,” that is, in a way that challenges the “unmediated relationship between words and things” (796).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Muñoz’s concept of “disidentification” seeks to understand the ways in which minoritarian subjects respond to the social pressures that surround concepts of belonging. He cautions that disidentification is not “to willfully evacuate the politically dubious or shameful components within an identificatory locus. Rather, it is the reworking of those energies that do not elide the ‘harmful’ or contradictory components of any identity” (12). In this, Muñoz engages psychoanalytic theory to analyze potentially productive ruptures within hegemonic discourses of identity.

My emphasis is in turn directly on the activities and experiences of physical bodies. The subjects in the texts in my study use artistic bodies to evoke desires for belonging, a process complicated by the sorts of cultural connotations that surface due to bodily differences. The contemporary writers, filmmakers, and artists I analyze challenge previous disembodied representations of nationalized bodies and models for cultural hybridity by referring insistently and explicitly to the ways in which artistic subjects live the effects of these generalizing identity constructs in their daily lives. The artistic subjects in these texts force readers and viewers to pay attention to how their stories are told, which is another way of analyzing the way in which the abstract—language, identity, subjectivity—becomes somehow more real. Bodies and their representations have played a crucial role in imagining Cuban and Mexican cultural identities, particularly during the early twentieth century. This

history weighs heavily on all of the texts studied in this project, and they explore the relationship between past and present through stories told by and about bodies, both physical and symbolic, that strategically displace these former models by way of an emphasis on embodied experience. Specific chapter topics of clandestine abortion and domestic violence, prostitution, race, and death illustrate the ways in which these artistic subjects experience the economic and political changes that characterize contemporary Cuba and Mexico. Sexualities, gendered and racialized violence, and concepts of death itself reference the way in which the experience of identity constructs filters through a complex set of interactions among mind, body, and environment, as well as the way in which art can be used to influence this process.

My first chapter examines the relationship between artistic representation and physical absence in Federico Campbell's Todo lo de las focas (1982, 1989) and Ena Lucía Portela's Cien botellas en una pared (2002). Each novel situates this questioning within a physically abusive romantic relationship, a technique that draws on the gendered connotations of the reproductive power of language within the Western tradition. The chapter thus explores the capacities of language to make real, particularly in the context of grief and loss. Art becomes, for each narrator, a hedge against the physical violence and surveillance that define their personal situations, as well as the border region and 1990s Cuba, but it makes them visible in response to stereotyped, disembodied discourses of gender, genre, and nationalism. The narrators in these works create literary bodies that, while borrowing from Hollywood's fantasies about Tijuana or Cuban nationalism, strategically displace those images

through attention to the effects of these portrayals on the bodies of living subjects. Following the death of his lover, the narrator in Todo lo de las focas, for example, loses all ability to represent his world coherently, a fragmentation that reiterates the way in which political and cultural boundaries carve up the territory between San Diego and Tijuana. Hybridity, in this novel, results in physical and representational disjuncture, a quality with tragic effects in the lives of the characters. In Cuba, Cien botellas en una pared slides between fiction and reality to analyze the patriarchal links between genre conventions and Cuban nationalism. The novel utilizes depictions of sexual abuse and victimization to strategically displace the aesthetics of sacrifice, nation, and narration in contemporary Cuba.

The second chapter analyzes the ways in which Mexican performance artist Astrid Hadad and Cuban writer Abilio Estévez challenge the portrayal of the nation through disembodied images of prostitution. Not unlike the abusive romantic relationships of the first chapter, concepts of economic productivity, as well as national and individual propriety, center on a gendered family structure. Appeals to national, political, or economic sovereignty are frequently couched within the language of prostitution, as with the image of Cuba as a “whorehouse.” This image disembodies women, turning their bodies into tropes of the nation. As in the first chapter, Hadad’s art (1990s to 2006) and Estévez’s novel, Los palacios distantes (2002), similarly emphasize the role of language in constructing identity, but strategically displace disembodied concepts of sexuality and nation through the specific sexual transgressions of prostitution. Hadad sells her body as “art,” a form of

prostitution in which she positions herself as a female Mexican artist engaging the legacies of colonialism, racism, and sexism. She displaces these concepts by calling attention to her explicitly sexualized body, which in Mexican cultural discourse is already prostituted. Prostitution in Estévez's novel provides a metaphor for the consumption of identities. Sexuality in general, and prostitution specifically, expresses the contradictory cultural jumble that Los palacios distantes posits as fundamentally Cuban, even as it illustrates the difficulties of strategically displacing oneself in a cultural context purposefully defined by multiplicity.

The third chapter deals with the disembodied portrayals of racial hybridity that have been used to depict the nation. Alfonso Cuarón's Y tu mamá también (2002), Tommy Lee Jones's The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2002), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's Guantanamera (1995), along with Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's novel, Trilogía sucia de La Habana (1994), allude to established twentieth-century corporeal discourse to tell stories about contemporary Cuban and Mexican identities. In their telling, notions of hybridity call forth not images of collectivity, but the discordant and sometimes fatal effects of these identity constructs on subjects who must negotiate diffident bureaucracies and economic turmoil. The films and Gutiérrez's novel draw on portrayals of the physical body to strategically displace official indifference to enduring and often virulent racism. In Cuarón's film, the protagonists' journey to the provinces parallels their exploration of Mexican identity. The narrator's voice-over segments guide our perceptions of the characters, but the film strategically displaces this narrative control by displaying links among

sexuality and Mexican class and ethnic identities. In Jones's film, a Border Patrol agent kills Melquiades, a Mexican immigrant; the film makes the cadaver explicitly visible to address the racialized categories of the border between the United States and Mexico. In death, Melquiades works a disquieting and darkly humorous strategic displacement of the essentialism that renders him marginal. In Cuba, the rhetoric of an idealized fraternity informs a racial, and at times racist, subtext within revolutionary discourse. Trilogía undermines the narrative of revolutionary progress with a narrator who is often racist and sexist, while Guantanamera deftly uses Afro-Cuban identity to negotiate the line between the "everything" within the revolution and the "nothing" without. With explicit concern for portrayals of national identity, the films and the novel strategically displace artistic conventions that represent race, ethnicity, and national identity through marginalized bodies.

The final chapter examines the ways in which Jorge Volpi's novel, La paz de los sepulcros (1995), and Antonio José Ponte's short story, "Corazón de skitalietz" (1998), and novel, Contrabando de sombras (2002), employ culturally specific concepts of death to challenge the disembodied depictions of cadavers in official concepts of history and nation. Volpi's novel references the way death in twentieth-century Mexico has been configured as uniquely national. The grotesque afterlife of the corpses in this text links discourses of reason to power, a relationship that undergirds state authority and sustains the artistic patterns that contribute to essentialized images of Mexican culture. The narrator's descriptions of the dead men strategically displace the state's disembodied portrayals by juxtaposing them with the

specific, embodied experiences of the subjects' lives. Cuban death imagery in turn offers a means of talking about political limbo. In Ponte's story and novel, death returns physicality to portrayals of Cuban history. Depictions of illness and death in "Corazón de Skitalietz" strategically displace versions of Cuban history that would stop time, either in a moment of revolutionary triumph or the nostalgia of exile and tourism. In Contrabando de sombras, the narrator links bodies to history to strategically displace commodified uses of Cuban history, whether created by the state or by outsiders enamored of Cuba's "exoticism," that ignore the consequences of Cuba's changing economic structure on living bodies.

These novels, films, and performance pieces present bodies celebrated as national symbols, yet privately regarded with apprehension, such as that of the prostitute; bodies broken by domestic violence; bodies confined by and pushed to transgress the United States/Mexico border; and, finally, bodies incompletely relegated to the land of the dead. My study thus examines how selected examples of recent Cuban and Mexican cultural production strategically re-configure previous discourses of identity by focusing on the effects these constructs have on the daily lives of the artistic subjects they portray. This emphasis on experience over generalized concepts of identity signals frustration with the ways in which concepts of culture and nation in contemporary Cuba and Mexico still bear the influence of disembodied corporeal discourses. By insistently depicting the experience of identity in the everyday and the ordinary, these artistic subjects reclaim an embodied space for themselves within concepts of nationalism and an increasingly globalized society.

## Chapter One

### Bodily Harm: Clandestine Abortion, Domestic Abuse, and Writing the Body

The unnamed narrator of Federico Campbell's poetic novella, Todo lo de las focas (1982, 1989), employs photography and narrative to revive his lover, Beverly, who dies following a clandestine abortion. Throughout the text, he reiterates—for himself, for the reader—memories of their time together, including her death at the border between Mexico and the United States. He replicates Beverly's body with language and photography, and then manipulates these images as part of his artistic project. For the narrator, under surveillance as a border subject, representation promises agency even as it threatens physical danger. Language in Ena Lucía Portela's novel, Cien botellas en una pared (2002), conjures memory as well as security. The narrator, Zeta, has, since childhood, counted down the one hundred bottles of the song "Cien botellas" to ward off danger. At the same time, the narrative constitutes a protracted linguistic defense of her potential involvement in the death of her abusive lover, Moisés. In this novel, language spins like time into the expanded present that José Quiroga attributes to the Special Period in Cuba. As in Campbell's novella, narration offers Zeta a means of resistance and survival, but it forces her to confront the stereotypes of women writing about romantic relationships. In both texts, language mediates a reality defined by abuse, violence, and the surveillance that the narrators experience as part of daily life along the border and in 1990s Cuba.

These texts emphasize the ways in which physical pain and violence press up against the limits of narrative. Disembodiment describes the manipulation of bodily



imagery, and Todo lo de las focas and Cien botellas en una pared struggle to convey the experience of physical pain and absence in a manner that does not replicate their marginal cultural contexts. Instead, the narrators write literary bodies that, while they borrow from Hollywood's fantasies about Tijuana or Cuba's intellectual heritage, strategically displace those images by focusing on the ways in which the artistic subjects in these texts live the contradictions of the border region and the Cuban Special Period. In both novels, an abusive romantic relationship frames cultural and historical contexts dominated by physical violence, surveillance, and the transgression of boundaries. Borders dominate Campbell's novella, primarily the political and cultural divisions between Mexico and the United States, but also the intersections of land, sea, and the characters' physical bodies. The violence done to geographic space in the text through war preparations and urban sprawl mimics the violence at the center of the narrative. The novella portrays Tijuana as surreal, characterized by Hollywood's desires and by the physical, geographic devastation caused by these disembodying fantasies. Rather than a celebratory image of transgression, Todo lo de las focas depicts Tijuana—and its inhabitants—as subject to ever-present possibilities of physical danger. Abortion represents the border context that defines the city and the novel's characters: by evading the visibility of pregnancy, abortion eludes surveillance, but its clandestine status exposes subjects to physical danger and institutional control. The narrator experiences Tijuana—and Beverly's abortion and death—as a violent fragmentation, a situation that the text uses to strategically displace more conventional, disembodied depictions of the border.

In Portela's novel, Zeta uses language as a defense against violence done to the body. While Todo lo de las focas portrays the asymmetries of power that inform the United States/Mexico border region, Cien botellas en una pared tracks between fiction and reality to reveal the patriarchal heritage of genre conventions and Cuban nationalism. Because these legacies operate by way of disembodiment—that is, they view women as sexual objects or as literary and cultural tropes—the narrator creates a literary body that challenges these depictions. The novel's references to genre fiction and the frank treatment of sexuality, for example, allude to disembodiment of gender and genre tropes, such as the detective novel's victimized female body or Cuba's complex association with prostitution. These images are woven into a highly self-conscious and intricately intertextual narrative structure that centers on how Zeta's body registers the political and economic changes that characterize contemporary Cuba. The novel pantomimes the detective fiction written by Zeta's friend, Linda Roth. By way of this genre paradigm, Zeta narrates the ways in which Cuban society and artistic conventions place her under surveillance, policing her body and her art. Rather than unraveling the detective novel's narrative enigma, however, Cien botellas en una pared utilizes images of abuse to strategically displace the aesthetics of sacrifice, nation, and narration in contemporary Cuba.

As Todo lo de las focas and Cien botellas en una pared explore the relationship between representation and the body, part of what the narrators seek to understand is the capacity of language to make things real. Each inhabits a world defined by violence and physical absence, in which patterns of disembodiment

underscore the distance between bodies and their depictions. Beliefs about culture and gender show up in language, and the narrators struggle with the images that others create of them, even as they make sense of pain, grief, and loss through narrative. They tell stories to strategically displace the stereotypical images that define the United States/Mexico border and Cuba, yet by their grief illustrate the limits of language to repair the wounds caused by death and physical violence. These two texts illustrate the problem analyzed by Bonnie Mann, who argues that the emphasis on discourse in theoretical analysis hinders consideration of our relationship to our physical environment (46). She laments this loss, noting that, “Having lost our belief in the referentiality of language, in the relation between words and things, we are stuck with signs that refer only to other signs” (46). Mann’s analysis suggests the bind faced by these narrators, who find themselves caught between the power of the language of others to structure their worlds, especially in the context of the surveillance that permeates the border region and 1990s Cuba, and their own narrative impotence in the face of physical violence and death. Artistic expression offers them a means of escape from their marginalized contexts, but the forms available to them often replicate disembodied patterns. These artistic subjects turn to bodies as a means of exploring alternate means of communication. They illustrate Diana Taylor’s point about the dangers of translating the social and physical into textual form; she values performance studies precisely because it recognizes embodied practices as a means of knowledge transfer (26). The narrators in Todo lo de las focas and Cien botellas en una pared tell stories of bodies defeated by gendered

violence, placed under surveillance and incarcerated by border authorities, and broken by substandard medical care and a lack of food, a narration of embodied experiences that illuminates the complicated relationship between the physical and the representational, including the ways in which it is shaped by the patterns of culture, gender, and genre.

Clandestine Abortion, Surveillance, and Border Crossing in Federico Campbell's  
Todo lo de las focas

One of the defining traits of the border in Federico Campbell's Todo lo de las focas<sup>5</sup> is a paradoxical sensation of simultaneous fluidity and rigidity. The characters are intensely hybrid, even as they are irrevocably of Mexico and the United States. In the introduction to her English-language translation of a collection of Campbell's writing, Tijuana: Stories on the Border (1995), Debra Castillo observes this interplay between stasis and mobility. She argues that the border creates "a sense of place as well as implicit displacement. It suggests a space that is both neatly divided and, in the crossover dreams of its inhabitants, disorientingly confused" (18). Gloria Anzaldúa likewise configures the border between Mexico and the United States as "una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25). This metaphor imagines the border as a festering division and underscores the violent punishment visited upon those who defy it. The physical bodies in Todo lo de las focas are fragmented, not unlike the narrative structure itself, a form of representation that calls attention to the literal violence suffered by subjects along the United

States/Mexico border, as well as to the role of language in creating and maintaining the concepts of nation and identity that inform decisions about how to enforce political borders.

The novella, which is situated in Tijuana, emphasizes that conventional depictions of border identity are frequently disembodied. Rather than celebrating hybridity, the text suggests that the pressures of inhabiting a region defined by multiple signification and heightened surveillance fragment the narrator's language and his sense of self. He tries desperately to imagine both his lover's body and Tijuana's geography as whole, cohesive entities, as if their unity would provide a framework for understanding his world. His experience of Beverly and of the geographic specificity of Tijuana is instead fractured. The fragmented narrative structure registers the narrator's grief at the loss of his lover, yet his desire to re-create her artistically is far from innocent. Just as Hollywood imagery disembodies Tijuana in this text, depicting it as a representative of vice and as a carefree playground, the narrator constructs Beverly as an art object within his own private iconography.<sup>6</sup> In Todo lo de las focas, the narrator and Beverly live the contradictions of border hybridity. Sex, pregnancy, abortion, and death sustain a narrative about the points of contact between Mexico and the United States that the narrator's language struggles to communicate. Abortion deprives the narrator of Beverly, which ruptures language and textual structure, while bodies and physical absence expose the unreliability of the narrator's linguistic and photographic representation. The novel presents the narrator's anguished search for memories of his lover and of his childhood in Tijuana,

while at the same time exploring the relationship between language and experience in a context defined by a disembodied hybridity. Language cannot, in this novel, repair physical injury and death, nor can strategic displacement resolve the border subject's entrapment within cultural, economic, and artistic confinements. Instead, the novel's emphasis on the experiences of physical bodies creates a more nuanced portrayal of what it means to live and write on the border.

Todo lo de las focas negotiates divisions between Mexico and the United States, as well as national tensions that contrast the increasingly industrialized north with Mexico City's concept of itself as the axis of a centralized political and cultural structure (Castillo, Rangel, Delgado 402).<sup>7</sup> Competing, contradictory images of Tijuana inform the text, and Campbell describes the city as “una zona entre el país México y el país Estados Unidos, entre la realidad y la irrealidad, entre el idioma español y el inglés, es el imperio del umbral: una no mans land [sic], es decir el área que parte en dos el campo de batalla” (La máquina de escribir 56-57). In the 1970s, when Campbell began to publish, the social convulsions of the 1968 protests in Mexico City forced the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to modify its style of government in rhetoric and in practice, particularly regarding economic policy (Halperín Donghi 331). By the late 1980s, this meant more industrialization along Mexico's northern border, often implemented through multinational corporate investment in maquiladoras that finish imported goods for re-sale abroad (372). Claudio Lomnitz contends that this industrialization brought further changes, in that the development of industrial centers outside of Mexico City “radically altered the

regional organization of production—including cultural production—as well as the government’s place in the modernizing project” (116).<sup>8</sup> Campbell was born in Tijuana in 1941. Founder of the literary press *La Máquina de Escribir*, he has published novels, short stories, and interview collections, in addition to his work as a journalist and a political and cultural correspondent in Mexico and abroad.

Although it illustrates the socio-political context of Tijuana, *Todo lo de las focas* centers on the relationship between the narrator and his lover, Beverly. Campbell calls this novella a variant on the Bildungsroman (*La máquina de escribir* 30), and indeed the narrator recounts memories of his childhood and adolescence, referring to the city and to his distant relationship with his family. He reveals details about his relationship with Beverly that hint at a darker side, such as when he tells of his secret residence in her home and his reading of her correspondence. By reiterating the events surrounding her death, the text plays on the subjective nature of memory in re-creating the narrator’s jumbled recall of events, places, and sensations. The narrator nevertheless maintains tight control over his reality—and the reader’s experience of that reality—with his descriptions of bodies, objects, and memories. This lends an obsessive quality to his relationship with his lover. He uses language and photography to sift through the past, compulsively returning to certain images and events. The text consists of variations on this basic narrative nucleus: “Beverly apareció un día en el aeropuerto. Beverly se movía. Beverly me daba un beso. Beverly caía a mi lado en el auto cuando llegábamos a la línea internacional” (23). The repetition of Beverly as the grammatical subject in this synopsis underscores the

tension between the narrator's proclamation that he is "el centro del mundo" (13) and her narrative function as the absent presence at the center of the text. Further, the short sentences and exaggeratedly simple grammatical structures contrast with the text's relative inaccessibility, an effect created by fragmentation and a lack of narrative cohesion.

The straightforward recounting of this plot structure belies the circular telling and re-telling of these basic events, a characteristic that Carol Clark D'Lugo attributes to the fragmented novel (7). This narrative technique becomes disembodied, however, given that the narrator uses memories of Beverly to revisit his childhood and adolescence, as well as specific events and locales from Tijuana's history. He refers to Tijuana's history and geography, most notably the ruins of the Agua Caliente Casino,<sup>9</sup> but the city and his lover exist primarily in relationship to the narrator's subjective reality. Although the narrator first observes Beverly at an airport, he learns her name while inhabiting her house: "Una carta dirigida a ella, el recibo de la luz, me daban el dato de su verdadero nombre: Beverly... Ya sabía cómo nombrarla, Beverly..." (31). Here, as throughout the novella, the narrator appropriates pieces of Beverly's existence to construct her. He fixates on details of her body, particularly her hair, but her identity remains ambiguous at best. The narrator blurs her into a collective female identity, stating that "Siempre fuiste la misma con diferentes nombres, la niña del barrio, la compañera en la escuela secundaria, la señora joven recién casada, la prostituta del casino, o la misma, tú misma" (87). Her literally disembodied image is all that remains of her, yet he grieves an image that he has



constructed. The narrator creates and re-creates Beverly, and with each reiteration deposits additional layers of information onto the basic events of their troubled relationship, her death, and his attempts to re-create her, a quality that mimics the processes of memory explored by the text.

Similarly, Tijuana exists only as the narrator's compilation of depictions emanating from Hollywood and from the rest of Mexico. The novella takes issue with the disembodying manipulation of images of Tijuana's cultural and geographic hybridity by the rest of Mexico and the United States. Whether imagined as a "whore of a city" (Castillo, Rangel, Delgado 401), a kitschy tourist destination, a stopping-place for transnational migration, or as Néstor García Canclini's "postmodern laboratory" (286), Tijuana's imagery serves the cultural and ideological projects of distant interests. García Canclini notes the impatience of tijuanenses with these sorts of "criterios 'misioneros,'" citing their claim to a less idealized image of the border, given that daily experiences "les hacen vivir intensamente la desigualdad" between Mexico and the United States (296-297). In Tijuana and in Todo lo de las focas, lived experience complicates theoretical abstraction. The novella links disembodiment specifically to artistic representation, particularly cinema and photography. Campbell cites the casino's cinematographic qualities, describing it as Tijuana's Cinecittà (La máquina de escribir 56). Aesthetically, the structure incorporates the region's multiple cultural influences, fashioning them into a display of faded glamour. The narrator portrays the casino as the architectural heir of "una mezquita turca un tanto híbrida al desomponerse en un vago estilo californiano, ya por sí mismo un poco

colonial y andaluz” (78). Not unlike the way in which the narrator resorts to images of Beverly’s physical body, the text imparts a strong sense of place, even as the ambiguity of the narration undermines any depiction of that geography and history as somehow “real.” Tijuana, like Beverly, lives in the fantasies of others, and the novella emphasizes the painful, violent effects of border hybridity on the characters.

Todo lo de las focas emphasizes visual forms of representation, such as cinema and photography, to call attention to disembodied portrayals of Beverly, of the city, and of the border region more generally. Patterns of observation are thus threaded throughout the novella, as the narrator feels continually threatened by the possibility of surveillance, yet surreptitiously observes and photographs those around him. The text likewise explores the relationship of pregnancy to artistic representation, but, in contrast to a Western tradition that endows literary language with reproductive capacity, abortion in this novella interrupts the visibility of sexual reproduction. As Mala Htun suggests, abortion occupies a space of legal uncertainty in Latin America, although it occurs on a widespread basis (6).<sup>10</sup> In Todo lo de las focas, this ambiguity underscores the complex nature of visibility on the border. As a border subject, the narrator is under constant surveillance, but he, too, participates in the act of watching. The text utilizes Beverly’s pregnancy, illegal abortion, and death to emphasize that these patterns of observation are tied to patriarchal and disembodied genre and cultural conventions. Despite the ethical absolutes of contemporary debates, abortion remains, as Peggy Phelan notes, caught between the politics of reproduction and the politics of representation (130). Beverly’s death

destroys the narrator's use of language. The resulting fragmentation contests the narrator's reliance upon patriarchal tropes of gender and genre, such as his use of photography to "capture" women.<sup>11</sup> Beverly's body, if whole, would enable the narrator to make sense of his world and to tell a coherent story about it. To that end, he tries desperately to make sense of her physicality through memory, photography, and the geographical spaces of their encounters. The narrator therefore views abortion as a rupture of meaning and of his relationship with Beverly and states his discomfort with the procedure (100). Such a use of her body is deeply disembodiment, however, a position that the text resists by way of narrative fragmentation. Rather than presenting a whole, cohesive depiction of Beverly or of the border, the text contests disembodiment through a circular narrative based on grief and memory.

Disembodiment in Todo lo de las focas illustrates the ways in which bodies on the border are both excessively physical—that is, exposed to institutional control based on ethnic, national, or gender identities—and frequently overlooked. The clandestine abortion that leads to Beverly's death further underscores the necessity of paying attention to the ways in which concepts such as hybridity and transgression affect living subjects. While border surveillance targets specific bodies, consumers take advantage of goods and services produced by cheap labor, sold at a price that does not reflect the experiences of its work force, nor the toll this work takes on their bodies. Not unlike the bleeding body of Anzaldúa's metaphor, human bodies in this novella suffer confinement, neglect, and violence as a consequence of their border identities. Physical space, in this text, is analogous with the characters' bodies, and

the narrator constructs Tijuana as the space of his grief. In addition to Beverly's broken body, he explores a landscape mutilated by urban sprawl, punctuated by cemeteries, and littered with the remnants of military installations and failed political projects. Because the border implies surveillance and economic exploitation for Tijuana and the novella's characters, abortion illustrates the double bind of eluding visibility: even as it challenges the ways in which these subjects become visible, thereby strategically displacing the stories told about bodies as part of the border's ideological, cultural, and economic exchanges, the clandestine circumstances of the procedure in this text makes it dangerous and, for Beverly, tragic.

Because it is structured around absence, Todo lo de las focas strategically displaces images of Tijuana as a liminal, fantastical zone. That is, the text challenges the way border subjects, and Tijuana itself, become visible within the cultural and economic exchanges between the United States and Mexico. Capitalism, to produce specific goods for various consumers, needs bodies to signify in meaningful, recognizable patterns. Roderick Ferguson describes Mexican labor in the United States as part of a "surplus population," an excess of labor that exists both to "fulfill and exceed the demands of capital" (14, original). He argues that while the accumulation of this labor pool violates "hierarchies of race, gender, age, and sexuality" by, for instance, encouraging transnational migration, capitalism relies on those same categories to assign economic and cultural value to that labor (16). In this example, capitalism disembodies border subjects by viewing them as a cheap, racialized, and frequently gendered labor force. Todo lo de las focas focuses on

bodies to search for alternate portrayals of border identity. Abortion disrupts this disembodied exchange by clandestinely negating sexual reproduction. Beverly's death illustrates, however, the danger of inhabiting the fragmentary, shadowy regions of the border. In this text, abortion permits strategic displacement by challenging the ways in which the characters' bodies become visible, but it illustrates the limits of language to ameliorate physical injury and marginality.

For this reason, the novella does not celebrate border liminality. Rather, it suggests that, while, border transgression is ubiquitous, border enforcement results in danger. In his ethnographic study of the Mexico/United States border, Pablo Vila complicates the image of the border as a metaphor for hybridity and cultural exchange, bluntly stating that, "On the contrary, many people want to reinforce borders" (9). Linked as it is to literary creation, sexual reproduction in Cambell's text engages the intersections of gender, sexuality, and visibility on the border. For example, the narrator refers to captive seals in a public park, far from their habitat of the "línea divisoria que empieza y termina en las playas" (66). He imagines them as

Seres a medias: metamorfoseados, fronterizos, en medio del camino  
hacia la vida terrestre, habitantes risueños de las olas, muñecas  
flotadoras, somnolientas, mudas, seres andróginos y en apariencia  
asexuados, las focas reaparecían y desaparecían bajo el agua cristalina.  
(66)

The narrator describes himself as living "a medias" (17) and, like him, the seals are unable—or unwilling—to accept the social meanings assigned to their bodies. Rather

than participating in a visual display of stable gender signifiers, the seals evidence an odd asexuality not conducive to reproduction, whether of offspring or meaning. However, this evasion results in their captivity and their function as a spectacle, which suggests a link between the border's ambiguity and increased surveillance. For Castillo, the seals are emblematic of dangerous border transgression; she notes that the text evokes then in "a context of mutilation, or death" (*Easy Women* 114). The text challenges ideas of border hybridity with an emphasis on the embodied experience of the border's contradictions, a condition underscored by the seals' captivity and Beverly's death.

Abortion in this novella complicates the way meaning is produced as part of the contentious exchange of images and bodies along the United States/Mexico border. This context identifies Tijuana with the satisfaction of multiple vices. The text describes, for example, the trade in war-time contraband that fuels the city's growth, until finally

así, de una ranchería de finales de siglo pasó a ser un pueblo fantasma al principio, luego una maravillosa tierra de nadie en la que tanto los visitantes como los nativos se sabían perdidos y sólo fraguaban negocios de remuneración inmediata y aspiraban a industrializar el aborto, los juegos de azar, los centros de diversión y las baratijas artesanales. (25-26)

Within the border economy, Tijuana absorbs the "población flotante" of tourism and assimilates it "como una manera natural de ser" (80). Tourist and leisure venues

flourish alongside more covert yet equally lucrative activities, such as abortion, and the narrator implies that catering to the desires of North American tourists has shaped the city's transition from rural backwater to no-man's-land of cheap illusions. By equating Tijuana with abortion's liminality, the text references the positioning of Mexico and the United States within the cultural and corporeal exchanges of the border region. As Castillo, Rangel, and Delgado explain, Tijuana "conflates symbolic moral and geographic exclusions from the healthy body of the state. From both sides of the border, Tijuana represents that tacky and vile and threatening thing that middle-class morality must resist but cannot stop talking about" (402). Abortion and gambling occupy a central location in the narrator's historical imaginary because, in contrast to promises of modernity through industrialization, Tijuana's development only produces a disembodied tourist spectacle.

As the text re-structures patterns of visibility, it strategically displaces the images of Tijuana created by the United States and the rest of Mexico. The novella combines clandestine abortion with a fragmentary narrative structure that undermines the narrator's reliance upon the false premises of his literary, artistic authority. Castillo argues that Tijuana is pulled between Los Angeles and Mexico City (Tijuana 15), and the narrator experiences the city as a convergence of discourses and temporalities. He links the city's history specifically to the United States, as when he refers to the naval base in San Diego and to schoolmates who died in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam (47). He details information about fighter planes, bombing strategies, and war preparations, then emphasizes the failure of these plans by

remarking that, “Años más tarde los refugios antiaéreos serían una mezcla de alambre de gallinero y fierros retorcidos” (59). Mexico City, and official Mexican culture, likewise lay claim to the Tijuana of Todo lo de las focas.<sup>12</sup> The narrator cites Lázaro Cárdenas’s decree to close the Agua Caliente Casino and convert it into a school, thereby suggesting that the casino is another casualty of time and the aspirations of distant political leaders (80). The text imagines Tijuana through multiple cultural discourses, a context in which abortion assumes an ambiguous role. If Beverly’s clandestine abortion offers the chance to negotiate a potentially dangerous visibility, it also signals, for the narrator, Tijuana’s ties to distant powers and an inability to represent itself.

Bodies, through the textual emphasis on abortion, thus relay hybridity’s creative potential alongside its problematic embodiments. Cárdenas’s gesture of turning a casino built by American business interests and frequented by Hollywood celebrities into a school is in keeping with the Mexican government’s post-revolutionary nationalist educational projects.<sup>13</sup> Identified in Todo lo de las focas as a wasteland of industrialized gaming and abortion, however, Tijuana cannot replicate this populist nationalism, except to service tourists satisfied by shoddy handicrafts. The city indexes Hollywood’s version of Mexican reality in tourist bars and cabarets. It does so by creating “construcciones fantasmales que querían ser al menos dos o tres paredes más auténticas que los sets hollywoodenses que ofrecían una versión acartonada y pintoresca de Tijuana” (25). For the narrator, Tijuana becomes real as an experience of disembodied patterns of discourse from Mexico and the United



States. Abortion's liminality facilitates evasion and temporarily thwarts the excessive surveillance of border subjects, but Beverly's death at the border returns the narrator to his representational captivity. He remains locked within artistic and cultural paradigms that dictate how he narrates his world, rendering him incapable of writing a border story in which he eludes dangerous visibility and simultaneously controls his fictional creations. The novella's bodies tell the tale he is unable to convey.

In addition to the narrator's association of Tijuana with Beverly's illegal abortion and death, he defines the city as feminine and sterile. Employing the trope of the earth as female, he describes Tijuana as a city of women, a "multitud de mujeres de todas las edades, ríos, ríos de mujeres, ríos secos y cuencas arenosas" (25). The narrator makes a more literal connection between the physical space of the city and the female body when he wanders onto the set of a movie filmed near a beach. He wades into the water, only to discover that it is made of women's bodies: "El tapiz era un cuerpo de mujer, un cuerpo de espaldas que me hacía resbalar. Besaba los senos de la mujer, ella me besaba; creí que fingía, y entre los apretados labios de nosotros dos se interponía un mechón de pelo rubio y castaño" (55). Beverly, referenced by her hair, works her way into the narrator's reality and changes his experience of Tijuana's physical space. This contact with her so unsettles him that everything around him dissolves into colors, vibrations, and nearly inaudible sounds. The narrator further describes the connection between land and the body, stating that he walks carefully across "las venas de la península, como si recorriera un tronco vivo y azulado, pleno de ramificaciones nerviosas, ríos, veredas, como en la

distribución de los nervios espinales” (55). In a region characterized by urban sprawl, the stark limitations of fences, and the ubiquitous transgression of borders, this example connects these geographic realities to the intimate psychological world of the narrator. Meanings traverse the region’s nervous system, circulating like blood or electricity through the synapses of behavior and contact. At the same time, their flow is disrupted by violence and indifferent blockades, an image the narrator utilizes to characterize his experience of Tijuana, not unlike Beverly, as a broken, divided body.

Rather than a fertile ground for reproducing economic or political ideologies, then, Tijuana’s female body aborts the links of narrative signification that might tell a coherent and unified story. Abortion, for Beverly, is fatal, and her death destroys the narrator’s ability to narrate according to conventional standards of coherence, suggesting that hybridity and marginality, like the border itself, are easier to theorize than to live. The bodies on display in Todo lo de las focas, in addition to the narrator’s oscillation between the fear of observation and the desire to observe, set up the border as primarily a place for watching. Castillo argues that Beverly exemplifies the “mysterious gringa” and “serves as a figure for the specular space in which the United States contemplates the strangeness of its own image” (Easy Women 105). The narrator does not, however, provide access to Beverly’s contemplation of Tijuana. Instead, the text focuses on the narrator’s experience of the ways in which Tijuana’s identity is refracted through the cultural imagery of the United States. Within this visual economy, abortion strategically displaces by manipulating the visibility of border subjects and by fragmenting language, narrative structure, and

physical bodies. The text refuses to represent Tijuana, Beverly, or the narrator as part of a cohesive system of representation, instead underscoring the high price exacted from border subjects and their physical bodies.

With the textual emphasis on various kinds of watching, visibility in Todo lo de las focas manifests the complexities of agency within literary or cultural representation. Phelan re-thinks the relationship between visibility and political power, arguing that to remain unmarked, or invisible, within cultural discourse often confers greater power (1). Visibility, in the border context, implies surveillance, a threat not lost on the narrator. He characterizes himself as excessively visual, even describing his camera as an integral part of his body (61), but he continually narrates a fear of observation. He tries to manipulate the representational field of the border, seeking always to see and rarely to be seen, even by his lover. In one scene, the narrator hunts Beverly with his gaze, but fears catching her, repeating that “le di rienda a mi presa” (45). The narrator imagines himself as part of a cinematic representation, stating that “me creía el héroe en una secuencia de espionaje cinematográfica” (44). He wants to be seen, but only on his terms, a desire that translates into his narrative technique. Textual fragmentation manifests the breaking of language, as well as the narrator’s desire to control how he is portrayed. Obsessed with the thought of constant observation, the narrator places himself—and Beverly—within the realm of language and symbol. In doing so, he confronts the excessive visibility of the border subject, a process epitomized by Beverly’s abortion and death. What the narrator fears is visibility as part of another’s representation, while his

concern about observation stems from a lack of agency, whether perceived or actual, in the border's traffic in bodies and cultures.

Representation, for the narrator in Todo lo de las focas, signifies both release and confinement. More than literary depiction but less than verifiably real, the bodies in this novella sit at the juncture between discourse about the border and the experience of living on the border. Clandestine abortion narrates the contact between literary language and embodied experience. As a metaphor, it delineates the spaces of the physically real—pregnancy, death, the narrator's inability to cross the international border—while emphasizing the ways in which this physicality can be hidden. For this reason, abortion in this novella focuses on the interplay of in/visibility that accompanies pregnancy. One cannot be, as the saying goes, a little bit pregnant. One can, however, be invisibly pregnant. As Phelan stresses, “the visibility of pregnancy is never absolute,” and the point of legal, medical and social surveillance of women's bodies is control over female subjectivity (145). Abortion facilitates the silent exchange of pregnant for not-pregnant. Like racial passing and border crossing, clandestine abortion in particular points to a discomfiting lack of control over identity's visible, physical signifiers. Martha Patricia Castañeda Salgado argues in fact that access to abortion contests the ways in which a patriarchal culture appropriates and writes women's lives and bodies (19). In Todo lo de las focas, Beverly's pregnancy and death force the narrator to confront an embodied reality beyond his artistic control. As a result, the text utilizes abortion to question how the real of the border is reproduced—and for whom.

At stake in the novella, then, is language's capacity to animate. Beverly's abortion and death undermine the narrator's literary abilities. In her discussion of abortion debates in the United States, Barbara Johnson describes apostrophe as "a trope, which, by the silvery voice of rhetoric, calls up and animates the absent, the lost, and the dead" (696). The narrator attempts to re-animate Beverly by way of literary language, a task made literally impossible by her death. Abortion in this text underscores the limits of art in repairing corporeal injury or absence. While language cannot undo death, Beverly's rhetorical, textual presence complicates her physical absence; she exists somewhere between her physical body and portrayals of that reality. The narrator's project is both animation and invention. Faced with her absence, he resorts to the imperfect recall of apostrophe:

Trato de definirte y fracaso. Trato de relacionarte, de registrarte, y me atiborro de palabras, exactamente igual como cuando intenté escribirte muchísimas cartas fallidas. Quise hablar de ti como si existieras o como si no me dirigiera a ti, pues de la noche a la mañana, en una fecha ya ida, me quedé hablando solo, mencionándote en tercera persona. (82)

This example does not make clear whether Beverly is dead or merely absent, only that her nebulous presence persists solely in his narrative. As she slips away, the narrator finds himself speaking alone, and he addresses her in the second person to re-animate her. The narrator states that, "En muchas palabras, te inventaría" (83), an invention that highlights the fact that the Beverly he misses is the Beverly he created.

Language and photography cannot substitute for her, yet they are all he ever had: because he could only approach her by way of disembodied portrayals, she was always absent.

Beverly, for the narrator, imparts an excessively present absence. His images of her, whether linguistic or photographic, only confirm her physical absence. The narrator both fears and desires her physicality, however, because the presence of her body suggests something fundamentally “real” that interrupts his constructed reality. Johnson describes apostrophe as a “form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness” (695). The narrator’s language gives life to Beverly, in the form of textual presence, and she seems most alive in the fragments of dialogue presented by the narration. The slipperiness of Beverly’s presence when he describes his invention of her complicates the structures of linguistic exchange: he is speaking directly to her, but relating the story of her absence. It is as if she has stolen away, and the narrator is left with the empty shape of what should have been her physical presence. The asymmetrical linguistic exchange exemplifies this absence: the tú, rather than marking her presence and participation in the conversation, evidences her absence. In this exchange, the voice that returns is not, and can never be, Beverly’s, but only an echo of the narrator’s voice. This address emphasizes Beverly’s entrapment within narrative structures, as the elusive materiality of her body becomes another signifier in the narrator’s private iconography.

If visibility in the border region signifies confinement within patterns of disembodiment, the bodies in Todo lo de las focas press their shape onto language. The novella employs bodies to emphasize the potential violence in all representation, given that meaning is constructed as much by what is left out as by what is included. The narrator expresses this with his desire to control Beverly's body through art. In an address of her memory, for example, he states that "Te me escapabas, te me vas, y trato en vano de tenerte otra vez conmigo, trato de condicionarte o inventarte en cualquier lugar del mundo o del pasado" (89). His tools in this enterprise include language and photography, a medium more suggestively physical in its depictions. Each morning the narrator attempts to reconstitute Beverly through words and objects (23), and attaches importance to the physical evidence of her existence. The accumulated material fragments of her history nevertheless frustrate his image of her: "El afán de conservarlas, con quién sabe qué propósitos, el hecho de acumular objetos en nombre del pasado, empobrecían la imagen ideal que yo quería formarme de ella" (34). Her pregnant body likewise forces an unbidden confrontation with the physical, which, for the narrator, amounts to a loss of control over his portrayal of her body. In desperation, he contemplates demolishing "el archivo, a destruir el recuerdo y el pasado a base de rompimientos materiales, dedicado a no conservar nada que tenga relación con lo que ahora se ha desvanecido" (90). By way of photography, Beverly emerges from the waters of his darkroom as if in a mythical birth, brought about by a process akin to alchemy (91). As he develops these images, his narrative hints not only at photography's capacity to replicate, but at the potential for violence. The

narrator describes Beverly's appearance in his darkroom as a birth, but then conveys a violent manipulation of her image: "Te cortaba. Buscaba diversos ángulos y encuadres con la guillotina" (91). His use of photographic tools evokes his desire to control Beverly and her image, hinting at the latent violence within all representation and, in conjunction with the preceding sentence, suggesting that this is acted out not on her image but on her physical body.

The narrator's reference to physical violence in this scene reiterates the way in which he experiences her abortion and death. Because it takes place under secretive, illegal conditions, abortion ceases to be a medical procedure and instead represents, for the narrator, yet another manifestation of his unending fear of observation. The morning after the procedure, the narrator notes that Beverly watches him, fearlessly, whereas "Yo he sido quien no ha dejado de tener miedo. No he podido dormir. He creído que alguien nos espiaba" (100). By taking his knife to her image, the narrator seeks to comprehend the relationship between her living body and his portrayals of that body. She reappears as he manipulates her image, "viva, palpable, saludando y agradablemente tibia en las manos" (91). With his knife, the narrator attempts to undo the doctor's incisions that result in Beverly's death. Her physical death limits his narration of her birth as photographic image. If the bodies in this text narrate, if they tell stories and cross boundaries and contest power, the narrator is, in this instance, incapable of intuiting anything beyond their frailty. What becomes clear to the narrator, gripped by the aching absence of Beverly's living body, is the lack that characterizes all representation. He sends her the photos he has crafted, anxiously



anticipating her pleasure and gratitude, but Beverly never receives them. The narrator, in his grief, renounces language, stating that, “A partir de aquel vuelo que te sacó del país para siempre, me propuse encerrarme en mi cuarto y no hablar ni siquiera a solas” (91). He loses faith in the narrative capacities of language and photography. The narrator uses both to construct his world and those in it, but his narrative cannot ultimately span physical absence and bring her back to him.

To this end, the structure of Todo lo de las focas is itself abortive, only reluctantly reproducing the narrative events as a cohesive entity. The narrator presents his memories in disjointed fashion, often focusing on discrete images or fragments of dialogue. As he works with her photographs, for example, the narrator isolates Beverly from other images, “rescatando un solo detalle (el pie, la cara de perfil, el codo sobre la bolsa de lona) y demorando en la espuma su camino hacia la luz con el agua del fijador” (20). In this instance, Beverly’s image is quite literally in pieces, a condition that points to the fallibility of the narrative process. In the context of this novella, pregnancy works as another form of narration, while abortion signals the inability of language to replicate fully the experience of life on the border.

Literary language can only convey imperfect images, which highlights the body’s potential in eluding the dangerous border visibility experienced by the characters. At the same time, abortion intervenes in the narrative process, cutting off the narrator’s control and frustrating his portrayals of the border through language and photography.

At the end of the novel, language devolves into a fragmented dialogue between the narrator and an unnamed authority figure. Castillo describes the

narrator's retreat into a "sequence of nearly meaningless Spanish courtesy formulas" as an "auto-silencing" that evokes his alienation from language (Easy Women 123).

More than alienation from language, however, the narrator's loss of language distances him from his own body. He states that "mis palabras no son mis palabras, empleo términos que para mí no significan nada, o bien cambian de sentido con los años o se diluyen en una dicción que ni a mí mismo sirve" (123). He catches himself en flagrante y estúpida falsedad, diciendo algo en cierta forma y de inmediato me cierra la boca el reconocimiento súbito de que no soy yo el que habla, ni siquiera tal vez el que abre la boca y mueve los labios y traga saliva. (123)

As evidenced by Beverly's death, language cannot transport the body across absence. The narrative stops short, broken by a border it cannot transgress. This abortion of language, and of the narrative project, reinforces the political border between Mexico and the United States. Language, finally, can go no further.

The reiterated descriptions of Beverly's lifeless body at the international border thus undercut the narrator's use of language and photography to elude surveillance. Although he manipulates images of her body, he cannot evade her physical death. This visceral reality renders him visible to the border's surveillance mechanisms, and he is detained and questioned. This detainment imposes incarceration, a situation that affects the narrator's recounting of his memories. The text's final scenes reveal the tragedy of the narrator's initial, apparent celebration of border crossing. He begins by proclaiming a remarkable ability to incorporate

himself seamlessly into different physical spaces: “No siento diferencia alguna entre una ciudad y otra. He llegado a lugares en que jamás estuve y me conduzco como si allí hubiera transcurrido toda mi vida” (13). Rather than subversive border transgression, the novella portrays a man broken by representation. Stripped of language, the narrator is reduced to solipsistic repetition and describes himself as “el centro del mundo, el espejo: nada importa, todo existe en función mía, cuando duermo desaparecen las cosas, la tierra deja de girar y de desplazarse por el universo” (13). For the narrator, the border’s excesses—exemplified by the circumstances of Beverly’s death—render him incapable of making sense of the world.

For this reason, he slips into a realm of indistinguishable sameness, in which “Todo me da igual. Poco a poco distingo menos los rasgos propios de las cosas y casi todas las tardes termino por entregarme a dormir, despertar y, naturalmente, no hablar con nadie” (13). Lost in grief, the narrator reproduces the world around him, including Beverly, as a function of himself. In doing so, his narration reiterates the way in which Mexico City and the United States construct Tijuana and its citizens in accordance with their own desires. Phelan describes the potential of performance as precisely the disruption of the tendency to create an other that replicates the self (3), describing it as a model for another system of representation, “one in which the reproduction of the Other as the Same is not assured” (3, original). In Todo lo de las focas, the characters’ bodies work against the narrator to suggest another means of performing the border, a portrayal in which abortion disrupts the images of Tijuana created by Hollywood or by Mexican nationalism. In this way, the novella

strategically displaces problematic configurations of the border. This maneuver, however, results in madness for the narrator. In this text, narrative fragmentation belies a profound sadness regarding the narrator. He is at times intolerable, even cruel, to Beverly, but he, too, is broken by the border's heightened surveillance.

The physical bodies in Todo lo de las focas therefore evidence the complex relationship between language and corporeality. Elaborate defenses can neither shield the narrator from the visceral reality of Beverly's death nor return her to him, and the effects of her death work their way into his language. Although he appeals to conventional tropes of power, grounded in gender inequality and a Western tradition of asymmetrical lines of sight, he is in the end unable to overcome the marginality of his own body. As loss and physical absence register in narrative fragmentation, the novella explores the multiple identifications, transgressions, and confinements that constitute Tijuana's textual border reality. The city's body, like Beverly's, is caught between various cultural discourses. Strategic displacement, by way of abortion, offers a temporary reprieve, but Beverly's death reinforces the confining paradigm that encircles the characters and the space they inhabit. In Todo lo de las focas, border identity exacts a toll on the bodies of those who inhabit the region. The text thus challenges the claims placed on Tijuana by the United States and the rest of Mexico, as well as questions depictions of the border that focus on hybridity's creative potential without taking into account the embodied experience of that reality.

True Crimes: Domestic Violence and Gendered Narratives in Ena Lucía Portela's  
Cien botellas en una pared

The narrator of Cien botellas en una pared, Zeta, also seeks the fragile refuge of storytelling, a process that helps her to make sense of pain and grief. Just as the narrator in Campbell's novella uses his art alternately to conceal and to reveal embodied experience, Zeta hesitates to narrate the violence to which her lover Moisés subjects her, weighing these revelations against the literary norms by which she is judged. While the border dynamics of transgression/surveillance inform Todo lo de las focas, Zeta's narrative of domestic abuse signals the policing of art by social and literary patterns. Not unlike the point Campbell's text makes about the distance between border imagery and border experience, Portela's novel, like many Cuban texts of the 1990s, accentuates the breach between revolutionary rhetoric about Cuba and Cuban reality as lived experience.<sup>14</sup> Cien botellas en una pared illustrates the way this disjuncture facilitates disembodied literary portrayals of women. Moisés's physical abuse of Zeta reiterates her marginal status with regard to Cuban cultural and artistic patterns, such as gender norms or the concept of literary taste. Her narrative mimics the detective fiction written by her novelist friend, Linda Roth; similarly, it appropriates Moisés's language, perspective, and rhetorical style. In doing so, Zeta creates a hermetic literary body that frustrates the supposedly open, legible female body of both detective fiction and Cuban nationalism, piecing together this portrayal from fragmented, borrowed images and strategically displacing the conventional uses of these images.

With the onset of economic and political problems following the collapse of the Soviet Union, ideological inconsistencies changed concepts of Cuban history; food shortages, meanwhile, emaciated literal human bodies. José Quiroga argues that these difficulties interrupted the 1960s revolutionary narrative that extended from “a clearly delineated national and collective memory that led from a colonial past to a promising future” (1). Magaly Muguercia charts this history corporeally. She describes the Cuban body of the 1960s as “a democratic, egalitarian, dignified, and communal body,” that, with time, lost ductility and gave way to a body frozen by “ideological firmness” (176). The Cuban body of the 1990s is intensely focused on the business of survival (181), and Muguercia describes it as a “loose” body, “not only in the sense of freed or untied but also in the sense of ‘escaped,’ thrown out of gear, in some way autonomous or alone” (184). She depicts a “usurping, chameleonlike body,” often opportunistic and capable of creating “multiple scenarios, from the picaresque to self-exile to madness and suicide” (184). Cien botellas en una pared pays attention to the “loose” body of the 1990s, using it to illustrate how the Special Period became, in many ways, a crisis of language. Zeta notes, for example, that the economic crisis replaced the verb “comprar” with the verbs “resolver” and “conseguir” (76). As language falters, bodies emerge as the narrative space of transgression, lack, contraband, and ambiguity. Luisa Campuzano characterizes recent narrative literature written by Cuban women by placing foremost the “articulation of what was off limits for decades, for centuries: the taboos and restrictions relating to silenced and concealed bodies” (15). She links this overt

vocalizing of previously silenced topics to a persistent meta-literary reflection on writing as an activity that offers strategies for shaking off repressive social patterns (15). Cien botellas en una pared, with its focus on abuse, gendered violence, and authorship, therefore writes embodied experience into the narrative of Cuban cultural identity to challenge revolutionary and modernizing mythologies of national progress.

As the limits of artistic production expanded in the 1990s, at least in terms of state oversight (Quiroga 4), literary language also seemed to change. Texts referenced the shortages of the early 1990s with a more visceral narrative of their effects on the body, while language became more diffuse, less anchored in a realist sense of time and place. Campuzano argues that, as the Special Period disrupted the normalcy of work and family life, many younger female writers portrayed the period's difficulties "laterally, with humor and irony, referred to or hinted at in texts that at first sight do not appear to discuss these topics, but on the contrary, often startle their readers with strange characters, spaces and problems that are a by-product of the disruptions of these years" (12). Portela, born in 1972, is recognized internationally and in Cuba for the sort of narrative innovation Campuzano mentions (17). Her novel, El Pájaro: Pincel y tinta china, won the 1997 Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) Novel Prize, and Cien botellas en una pared won a Spanish literary prize, the Premio Jaén de Novela, in 2002. In contrast to texts such as Abilio Estévez's Los palacios distantes (2002), which I analyze in the second chapter and which evokes severe shortages through semi-fantastical elements or marginalized spaces and beings, Portela's Cien botellas en una pared explores the

self-imposed fantastic. This is evident in the novel's emphasis on altered states of consciousness through alcohol and drug use, as well as the deliberate entangling of reality and fiction.<sup>15</sup>

In Cien botellas en una pared, Zeta appropriates elements of her friend Linda Roth's detective fiction to call attention to the ways in which literary genre and post-revolutionary Cuban nationalism disembody female subjects, either by reducing them to physical objects or, alternately, to artistic tropes. Zeta's narrative subverts genre conventions, particularly those governing visibility, to articulate a literary body that contests this essentializing disembodiment. Insofar as this novel functions as detective fiction, it investigates the ability of language to convey the visceral realities of embodied experience. Persephone Braham argues that realism in post-revolutionary Cuban fiction emphasized the "perceived need to strip away th[e] 'contaminating' ornament from literary production, leaving only the virile discourse of revolutionary truth" (28). According to Braham, Cuban detective fiction, particularly in the 1970s, pitted "the hermeticism of modern (prerevolutionary) poetic language against the exigencies of liberal and anticolonial political endeavors, which required clarity and moral commitment of the intellectual voice" (xi). This kind of literature in post-1959 Cuba was therefore compelled by the strictures of an ideologically committed realism to narrate accurately and faithfully.

To work within the revolutionary parameters defined by Castro's 1961 "Words to the Intellectuals," Cuban artistic and literary expression was asked to provide a succinct and transparent message that conveyed the immediacy of the



social, political, and cultural struggles confronting Cuban society. Zeta's narrative in Cien botellas en una pared engages this legacy, dutifully re-creating a "believable" account of the events while at the same time combining personal anecdotes, neighborhood gossip, and literary references in a deliberate subversion of the call to narrative clarity. Her narrative illustrates another aspect of Braham's contention that detective fiction in Cuba "has proven to be a faithful reflection of ideological trends, both official and popular, and often reveals—albeit unintentionally—the disjunctions between reality and bureaucratic discourse" (21). Recent Cuban detective fiction challenges the propagandistic uses of art frequently associated with socialist states, a project taken up in part by Zeta's narrative. As she tells her story, Zeta enacts a sort of linguistic striptease, assuming and then discarding voices, styles, and genres. In doing so, she utilizes the framework of artistic convention to strategically displace patterns of gendered violence by constructing a contestatory and specifically literary female body.

As in Todo lo de las focas, Zeta reconstructs her relationship to a dead lover. In an activity reminiscent of detective fiction, she pieces together the past, including her potential involvement in the events leading up to Moisés's death. Unlike the abortive reiterations of Campbell's novella, Zeta doles out clues in a more unified narrative structure. This relative cohesion does not preclude, however, the intricate telling and re-telling of stories, nor the calculated confusion between her reality and the fictional worlds she creates. Zeta recounts her life story in a tale that references the picaresque and *Kunstlerroman* literary traditions. It includes the brief relationship

between her French mother, who died in childbirth, and her gay Cuban father, who later leaves the island; the origins of her friendship with Linda Roth; her conflicted religious faith and her bond with her confessor, Father Ignacio; various academic and romantic misadventures; and her romantic liaison with Moisés. The novel opens with Moisés's physical mistreatment of Zeta, a scene in which Zeta borrows his words and perspective to characterize herself. Her description of the conflict emphasizes his cultural prowess—he argues by quoting Latin—as well as his inordinate desire for intellectual superiority. After the fight, she relays his instructions to her, stating that

yo debía dejarme de tanta lloradera y tanto artistaje, levantarme de una buena vez antes que él me levantara de un sopapo o me arrastrara por los pelos e ir al antro de los bajos [...] a comprar un litro, ah, y cigarros [...], porque no había en el mundo todo panorama tan indecente como el de una gorda subnormal y despatarrada en el suelo, con el rímel corrido, llorando lágrimas negras y haciéndose la víctima, la dama de las camelias. (15)

Zeta invokes Moisés's language, along with his intellectual privilege, to illustrate the ways in which she is disembodied by Cuban intellectual and cultural traditions. This recurrent tactic evidences one of the maneuvers I describe as strategic displacement in her narrative, as she frequently narrates herself using another's focalization, most often that of either Linda or Moisés.

Zeta, pregnant, realizes that she cannot raise the child she desperately wants in such an abusive relationship. She is, however, unwilling to resolve the situation

either by way of abortion or leaving Moisés. After Linda's jilted lover, Alix, moves in with Zeta and Moisés, she silently hatches a plan to rid Zeta of Moisés. Alix leaves a large window open with the curtain tightly drawn, knowing that Moisés will search out the source of warm air entering the air-conditioned apartment. When he does, he falls to his death in the street below, crushing a neighbor. Before leaving unnoticed, Alix warns Zeta, who remains half-asleep, that the window is open. Following the deaths, Zeta is detained and questioned by the police, who eventually abandon the investigation. The police, while at first suspicious, willingly construct and accept an "official story" about the events. When Zeta reveals her version to close friends, they attribute it to madness or shock. In her narrative account she submits the sequence of events to review, emphasizing their relative disorder in her mind and calling attention to her ordering process.

Zeta seeks not merely to organize, however, but to turn order into meaning. She wants clarity for herself, even as she consciously provides the narrative enigma typical of detective fiction. Her narrative thus functions as meta-literary memoir and as a detective novel. Ironically self-deprecating, Zeta characterizes herself as a rather unlikely author, referring explicitly to the writing process and to her concerns about how her writing will be received. As she describes the former owner of the house in which she lives, for example, she imagines him reading over her shoulder with "oligárquica reprobación y muchas ganas de arrebatar me el lápiz. ¿Quién soy yo, tan fresca, para hablar así de él, de su vida privada? ¿Quién me dio permiso? ¿Y qué canallada es esta de escribir con un mocho miserable en unas harapientas hojas de

papel gaceta?” (33). Later, she worries that she reveals too many of Linda’s secrets, asking herself “¿quién era yo para irrumpir de modo tan abrupto en su intimidad? Supongo que se enterará cuando lea este libro, si llego a terminarlo, si llega a leerlo, y quiera Dios que no me odie entonces” (116). At the same time, her narrative is inflected by orality in her choice of phrases, expressions, and linguistic patterns. Because Zeta’s telling blends episodes, anecdotes, and memories, she includes narrative markers that relate the events to each other and to the story she is presently telling. While recounting her failed attempt to become a jinetera, for example, she states that, “En cuanto a Moisés, aún me faltaban unos meses para conocerlo” (79). Later, she begins to introduce Alix, but trails off, promising future revelation: “Alix Ostión, la más notoria entre las amigotas de Linda, [...] quien vivió con nosotros durante algún tiempo, hasta que... Pero aún no es el turno de Alix, ya hablaré de ella más adelante” (79). Throughout her narrative, Zeta provides information that, while fragmented, points to the possible resolution of a mystery.

Less clear is the exact nature of the mystery in need of resolution. Playing off of the conventions of genre fiction, Zeta intercalates episodes of her life with neighborhood gossip, history, and selected portions of Linda’s detective novels. Zeta downplays her own literary talent in comparisons with Linda, who imagines herself as a future Nobel Prize winner, but she also slyly parodies her friend’s status as a “serious writer.” She describes Linda as “una escritora profesional, una escritora de verdad, viajera, ambiciosa y enérgica, a sus horas feminista y con pensamientos de gran envergadura” (22, original). The relationship between Zeta and Linda

epitomizes the complicated interlinking of fact, fiction, and narrative voice in Cien botellas en una pared. The narrative ironically employs Linda's focalization of Zeta, but it also devotes partial chapters to re-telling one of Linda's most popular novels, Nocturno Sebastián. Zeta transforms Linda's creation, which is itself based on a "real" neighborhood tragedy, in the service of her own narrative project. She repeats it not only for the reader, but relays the plot to Moisés as gossip. Further, the title of Portela's novel, Cien botellas en una pared, repeats the song Zeta sings to calm herself, but is the title of another of Linda's novels. Zeta's narrative parallels Linda's fiction, particularly at a thematic level. Instead of the two homicides in Linda's Cien botellas en una pared, Zeta's text contains two accidental deaths and a series of abusive romantic relationships. Rather than the gore of Linda's detective writing, Zeta focuses on the violent eroticism of her relationship with Moisés. Despite Linda's emphatic disgust at Moisés's treatment of Zeta, her cruelty toward Alix reiterates the patterns of sexual violence she criticizes in Cuban society. Linda likewise frequently and unkindly criticizes Zeta, although the text demonstrates the endurance of their friendship.

Cien botellas en una pared exploits the detective novel's enigmatic structure to portray fragmented narratives and injured bodies. Zeta's narrative links Moisés to an authoritative intellectual tradition in terms of physiology, academic training, and behavior. She relates him to Rodin's Thinker (18), to a Greek god (120), and, with his white beard, to Leonardo da Vinci (21). In addition, Moisés trained as a legal scholar and held a position on Cuba's Supreme Court. Zeta describes him as

“cultísimo y muy elocuente, le encantaba calzar sus discursos con latinajos,” which she, despite repeatedly calling herself a “burra,” footnotes to save readers the trouble of translating them (15). She states that Moisés “Dominaba como nadie el arte de la humillación y la poética del escarnio, en su vocabulario no faltaba ni una entre las palabras y expresiones que sirven para denigrar al ser humano” (20). Art, in Moisés’s hands, accuses Zeta of misrepresentation and punishes her with beatings and insults. He combines his linguistic faculties with physical violence to dominate, humiliate, and disembody Zeta, reinforcing that she is a sexual object and will never match his intellectual prowess.

The novel suggests a connection between the intellectual and cultural traditions that Cuba inherited from Europe and the sexual violence—and attraction—that Zeta experiences. By linking domestic abuse and art, Zeta attempts to write her way out of the gendered parameters established by Cuban literary and intellectual conventions. Campuzano contends that the emergence in the 1990s of previously taboo themes, such as sexual violence, is a means of rewriting “silenced and concealed bodies” and of challenging private and public gender repression (15). Patriarchy could ensure its survival by deeming domestic abuse or gendered violence unfit for the literary realm. For this reason, both Moisés and Linda criticize Zeta for her lack of literary taste and intellectual rigor. When Zeta tries to patch up a disagreement with Linda by flattering her with a comparison to Virginia Woolf, Linda responds with disdain, explaining that “ella sabía que era un genio, mucho mejor que esa lagartija inglesa tan hipocritona que yo había osado mencionar en su

presencia” (25, original). The linguistic and sexual violence Linda and Moisés exercise over Zeta disembody her, rendering her the “gorda burra” of Moisés’s rants (16) or the stereotypical, passive female victim abhorred by Linda (26). In response, Zeta contradicts literary convention to voice this violence. As she does, her literary body strategically displaces literary paradigms that relegate gendered violence to the artistic margins and to the periphery of national culture.

Not unlike the narrator in Todo lo de las focas, Zeta desires control over the way in which she becomes visible, especially in a literary sense. Her unsettling account of domestic violence is careful about how much, and in what fashion, it reveals. This process becomes most evident through focalization, as Zeta describes herself with the words and thoughts of Moisés and Linda, only to undermine the narrative authority she has temporarily granted them. When Zeta dedicates a chapter to describing herself, her family history, and her living conditions in a dilapidated house in Havana’s Vedado neighborhood, Linda’s descriptions of Zeta make their way into her narrative. Zeta prefaces a physical description of herself by stating her dislike of exercise and acknowledging the effects of this on her body (30). She narrates Linda’s frequent reproaches, stating

¿Treinta y cinco libras de sobrepeso? ¿Pero qué descaro es ése? ¿Por qué he descuidado mi apariencia de un modo tan infame? ¿Existirá en el mundo alguna criatura más golosa que yo? ¿Cuántas pizzas murruñosas y panes con croqueta y turrónes de maní me atrevo a engullir al día? ¿Por qué mejor no me dedico a los vegetales? ¿Será

que nunca me miro en el espejo? ¿A quién coño me quiero parecer?

Y así. (30)

Zeta keeps quiet in order not to offend Linda, but uses her narrative to rebut the insults and verbal abuse heaped upon “humildes e inofensivos gordinflones” (30). By incorporating Linda’s description, the narrative portrays Zeta’s body through a double vision. Zeta filters and selectively relays Linda’s focalization of her body, setting up a narrative situation in which Zeta watches Linda watching her. While there may well be multiple victims in Cien botellas en una pared, Zeta, in contrast to the conventions of detective fiction, is a victim who returns the gaze.

Campbell’s Todo lo de las focas characterizes the border as a place for watching, and Cien botellas en una pared likewise emphasizes that Zeta is subject to social surveillance. The doubled vision of her narrative structure reinforces this sensation and evidences the ways in which her body is at odds with Cuban society. For Linda, Zeta’s corpulence is a literal manifestation of her weakness, lack of discipline, and low self-esteem. In contrast to Linda, Zeta does not take full advantage of Cuba’s educational opportunities, nor does she excel at gaming the Cuban and international literary circuits. While Linda avails herself of an ambiguous ethnic identification, travels on a European passport, converses in multiple languages, and markets herself as a Cuban writer, Zeta remains in Havana. She holds a university degree, but gets by on remittances from her father and odd jobs, including automotive and mechanical repairs. Her body also complements a dominant theme of Special Period literary production, that of hunger. Zeta describes the food shortages



that plague Cuba, stating that “Durante toda mi vida he pasado hambre, por momentos aguda y siempre crónica” (86-87). The two women experience the complexities of the Special Period differently, as Linda travels abroad and reaps the benefits of international interest in Cuba, while Zeta’s body reduces in size due to a lack of food. Linda sadistically views weight loss as the bright side of hunger, to which Zeta remarks that “Lo de perder kilogramos por concepto de dieta forzosa me pareció un razonamiento bastante cruel y despiadado, típico de ella” (80). Mediated by external focalization, Zeta’s body registers her contentious relationship to Cuban society. Although language only imperfectly conveys embodiment, Zeta’s literary body suggests possibilities for strategically displacing the ideological exigencies of that portrayal.

Zeta’s body evidences that the Special Period manifests, among other things, a profound crisis of representation. The early days of the revolution allowed Cubans to imagine their history as a collective struggle leading to a brighter future, as Quiroga suggests, and creating, as Muguercia describes, a socialist body that emerged from the “friction and disorder of diverse identities, in conflict and understanding, in tensions between diverse classes, races, ages, and sexes who, for the most part, shared the same project” (176). The 1990s, in contrast, rendered a different image of Cuba and Cubans. Zeta compares the difficulties of the 1970s to those of the 1990s, stating that the former “Eran los años duros, cuando no había nada de nada, arroz con merluza, ilusiones y va que chifla. (Nadie imaginaba que veinte años después regresarían los años duros más endurecidos todavía, sin arroz, sin merluza, sin

ilusiones)” (37). Campuzano suggests that the difficulties of the 1990s were particularly hard on women because, “despite all the advances and advantages achieved by women during the preceding years, Cuban society continues to be eminently patriarchal, and this is exacerbated during a time of crisis” (13). Because it is specifically literary, Zeta’s text reflects on how best to narrate changing concepts of what it means to be Cuban and female. In this way, it evidences the difficulties of the 1990s, even as it breaks with other, disembodied depictions of Cuban women. Neither pre-revolutionary harlot nor model socialist worker, neither ambitious feminist writer nor hustling jinetera, Zeta uses her body to construct a counter-narrative to the patriarchal and authoritarian social structures that still inflect Cuban society. Zeta narrates her experience of the Special Period crisis through her body, creating an image that is less overtly oppositional without becoming less critical.

In doing so, Zeta’s literary body references the Enlightenment legacies that shape Cuban nationalism. She favors the eighteenth century (25) and repeatedly links her physical appearance to this time period. When Moisés describes her as a “gorda burra con estampa de puta francesa del siglo XVIII,” she remarks that “Esta descripción, un tanto rococó, me pareció fascinante” (16). Aída Beaupied links nationalism to bourgeois decency, a connection she considers central to Cuban nationalism’s “moralizing discourses,” which call for self-sacrifice for a collective cause (125-126). By way of her literary body, Zeta contests the disembodiment exercised by nationalism and patriarchy over her corporeality, aesthetics, and sexuality. As Enlightenment philosophy informed European colonial rule as well as

Latin American independence movements, criollos, mestizos, and, later, newly independent citizens lived a disconnect between universal subjectivity and an economic system based on racial abjection and forced physical labor. Beupied notes that the “unresolved tensions” of the Enlightenment are especially evident in Cuba, “a land of masters and slaves whose war of independence was fought under the banner of universal freedom and justice for all” (127). These maneuvers presuppose an Enlightenment appeal to universal subjectivity. Zeta writes herself as white and Western, but does so to illustrate her body’s function as a sexual object. She thus strategically displaces the narrative and physical violence suffered by Cuban bodies, particularly female Cuban bodies, in the service of nationalism.

Without mentioning it explicitly, Cien botellas en una pared echoes Alejo Carpentier’s novel, El siglo de las luces (1962), in teasing out the hypocrisies of a political order split between the ideals of universal subjectivity and political realities. As in Carpentier’s novel, Portela’s text suggests a secondhand Cuban culture that, not unlike descriptions of Zeta’s body, is composed of objects and ideas that originate elsewhere. Both novels negotiate what Carlos Alonso terms a narrative of futurity that relegates America to an unrealized future, thereby making it “the object of a ceaselessly regenerating discourse of mystification and perpetual promise” (8). By utilizing America as a cultural or rhetorical trope, the futurity Alonso analyzes disembodies the region’s inhabitants. Carpentier’s novel undercuts this portrayal by refracting Enlightenment ideals through a turbulent and anachronistic Caribbean context. Language, in this novel, refutes reason, and is formed by “la aglutinación, la

amalgama verbal y la metáfora, para traducir la ambigüedad formal de cosas que participaban de varias esencias” (189). Latin American embodiments, this example contends, necessitate different linguistic forms, which do not line up with European models. This image is likewise fraught with violence: the guillotine, which the novel associates with theater, arrives concurrently in the New World with word of the French abolition of slavery (140). The post-1959 revolutionary government in many ways took up the rhetoric of futurity, promising future triumph in exchange for present sacrifice. Cien botellas en una pared maneuvers an Enlightenment legacy, filtered through the rhetoric of the revolution as well as prior Cuban literary production, that still informs corporeal and literary norms. At the same time, the text forcefully narrates against the violent disembodiment futurity implies, creating a literary corporeality that gives voice to the experiences of the silenced bodies excluded from the narrative of Cuban nationalism.

As in Carpentier’s novel, language in Cien botellas en una pared is imperfectly bound up with the physical body. Moisés distrusts Zeta’s sexual pleasure, accusing her of trapping him in an erotic fiction. She recalls that “Mi placer, desde luego, le sonaba ficticio. ¿Por qué yo suspiraba? ¿Por qué gemía? ¿Por qué la humedad tan rápido, si él sólo aspiraba a torturarme? ¿Acaso podía gustarme un tipo a quien no entendía para nada, que hubiera podido ser mi padre y que fregaba el piso conmigo?” (21). The narrative slips between Zeta’s telling of the episode and Moisés’s focalization of Zeta, emphasizing his observation of her. Even as she stresses her own version of events, Zeta appropriates his language through a

narrative ventriloquism. Moisés believes that her body lies to him, just as do the “others,” the phantom philosophers, scholars, and ruffians against whom he continually rails. Their perceived affront consists primarily in forcing their intellectual inferiority upon him. To Moisés, Zeta remembers, “Yo era como ellos, embustera y farsante, puta mala. Malísima. De las que mienten con todo el cuerpo” (21). According to this account, Zeta perpetuates a farcical sexual desire. Her body—and indeed her art—present Moisés with a model his academic training leaves him incapable of interpreting, a failure he blames on Zeta’s lack of taste and intellectual rigor. Language and bodies facilitate trickery and false representation, and such intellectual dishonesty is, for Moisés, tantamount to prostitution.

Cien botellas en una pared links identity to sexual behavior. The text describes Zeta as “francesa” not because her mother was French, but because of the specific sexual acts she performs. When she encounters JJ, a former classmate, on Havana’s Malecón, he asks her about Linda. Zeta recounts their exploits and the relatively tolerant university atmosphere of the early 1990s, but then re-directs her discussion into oral sex. She asks herself, “¿qué podía importarle todo eso a JJ? En vez de parlotear, ¿por qué no empleaba yo la boca en algo más útil, más sustancioso, en aquella maniobra submarina por la cual me acusaban de ‘francesa’? Y así lo hice” (114). Although it is not clear which character prompts the substitution of oral sex for language, this act establishes an explicit connection between bodies and narration. In doing so, it delineates the possibilities as well as the risks of corporeal narration, particularly for a female narrator. Zeta stresses that she too derives pleasure from the

encounter, but this public sexuality opens up scrutiny of her body and her narration. Further, the text suggests in this instance that Zeta's sexual orality carries greater importance than her narrative, an exchange that evidences the uneven replacement of narration with oral sex. Because sex presupposes physicality, the text's evaluation of oral sex as a more substantial, and perhaps useful, form of exchange contrasts with the unreliability of linguistic representation. By emphasizing the literal role of her mouth in each instance, however, Zeta renders visible the ways in which her narrative issues from an already sexualized body. According to literary conventions that denote veracity and good taste, Zeta is a "puta mala" and, worse still, not believable; she is a disembodied sexual object forced by necessity to narrate through her body. Her narrative contests this role, but it also recognizes the contradictions of utilizing a sexualized female body to strategically displace literary and cultural conventions.

As Zeta's body facilitates the duplicitous yet potentially fruitful encounter between sex and language, her sexual behavior exiles her from what is "Cuban" and associates her with a foreign sexual geography. She comments that, in school, "yo tenía fama de puta, loca, francesa, descarada, libertina, ligera de cascos. Había muchachas que ni siquiera me dirigían la palabra, como si padeciera de alguna enfermedad contagiosa. Pero qué más da. No creo haberle hecho daño a nadie" (112). Zeta is frank about her affinity for sex, describing herself as "de las que no se rehúsan" (39). Although she narrates her failure at the literal business of prostitution, the reiteration of the word "puta" suggests a lack of resolution regarding the relationship of female sexuality to Cuban society. Zeta's body is excessively

corporeal, in terms of physical stature as well as sexual behavior. Her textual image strains against the physical and linguistic limits imposed upon the female body, while linking this struggle to female authorship. Emilio Bejel identifies homoeroticism and gender transgression as threatening to Cuban nationalist discourse (xiv). To this end, he argues that intertextuality and the interconnection of narrators and narrative levels, which he considers defining characteristics of Portela's work, "point toward an (un)veiling of machismo" (188). In Cien botellas en una pared, Zeta employs her sexuality, and her narration of that sexuality, in a strategic contemplation of Cuban identity discourses.

In a sense, the mystery that Zeta's narrative seeks to explicate is the collusion among literature, nationalism, and corporeality. Rather than emphasize more openly transgressive liaisons, such as the homoeroticism prevalent in many of Portela's other texts,<sup>16</sup> Cien botellas en una pared situates the relationship between Zeta and Moisés within the realm of the heterosexual family unit. The novel thus foregrounds the way in which Cuban nationalism presupposes and condones gender inequality, even sexual violence, in the service of national identity. Zeta's narration draws on the relationship between language and the physical body to illuminate new possibilities for writing the nation. As Bejel suggests, the multiple, interconnected narrative levels in Cien botellas en una pared contest the structural integration of machismo into concepts of gender, genre, and nationalism. Zeta writes a literary body that refuses the disembodied categories of literary genre and sexual behavior. Her narrative centers on the physical body but diverges from it, giving her literary body an opacity

that shields it from excessive, and unbidden, observation. This narrative borrows liberally from Linda's detective fiction, but creates a literary body that resists interpretation; it is partially illegible to the literary and cultural discourses that would explain it. She frustrates the conventions of a genre that, as Braham argues, was closely linked to socialist projections of Cuban identity and reality.

In this way, Zeta manipulates literary conventions to fashion a strategic visibility. Braham emphasizes that detective fiction in socialist Cuba attempted to strip the "contaminating' ornament" from literature, revealing the virility of "revolutionary truth" (28). Zeta, too, plays with exposing herself in a literal removal of her clothing as well as through her narrative structure. She describes how she would strip for Moisés, then reveals, in parenthesis, that "hace años que sueño con desnudarme delante de un montón de gente, encima de un mostrador o algo así, pero nunca se me ha dado la oportunidad" (16). This is exactly what she pretends to do with her mock detective story. Unlike the self-explicating detective genre, Zeta's narrative depends upon confounding explanation. Contrary to her stated desire to strip and divulge the narrative enigma, Zeta utilizes what Doris Sommer would term a rhetoric of particularism. Certain texts, Sommer contends, erect barriers to readerly identification, a refusal that "insures an indigestible residue from voracious mastery. To the extent that particularist writing is provocative, it is calculated to produce the desire that will then be frustrated" (15). By imagining herself through external focalizers, Zeta takes on the tropes of disembodiment and presents herself to the



reader as she appears to Moisés or Linda: a silly, passive woman, a mediocre writer, or an exhibitionist.

Amid the rush to narrative resolution, however, Zeta quietly maintains her secrets, prohibiting unfettered access to textual nudity. After all, she reminds us, she is not persuasive like Linda and tends to be impressionable (254). Before recounting her version of the events surrounding Moisés's death, for example, she warns the reader that no one believes her (247). Not even the protected space of fiction can prove the validity of her narrative. She contemplates creating a text in which she describes

lo que nadie se presta a escuchar con un mínimo de fe. Lo estafalario. Lo novelesco. Lo increíble. Pero no estoy muy segura. Si este libro fuese una novela, es probable que tampoco me creyeran. [...] Ya sé que la ficción está más allá de lo verdadero y lo falso. Es ficción y punto. Pero de algún modo debe convencer, por lo menos mientras se lee, si no qué gracia tiene. A eso le llaman, creo, 'verosimilitud.'  
 Contar lo que tal vez no fue, pero bien pudo haber sido. (248)

By constructing a narrative that is ostensibly private (254), Zeta invites the reader to participate in her mental re-ordering without having to justify either her techniques or her motives. The text inhabits a space between fiction and reality, defined by a potentiality based on belief and the narrator's ability to convince a reader. If we place our faith in the telling of what might have been, as Zeta urges, we arrive at verisimilitude. This is not unrelated to narration's approximation of the body and

embodied experience. While language may not accurately convey embodiment, Zeta nonetheless crafts a literary body that resists facile interpretation. As in Todo lo de las focas, this body refuses to be silenced, yet is wary of yielding its secrets.

Cien botellas en una pared thus modifies the framework of the detective novel to examine the relationship of violence to art, genre conventions, gender identities, and Cuban nationalism. Domestic abuse is the catalyst for this examination, but the novel works a subtle kind of violence through the construction of Zeta as a character. For Moisés, Zeta functions as a sparring partner in his generalized fight against humanity (27). Her body assumes a symbolic quality, by which she stands in for what Moisés considers the worst of the human condition. His blows to her body reiterate historical violence, such that “Romperme un dedo equivalía a la defenestración de Praga. Estrangularme casi hasta la asfixia, a la matanza de Tlatelolco. Si algún día (mera suposición) se le hubiera ocurrido matarme...bueno, Hiroshima y Nagasaki” (27-28). This example articulates the sacrificial paradox René Girard derives from Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss. He argues that, “Because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed” (1). If Zeta is configured as sacrificial surrogate, Moisés is justified in his verbal and physical violence against her. In this view, his gendered violence purges the Cuban national body of other, more dangerous forms of violence.

Linda attributes her friend’s lack of revolt to pathological submissiveness, but Zeta uses her literary body to emphasize how nationalism configures women’s bodies to suffer various forms of abuse. Indeed, Zeta’s narrative reinforces Girard’s

observation that the sacrificial object, when not human, tends to be found among those animals “most human in nature” (3, original). She repeatedly describes herself as gentle, good-natured, and inoffensive, even describing her relationship with Moisés by way of a violent sexual encounter between her neighbors’ dog and pig. She states that, “La fiera belicosa, tan similar a este hombre, que le coge el culo al manso gordinflón, tan similar a... Bueno, mejor dejarlo ahí. ¿Para qué hacer comparaciones?” (128). As Zeta’s corporeality indicates, she is both of Cuban society and outside of it, a condition that Girard deems necessary for sacrifice to function properly (8). That is, the sacrifice must re-direct violence, thereby restoring “harmony to the community, [reinforcing] the social fabric” (8). Violence, in Cien botellas en una pared, is intertwined with a cultural debate about literary aesthetics. In a context in which nationalism and literature include constant calls for collective sacrifice, the search for a victim is a defining force in Cuban letters (Beaupied 129). Beaupied contends, in fact, that the tragic sacrifice of the individual for the collective historically has constituted Cuban cultural identity: “a ‘true Cuban’ is willing to sacrifice his or her individuality to become a fragment of the transcendental national Subject” (131), a subject that is by definition disembodied. Zeta’s narrative of domestic abuse performs the sacrificial violence visited upon writing women, but it willfully re-imagines the aesthetics of that image.

Because she refuses the disembodied role of sacrificial victim reserved for her by Cuban nationalism, Zeta is guilty of strategically displacing the sacrificial violence intended for her. She creates, in effect, a literary body that resists its role in the

cultural drama of sacrifice, redemption, and revolutionary progress. Although Zeta uses language as a means of self-defense, she recognizes the latent violence of her portrayal. As she reflects on this period of her life, she thinks of Moisés, although

No se trata de ‘pensar’ en el sentido recto, riguroso, lógico de la palabra. Eso creo que nunca he sabido hacerlo. Qué pena, con lo importante que es. Más bien divago, dejo suelta la memoria y es ella sola, animalejo silvestre, quien fluye, serpentea, se enrosca y termina por saltar al cuello de Moisés. Hay muchas preguntas y pocas respuestas. (27)

Rather than following the rigid, logical processes of reason, Zeta allows her mind to wander. Reason is transformed by the vagaries of memory, which she turns loose like a wild animal, and it is memory that coils to attack Moisés. Zeta, configured by cultural discourse as the more fitting victim, survives, while the textual violence claims the erudite Moisés. This re-direction of violence is the crime Zeta’s narrative seeks to explain and to obfuscate. It is also ultimately the story her interlocutors refuse to believe.

While Zeta’s narrative traces out the very real links between literary language and physical violence, it also searches for a means of extricating itself from the miasma of the Special Period and moving forward. She takes advantage of this time period’s relative reprieve of censorship to narrate the silenced and concealed bodies to which Campuzano refers. In doing so, she points to the ways in which the Special Period’s crisis of representation correlates to literary and cultural violence. By

narrating her relationship to Cuban culture and nationalism through a contestatory literary body, Zeta's narrative strategically displaces the constraints placed upon her body and her literary depiction. As in Todo lo de las focas, Zeta's maneuvers cannot evade physical violence, nor can they undo Moisés' death. She does, however, appropriate the structures of detective fiction to expose the ways in which nationalism presupposes gender inequality and a need for sacrifice, a project that alludes to physical and rhetorical violence at the heart of Cuban nationalism. Zeta's pregnant, injured body demonstrates the effects of that violence, but by way of strategic displacement it struggles to write a new female, Cuban literary body.

What Cien botellas en una pared and Todo lo de las focas do, then, is examine the relationship between bodies and literary representation in the context of Cuban and Mexican nationalisms. In both cases, the language of nationalism exacts a toll on the bodies of its citizens, but these two texts illustrate possibilities for an alternate, corporeal response to that interpellation. For the narrator in Campbell's novella, abortion highlights his conflicted relationship to literary artifice and materiality. It undercuts his dependence upon tropes of visibility and gender inequality, even as the text utilizes his narrative fallibility to strategically displace conventional depictions of the border and border identities. For Zeta, sexuality—and sexual reproduction—allows her to create a literary body that contests the appropriations of female bodies by Cuban literary and nationalist traditions. The novel thus re-configures paradigms of sacrifice and violence and strategically displaces the rhetorical and gender conventions that confine Zeta's art as well as her physicality. In both cases, physical

bodies provide the nexus between identity and discourse, and while these texts tell their stories through the physical body, they also narrate against the violence done to bodies.

## Chapter Two

### Performing the Brothel: Prostitution and the Traffic of Identity

In October 1994, the Miami Herald published a story about the intoxicating effects of female Cuban dancers on men in the Mexican city of Mérida.<sup>17</sup> The article by Andrés Oppenheimer details the discomfort of women concerned about the Cuban dancers' influence on their sons and husbands. It cites María Isabel Cáceres de Urzaiz as emblematic of the anxiety about men of prominent families leaving their wives for the Cuban dancers. In the article, Cáceres de Urzaiz describes the Cuban women as “home-wreckers” who pose a grave danger to the institution of the Mexican family. She contends that, “Our young men were used to having fiancées who behaved like saints, with whom they didn't have premarital sex. [...] Then came these Cuban women, and our boys went crazy” (1). The resistance to their presence is due to their connection—at least in popular imaginations—to prostitution. Oppenheimer explains that “While many [of the dancers] are legitimate artists, others dance in skimpy Vegas-style costumes and, critics allege, resort to prostitution after their shows” (1). In addition, many Mexican performers worry about competition from the Cuban performers.

This debate illustrates the central concept of this chapter: tensions about sexuality and social class bracket any discussion of prostitution. Whether or not the dancers literally engage in sex work is beside the point. My concern is instead with how the debate about prostitution works as a rhetorical tool, disembodying women and turning them into tropes of national or cultural identity. Cáceres de Urzaiz's

comments about marriage reveal more anxiety about the economic and social repercussions of the alleged prostitution than about sexual promiscuity per se. Her arguments about premarital sex and acceptable fiancées respond to a specific manner of understanding virginity's role in preserving the family as an economic and social unit. The “craziness” to which she refers is not that of cavorting with prostitutes, but rather of running off with women who are not “marrying types.” Prostitution is a cultural category that registers cultural, gender, and sexual identities. It also speaks to concepts of nationalism. Latin American patriotic discourse is rife with exhortations to resist imperial “penetration” and to prevent national territory from serving as a “brothel” for foreign investors and tourists.<sup>18</sup> Prostitution functions as an ethically charged rhetorical tool for buttressing nationalism. It works by provoking moral outrage at the selling of the nation like chattel, linking nationalism to gendered, class-specific, and frequently patriarchal notions of sexuality. Regularly imagined as a feminized entity, the nation must be made to produce—goods, services, and art—in the service of a collective, national “family” structure. The patriot's duty is to protect national honor through proper, non-prostituting means of development, a process linked ideologically to the conventional duty to produce children within a heterosexual marriage. For this reason, I focus on the prostitute as a specifically feminized entity, whether by biological sex or by perceived social function.

The performances from the 1990s to the present of Mexican performance artist Astrid Hadad and the novel by Cuban writer Abilio Estévez, Los palacios distantes (2002), engage prostitution as a critical artistic trope and use it to explore



the processes by which bodies, art, and culture are commodified. Prostitution as a cultural or national trope is often disembodied in that it permits the manipulation of body imagery without regard for how this affects the lives of embodied subjects. It provides an overarching metaphor for the interactions of Cuba and Mexico with globalized economic and political structures and becomes a way of talking about what's wrong with a country's situation, yet overlooks the complex reasoning behind why people engage in prostitution. The focus by Hadad's performances and Estévez's novel on the ways in which subjects experience commodification in their daily lives contests the moralizing, nationalistic connotations of prostitution in Mexico and Cuba. The performances and novel emphasize the role of language in constructing these performances of identity, as well the effects of linguistic constructs on social bodies. They grapple with the consumption of identity: cultural and gender identities are "prostituted," or sold to an other, even as invoking prostitution provides a means of rebelling against this sale. By invoking the label of "prostitute," Hadad in her performances and the characters in Estévez's novel cast themselves as social misfits and create an oppositional sexuality at odds with official dictates of cultural identity. Prostitution as an artistic trope in Hadad's performances and Estévez's novel thus illuminates the ways in which concepts of the nation draw on disembodied portrayals of gender and sexuality.

The performances and the novel undermine the way in which conventional depictions of prostitution disembody artistic subjects by presenting these images as patently fictional. By re-working the cultural connotations of prostitution, Hadad's

performances and Estévez's novel strategically displace more conventional depictions of prostitution. Not unlike Gerard Aching's assertion that "masking practices negotiate degrees of recognition, misrecognition, and nonrecognition between masked subjects and viewing subjects" (5, original), Hadad in her performances and the characters in Estévez's novel assume the guise of prostitution to call attention to the ways in which their bodies are commodified by discourses of nationalism. Hadad and these characters utilize the prostitution trope to negotiate the roles assigned to them, creating a contestatory image that challenges how their bodies are viewed and consumed. Prostitution, as masking practice or artistic trope, mediates the relationship between these artistic subjects and the world they inhabit. Hadad assumes the role of a sexy woman selling herself as "art." She also references cultural traditions that evoke images of prostitution, especially in her recycling of Mexican cinema. In Los palacios distantes, the topic of prostitution is never far from a world circumscribed by the shortages of post-Soviet Cuba. Prostitution appears at a narrative level, in the character of Salma, and serves as a meta-narrative organizing structure. Like Hadad's sale of herself as art, the text plays with selling Cuban specificity to foreign readers. In Hadad's art and Estévez's novel, language is a medium through which normative discourses about bodies and identities affect individual subjects. As a rhetorical mask, prostitution reveals as much as it hides.

Prostitution, whether as literal sex work or artistic trope, evidences the body's role as a social signifier. It evokes the enduring patterns of racism, sexism, and economic and political dependence that mark Cuban and Mexican societies. Denise

Brennan argues that contemporary Western concepts of race, sexuality, and nationality are informed by colonial ideologies in which “white Europeans were set in opposition to the darker ‘natives’ they colonized” (34).<sup>19</sup> This colonial paradigm frames the use of prostitution as artistic trope in Hadad’s performances and Estévez’s novel. By referencing prostitution, Hadad’s performance art and Los palacios distantes explore the contradictory concepts of race and gender that inform national identities. Even when enunciated as rebellion, however, prostitution can work as an ideological tool to inscribe sexual others within social norms. Within the context of Cuba and Mexico, this shows up in the prominence of racial hybridity in definitions of national, cultural identity. This mixing evokes the intersection of colonial legacies of racism and slavery, referenced by Kamala Kempadoo and Brennan, with sexual transgression. Coco Fusco argues that, in the case of Cuba, “the mulata has stood for illicit sex—stemming from the reality that from colonial times onward, many mixed-race women were the ‘love children’ and mistresses of white men” (143). The Cuban government has been accused of plumbing the myths of mulata sensuality to shore up the tourist trade after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> While the embrace of hybridity can be an affirming response to the legacies of colonialism, slavery and racism, it can—as can uncritical portrayals of prostitution—result in disembodied identities.

While prostitution often circumscribes women within conventional sexual morality, critical attention to it as a trope offers subversive potential and illustrates the intersections of art and life.<sup>21</sup> Assumptions about sex work and prostitution are

intimately linked to beliefs about morality, ethics, and the relationship between corporeality and identity. Brennan argues that much of the debate about female sexual labor revolves around issues of agency and victimization (23). Many scholars and activists prefer the term “sex work” to prostitution, which, for them, implies the absence of any sort of agency (23). By contrast, I emphasize the term “prostitution” precisely to evoke the historical, cultural, and affective cloud that envelops the term; these are the signifiers that Hadad’s performances and Estévez’s novel displace. In her study of race and prostitution in the Caribbean, Kempadoo challenges two conventional renderings of prostitution in academic scholarship. Rather than discussing the capitalist commodification of the body or studying prostitution as “the ultimate expression of patriarchy,” Kempadoo argues for a culturally specific approach to discussions of sex work (75). In addition to economics and patriarchy, she states that “contemporary forms of prostitution and sex work are complicated by hierarchies of race and ethnicity as well as exploitations of ‘the exotic’” and advocates understanding sex work as another form of labor (85).<sup>22</sup> This analysis views sex work as another form of labor, permitting women a measure of economic productivity. Kempadoo’s emphasis on the importance of hierarchical categories of race and ethnicity points to a link between art and life, given that, as with disembodied images of prostitution, assumptions about gender, sexuality, and identity show up in cultural production. Literature, film, and art manifest and maintain the categories of identity that affect, for example, the working conditions of the sex workers in Kempadoo’s study. By changing the way we think about sex work, she

suggests, sex workers gain a small but significant measure of agency. As Hadad's performances and Estévez's novel re-think concepts of prostitution, they accomplish a similar shift in perspective through art.

"Soy virgencita y mucho más": Neocolonial Bodies and Astrid Hadad's Performance of Displacement<sup>23</sup>

Through specific cultural references and her choice of materials, Mexican cabaret singer and performance artist Astrid Hadad self-consciously inserts her art into the consumer culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As a part of this project, she re-works paradigms of disembodiment to contest the consumption of bodies and identities in a reality defined by economic neoliberalism and multinational politics. Hadad's performances disrupt the easy translation of cultural "essence" into quantifiable patterns of behavior and meaning, while her emphasis on corporeality imagines the body as a contested site. She deploys strategies of displacement to contest systems of patriarchy, national identity and, to a certain extent, feminism. Hadad positions her body as a cultural product,<sup>24</sup> and her sale of herself as art utilizes prostitution as a trope to articulate her position as a female Mexican artist engaging the legacies of colonialism, racism, and sexism. Her art points to the ways bodies are "prostituted" by discourses of cultural identities. She challenges this pattern by reconfiguring prostitution into an act of resistance, thereby strategically displacing moralistic and reactionary renderings of the trope in cultural or academic practice. Hadad's art thus negotiates the construction of cultural,

gender, and ethnic identities through an emphasis on the physical body as a social commodity; her strategic displacement of the prostitution trope allows her to contest the consumption of both bodies and identities.

As Hadad uses her art to re-fashion the relationship between corporeality and culture in Mexico, she engages prostitution as an oppositional artistic trope. This move counters more conventional linkages between prostitution and national identity in Latin America. Hadad's sale of herself as "art" plays with the sale of cultural specificity to foreign and domestic audiences. She appeals to the linguistic, visual, and performative components of cultural identity, creating symbols of embodied Mexicanness. These include, among others, the femme fatale, the pious woman, the saintly icon, the peasant girl, and the Revolutionary soldier. In their appeal to the national, her performances call attention to the collective, public nature of these iconographies, as well as to the ways in which they are utilized by normative discourses. Hadad's construction of herself as deliberately, emphatically sexy evokes how that which is public, in Mexican cultural discourse, often becomes both sexualized and gendered. The phrase mujer pública, after all, is another way of saying, "prostitute."<sup>25</sup> Further, Hadad draws upon European and Mexican performance traditions in a way that complicates art's role as a cultural product. Her shows incorporate elements of European avant-garde and cabaret theater, in the style of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill (Alzate, "Expanding los límites" 153), as well as those of popular Mexican theater, such as teatro de revista or teatro de carpa (Gutiérrez 74). Her performances borrow from Mexican cinema, in particular the

aesthetics of Mexican identity espoused by directors such as Sergei Eisenstein or Emilio “El Indio” Fernández. In her elaborate costumes, exaggerated props, and her comic and sexual plays on language, Hadad integrates various cinematic and theatrical traditions with elements of Mexican specificity. As she inscribes these signifiers upon her body, Hadad utilizes the prostitution trope to emphasize how art and culture are constructed as sexualized, gendered commodities.

Hadad refers to her performances as ongoing workshops rather than finished products (Holy Terrors 191), a rhetorical move that complicates the commodification of her art. The performance pieces Corazón sangrante (1993) and Heavy Nopal are available in video form, and Corazón sangrante is accessible on the Internet. She has released musical CDs—“Ay” (1993), “Corazón sangrante” (1995), and “Soy virgencita y mucho más” (2004)—that contain versions of the songs used in her shows. Hadad tours with her cabaret show, participating in theater festivals and performing throughout the Americas and Europe. In the summer of 2004, she performed in Barcelona, Spain, an exclusive event requiring a relatively expensive ticket, as well as at a free event in a public plaza in Santiago de Compostela.<sup>26</sup> Hadad’s website contains meta-critical material in which she theorizes her own work, regarding both politics and poetics, and situates herself within contemporary Mexican and global cultural production. Hadad’s distribution of her art transforms her body into a cultural product, but it also works within and against the state and corporate controls that influence theatrical and cinematic expression in Mexico.

Hadad is known best for cabaret-style theatrical performances such as Heavy Nopal. Her shows offer political and social commentary on globalization, national identity, and feminism, as well as on the commodification of identity and culture as a disembodying phenomenon. Hadad's multigeneric approach contests the classification of her artistic body, and her website describes her shows as:

el nacionalismo confundido con el fascismo, el delirio trágico religioso mexicano y el fatalismo, en una explosión cabaretera con tintes intelectuales. 'Un espectáculo sincrético, estético, patético y diurético.' Algunos dicen que es la síntesis inmejorable del arte kitch mexicano, en movimiento de los tiempos modernos, irreverente, sarcástico, cáustico, comprometido. La encarnación sincrética de un personaje y todos a la vez. (Hadad, par. 1-2)

This description points to Hadad's strategic displacement of the forms of Mexicanness, particularly as they are experienced within a material body imagined as a contested social site. As she challenges the conventions of Mexican cultural identity, Hadad takes special delight in frustrating the precise definitions of ever more specific and ludicrous genres, cross-genres, and hybrid fusions. The packaging of Mexican cultural identity as hybrid, suggests Hadad, results in another form of disembodiment. Arguing against this sort of classification of her music, she states, "si no hay una etiqueta, ¿dónde le pongo el precio?" (Hadad, par. 2). Hadad's work is contestatory in that she forces a closer inspection of the terms of sale, especially when she sells herself.



Cultural assumptions about sexuality and power are knotted around the figure of the prostitute, and Hadad's use of this trope elicits anxieties about art, culture, and agency. In her strategic displacement of prostitution, she performs a self-conscious marketing of herself that mimics film's role as a cultural product. Films are more easily distributed than live theater to foreign audiences, and Mexican cinema figures among the most stable film industries in Latin America; it has also historically provided a medium for cultural synthesis. The Mexican comedian Cantinflas, for example, began as a performer in the teatro de carpa and later appeared in films such as Ahí está el detalle in 1940 (King 50).<sup>27</sup> As in her website's description, Hadad references constructs of Mexican identity to sell herself as a cultural product. The references to "el delirio trágico religioso mexicano y el fatalismo" and to "[el] arte kitch mexicano," point to an enduring association of Mexican culture with tragic, fatalistic excess and to the contested boundary between elite and popular art. While both tendencies inform Hadad's dialogue with theater and performance traditions, her deliberate use of them is perhaps nowhere as clear as in her re-working of Mexican cinematic imagery. Perhaps because her art lends itself so well to study as cabaret, relatively little critical attention has been paid to this facet of her work. Critics such as Roselyn Costantino point to the influence on Hadad of transgressive cinematic divas and of Mexico's folkloric national image (Holy Terrors 188), but I argue that the parallels are of form and of content.<sup>28</sup> She incorporates imagery reminiscent of the cinematic iconography of filmmakers such as Eisenstein or Fernández, for example, or cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa. She relishes the unpredictability of

live performance and exploits it in the popular tradition of the Mexican teatro de carpa. Yet Hadad is cognizant of film's versatility as a cultural product, a quality evident in the marketing of her art. She appeals to a nostalgic sense of cultural identity exported in film, music, and literature, even as she complicates its consumption.

As an art form, cinema provokes debate about cultural autonomy, particularly, as Jason Borge argues, in Latin America. Although cinema seduced many Latin American intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s, he argues, the explicit link to the United States and to a general preoccupation with of the “vulgarization” of culture made it problematic (10). Mexican cinema grew out of an association with Hollywood, as North Americans filmed parts of the 1910 Mexican revolution. The actors and production crew who worked on Santa (1932), Mexico's first film with direct sound, had trained in Hollywood (King 42).<sup>29</sup> In the 1930s, Eisenstein's Mexican project, although never completed due to economic and ideological conflicts (43), established a cinematic framework for disseminating Mexican identity. This imagery resonated with the post-revolutionary cultural climate, in which artists such as Diego Rivera engaged in public works lauding the struggles of Mexico's popular classes. John King contends that Eisenstein's influence was more aesthetic than political, especially the popularity of the “painterly” aspects of his work (44). This style, which emphasized images of the Mexican landscape—the skies, the maguey plants—along with images of Mexicans as a “noble hieratic people,” ultimately influenced the filmmaking of Fernández (44). Fernández, who famously proclaimed

“El cine mexicano soy yo” (48), was likewise instrumental in constructing Mexico for Mexicans and foreigners. His aesthetics, which characterize much of 1940s Mexican cinema, echoes Eisenstein’s iconography as well as the populist imagery of the post-revolution muralists.

In her art, Hadad re-creates costumes and poses that trade on these stylized images of Mexican identity. The Virgencita... CD, for example, depicts Hadad dressed in a manner reminiscent of Rivera’s The Flower Seller. Always verging on the popular, Fernández’s cinematic treatment of Mexico’s “tragic” sensibility, has, in the intervening years, resulted in a kitschy version of itself. The Mexican cinematic tradition grounds itself in the uneasy relationship between high and low culture, a characteristic exploited by Hadad in her performances. The aesthetics of influential filmmakers persist alongside other cultural phenomena, such as popular theatrical forms and traditional songs and dances, as part of the visual, iconographic culture in which Hadad operates. Playing to the elitist fear of “selling out” out to the masses and to the financial exigencies of the popular performer, Hadad’s art uses the prostitution trope to capitalize on this uncertainty as a means of theorizing the body’s relationship to identity.<sup>30</sup>

If performance, in Hadad’s art, maintains a close relationship with corporeality, then her use of film and the Mexican cinematic tradition—including her own video productions—constitutes a specific form of selling one’s body. As a performer, Hadad conflates Mexican culture with her body and offers it to the audience in an act of prostitution. In doing so, her art attests to the way bodies are

already utilized—or prostituted—in Mexican cultural discourse. Persephone Braham makes a similar point in discussing post-1968 Mexican detective fiction. In pursuing an elusive modernity, she argues, the Mexican government has carried out systematic violence against its citizens (xi). Braham views this violence as “grounded in, condoned by, an oppressive discourse of ‘Mexicanness’ (mexicanidad) represented in elite culture, official history, and the mass media” (xi). Linked to the legacy of the Mexican revolution, this official discourse appropriates subaltern bodies and utilizes them to prop up projects of national culture. In light of formulations of Mexican identity such as that of Octavio Paz, the use made of these bodies is inherently sexual. In El laberinto de la soledad (1950), Paz asserts that Mexicans want to remain “closed,” always penetrating and never penetrated. In her performances, Hadad makes explicit the ways official discourse links subjectivity to sexuality. Her performances create a sexualized female body, inscribed with signifiers of ethnic, class, and gender identities, that illustrates the dependence of official discourse on social inequalities. As she does so, Hadad maintains agency in how she markets and packages her cultural and gender identity, thereby challenging the use made of her body by official discourses.

Through costumes, song lyrics, and commentary, Hadad evokes the “prostitution” of Mexican cultural identity even as she displaces conventional notions of prostitution. In her art, Mexico is identified with a sexualized female body, but it is also imagined as that of a prostitute. In Teatro de cabaret: Imaginarios disidentes, Gastón Alzate argues that Hadad creates an analogy between Mexico and an “open”

female body (49). He cites her exaggeratedly feminine clothing and her representations of Mexican nationalism, such as “un cinturón con varios senos de espuma que [...] representa la patria exprimida (“chupada”) de todas sus riquezas por el estado y las multinacionales” (49). Alzate views this feminization as a strategy that facilitates Hadad’s consideration of Mexican identity, one that allows her to step outside of the social structure in order to analyze it (57). As the example of Paz illustrates, however, Mexico is already “feminized,” conceived as a fragile entity of imperiled honor, in need of a vigilant, virile nationalism. To be feminized, in this context, does not suggest possibilities for distance or analysis; rather it is to be prostituted. The performance cited by Alzate does not, after all, merely depict the sale of Mexico’s natural resources, but imagines this sale as a sexual transaction.

Hadad’s use of the prostitution trope, in this context, rebels against authoritative concepts of nationalism by performing cultural fears about gender, sexuality, and the public body. Rather than the normative feminization cited by Alzate, Hadad’s use of the prostitution trope as strategic displacement permits analysis of the contradictions of linking national identity to concepts of gender and sexuality. She “prostitutes” her body/culture/art, thereby challenging conventional concepts of corporeality and femininity, while condemning those who auction off pieces of Mexico for private benefit. Her performances strategically displace the rhetorical configurations of Mexicanness onto the physical body, making them visible. Indeed, her performances suggest, as Costantino and Diana Taylor argue in the preface to Holy Terrors, that Mexico is only visible as a cliché (19). Rather than

displacing herself to a space outside the linguistic system, as Alzate argues (64), Hadad's art makes language material, through her critical use of the prostitution trope, to explore the structures of sexual desire that turn bodies into social commodities.

In the process of strategic displacement, Hadad inscribes upon her body the material signifiers of class, race, gender, and economic inequalities. These take the form of peasant skirts, religious iconography, both Catholic and pre-Colombian, exaggerated make-up and jewelry, condoms and a sex toy attached to the stereotypical sombrero, foam rubber props (including stones mimicking indigenous ruins, eyes, and bleeding hearts), as well as almost architectural inventions that extend out from her body in the form of flowers, trees, beds, and out-sized hats. She plays with the prostitution trope by calling attention to her sexuality with revealing clothing, provocative dialogue, and frequent costume changes, which often occur on stage in front of the audience. As part of one such costume change in the course of the 2004 Santiago show, she chided her attendants to un/dress her with care, reminding them that audience members "ni pagaron para tanto"; she then laughed coyly, remarking that "ah, sí, si ni siquiera pagaron." Many of her costumes consist of an almost infinite amount of layers that emphasize the material manifestations of the discourses Hadad criticizes. Costantino describes the clothing and props as evocative of "the layers of meaning of seemingly innocent elements of popular culture that the Mexican audience obviously recognizes and responds to with enthusiastic laughter" ("And She Wears It Well" 409). Hadad positions herself

literally within the discourses she examines, yet acts as the agent that sets them into motion, thereby calling attention to society's, and her own, complicity in the maintenance of these patterns.

This use of exaggerated props makes explicit the relationship between the physical body and identity, as mediated by Hadad's use of the prostitution trope. The consideration of this artistic body relates to the neoliberal colonization of corporeal space referenced by Hadad's rejection of the ludicrous specificity of labels, as well as her questioning of a globalized economic climate that views Mexico primarily as a source of cheap labor. At the Santiago show, Hadad explained her choice of oilcloth for many of her costumes as a nod to the product's low cost and wide association with Mexican popular culture, linking this choice to the economic difficulties of producing art in a developing country. She intervenes actively in the consumption of cultural particularity, presenting a folkloric vision and then interrupting it with self-reflexive commentary on the oilcloth's function as a symbolic link to popular culture, art, and the global economy. Hadad presents a corporeal text inscribed with patterns of commodification, and the link between text and culture is purposefully explicit: cultural consumption, like prostitution, is not without embodied, material consequences.

Hadad's use of inexpensive goods, such as foam rubber, has the benefit of permitting artistic flexibility in a difficult economic situation; in terms of practicality, their minimal weight also allows for multiple layers of props that do not hamper Hadad's physical movements (Holy Terrors 199). Her use of low-cost and cast-off

objects manifests the contradictory relationships of economic and cultural exchange. Robert Stam, in his discussion of what he terms the “hybrid bricolage aesthetics” characteristic of Latin America and the Caribbean, states that this aesthetic imparts a “strategic redemption of the low, the despised, the imperfect, and the ‘trashy’ as part of a social overturning” (62). His analysis of this hybrid aesthetic focuses on materiality to expose the asymmetry of cultural and economic exchanges. Similarly, Hadad’s choices regarding materials reference the tawdriness of prostitution. Such a sexual encounter does not bespeak, in conventional terms, the self-important rhetoric of procreation or the passion of a romantic relationship, but rather the “cheap,” purely sexual exchange. She employs the “trashiness” of prostitution as a protest against social norms that commodify female sexuality as they also curtail women’s engagement in political, intellectual, or cultural life. In this way, her inclusion of inexpensive, even tacky, materials mimics the redemptive critical practice she performs using cultural scraps and stereotypes. Her recuperation and rearrangement of iconographic cultural images, made manifest in the detritus of a globalized consumer economy, allows her to reject essentializing practices of disembodiment and to question the naturalization of social patterns such as misogyny.

As she performs various symbols of Mexican cultural identity, Hadad’s use of the prostitution trope underscores the ways in which sexuality and gender shore up concepts of reproduction and nationalism. Her art demonstrates the fetish of the image through the appropriation of “essential” Mexican symbols, as well as a persistent use of the red, white, and green of the national flag. If the “honorable,”



heteronormative use of these symbols reproduces Mexican nationalism, Hadad's performances strategically displace this process through an emphasis on the trashiness of prostitution. The prostitution of the nation may be a common theme in Mexico, but Hadad also links the already prostituted national body to that of the Virgin of Guadalupe. By invoking the symbolic mother, the conflation of Mexican nationalism with the Virgin of Guadalupe epitomizes the "prostitution" of marginalized bodies by dominant discourses. Religious doctrine and nationalism configure the female body according to their own desires.<sup>31</sup> Drawing on the conventional virgin/whore dichotomy, Hadad's performances point to the ways in which both figures are used to maintain social patterns. While her audiences typically respond enthusiastically to the critical use of Mexican nationalism, Costantino states that one of the few instances of state censorship encountered by Hadad involved her appearance on national television in an outfit that invokes both the Mexican flag and the Virgin of Guadalupe ("And She Wears It Well" 407).<sup>32</sup> Her critical use of prostitution disrupts the conventions that relate feminine corporeality to religious or political domination, forcing a critical reading not only of her use of that iconography but of the symbols themselves.

Hadad alludes to the symbolic prostitution of female figures such as the Virgin of Guadalupe, but she creates a literal portrayal of prostitution in her performance of "La mujer del puerto." Her rendition of the song registers the imposing presence of the United States and the continuing resonance of the aesthetics of Golden Age Mexican cinema. Wearing a costume that refers to the Statue of

Liberty, Hadad sings “vendo placer / a los hombres que vienen del mar / y se marchan al amanecer / ¿para qué he de amar?” The version on the CD “Virgencita...” is performed in the style of a lounge singer, complete with finger snapping and audience applause. During the live performance, Lady Liberty’s torch was a flashlight that Hadad pointed at individual audience members. Her performance of this song references Arcady Boytler’s 1933 film, La mujer del puerto.<sup>33</sup> The film stars Andrea Palma as Rosario, a young country girl seduced and betrayed by her fiancé. Her shameful actions cause the death of her father and she leaves her small town for the port city of Veracruz. There, she works as a prostitute until, unknowingly, she sleeps with her long-absent older brother. When the siblings learn the truth, Rosario jumps into the sea and drowns.

In her performance of “La mujer del puerto,” Hadad draws on the excess of melodrama and the stylized emotions of the cabaretera, or brothel, films in re-creating the artistic space as a brothel. Rather than romanticizing or vilifying the prostitute, she constructs an exaggerated image that questions the relationship of female sexuality to power. The film La mujer del puerto gives a sense of the way in which the cinematic brothel was configured as a space of controlled transgression. King documents the historically close relationship between popular music and cinema in Mexico, particularly in the case of singer and composer Agustín Lara. Although Ricardo López Méndez is credited with the lyrics to “La mujer del puerto,”<sup>34</sup> the song and the film illustrate King’s argument that the ballads and the cabaretera films established the brothel as place of “exalted passions and sensibilities” (42). Hadad’s

construction of the artistic brothel as a space amenable to controlled transgression is in keeping with the more frivolous or ludic aspects of the popular theatrical traditions on which she draws. The characterization of it as specifically sexual, however, allows her to foreground the role of bodies and desire in the uneven power dynamics that inform cultural production. This performative brothel implies another key difference with respect to the cinematic brothel on which she draws: unlike the punitive sacrifice of the cinematic prostitute, Hadad refuses either to repent or to die off. Instead, she exploits the transgressive potential of the brothel in re-configuring the consumption of her corporeality.

As she does with the Virgin of Guadalupe, Hadad re-signifies the Statue of Liberty as an inherently prostituted body, but unlike the Virgin, the prostituted Statue of Liberty is explicitly intimidating. More than the tragic prostitute of the cabaretera films, Hadad's Statue of Liberty is a threatening femme fatale. Constructed as a body open to sexual exchange and capable of inflicting pain, Hadad's Statue of Liberty invites the physical intimacy associated with prostitution and the interrogation conjured by her use of the flashlight. By combining the image of a prostitute with that of an accusatory Statue of Liberty, Hadad wavers between pleasure and pain, sexual release and criminal incarceration. Although the Spanish audiences laughed at Hadad's jab at American foreign policy, the use of the flashlight created an undercurrent of intimidation and uneasiness within the laughter. The light from the flashlight made viewing the person wielding it invisible, known only as a dark mass, representing in this case the weight of United States foreign and domestic policies as

well as agencies, such as the military, that enforce these orders. The distancing effect of the flashlight's beam contrasts sharply with the song's lyrics about the intimate physical contact presupposed by sexual intercourse and re-creates for the audience a sense of the embodied effects of foreign policy on living subjects.

Hadad's portrayal of the Statue of Liberty illustrates the uses made of the female body by discourses of power, but her performance establishes a very different rhetorical situation. Through her performance, Hadad infiltrates a key site in the imagery of North American political and cultural identity. This strategic displacement of the archetypal symbol of American idealism criticizes the hypocrisy of the United States government, particularly in dealing with matters of foreign policy. Her version of the song therefore includes the advice, "visite Estados Unidos antes que Estados Unidos lo visite a usted." Hadad's menacing use of the flashlight refers to—and takes advantage of—the ways in which female sexuality is coded as dangerous. In this performance, she disappears into the figure of the prostitute, both as she cloaks herself in the visibility of this trope as cliché and as she makes herself literally invisible behind the flashlight's beam. Her invisibility provides her with power, but the site of enunciation is that of a prostituted, feminized body. This move illustrates Peggy Phelan's argument about the potential risks of visibility politics, as both conservative and progressive groups believe that "greater visibility of the hitherto under-represented leads to enhanced political power" (2). Through the complicity of power and invisibility, Hadad assumes a degree of agency; that she

does so through a body that should be silent, however, denounces the consumption of othered bodies by discourses of nationalism.

As she explores the relationship between language and corporeality, Hadad's art uses strategic displacement as a means of gaining agency within the social mechanisms she defies. Her performances project neither an air of defeatist pessimism nor the blind destruction of any and all cultural discourses. Rather, she recuperates the transgressive potential of the artistic brothel, leveling sharp criticism at exploitative and disembodied cultural patterns while reveling in the naughtiness of the prostitution trope. Hadad uses humor to involve the audience in the construction and the deconstruction of these cultural identities. As Laura Gutiérrez notes, her use of humor serves a distancing function, allowing her to gain critical distance from these discourses (228). Her performances flirt with sexual availability, enticing audience members with the sexy spectacle of her body. Hadad establishes a sophisticated exchange of pleasure, re-positioning herself within a cultural discourse that curtails the uses of sexuality, particularly female sexuality. Her use of the prostitution trope therefore does not ignore the contradictory agency gained through the sale of one's body. Rather, her performances underscore the ways in which her body, in Mexican cultural discourse, is already prostituted, as well as the creative potential of this condition.

Hadad's exploration of the prostitution trope links normative sexuality to the construction of cultural identity and offers a potentially uncomfortable paradigm for the consumption of otherness. If feminist thought has often avoided discussing the

role of the body for fear of negative connotations, Hadad assumes the risk of being seen and consumed as a purely physical, objectified female body. Perhaps because of this, Costantino cites reluctance on the part of some feminist groups, particularly in North America, to endorse fully Hadad's projects and methods (415). Similarly, Hadad reinforces—albeit ironically—the stereotypes of Mexican national identity, those held about Mexicans and those held by Mexicans about themselves. Her performances point to the way that which is exposed or open, in Mexican cultural discourse, is rhetorically feminized. At the same time, elitist formations of cultural identity or “authenticity” depend on disembodied versions of otherness. Both the cinematic brothel and the folkloric depictions of cultural identity contribute to a normative Mexicanness that privileges the popular with little regard for the embodied reality that forms its base. Hadad's critical recycling of these identity tropes, in contrast, permits a strategic acquisition of agency that illustrates how power is denied to certain bodies.

Hadad reaches an uneasy peace with official Mexican culture and with the globalization and commodification of cultural and artistic production, including her own. Costantino argues that Hadad's insistence upon as much economic and artistic control over her shows as possible allows her to negotiate the terms of her own commodification (Holy Terrors 193). To wit, during Hadad's Santiago performance in the summer of 2004, she mentioned a then-recent, lucrative Sotheby's auction and laughingly told the audience she had decided to transform herself into art to net a higher price. This comment made explicit many of the tensions latent in her art,

referring to her need to earn a living with her art in an often-precarious Mexican economy, as well as to the relationships among culture, art, and a global economy. The recognition of the limits and the creative possibilities afforded by reconfiguring prostituted identities allows Hadad to employ strategies of displacement in order to work within a rather limited space. In her art, visibility proves unstable, as she weaves together clichéd images of Mexican cultural identity. Hadad structures these iconographies as a strategically displaced cultural prostitution, reflecting on how Mexican culture consumes, sells, and makes visible that which it also others. Her performances illustrate the value of strategic displacement as a destabilizing concept that challenges the naturalized discourses that sustain various types of disembodiment. Prostitution, in Hadad's performances, is thus a means of selling herself without selling out.

#### Revolutionary Sex: Prostitution and Memory in Abilio Estévez's Los palacios distantes

As in Hadad's art, prostitution in Abilio Estévez's Los palacios distantes negotiates the sale of cultural exoticism. Sexuality is in this novel a potentially revolutionary force, although, unlike Hadad's performances, the narrator does not disentangle the gender, racial, and cultural categories that inform the prostitution trope. The depiction of prostitution dialogues with the literary jinetera's nearly ubiquitous presence in recent Cuban fiction.<sup>35</sup> Linked to pre-revolutionary Cuba and to the Special Period, as well as to national "honor," prostitution in Los palacios

distantes offers a conflicted vehicle for depicting Cuban identity. Here, it constitutes both the subversive recovery of a past willed silent by the revolutionary government and a denunciation of socialism's shortcomings. The trope thus contributes to a queering of the physical spaces and bodies in this novel, in the sense described by Judith Halberstam: that of being outside of the "temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family" (6). Due to the complicated relationship between prostitution and Cuban revolutionary rhetoric, the use of the trope in this novel speaks to the politicization of time, history, and space in contemporary Cuba, and to a specific way of embodying modernity. Rather than Hadad's reworking of the embodiments of cultural identity through the prostitution trope, Los palacios distantes employs the prostitute's not-modern body to re-configure Cuba's relationship to history. What the novel strategically displaces is not the rhetoric of prostitution, but the essentialized images of Cuban bodies (both human and geographical) used to represent history and identity.

Sexuality has occupied an uneasy role in revolutionary Cuba. In "The Mysticism of the Flesh," Estévez argues that, the sexual reputation of Cubans notwithstanding, the Castro government has not been particularly revolutionary regarding sexuality (25). The enduring effects of bourgeois sexuality are especially clear in the regime's uncomfortable relationship to homosexuality and prostitution, as both were seen as inappropriate means of embodying the nation. G. Derrick Hodge argues that the revolutionaries fashioned themselves as a battle-hardened group, an image they felt was inconsistent with homosexuality (629). He states that, "[a]s an



affair of macho men, it was the duty of the Revolution to rescue the (feminized) island and its women from what was seen as the corruption of penetration from the North, and a product of capitalist exploitation” (630). Defined by non-reproductive sexual excess and the vestiges of colonialism, pre-revolutionary prostitution was an impediment to the processes of nationalism and self-determination. After the triumph of the revolution in 1959, the new government rejected Cuba’s infamous image as the “brothel of the Caribbean.” As a part of the transition from the economic and political dependence of the Batista dictatorship, prostitutes were to be rescued and rehabilitated, an activity consistent with the state’s image of itself as paternalistic provider and guardian of national “honor.”<sup>36</sup> The economic and political crisis following the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1991 changed that.

During the Special Period, tourism in Cuba became inextricable from sex work, while the rhetoric of prostitution spelled a practical and an ideological failure by the government. Unable to provide for Cubans in material terms or to prevent the symbolic sale of the nation, the government turned, as José Quiroga has argued, to a different form of crisis management (4). Rather than memory’s contributions to the linear narrative of progress prevalent in the 1960s, Quiroga describes memorialization as a mechanism by which the state could negotiate past errors and present difficulties without ceding control (4). Not unlike Halberstam’s analysis of time and space, Quiroga identifies temporal and spatial aspects of memorialization, describing the Special Period as a kind of “interregnum, in which other temporalities could always intervene” (5). For him, Cuba in the Special Period was characterized as “a space

that could not fashion the future except as the return of the most odious forms of the past that the state had always tried to eliminate” (5). Principal among these was prostitution.

The characters in Estévez’s novel experience Cuba’s relationship to history and to memory as disjointed at both an individual and collective level. The literary prostitute Salma’s sexualized, commodified body, in conjunction with those of her clients, evokes other times and places, even as it offers her access to scarce material goods. Changes to Cuban economic policy in the 1990s created, as Quiroga argues, a sense of temporal disjointedness (8), at odds with past imagery as well as present realities. The Special Period constituted an odd temporality, defined by anachronism and shaped by memorialization; in Los palacios distantes, the experiences of physical bodies register the disjunctures of this temporal multiplicity. Halberstam defines the term “queer,” as it relates to the goals of In a Queer Time and Place, as the “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (6). The bodies and spaces in Los palacios distantes register the temporal and cultural disjunctures that characterize contemporary Cuba, as sexual encounters reference events from Cuban and world history. Sexuality gives them access to experiences that defy the disembodied way that state discourse imagines Cuban history through memorialization, “management” of the crisis, and limited criticism. The novel portrays the Special Period through physical experience, which strategically displaces conventional depictions of Cuban history.

The narrator draws on canonical Cuban iconography in describing the characters and in telling their stories, but situates them at the margins of contemporary Cuban society. The protagonist, Victorio, feels like an exile, simultaneously in and alienated from Havana: “Son muchos los años en que se ha sentido ajeno, observado y observador, extraño, excluido, incomunicado, fuera de lugar” (124). These characters experience the city in a manner similar to that of Hablerstam’s “queer subjects,” in that they live “(deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned” (10). While Cuba, during the Special Period, is in many ways profoundly peripheral, the characters in Los palacios distantes inhabit a semi-fantastic netherworld within this marginal space. The narrator reinforces this sensation by providing an erudite account of the city’s decay, characterized by a variety of allusions to cultural and historical figures. Although the narrator rarely cedes narrative control, Victorio is often at the center of the novel’s focalization, either as the focalized entity or as the focalizer. There is an intimate correspondence between the narrator and Victorio, a character described as deeply connected to and alienated from Havana and Cuban history.

Victorio is the aging gay son of an ardent but enfeebled revolutionary. He abandons his bureaucratic job, is forced out of his home by a demolition order, and takes up life on the streets of Havana. Salma, a younger woman, supports her mother by working as a prostitute. She dreams of becoming an actress, of conquering Hollywood, and of marrying a rich actor like Andy García or Benicio del Toro (168).

She adopts her name in homage to Mexican actress Salma Hayek and to escape her past. Salma and Victorio encounter Don Fuco, an elderly clown, and begin an apprenticeship with him. The trio inhabits the ruins of a theater, the Pequeño Liceo de La Habana, which is isolated from the city and contains puppets and artifacts, the relics of Cuban identity. Already the owner of an eclectic mix of artistic and cultural objects, Don Fuco wishes that he could also store the smell of the rain or the grief of Cuban rafters who left in 1994, and eschews the officially sacred while seeking “las otras, las verdaderas, las reliquias profanas, esas que no son épicas, las que no sirven como arma de guerra” (135). The marginal spaces in Los palacios distantes are deliberately corporeal and historical, and the narrator establishes a correlation between the spaces of Havana and the bodies of the city’s inhabitants. Both possess an off-kilter physicality that undermines ideological uses of memory and nostalgia, as described by Quiroga’s concept of the state’s recourse to memorialization, and the ways in which these disembody.

The narrator instead focuses on embodied experience by locating historical memory within the spaces and bodies of Havana and its inhabitants. In this novel, memory exists outside the spaces and discourses of official concepts of Cuban history, which strategically displaces the disembodied images propagated as part of the state’s management of the Special Period. Just as the physical space of Havana retains the material evidence of history, the characters in Los palacios distantes embody historical memory. In a series of analepses, the narration relates Victorio’s childhood as an alienating experience, from his family as well as from Cuban society.

Born before the revolution and named in anticipation of revolutionary triumph, Victorio represents, for his father, the hope for the idealized New Man, in the style of Che Guevara. His father, to whom he refers as Papá Robespierre, dressed Victorio as a militant, took him to political rallies, and forced him to undergo tests of valor that left the child paralyzed with fear (116-117). Absorbed in his project, Victorio's father failed to understand the "joven triste, taciturno y melancólico que formaba" (117). Salma's nickname for Victorio, Triunfo, further exposes the divergence between the revolution's plans and Victorio's experience of socialist Cuba. His life spans the temporal arc of the revolution, embodying its hopes and its failures, but it is a life defined by marginality. Because he accompanied his father in his pre-1959, secret activities in support of Castro, for example, Victorio notes that he was born to be clandestine and that "Desde niño he sido un ilegal" (116).

Salma belongs to a younger generation of Cubans, one characterized as naïve. The narrator repeatedly refers to her as a "niña," emphasizing her playfulness and ability to take pleasure in simple activities. Her ignorance of the city surprises Victorio, who explains that "Para los más jóvenes La Habana carece de historia, y esto resulta, acaso, un modo de defensa, los más viejos inventan otra historia, en la que La Habana termina siempre como una especie de Susa, Persépolis o Síbaris que ellos han tenido la dicha de habitar" (219). If the intimate connection to Cuban history, for Salma's generation, has been truncated by the material and ideological difficulties of the Special Period, her example is instructive for Victorio in other ways. The narrator describes her presence as a blessing, stating that, "ella está

siempre alegre y dispuesta a cualquier juego. [...] Para Salma se trata de algo más simple: ella goza, y el resto, razones, explicaciones, relaciones, implicaciones, interrogaciones, carece de sentido” (152). Unlike Cubans of previous generations, the novel implies, Salma’s life does not unfold within the acute historical awareness that characterizes Victorio’s relationship to his past. Despite this, Cuban history organizes Salma’s sexual and sentimental life, especially regarding her sexual initiation and her sex work with foreign tourists. While the narrator characterizes Salma as a sexually liberated woman, the novel “rescues” her from her work as a prostitute for tourists and from her exploitative Afro-Cuban pimp/lover, known as Negro Piedad. The plot culminates in a violent confrontation between Don Fuco and Negro Piedad, in which Negro Piedad kills Don Fuco. Salma responds by killing her pimp with a bronze bust of nineteenth-century Cuban patriot José Martí. The narration thus invests Victorio and Salma’s bodies with the contradictory signifiers of Cuban historical identity. The novel emphasizes, by way of the characters’ relationships to the discourses of revolution, prostitution, and sexuality, the multi-temporality of the Special Period as well as the ways in which this can be subversively re-configured.

The characters in Los palacios distantes inhabit social and psychic spaces caught between continuous alteration and immobility. The narration highlights the contradictory mutability of Havana, locating it within a geographical and sensual specificity. There are, for example, continual references to the climate, especially the light and the (non) changes of the seasons. The city reveals itself through infinite

modes of being “idéntico, diverso y exacto” (21), even as it is “siempre la misma y no conoce el cambio, a la ciudad se la siente derrotada, deshecha, mucho más que otras de mayor antigüedad e igualmente castigadas por la historia, aunque no martirizadas por algo tan funesto como la inmovilidad” (137). The narration constructs Havana as a sexualized performance of space that speaks to a manner of being Cuban. Havana’s embodiments provoke a fantastic madness in those who inhabit the city: “La Habana puede engendrar esas locuras. Delirios de templos griegos, anfiteatros romanos, palacios florentinos, iglesias góticas, pabellones rococó” (35). The city in Los palacios distantes condenses and intensifies the artifacts, influences, and habits of multiple cultural traditions. This eccentric multiplicity underscores the novel’s view of Havana’s—and, by extension, Cuba’s—peripheral relationship to Western historical and cultural traditions. The ways in which the characters enact Cuban identity, particularly sexual identity, bear evidence of this cultural hybridity. Rather than a precise correspondence between signifier and signified, Havana’s architecture grows out of the delirious, promiscuous fantasies of its inhabitants.

The narrator presents the relationship between the characters and Havana’s physical space as another aspect of the counter histories that proliferate in Los palacios distantes, thereby linking it to the performance, ritual, and physicality that permeate this novel. Havana is personified and frequently feminized throughout the novel. The tensions between public and private uses of space—and the dominant and subversive identity patterns these provoke—link the novel’s depiction of the city to prostitution. Víctor Fowler makes a similar analogy when he argues that the literary

jinetera illustrates “los dolores de la crisis económica por la que el país transita” (324). Fowler’s formulation equates the literary prostitute with the Cuban nation, forced to sell its body due to economic necessity. The city and the literary prostitute, in Estévez’s novel, provide a means of embodying historical memory, and the narrative ambivalence regarding both responds to the convoluted uses made of this physicality by Cuban nationalism. The narrator describes the city as “la tramoya de una zarzuela pobre” (20). This physical space of the city, like the prostitute’s body, becomes a stage for the performance of Cuban identity. Havana is identified as a “mulata maquillada, perfumada y entallada” (43); a prolongation of the Pequeño Liceo de La Habana (95); and the vigilant eyes that watch Salma from behind “los visillos de las miles y miles de ventanas” (165). The prostitute’s body and Havana thus provide the medium and the setting for the performances of Cuban identity.

By locating this performance within the temporal and physical spaces of Havana and the prostitute’s body, the novel examines the interaction of bodies and identities. Because strategic displacement in Los palacios distantes pays careful attention to embodied history and memory, each move of displacement contains a residual memory of what came before, the imprint of former identities. Rather than the state’s official multiplicity, suggested by Quiroga’s concept of memorialization, the novel focuses on how these ambiguities play out in the characters’ experience of contemporary Cuba. The emphasis on embodied experience results in a strategic proliferation, one designed to confound facile consumption of either Cuban bodies or identities. History provides an organizational structure for Cuban identity in the



novel, and the inscription of official history onto physical bodies and spaces provides a means of transiting that history. In their relationship to memory and identity, then, prostitution and the city operate as what Joseph Roach describes as a “genealogy of performance,” and attend to the corporeal inscription of both official history and “counter-memories” (25). Bodies bear the evidence of history’s remains, as Roach suggests, but they are also formed from history itself. These characters’ embodied experience of Cuban history is fundamentally queer, however, given that their sexual practices place them outside of what is considered proper. The novel thus focuses on their physical bodies to question authoritative concepts of history and identity.

If the prostitution trope allows Hadad to sell herself without selling out, in Los palacios distantes it provides a rhetorical framework for criticizing, and complicating, the sale of Cuban cultural specificity. Hadad counters the normative, already-prostituted state of social bodies in Mexican cultural discourse, exploring how that which is public is also feminized. She exaggerates her own sexuality, constructing a strong female body that strategically appropriates positions of invisibility. In Hadad’s art and in Estévez’s novel, sexuality functions as a potentially radical means of disrupting normative identity patterns. In the novel, use of the prostitution trope does not investigate how bodies come to be sexualized, but rather conflates the performance of that sexuality with Cuban identity. The novel decries the uncritical sale of cultural specificity—imagined as sexuality and epitomized by the resurgence of literal prostitution in Cuba—by the Cuban state in its reliance on tourism to manage the crisis of the 1990s. The novel’s narration mimes the seductive, nostalgic

image of Cuban culture that currently make the island a tempting tourist destination, for example employing references to pre-1959 Cuba and to the heyday of the revolution. Rather than capitulating either to tourists' desires or to the official imagery suggested by memorialization, the narration resists facile consumption by underscoring the characters' complicated experience of this reality. The narrator conveys this quality with the use of hyperbole, exaggeration, and multiple cultural and historical references. The novel strategically displaces conventional cubanía, as defined by either patriotism or tourism marketing. The novel's emphasis on historical memory underscores the remains of race, gender, cultural, and class categories that inform contemporary Cuban society and the use of the prostitution trope.

Sex and sexuality provide the stage and the medium in Los palacios distantes for a subjective encounter with history, suffused with the affective miasma of prostitution and the nostalgia evoked by Havana. The narration pays careful attention to the former identities of places and people and underscores that Havana is a city of collapse, characterized by "derrumbes que informan del paso de la Historia sobre el hombre" (64). The collapsing buildings manifest the simultaneous making and unmaking of the city, a revelation of history's action on Havana's "body." Quiroga describes Havana during the 1990s as a verb tense that combines the Spanish past and future perfect (9). He comments on the ways in which the city trades on its past: the publication of expensive magazines, such as Opus Habana, that celebrate the city's history; nightclubs that recall pre-1959 splendor; and European fashion shoots that use collapsing buildings as a backdrop (9). As with the prostitute's body in Los

palacios distantes, the collapsing buildings condense multiple temporalities into a ruin that, while it reveals the elements of its construction, does not deconstruct how history, memory, and physicality create identity. In contrast to these official images of history, however, the novel uses embodied sexuality—exemplified by the prostitute’s body—to complicate authoritative uses of Cuban history and physicality, as well as how this identity is marketed as a nostalgic commodity.

A retrospective vision expresses frustration with didactic uses of Cuban history—most recently by the revolution—and a desire to challenge this ideology by re-signifying Havana’s physical spaces. At the novel’s opening, for example, the narrator describes two buildings on the verge of collapse, the Royal Palm hotel and a mansion that belonged to a long-forgotten family (17). Although they are both in shambles, the former is still inhabited; this is Victorio’s home (18). The narrator references the human past of the two buildings, noting that within the mansion lived “una sola y holgada familia,” along with “esclavos, sin lugar a dudas más esclavos que familia, veinte esclavos mandingas, yorubas, lucumís” (18). Rather than a single family, multiple families now inhabit the building. These families are the result of “la lujuria de amos y esclavos en tierra propicia a mezclas, desfogues y lujurias” (18). As a result, the narrator remarks on the futility of the former names of “palacio” and “hotel” to describe in adequate fashion the current state of the buildings. Guillermina de Ferrari argues that this emptying of language links Estévez’s novel to the neo-baroque tradition, stating that “las palabras se presentan como gastadas por la historia, precariamente sostenidas por los puntales del significado” (252). The novel’s

language mimics the ruin suffered by physical bodies and Havana itself, laid to waste by history. Language's function parallels that of the ruins of Havana and of the prostitute's body, that is, to condense and ultimately to re-signify. This description thus underscores the convergence of cultural narratives and physical entities, as well as the persistence of former identities within the present incarnation. The present, decrepit condition of the buildings speaks to the difficulties of post-Soviet Cuba, while the reference to the absent former owners alludes to a contentious national debate about social change and Cuban identity.

This description of the former identities haunting the Cuban present puts sexuality at the core of Cuban identity. The narrator suggests that sexuality explains the historical past as well as its relevance to the present. While the sexual interactions of owners and slaves were conditioned by economic factors, the narrator characterizes both groups by their sexual desire, a lust that frames Cuban identity and social space. Populated by groups with a promiscuous bent, Cuba as social and geographical space facilitates the sort of mixing the narrator describes. The mythology of Cuban sexuality referenced by the narrator contributes to Cuba's contemporary fame as a destination for sex tourism, what Brennan terms a "sexscape" (15).<sup>37</sup> In refashioning the island as a tourist destination, the state has relied upon images of quintessentially "Cuban" identity to attract visitors and their money. For the narrator, this official use of identity extends from, and ultimately perverts, the sensuality perceived as a fundamental manner of being Cuban. Within this rubric, sexuality can be subversive, but prostitution remains the province of official discourse, the trafficking of identities

and bodies in materialistic exchange. At the same time, the narrator's location of cultural identity within a sexualized, racialized group appeals to normative descriptions of Cuban history. In the deliberate use of stereotypical Cuban sexuality, the narration "prostitutes" itself to circumvent official discourses and strategically displace Cuba's relationship to history. Unlike Hadad's unpacking of prostitution imagery, however, the narrator in Los palacios distantes regards prostitution's gender baggage warily.

Prostitution as a literary trope in this novel, then, engages patterns of dependence, economic exploitation, gender, and race. It trades on the ambiguities inherent in making a marginalized group the synecdoche of official culture. The narrator utilizes prostitution to configure Cuba's relationship to history as economic and corporeal, whether through colonialism, communism, or capitalism. The link among sexuality, national identity, and prostitution is not made as explicitly problematic in this novel as it is in Hadad's performances. The text nevertheless illustrates the ways in which tourism in Latin America, as Coco Fusco argues, provides a "theater for the playing out of colonialism's unfinished business" (137). Prior to the Special Period, female prostitutes had a crucial role in the socialist drama of national redemption and progress. Fusco maintains that the "liberation" of prostitutes was "touted as evidence that the Revolution had eradicated the corruption and immorality associated with capitalism" (143). As part of their rehabilitation, the government employed former sex workers as clerks, waitresses, and bus drivers (143). The resurgence of prostitution points to the ideological functions of race and

ethnicity in contemporary Cuba. Fusco contends that, with the Special Period, the Cuban state is no longer as interested in projecting the image of a modern, industrial nation and has instead turned to “traditional” Cuban culture, often in the form of tropicalist stereotypes about Afro-Cubans, in marketing itself (150).<sup>38</sup> Because this authoritative use of history, in Los palacios distantes, manifests itself through disembodied depictions of marginal bodies, the narrator uses these images to strategically displace Cuba’s relationship to economic discourses, emphasizing the characters’ subversive transit of Cuban geographic space and history.

While the use of prostitution as a meta-narrative trope in Los palacios distantes constitutes a nuanced response to an economic situation that breeds commodification, the novel seems uneasy with concepts of race, class, gender, and identity bound up in the topic of sex work in Cuba. Fusco argues that, for many Cubans, the socialist projects of economic diversification and modernization were intertwined “with no longer having to service first-world desires for exotica” (150). Her analysis underscores the resentments that surface as tourists seek exoticism in the form of Cuban women, especially mulatas (150). Salma is described as white, but her sexual experiences and her work as a prostitute evoke the racial and temporal overtones that inform nostalgic depictions of Cuban identity. When she loses her virginity at fourteen, it is to a much-older black man named Cuartobate. The experience rejuvenates Cuartobate, such that he again becomes “el negrón fabuloso y estibador de los años treinta, de la época del Machadato [...] o de la Pentarquía” (161). Her sexual experiences with tourists likewise recall previous historical

periods—such as the Middle Ages or the Renaissance (166)—and the places of encounter, such as the Sweet Feeling Café, refer to Cuba’s marketing of cultural nostalgia and exoticism. The novel’s depiction of Salma emphasizes the way in which the future, in Cuba, reiterates the past. Whereas Hadad uses the prostitution trope to strategically displace what it means to be commodified, in Los palacios distantes the trope does not re-work the relationships of gender, class, and race, but instead disrupts attempts to commodify Cuban identity.

The narrator uses marginal bodies and physical spaces to challenge disembodied patterns of cultural identity. Concepts of theatricality and performance constitute a crucial element of this strategic move. If these cultural “scripts” exist in a collective realm, the characters appropriate them from the margins to displace the way that they are incorporated into official culture. De Ferrari points to this aspect when she describes Cuba as a “ritual donde se repiten ‘las mismas palabras, los mismos gestos, las mismas palabras, los mismos gestos’” (254). The novel creates a world in which theater and performance reign as dominant epistemes, but the narrator uses theatricality’s implied emphasis on the corporeal to exploit the breach between sign and signifier. Not only are things not as they appear, but they are also not as they are said to appear. The challenge to the conventions of disembodiment results in part from the ideological morass of the Special Period. As de Ferrari emphasizes, objects and words in Los palacios distantes change meaning (254). Although revolutionary slogans, especially, persist in fossilized form, the novel reveals the manner in which they are continuously re-contextualized by the realities of daily life

in Cuba. De Ferrari argues that revolutionary rhetoric survives in such a form that it has forgotten “sus significados originales. Son sólo palabras que forman un ritual absurdo” (254). As with the narration’s strategic proliferation, however, the sort of forgetting practiced in this novel points always to the fact that such a process has occurred and that it is repeated. The counter-narrative constructed by the narration de-masks the revolution’s use of Cuban history and identity, but it exists alongside the originals. Counter-histories and official discourses are crammed together in a promiscuous jumble. This muddling manifests itself physically in the geographical space of Havana and in the bodies of the characters as they perform the “absurd ritual” of daily life in Cuba.

Through the counter-narrative constructed in Los palacios distantes, historical time and cultural memory converge on the body of the literary—and literal—prostitute, Salma. Her character evidences both prostitution’s residual force as a metaphor for neocolonial intervention and its more recent incarnation as economic crisis. Salma embodies Quiroga’s description of the palimpsest that results from that “queer form of reproduction, one where two texts, two sites, two lives, blend into one continuous present” (ix). Unlike Hadad’s performances, in which the prostitution trope reconfigures expectations for female sexuality, Salma’s role highlights the ways in which this topic still offers lessons in subordination to patriarchal structures, to economic pressures, and, ultimately, to history. Because of prostitution’s entanglement with the rhetoric of socialist progress, the Cuban prostitute’s body has been configured as profoundly not-modern. Modernity, under Cuban socialism, has



been rhetorically linked to the ability not to sell oneself, whether at an individual or a national level. Even as Cuban women have gained a significant, if relative, degree of sexual independence, Salma's work as a jinetera is still rhetorically linked to the figure of the whore. A whore is never merely a sex worker, or even a prostitute, but rather a reiteration of the corruption and political dependence that plagues Cuban nationalism, despite the best efforts of reformers and revolutionaries.

The narrator thus distinguishes between sex as pleasure and sex as economic exchange. For Victorio, sex offers the possibility of social change: "el sexo resulta la única forma de verdadera democracia que puede existir en el mundo. O razona quizá que sería mejor deducir que cualquier revolución que se precie de democrática debe comenzar por el sexo" (74). He formulates this despite lamenting that his sexual liaisons are consistently loveless and characterized by the crass material exchange typically associated with prostitution. In contrast, the narrator presents Salma's paid sex work as a perversion of her "natural" inclination to sexuality. She characterizes herself as an innately sexual being, stating that "fui una niña que tuvo siempre el corazón entre las piernas, supe desde bien pronto que el centro de mi vida palpitaba allí, nada más poseyó importancia, el resto de mi cuerpo me traía sin cuidado" (157). In addition, she states that the enjoyment by others of her body brings her nearly as much pleasure as it does them (157). Within the context of contemporary Cuba, this description perhaps evidences changing patterns of sexuality among Cuban women, including increased agency in sexual relationships.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the statement constructs the female body as an object for others. Not unlike the prostituted,

national female body Hadad criticizes in her performances, the novel exploits Salma's body in the service of Cuban nationalism, whether presented as the prostitute or as the "liberated" woman.

Salma's sexual experimentation demonstrates how her embodied experience of history—and society—shapes her identity. When the neighborhood finds out that Salma has had sex with the much-older Cuartobate, they denounce the man as a child abuser (165). After she denies the charge, the neighbors turn on her, calling her a "puta" (165). She becomes, at fourteen, "la puta-puta-más-recontraputa, me pusieron un sobrenombre horrible [. . .] me llamaron Isabelita-muerde-y-huye" (165). As she tells the story, Salma emphasizes the manner in which her corporality shapes her relationship to society. She states that, after leaving Cuartobate, "conocí el pernicioso poder de los ojos que espían tras los visillos de las miles y miles de ventanas" (164-65). Cuartobate's status as a sixty or seventy year old man, in addition to the fact that he is black, condition the manner in which the neighborhood responds to his sexual relationship with Salma.

The sexual encounter between Cuartobate and Salma evokes the way bodies in Los palacios distantes function as a point of contact between various binaries, including the relationship between past and present. Salma relates that during their encounter, Cuartobate's body once again becomes that of a young man. As she kissed him, his body, piece by piece, was rejuvenated,

las manazas que ya no estaban endurecidas por años y trabajos, que  
habían vuelto a ser las manos de un muchachón del Puerto de La

Habana, los brazos de bronce modelados para la estiba de sacos de azúcar, jovencitos de nuevo, de nuevo de bronce, surcados de venas por donde no se cansaba de circular una sangre de veinte años, tú, besé su cuello, sus mejillas renovadas, y dejé que mi boca desapareciera en la bocaza, la bamba de Cuartobate, cuyo gusto a tabaco y a aguardiente me turbaba, mezclé mi sudor con el de aquel cuerpo que gozaba y gozaba y sabía a saco de yute, azúcar, yerba, harina, tierra, cebolla, ajo y sudor. (161-62)

The references to him as “aquel cuerpo” emphasize that physicality undergirds this encounter, but Cuartobate’s and Salma’s bodies evoke the temporal and cultural layers of Cuban identity. Sex, in this example, is a means of evoking and understanding history. As with Salma’s adolescent female sexuality, Cuartobate’s racialized body defines his relationship to Cuban society. In her re-telling, Salma emphasizes the racial distinctions that characterize their relationship, describing “la morbosa felicidad que le daba templarse a aquella blanquita que podía ser su nieta, ¡qué digo!, su biznieta” (161). As this encounter alters the norms of bourgeois sexual reproduction, it strategically displaces the official reproduction of Cuban history and identity.

At the same time, this encounter evokes the patterns of race, gender, and nationalism that inflect contemporary Cuba. Salma’s description of Cuartobate as a “negrón fabuloso y estibador” hinges on the use of Afro-Cuban sexuality as a sort of historical fetish. In this example, history returns in virile, sexualized form and takes

possession of Salma in a manner that is both liberating and threatening. In a sense, Salma copulates with a version of history itself, incorporating it into her own body. Not unlike the literary prostitute, Cuartobate embodies a history of racism, overt sexualization, and class exploitation. The underlying elements of race, even racism, in this novel call attention to the difference between what the government says about race in Cuba and what Cubans actually experience. If racism, like prostitution, is another way in which the past reappears in the Special Period, the novel uses this contradictory imagery to contest not history's inscription, but its interpretation. The novel posits multiple—and frequently subversive—means of transiting the ruins history has made of Cuba and Cubans.

After her experiences with Cuartobate, Salma begins to work with tourists as a prostitute under the guidance of Negro Piedad. He is both lover and pimp; Salma describes him as an incestuous brother, stating that it was he who “puso tarifa a mis satisfacciones” (165). As prostitution provides Salma and her mother with money and access to scarce material goods, the narrator again emphasizes the way in which sex mediates temporality and culture. Salma's clients include

viejos españoles, italianos, alemanes, blancos como ranas blancas, salpicados de manchas, cultos, con sudores cultos, con sudores extraños, sudores de civilizaciones antiguas, sudores que llegaban del Imperio Romano y del Medievo, [...] sudores que llegaban de civilizaciones agotadas, sudores de Cartago y de Tiro y de Chipre, viejos turistas con alientos fétidos, alientos cultos, algunos con

pinguitas flácidas que ellos llamaban penes, viejos con pestilencias del Renacimiento que se ecahaban sobre mí y en mí satisfacían los aburrimientos de Europa. (166)

As in the episode with Cuartobate, sex works as a conduit between cultural and temporal divides. Physicality serves as the medium for temporal exchange: the narrator distills the foreign tourists into a cultural essence contained in corporeal form. Salma's body, too, is implicitly identified with Cuba. The tourists are white, European men whose bodies represent privilege and whose sexual performance projects a historical narrative of Western superiority. Whereas Salma's sexual exchange with Cuartobate emphasized, for the narrator, a necessary re-connection to a specifically Cuban history, her encounters with the foreign tourists delineate Cuba's relationship to history. In this view, Cuba has been, in effect, history's whore.

Prostitution in Los palacios distantes is a tool to elicit the historical complexities—of race, gender, class and culture—that undermine the state's use of memorialization. Unlike Hadad, who strategically displaces prostitution itself, this novel instead utilizes the problematic nature of this trope to contest Cuba's relationship to history.

The novel underscores that, in contemporary Cuba, History has eliminated pleasure (82). The narrator asks whether, in a city in which history trumps pleasure, “¿será que cualquier cosa, lo más nimio, lo más pueril, lo más estúpido, lo más rudo, llega finalmente a convertirse en delicado urgente placer?” (82). The persistent sexualization of history is thus an attempt to reclaim pleasure. Although the characters' search is not solely for sexual pleasure, sex is politicized and offers a tool

for resistance. This echoes Fusco's study of Cuban jineteras and Estévez's arguments in "The Mysticism of the Flesh." Fusco notes that casual sex has, in some sense, replaced the consumer luxuries unavailable in the 1990s (144). She frames the increasing openness regarding sexual activity as an "unspoken revolt against both the socialist emphasis on productive labor and the revolution's puritanical morality" (144).<sup>40</sup> Estévez maintains that "We Cubans have learned to concentrate on the only thing that allows some chance of independence," that is, sexual expression (25). For Salma, in the fictional world of Los palacios distantes, sexual activity provides necessary pleasure, part of which is access to otherwise forbidden spaces and times. Through sex, Salma has contact with Cuban history, embodied by Cuartobate, as well as with Western cultural antiquities in the form of foreign tourists. In this way, she can strategically displace the expectations of revolutionary Cuban society regarding the uses of the past and of pleasure. That human bodies mediate these experiences is precisely the point: physical contact provides another means of knowing history or culture that is less regulated. If, as Fusco and Estévez argue, sex in and of itself can be resistance, in Los palacios distantes it challenges the persistent vigilance of bodies, spaces, and histories.

Prostitution in this novel positions Cuba with regard to the Western cultural tradition and the contemporary changes brought about by the Special Period. The literary prostitute evidences the paths of desire that inform the relationships between developed and industrialized, exotic and normative, self and other. Salma's interactions with men point to the ways in which she is both exotic other and desiring

agent. Los palacios distantes suggests that sexuality, particularly in the Cuban context, provides a means of de-centering history as well as of gaining a subversive knowledge by moving through the spaces of difference. Sexuality is also, in this novel, a cultural performance, a means of being Cuban. In this, the novel caters to the expectations of Cubans and foreigners, using this image to seduce readers and ultimately to complicate cultural consumption. The novel strategically displaces the material, embodied signifiers of Cuba's relationship to history. It demonstrates that, as the revolutionary government engages in the memorialization of Cuban history to salvage legitimacy in the present, merely revisiting the past does not itself constitute an effective challenge to the official uses of that past. The prostitution trope in Los palacios distantes illustrates the challenges of strategic displacement in the Cuban context, as the state attempts a sort of hegemonic displacement. The trope thus evokes the past, described as colonial domination, as well as Cuba's potential fate in a globalized economy. Although the narrator leaves relatively unexamined the race, gender, and class assumptions that mark the literary prostitute's body, this complexity nevertheless creates a nuanced displacement of Cuba's relationship to history.

Hadad's performances and Estévez's novel utilize the prostitution trope to question Mexican and Cuban cultural identities with regard to discourses of history, memory, and power. In both examples, the prostitution trope serves as a rhetorical mask that structures the relationship between corporeality and subjectivity. Hadad's art constitutes a more straightforward, though not simplistic, example of displacement. She posits that bodies enter Mexican cultural discourse as already

prostituted entities and then uses her performances to reconfigure prostitution's signifiers. Hadad uses the prostitution trope to challenge the legacies of sexism and colonialism that inflect the marketing and consumption of gender, ethnic, or cultural identities. In contrast, Los palacios distantes presents the prostitution trope as a metaphor for Cuba's relationship to history. Although the novel plays with the prostitution trope in constructing a narrative that corresponds to certain stereotypical images of Cuban identity and literature, it does not displace prostitution, as a trope, in the same way that Hadad's performances do. Instead, the novel uses the trope to elicit a contradictory proliferation of cultural signifiers that complicate the state's project to manage Cuban history through the process of memorialization. Through an exploration of sexuality and pleasure, the novel's characters inhabit history by way of marginal bodies and spaces, in particular the prostitute's body and a crumbling Havana. In Hadad's performances and Estévez's novel, prostitution structures the intersections of bodies, cultural discourse, and subjectivity; attempts to displace this trope thus mark the ways in which subjects articulate their relationship to other subjects and to power.



### Chapter Three

#### The Art of Belonging: Bodies and the Language of Race, Ethnicity, and Nation

Race, in the Americas, evokes connotations of slavery and the exploitation of labor and resources, but in Latin America it also shares affinities with national identity. José Martí's essay, "Nuestra América," published in 1891 during his exile in Mexico, analyzes America's diversity. As a region cloaked in "los calzones de Inglaterra, el chaleco parisiense, el chaquetón de Norte América y la montera de España," he describes a cultural figure that excludes various groups—Indians, blacks, and campesinos—that embody crucial aspects of Latin American reality (10-11). For Martí, creativity is necessary to express American experience and he declares that "Ni el libro europeo, ni el libro yankee, daban la clave del enigma hispanoamericano" (11). His vision of regional identity centers on rhetorical and physical differences: distinct in body, Latin America generates different cultural identities. He exiles racism from his America, explaining that "No hay odio de razas, porque no hay razas" (13). Martí reformulates the ideal of universal subjectivity by stating that "El alma emana, igual y eterna, de los cuerpos diversos en forma y en color. Peca contra la Humanidad el que fomente y propague la oposición y el odio de las razas" (13). Revolutionary in the context of a Cuban society that had only recently abolished slavery, Martí's analysis of race reveals the tensions between ideas of national identity, cultural power, and bodies in Latin America. He narrates America through bodily difference, but the subordination of some of those bodies within Western intellectual hierarchy rankles his idealism. For Martí, as for later creators of

discourses of mestizaje, physical differences define Latin American cultural identities in opposition to those of Europe or North America, even as the very existence of race must be denied in favor of an idealized social equality.

Far from being resolved by political independence, these tensions dominate Latin American national rhetoric in the twentieth century. The three films and the novel discussed in this chapter respond to the sorts of questions posed by Martí's essay. What counts as American, for example, and how is it embodied? How do these identities and bodies intersect with the region's portrayals of and by outsiders, particularly Europe and the United States? Y tu mamá también (2002, Alfonso Cuarón), The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2005, Tommy Lee Jones), Guantanamo (1995, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío), along with Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's novel, Trilogía sucia de La Habana (1994), all use bodies to tell stories about Cuban and Mexican identities. They highlight the ideological contradictions of placing images of marginalized bodies at the center of myths of national identity. This practice, which I describe as disembodiment, characterizes the populist rhetoric of cultural hybridity, frequently expressed in Mexico as mestizaje and in Cuba with concepts such as transculturación or cubanía. Each of these four works emphasizes the effects of ethnic, racial, cultural, and artistic patterns on the embodied artistic subjects whose lives they depict, a technique that they use to contest the ways in which concepts of identity are often imposed as generalizing categories.

The films and novel in this chapter draw on historical concepts of national bodies, such as those from the early twentieth century, but they underscore the

complicated ways in which artistic subjects live the residues of these artistic, cinematic, and literary discourses at the turn of the new millennium. As “Nuestra América” anticipates, twentieth century debates about hybridity increasingly centered on questions of representation. Artists, writers, and political leaders imagined Cuba and Mexico as a body, alternately violated and emancipatory, but nearly always marginal. Bodies, in practical as well as theoretical terms, defined how citizens belonged to nation and culture.<sup>41</sup> These concepts retain a complicated inheritance from colonial and nineteenth-century views on bodies and belonging and the perceived importance of concepts of hybridity to national identities. Marilyn Grace Miller points out, for example, that the term “mestizaje” can indicate “racial or ethnic lineage or physical characteristics,” as well as refer to the “aesthetics or stylistics of cultural production” (7). Given my focus on the literary functions of bodies, I use the term “race” to refer to characteristics associated principally with the physical body. Ethnicity, in contrast, draws on a shared genealogy that includes the biological body, but also exists through cultural practices that link people to groups. By way of hybridity, Cuban and Mexican concepts of race and ethnicity were intertwined with national and cultural identities. The novel and films in this chapter strategically displace “nationalized” images of marginal bodies by engaging them as artifice and as living subjects. These literary and filmic bodies exhibit themselves as art that emphasizes the embodied effects of these fictions on Cubans and Mexicans.

Because race deals with the social interpretation of bodies, it is culturally specific. Despite historical commonalities, concepts of race developed differently in

various parts of the Americas. Race goes beyond the body, an idea that echoes Paul Gilroy's assertion that, prior to the scientific racism of the nineteenth century, "race" meant much the same thing that "culture" does today (8). Manning Marable, in discussing African American responses to the Cuban revolution, outlines concepts of race in the United States and Cuba. He argues that both countries share a history of racialization—that is, they are societies formed by racial hierarchies stemming from slavery—and that race in the United States has historically been "simultaneously imposed from without and constructed from within" (92). He defines the Cuban concept as a collective "social hierarchy," stating that, "Blackness was [...] something to be avoided, overcome, transcended" (92-93). Cuban and Mexican discourse often rejects North American racial categories—especially those based primarily on skin color or phenotype—in favor of other identification strategies. This does not of course preclude the use of physical difference to talk about identity. Bodies can provide a model for cultural and political unification, particularly, as Miller contends, through mestizaje (25). Alejandro de la Fuente argues that race was crucial to Cuba's independence project, albeit in ways that wrote race out of an idealized racial fraternity (3), as observed in Martí's essay. George Reid Andrews traces racial ideologies after independence and notes that, in contrast to nineteenth-century concerns with civilizing whiteness, Latin American nationalisms in the twentieth century were based upon egalitarianism and racial and political democracies, a process he terms "cultural browning" (165).

This phenomenon is not unrelated to disembodiment in that brownness may travel across social strata and be separated from the bodies that give it cultural meaning. Post-revolutionary Mexican artists or politicians, for example, could draw on populist rhetoric or indigenismo without being trapped in working class or indigenous bodies. Edna Rodríguez-Mangual argues that post-1959 Cuban cultural projects likewise borrow from marginalized bodies. Revolutionary “rhetoric incorporates black history and its contribution as an important stratum of Cuban identity,” a strategy of identification that creates a “distinctively postcolonial identity for postrevolutionary Cuba” (17), a tactic not unrelated to the kind of literary afrocubanismo associated with the poetry of Nicolás Guillén. Cultural browning counters European or North American notions of race-based cultural superiority, but it risks essentializing disembodiment by appropriating marginalized bodies for national, frequently elitist projects. This process constitutes a salient rhetorical strategy in twentieth-century Cuba and Mexico, and it is to this use of bodies that Y tu mamá también and Trilogía respond. Guantanamera and Three Burials occupy different positions with regard to cultural power structures, as the Cuban film criticizes from within revolutionary discourse and the North American film treats racialized categories along the United States/Mexico border.

Strategic displacement emphasizes the body’s ability to maneuver cultural patterns through creative representation, which links it to mobility. Race and ethnicity in the Americas suggest, despite regional differences, transnational movements. As in Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic, Andrews’s Afro-Latin

America, and Joseph Roach's circum-Atlantic world, ethnicity is linked to mobility in practical and theoretical terms. Tim Cresswell defines mobility as "socially produced motion" (3), and argues that it cannot be understood apart from the physical experience of movement or the cultural narratives that give meaning to movement (4). This concept, for Cresswell, is essential to what it means to be modern, and he views modernity as a shift toward evaluation in terms of mobility (15-16). He ties scientific exploration of the body, particularly of the circulatory system, to mobility's increasing relevance to modern life (14). Cresswell argues that philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes borrowed from medicine to formulate concepts of liberty dependant upon individual mobility (14), while Pierre L'Enfant's plan of Washington, D.C., drew on healthful connotations of blood circulating through the human body (8). Whereas European thinkers articulated modernity through the body's unrestrained movements, the bodies through which Latin American modernity was depicted were often not agents of their own mobility, as with the indigenous and African populations that informed Cuban and Mexican concepts of hybridity.

Race and ethnicity in the Americas recall the literal, involuntary displacements experienced by people in transit between continents or nations. In a context historically defined by forced movement and lack of agency, strategic displacement allows artistic subjects to negotiate their own mobility by challenging portrayals of their bodies. This process engages historical patterns, such as the forced and voluntary migrations that brought African, European, and indigenous groups into contact and gave meaning to their bodies. Indeed, Coco Fusco maintains that, "Black

people's history in the New World begins with a scene of the actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile of their bodies" (5). Movement, as Cresswell's concept of mobility stresses, has meaning because it is represented through art, history, myth, or cultural storytelling. Through strategic displacement, marginalized subjects can, at a narrative level, gain representational power. In Y tu mamá también, the protagonists' journey to the provinces parallels their exploration of Mexican identity. The narrator's voice-over segments guide our perceptions of the characters, but the film challenges this narrative control by displaying links among sexuality and Mexican class and ethnic identities. In Three Burials, a Border Patrol agent kills Melquiades, a Mexican immigrant. When his friend forces the agent to return the body to Mexico for burial, the film makes the cadaver explicitly visible to address the racialized categories of the border between the United States and Mexico. In death, Melquiades works a disquieting and darkly humorous strategic displacement of the essentialism that renders him marginal. In Cuba, the rhetoric of an idealized fraternity informs a racial, and at times racist, subtext within revolutionary discourse. Trilogía undermines the narrative of revolutionary progress with a narrator who is often both racist and sexist, while Guantanamera deftly uses Afro-Cuban identity to negotiate the line between the "everything" within the revolution and the "nothing" without. With explicit concern for portrayals of national identity, the films and the novel strategically displace artistic conventions that represent race, ethnicity, and national identity through marginalized bodies.

Bodies, Storytelling, and Cultural Identity in Alfonso Cuarón's Y tu mamá también and Tommy Lee Jones's The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada

Mexican cinema got its start during the upheaval of the 1910 revolution and came of age during the subsequent national—and nationalist—consolidation, making it influential in portraying the ethnic and cultural identities that comprise the nation. Filmmaking arrived, as John King notes, with an influx of foreign films, initially French and Italian and later North American (14). Elissa Rashkin argues that the historical coincidence of the revolution's social and political changes with the development of narrative cinema gave filmmakers material that was necessarily about the nation (9). The revolution hoped to constitute a modern Mexico, and film technology proved a logical ally in that process. Cinema expresses identity, a function recognized institutionally by protectionist funding regulations, for example, or by quotas that reserve screens to exhibit "national" films (Smith 391, 393). Given that filmmaking requires a concentration of resources and capital, these portrayals are often at the disposal of the powerful, whether as state or private financiers.<sup>42</sup> Alfonso Cuarón's Y tu mamá también (2002) and Tommy Lee Jones's The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2005) each wrestle with a contradictory cinematic heritage through a visual and thematic emphasis on characters' bodies. The films transgress cinematic and social propriety, as with the nudity of Julio and Tenoch's bodies or the on-screen presence of Melquiades's cadaver. By strategically displacing cinematic conventions that replicate gender, cultural, and class norms for bodies and their movements, the films challenge concepts of ethnicity and cultural identity linked to



bodies and the ways they move through Mexican society or between Mexico and the United States.

The characters in these films navigate a landscape that recalls Mexican and North American cinematic traditions. Y tu mamá también and Three Burials narrate Mexico elliptically, as they traverse a mysterious but not entirely unfamiliar territory. This familiarity stems in part from the manipulation of cinematic genre conventions: Cuarón's film is a road trip movie, while Three Burials utilizes the tropes of Hollywood Westerns and Mexican cowboy culture. The films capitalize on the liminal status of their traveling protagonists, using geographic displacements to investigate categories of ethnicity and nation. Y tu mamá también follows Julio Zapata and Tenoch Iturbide as they travel from Mexico City toward Boca del Cielo, a beach the friends have invented but which turns out to be real. Luisa Cortés, the slightly older Spanish wife of Tenoch's cousin accompanies them.<sup>43</sup> The film juxtaposes images of their bodies with shots of the countryside and rural Mexicans, a relationship mediated by a voice-over narrator. This technique conflates class and race, as well as disembodies mestizo and working class Mexicans through artistic discourses. The film focuses on Julio and Tenoch's bodies to strategically displace the artistic and political practices that hide the links among class, race, sexuality, and concepts of the nation. Three Burials deals with the shooting death of Melquiades Estrada, a cowboy and undocumented immigrant to the United States, by an overzealous Border Patrol agent. Facing local law enforcement's indifference, his Texan friend Pete kidnaps the guilty agent and sets out on horseback to return Melquiades's

body to Coahuila. Pete follows a hand-drawn map and his friend's stories, descriptions that unravel into local legend and oral tradition. The film illustrates the institutional monitoring of Melquiades's body, a control that he strategically displaces through narrative ambiguity.

Both films are anomalous in that they are transnational without precisely subscribing to the production trends that Hester Baer and Ryan Long attribute to recent global cinema (150). Although Three Burials deals with Mexican identity, it is not, strictly speaking, a Mexican film. With a screenplay by Mexican writer Guillermo Arriaga and financing from France-based EuropaCorp, the film database IMDb classifies it as a France/United States co-production. The film capitalizes on the credentials of its director and star, Tommy Lee Jones, who features prominently in promotional materials. In contrast to the cross-border affiliations of Three Burials, Cuarón's film focuses explicitly on Mexico. Paul Julian Smith argues that this film, along with Alejandro González Iñárritu's Amores perros (2000), exemplifies recent financing and production trends in Mexican cinema. Citing the way in which publicity for these two films extols the creative freedom private funding gives directors, Smith explains that this scenario "neatly reverses the European or PRI-ista protection-promotion model whereby only state intervention could guarantee the creative liberty of smaller nations whose artistic heritage is believed to be threatened by mercenary US capitalism" (395).<sup>44</sup> Smith also details the multinational business savvy of Omnilife, the parent company of production company Anheo (396). Building on Omnilife's Latin American presence, Cuarón and Jorge Vergara, Anheo

representative and executive producer of Y tu mamá también, have set up branches in New York and Los Angeles (397). In terms of financing, production, and artistic content, Three Burials and Y tu mamá también complicate nationally defined categories of identity.

Cultural boundaries, political realities, and death separate the friends in Three Burials. A tragic cowboy sensibility unites them, however, suggesting that love for the land resists the border's fractious divisions. Y tu mamá también is less optimistic. Julio and Tenoch inhabit overlapping spaces, partying with mutual friends and sleeping with the same girls. The camera and the narrator nevertheless point to differences, contrasting an image of the leftist activism of Julio's sister at a rally with that of a maid walking the length of Tenoch's house to answer the phone that is next to him. Yet the clichés of adolescent masculinity organize their worlds: sexuality, friendship, and coming-of-age pressures. The narrator situates Julio and Tenoch within a broader social context, as when he cuts away to narrate—while the camera illustrates visually—the cause of a traffic snarl: a pedestrian, who had migrated to Mexico City, was killed while crossing the street. Although critics regularly discuss the manner in which this film “sells” Mexican identity as part of a global film industry,<sup>45</sup> the specific ways in which portrayals of bodies intersect with race, class, and sexual or cultural identities remain less investigated. Mexican cinema, like Mexican nationalism, frequently trades in disembodiment, using indigenous elements in films such as Emilio Fernández's María Candelaria (1944) or female bodies in cinematic depictions of prostitution. Y tu mamá también addresses the

homoeroticism of their friendship to examine the links among race, class, and sexuality in late twentieth-century Mexico. Sergio de la Mora argues that representations of masculinity are a crucial component of Mexican identity, particularly at the movies, where “virility is a metonym for Mexicanness, and this manliness is literally larger than life” (xiii). The contrast of the explicit visibility of Julio and Tenoch’s bodies with the narrator’s literally disembodied voice points to the way artistic or political authority may maintain power by portraying disembodied identities. The film strategically displaces this power by making visible the complex embodiments of Mexican identity through Julio and Tenoch and in their physical relationship to Mexico and other Mexicans, as evidenced during their road trip.

Y tu mamá también begins with Tenoch and his girlfriend Ana in bed together on the eve of her departure to Italy. Tenoch asks for sexual and national fidelity by making her swear not to have sex with Italians, with a “pinche gringo mochilero,” a “francesito puto,” nor with some “dirty Mexican” selling trinkets on the street. Once their girlfriends leave, Tenoch and Julio make plans for the summer. When they meet Luisa, the pair entices her to join them on a trip to the beach. Luisa declines, but changes her mind after a visit to the doctor and her husband’s revelations of infidelity. Although the film maintains suspense about Luisa’s diagnosis, it later reveals she has terminal cancer and is leaving her husband. After her acceptance of their offer, the boys borrow Julio’s sister’s car and set out with directions from a druggie friend. Along the way, Luisa has sex with both Julio and Tenoch; the adventure ends when all three spend the night together. We see the boys kiss and

then wake up in bed together, an allusion to a sexual encounter that ends their friendship as well as the travel narrative.

Y tu mamá también uses visual images and plot structure to place bodies at the center of the story that it tells about Mexico and Mexican identities. As the trio travels through the countryside, the camera focuses on images of Mexicans that remain, for Julio and Tenoch, largely un-analyzed, but which recall literary or folkloric depictions of Mexico. On the highway, for example, they pass a Volkswagen, crammed with a wedding party and decked out with pink and white flowers; a group of people collecting donations for a local festival; and policemen detaining people along the side of the road. At one point, a herd of cattle in the road halts their car. In these scenes, the camera's position often mimics that of the characters: we see the countryside and small towns as though we, too, were riding in the car. This gaze looks out to the car's surroundings, but includes glimpses of the interior that anchor its location within the vehicle. We see reflections on window glass, the rear-view mirror, or the seat belt strap in a camera angle that imitates the act of looking over one's shoulder. The film momentarily fuses, if not precisely our bodies, then our physical sensation of sight with that of the characters. Although the camera and the narrator provide viewers with a broader perspective than the characters might possess, this technique permits—through lines of sight—a temporary means of exploring Mexico through their bodies.

This identification is limited, as the camera's emphasis on window glass suggests. Further, the narrator's commentary augments camera techniques. He

mediates our experience of the characters as he reveals historical contexts and personal information they keep from their companions. Although the narrator and the camera do not always work in tandem, each has a similar function in these segments, which is to amplify the plot that centers on the friends and to juxtapose this context with the reality the boys create in their own narrative process. In one scene, the narrator explains that the fishing family the friends meet will be pushed off their land to make way for the construction of an exclusive hotel. Due to local union politics, the narrator explains, the husband, Chuy, will bounce between jobs and end up as a janitor at the hotel, never to fish again. Despite his matter-of-fact tone, the narrator's efforts are hardly disinterested. A change in sound quality precedes each segment of voice-over narration, as other noises fade away and place his voice at the center of the spectator's attention, a technique that establishes his interpretative authority. He appropriates images and stories of marginalized groups—in this case, Chuy and his working class family—to depict them in a manner that, while sympathetic to their plight, never doubts his interpretive authority or explains his relationship to them.

The narrator disembodies Julio and Tenoch with his depictions of their bodies, evidenced by the confluence of camera angles with his narrative. As Julio registers Tenoch and Luisa's sexual encounter, for example, the camera shows him from behind. In contrast to angles that approximate the position of their bodies, this scene focuses on Julio. He sits on the edge of a swimming pool, staring at the leaf in his hands. We see his legs in the pool, a tattoo on his shoulder, and drops of water on his back, but despite the narrator's revelations, his face remains concealed. The scene is

intimate, yet feels intrusive: we know, or think we know, the thoughts in his mind and the sensations affecting his body, but Julio does not reveal this information. Instead, viewers engage his body guided by the narrator's interpretation. In addition, the narrator analyzes Julio's reaction in terms of bodily discomfort, a pain he links to narratives about how the boys experience Mexican society. Julio does not verbalize his feelings, but the narrator tells us that he felt a similar sharp pain just above his stomach when, at eight, he saw his mother in his godfather's arms. To retaliate, Julio tells Tenoch that he slept with Ana. The narrator relays that Tenoch, too, feels a sharp pain. He remembers this sensation from his discovery, at eleven, of his father's involvement in a public scandal and the family's self-imposed exile to Vancouver. The descriptions of Tenoch's family refer to a script of endemic political corruption. Sexual infidelity prompts the same pain in each friend, which the narrator uses to dramatize Mexico's social and cultural divisions. Just as camera angles invite intimacy with their bodies, the narrator places Julio and Tenoch's thoughts and physical sensations under his artistic control. The film uses this technique to raise questions about narrative agency and the manner in which stories about bodies and identities are told.

While the narrator controls Julio and Tenoch's narrative agency, that of other Mexicans is far more limited. As he does with images of the boys' bodies, the narrator uses their encounters with other Mexicans to weave a story about social class and cultural identity. Cresswell's arguments about mobility stress the cultural meanings of moving bodies, and although Julio and Tenoch share Mexico's physical

space with fellow citizens, the film emphasizes that they move in a markedly different social space. As they drive past the hometown of Leo, Tenoch's nanny, Tenoch gazes out the window. The narrator tells us that Leo migrated to Mexico City at thirteen and that Tenoch called her "mommy" until age four. The camera shifts from the car's interior, where they joke and smoke pot. We see Tenoch's image superimposed with a reflection of the countryside, then a shot of the town in the distance, as if focalized by him. When the moment passes, the camera returns to the space of the car. This dramatizes Tenoch's mediated relationship to provincial Mexico: his class status separates him, a relationship he intuits but which is explained to the viewer by the narrator. Compared to fellow Mexicans, Julio and Tenoch inhabit a separate narrative space. Bodily differences underlie and reinforce this distance, given that Leo, like Chuy's family, comes closer than the boys, who are relatively light-skinned, to embodying the stereotypical mestizo. The film stresses this as Chuy, Julio, and Tenoch play soccer on the beach. The camera is behind Chuy, placing his brown, tank top-clad back in the foreground as Julio and Tenoch play in the distance. The shot emphasizes differences between the white friends and other Mexicans, as well as the narrator's disembodied appropriation of their images to tell a story about the relationship between the chilango friends and provincial Mexico.

In contrast to conventional cinematic connections between bodies and Mexican nationalism, the primary focus of this film is neither mestizo or indigenous bodies nor the iconic female body, but the bodies of two relatively white male adolescents. In Mexican cinema, argues Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz, "the woman's



body (through motherhood or prostitution/sex and violence) constitutes the site where ‘the nation’ is articulated” (40). He analyzes Y tu mamá también in terms of Luisa’s body and contends that her narrative agency challenges the cinematic female body’s role as provider of “voyeuristic pleasure,” thereby subverting the tropes of Mexican cinema and creating a new image of the nation (47). Julio and Tenoch occupy the film’s visual and narrative core, however, and we see far more images of their bodies as part of a plot that centers on their friendship. The film contains relatively few images of female nudity, and women are distant: Julio and Tenoch’s girlfriends leave for Europe and Luisa dies discretely, off-camera, before her youthful body exhibits any symptoms of disease. De la Mora refers to the scandal caused when a nude photograph of Mexican film icon Pedro Infante surfaced, arguing that this type of visual representation reverses gendered paradigms of the gaze and that “male nudes raise the specter of homosexuality, the fear of men looking at men as erotic objects” (x). In Y tu mamá también, Julio and Tenoch’s bodies are displayed in sexual as well as national contexts. Their relationship with Luisa reverses cultural myths about a conquering colonial power and a feminized, violated colony, even as it suggests, in the context of global cinema, evolving political, cultural, and economic relationships between Spain and Latin America.

Although Y tu mamá también hardly constructs Julio and Tenoch as sex symbols on the order of Infante, it contemplates their bodies as explicitly sexual. In this, the film evokes homoeroticism to analyze the role of sexuality in constructing Mexican identities. We see images of the boys’ bodies, often nude, as they compete

in swimming races, sexual conquests, and linguistic banter that includes charges of “maricón” and “putito” as well as references to oral sex.<sup>46</sup> Visual effects and the narrator’s commentary call attention to depictions of their bodies, and the narrator examines the boys—and their bodies—as products of their social and cultural milieu. At one point, he interrupts the stories they tell Luisa to explain details they conceal from each other. As the narrator describes Tenoch’s avoidance of physical contact with items in the bathroom at Julio’s house and the way Julio lights matches after using the bathroom at Tenoch’s house, we see images—framed by the windshield—of small town evening activities. Shots of shopkeepers closing for the evening, commercial signs on buildings, and a horse-drawn cart accompany the narrator’s account of the friends’ incomplete narrative, the class differences that divide them, and the secrets they keep. The film encodes class disparity in Mexico as cultural, racial difference, and links it to sexuality. When Julio tells Tenoch that he slept with Ana, Tenoch escalates the rhetoric, telling Julio that “chingaste nuestra amistad, me chingaste a mí,” a verb that connotes sexuality and mestizo Mexican identity in the body of La Malinche. Sexual contact registers the intersections of bodies, politics, and Mexican culture as the narrator portrays identities through Julio and Tenoch’s bodies, a process I term disembodiment.

Because Y tu mamá también is a road trip film and a coming-of-age story, Julio and Tenoch’s bodies are in flux, a quality reinforced by their journey away from the city. Baer and Long note that they inhabit the spaces “between childhood and adulthood, city and province, life and death, where social conventions, boundaries,

and taboos are suspended,” a quality emphasized by “locations floating between the public-private divide: swimming pools, cars, motels, restaurants, and beaches” (157). This suspension of boundaries is not without consequences, however, for their friendship or for their relationship to Mexico. The film’s narrative structure illustrates that Julio and Tenoch understand more about what it means to be Mexican through their travels and through sexual contact. Set in the summer of 1999, on the eve of a new millennium and the PRI’s historic presidential defeat, the nation, like Julio and Tenoch, is decidedly liminal. In the film’s final scenes, the narrator’s comments juxtapose the end of their friendship, brought about by their sexual encounter, with the PRI’s political defeat. As the friends drink coffee, policemen pass by on horseback. Combined with the narrator’s political commentary, this detail references the revolution. De la Mora argues that for men the revolution “involved recovering their manhood, which in turn reflects back on the hypermasculinized nation-state” (5). Julio and Tenoch perform aspects of this, such as equating sexual infidelity with personal violation, but the film’s historical moment changes these roles. The PRI’s control over Mexico, not unlike the narrator’s, is linked to representation and the ability to determine what is legitimately Mexican. Because Mexican political and artistic discourses have often used disembodiment and cultural browning to maintain power, this film uses the traveling bodies and ambiguous sexuality of two white, urban friends to strategically displace images wielded by entities such as the PRI and the narrator.

Even as the narrator uses Julio and Tenoch's bodies to explore contemporary Mexico, his own body remains assiduously concealed. In this, his artistic control over the portrayal of Mexico and Mexican identities—as well as his invisible corporeality—links him to political authority in Mexico, particularly as this regards the relationship between politics and art. Baer and Long describe the voice-over as “an ‘undemocratic’ assertion of male authority and control,” one that creates “a hegemonic national memory of Mexico’s contemporary political transition” (159). Not unlike the narrator’s bodily invisibility and pervasive authority, Alma Guillermoprieto describes the PRI’s control over Mexican political culture as “a system of such subtle and exquisitely managed controls and gratifications that no one can even prove they exist” (226).<sup>47</sup> The traditions of post-revolutionary nationalism color the narrator’s portrayal of Mexican identity, shaping his interpretations of the characters’ bodies and their physical interactions with each other and with Mexico. He opens them to the audience and reveals the intimacy of their sexuality and private concerns, especially those they conceal from other characters. Their bodies become the same sort of public/private space as the motels, beaches, and swimming pools described by Baer and Long. He can disembodiment because he himself is not tied to a physical body. In contrast to the disembodiments experienced by Julio and Tenoch, the narrator’s lack of body illustrates the power of remaining, in Peggy Phelan’s terms, unmarked.<sup>48</sup> The narrator is liminal, caught between body and voice, but unlike Julio and Tenoch, he escapes scrutiny because he is unseen. In this regard, the most powerful body is the one we never see.

Y tu mamá también references a moment of historical change and may well illustrate, as Baer and Long contend, that “the more things change, the more they stay the same” (165), but it nevertheless registers a shift from the PRI’s tightly scripted display of omnipotence to a different paradigm, albeit one that is no more “democratic” despite its relative diversity. Julio and Tenoch have (limited) narrative authority in part because they are like the narrator in important ways. Although they have a propensity for farting and making sex jokes, Tenoch wants, at the film’s beginning, to be a writer, although he follows his father’s advice to study economics. Their creativity evokes the manner in which Mexican cultural production, such as this film, slides between the universal and local in a context of globalization. Julio and Tenoch pepper their language with foreign cinematic and musical references, yet their speech is insistently Mexican, so suffused with regionalisms that Luisa asks them to translate various words and expressions. The film evokes a Latin American avant-garde literary tradition in that Julio and Tenoch organize their identity around what they call the charolastra manifesto. The boys offer various versions of how the word “charolastra” came about, from the misinterpretation of English song lyrics to a combination of “charro,” a Mexican cowboy, with astral elements. A set of rules based in large part on personal freedom, athletic allegiances, and on not sleeping with a fellow club member’s girl, the manifesto declares that “pop mata poesía” and that “la neta es chida, pero inalcanzable.” As they explain this to Luisa, the narrator breaks in to state that storytelling reinforces their inseparability and binds them together as friends, as club members, and, presumably, as Mexicans.

Not unlike the Mexico of the historical moment depicted, Y tu mamá también evidences a struggle based on memory, bodies, and narrative control. Acevedo-Muñoz borrows Néstor García Canclini's term "counter-epic" to describe how this film narrates against dominant national images, principally the Malinche myth, and forces gender, machismo, and revolutionary ideology to confront a "more brutal, more honest reality" (40-41). Indeed, not unlike Cuarón himself (Smith 395), the narrator strikes a pose of intellectual distance from official, state-regulated versions of national identity, reiterating an artistic tradition of creative opposition. However, the narrator draws on the same conventions of cultural browning and disembodied stock characters through which the state has articulated Mexican identity, as we have seen. The film emphasizes this convergence, and strategically displaces these artistic and political traditions with a subversive muteness. Even as the narrator animates bodies to narrate contemporary Mexico, the film deliberately emphasizes the absence of sound to resist narrative control. It also does so through bodies: particularly in shots that mimic Julio, Tenoch, and Luisa's points of view, the film allows us to experience Mexico by way of an illusory physical proximity. The fusion of our bodies with those of these characters opens up the possibility of competing versions of reality, challenging the narrator's interpretive authority. However, his technique points to the troubling disparity that determines narrative agency: Julio and Tenoch are relatively privileged and share important qualities with the narrator. He disembodies and manipulates them, but they do have a limited narrative capacity and it is through their bodies that we experience Mexico. The film thus underscores the problematic

alliance of social, gender, and ethnic privilege with artistic conventions, which it uses to strategically displace Mexican cinematic conventions for portraying national bodies, substituting images of female prostitution, hypermasculinity, and mestizo bodies with those of male nudity, ambiguous sexuality, and whiteness, in its depiction of Mexico's political transition.

Similar to Y tu mamá también, The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada creates a world concerned with masculine affairs and employs a travel narrative centered on the bonds of friendship to investigate ethnic categories and artistic conventions. Whereas Cuarón's film examines sexuality, national identity, and narrative in Mexico's changing political context, Three Burials appeals to the nostalgia of cowboy culture as it denounces the racialized violence and social injustices brought about by the border's inequalities. The film's formal conventions take on the hybrid qualities of the border region it depicts. Titles and credits appear in Spanish and English, and characters alternate between two languages. Tommy Lee Jones directed Three Burials, and Mexican novelist and scriptwriter Guillermo Arriaga wrote the screenplay.<sup>49</sup> Although the plot refers to immigration patterns predicated in part on economic globalization, the film hearkens back to identities from a pre-industrialized past. Genre conventions demand that these characters prove their physical mettle against a society that denies them worth. Although Hollywood's Westerns have often sinned with uncritical portrayals of ethnocentric expansionism, Three Burials uses the on-screen presence of Melquiades's cadaver to strategically

displace these artistic conventions and the racism that informs debates about immigration and the relationship between Mexico and the United States.

The plot in Three Burials unfolds by way of interplay among the characters' perspectives, reinforced with the camera's frame of reference and narrative revelation. Yon Motskin links the plot structure to visual revelation: Pete pieces together the events of the crime in order to re-create this suspense for the audience (28). The events of the plot are reiterated from various points of view, including the border agent's, Pete's, and Melquiades's. The film narrates retrospectively, filling in the details of Melquiades's arrival in the United States, his friendship with Pete, his death at the hands of Mike Norton, a Border Patrol agent, and connections among the inhabitants of the small Texas town where the film begins. The local sheriff, Belmont, who resists investigating the murder, is like Pete involved in an adulterous relationship with Rachel, a waitress. She befriends Mike's lonely wife Lou Ann, and the women engage in sexual liaisons with Pete and Melquiades. Lou Ann sleeps with the man her husband later kills, although the film never indicates Mike's awareness of this fact. Mike buries Melquiades for the first time, hiding his body in the desert. When animals lead police to the body, an autopsy is performed, and the police, against Pete's wishes, bury Melquiades again. Pete kidnaps Mike at gunpoint, forces him to dig up the body, dresses him in the dead man's clothes, and obliges him to set off on horseback for Mexico. In classic Western form, the men endure the harshness of the landscape, emblemized by heat, grueling labor, and constant physical danger.



Throughout the journey, Melquiades's cadaver is the men's constant companion, and the corpse contextualizes circumstances Mike would prefer to ignore. As they advance into Mexico, Mike grows increasingly leery of Pete's mental state. Pete talks to his dead friend and tends to his needs, filling the body with antifreeze to retard decay, setting it on fire to kill off an ant infestation, and feebly grooming it. Melquiades's dead body plays a crucial role in the film's narrative structure, yet the questionable veracity of his life story comments on the social forms and functions of narrative. Like Julio and Tenoch, Pete and Melquiades have bonded by telling stories about themselves. Melquiades had asked Pete to return his body to Mexico should he die in the United States, giving his friend a hand-drawn map, a photo of his family, and a geographic description. When they arrive in Coahuila, the locals tell Pete that Jiménez, his friend's supposed hometown, does not exist. Pete finds the woman from the photo, but she denies knowing Melquiades and asks Pete to leave before her husband gets suspicious. Mike mocks these inconsistencies, but Pete finds a spot reminiscent of his friend's description and forces Mike to bury the body. Mike may remain unconvinced, but Pete believes these stories because their truth gives meaning to his actions. In the final scene, Pete gives Melquiades's horse to Mike and leaves, doing little to resolve Mike's doubts. The lack of resolution reinforces Mike's sense that Mexico, and indeed the border and its inhabitants, are inscrutable. As viewers, we sympathize with Pete's need for truth and Mike's alienation, a situation that the film uses to examine the intersections of bodies, identities, and storytelling in a region defined by violence and often racism.

Three Burials uses the Western's attention to the physical to respond to the disembodiments of modern life. It employs iconic Western tropes, such as limited dialogue, primarily male relationships, an emphasis on pain and physical endurance, and cinematography that portrays the land as a beautiful yet harsh proving ground. In West of Everything (1992), Jane Tompkins argues that unpleasant physical sensations constitute a central tenet of the genre. The hero's "pain is part of our pleasure. It guarantees that the sensations are real. So does the fact that they come from nature: the sun's glare, not the glare of a light bulb; a buckskin shirt, not a synthetic wash-and-wear. For Westerns satisfy a hunger to be in touch with something absolutely real" (3). In this, Three Burials does not disappoint. It portrays rural hardships—snakebite, a horse's fatal misstep on a steep trail, an old blind man's utter isolation—as well as the social violence of the border, dramatized by the decaying corpse. The characters in this film experience identity through bodies, particularly as Mike understands the consequences of his actions through physical proximity to his victim's cadaver. Rural life is hard, Westerns argue, and is therefore real. As Tompkins explains, modern life is unfulfilling in part because it hampers meaningful physical engagement with the world: people carry out trivial tasks, rather than testing "one's nerve, physically, as a means of self-fulfillment" (13). Westerns respond by linking work to physical pain, which, as Tompkins states, subsumes the body in total action and directs all energies to immediate survival (12).

The characters in Three Burials experience the shallowness of ordinary work and social interaction as a form of disembodiment. The film follows genre

conventions by illustrating that, in contrast to the Western's need for genuine experience, the characters idle away their time. Lou Ann, for example, smokes and drinks coffee as she stares out the café window, alone. Tompkins argues that survival is at stake in the Western (24), but these characters' lives fail to test them, a lack that severs them from the physical interactions that would provide transcendence. Rather than pushing their bodies to their physical limits and engaging life in its gory fullness, the characters expend their energy on stultifying tasks and empty relationships. The camera focuses on the mop's repetitive motion as Rachel cleans the diner floor, emphasizing solitude and boredom. Sexual encounters are likewise perfunctory, undertaken out of boredom and opportunity. Rachel's dalliances seemingly do not provoke deep feeling, and the film only hints at her husband's possessive, impotent jealousy. Mike's job, although it promises action in the tradition of the Texas Rangers, instead leaves him alone in his vehicle with a smutty magazine, anxiously scanning the landscape. Although his shooting of Melquiades is an accident, the nature of his labor isolates him from fellow inhabitants. In contrast to Melquiades and Pete's bonding as they work cattle, these scenes convey the sense of hopeless abandonment that pervades the town and its citizens.

Violence, as both product and agent of physical pain, answers the emptiness experienced by the characters in Three Burials. In combination with the Western's focus on physical pain, murder and physical coercion force the characters to engage bodies as fundamentally real. In doing so, the film uses violence to strategically displace the disembodied cultural stereotypes of the United States/Mexico border.

The characters face various forms of aggression, but the film allows Pete and Mike to re-negotiate their perceptions of that violence. Three Burials links violence to cross-border movements, as with Melquiades's clandestine presence in the United States and Pete's kidnapping of Mike. Tim Cresswell explains that movement acquires cultural meaning through story telling (6). He states that, "Stories about mobility, stories that are frequently ideological, connect blood cells to street patterns, reproduction to space travel. Movement is rarely just movement; it carries with it the burden of meaning" (6). The film therefore situates the shooting death of Melquiades within cultural narratives about identity and mobility on the border. Mike's job with the Border Patrol requires him to monitor the movements of a racially, ethnically, and nationally defined group and to limit their physical and social mobility. The authorized movements of Melquiades's body, alive and dead, are understood within the racialized framework of border identities.

Violence, in Three Burials, informs nearly all aspects of life. The film uses this condition to illustrate how the border disembodies, as with the racism that leads to Melquiades's death. Violence is likewise the tool that Pete employs to force Mike to confront his actions. To local authorities, Melquiades is doubly threatening: in life, he travels illegally to the United States, and Pete moves his corpse without permission. In addition, his body transgresses genre norms and cinematic propriety by appearing insistently and grotesquely on screen. Racial categories inform the extra-legal movements of this body, assigning him low social status and exposing him to physical danger and violence. Mike views Melquiades as a threat to which he

responds with violence, an act that local authorities accept, given that they, too, attach little importance to the death of an undocumented Mexican. Race, understood as the embodiment of cultural differences, intersects in this instance with socially sanctioned violence. Pete uses violence to force Mike to exhume the corpse and enter a prolonged proximity with his victim's body. He challenges not only the racist cultural meanings attached to Melquiades's body, but violence's narrative function. Mike's accidental shooting of Melquiades is rooted in the racism and disembodiment that informs border identities, while Pete's violent treatment of Mike requires him, and the viewer, to engage Melquiades as fully, tragically human.

Three Burials uses the language of Westerns to express frustration with the disembodiments of contemporary North American society, particularly as these relate to debates about immigration. Life is hard, the genre suggests, and must be met with vigorous physical action. Physical pain, even violence, is therefore necessary and forces subjects to confront the reality of their bodies. Although this tactic is not the same as strategic displacement, it accomplishes a similar function in that the Western's focus on physicality asks subjects to examine the relationship of bodies to identities. As Three Burials borrows from Westerns, however, it must respond to a problematic inheritance from that genre, as well as to the particular disembodiments of the United States/Mexico border. Chon Noriega argues that Hollywood often used latino characters as the "exotic, criminal or sensual 'other'" in narratives of self-definition (52).<sup>50</sup> Three Burials utilizes Melquiades's decaying body to address the racist, dehumanizing tendencies latent in the expansionism that informs Westerns as

well as United States immigration policy. In Y tu mamá también, the sexual encounter between Julio and Tenoch confronts artistic and political conventions for embodying Mexican identity. Similarly, Three Burials juxtaposes the narrative function of language with that of bodies, as Pete performs a very literal strategic displacement by carting his friend's body into Mexico.

Three Burials uses images of Melquiades's cadaver to expose fissures within the unifying narrative of racial and cultural identity in the United States. His body represents that upon which the United States depends economically—the silent labor of immigrant populations—but which is excised from official culture. As Roderick Ferguson argues, racialization in the United States depends not only on physical characteristics, but also on making patterns of gendered and erotic behavior the social norm (13). In this view, immigrant groups, as well as African Americans, cause anxiety by deviating from the cultural and corporeal norm (13). Three Burials frays the cultural narrative based upon linguistic or racial homogeneity by emphasizing the interconnected lives of its characters. Border Patrol agents cross paths in a café with Mexican-American kids discussing Eminem and the Kumbia Kings, and Mike and Pete encounter Mexican men gathered around a television in the desert, watching the same soap opera that Lou Ann watched as Mike forced himself upon her. The local police and the Border Patrol downplay the murder, yet the narrative points to connections overlooked by the dominant culture. Institutional authority disembodies Melquiades, deeming him a “wetback” and disposing of his body in a utilitarian burial plot. Faced with injustice, Pete takes up his friend's cause. Jim Kitses labels

this “old-style Hollywood liberalism, a white male’s rescue and affirmation of a minority identity” (3). Kitses’s dismissal only tells part of the story, however, as Melquiades’s body strategically displaces this rescue narrative and takes revenge on his killer and those who disregard this crime.

Even more than ethnic other, Melquiades embodies death, and the visibility of his corpse flouts genre conventions and cultural norms in a bid to control his identity and story. For Tompkins, death in Westerns serves a fundamental narrative role. The genre’s treatment of death gives it a sense of the sacramental, and “the imminence of death underwrites the plot, makes the sensory details of the setting extraordinarily acute, and is responsible for the ritual nature of the climax: a moment of violence formalized, made grave and respectable, by the thought of annihilation” (24). Despite death’s conventional role, bodies should not be as obsessively visible as that of Melquiades. Vicki Goldberg explains that, beginning in the late eighteenth century, rising life expectancies, improved public health, and changing social norms increasingly displaced death from public view, even as technological developments substituted literal experience with representations of the dead and dying in newspapers, photographs, and eventually television and film. She argues that, “Even as death seemed to die and be properly buried, it sprang to life on the printed page and in various visual spectacles. Illustration moved in as death moved out” (30). In contrast to the legal, scientific certainty of shows such as the CSI series, or the technical skill of actors and stuntmen cited by Goldberg (51), Melquiades dies an ugly death, and his corpse decays on screen, bloating, putrefying, and falling apart.

Further, the ritual of his death and our viewing of it lead neither to transcendence nor redemption. Mike repents, but the film invests little in this event, coming as it does just before the narrative ends, and instead emphasizes Melquiades's escape into legend.

In life, Melquiades faces disembodied institutional racism in the United States. An undocumented immigrant, he transgresses boundaries of ethnicity and political borders, and in death his body contests racism as well as the patronizing intentions of would-be saviors. The disintegration of his corpse literalizes the bigotry he suffers in the United States, but its visual presence returns to him a certain amount of dignity.<sup>51</sup> Mike carries Melquiades's dead weight, a circumstance that forces him to contemplate the human, material dimension of his actions. As he does, the body disappears from view. The corpse is more frequently covered by a tarp until, at the film's end, Mike asks for earnest forgiveness; only then is Melquiades buried for the third and final time. Pete, the white knight who would save his downtrodden friend, finds this rescue to be more complex than he might have anticipated. Pete exercises physical violence over Mike as he seeks justice, but the cadaver exerts a strange control over Pete. If Pete is tempted to take on the role of savior, Melquiades does not make it an easy task. Freed by death itself from the threat of annihilation, Melquiades becomes a trickster, and his body, so abused in life, resists posthumous attempts to affix meaning. Westerns ask their heroes to push their bodies to the limit between life and death, and Melquiades transgresses this boundary, too, as his body takes on a life after death. Rather than meeting death with the stoicism of the classic



Western hero, he uses it to play a last trick on his buddy. The decaying corpse is a grim reminder of death, yet its presence on screen functions as a joke that deflates the earnestness of Pete's Western ethos. Heroism cannot be that easy, and Pete, a grizzled old cowboy, should know better.

With Pete's help, Melquiades evades the institutions that would separate him from burial in Mexico, and in the process displaces the categories of identity placed upon in him, in life as well as in death. Melquiades cannot escape death, but returns a measure of the violence visited upon him by disembodiment. He does this by denying the pleasure of the real upon which the Western is predicated. Although Three Burials glories in the physically real—even to the point of hyperbole, as with its unflinching depictions of the decaying cadaver—the unraveling of Melquiades's narrative undermines the realism that Tompkins considers central to Westerns. Goldberg argues that repetitive viewing of pictures, both still and moving, permits a sense of control over the image, as spectators can decide when and how to react (39). Three Burials draws on this effect, as well as upon genre tropes, to lull viewers into accepting the film's "realism." Like Pete's belief in Melquiades's tales, we accept the substitution of narrative and visual representation for reality. There are things we cannot know about him, the film suggests, either because he is dead or because he is Mexican. Melquiades uses the racialized identity that led to his death to withhold narrative resolution. His victimized body tells its own story while forcing viewers to pay attention to how that story is told. Melquiades thus strategically displaces institutional neglect, as well as the artistic conventions, informed by ethnocentricity,

that lead Pete, Mike, and viewers to expect a complete narrative resolution that would depend on his disembodiment.

The manner in which Y tu mamá también and Three Burials challenge artistic and social conventions through strategic displacement is imperfect. Y tu mamá también tweaks portrayals of Julio and Tenoch's gender, class, and ethnic privilege to strategically displace the sort of artistic and political traditions represented by the narrator and the PRI. It is troubling, however, that the film gives little narrative agency to mestizo and working class characters. The film condemns—with a focus on the in/visibility of bodies—the perpetuation of political and social inequalities by artistic conventions, even as it illustrates the continued relevance of those privileges. For Melquiades, posthumous strategic displacement must be a small comfort. Three Burials displaces the genre tropes of Westerns, among them the roles assigned to Mexicans, to bodies, and to death. Just as Cuarón's film reiterates certain of the tropes it strategically displaces, Jones's film uses the corpse to make a point about racist, disembodying violence of the border region. Melquiades's resistance to narrative resolution divests this appropriation of some of its disembodying power, but this agency comes only after he is dead. Both films challenge conventional portrayals of bodies defined as other, but offer problematic means of going about this project. In this, the films demonstrate the limits of language. Storytelling cannot overcome the literal breaches of violence and death, even as it challenges how bodies are incorporated into cultural narratives.

Race and Revolution in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's  
Guantanamera and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's Trilogía sucia de La Habana

Whereas Y tu mamá también and Three Burials highlight social and ethnic divisions, official Cuban discourse about race deliberately evokes images of a unified nation. Under the revolution, Afro-Cubans have made legitimate gains and Afro-Cuban identity is often posited as Cuban identity, even as practical racism remains a problem. The discussion of race—and more precisely, racism—has political connotations in socialist Cuba. In his examination of race in Cuba, Alejandro de la Fuente views race as a constant in Cuban nationalism (1), and states that, after 1959, racial equality became a lofty social goal and a means to a political end. Social spaces opened up for Afro-Cubans in socialist Cuba, while racial rhetoric unified Cubans against foreign threats. The state pointed to the discrimination of African-Americans to discredit the United States, for example, and Santiago Alvarez's documentary short, NOW! (1965), aligns the civil rights struggle of African Americans with Cuban desires for political self-determination. Revolutionaries cultivated the image of a modern, egalitarian state in which Afro-Cubans could advance freely. Nonetheless, de la Fuente identifies race as a topic that, if discussed, could threaten “national unity and Cuba's racial fraternity” (3). With socialism, racism became counter-revolutionary even as elements of Afro-Cuban music, dance, and popular culture offered, by the 1990s, a visible means of being Cuban.<sup>52</sup> Race is central to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's 1995 film, Guantanamera, and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's novel, Trilogía sucia de La Habana (1994), because it

elicits questions about Cuban identity, the relationship between this identity and state control, changing economic patterns, and equitable participation in the Cuban social project. They employ racialized bodies to strategically displace the legacies of Cuba's position with regard to Europe and the United States, as well as lingering internal racism.

The film and the novel draw on Afro-Cuban imagery to construct Cuban identity, but utilize very different aspects of that iconography to respond to the realities of post-Soviet Cuba. Guantanamera portrays Afro-Cuban culture as integral to Cuban culture and seeks horizontal solidarity as protection against the Special Period. The film references material shortages and ideological contradictions, but suggests that an inclusive cubanía might overcome these. Tabío and Gutiérrez Alea are icons of post-1959 Cuban cinema and the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC), an artistic position that, in conjunction with the film's plot, provides an inter-generational perspective on Cuban art, culture, and institutional oppositionality, that is, the idea that marginality is central to Cuban identity. In the 1960s filmmakers, including Gutiérrez Alea and Tabío, availed themselves of international models to craft a revolutionary cinema. Known as "imperfect cinema," a term coined by Julio García Espinosa to describe a committed art form (74, 76), it espoused an aesthetics that rejected elitist norms to engage spectators in an active, political artistic process. Given the realities of financing and co-productions, contemporary Cuban cinema negotiates another kind of perfection, but Guantanamera accomplishes with Afro-Cuban culture what earlier filmmakers did with imperfect

cinema. These elements demarcate artistic distance from North American or European models; the emphasis on Cuba's African heritage portrays the country as a struggling outsider and conveys cultural legitimacy. This use of bodies is another example of the cultural browning described by George Reid Andrews, given that Afro-Cuban cultural practices are portrayed as available to all Cubans. In step with official positions regarding race and cultural identity, the film nevertheless focuses on the various ways in which the characters' bodies mediate their relationship to Cuban society. It offers a delicately parsed criticism of lingering social inequalities, primarily those related to race, without losing sight of the fact that the state it would criticize is the entity that supports ICAIC.

Not unlike imperfect cinema's revolt against cinematic and social conventions, Trilogía chafes under the ideological strictures of 1990s Cuba. Whereas Guantanamo portrays survival through a cultural alliance across divisions of race, gender, and generations, the novel posits a fragmentary, isolated identity. It displays Cuba's racial tensions—with a dirty realist emphasis on the unseemly—in a flagrant insurrection against the rhetoric of socialist progress. Race, in Cuba, evokes national identity and desires for political modernity; racism, like prostitution, belonged to the past, and neither had a place in socialist Cuba. The bodies in this novel try to survive the crisis of the 1990s, but in contrast to the bourgeois norms of pre-1959 Cuba or the revolution's new man, they express a scatological, sexist, and sexualized racism that deconstructs the reality of the Special Period. Tamas Dobozy argues that dirty realism implies rebellion against any and all rules, including those established

internally, given that “contradiction is the logic of dirty realism” (47). Gutiérrez’s novel sets aside aesthetics and beauty to wallow in the excesses of dirty realism, using race and racism to de-legitimize the Cuban state. Guantanamo draws on imperfect cinema and institutional oppositionality, while the novel utilizes racialized, sexualized bodies to narrate against literary traditions that relegate Cuba to modernity’s periphery, among them the revolutionary rhetoric of socialist progress. The novel capitalizes on the contradictions of Cuban cultural production to discredit authoritative depictions of cultural identity.

Both the film and the novel draw on a tradition that places blackness at the periphery, even as it situates that marginality at the center of Cuban cultural identity. African elements are understood as being outside of the Western tradition, while an essential outsider-ness comes to symbolize Cuba’s position with regard to Europe and the United States. If countries such as Great Britain or the United States could imagine a fundamentally white national identity, Cuba’s situation has been less clear. As de la Fuente explains, Cuban national identity grew out of discourses of racial fraternity. The afrocubanistas of the 1920s and 30s, he argues, built upon Martí’s ideas to proclaim miscegenation as the essence of a “mulatto ‘Cuban race’” (15). Similarly, writers such as Jorge Mañach, with his analysis of the peculiarly Cuban linguistic habits he calls “choteo,” and Fernando Ortiz, who described cultural convergence with the term “transculturación,” expressed Cuban culture as deliberately hybrid.<sup>53</sup> Cuban intellectuals, like their counterparts throughout Latin America, “reacted to North Atlantic ideas of race by exalting miscegenation without

abandoning the notion that race was central to the representation and future of the nation” (15). In this way, bodies—and their representations of class, gender, racial, and ethnic identities—define the nation, a characteristic central to the film and the novel. However, Guantanamera and Trilogía perform different kinds of strategic displacement. The film criticizes authoritative uses of Cuban identity, exemplified by the character of the bureaucrat Adolfo, yet imagines popular expressions of Afro-Cuban identity as uniquely, creatively national. The novel satirizes the concepts of racial fraternity upon which Guantanamera, and indeed Cuban socialist rhetoric, depend, using abject bodies to strategically displace a nationalism that represents certain groups as central to cultural identity while relegating them in practice to the margins of social and political life.

Though typically analyzed in the context of the directors’ previous work, Guantanamera engages the racial subtexts of Cuban nationalism by using Afro-Cuban imagery and mythology. Solimar Otero argues that the film “resituates Afro-Cubanismo by using Yoruba mythology to critique spirituality, nation, and culture in contemporary Cuba” (124). As in Three Burials, the film deals with a cadaver’s literal displacements. Yoyita, a singer, dies in Guantánamo but is to be buried in Havana; along the way, her coffin is confused with that of an elderly black man who died at the age of 109. At the film’s beginning, Yoyita has just returned after a long period abroad. She rekindles an adolescent romance with a musician named Cándido, and, as the two reminisce, Yoyita dies in his arms. Her burial wishes provide Adolfo, the husband of her niece Gina, with an opportunity to test his plan for

funerary transport. Because fuel shortages mandate conservation, he devises a plan whereby provinces can transport bodies and grievers to divide costs. As the funeral cortege crosses Cuba, it becomes clear that the couple has problems with political orthodoxy: despite Adolfo's metonymic connection to the state, he has been demoted to his present job, and Gina was fired from her position as a university professor. Along the way, she encounters a former student still in love with her. As her marriage deteriorates, Gina is drawn to Mariano, who left school to become a truck driver. The experiences of Mariano and his co-driver, Ramón, reference the Special Period. Like the state-employed driver of the funeral cortege, Mariano and Ramón engage in the informal economic activity that enables survival for ordinary Cubans. Food and drink are nearly impossible to come by in state-run locales, a reality juxtaposed with the driver's use of dollars and smuggling of agricultural products to the city. He procures food for Gina, Cándido, and Adolfo, while Mariano and Ramón supplement their income transporting people by truck and eat at the private restaurants known as paladares.

Ramón's character introduces elements of Afro-Cuban culture by decorating his truck and blessing it with smoke and rum, but Yoruban mythology also structures the film's plot. As the characters advance to Havana—which, as Michael Chanan points out, is the route taken by revolutionaries in 1958 (477)—Cándido sees a small, blond girl in antiquated, turn-of-the-century clothing. The girl is visible to viewers, but only appears to characters about to die. Yoyita sees her shortly before her death, and the girl first manifests herself to Cándido standing beneath the word "death" in a



mural proclaiming “Socialismo o muerte.” Her role becomes clear when a voice-over narration tells the story of Olofi and Ikú. The narration, set to drum music, recounts Olofi’s creation of the world. He forgets to create death, however, and the world is soon over-crowded. Ikú sends a flood, which the nimble young escape by climbing trees, but in which the elderly perish, a necessary end to immortality. The sequence contains images of a rain-soaked Cuban landscape, as well as images of the girl, Ikú, leading an elderly woman to a cemetery. She likewise appears to the black centenarian whose coffin is confused with Yoyita’s. Cándido, who sees Ikú throughout the film, dies of shock when he views the man’s body in place of Yoyita’s; Ikú, too, is shocked by the swap and curses. Near the end of the film, in Havana’s Colón Cemetery, Adolfo climbs a pedestal to proclaim a flowery, self-serving elegy to Yoyita and Cándido. It begins to rain, and the group of mourners disperses. He calls for help, but Ikú alone appears. The film has made clear the type of help she provides, although he remains unaware of her function. She reaches out to him, and the film ends with the image of a laughing, rejuvenated Mariano and Gina bicycling away together in the rain.

In the context of the Special Period and an aging revolutionary leadership, Guantanamera speaks to the possibility of change and to the eventuality of a post-Castro world. Chanan describes it as “an allegory on the irony that the same man who brought Cuba to Revolution may now be forced to see it off” (478). The film recalls debates about the role of art under the revolution. Sujatha Fernandes suggests that Cuban filmmakers, in comparison to writers, were relatively willing to respect

self-imposed boundaries, meaning that Cuban cinema experienced less censorship or state interference (48).<sup>54</sup> Whereas Alea and Tabío, earlier in their careers, dealt with economic constraints, revolutionary aesthetics, and an internationalism designed to foment political change, Guantanamera evidences the difficulties of contemporary Cuban cinema. Fernandes contends that Cuban filmmakers find themselves caught between the constraints of the state and the need to garner international financing (46). She argues further that the market influences recent cinematic trends, such as homosexual themes or the inclusion of Afro-Cuban spirituality, due to the “attractiveness of ‘difference’ as a marketable commodity” (46). At the same time, Guantanamera plays to the specifically national: the film’s Afro-Cuban elements may be attractive to foreign audiences seeking the exotic, but they likewise construct a uniquely Cuban reality.

As in Alea’s previous satire of bureaucratic ineptitude, La muerte de un burócrata (1966), Guantanamera mocks clumsy attempts to create solidarity even as it celebrates cultural identities that unite Cubans despite, and occasionally because of, state inefficiencies. Various characters throughout the film repeat claims to equality under the revolution. The era of special treatment has ended, they insist, despite the film’s portrayal of a contradictory situation that breeds illegality and dubious privileges. In one scene, the state is supposed to provide snacks for the mourners at funeral homes. As food was previously unavailable, a group returns later to claim their ration. Adolfo, the quintessential bureaucrat, throughout the film resolutely refuses to pay for food in dollars. At the funeral home, he decries the self-interest of

the mourners but has no qualms about taking food he views as rightfully his. After the crowd is turned away, the camera shows Adolfo eating greedily. His scheme to divide the fuel costs of funerary transport evenly among all of Cuba's provinces gives the illusion of socialist equality. As the plot advances, however, Adolfo reveals that the plan's true purpose is to regain his standing within the bureaucracy. The sight of people practicing tai chi in a park prompts a daydream in which he imagines a statue of himself surrounded by admirers bowing to his image. It is fitting, then, that his final climb atop a pedestal results in an early death.

Even more than the biology of race, Afro-Cuban cultural practices, along with a sense of collective struggle in the face of difficulty, provide the basis for the solidarity imagined by Guantanamera. The film treats the complex realities of Cuban socialism, especially for the older revolutionary generation. Tabío and Alea's stature within cinematic and revolutionary circles forces Guantanamera to wrestle with the expression of an oppositional cubanía—Cuba united against the world—while confronting an institutional revolution. Not unlike Mexico's PRI, this is a central challenge for revolutionaries of Castro's generation. Guantanamera's depiction of contradictions and inefficiencies manifests the problems of the 1990s as well as the traditions of imperfect cinema, which is grounded in collective struggle and triumph. As in La muerte de un burócrata, Cubans can, by laughing with the revolution, ameliorate a difficult present and maintain optimism about an uncertain future. Guantanamera treads a fine line between outright criticism of the state that has nurtured the careers of its filmmakers and situating the increasingly obvious political

and economic problems of the 1990s within an ongoing narrative of socialist progress. This film, as in the other works in this study, does so by underscoring the effects of these contradictions on the lives and bodies of its characters.

Ikú's presence, the re-telling of the creation myth, and the emphasis on corpses suggest that using bodies to tell the story of cultural solidarity in 1990s Cuba evokes questions about contemporary as well as historical disembodiments. The focus on death and regeneration permits the graceful exit of the previous generation, but the film situates this debate within the plot of Cuban history. Cultural production under the revolution has emphasized the colonial period, a focus that, when combined with the state's attempts to reduce racism, hints at the tricky relationship between bodies and national culture.<sup>55</sup> In Guantanamera, Ikú and the black centenarian recall the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she through her clothing and the man with his advanced age. The bodies of both characters call attention to Cuba's turbulent transition from Spanish colony to newly independent republic, a process to which the socialist state considers itself the rightful heir. This time period is also roughly that of Martí's "Nuestra América." De la Fuente argues that, as the United States oversaw Cuba's move toward political independence, occupying forces contributed ideologies of racial hierarchy backed up by social Darwinism and its attendant pseudo-scientific practices (40). In this context, "miscegenation was seen as Cuba's greatest ill" (40), a condition that sparked enormous debate about the proper racial classification of patriot Antonio Maceo (38). Not unlike Yoyita and the black man's bodies, competing factions used Maceo's remains to bolster fictions

about the proper embodiment of the emerging Cuban nation.<sup>56</sup> The historical specificity of Ikú and the centenarian's bodies points to discussions of race, identity, and belonging in Cuban society.

Decreasing racism was supposed to imply socialist progress in Cuba, yet this goal runs counter to entrenched ideas about national identity and cultural practices. Guantanamera imagines Afro-Cuban mythology as fundamentally Cuban, even as it manifests social, racial hierarchies that determine who can represent whom. Castro declared racism and revolution incompatible (de la Fuente 266), but this statement did not immediately change Cuban attitudes about relationships among skin color, behavior, and national belonging, nor did it make Afro-Cuban spiritual practices openly acceptable. Revolutionary logic struck a balance between public criticism of the social origins and effects of racism and the tolerance of a certain amount of private racism. In addition, Cuban nationalism responds to the complex relationship of blacks to Western modernity. Despite problematic portrayals and absences, Gilroy contends that blacks are internal to Western culture (5), in part because slavery reveals the foundation of modernity on both reason and racial terror (39). Cuban intellectuals used this duality to argue for a more inclusive society on the basis of a national identity in opposition to North American or European concepts of racial, and therefore cultural, superiority. Writers and artists could acquire, through cultural practices, characteristics of Afro-Cubans that offered a means of expressing Cuba's essential difference. This borrowing, what Andrews terms cultural browning, could be used either to disembody or to strategically displace. Guantanamera, as the

product of revolutionary Cuban nationalism and its attempts to challenge social hierarchies, therefore takes difficulties—such as the Special Period or racial tensions—and turns them into an expression of a uniquely Cuban identity. As it performs this strategic displacement, the film caters, as Fernandes suggests, to foreign expectations about the essential difference of Cuban identity, as well as reinforces national paradigms of belonging and exclusion.

The film illustrates that race in Cuba is about more than skin color, just as it shows that bodies still matter. A small blond girl embodies Ikú, in contrast to associations of death with advanced age and Afro-Cuban deities with black Cubans. In her role as Death, Ikú has a leveling function: she comes, eventually, for all Cubans, irrespective of race, political orthodoxy, or time spent outside of the country. Afro-Cuban culture is undeniably Cuban, her presence insists, even to the point that little nineteenth-century white girls can be black. Otero contends, in fact, that the term “Afro-Cuban” is redundant (121). This assertion does not fully explore, however, the ways in which Cubans of varying ethnic backgrounds appropriate and embody these cultural traditions. Despite socialist desire to eliminate racism, Ikú as a little blond girl represents pan-Cuban identity in a way that a black character could not. Just as the narrator in Y tu mamá también evidences a literary tradition in which certain ethnic groups need an authoritative representative, Ikú depicts a world in which her whiteness allows her to assume an Afro-Cuban guise to speak about all Cubans. Ikú represents a disembodied Afro-Cuban identity. The appropriation of this role by a blond girl in nineteenth-century clothing references independence-era

debates about the role of bodies and race, but also that of artists and writers, as Martí illustrates, in representing Cuba and Cubans.

Cuban nationalism, in Guantanamera, imagines Afro-Cuban culture as a set of cultural practices, available to all citizens and not intrinsically linked to particular bodies or embodied experiences. The film juxtaposes these disembodied concepts of cultural identity with literal depictions of racialized bodies. The corpses of Yoyita and the black centenarian stand in for the relationship of Cubans to Cuba and Cuban history. Yoyita has been abroad, a nod to the complicated geographic and affective ties between Cubans and Cuba's physical space, while the man's age references pre-revolutionary Cuba. The timing of their deaths and their desire for burial in Havana join them, as part of Adolfo's absurd plan, in a transit of the island's physical space. As in Three Burials, their dead bodies are subject to bureaucratic and institutional control. Just as Melquiades satirized death's role in Westerns, these two cadavers mock the patriotic discourse of death in Cuban nationalism, outlined by Aída Beupied as "the sacrifice of the individual who loses his or her identity to the identity of the nation" (128-29). In death, as in revolutionary solidarity, bodies are immaterial and the spirit joins a collectivity outside the corporeal and the individual. Carried to the extreme, this rhetoric would suggest that the switch between Yoyita's and the man's coffins should not matter. Both are Cuban and both are dead, which is Adolfo's resolution of the error. He covers the coffin's window and acts as though nothing were wrong. The literal replacement of one body for the other, however, points to the film's use of strategic displacement. This moment effectively

undermines the disembodiment of Afro-Cuban culture as a set of practices equally available to all Cubans. The shock caused by the mix-up reinforces what the historical connotations of Ikú and the black centenarian's bodies suggest: specific, particular bodies mediate the experience of cultural identity.

Rather than present death as the great equalizer, the corpses of Yoyita and the elderly black man fracture the indistinguishable collectivity of Cuban nationalism, particularly in its revolutionary incarnations. Guantanamera points to the ways in which this nationalism appropriates identities and bodies. The film draws on cultural, corporeal elements viewed as marginal in European or North American contexts to create a strategically displaced Cuban identity. These cultural practices unite Cubans across racial, generational, and geographic divides, but the film points out that Cubans, in their quest for solidarity, should not overlook the painful historical memory bound up in particular embodiments of the nation. While the film portrays more optimism about Cuba's future, Trilogía sucia de La Habana expresses resolute disillusion with socialist failures. The identities and realities imagined in this novel are antagonistic and challenge Western aesthetic standards as well as the conventions of Cuban political and social life. Trilogía employs scatological, racist, and sexist portrayals of Cubans to strategically displace the revolution's contradictory legacies.

Ideas about race play a complicated role in this dismantling. For Trilogía's narrator, a middle-aged former journalist named Pedro Juan, race simultaneously serves a divisive and unifying cultural function. His portrayal privileges hybridity, as biology and as the sort of cultural imaginary posited by Guantanamera, yet his



narrative locates his use of the concept within the more explicitly sexual origins of the term. Pedro Juan classifies people according to race, including odors and the physical, sexual, and personal characteristics he attributes to these groups, but he participates in the Afro-Cuban cultural practices that the novel, like the film, takes as fundamentally Cuban. He relies upon the rituals of santería and makes regular references to his spiritual beliefs. Despite this unifying potential, Pedro Juan's narrative wields racism, sexism, poverty, and hypocrisy to underscore the body's presence. Not unlike Melquiades, the bodies in this novel experience the effects of racism and ideological contradictions. The ugliness of the Special Period cleaves any potential unity brought about by spirituality, nationalism, or sexual exchange, and the novel's characters cannot overcome the psychic, social, and literal penury of their circumstances. Strategic displacement serves not to revalorize marginalized bodies, but as a constant reminder of their deeply ambivalent position within Cuban cultural discourse. This strategy is productive in the sense that it permits survival, but the products of this process—the identities and realities depicted by the narrative—are a deliberately ugly manifestation of the era. Pedro Juan claims to wrestle his narrative from reality, explaining that, “La agarras con las dos manos y, si tienes fuerza, la levantas y la dejas caer sobre la página en blanco. [...] Sin retoques. A veces es tan dura la realidad que la gente no te cree” (103). Pedro Juan strategically displaces through deliberately unsightly art.

Trilogía consists of an interconnected set of vignettes about life in 1990s Havana. The majority of these deal with the narrator and his constant search for

income, sex, food, and companionship in a landscape dominated by rubble and lack. Pedro Juan describes the sentiment of the times with references to prostitution, including his own turn in the trade, as well as to relationships of convenience that permit survival in 1990s Cuba. He states that “El espíritu de la época es mercantil. Dinero. Si son dólares mejor aún. El material para fabricar héroes escasea más cada día” (324). The text is divided into three roughly equal parts, “Anclado en tierra de nadie,” “Nada que hacer” (1995), and “Sabor a mí” (1997), each containing a series of relatively brief and loosely connected stories. Pedro Juan emerges as a protagonist struggling to harden himself, although a few episodes revolve around acquaintances and characters otherwise extraneous to his narrative. His language is direct, explicit, and imbued with Cuban expressions and vocabulary. Despite a stated aversion to exquisite stylistics, Pedro Juan’s attention to language is such that he remarks on non-Cuban expressions, typically acquired in a relationship of prostitution. He asks a friend, “¿De cuándo pa’ cá tú eres gallego, acere?” (18). The friend explains that he has picked up expressions from jineteras, stating that these women “Son tan imbéciles que hablan como los españoles que andan con ellas. [...] A mí me falta un pedazo de cerebro y estoy hablando igual que todos esos gallegos y sus negras putas” (18).

Esther Whitfield argues that the reader is likewise forced into a commercial transaction with the novel, a characteristic she cites as the text’s operating principle (330). In this novel, language, like bodies, registers the negotiations of national identity, sexuality, and daily survival in Cuba.

In Trilogía, as in Three Burials, bodies suffer injuries that revolutionary rhetoric cannot repair. The novel instead suggests that this discourse inflicts wounds. Race and racism, in the novel's context, undermine Western disavowal of the body as well as the Cuban language of racial fraternity. Pedro Juan's frequent mention of shit, along with references to racism and sexism, figure prominently in this project. Guillermina de Ferrari points to the novel's allegorical use of excrement to describe the state of the nation (30), as physical space, narrative, and political failures converge in descriptions of the decrepit conditions of Havana's overpopulated buildings. De Ferrari suggests that these buildings have, like the revolution, failed to serve their original purpose, leaving the characters to "deal with the general state of crisis by literally shitting on one another" (29). The narrator drags his characters through multiple iterations of abuse, sex, and hunger, and the bodies in this novel provide physical testimony to the shortcomings and hypocrisies of contemporary Cuban life. Pedro Juan is a former journalist fired for being too "visceral" in times which call for prudence, given that "el país vive un momento muy delicado y fundamental en su historia" (14). In the narrative present, he chronicles Cuban life through poetry and short stories and makes frequent references to the stylistics of writing. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about art and taste, de Ferrari argues that Trilogía employs a scatological, destabilizing aesthetics to challenge cultural norms—including the artifice of Western modernity—by revealing the "more animal aspects of human experience" (36).<sup>57</sup> Through explicit references to sex and shit, and to the visceral injuries caused by Cuban nationalism, Trilogía rails against a

revolutionary legacy informed by the aesthetic, corporeal, and political norms of Western modernity.

Cuba, in revolutionary discourse, was embattled but noble, guarding against the physical and ideological intrusions that would weaken national will. Pedro Juan's narrative relates projections of socialist identity to physical purity, remarking that "Cuba en plena construcción del socialismo era de una pureza virginal, de un delicioso estilo Inquisición" (17). He explains further that "Una sociedad modelo no puede tener crímenes ni cosas feas" (85). As I argue in the second chapter, artistic representations of prostitution often function as allegories of economic and political relationships. Further, socialist reformers depended as heavily upon the prostitution trope and notions of female physical purity as did Cuban nationalists of previous generations. In *Trilogía*, Pedro Juan exposes sordid realities not to lament the loss of an idealized "virginal purity," but to reveal the fallacy of its construction. This concept disembodies by using bodies to convey authoritative notions of ideological or physical purity. It also creates a standard for how to embody the nation, modernity, and the norms of taste. The novel's explicit focus upon sex and racism strategically displaces the enforcement of these bodily standards, and he justifies this project as a reaction to the ugliness around him. Frustrated with journalism, Pedro Juan writes crude stories because, he describes, "En tiempos tan desgarradores no se puede escribir suavemente. Sin delicadezas a nuestro alrededor, imposible fabricar textos exquisitos. Escribo para pinchar un poco y obligar a otros a oler la mierda. [...] Así aterrizo a los cobardes y jodo a los que gustan amordazar a quienes podemos hablar"

(85). Pedro Juan suggests that Cuban socialism—in rhetoric and practice—depended upon a fictional and protected physicality, a convention he destroys with his wanton corporeality and his unseemly narrative.

Race, as a cultural category and not merely skin color, maintains a specific currency within Pedro Juan's oppositional equation. Although the revolution cherishes racial equality as a hallmark of social progress, texts of the 1990s often insist otherwise.<sup>58</sup> Pedro Juan's sexual proclivities, combined with images of the iconic mulata, evoke the convoluted relationship of Cuban cultural identity to bodies, particularly in racialized, sexualized female form. Pedro Juan describes himself as "más o menos blanco" (21), and links this category to his social position and a faltering sense of civic duty. Race, he insinuates, is conveyed through behavior, especially class-based concepts of discipline, at least as much as it is through phenotype and skin color. Pedro Juan describes the voice of a local radio host as "potente, con una dicción vulgar y callejera, como si nunca se hubiera movido de Centro Habana" (13). He imagines the man as "un negro inteligente," but later learns that he is "blanco, joven, universitario y culto. Pero le quedaba bien aquella imagen" (14). He relates his own racial category to a sense of civic duty he is eager to forget, given that "me hacía perder las cosas verdaderamente importantes. Me habían inoculado demasiada disciplina en el cerebro, demasiado sentido de responsabilidad, mezclado con autoritarismo, verticalidad" (21). Race and concepts of personal responsibility and discipline are caught up in his description with revolutionary

norms. Pedro Juan's use of "racial" categories indexes social or educational status, as well as a relationship to socialist Cuba.

It is telling, then, that Pedro Juan narrates his descent through Cuban social strata in terms of bodies, paying close attention to the effects of race and class on these bodies. He hardens himself with desensitization to the smells, tastes, and sights of the extreme poverty to which he is subjected. In contrast, Jacqueline, his Manhattan-born wife from a cosmopolitan Caribbean family, leaves the island because Havana in 1994 is simply too much for her refined nature: she is, he says, "un producto demasiado complicado y poco asimilable por un macho tropical y visceral como yo" (15). Pedro Juan is himself "cada día más indecente" (47). The middle class, for him, represents a stultifying existence not unlike that rejected by Westerners: "Debe ser terrible pertenecer a la clase media y querer enjuiciarlo todo, así, desde afuera, sin mojarse el culo" (198). His "viscerality" prevents him from practicing journalism, and he is forced to take whatever work he can find, from manual labor to street cleaning. His career change corresponds to physical changes, and Pedro Juan goes from being "Bien vestido, afeitado, con agua de colonia, el reloj con la hora exacta" (48) to arriving home sweaty, dirty, and unshaven (49). This state excites his lover, Miriam, with a sexual desire Pedro Juan links to race and class.

He asserts that mulatas are the most racist of Cubans, and reveals his own racism with his portrayal of Miriam. In addition to her "viejo concepto del hombre en la calle y la mujer en la casa" (49), Pedro Juan notes her lack of social graces, describing a "falta de pudor [que] llegaba a la grosería. [...] A ella le gustaban los

negros bien negros, para sentirse superior” (47). He lives with her in a run-down building that he insists suits him well: “Me sentía bien en aquel solar apestoso, con aquella gente nada culta, nada inteligente, que no sabía ni cojones de nada y que todo lo resolvía—o los desgraciaba—a gritos, con malas palabras, con violencia, y a golpes. Así era. Al carajo todo” (48). He notes that the poet José Lezama Lima once lived on this street, but Pedro Juan’s education, literary talents, and social convictions are worth little in 1990s Cuba, and they are, like the poet, forgotten. He abandons them for a mercantilist ethic, striving to be less dependent upon intangible values of equality, progress, and social justice.

As the patent failure of revolutionary aims, the Special Period cannot be but dirty, a quality echoed in Pedro Juan’s narrative. Instead of following Guantanamera’s model of solidarity, rampant commercialism and a pervasive sense of loss oblige the characters in Trilogía to go it alone. He describes an elderly woman, formerly a revolutionary but now dirty, hungry, and abandoned by her family and the state she loyally supported. He states that Chicha, rather than using the revolution for personal gain, “estaba convencida de que ésa era la única forma correcta de actuar con moral revolucionaria: honradez, autoridad, orden, disciplina, control, austeridad. Ahora, sin dinero, sin comida, se desesperaba a veces” (343). Not unlike Pedro Juan, Chicha’s body, once a model of decorum, respectability, and discipline, is now reduced to a figure that is “esquelética, enfermiza, con un catarro perenne que le hacía escupir flemas apestosas en todos los rincones” (343). If the Cuban state only obliquely acknowledges the failures of the Special Period,<sup>59</sup> Trilogía

manifests impatience with elliptical explanations and instead uses emaciated, dirty, diseased, and racialized bodies to call attention to problems afflicting individual Cubans as well as the body politic.

Part of what makes Trilogía dirty, then, is a displacement of the conventional order of things, including citizens' expectations of their government. The novel suggests that the socialist state overlooks discrimination experienced by contemporary Cubans in favor of locating the struggle to overcome that racism within the larger narrative of Cuban history. Guantanamera, for example, analyzes race and racism within artistic and cultural conventions that position the revolutionary state as the legitimate heir to a struggle begun by patriots such as Martí and Maceo. Trilogía has no qualms about airing Cuba's dirty laundry, especially as it concerns racism. Drawing on Mary Douglas's analysis, de Ferrari describes both shit and dirt as "matter out of place" (29). That these elements can be found out of place indicates that they are regulated by a system, and de Ferrari argues that "The persistent abundance of dirt in inappropriate places—as is the case of shit on the azoteas, the stairs, the street, and, at a more literary level, in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's text—is the sign of a system that has gone afoul" (29). This literal and textual dirtiness references the literal problems facing Cuba and Cubans, as well as disillusion with what the revolution was to have meant for the country. For Emilio Bejel, the revolution's nationalist character inspired official and popular desires for the cleansing of "national ills," such as reliance upon sugar cane, dependence upon the United States,



social and class inequality, and government corruption, linked in popular perception with personal immorality (95).

Pedro Juan's narrative also suggests that there is something inherently dirty about how race and racism are represented in Cuba. If Guantanamera portrays Cuban notions of race in a more "respectable" manner—a quality that might contribute to the relative dearth of criticism on the way race operates in the film—then Trilogía deliberately seeks the ugly side of race in Cuba. As he distances himself from revolutionary respectability, Pedro Juan acts out early twentieth-century fears about African culture. Andrews cites Fernando Ortiz's early interest in black criminality, particularly the perceived susceptibility of working class whites to these dangers, given their "often-tenuous ties to European civilization and their 'psychic proximity' to African primitivism" (122). Whereas Guantanamera evokes national debates about race with portrayals of the bodies of Ikú and the black centenarian, Trilogía's blatant racism recalls the derogatory connotations of miscegenation that concepts of hybridity attempt, with various degrees of success, to challenge. The novel exposes the racist internal dialogue that has measured Cuban identity against European and North American models. Cuban bodies are indeed different, this tradition suggests, which is problematic as well as potentially creative in representing a uniquely Cuban modernity. The novel thus portrays Cuba in a manner that is not entirely proper: through the abject, dejected, and diseased bodies of its citizens. In this, Pedro Juan's narrative strategically displaces the official avoidance perpetuated by the Cuban state in the face of hunger, racism, and social upheaval.

Trilogía and Guantanamera use Cuban identity to negotiate vastly different relationships to the revolution, even as race and racism provide both with a means of talking about ways of being Cuban. The film models unity in the face of difficulty but uses the bodies of Yoyita, the elderly man, and Ikú to address race and disembodiment in the context of Cuban history. In the novel, Pedro Juan participates in Afro-Cuban cultural practices and values the sort of hybridity celebrated by the film. However, he uses a sexist racism to discredit the official images propagated by the Cuban state. The film alludes to the difficulties of the Special Period, but hopes to overcome these by way of a harmonious cultural union. The film's visual beauty and narrative resolution downplay the period's harsh realities in favor of cautious optimism. Trilogía forces readers into an encounter with ugliness and filth and describes the writer's work as that of a "revolcador de mierda" (104). While Guantanamera utilizes strategic displacement to suggest possibilities for Cuba's future, the strategy in Trilogía evidences revolutionary contradictions and failures. Rather than overlooking the novel's sexism and racism, it instead asks that we face the problematic appropriations of Cuban bodies by discourses of race, gender, and nationalism.

As the title to this chapter suggests, the language of race, ethnicity, and nationalism delineates which bodies belong to the nation and how that membership is expressed. Strategic displacement, because it analyzes how bodies tell stories, issues a narrative challenge to conventional representations of identities. Y tu mamá también utilizes camera angles and a voice-over narrator to reference the disembodied

portrayals common to Mexican cultural, cinematic, and political discourse. The film displaces these naturalized conventions with the depiction of sexuality, social class, and cultural identity. Three Burials explores links between bodies and storytelling, as well as the violence and ethnocentricity of the border region. The portrayal of Melquiades wavers between disembodiment and strategic displacement, given that he gains agency by denying narrative resolution while the film uses his body to narrate border identities and injustices. Guantanamo's borrowing from Afro-Cuban cultural practices to define a general Cuban identity likewise draws on this ambiguity. The film appeals to national, cultural unity and uses Afro-Cuban identity to articulate distance from the disembodiments foisted upon Cubans by outside pressures, but it confronts the contradictory relationship between race and Cuban history through its characters' bodies. In contrast, Gutiérrez's novel displaces by way of ugliness, assuming a commercial guise and displaying a sexist, scatological racism in order to expose revolutionary hypocrisies. In all four cases, the artistic representation of bodily difference explores the relationship of individuals to Cuban and Mexican societies, as well as to concepts of nationalism. Art allows subjects, by way of strategic displacement, to forge new representations of their identities and bodies, thus influencing the conversation about who belongs to the nation and under which conditions.

## Chapter Four

### Bringing out the Dead: The Embodiments of History, Memory, and Nation

In thinking about the cultural role of death, I am reminded of a story about a poor man living in rural Mexico. One day, the man happens upon a chicken. Tired of depriving himself to provide food for a hungry family, the man steals away to eat it alone. Just as he is about to take a bite, God appears and asks for half. The man refuses because, as the story goes, God unjustly makes some men rich and others poor. When Death appears, the man splits the chicken with him because Death, after all, treats everyone equally. Although death is rarely as fair as the story imagines, the finality of death in Western thought has served to legitimize religious hegemony, to undermine social vanities, and, as this anecdote illustrates, to level social inequalities. In her analysis of the political functions of corpses in the post-Soviet bloc, Katherine Verdery remarks that, although “death is the great universal, it calls forth human responses that are extraordinarily varied” (22). The characters that populate the performances, films, and novels of my study lead dangerous lives, and death is often the outcome of their entanglements with authority. In the works studied in this chapter, however, death is not final, a quality that allows subjects to reclaim bodies from political, economic, and cultural control. These texts resurrect, through strategic displacement, bodies scarred, brutalized, and marginalized by their interactions with power. By making these abuses explicit, these artistic subjects contest the use of physical force to silence, even as they highlight the ethical complexities of writing about fatal violence done to others.

These contemporary portrayals of death in Mexico and Cuba resonate, albeit quite differently, within the cultural frameworks of institutionalized revolutionary ideologies. An embrace of death marks twentieth-century Mexican culture, exemplified by the literary dialogue between death and the revolution, as in Juan Rulfo's 1955 novel Pedro Páramo, or the use of the Days of the Dead to refute Halloween's neocolonial incursions (Lomnitz 406, 454). Claudio Lomnitz analyzes Mexican nationalism through death imagery, an affiliation he characterizes as one of mutual seduction and betrayal (39). Jorge Volpi's novel La paz de los sepulcros (1995), examined in this chapter, makes explicit this amorous liaison with death. Dead bodies take center stage as a tabloid journalist investigates a double murder linked to a group of businessmen and politicians, known in the novel as the cofradía, who mask their corruption by manipulating public opinion through the media. The grotesque afterlife of the corpses in this novel evidences a collusion of reason and power, a relationship that undergirds state authority and sustains the artistic patterns that contribute to essentialized images of Mexican culture. The journalist narrator tells his story through the conventions of his craft, including investigative reporting and sensationalist exposé, but he makes his revelations conform to a government-sponsored cover-up of the circumstances of the murder. The novel sets up an explicit contrast between the state's portrayals of the victims and their cadavers and those created by the narrator, a disparity that undermines official discourse. Although the narrator's account ultimately complies with the state's version, his narrative emphasis on the dead men's bodies tells another, more private tale about the ways in which art

can be made to lie. Whereas the state disembodies the victims, turning their cadavers into iconic images that prop up an official story, the narrator's emphasis on the specific, embodied experiences of the subjects in life strategically displaces this use of their bodies.

Cuban death imagery in turn offers a means of talking about political limbo. Death in recent literary, filmic, and critical texts points to the changing Cuban socialist project, as well as to the inevitability of a post-Castro world. Both topics elicit ambivalence about the future and underscore the resurgence of previously taboo subjects and practices, such as racism and prostitution. The material shortages and the ideological ambiguity of the Special Period bring corporeality to the fore and underscore competing uses of concepts of history and memory. In Antonio José Ponte's short story "Corazón de Skitalietz" (1998), and novel, Contrabando de sombras (2002), death returns physicality to portrayals of Cuban history. The past weighs heavily on the present in these texts, and the characters' bodies manifest the scars of history along with more contemporary contradictions. The protagonists in the short story are an astrologist dying of cancer and a love-lorn, soon-to-be unemployed historian. They disengage from the habits of socialist respectability, such as a fixed residence and stable employment, and inhabit a Havana ravaged by the difficulties of the post-Soviet era. Depictions of illness and death in this story strategically displace versions of Cuban history that would stop time, either in a moment of revolutionary triumph or through the nostalgia of exile and tourism. They do so by highlighting the effects of time on physical bodies. In Contrabando de

sombras, the protagonist recreates a dead adolescent lover in a man he meets in Havana's main cemetery. He hopes to repair the wounds of his personal history through a connection with this man, but the contact between their bodies calls forth a collective past scarred by physical violence and homophobia. The novel links bodies to history in order to strategically displace commodified uses of Cuban history, whether created by the state or by outsiders enamored of Cuba's "exoticism," that ignore the consequences of Cuba's changing economic structures on living bodies.

Each of the texts studied in this chapter engages bodies as a means of examining history and nation. They bear evidence of the institutions created after the Mexican and Cuban revolutions, structures informed by ideologies that alternately seek to kill off and resurrect elements of the past. Cultural and personal memories of violent conflict inform allusions to these national histories, a struggle manifested by the experiences of physical bodies in these texts. In La paz de los sepulcros, government agents pose as members of a discredited indigenous guerrilla group to kidnap the narrator, an allusion in part to the contentious role that indigenous ethnicity has played in Mexico. In Ponte's short story, Veranda's cancer-ridden body reiterates the dilapidated state of Havana itself, while the novel depicts the way in which the homophobia of Cuba's colonial past persists in contemporary attitudes about sexuality. These texts dialogue with debates about the role of the state in cultural production, an area in which Cuba and Mexico have offered differing models to a pan-Latin American audience. Hester Baer and Ryan Long argue that the two countries, in the 1960s, offered paradigms for state investment in national culture

(153). In the context of the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s, as well as the political projects of the New Latin American Cinema, the Cuban revolution represented, for many, the “political equivalent, if not an important cause, of the cultural emancipation exemplified by developments in cinema and literature” (153). Mexico was the prototype for the period’s other significant model, that of the “continuing, though already waning, hegemony of the national-developmental state” (153). Cuba and Mexico have since come to represent the fossilization of revolutionary promise into the stasis of institutional ideology, a characteristic evidenced by the interactions of the characters in Volpi’s and Ponte’s texts with revolutionary ideologies and institutions.

In these contemporary works, a general sense of disillusion about previous revolutionary projects registers in the fatal violence done to bodies, particularly by the state. This disenchantment stems in part from the relationship between Cuban and Mexican revolutionary rhetoric and the embodied experience of that discourse by citizens in each country. For Magaly Muguercia, the triumphant festivity of the Cuban revolution was channeled into myths of “unity” and “ideological firmness,” a shift she links to the deaths of Che Guevara in Bolivia and Salvador Allende in Chile (176).<sup>60</sup> The media transmitted images of the “body of a fighter that we pictured torn apart by bullets, raped, or violated,” a loss that struck at a Cuban solidarity committed to international projects of political, cultural, and economic independence (176). Likewise, the violent repression of student demonstrations by government forces provoked a crisis in the national-developmental model in post-1968 Mexico (Baer



and Long 153). In both instances, the violence inflicted upon bodies invested with hope for political and social change pulls apart official images of truth and progress. In a similar manner, the texts studied in this chapter examine portrayals of death and physical violence as a means of analyzing and contesting the state's imposition of models for identity, culture, and modernity.

La vida no vale nada: Violence and the Performance of Mexico

The late 1980s and 1990s in Mexico brought increasing changes as the PRI's long reign suffered repeated challenges and globalization reshaped economic structures and demographic patterns. It was a period afflicted by fatal violence, such as that associated with drug trafficking and the assassination of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in 1994. While the media provided a public stage on which to display the bodies affected by these changes, films such as La ley de Herodes (Luis Estrada, 1999) and Amores perros (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000) depict Mexican political and social life as formed from a culture of endemic corruption and cyclical violence. Jorge Volpi's 1995 novel, La paz de los sepulcros, combines elements of journalism and detective fiction to dramatize the ways in which bureaucracy and institutional corruption stymie the circulation of information in contemporary Mexico.<sup>61</sup> More than this, however, it portrays journalism and detective fiction as ineffective epistemologies, and therefore symbolic of a cultural context in which even scandalous exposé prompts neither outrage nor change. The novel exposes "truths" about the Mexican political system, but does so within a

circular plot structure informed by bureaucratic hierarchies that ultimately nullify the revelatory power of language. Authorities use the threat of bodily harm to silence and repress, a tactic to which the narrator responds by strategically displacing death's finality. His narrative resurrects the murder victims, re-tracing their lives to create a version of events that contests the ways in which the government and the media use images of the victims' mutilated corpses. In doing so, the narrator denounces these abuses and points to the complicity of language, literary conventions, and Mexican nationalism in perpetuating and covering up violence.

Set in a future in which the country has supposedly made the transition to a more pluralistic democracy, the novel foregrounds systemic corruption in Mexican political life. It opens in a seedy Mexico City hotel room with a detailed description of the brutal double homicide of Ignacio Santillán and Alberto Navarro, the Minister of Justice for President Del Villar. Agustín Oropeza, a tabloid reporter who is the narrator and protagonist, arrives at the scene with his photographer; their scoop makes headlines, and the coverage takes on a life of its own. Although Santillán's identity is initially unknown, the narrator recognizes him as a former school friend and fellow student activist. As he investigates the circumstances of the murder, Oropeza positions himself as an involved outsider, a move that recalls Persephone Braham's rendering of Latin American neopolicia detectives as "vigilantes who expose themselves to the viciousness and corruption of society with a paradoxical mix of cynicism and idealism" (xiii).<sup>62</sup> When government agents posing as members of the FPLN, an indigenous rebel group, kidnap Oropeza and hold him hostage, he

meets Marielena Mondragón, who was the lover of both Navarro and Santillán and is perhaps their killer. The narrative sets an unsolvable murder-mystery against failed attempts at social change and illustrates the political establishment's machinations to close off the possibilities for justice. In a disclosure at odds with his detailed narrative, Oropeza laments at the end of the novel that "Es una lástima que nunca vaya a poder escribir sobre lo que sé: al menos mi conocimiento ha funcionado como una amenaza fallida" (228). He accepts his role and prepares an acceptance speech—entitled "Cómo fui rescatado de manos de la guerrilla" (229)—for a national journalism award, actions that reiterate his earlier statement that "las palabras también matan, sepultan" (161). His narrative implicates writing, including his own, in the novel's criticisms of power, violence, and ineffective concepts of justice.

Oropeza inhabits a fictional world dominated by mass media and political corruption. Tabloid sensationalism disembodies in this context, turning even the corpses of murder victims into commodities and facilitating their appropriation by authority. The narrator draws on a jaded mix of journalism and detective fiction to tell his story, linking each murder victim's body to different forms of artistic representation. He combines graphic depictions of their physical deaths with detailed investigations of their lives, a tactic with which his version contests the conventions that govern how bodies are to be displayed in mainstream journalism, as well as the disembodied tendencies of tabloid sensationalism. The ideals of social criticism and the commercial realities of acquiescence to power characterize journalism as an institution, but in La paz de los sepulcros this form of writing replicates a

commercialized public sphere in which nothing seems real. Oropeza describes a world in which “parece que las cosas nunca ocurren, que todo es parte de un teatro de la imaginación y de la publicidad y de los medios, y que nada es comprobable ni cierto” (82). This self-referentiality results in disembodiment as the murder victims become less and less individuals rooted in the particularity of their lives and social networks and increasingly defined as products of the media and of the political system that benefits from controlling portrayals of their deaths.

The blood and gore that characterize Oropeza’s professional writing respond to market forces that commodify art and essentialize identity, a dynamic that his more “literary” tale—the story he relays to readers but which is not shared with the fictional public within the novel itself—undermines with a combination of erudition and an emphasis on the connection between physical bodies and social identities. The novel centers on various forms of commodification to explore the concept of “selling out,” a notion with ramifications for how the narrator perceives his own literary production. Oropeza is, like many artists, caught between the story he would like to tell and the one he must tell, in this case for political as well as financial reasons. As an institution that professionalizes writing, journalism elicits debate about the relationship between commerce and art. Aníbal González points to misgivings, especially acute in the context of Latin American modernismo at the turn of the twentieth century, about the way in which journalism subordinates aesthetics to economics by turning texts into “merchandise” (Killer Books 9). Writers such as Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera longed for aesthetic experimentation but were forced to

“earn their keep through journalism, an institution that turned words into merchandise and writers into laborers” (32). In contrast to the social privilege of their literary predecessors, these writers lived the contradiction of “aristocracy in literature, and trials and tribulations in everyday life” (32). In La paz de los sepulcros, Oropeza is a failed novelist and former political reformer who works as a tabloid reporter and benefits personally by going along with the official version of events, albeit rather unwillingly. His narrative thus conveys a sense that he has sold out long before his capitulation at the end of the novel, a failure he attempts to remedy with the private, “literary” tale he shares only with readers.

This “selling out” originates with the type of writing Oropeza does and the ways in which it represents the relationship between bodies and identities. He practices a craft debased by vice and commercial exchange: unable to hack it as a novelist, he stays at the tabloid out of inertia (88).<sup>63</sup> González argues that, by displaying “writing’s gross materiality and its links with the worldly, the criminal, and the excremental,” journalism is “‘tainted’ by its collusion with the state and its attendant violence” (9). Not unlike his modernista precursors, Oropeza is a journalist with literary affinities polluted by the connections of tabloid journalism to mass culture, state violence, and the criminal underworld. Further, a context of political authoritarianism and economic globalization informs the novel, constraining what can be said and how. Forced to make a living off of language in a world defined by mass media, Oropeza works in a trade that specializes in salacious breaches of privacy. He writes to re-invent the world, to give “forma a lo privado como público. No buscaba

lo cierto, sino resaltar unos cuantos hechos [...]: transformar lo que tocaba, como un Midas empobrecido, en material de venta: de escándalo” (89). Unlike the writing Oropeza does for the tabloid, however, the novel he narrates is less commercial, although still shaped by the exigencies of the market and a context of global capitalism. This sense is reinforced by the way the text veers between references to philosophy and to North American talk shows, as well as a narrative voice characterized by convoluted syntax and the lowbrow affinities of tabloid journalism.

With self-consciously artistic language and deliberately gruesome descriptions of the murder victims’ cadavers, Oropeza’s narrative strategically displaces a legacy of essentialized post-revolutionary artistic discourse and the disembodiments of neoliberal market capitalism. In Death and the Idea of Mexico, Claudio Lomnitz argues that post-revolutionary death imagery in Mexico is tied both to popular culture and to concepts of nationalism. By identifying a specifically “Mexican” intimacy with death, this sort of discourse creates essentialized images of death that separate representations of corpses from their identity as living subjects, what I call disembodiment. Diego Rivera offers a clear example of this trend as he recasts images of pre-Hispanic death rituals and José Guadalupe Posada’s skeletons in the service of a particular brand of post-revolutionary national culture (46, 48).<sup>64</sup> His portrayals have come to represent Mexican popular culture and are reminiscent of the sorts of disembodiment projected by Golden Age cinema in films such as María Candelaria (Emilio Fernández, 1944). By the 1960s, the nationalistic nature of post-revolutionary uses of death gives way to a commercialized relationship between death

and Mexican popular culture (408). In the context of emerging patterns of globalization, death imagery becomes yet another consumer product. Marvin D'Lugo argues, for example, that films such as the commercial hit Amores perros draw on cultural stereotypes of fatal violence to sell Mexico (221). By emphasizing tabloid journalism, La paz de los sepulcros likewise reiterates the commercialization and the essentialization of death imagery and fatal violence in Mexican popular culture.

The novel emphasizes death and fatal violence as a means of performing Mexican culture and nationalism, identities that his reflections on the institution of journalism and the nature of art tie to debates about genre, commerce, and bodies. Rather than the aestheticized, nationalistic images of death created by artists such as Rivera, Oropeza turns gore a commodity to satisfy the morbid tastes of the tabloid reading public. Within the novel he narrates, his grisly imagery becomes self-reflexive. As authority forces bodies to give up their secrets, death, dismemberment, and narrative make the physical body a site of struggle between the state and its citizens, and between truth and fiction. Oropeza undermines the concepts of truth on which journalism relies, explaining that “cualquier crimen en el que se vea entremezclado el poder, de un modo u otro, jamás será completamente esclarecido” (27).<sup>65</sup> Eloy Urroz traces the influence of the events surrounding Colosio’s death on this text, calling them “sediment” that inflects the novel’s political intrigue (150).<sup>66</sup> As with the investigation of Colosio’s murder, the legal, political, and journalistic institutions in Volpi’s novel put up a front of due process. Proclamations that the crime “debía ser investigado (‘hasta las últimas consecuencias’, como siempre se

dijo), el público debía conocer la verdad (al menos algunos avances hasta que encontrase un nuevo entretenimiento), y el culpable o culpables debían ser hallados y castigados” (original, 26) refer to the efforts by institutional authority to maintain an official version that ignores the embodied nature of the crime. This formulation plays up the role of discourse, juxtaposing a well-worn script with weary expectations. Similarly, Volpi argues in “La segunda conspiración” that the conspiracy theories surrounding Colosio’s death reaffirm power by destroying concepts of truth, as well as the possibility of narrating events in a believable fashion (50). As with Oropeza’s capitulation to state authority, language can be made to lie. His version is tolerated, if not believed, because the state enforces it with kidnapping, murder, and media supervision. In the absence of resolution, what counts is how the role is played.

The crime at the center of Oropeza’s narrative litters the text with depictions of corpses, while competing versions of the events make bodies the medium of a struggle over how to represent culture. Lomnitz asserts that, in Mexico, “Modern popular culture was [...] nothing if it was not macabre, and a rich tradition of manipulation of the dead became the legacy of the modern state” (339). The cadavers in La paz de los sepulcros embody ideas about art and the media, as well as what it means to be Mexican and modern in a global world. For this reason, public and private entities lay claim to bodies and their meanings.<sup>67</sup> Ever conscious of his role as a tabloid reporter, the narrator chronicles the manipulations of the homicide investigation and the relationships of meaning between these dead bodies and an elusive Mexican democracy. As students, Santillán and Navarro moved in the same



activist circles; later, they share a mutual lover and form part of the “cofradía,” a group of relatively wealthy and influential characters who participate in necrophilia. The two nevertheless diverge in their relation to political and epistemological authority. The child of blind parents, Santillán wavers between light and shadows. He echoes the text’s re-working of binaries, in which darkness offers a mode of seeing.<sup>68</sup> This characteristic follows what Braham contends is in contemporary Latin American crime fiction an “explicit defiance toward modern notions of rationalism, legalism, and even simple causality” (5). In contrast to more typical connotations of darkness, in this novel “la noche también descubre y desentume, cambia y metamorfosea, descorre la pesada cortina de la luz para revelar los mundos ocultos, activos y móviles, fatales, que se amparan detrás del día” (103). Light in turn alters “la auténtica composición de las cosas, las distorsiona con su ansia de precisión y claridad” (103), a tool wielded by the novel’s political elite. Oropeza’s narrative likewise situates itself within the tacky sensationalism of tabloid journalism to undermine genre conventions based on the concepts of truth, clarity, and reason that become tyrannical in this novel.

Navarro inhabits a region where clarity merges with power and serves to blind and distort. In the novel, he is aligned with the structures of political authority, as well as with intellectual discourses that have privileged the mind over the body. Urroz views Navarro as the embodiment of power (150), and Mondragón tells Oropeza that, for Santillán, this politician is “el poder contra el que siempre debe lucharse” (208). Navarro gives himself over to power: he dreams of becoming

president and of creating a government that is “prístino, nítido, transparente: luminoso” (203). He covets power that would allow him to transcend his body, a desire manifested in his Enlightenment fantasies. Wary of the night, he longs for a metaphorical daybreak that will bring, “[d]espués de la Edad de las Tinieblas, un Siglo de las Luces, una nueva Ilustración, un nuevo Iluminismo: Rousseau y los enciclopedistas son sus pilares, sus modelos, sus metas: y su paso por el gabinete de Del Villar y [...] la cofradía apenas un mal necesario” (203). His desire speaks to a mode of knowledge at once courted and de-legitimized in late twentieth-century Mexico.<sup>69</sup> This tension stems from the contradictory position of Mexican intellectuals, caught between a desire to attain the allegedly universal discourses of reason and a yearning to subvert these same paradigms. If Enlightenment ideas disembody Mexico, politicians, intellectuals, and artists disembody fellow Mexicans—often marginalized groups—in their response to these discourses.

The way in which the state utilizes Navarro’s embalmed corpse literalizes this double bind. His faith in abstract concepts of reason, order, and justice allow him to justify all manners of practical tyranny in the form of state-sponsored violence and the manipulation of information. He appeals to these ideals as a means of overcoming the violence he sees as inherent to the Mexican political system. Navarro leads a dual life, one in which he tricks neither himself nor the public because “de verdad era un buen ciudadano, un buen funcionario y un buen padre [...], independientemente de que también fuese una víctima del narcotráfico, la corrupción y la muerte en los barrios miserables de la ciudad” (173). By idealizing an escape

from the body, including the negative connotations of corporeality, he perpetuates the essentializing disembodiment that has characterized twentieth-century Mexican nationalism. The circumstances of his murder demonstrate not only the fundamental impossibility of transcending one's body, however, but also the tragic contradictions in the way in which these discourses have been used in Mexico. At his funeral, the state appropriates Navarro's embalmed corpse to maintain appearances, a disembodied move. The narrator describes embalming as an attempt to return him to "su condición de cadáver común, de muerto idéntico a tantos que, con el maquillaje y las costuras bien hechas, los líquidos y humores para preservarlo, permanecen como anónimos vestigios, réplicas de sus dueños originales" (84). Death severs Navarro from society, and the funeral offers official reincorporation (84). His embalmed body thus works as a performed effigy, in the sense developed by Joseph Roach, who argues that performed effigies and the practices associated with them "provide communities with a method of perpetuating themselves through specially nominated mediums or surrogates," of which corpses are one example (36).<sup>70</sup> Navarro is an accomplice to power, and the state appropriates his cadaver to paper over the ruptures caused by his death. By using his embalmed corpse as a "replica," the state employs a form of corporeal art to maintain its legitimacy. This use of his cadaver is a literal disembodiment in that it removes any measure of agency he might have over how his body is represented or how that image is linked to his identity.

Oropeza, in contrast, depicts the corpse and the funeral in such a way as to point out the hypocrisy of the state's self-constructed democratic image. He does so

through the criminal, commercial connotations of the crime fiction and tabloid journalism that inform his writing, as well as with references to the unseemly circumstances of Navarro's death. As with Roach's concept of the performed effigy, Navarro returns as obviously something other than himself, a "monstrous double" that is tolerated, even feared, but not believed. For the narrator, this is because Navarro's body is fundamentally bad art, and his funeral unconvincing theater. The embalmer mimics life in death, his task to prepare the body for a role in which it is fated to fail.<sup>71</sup> The narrator depicts the corpse as a doll or a clown (84) and ties the funeral's theatricality to fabrication, describing it as "simulación" and "mentiras" (85). The affair is replete with exaggerated realism, as cameras transmit live images of "las muestras de amargura y las condolencias durante el sepelio, y luego, mientras los conductores de los diversos canales, engolando la voz para hacerla lúgubre y marcial, narraban los acontecimientos (un deporte turbio y morboso), las cámaras seguían de cerca la procesión que llevó el cadáver del Ministro" (85). The state's art, embodied by the corpse, becomes a grotesque representation, akin to the way in which the appearance of democracy and legal process are used to cover up corruption. By exhorting unity, for example, the administration invokes political security to justify its actions and inveighs against "los rumores que vulneraban la estabilidad de la democracia que con tantos sacrificios había sido alcanzada por el país" (26-27). With the funeral, the state hopes to return Navarro to "la tierra y al silencio, inútil paso después de la terrible muerte que lo volvió, a su pesar, inmortal" (85). Instead, descriptions of the corpse call attention to its function as an artistic construction, a

repository for the state's attempts at legitimacy and the narrator's desire for a counter-performance.<sup>72</sup>

In contrast to the elaborate public rituals of Navarro's life and death, Santillán lives and dies on the margins.<sup>73</sup> Whereas Navarro's disembodiment stems from his close proximity to political authority, Santillán experiences a different type of disembodiment, one that manifests his lack of political or social agency. The narrator points to explicit links between Navarro and discourses of political and intellectual authority, as when the narrator describes his concern with the preservation of "su imagen, que era la imagen del gobierno del presidente Del Villar" (167), while Santillán is associated with darkness. After a trip to the desert during which he nearly dies of sun exposure, he returns to the darkness that is his birthright (168). He is reborn of death, an image informed by the "lugares comunes de la imaginaria moderna, pero la convicción de saberse cadáver—lo había sido pues, antes de serlo—le daba a su vida, a su renacimiento, una condición especial. [...] [L]a muerte lo había salvado" (169). The near-death experience turns Santillán into a living cadaver, which, unlike Navarro's embalmed corpse, expresses a very different relationship to contemporary Mexico. If Navarro is linked to political authority, with its deceptive uses of tropes of light and clarity, Santillán represents the sort of cultural production that the novel links to darkness. He works at Cinemex, where his tasks include verifying the dubbing on low budget films, many of them pornographic (169). While Mexican cinema is often insistently national, here it recalls neither a cinematic Golden Age nor more recent films that articulate Mexico for a global audience.<sup>74</sup>

Instead, it positions the country as the passive recipient of low quality drive, indicative of the technological modernity that orders Santillán's world. The presence of his cadaver at the murder scene, and indeed throughout the novel, complicates the state's ability to manipulate information, a quality the narrator links to Santillán's association with social and artistic marginality.

Santillán and Oropeza work in the culture industry and aid in the diffusion of commercialized art. When juxtaposed with Navarro's reliance upon the disembodied models of Enlightenment philosophy, the novel's inclusion of this type of art poses a challenge to conventions of literary taste and norms for depicting physical bodies. Oropeza comments on the role of physical bodies in contemporary cultural production, remarking that readers, television viewers, and cinephiles are interested only in "historias verdaderas, en recreaciones de hechos, en imitaciones de la realidad. Nos enfrentamos a un neorrealismo implacable: sólo le creemos a un actor si sabemos que está repitiendo una escena auténtica, y resulta aún mejor si podemos descubrir en la pantalla lágrimas, sangre y dolor auténticos (o que nos han dicho que lo son)" (148, original). Unlike the Enlightenment models espoused by Navarro, journalism—particularly tabloids—and crime fiction provoke explicit questions not only about the nature of writing, but about how to represent bodies. Both genres typically juxtapose their textual subjects—often the nefarious world of violent crime—with the reason and objectivity they offer as tools of investigation. Braham argues that the Latin American neopolicíaco depicts this contradiction by way of the detective's body. As order becomes tyrannical, "the Mexican detective hero rejects

ratiocination, legal process, and the scientific method as a means to truth, offering his physical body as both a catalyst and a stage for the battle between good and evil”

(66). This fiction is self-reflexive, insofar as the object of analysis is the genre itself, and the detective’s scarred body bears testimony to the compromised division between narrative object and narrating subject. Not unlike the neopoliciaco detective’s abused body, Oropeza’s narrative contests disembodied models by flaunting the scars of its association with lowbrow literature and political corruption.

As illustrated by the narrator’s representations of Navarro and Santillán’s cadavers, La paz de los sepulcros uses fatal violence to challenge the disembodiments created by a post-revolutionary artistic legacy and the commercialization of culture. For Roach, violence forms part of the same cultural category as the aesthetic because, except on rare occasions, it is not necessary for physical survival (41). He describes violence as both excessive and performative, given that, “to be fully demonstrative, to make its point, it must spend things—material objects, blood, environments” and because it presupposes an audience of some sort (41, original). In Volpi’s novel, fatal violence delineates the relationships between subjects and the Mexican state, even as it points to the intersections among bodies, political or cultural authority, and artistic representation. The battle for control, however, centers not only on violence as a performance of power, but also on the way in which the effects of that violence will be represented and interpreted. As with the Minister’s funeral, the state seeks to control its own image by appropriating the bodies of those associated with it. The violent means by which it does so, as with Oropeza’s kidnapping, are excessive, in

Roach's sense of the term, but also because neither the conventional press nor opposition groups are capable of mounting a credible challenge to state authority.

The narrator portrays violence to reiterate a legacy of authoritarian rule, exemplified by the PRI's stranglehold on the Mexican political system.

The novel uses death and fatal violence to contest the way that political authority uses art to maintain power. The references to necrophilia in particular recall the sort of intimacy with death imagined by artists such as Rivera to be fundamentally "Mexican." The narrator takes this artistic trope and makes it graphically, grotesquely literal. Death stages the repetitive, unbidden return of bodies, objects, and realities, as with the doubling associated with Navarro and Santillán's cadavers. Avery Gordon argues that "haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence" (8), and contends that "phantom doubles conjure up 'archaic' desires for dead things to come alive" (50-51). If Navarro's embalmed corpse demonstrates the state's desire to "animate" his body according to its own narrative, a move that silences the other stories his body might tell, the scene in which the murder victim's bodies are discovered illustrates the sort of unruliness suggested by Gordon's concept of haunting. In this novel, death is not final, and the deceased literally take on a life of their own. The crime occurs in "un sórdido cuarto de hotel" (15), and as reporters, doctors, and police crowd the room, Navarro's corpse taunts death: "El rigor mortis había hecho que, por encima de ese cúmulo de huesos y carne, como si se tratara de una afrenta o un desafío—un último grito o un siniestro ápice de vida en medio de tanta muerte—, destacara el pene erecto de la víctima 1" (16-17).



Once his body has been embalmed, it is comfortably circumscribed by the undertaker's artistic efforts within the parameters of a "common death," one that does not threaten the public image of the Del Villar government. At this initial stage, however, the circumstances of the murder are not yet clear. Without the artistic embellishments of the embalmer, working in the service of the state, literal corpses are much less compliant and less readily turned into symbols. This quality points to the social role of art, whether in maintenance of the status quo or in the narrator's attempts to undermine state authority.

La paz de los sepulcros links eroticized corpses to a nationalist tradition, thus resuscitating the ghostly cadavers of Mexican history. Urroz argues that this novel is in effect haunted by Martín Luis Guzmán's 1929 novel, La sombra del caudillo (170). The use of necrophilia evokes artistic representations of death that were frequently tied to authoritative depictions of Mexican culture, as in post-revolutionary art. In his investigations, Oropeza stumbles upon information about thefts of corpses. He initially attributes it the FPLN as a tactic of "psychological terrorism," but after meeting with a cousin who works in the morgue, he revises his opinion (136). His cousin relays an intimacy born of constant contact with cadavers, such that "dejas de considerarlos como desechos, al verlos a diario comprendes que quizá ya no sean seres humanos, pero que aún así continúan con sus propios procesos, cambian y se modifican. Los cadáveres no están muertos, no son la muerte"(137). He speaks of a "romance con la muerte," a mutual seduction that often proves irresistible (138, original). Those responsible for stealing cadavers, therefore, are not members of an

urban guerrilla force, but “sus admiradores, sus enamorados, los que sueñan con ellos, los que los veneran, qué horror, los que los resucitan” (138). If an intimacy with death made Mexico different, for many twentieth-century artists, writers and filmmakers, the embrace of the past raises ethical questions about the representation of Mexico through marginalized, voiceless bodies. The novel thus dialogues with post-revolutionary nationalism and literary tradition. The eroticized corpses in La paz de los sepulcros fall sway to the irresistible lure of the past, but they also demonstrate the violence that disembodied portrayals of that history inflict upon citizens.

Necrophilia, in this novel, performs a monstrous strategic displacement of official, authoritative versions of Mexican history and identity. The portrayal of eroticized cadavers literalizes obsession with the past, whether of a now-fossilized revolutionary potential or modernity’s elusive promises. In linking these epistemological patterns to Mexican cultural production in the twentieth century, the novel reveals an abject fascination with postmodernity’s intermingling of high and low culture. Not unlike necrophilia’s role within the novel, the lure of the tawdry, exemplified in the text by tabloid journalism and lowbrow movie imports, exerts a strange pull over the erudite narrator. He is compelled by the norms of taste, as well as the state’s threats of violence, to dress up his narrative in the same way that an embalmer prepares a corpse. He does so by disavowing its revelatory power with his capitulation to the state’s version, as well as by transforming the thematic elements of the nota roja into a non-commercial text. The novel thus salvages literary decorum, embracing the potential of darkness to strategically displace an official discourse

predicated on the deceptive lucidity of power, even as it remains excruciatingly aware of the dangers of inhabiting marginalized bodies.

In La paz de los sepulcros, the text's performative elements facilitate the narrator's criticism of Mexican political culture by foregrounding the manipulation of discourse and bodies. His engagement with the philosophical legacies of death sets up the physical body as the link between state and citizen, such that the corpses of the murder victims incarnate the fragmentation, dismemberment, and violence of a contentious Mexican nationalism. The self-reflexive nature of detective fiction focuses attention on how the stories of artistic genre, physical violence, and nationalism are told in contemporary Mexico. Mass media and culture show up in the text, eliciting anxieties about the continued relevance of writing, especially the role of literary writing. These concerns echo fears from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about modernization, mechanization, and the commodification of writing and culture. Death became a novel means of engaging these modernizing currents, re-configuring them as uniquely, artistically national in the context of revolutionary violence and the uncertainties about Mexico's role in a changing world. For Mexican artists and writers, the use of death as a trope in the twentieth century offered a model for distancing themselves from European or North American literary and cultural models. At the same time, its use frequently constructed disembodied images of marginalized groups within Mexico. The depictions of death and physical violence in La paz de los sepulcros deliberately evoke Mexico's violent nationalism, thereby disavowing the ways in which the state has hidden its use of violence under

the cover of reason and order. By bringing bodies back to life and making physical violence explicitly visible, the novel strategically displaces not only the state's official version, but also the compliance of literary, artistic, and journalistic conventions with these disembodied images of Mexican nationalism.

Public Bodies and Private Scars: Projections of Corporeality in Antonio José Ponte's "Corazón de Skitalietz" and Contrabando de sombras

If death imagery in Mexico offers language for talking about an elusive modernity and cultural identity, death and dying in recent Cuban cultural production suggest the profound sense of loss engendered by successive blows to revolutionary ideals, a process that culminates in the grief and anger of the post-Soviet era. For Lomnitz, death as a cultural sign in twentieth-century Mexico changed from "history as experience" into "history as symbol," a condition exploited by a culture industry that turned this image into a saleable trinket (410). He nevertheless emphasizes death's ability to disrupt the bourgeois underpinnings of modernity, describing the 1959 Cuban revolution as a violent awakening that shakes loose a hidden reality from the slumber of an "Americanized" modernity (411). The Cuban socialist state thus self-consciously provides a model for rejecting a version of modernity structured around consumerism and backed by foreign interventions. Although Castro's revolutionaries were less than successful in distancing themselves from patterns of bourgeois morality, as I argue in Chapter Two, the revolutionary triumph validated, on a very public stage, pan-Latin American struggles for self-determination. Acutely

aware of this symbolic currency, the Cuban state cultivated it through an active cultural sector, comprised of an influential and relatively prolific film industry and literary scene, as well as with political overtures and military actions.<sup>75</sup> The state undertook this task, as José Quiroga notes, by “commanding a symbolic language that registered with the people, always addressed in the plural” (2). Revolutionary Cuba spoke—indeed, speaks—to the possibility of resisting the imposition of foreign economic and political models.

The characters in Antonio José Ponte’s short story, “Corazón de Skitalietz” (1998), and novel, Contrabando de sombras (2002), respond to the ways in which the socialist state utilizes the past to construct cultural identity in a contentious present.<sup>76</sup> In Cuba, post-revolutionary cultural institutions such as cinema re-worked images from history, particularly the colonial period, as a means of legitimating the socialist project through an association with previous struggles for political self-determination. Films such as El otro Francisco (Sergio Giral, 1975) or La última cena (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1976), as well as Miguel Barnet’s interview-based text Biografía de un cimarrón (1966), exemplify this trend. Guantanamo (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, 1995), analyzed in the previous chapter, takes to task these representations of Cuban history and the ways in which they lead to disembodiment: by aligning struggles to end slavery and colonialism with revolutionary nationalism, these portrayals fail to analyze the specific ways in which the corporeality of race and gender condition the experience of Cuban history and identity. In an essay entitled “The Supervised Party,” Ponte describes the state’s desire to preserve indefinitely the

moment of revolutionary triumph, arguing that “institutional revolutions describe an absurd model: that of an orbit composed of a single point” (218). The attempts to freeze history in the name of revolution disembody, given that the passage of time is an inescapable component of the human experience. Attempts to manage the experience of time and history are, as José Quiroga contends in Cuban Palimpsests, hallmarks of official 1990s Cuba.

As with the disembodiments that result from the ways in which the socialist state has utilized images of the colonial period to legitimate its own project, the management of history removes embodied experience from concepts of nation and identity. Revolutions may indeed be timeless in their representations and imagery, but physical bodies never are. Death and dying in these two texts by Ponte reinforce the importance of bodies to the experience of history in contemporary Cuba, as well as the way in which this affects ideas about memory and identity. The processes of death and dying in these texts allow the characters to map out their relationship to Cuban history and identity, thereby strategically displacing the fossilized experience of time described by Ponte’s analysis of institutional revolutions or cinematic depictions of Cuba’s colonial past. This process evokes the duality of history in contemporary Cuba, in that the state turns to a “memorialization” of the past, in Quiroga’s terms, to deal with the present, even as Cuba’s anachronisms are quite literally hot commodities in terms of tourism and a global culture industry.<sup>77</sup> Post-1959 Cuban cultural production has enjoyed a larger-than-life presence, due in large part to the deliberate internationalism of the socialist state and the symbolic value of

revolutionary Cuba. Quiroga underscores the ironies of turning nostalgia about Cuba into a commodity, describing the country as a construction where “the capitalist and the consumer are offered a kind of unspoiled site where there is no capitalism” (xvii). In these two texts, death strategically displaces by bringing the focus back to the physical body: political and cultural nostalgia may bring tourist dollars to the island, but they come at the expense of Cubans who live the cataleptic limbo between past and future, between capitalism and socialism.<sup>78</sup>

In La paz de los sepulcros and in Ponte’s short story and novel, cadavers evidence a contentious relationship between past and present, as well as anxieties about how to represent the nation. In the Mexican text, death reiterates a deeply hierarchical nationalism that isolates social groups from the exercise of power even as it appropriates their bodies. In the Cuban texts, the places and processes of dying—a day clinic for the mentally ill, a ransacked apartment, a boarding school, Havana’s principal cemetery—call attention to a fractured socialist collectivity as they re-insert bodies into the narrative of Cuban history. Rather than timeless images of revolutionary nationalism or nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Cuba, the bodies of the characters in these two texts bring into sharp relief the material and ideological contradictions of contemporary Cuba, of bodies wasted by disease, for example, or Havana’s crumbling infrastructure and frequent blackouts. The processes of dying in these texts underscore the way in which Cubans are caught between a destabilized revolutionary ideology and an uncertain future. Rather than a willful denial of the passage of time, death in the short story and the novel forces a reckoning with the

effects of history on bodies. The uses of Cuban history have been ideological and national, particularly since 1959, and the emphasis on personal, embodied experience rather than on homogenizing concepts of identity and nation challenges the official uses of these ideas by supporters and detractors of the revolution.

“Corazón de skitalietz” takes place in contemporary Cuba, a temporal and geographic designation that, like the characters themselves, is both profoundly affected by history and disengaged from a cohesive narrative of that history. The story’s main characters are Veranda, an astrologist, and Escorpión, a historian. It depicts a friendship that develops during a dying woman’s final months, as the characters leave the stability of home and work to take up life on the streets of Havana. Their social identities dissolve and “No podrían ser más historiador y astróloga, eran ya vagabundos. Sus profesiones se les habían convertido en andrajos. [...] Se dieron cuenta entonces de que habían perdido la costumbre de volver a sus casas” (36). Eventually, however, their vagabond existence comes to the attention of a social worker who employs the tools of her trade to force them into the comprehensibility of statistical categories. Veranda proclaims that “Te puedes escapar de tu trabajo y de tu casa, salirte de tus obligaciones, pero no dejarás de ser un número (39). Havana is equally refuge and trap for these characters as they seek solace on its streets and narrate their lives through its refuse, turning scraps of paper into what they term “la revista de la calle” (36). The city, often unnavigable due to blackouts, lacks a cartography that would locate it—and the characters—within a recognizable space and time.



The characters in “Corazón de skitalietz” include physicality in the representation of contemporary Cuba, a reminder that revolutionary ideology is likewise subject to the vicissitudes of time. Veranda’s interpretations of the future drain her dying body, and Escorpión is a historian who wants to escape his past. She describes, for example, her clients who arrive without hope and expect her to invent a future for them, “‘Un poco de futuro que me saco de aquí para cada uno de ellos...’ tuvo que señalar a algún punto del bulto de su cuerpo, al corazón, al hígado o a la cabeza” (13). The initial encounter between Veranda and Escorpión, which takes place during a blackout, has a distorted, dream-like quality, an effect perhaps intensified by prescription drugs. Escorpión confuses a cushion with a cat, and the cat’s voice with that of Veranda (13); in his desire to forget, he takes more pills to sleep, and, “si acaso ya se encontraba en [el sueño], hundirse todavía más” (14). The end of a romantic relationship causes Escorpión’s despair, but Veranda’s questions about what kind of Scorpio he is recall the items on which nostalgic discourse about Cuba centers. She asks him if he likes “las cosas viejas, los carros de otra época, las antigüedades, las películas de antes, los libros viejos y la ropa usada, [...] las sábanas gastaditas, [...] las mujeres mayores, las canciones antiguas, las noticias que ya no son noticias” (13). These images suggest a cultural history that coincides with Escorpión’s profession. These are also the types of images that, in Quiroga’s analysis of contemporary Cuba, project a specific image of cultural identity abroad (23). In this story, then, the characters experience a contemporary Cuban reality mediated by

loss, confusion, and the intrusion of the past into the present in the form of objects and practices with a direct effect on the characters' physical bodies.

The collapse of the Soviet Union devastated Cuba's economy, an event with material as well as ideological consequences. These effects show up in Ponte's story in the physical decline of Havana and of the characters' bodies, along with the increasing irrelevance of their professional lives. Under these circumstances, both the historian and the astrologer become superfluous. As the state looks to history to manage the present, as Quiroga's analysis of memorialization suggests, the representations of illness and death in this story highlight the ways in which ordinary Cubans experience this crisis in bodily form. In such a context, Escorpión's profession becomes absurd. During his first encounter with Veranda, a voice—ostensibly that of the cat—states that, as a historian, he must have asked himself what people turn to in order to keep on living (13). Coming as part of Escorpión's drug-induced, dream-like state, the cat's question manifests the desperate surreality of the present. When he situates this statement within the realm of official history by repeating it to his boss at the journal where he works, however, it opens a discussion about the proper boundaries of history as a discipline, and Escorpión asks, “¿Qué sentido tendría dirigir un departamento de historia cuando a la propia historia le faltaba sentido?” (16). The story questions the ability of historical inquiry to investigate the salient questions of contemporary Cuba, as well as the official uses of this methodology. The characters are caught somewhere between the failures of

revolutionary history as a mode of analysis and misgivings about a forced re-insertion into capitalist economy and history.

Escorpión puts his professional training to use in a manner that evidences the disembodiments that result from these official uses of history. Skilled in methods of historical analysis, he uses them to interpret his fellow patients at the day hospital where he increasingly spends his time. Escorpión plays a historian on the sly, turning each patient into “una de sus fichas de historiador” (19). This mode of analysis disembodies the patients, reducing them to a brief summary of their symptoms and how these are manifested. His methodology falters, however, as he spends more time with them. Escorpión begins to wonder if the “el idioma verdadero de la sabiduría era el de la lengua retardada por efectos químicos, aquél que hablaba el hombre envejecido antes de tiempo” (20). This particular patient is convinced that he has another half, someone who takes on the activities of his daily life during the blackouts that are common to Havana. He reasons that one part of this city loses power so that another may exist, and affirms that, when “no hay luz eléctrica, en la casa oscurecida, he tenido la seguridad de que otro como yo, otro yo en alguna parte iluminada de esta misma ciudad, hace cosas por mí, vive mi vida” (19). He seeks this other half in the expectation of creating something bigger, “Algo que sobrepase la suerte de sólo dos personas” (19). Conventional modes of historical analysis, as utilized by Escorpión in this episode, cannot explain the man or his condition, which is a direct result of the material circumstances of 1990s Cuba and the reduction of ideals of socialist unity to the dream of a crazy man. When the patient disappears entirely, from the hospital as

well as from his home, Escorpión realizes that the man is but one of a multitude of people who simply disappear without dying, a phenomenon of wanderers who become skitalietzs, the Russian word for the “vagabundos desheredados” of the story’s title (20).

Conventional history proves incapable of conveying the experiences of Cubans, and the story, through the figure of the skitalietz, invents a language of physical displacement to communicate the relationship of Cubans to the island’s geographical space. The skitalietz makes literal the ways in which the characters are disembodied by concepts of revolutionary history and identity: condemned to a social death and turned into an atemporal symbol, the skitalietz is nevertheless denied the physical death that would, by emphasizing the effects of time on the body, permit a sense of embodied history. In an epilogue, Ponte defines the skitalietz as a “vagabundo en su propio suelo, como mártir ruso” (vii). Escorpión explains that skitalietzs are vagabonds who disappear without dying, an entity that “no se mata, se desentiende de sus pertenencias, se reduce a vagar” (20). He describes Havana as a city full of “skitalietzs, gente que vagabundea aparentemente sin destino” (20). In a cultural context in which travel can express an individual’s relationship to the revolution—citizens privileged enough to travel for official reasons, for example, or those who leave for exile—the figure of the skitalietz reiterates the role of movement in constructing Cuban national identity. Ambrosio Fornet, for example, analyzes mutations of the term “exile” and identifies such “national” symbols as the single star on the Cuban flag and the palm tree as “nostalgic images of an exiled poet,” José

Martí (94).<sup>79</sup> In an effort to stop time and preserve its own legitimacy, the revolutionary state in effect asks Cubans to overlook the passage of time. In doing so, bodies must necessarily be excluded from concepts of history and identity, which is what I define as disembodiment. The characters' existence as skitalietzs in this story strategically displaces this sense of timelessness by focusing on their physical experiences of disease and death.

The use of the Russian word "skitalietz" ascribes to these vagabonds a peculiarly Cuban disinheritance. It also points to the way in which contemporary Cuban history is marked by a sense of loss. Svetlana Boym analyzes the divisiveness of nostalgia, distinguishing between "reflective" and "restorative" nostalgia. The former emphasizes ambiguity and "dwells in the ambivalences of human longing and belonging" while also exploring "ways of inhabiting many places at once" (xviii), a concept with an affective kinship to the way in which I argue that the artistic subjects in these works privilege embodied experience. Restorative nostalgia, in contrast, imagines itself as "truth and tradition" (xviii). She argues that the nostalgic rebels against "the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" (xiii). The nostalgic discourse created by exiles or the tourism industry about Cuba, not unlike revolutionary history, wishes to stop time, creating disembodied images of Cuban identities by disavowing the passage of time. Whereas the socialist state sought modernity, using memory, in Quiroga's words, as "part of a long narrative leading toward a future" (4), nostalgia looks back. As I argue in Chapter Three, writers such as Pedro Juan Gutiérrez call attention to present problems through depictions of the

embodied consequences of the unresolved contradictions of the past. Nostalgia, however, works differently. Boym notes that it can be retrospective as well as prospective, a desire for “the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that became obsolete” (xvi). In the Cuban context, it evokes a longing for a time and space untouched by history, as well as an element of sadness about the shortcomings of the socialist project. Although nostalgic images of pre-revolutionary Cuba are frequently associated with the exile community, they are also popular in selling Cuba as a tourist destination. Examples of the tension between exile and the sale of nostalgia include the films Cosas que dejé en La Habana (1997), by Spanish director Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, and the ICAIC-produced Fresa y chocolate (1994), by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío.<sup>80</sup> Characters such as Veranda and Escorpión thus experience a dual disembodiment of Cuban history, by the state as well as through the sort of nostalgic discourse common both to the exile community and the tourism industry.

While relocated Cubans may long for the Havana of their (or their parents’ or grandparents’) youth, Cubans on the island inhabit the physical sites of that history. Despite a stated desire to travel, for example, Escorpión seeks “Algo que perdí aquí en La Habana [...] y que debo encontrar precisamente aquí” (27). The two friends approach the present, linked to the city and to the outside world, with trepidation. As they prepare to leave the apartment, for example, they dread entering the city, seized by a fear “a que las escaleras terminaran, a terminar en la calle, en el presente” (27). Their anxieties about rejoining the present illustrate that, despite the problems

associated with disembodiment, it provides a frame of reference for concepts of history and identity, one that becomes increasingly difficult to maintain due to the crisis of the 1990s. The story nevertheless underscores that, despite the attempts by the state and proponents of nostalgic discourse to stave off the passage of time, Escorpión and Veranda cannot escape the effects of history. These effects manifest themselves in the physical bodies of these characters, and Escorpión comments that they might be dead without yet realizing it (29), an observation many make wryly about Castro and his revolution. As skitalietzs, Escorpión and Veranda experience a social death defined by disembodiment and the fossilization of time. Escorpión thus laments, “¡Qué mal muertos estamos!” (30). If nostalgia, as Boym suggests, attempts to re-write both past and future, the characters in “Corazón de skitalietz” take issue with representations that, in effect, write them out of the story.

Place, along with the physical body, becomes a fundamental component of strategic displacement as it works in “Corazón de skitalietz.” The story posits continuity between Havana and its inhabitants, and the relationship of the characters to the physical space of the city undermines the timeless, disembodied quality of revolutionary time and nostalgic portrayals of Cuban history. The city is a contested symbol of Cuban identity that, rather like the corpses in La paz de los sepulcros, has been utilized by competing interests. The narrator describes the city as the site of a war movie, one in which “[t]odo parecía haber sucedido ya, todas las devastaciones” (24). Havana, as a synecdoche for the nation and the revolution, becomes a movie set, filled with props used over and over again to project multiple fictions. The

narrator describes the city as “igual a un escenario construido para el cine. Un día de agua acentuaba la ficción de todo” (40). Havana, which figures so prominently in revolutionary imagery and in the memories of exiles, becomes palpably fictitious in this story, a trope of time and geography. Escorpión understands that he needs to play his role properly, but it is no longer clear from whom he is to take direction. The story ends with his sense of being observed, that “alguien lo miraba, de que pertenecía a un rodaje de exteriores. No sabía qué hacer frente a Dios o la cámara” (49). The city becomes in this story a place for watching, as further evidenced by Veranda’s name, an aspect that suggests debates about how Cuban identity is performed and for whom.<sup>81</sup> The references to Havana as a film set illuminate the ways in which the stories told about Cuba often disembody Cubans, turning them into timeless symbols of exile, history, and revolution.

While disease and death in “Corazón de skitalietz” strategically displace this timeless quality by underscoring the effects of time on the physical body, Escorpión’s care for Veranda’s corpse emphasizes the performative nature of this process. As Navarro’s corpse in La paz de los sepulcros illustrates, the funeral preparations of bodies create a performed effigy that substitutes for a living presence. In both texts, this effigy makes literal the disembodiments experienced by the dead characters, but in Ponte’s story Veranda’s non-conventional funeral rites restore a sense of physicality to the portrayal of her death. Unlike Volpi’s novel, in which the narrator’s description of the funeral undermines the state’s disembodied portrayal of Navarro, in “Corazón de skitalietz” Escorpión carries out a literal strategic



displacement. The care of Veranda's corpse falls to him, and he complies with her wishes to have her body left alone in her apartment (34), doing so in a manner reminiscent of a theatrical production. He places her inert body on his bed, which he situates in the center of her empty living room, and wraps her in his sheets (49). Before leaving, he contemplates the scene he has created, with Veranda "acostada en la barca de su muerte," and then exits, leaving the house open behind him (49). Cadavers are intended to be viewed as a part of the rituals of death and burial, a public performance, as Roach explains, of the "the tangible existence of social boundaries and, at the same time, the contingency of those boundaries on fictions of identity" (39). Insofar as funeral preparations express the relationship between the individual and the collective, Veranda's would seem a solitary fate. The viewing of her body as staged by Escorpión emphasizes the absence of a Cuban collectivity to make sense of her death. Veranda's body, consumed by an insidious, invisible cancer, belongs finally neither to the Cuban state nor to its detractors, neither to the social worker's data graphs nor within a marketable image of Cuba as nostalgic history. The narrator therefore does not depict her burial. Instead, the description evokes preparations for a journey, suggesting that Veranda's cadaver will rest not within a tomb, but continue the vagabond wanderings of the skitalietz.

As time forces Cubans to confront the realities of the twenty-first century, nostalgic histories ask Cubans to freeze time, preserving either the heady days of pre-revolutionary excess or the bittersweet triumphs of an autochthonous socialism. Because Cubans are asked to create disembodied versions of their history, the

characters in this story strategically displace by refusing to bury their dead. A hallmark of modern Western culture has been the separation of the living from the dead in terms of physical space and linguistic discourse (Roach 48), a boundary transgressed in “Corazón de skitalietz” by bodies that resist simply passing away. Reduced to a vagabond existence and plagued by mental and physical illness, Escorpión and Veranda’s bodies rehearse struggles over Cuban history and identity, particularly as they relate to the way debates about the revolution translate to positioning, both linguistic and literal, with regard to the island’s physical space. Contrabando de sombras in turn deals explicitly with the relationship between physical space and Cuban history, using death to reiterate the border crossings that have come to define contemporary Cuban culture. As an island, Cuba’s geographical borders would appear well-defined, precise, and isolated from those of other nations. At the same time, their coastal nature, liminal by definition, begs the blurring of this precision, a quality with profound political consequences. In this novel, the characters’ bodies bear scars that trace their passage through Cuban history, including the effects of an emerging system of market capitalism; by paying attention to these marks, the novel strategically displaces disembodied versions of Cuban history that alternately ignore and commodify the lived experiences of marginalized subjects.

Set in contemporary Havana, Contrabando de sombras depicts the commingling of personal and collective histories within a contentious present. The protagonist, Vladimir Varela Quintana, is a gay writer working with a foreign photographer to narrate photographs of Havana. This work, in addition to the death

of his friend Renán, takes him to Havana's main cemetery, the Necrópolis de Colón. Vladimir begins to visit the cemetery frequently, where he encounters a group of men who dream the same dream night after night. In it, Inquisition authorities prosecute a group of eighteen men on charges of "amujeramiento"; they are loaded onto a boat and held in Cayo Puto, where they are tarred and feathered before being burned to death. Vladimir reads an account of the auto da fe before Renán's death, a reading that returns to him in a dream as he is held in a police station after his arrest for loitering in the cemetery. The link between modern Cuba and the colonial past is material as well as symbolic, given that the past manifests itself in various ways throughout the novel. Vladimir returns home one evening to find his books destroyed, the pages torn out and littering the apartment. He interprets it as a warning from the secret police, stating that "Hay solo dos clases de seres capaces de atravesar puertas [. . .]. Ustedes [la policía] y, de creer en ellos, los espíritus de muertos" (84). He later discovers that the executioners aboard the Inquisition's ship destroyed books by tearing out their pages and burning them along with the prisoners (158).

The novel's use of death strategically displaces the forgetting that leaves the stories of marginalized subjects out of Cuban nationalism. Bodies and embodied experience are, in this novel, conduits to memories suppressed by conventional ideas about identity and nation. In the cemetery, Vladimir meets a man, César, whom he confuses with Miranda, his first lover at boarding school.<sup>82</sup> Vladimir's own past bleeds into the narrative structure in the form of analepsis recounting the events leading up to Miranda's death. The past and the present become inextricable in this

novel, and the relationships among living characters constitute a complex web of acquaintances, past crimes, and current regrets. César, twice imprisoned for trying to leave Cuba, is jailed for loitering in the cemetery; Lula, Vladimir's lawyer friend who lobbies for César's release, was, as a child, part of a mob that attacked César's father in his home for planning to leave the country. In self-defense, César's father threw a bucket of urine at the crowd, injuring Lula and leaving her with a scar across her thigh. After testifying in a trial that found César's father guilty, Lula became a lawyer and makes her living translating for foreigners, arranging marriage licenses for those who wish to marry Cubans, and guiding them on tours of Havana's collapsing infrastructure (38). In this novel, the past returns in multiple ways, but as one of the men from the cemetery, asks Vladimir, "¿Crees que si volviera iba a tocarte estrictamente tu cuota personal? ¿Solo la vida que viviste antes?" (155). The novel uses the past to construct community, even as the recurrence of scarred bodies points to what is left out of this process.

Despite never mentioning Castro or the Special Period explicitly, Contrabando de sombras evidences an acute awareness of the weight of the immediate past.<sup>83</sup> Ponte's novel thus tells a story about contemporary Cuba that, to borrow a phrase from Idelber Avelar's analysis of postdictatorial fiction in the Southern Cone, intends to "remind the present that it is the product of a past catastrophe" (3). This shows up in the way that economic necessity, especially a need for dollars, affects the interpersonal relationships in the novel, rendering culture a set of material exchanges. When Vladimir learns that the gravediggers augment their salaries by selling goods

stolen from graves, he equates their actions to those of people who comb through trash looking for still-usable objects. The novel thus establishes symmetry between corpses and discarded objects, given that gravediggers search tombs as if they were “tanques de desechos, sin respeto por los cadáveres” (106). In a country where tourists pay to see decay, Cubans are obligated “to walk among tombs,” a situation that disembodies Cuban history (39). Rather than the embodied sense of history transmitted by the reappearance of Renán’s moccasins in César’s possession (108-109), for example, the combination of nostalgia with tourism depends upon emptying the profoundly personal meanings of death to create an experience of it as a state that can be visited and then left behind. The photographer in this novel is, like so many others, interested in documenting the decay of the city. Vladimir questions this formulation of beauty, asking “¿Todos estamos más o menos muertos, y son hermosas las más o menos muertes que llevamos?” (24). As Boym argues, the nostalgic wants to visit the past as a private mythology (xv), a desire to which the Cuban tourism industry caters. Lula notes that the photographer “[q]uiere regresar a su país cuanto antes. [. . .] Le gustan mucho los derrumbes pero de visita, por un rato. Igual que a todo el mundo” (129). Cubans cannot leave the past behind, and the novel uses death to contest the ways in which Cubans are asked to disembody their history as the price of passage into the globalized present.

Bodies, in this novel, register the complicated re-entrance of Cuba into capitalism, particularly the ways in which both revolutionary ideology and a global market for nostalgia turn history into a commodity. Avelar analyzes the relationship

of market capitalism to postdictatorial literature in the Southern Cone, arguing that what he terms “mournful texts” resist the market’s “substitutive, metaphorical logic in which the past must be relegated to obsolescence. The past is to be forgotten because the market demands that the new replace the old without leaving a remainder” (2).

The market, like so many other things, operates differently in 1990s Cuba. By reselling stolen goods, the gravediggers in Ponte’s novel perform a necessary economic role, a service that Vladimir nonetheless refuses. César holds a more pragmatic view, maintaining that “Todos los días podía tener pruebas de cómo la vida se nutría de lo no vivo para seguir” (101). The gravediggers do what they must to survive, given that “Ninguno de ellos podría remontar el mes con el sueldo que le pagaban, y no hallaban salida mejor que robar de su trabajo. Un camarero podía hacerlo con cigarros y cervezas, la cuadrilla de sepultureros tenía que intentarlo con objetos desenterrados” (107). If the postdictatorial triumph of market capitalism in the Southern Cone asks for a clean excision of the past, as Avelar argues, Cuba’s transition looks very different, at least from the vantage point of cultural production.

As the example from Contrabando de sombras illustrates, capitalism as it currently operates in Cuba depends not so much on replacing old with new as it does on transferring ownership, often under duplicitous conditions.<sup>84</sup> By expressing this exchange through bodies and sexual desire, the novel uses the material return of the past to strategically displace the theoretically clean—and therefore disembodied—substitutions of market capitalism. As in Roach’s concept of surrogation, the embodied nature of these transactions always leaves a performative echo, a quality

emphasized by this novel. Although the re-purposing of objects, including those disinterred by the gravediggers, has a practical logic in 1990s Cuba, Vladimir is shocked to see César wearing Renán's shoes. Rather than capitalist substitution, this transfer of goods calls attention not only to the material return of the past, but to the chain of possession that brings them back to life. Although Avelar's analysis deals with literary production in national contexts that, like Cuba, must negotiate global capitalism, this response operates differently in the context of a revolutionary state now obliged to trade in the imagery of cultural memory. Whereas Avelar argues that mourning exists outside of a Marxist system of use values, given that there is "no 'use' for an epitaph or a memorial—they dwell outside all utility" (4), Quiroga's analysis of the commodification of Cuban cultural memory suggests otherwise. Indeed, the title of Ponte's novel suggests the illicit trade that makes daily life in Cuba possible, as well as ponders the specific currency, both literal and symbolic, of the traffic in cultural memory.

As the revolution increasingly functions as a memorial—a suspension of time, as Ponte argues in "The Supervised Party," that pays homage to an iconic image of Cuba—it likewise works as a cadaver. Avelar identifies a fundamental link between mourning and storytelling (20), but, by situating this process within a narrative specifically about bodies, Contrabando de sombras contests disembodied portrayals of Cuban history and identity. Ponte's novel thus tells a story about the nonlinear connections between past and present that defy capitalist substitution and the revolution's image of itself. This relationship is specifically both artistic and

corporeal. For Lula, part of her affection for the revolution has to do with the trappings of popular imagery, “las banderas al viento, los carteles que ocupaban fachadas enteras en las plazas, los himnos... Y, ¿qué eran banderas, carteles e himnos, sino piezas del arte más temerario, del kitsch? Lo suyo había sido desde siempre un entusiasmo artístico” (39). As with Oropeza’s conflicted feelings about art and commerce in La paz de los sepulcros, the revolution is depicted by way of language that links aesthetic taste and nationalism. Art enters debates about the aestheticization—and commodification—of decay as a means of representing Cuba. The photographer’s project takes the trio to the cemetery, and, while Lula and Vladimir are not required to pay to enter the Necrópolis, he is. The entrance fee assigns a monetary value to the cultural memory contained within the cemetery, such that “[t]anta pompa de muerte se había convertido en una más de las atracciones turísticas de la ciudad, una playa de la que el mar se retira dejando aquella franja de estatuas y de cruces” (34). Vladimir adds that Cubans pay “al final” and with a currency other than money (35), whereas the photographer must pay up front to transform the past into a nostalgic commodity.

The text brings bodies into representations of Cuban history through an emphasis on scars. By exploring fissures, these characters underscore the fragility of the physical body, as well as the artifice of representation. For the photographer, Havana’s physical appearance evokes childhood memories of World War II. From that point on, “nunca más volvería a encontrar sabor en lo intacto. En adelante palparía la belleza en busca de sus cicatrices, desconfiaría de lo pulido, de lo sin



fisuras” (37). Not unlike the way in which “Corazón de skitalietz” imagines Havana as a film set, the photographer projects his own experiences onto the city’s space, comparing it to the destruction of Beirut (23). Cubans experience the return of the past in embodied form, however, and their scars are profoundly literal. The scar on Lula’s leg bears testimony to the fight between César’s family and the mob intent upon shaming them for betraying the revolution by wanting to leave the country. In describing how Lula’s injury singles her out, the narrator compares the scene to photos of crowds or mass protests, stating that “En algunas fotografías de aglomeraciones acostumbran a indicar con una flecha a determinado personaje. De igual manera, metida en un montón de gente que tumbaba la puerta, ella había sido señalada por el golpe de un cubo” (136). Implicit in this image are photographs of crowds marching to protest Cubans leaving the country, an allusion to the contentious debate about national identity and loyalty to the revolution. The incident fueled Lula’s animosity toward her attacker, an anger linked to the reminder inscribed onto her body: “Cada vez que la saya de uniforme escolar no conseguía ocultar la cicatriz del muslo, se le ofrecía oportunidad para ello” (136). In this way, her body bears the scars of a past marked not only by the national debate about identity and the troubled relationship between supporters and opponents of the revolution, but by the personal tragedy of César’s family and her role in both events.

César’s body has been scarred in different ways by his relationship to Cuba. He tells Vladimir that the scar on his chest is from a fight, to which the narrator adds that “Era de una pelea ocurrida en prisión” (65). When the police imprison César for

loitering in the cemetery, Vladimir asks Lula to help with his case. Lula, confronted by César about her role in his family history, feels threatened by him. For this reason, she resists helping him, explaining the significance of a scar “Hecha en prisión, ¿sabes? Quiere decir que fue capaz de sobrevivir a una pelea carcelaria. Consigo que lo pongan en libertad y es capaz de partirme unos huesos, hacerme otra cicatriz, hasta matarme. . .” (137). César’s scar is indirectly the result of the actions of the mob of which Lula was a part. Because his family’s plans were disrupted, César was later imprisoned for trying to leave and the mark on his body evidences the rancorous debate about Cuban identity. In contrast, Vladimir reads César’s scar as a link to the memory of his dead lover, Miranda. During Vladimir and César’s first sexual encounter, hidden in a pantheon within the cemetery, Vladimir kisses the scar with the sensation that he has done it before. He associates it with the torn screen of a movie theater: “Sentado en una de las primeras filas del cine, la tela que servía de pantalla le había mostrado una costura, un remiendo, la cicatriz que ahora lamía” (66). The connection between César and the movie screen alludes to Vladimir’s image of César as a replacement for Miranda, and consequently to the vexed relationship between past and present.

Scars in this novel strategically displace by using bodies to disrupt the clean substitutions desired by capitalism. In Contrabando de sombras, scars illustrate the tenuous division between past and present, underscoring the irrecoverable nature of that past, which is necessarily based on the fragility of the human body. Despite the chain of substitutions suggested by the novel, Miranda is irrevocably lost to Vladimir,

even as Vladimir searches desperately for a means of resurrecting him and therefore absolving himself of a sense of responsibility for the boy's death. Reacting to Vladimir's insistent appeals on César's behalf, Lula tells him that "aun cuando yo actuara en este caso y las cosas se solucionaran tal como quieres tú, aun cuando pudiera cambiar mi pasado y el de ese muchacho, me temo que el tuyo seguiría igual" (138). Miranda's death weighs on Vladimir as a sin he must expiate. Not unlike the way in which the reappearance of Renán's moccasins calls attention to material and economic exchanges, scars in this novel provide physical testimony to the processes of substitution that characterize history in this novel. In this way, they allow these processes to become visible. While in the theater, Vladimir fixates on a tear in the screen and the ways in which it disappears with the darkness of certain images, and then reappears as the sky or skin is projected onto it (41). He views this tear as a scar, which he reads as if it were Braille, "como si se tratara de un mensaje en relieve que debería entender, como escritura para ciegos, un subrayado" (108). He notes that a scar is, like an underlined passage in a book, "una marca para la memoria. Una marca, una advertencia" (75). Writing, with its links to materiality, offers the hope and the dangers of making real, but like scars and cadavers, it registers the physical evidence of something now absent. Vladimir knits together images of the past, "pedazos de gente perdida" (109), wanting to recreate his lover, but finding only the scars that mark his absence and the failed substitutes that could not replace him.

Throughout Contrabando de sombras, Vladimir searches for "el lugar más imposible," a phrase that comes from a conversation with Renán the night before he

died; for Renán, this was the cemetery. Vladimir first views the pantheon where he encounters César as the “lugar más imposible” because it permits the union between a living person and a spirit, in this case Miranda in César’s body (151). After their final sexual encounter, which takes place between the reverse of a movie screen and the back wall of the theater, Vladimir describes this impossible place as “uno donde hubieran coincidido ambos en igualdad de condiciones, el pasado” (151). In this non-place, behind the projection of a movie that covers the back wall with “una luz sucia, por sombras,” Vladimir and César find a space free from vigilance (150). The movie, which is projected continuously, takes place in the Pacific, and César’s body displays the film’s images. The waves break in silence as César plays among them, until he looks to Vladimir like “una boya flotante en un mar de sombras, una caja caída de algún barco, un ahogado” (150). César becomes Miranda, who committed suicide in a swimming pool, and as César disappears in the waves, Vladimir presses his face to the wall, discovering that “Ya era capaz de atravesar paredes, capaz de conversar con los espíritus. Movi6 sus labios del otro lado de la pared, pronunci6 palabras ininteligibles, convers6 con alguien” (150). Upon opening his eyes, Vladimir finds himself alone; his companion, “Cualquiera de los dos que hubiera sido, César o Miranda, había nadado hasta encontrar su libertad” (151). During this encounter, the contact between their bodies transgresses temporal boundaries, as well as those of language itself. Like the ghosts and the secret police referenced earlier, Vladimir reaches through time and space to his past.

For Vladimir, the “lugar más imposible” is contact with the temporal past without the vigilance imposed by the social, embodied nature of history. The role of the physical body in this process is contradictory, given that sexual contact facilitates his search even though the transcendence of history would obliterate his body. The novel insists on the centrality of the physical body to identity, history, and memory, despite the limitations it imposes and the dangers it creates. After César/Miranda has left, Vladimir recognizes this paradox, when, “como si no hubiese salido de su propio cuerpo, él atendió al recorrido que el disparo de leche hacía por el reverso de la pantalla” (150). Semen, like scars, cadavers, and language, in this example writes an irrecoverable absence. The lovers escape time by way of their bodies, but those same bodies reiterate the historical conditions that separated them. Miranda committed suicide because of the boarding school’s homophobic atmosphere, and Vladimir takes on the role of a spirit or, ironically, an agent of the secret police. It is the “lugar más imposible” because the lovers escape, momentarily, improbably, the bodies through which their lives, as well as Cuban history, are narrated. A few nights later, the dream returns to Vladimir, this time melding the encounter with César/Miranda with images of the Inquisition’s victims: “Los rostros de los condenados, irreconocibles tras la brea y las plumas, cruzaban el reverso de la pantalla de un cine de mala muerte. Un vehículo a ratos barca de la Inquisición y a ratos camión policial, llevaba a los condenados hasta la plaza donde arderían” (157). From this point forward, Vladimir recognizes that he will not be able to avoid the cemetery. Their bodies, which they cannot escape, condemn them to a history they cannot transcend.

Contrabando de sombras illustrates that to overlook corporeality is impossible as well as unethical. In this novel, history is told through bodies marked by ideas about what it means to be properly Cuban, especially in terms of sexuality and ideological commitment to the revolutionary project. Even as the transition from socialism to whatever might come next leaves its own scars on Cuban bodies, the bodies of the characters in this novel display the wounds of a past that predates and informs the revolutionary state. The novel suggests that capitalism, if it is indeed to return to Cuba, will not look like it does elsewhere. Economic necessity creates a mode of exchange based on transfer, rather than the substitutional logic described in Avelar's analysis of the postdictatorial Southern Cone. This pattern informs interpersonal relationships among the novel's characters, but it also describes their links to Cuban history. Scars, in this novel, trace the return of the past. The attention to bodies contests the way that Cuban history writes marginalized groups out of the national collectivity, thereby strategically displacing the processes of forgetting. History returns in material form, invading the bodies and dreams of the novel's characters and forcing them to live out the hopes and fears of the past in an eternal present.

Death, in each of these three cases, describes an embodied relationship between an individual and discourses of power, whether these take the shape of nationalism, history, or literary genre. In La paz de los sepulcros, corpses function as performed effigies that offer a site of struggle against representational authority. Both the state and the narrator utilize Navarro's corpse to buttress their portrayals of

Mexico, even as the text uses necrophilia to strategically displace the state's disembodied versions of history. The Cuban texts, in contrast, investigate the links between history as a discipline and the country's current reality. "Corazón de skitalietz" sets up a dialogue with nostalgic images of Cuba, especially those portrayed in cinema, and stages Veranda's death to reiterate the isolation and disembodiment such images produce. The text refuses to participate in the burial rituals that would claim her corpse, either for or against the revolution, instead strategically displacing it to a place outside of the narrative time and place and therefore beyond nostalgia. Contrabando de sombras deals with Cuban history, especially the ways in which that past has been alternately overlooked and commodified by the state. The text uses scars to trace the return of the past, as well as to strategically displace the disembodied substitutions generated by Cuba's emerging capitalism. Death and physical violence mark the profound losses suffered by the characters in these works, even as corpses register attempts to repair that absence. Rather than bringing bodies back to life, these texts resurrect cadavers as effigies that bear the scars of their passage through history. In this way, the novels and short story use them to guard against the forgetting, the nostalgia, and the disembodiments that characterize official histories in contemporary Cuba and Mexico.

## Conclusion

Embodiment, the Social Role of Art, and a Partial Answer to the Question,

“So, Why Are You Studying That?”

In a New York Times article on the links between evolution and art, Natalie Angier summarizes recent research on art’s possible biological origins. Citing the work of Ellen Dissanayake, Angier notes that, in contrast to contemporary Western ideas that view art as a realm entirely separated from that of “real life,” art has historically been a more communal activity, expressed through activities such as dances and religious festivals (1). In this view, art “did not arise to spotlight the few, but rather to summon the many to come join the parade [...] Through the harmonic magic of art, the relative weakness of the individual can be traded up for the strength of the hive, cohered into a social unit ready to take on the world” (2). In this view, then, art has the capacity to do something in the world, to re-draw social boundaries and perhaps to effect change. Given that they inhabit a world defined by the legacies of Cuban and Mexican revolutionary ideologies and by the increasing influence of mass media and culture, many of the artistic subjects in the texts studied here are leery of the more propagandistic tendencies of communal artistic expression. This anxiety provokes debates within the texts themselves on the nature of literary or artistic expression, on the forms it will take and the rules it will follow, as well as on who or what will be the arbiters of these norms. Taken as a whole, these novels, films, and performance pieces evoke the solitude, the violence, and the divisions of



the contemporary world, even as they express a tenuous faith in the ability of art to open up spaces for change.

A focus on the concepts of disembodiment and strategic displacement in these works from Mexico and Cuba reveals the relationships among bodies, identities, and representation. This emphasis highlights the ways in which performance artists, writers, and filmmakers use their craft to participate in the conversation about the embodied experience of identity constructs. In other words, this study showcases the social role of artistic expression. If the theoretical inclinations of cultural studies have brought to the field of literary criticism a healthy skepticism regarding canonicity and genre, they also beg the question of why we study literature at all. Disregarding for a moment the ethically and culturally charged debates about what counts as literature, literary criticism often seems hopelessly distant from the immediate practicality of, for example, medicine or political activism. Even to its practitioners, trained in the arcane codes of poetic tropes and armed with the latest theoretical terms, literary criticism can seem far removed from, say, the war in Iraq or even the repercussions of Fidel's illness and resignation or the PRI's electoral defeat. Art matters, however, because our social worlds are comprised of the stories we tell about the material objects, the abstractions of time and the realities of space, the hopes and fears that make up our daily lives, or what Kathleen Stewart terms the "ordinary" (1). As Tim Cresswell notes, storytelling likewise helps to make sense of our movements through the world (6). By focusing on artistic representations of the physical body, here I have used the tools of literary criticism to illuminate the

intersections of ideology, concepts of the self, and the embodied experiences that make up what we call daily life.

The focus on bodies bridges the divide between the theoretical and the practical. Bodies are irrevocably physical even as they give shape to the ideologies and belief systems that make meaning of their matter. The stories of post-revolutionary Mexican and Cuban societies have, in many senses, been told through the bodies that live them. This storytelling manifests historically specific cultural beliefs, from the disembodied images of women and indigenous groups early in the twentieth century to the strategically displaced depictions of experience in the novels, films, and performance pieces in this study. The specific social goals of the Cuban and Mexican revolutions—education, health care, agrarian reform—brought gender, class, and ethnicity to debates about national identity and the role of the state, although these categories of difference were addressed according to prescribed patterns. Mestizaje, for example, expressed an essentially national quality that made Mexico unique, even as the term “indio” remained an epithet aimed at those considered poor and uneducated. The multiple incarnations of the literary, cinematic prostitute Santa stand in for anxieties about the changing role of women in the wake of revolution and industrialization, while Octavio Paz’s El laberinto de la soledad (1950) describes social interactions in Mexican culture through the metaphor of physical penetration. Socialist Cuba in turn measured progress toward modernity with goals such as reducing racism, yet Afro-Cuban religious and cultural practices at times faced official restrictions. Miguel Barnet’s Biografía de un cimarrón (1966)

places the social goals of the Cuban revolution within a historical tradition of struggle for racial equality, and Sara Gómez's De cierta manera (1977) and Pastor Vega's Retrato de Teresa (1979) portray the revolution through the complexities of gender and class.

These historical examples nevertheless engage in disembodiment by putting corporeal imagery to work for generalizing, overarching concepts of nation and identity. Novels, films, and performance pieces such as those by Federico Campbell, Astrid Hadad, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Ena Lucía Portela, Abilio Estévez, Antonio José Ponte, and the others in my study counter this tendency by focusing explicitly and insistently on the embodied experience of these concepts. Rather than spurring their readers and viewers toward collective action—as was frequently the case with the social realist poster art previously popular with the Cuban state, for example—the artistic subjects in these texts underscore the contradictory effects of these constructs on their daily lives and their experience of Cuban and Mexican history and culture. The concept of strategic displacement gives us a vocabulary for talking about the ways in which abstract concepts of ideology, culture, gender, and class become real in the bodies and lives of these characters. Whereas disembodiment keeps bodies in the abstract realm of discourse, strategic displacement traces the effects of language on bodies and the interdependent relationship between artistic representation and the “real” world. Stewart describes a similar process as she explains how the public/private feelings she calls “ordinary affects” work “not through ‘meanings’ per se, but rather in the way that they pick up density and texture as they move through

bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds. Their significance lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible” (3). The emphasis by the subjects in the texts in this study on bodies and experience challenges disembodiment by showing, through art, how ideologies of culture, gender, and nationalism become real.

By depicting culture, language, and nationalism as embodied, the artistic subjects in the texts studied here emphasize the connection of art to their reality and to that of contemporary Cubans and Mexicans. Several of these works, such as Hadad’s performances (1990s to present) and Antonio José Ponte’s Contrabando de sombras (2002), deal directly with the way in which gender and sexuality are discussed in contemporary Cuba and Mexico and illuminate the gains to be had from an emphasis on bodies and experience. Hadad plays with the ways in which Mexican cultural discourse defines her visible female body as prostituted; as Debra Castillo points out, in Mexico, “Women who infringe upon the public space remain scandalous” (Easy Women 4). Hadad borrows from cultural and artistic imagery that is instantly recognizable as stereotypically Mexican: sombreros, Aztec deities, and the iconography of folk Catholicism. By grafting these collective images onto her very specific female body, she blurs the lines that divide public from private and art from reality. These disembodied images float in the ether of cultural consciousness, Hadad suggests, a nebulous presence that nevertheless affects how Mexicans perceive women, other Mexicans, and themselves. Similarly, Ponte’s novel refers to the dramatic instances in which sexuality intersects with art and life, as in the collective

memories of the colonial-era auto da fe that frame the narrator's contemporary fear of repercussions for writing against the government. Not unlike the way in which Hadad pulls from a communal store of images of lo mexicano, the narrator shares dreams of a collective Cuban past, scarred by homophobia and violence, with a group of men who gather in Havana's main cemetery. In contrast to the atemporal, disembodied images of revolutionary triumph, the novel argues, Cuban history needs bodies to become real. In Hadad's performances as in Ponte's novel, bodies tell a necessary story about the effects of abstract concepts on living subjects.

The attunement to the ways in which embodied subjects experience abstract concepts of culture and ideology, common to all of the texts studied here, suggests possibilities for how the concepts of disembodiment and strategic displacement might illuminate other kinds of stories. As in the meta-literary fiction of Portela's Cien botellas en una pared (2002), these texts ask readers and viewers to pay attention to the forms of representation, that is, to how the tale is told. These qualities are also prominent in Elena Poniatowska's account of women in the Mexican revolution, Soldaderas (1999). While films such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío's Guantanamera (1995) and novels such as Jorge Volpi's La paz de los sepulcros (1995) borrow from Cuban and Mexican history, Soldaderas blends literary and historical methodologies, including prose and visual images. Prefaced with an essay that analyzes depictions of the female fighters in art, literature, and popular culture, the text tells of the women who followed the Mexican revolutionary forces, tending to the soldiers' physical needs and sometimes donning male clothing to lead

armies. It includes a series of photographs of the soldaderas themselves, images that are evocative of, but very different from, the sorts of Adelita imagery that later became associated with the female soldiers and on which Hadad draws. In Federico Campbell's novella, Todo lo de las focas (1982, 1989) the narrator's interest in photography raises doubts about artistic authority and gendered, hierarchical patterns of watching. Poniatowska's text connects art to life by emphasizing the experiences of women during the chaos of war, as well as the effects of artistic representation on how female soldiers were perceived in Mexican society. The sorts of concerns that remain latent in the novella become explicit through the combination of prose descriptions and photographic images of the women later disembodied by the sorts of folkloric, nationalistic imagery collected and analyzed by Angela Villalba in Mexican Calendar Girls (2006). The concepts of disembodiment and strategic displacement draw attention to form and to experience, and Poniatowska's text suggests what this approach might look like when utilized to analyze the interactions of history, art, and society.

The concept of strategic displacement evokes another key feature of modern life and of contemporary Cuba and Mexico: that of movement, in the forms of travel, exile, migration, economic and cultural globalization, and border crossing. In Campbell's Todo lo de las focas, Tommy Lee Jones's The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (2005), and Ponte's "Corazón de skitalietz" (1998) the characters are defined in part by their movements—or lack thereof—across national boundaries, a characteristic linked to their experience of national and ethnic identities, as well as

political and economic instability. In the context of transnational movement, disembodiment is helpful in thinking about how private decisions—such as that to leave one’s country of origin—gain ideological currency. Even the terminology used to describe such travel is political: going into exile is not the same thing as immigrating, and Cubans and Mexicans transit markedly different bureaucratic paths to residence in the United States, even though their reasons for leaving are often similar. The language used to describe such travelers varies according to country and historical period, but frequently draws on disembodied images that minimize the stark circumstances that lead to the decision to move. In Cuba, for example, those who left were described as gusanos, traitorous worms who eat away at the collective solidarity necessary to create revolution, even as United States immigration policy grants these Cubans a status enjoyed by few other groups. Studying these kinds of movements through the concept of strategic displacement does not de-politicize them, but rather offers another way of conceiving the relevance of politics in the lives of subjects.

Bodies provide a link between art and life. They are in many senses profoundly artistic objects, the product of complex interactions between self and the environment that manifest themselves by way of clothing, posture, speech, and movement. In the texts in this study, artistic portrayals of physical bodies reveal insights about the complexities of the ways in which revolutionary ideology in each country affects the daily lives of citizens and, in turn, the effects of this process on the construction of various forms of identity. Critical attention to the way in which the narratives of revolutionary progress and disillusion are told through bodies thus

permits the emergence of other, more private stories. In contrast to the lofty goals of revolutionary art, exemplified by the Mexican muralists' desires to edify the masses and the Cuban state's deliberate internationalism in the realms of cultural production, military action, and political solidarity, the stories told in these texts are less concerned with changing the world through politics than with using art to explore the ways in which politics and ideology are lived on a daily basis. In these texts, then, art is used to invoke a different sort of community, one based on the careful attention to difference that comes from giving critical attention to physical bodies and embodiment. These artistic subjects demonstrate that art does indeed matter to everyday life and, by way of dialogue with dominant artistic and cultural discourses, provide a model for negotiating social agency.

At the same time, however, I share with the narrator of Todo lo de las focas a distinct frustration with the capacities of language to convey the relevance of bodies, their representations, and what this means to the lives of those depicted. The artistic subjects in these texts, be they writers, historians, or migrant storytellers, ask us to care about them and about the characters that people their fictional worlds. The stories they tell matter. They take as their backdrop the worst years of the Special Period, set against an arc of Cuban history that includes both revolutionary faith and disillusion, as well as Mexico's contentious relationship with the United States and with its own history, registering the effects of the way the PRI's long reign morphed into the right-leaning policies of recent presidents Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón. These artistic subjects make difficult decisions that, while they may be influenced by



such abstractions as political ideology, cannot be explained by recourse to conventional morality or facile cultural interpretations. They inhabit a world alternately explained by the clarity of Marxism, by the dispassionate practicality of neoliberalism, and by the transgressive hybridity of theorists such as Néstor García Canclini. Politics, economics, and culture combine into an amorphous substance with very real effects on the lives of these subjects. Their experience of the world is marked by discordance and a lack of logic, characteristics that show up in the abused and frequently absurd bodies in these texts.

The concepts of disembodiment and strategic displacement allow us to appreciate the complex ways in which subjects live the abstractions of culture, nation, and identity, but the concepts themselves often seem excessively theoretical. This is in part because this terminology belongs to the realm of academic discourse, a field that is often both disembodied and disembodiment. Performance studies offers one means of challenging this paradigm, as does Stewart's ficto-critical exploration of the experiences that make up our individual and collective sense of the ordinary. I argue, however, that we should also turn to the texts themselves. The artistic subjects in these texts provide examples of how to animate, call forth, kill off, describe, imagine, and write about bodies and their experiences using language that is by turns beautiful, embittered, sensual, caustic, and humorous, yet insistently resistant to the disembodiment images that have been bequeathed to these turn-of-the-millennium artists, writers, and filmmakers. We, as literary critics who so often write about

worlds distant from our own, would do well to emulate them as we negotiate the slippery relationship between representation and reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples from Mexican cinema include María Candelaria (1944, Emilio Fernández) and La negra Angustias (1950, Matilde Landeta), as well as the films associated with the cabaretera, or brothel, tradition. This tradition is discussed more fully in Chapter Two. In Cuba, examples include films such as Sergio Giral's El otro Francisco (1975). The specific connection of this tradition to the topic of race in Cuba is discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> As Kathleen Hayles notes, “the liberal subject possessed a body but was not usually represented as being a body. Only because the body is not identified with the self is it possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality, a claim that depends on erasing markers of bodily difference” (4-5, original). She views the current critical discussions of cybernetics as an opportunity to challenge the paradigm of the liberal, humanist subject and states that her vision for what she terms the “posthuman” is as an entity that “embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival” (5).

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Eugenides's novel Middlesex (2002) provides a literary example of Fausto-Sterling's arguments about the ways in which biological sex is determined by the complex interactions of science, culture, and history.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Taylor likewise studies performance as a means of re-thinking critical methodologies imbued with the power dynamics of textuality (27). She argues that performance studies legitimates alternate forms of knowledge transfer and that "Part of what performance and performance studies allow us to do, then, is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge" (26, original).

<sup>5</sup> Todo lo de las focas began life in print in 1978 in the Revista de la Universidad de México in 1978. It appeared as a novel in 1982, and was later re-published in 1989 in Tijuanaenses. In 1995, Debra Castillo published an English translation, "Everything About Seals," in the collection, Tijuana: Stories on the Border. The primary differences between the 1982 edition and later versions are organizational, with the first edition lacking distinct chapter divisions. The narrator's lover in the 1982 version is named Emily, however, while in later versions her name changes to Beverly. Castillo links Beverly's name to Beverly Hills and to an ambiguous desire for the United States (Easy Women 105), but she does not analyze the name change.

<sup>6</sup> Country singer Toby Keith's 2004 song, "Stays in Mexico," for example, details the dalliances of wayward travelers under the irresistible influence of tequila and Mexico's tropical exoticism. Steven Soderbergh's Traffic (2000), in contrast, capitalizes on gritty images of Tijuana to characterize a conflicted Mexican

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policeman (played by Benicio del Toro) and the corruption that surrounds the drug trade and official attempts to halt it.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Debra Castillo, María Gudelia Rangel, and Bonnie Delgado refer to the way in which the centrist rhetoric of Mexican nationalism has imagined Tijuana as “a whore of a city and a particularly loathsome blight on the national self-image” (401).

<sup>8</sup> Lomnitz argues that from approximately 1940 until the debt crisis of 1982, the Mexican state, under the PRI, sought modernization based on the model of import substitution industrialization, which depended upon inculcating a “revolutionary nationalism” that placed Mexico City at the center of national life (114).

<sup>9</sup> The Agua Caliente Casino and Hotel opened in Tijuana in 1928, partially in response to the measures of Prohibition then in effect in California (Castillo, Rangel, Delgado 402). Designed by architect Wayne McAllister, the Casino boasted gambling, drinking and horse racing, as well as spa, resort, and athletic facilities. It was popular with the Hollywood elite until Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas closed the casino in 1935, converting it into a state-run school. Elena Poniatowska states that the Casino gave work to the poorest inhabitants of Tijuana’s slums; Rita Hayworth began her career singing there (41).

<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the early twentieth century, when Latin American countries such as Argentina were at the vanguard of decriminalizing abortion (Htun 143), Htun states that, outside of Cuba, there have been few updates to Latin American abortion laws since the 1940s. In practice, upper- and middle-class women have access to safe abortions, while poor women seek care in dangerous, sub-standard conditions (6).

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For Htun, this duality explains in part the dearth of political motivation to change current abortion laws (6).

<sup>11</sup> Clark D'Lugo contends that narrative fragmentation in Mexican fiction serves a dual purpose: to counteract official, governmental discourse and as a technique with which to challenge literary conventions (3).

<sup>12</sup> The rest of Mexico places demands on Tijuana in the form of internal migration, as Pablo Vila argues in Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders. According to Vila, more than 58% of Tijuana's population comes from areas outside of the state of Baja California, with many people migrating from central and southern Mexico (17).

<sup>13</sup> Cárdenas nationalized Mexican oil reserves in 1938. Following the revolution, the Mexican government implemented a plan in which teachers from urban areas traveled to the countryside in order to educate rural students.

<sup>14</sup> Examples include novels such as Abilio Estévez's Los palacios distantes (2002) or Daína Chaviano's El hombre, la hembra y el hambre (1998), which are more explicit in their attention to these disjunctures; writers such as Antonio José Ponte, Karla Suárez, and Anna Lidia Vega Serova also emphasize this sort of rhetorical disconnection.

<sup>15</sup> Campuzano notes that "Bizarre characters of all sorts, their relationship to others, their social groups and spaces of selective marginality populate Ena Lucía Portela's narratives" (15).

<sup>16</sup> Both Bejel (189) and Campuzano (15) name lesbianism as among Portela's most frequent narrative themes. As an example, Bejel analyzes two of Portela's short

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stories, “Dos almas perdidas nadando en una pecera” (1990) and “Sombrío despertar del avestruz” (1997).

<sup>17</sup> I learned of the Miami Herald article in Coco Fusco’s analysis of prostitution in contemporary Cuba, “Hustling for Dollars: Jineteras in Cuba.” She cites the article as evidence of how latinos outside of Cuba have reacted to the increase of prostitution within Cuba. She links the Mexican women’s negative reactions to religion, class and race, stating that “the dancers’ brazen sexual behavior was luring many of the city’s wealthiest men away from their wives. The ladies of Merida took to the streets to protest—however sanctimoniously—the disintegration of the Mexican family at the hands of the Cuban mulatas” (142). Fusco distinguishes this sort of reaction from that of more liberal sectors, which tend to be more concerned with the exploitation that prostitution frequently entails.

<sup>18</sup> Doris Sommer’s analysis of nineteenth century Latin American literature as “national romances” provides one context for thinking about the connection between family honor, female virtue, and nationalism. In another example, Cuban slogans protesting the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (known by the acronyms, FTAA, in English, and ALCA in Spanish) proclaimed “No somos ALCAhuetes,” thereby linking economic and political sovereignty to the rhetoric of prostitution. Beatriz Flores Silva’s 2001 film En la puta vida portrays a Uruguayan woman who travels to Spain and works illegally as a prostitute. In addition to romantic conflicts, the film illustrates the ways in which prostitution networks are bound up with political and economic interactions.

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<sup>19</sup> In her arguments about the transnational sex trade, Brennan maintains that these patterns govern not only clients' desire but economic possibilities for the sex workers themselves. In this view, lighter-skinned exotic women are in higher demand and are therefore able to command better salaries and working conditions (34).

<sup>20</sup> Without agreeing with the charge, Fusco cites complaints by the exile community that Castro's government is pimping out its young people to raise tourist revenues (146). She also notes the use of the mulata as a national symbol in recent tourism campaigns (143).

<sup>21</sup> Although outside the scope of this study, an examination of the topic of male prostitution in Cuba and Mexico would offer additional insights into the ways that sexuality is linked to cultural identity.

<sup>22</sup> Kempadoo favors "empowering alternative definitions of sex work," alongside the deconstruction of the race, ethnic and gender hierarchies that organize sex work and discussions of the topic. She argues in practical terms that a new conceptualization of sex work "enables us to make links to international divisions of labor and to support broader working peoples' struggles for change" (86). Kempadoo analyzes sex work as part of the growing trend of women as "miniscule entrepreneurs" in occupations such as trading, street vending, and shopkeeping (87).

<sup>23</sup> The cited portion of this title comes from the title of Hadad's music CD. The phrase alludes to a song title, as well as to one of Hadad's better-known characters.

<sup>24</sup> Hadad's critical use of prostitution is in keeping with Elizabeth Grosz's definition of the body as "the cultural product" (23, original).

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<sup>25</sup> Debra Castillo makes a similar point regarding women and the public sphere in Mexico, arguing that, “Women who infringe upon the public space remain scandalous” (4).

<sup>26</sup> I attended two of Hadad’s live shows in July of 2004, first in Santiago, Spain, and later at the Forum in Barcelona; the appearance at the Forum was Hadad’s second of the summer at that venue.

<sup>27</sup> Cantinflas evidences the crossover between cultural forms, such as the teatro de carpa, and cinema, but he also demonstrates the marketing of cultural nostalgia. As King notes, Cantinflas was the official “logo” of the 1986 World Cup, held in Mexico; T-shirts, mugs and lighters were emblazoned with his image (50).

<sup>28</sup> In her essay, “And She Wears It Well: Feminist and Cultural Debates in the Work of Astrid Hadad,” Costantino uses film theory to discuss Hadad’s attempts to disrupt the “male gaze,” analyzing what she considers problematic aspects of Hadad’s performances.

<sup>29</sup> Based on Federico Gamboa’s 1903 novel Santa, director Antonio Moreno’s film follows the trajectory of a young peasant girl, tricked by a soldier into a sexual relationship, spurned by her family, and forced into prostitution. Wildly popular, the novel has inspired four cinematic versions (the first in 1918), as well as a telenovela.

<sup>30</sup> In considering Hadad’s negotiation of popular and high art traditions, it is worth noting that she has also acted in commercial Mexican cinema (Solo con tu pareja) and various telenovelas (Holy Terrors 189).



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<sup>31</sup> The Virgin of Guadalupe is closely tied to Mexican religious, cultural, and political identity. Her apparition in 1531 helped consolidate Spanish religious, and therefore political, authority in the region, and many revolutionaries, reformers and politicians have since used her image. While the Catholic Church legitimizes the Virgin of Guadalupe, her extra-institutional appeal is equally powerful. Devotion to her likewise cuts a wide demographic swath.

<sup>32</sup> According to Costantino, national television in Mexico is closely linked to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Mexico's ruling party until Vicente Fox's election in 2000. She states that the PRI has a legal monopoly on the colors of the flag, preventing any other party from using them (407). Fox's party, PAN, uses white and blue. During the 1994 presidential elections opposition groups, including the rebels in Chiapas, called for the "release" of the flag to all Mexicans (407).

<sup>33</sup> A Russian immigrant to Mexico, Boytler was active in the Mexican film industry from the 1920s until the 1940s.

<sup>34</sup> The Virgencita... album liner credits Manuel Esperón with the song, "La mujer del puerto." A similar version of this song is known by the title, "Vendo placer," and is associated with the film La mujer del puerto.

<sup>35</sup> The term jinetero/a is somewhat ambiguous. In literal translation, it means "jockey," but is used to describe various types of hustling, from providing tours and information to tourists in exchange for money to engaging in sex work.

<sup>36</sup> Fusco states that contemporary Cuban sex workers frequently expect their clients, or pepes, to provide for them in a way that the paternalistic state no longer can (142).

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She argues that these Cubans are “looking for dollars, a good time, and, very often, a ticket out of the country” (142).

<sup>37</sup> Brennan bases this term on Arjun Appadurai’s terminology of landscapes that function as “building blocks” of “imagined worlds” (15). She uses the term to refer to “both a new kind of global sexual landscape and the sites within it” (15), adding that “sex-for-sale is one more dimension of global cultural flows” (16).

<sup>38</sup> This use of “traditional” Cuban culture provides a counterpoint to previous uses the revolution has made of popular culture. In the 1960s, for example, the government attempted to promote and to elevate the popular culture—in opposition to mass culture—as a means of furthering the revolutionary project.

<sup>39</sup> Fusco notes a more relaxed, permissive attitude toward sex among Cubans, attributing it to “More than thirty years of free birth control, sex education, co-ed boarding schools and a social system that reduced parental control” (144).

<sup>40</sup> The “unspoken revolt” referenced by Fusco appears as a consistent thematic subtext in Cuban fiction of the Special Period, as characters frequently abandon (or are forced out of) the official labor sector, the education system, and often their homes. This contrasts markedly with the prominence of labor issues in earlier Cuban cultural production, evident in films such as Pastor Vega’s *Retrato de Teresa* (1979). Not unlike Victorio and Salma in *Los palacios distantes*, in Antonio José Ponte’s short story, “Corazón de Skitalietz” (1998), the protagonist leaves his position as a historian, while the narrator of Karla Suárez’s novel *Silencios* (1999), isolates herself from both school and work. In addition to registering the economic difficulties of the

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Special Period, this rejection of formal economic activity resonates with Halberstam's notion of queer time and space. No longer part of the socialist pact, these characters challenge revolutionary models of productivity and contribution to society's future.

<sup>41</sup> In Mexico, La Malinche variously embodies histories of violent conquest, colonial dominance, and the creative engendering of a uniquely Mexican "race," while José Vasconcelos elaborated a unifying mestizaje in his La raza cósmica (1925). In Cuba, Fernando Ortiz's work shifts from, as Miller points out, "mestizaje as a result of a biological genealogy to transculturation as the result of the specific local economy" (16). In Calibán (1971), Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar uses mestizaje to distinguish Latin America—in the context of the 1959 revolution—from Europe and the United States.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Julian Smith, in his study of thematic, financing, and production trends in the Mexican film industry, discusses the manner in which the state-financed model of post-revolutionary Mexican cinema has, since the Salinas administration, given way to a system based in large part upon private investment (394).

<sup>43</sup> Baer and Long (161) and Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz (41) discuss the cultural significance of the characters' names. Tenoch is an Aztec name, chosen by his parents, the narrator tells us, in a rare fit of nationalism, while Julio's surname recalls revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata, as well as the contemporary movement that bears his name. Luisa's surname and Spanish ethnicity refer to the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, Hernán Cortés.

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<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the emphasis on artistic freedom, Smith notes potential irony in Vergara's presence in the film: viewed from behind, he plays the unknown, yet-to-be-elected Mexican president at the wedding scene where Julio and Tenoch meet Luisa (397).

<sup>45</sup> See Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz, Paul Julian Smith, Hester Baer and Ryan Long.

<sup>46</sup> These exchanges suggest the Mexican linguistic practice known as albur. De la Mora links it to the popular classes and argues that it is a gendered discourse, often involving “sexual puns, ‘indecent’ jokes, and activities coded as male” (16).

<sup>47</sup> She argues that the 1994 Zapatista uprising punctured the rhetoric and programs of the Salinas administration, revealing a “profound ambivalence in the body politic” (228).

<sup>48</sup> In Unmarked, Phelan takes issue with the idea that the increased representational visibility of marginal groups automatically translates into greater political, cultural, or social clout. Instead, she argues that power often reserves invisibility for itself and instead seeks a means of rethinking the benefits of remaining unseen.

<sup>49</sup> Arriaga wrote screenplays for Amores perros (2000), 21 Grams (2003), and Babel (2006), in addition to the novels El búfalo de la noche (1999), Un dulce olor a muerte (1994), and Escuadrón guillotina (1991); El búfalo de la noche was made into a Spanish-language film of the same name, directed by Jorge Hernández Aldana and released in 2006. Arriaga wrote Three Burials in Spanish and had it translated to English; according to Yon Motskin, Jones adjusted the script to make it more “Texan” (28).

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<sup>50</sup> Noriega's "politics of denial" (64) recalls the historical event on which Three Burials is loosely based. In 1997, drug agents, working with the Border Patrol, shot Ezequial Hernández, an eighteen-year-old Mexican-American, who was tending sheep; the agents were never tried for the murder (3). Casey Peek's documentary, New World Border (2001), discusses this event in the context of increased violence along the border as a result of Operation Gatekeeper's emphasis on drug control and enforcement.

<sup>51</sup> This echoes Arriaga's statement that his films and novels are obsessed with "The weight of the dead and the living. [...] The consequences of violence. And the possibility of every man to find meaning to life and redemption" (Motskin 28).

<sup>52</sup> De la Fuente states that in the 1920s Cuba was reconfigured as a "mulatto," "mestizo" nation, and that it was in the "area of 'culture' that Afro-Cubans' contribution to national life was acknowledged, researched, and publicized in mainstream intellectual circles as part of national folklore" (3).

<sup>53</sup> In the context of my arguments regarding the ways in which Guantanamera and Trilogía use popular culture to stake out a space of resistance to authoritative uses of Cuban culture, it is significant that Mañach's essay, first published in 1928, deals with the uses of culture to negotiate conflict: he argues that the disorderly spirit of choteo challenges false or rigid authority.

<sup>54</sup> Guantanamera, however, initially prompted Castro's disapproval, and he cited it as an example of films that seek international appeal by criticizing the revolution (Chanan 1-2). Alea died of cancer shortly after the film's Havana opening (477-78).

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He also directed La muerte de un burócrata (1966), Memorias del subdesarrollo (1968), Hasta cierto punto (1983), and, with Tabío, Fresa y chocolate (1994).

<sup>55</sup> This focus is evident in Sergio Giral's El otro Francisco (1975), Gutiérrez Alea's La última cena (1976), as well as Miguel Barnet's Biografía de un cimarrón (1968).

<sup>56</sup> De la Fuente states that, when Maceo's remains were exhumed in September 1899, his skull underwent scientific analysis (38). A subsequent study pronounced that, "although a mulatto, Maceo was closer to the white racial type than to the black" (39).

<sup>57</sup> In her analysis of Trilogía's reception by the Cuban literary community, the Cuban government, and the exile community, de Ferrari states that Gutiérrez's work circulates in Cuba within relatively limited parameters and that "Both the [Cuban] government and the official opposition are more willing to manipulate the text than to judge it aesthetically, let alone determine the text's complex relation to reality" (37).

<sup>58</sup> In addition to Trilogía, Ena Lucía Portela's Cien botellas en una pared exposes the contradictions of the purported elimination of racism from contemporary Cuba.

<sup>59</sup> In Cuban Palimpsests, José Quiroga describes the actions of the Cuban state in the 1990s as "memorialization," an engagement with national memory that permits managed criticism of the past in order to "buy time" in the present.

<sup>60</sup> Idelber Avelar, drawing on the work of John Beverly, situates the allegorical end of the literary boom with the death of Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973 (13).

<sup>61</sup> Jorge Volpi Escalante is a novelist and essayist whose writings include the novels En busca de Klingsor (1999, the English translation was published in 2002 as In

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Search of Klingsor); El fin de la locura (2004); No será la tierra (2006); and the essay La imaginación y el poder: Una historia intelectual del 1968 (1998), among others.

La paz de los sepulcros was re-published by Seix-Barral 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Braham traces the development of the Spanish and Latin American neopoliciaco as based loosely on the North American hard-boiled genre. For Braham, the hard-boiled detective novel, or novela negra, “proclaims a dystopian view of the modern city in which chaos, alienation, and discord prevail” (xiii). The hard-boiled genre portrays capitalism’s injustices, while the neopoliciaco tends toward more explicit, often leftist, criticism, creating an urban, atmospheric scene that highlights violent irrationality (xiii).

<sup>63</sup> Braham argues that a characteristic of the Mexican neopoliciaco is the criticism of the sensationalist nota roja, particularly regarding the commodification of crime (68).

<sup>64</sup> Posada was mestizo and worked for the penny press, two traits seen as giving him the popular cachet coveted by artists in the post-revolutionary period (Lomnitz 48).

<sup>65</sup> In his article, “La segunda conspiración,” Volpi attributes his knowledge of this quote from Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia to fellow Mexican author Federico Campbell (47).

<sup>66</sup> Urroz explains that an earlier version of La paz de los sepulcros opened with the murder of a presidential candidate; after Colosio’s murder, Volpi had to re-think his novel to avoid having it be, as Urroz puts it, “un mero panfleto amarillista, de ocasión” (147).

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<sup>67</sup> Analyzing the Argentine context, Josefina Ludmer argues in El cuerpo del delito. Un manual that concepts of “crimes” mark the boundaries between culture and not-culture, as well as between subjects and various facets of literature and culture (14).

<sup>68</sup> The novel’s epigraphs, from Martín Luis Guzmán and Michel Foucault, allude to the potential of darkness and disorder as tools of understanding.

<sup>69</sup> The passage echoes Braham’s description of “internal orientalism” in Spanish American literature, by which she refers to the ways in which dominant discourse criticizes models of modernity even as it enjoys their benefits (16).

<sup>70</sup> In the process Roach describes as surrogation, members of a community repair loss by fitting replacements into the “actual or perceived vacancies” occasioned by deaths, departures, and absences (2).

<sup>71</sup> Braham describes the nationalist display of “mestizo destiny” in institutions like the Museo Nacional de Antropología as “embalming” (67), and Vicki Goldberg references the practice as a nineteenth-century device for dressing up death (35).

<sup>72</sup> In his discussion of Mexican artist Teresa Margolles and her performance group SEMEFO, which creates grisly art out of the literal remains of those claimed by violence, Cuauhtémoc Medina analyzes the Mexican art world through the evolution of their work. He cites an interest in “provoking local debates around the critique (or satire) of the state-controlled national narratives [and] exploring methodologies that would challenge the legitimacy of traditional media,” as well as the failure their art to conform to the multiculturalism of the early 1990s, particularly the assumption that the “periphery was to produce a hybrid brand of post-modern culture resulting from



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the adjustment of vernacular and ‘non-Western traditions’ to mainstream practices” (320-321).

<sup>73</sup> Santillán is beheaded at the murder scene, and his head placed on a stake in the cemetery where Navarro is later interred.

<sup>74</sup> For example, films such as Alejandro González Iñárritu’s Amores perros (2000) or Alfonso Cuarón’s Y tu mamá también (2001).

<sup>75</sup> The references to film in the two Ponte texts thus index the cultural context. Cinema has been highly influential in socialist Cuba; the national film institute was, in fact, one of the first governmental organizations established by the revolutionary government. Cuban filmmakers and film theorists were influential in New Latin American Cinema, and co-productions and the Havana Film Festival currently bolster the tourism industry and foster cultural dialogue.

<sup>76</sup> Born in Matanzas and trained as an engineer, Antonio José Ponte has written poetry, short story collections, essays, screenplays and a novel (“Interview”).

<sup>77</sup> Quiroga defines memorialization as the management of the past, a “mediated openness” on the part of the revolutionary government (4).

<sup>78</sup> Quiroga refers in passing to catalepsy, a medical condition in which the body is rigidly unresponsive to external stimuli, to the point of appearing dead (xviii). He alludes to it as part of the animosity of the Miami Cuban community toward Fidel Castro, as when a radio host wished this condition upon the Cuban leader. Given the topic of this chapter, however, it is an apt description of Cuba in the 1990s.

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<sup>79</sup> Fornet also argues that even to accept the events since 1959 as revolution, and not mere power play, bespeaks ideological commitment; for this reason, he notes, many Miami Cubans speak only of “Castro” and never of the “Revolution” (94).

<sup>80</sup> In both, Jorge Perugorría plays a character who seduces by way of Cuban cultural artifacts. In Aragón’s film, Perugorría’s character is a Cuban living in Spain. He leads the picaresque life of an immigrant surviving in the interstices of global culture, using old photographs and glorified tales of revolutionary Cuba to earn a living sleeping with Spanish women. He plays the role of Latin lover, augmented by the nostalgic mystique of a revolutionary Cuba that no longer exists. This performance is set alongside more literal rehearsals of Cuban identity, as his Cuban love interest appears in a play based upon the tragic literary figure of Cecilia Valdés. The play undergoes multiple revisions to suit the tastes of a Spanish public, finally becoming a disembodied, folkloric version of the original. In *Fresa y chocolate*, Diego, a gay aesthete, tries to seduce David, a young communist militant, with a sumptuous display of Cuban literary and cultural artifacts, many of them prohibited or suppressed by the revolutionary state. Sexuality complicates David’s desire for the artifacts of a Cuban culture previously obscured to him. David makes his own contributions to Diego’s pantheon of Cuban culture when he includes revolutionary mementos. By aligning homosexual desire with an alternate history of Cuban culture, the film questions the role of art in a revolution its makers viewed as necessarily virile. Often billed as an apology for the problematic stance of the state toward gays, the film was

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popular with Cuban audiences because it rearticulated culture, history, and identity into a more inclusive vision of Cuban society (Fernandes 58).

<sup>81</sup> Escorpión comments on Veranda's name, stating that it refers to "un sitio desde donde mirar," to which she replies, "Es lo que he hecho durante muchos años" (25).

<sup>82</sup> "Miranda" was the boy's surname; the school identified the students by their last names, and neither the narrator nor Vladimir reveal Miranda's first name to the reader.

<sup>83</sup> This narrative absence contrasts with the realismo sucio of writers such as Zoé Valdés or Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, who deal more explicitly with the problems of the Special Period and their effects on physical bodies.

<sup>84</sup> Another example of this sort of exchange is the film Se permuta (Juan Carlos Tabío, 1984), which details the convoluted manner in which Cubans, facing restrictions on the sale of property, swap homes to accommodate changes in lifestyle or family needs.

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