

Theater in revolution (1959-2010)

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HERE IS an art which by focusing, for its very nature, on the tensions and contradictions between individuals and society, absorbs the major conflicts of the human being in search of happiness amidst the contingencies of reality. This art is the theater, or rather the *theaters*, which through various languages and stylistic options move around stages and other spaces in a constant dialogue with a country's cultural, social and political life. The development of Cuban drama over the last five decades coincides with the period when, after the triumph of the Revolution, Cuban society was engaged in a complex process of learning and building a new order. Thus, dramatic creation is related, one way or another, to the splendor, bumbles and setbacks of revolutionary life. Cuban drama is not a complacent creation, but an art form that, not without problems and with an acute critical perspective enables us, Cubans, to reflect about who we are and how we live.

As it is impossible to summarize the complexity of this path in such limited space, I will attempt to provide only a minimal description of the features, trends and names of the Island's theater that enable outlining its future and, in a way, understanding the present. I also suggest other readings, not always convergent but useful for an interaction that allows a more integral grasp.¹

The theater was a full beneficiary of the fundamental changes that the Cuban Revolution brought to culture, converted into a priority of its social policy and as a right of the people. In 1966 Virgilio Piñera complained about the pitiable condition of the playwright before 1959,² who was isolated, underperformed, played to a scarce audience and enjoyed little recognition; authors who had only been able to prove their daring compositional procedures to recreate the outrageous Cuban reality. The changing society boosted the development of the theater by implementing a system of artistic education with professional training in various specialties of the performing arts; i.e., by creating, in each province, stable collectives of drama and children's theater subsidized by the State. And which by recognizing the need of the public for these forms of expression, along with the campaign that eradicated illiteracy, spurred a broad movement of amateur theater in student and working sectors, both urban and rural, stimulated by trained young art instructors such as the brigades of literacy teachers, in response to Fidel Castro's appeals.

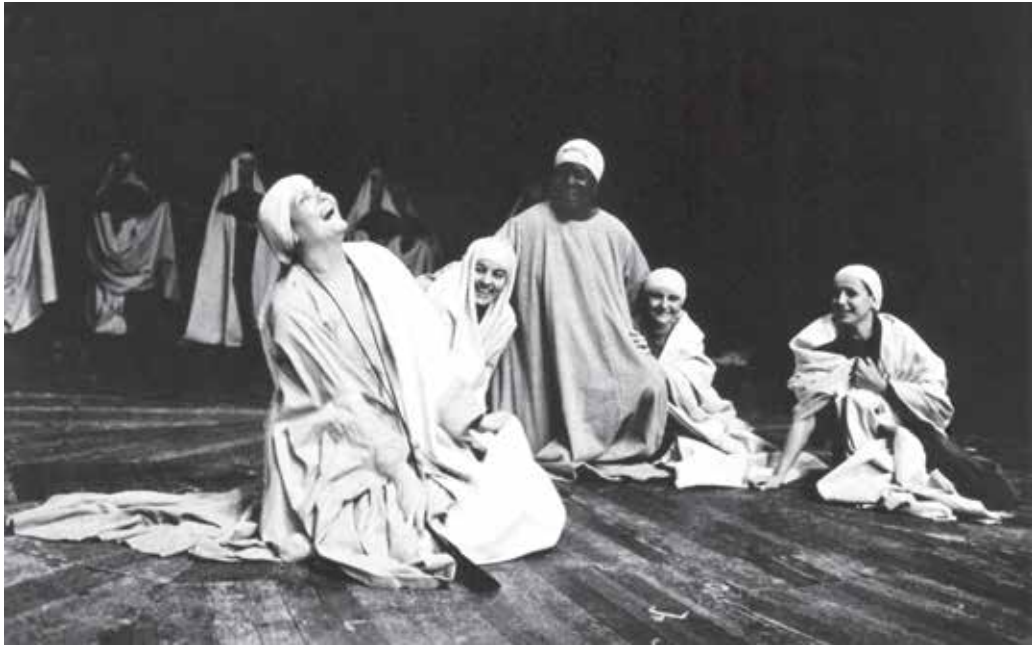


Photo: Courtesy of the author

The House of Bernarda Alba, by *Federico García Lorca*, directed by *Berta Martínez*, *Estúdio Theater* (1982).

As a direct consequence of the exercise of a democratic and participatory cultural policy, the 1960s revealed a stunning number of playwrights who succeeded in staging their creations. To the plays by Virgilio Piñera, Rolando Ferrer, Carlos Felipe, Paco Alfonso, Antón Arrufat, Fermín Borges, Eduardo Manet, among others, one should add those by Abelardo Estorino, Pepe Triana, Manuel Reguera Saumell and Nicolás Dorr. And the newly founded National Theatre organized a Playwriting Seminar which, in the hands of outstanding creators (such as the Argentine Osvaldo Dragún and the Mexican Luisa Josefina Hernández) produced authors like José Ramón Brene, Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, Ignacio Gutiérrez, Jesús Gregorio, Gerardo Fullea León, José Milián, Maité Vera, René Fernández, Pepe Santos and others who, together with the aforementioned authors, gave a new meaning to themes and conflicts.

Some commitments to an art theater undertaken since “La Cueva”, Adad, the University Theatre, Prometheus and Nuestro Tiempo Society, among many heroic efforts, finally found a path to fulfillment. The coexistence of realism with absurdity inherited from 1959 focused especially on the family, not only fed on works that opened up their spectrum, but gradually incorporated tensions between old and new values and critically analyzed social, racial and gender prejudices, which are out of tune with the new life. In parallel, new directors emerged, who tested the new techniques in their creative discourses. A singular moment was that of *Estúdio Theater*, founded in 1958 by Vicente and Raquel Revuelta “to analyze our environmental, cultural and social conditions to select plays for their message of human interest and to perfect our performance

technique until we can achieve an ensemble of the finest artistic quality...”. The group produced important directors besides Revuelta, a great actor and master who introduced in Cuba the theories of Stanislavski and Brecht – whose plays he was the first to stage with a correct reappropriation perspective – as well of Grotowski and the Living Theatre. With its eclectic repertoire and artistic rigour, the group served as a reference for new groups.

Photo: Courtesy of the author



María Antonia, by Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, directed by Roberto Blanco, Taller Dramático y Conjunto Folklórico Nacional (1967).

The 1960s was marked by the staging of *Aire frío*, by Virgilio Piñera, and Felipe’s *Réquiem por Yarini*. It was also marked by the premiere of plays such as José Ramón Brene’s *Santa Camila de La Habana Vieja*, a story about the tensions surrounding the social inclusion of an outlaw, which oscillates between religiosity and social commitment (at that moment understood as opposites); Aberlardo Estorino’s *La casa vieja*, about the contradictions between the old bourgeois morality and the morality that emancipates; Eugenio Hernández Espinosa’s *María Antonia*, a daring tragedy in which a humble black and transgressive woman has an independent view before the world (still during the media-oriented, racist and classist Republic) that destroys her; *Contigo pan y cebolla* and *El premio flaco*, by Héctor Quintero, a fortunate combination of costume and grotesque melodrama to examine the recent past. Antón Arrufat staged *El vivo al pollo* and *Todos los domingos*, taking a quality leap compared to his previous work; the young Nicolás Dorr debuted with *Las pericas* and a personal signature that combines farce, absurdity and dark humor; and José Triana rewrote a classic from the manor environment with *Medea en el espejo* and *La noche de los*

asesinos, which received the Casa de las Americas Award in 1965. In 1966, the work of Vicente Revuelta received the El Gallo de la Habana Award and was acclaimed on stages worldwide.

As a continuation of the repertoire of the 1950s, in small rooms the public enjoyed plays by Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Lorca, Pirandello, Williams, Chekhov, Ionesco, Sartre, Mishima, in tune with the universal vocation in which the revolutionary cultural policy is inserted. There was also a large number of Latin American and Caribbean plays, especially due to the efforts of Casa de las Americas and its Latin American Theater Festivals (1961-1966). The stage was shared by Latin American directors attracted by the changes like Ugo Ulive, Adolfo Gutkin, Néstor Raimondi, Isabel Herrera, and Alberto Panello. Those were years of arduous ideological confrontation and great mobility. As the Revolution became increasingly radical by proclaiming its socialist character and nationalizing the playhouses, some of them began to leave the country.

Decades later, a growing feeling of dissatisfaction with the gap between the bustling social life and the limited reach of the theater led some artists to choose new paths. The First National Theater Seminar, convened in late 1967 to discuss the role and situation of the theater, gives rise to the establishment of: the Third World Theater, with an overtly political profile; Los Doce [The Twelve] group, created by Vicente Revuelta as a laboratory for Grotowskian experimentation; and the Escambray Theater, founded by Sergio Corrieri in the mountains, in the heart of the Island, to provide a stage for a new audience that spoke of their contradictions through new languages. The Centro Dramático de Oriente became the Cabildo Teatral Santiago and rescued a local popular form of expression, the theater of relations, to discuss history and the present. While the Third World Theater and Los Doce group were short-lived, the Escambray Theatre established itself - not without contradictions - in line with the new theater movement that grew in those years in Latin America, and in the next decade other groups followed that path.

When as a result of artistic development the theater experimented with absurdity and ritual (with plays by José Milián, Pepe Santos, Tomás González and others), and against the grain of Ernesto Che Guevara's warning about dogmatism, an intense ideological confrontation imposed on the cultural policy paths that distrusted unrealistic routes. As a result of the enforcement of the theses approved by the Congress of Education and Culture in 1971, the theater movement endured dogmatic measures that were strange to the artistic creation and unaware of core cultural processes and, in the name of an alleged revolutionary purity segregated numerous authors for personal reasons related to sexuality and morality (understood in bourgeois canons). Professionals were taken away from their areas of expertise to do anonymous work, thus staining the dialogue between artists, institutions and the State.



Medea Sueña Corinto, playwright and direction by Abelardo Estorino, Estudio Theater (2008).



Photo: Courtesy of the author

De cómo Santiago Apóstol puso los pies en la tierra, by Raúl Pomares, a collective creation by *Conjunto Dramático de Oriente* (1977).

Plays containing political statements were also encouraged. The critical condition of the revolutionary art and “conflicting” or ambiguous works (what was and what was not art) was questioned, causing performances to be postponed due to censorship or self-censorship and authors to be engaged in low profile creations. However, despite everything, events of interest coexisted in the theater, such as: *Galileo Galilei*, by Vicente Revuelta; the Studio Theatre, a bastion capable of defending its line thanks to the prestige of its leaders; *La vitrina*, staged by the Escambray Theater, which proposed a farcical language and the recovery of popular forms of expression to criticize entrenched attitudes in the ways of life of peasants who, for their individualistic attitude fettered socialization of the land and agricultural production; *Los profanadores*, by Gerardo Fullea León, with the Rita Montaner Group, which portrayed the real blame for the eight medical students shot to death in 1871 by the Spanish colonial power for a false crime, and was included in the line of historical quest around intellectual names, introduced by Estorino with *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de Don José Jacinto Milanés*, a play about the contradictions of the great antislavery poet of the nineteenth century.³ The Bertolt Brecht Political Theatre, whose mission was to spread the dramaturgy of socialist countries, premiered plays staged by guest and its own directors such as *El Carrillón del Kremlin*, which has Lenin as its protagonist; or Brecht’s *La panadería* [The Bakery];

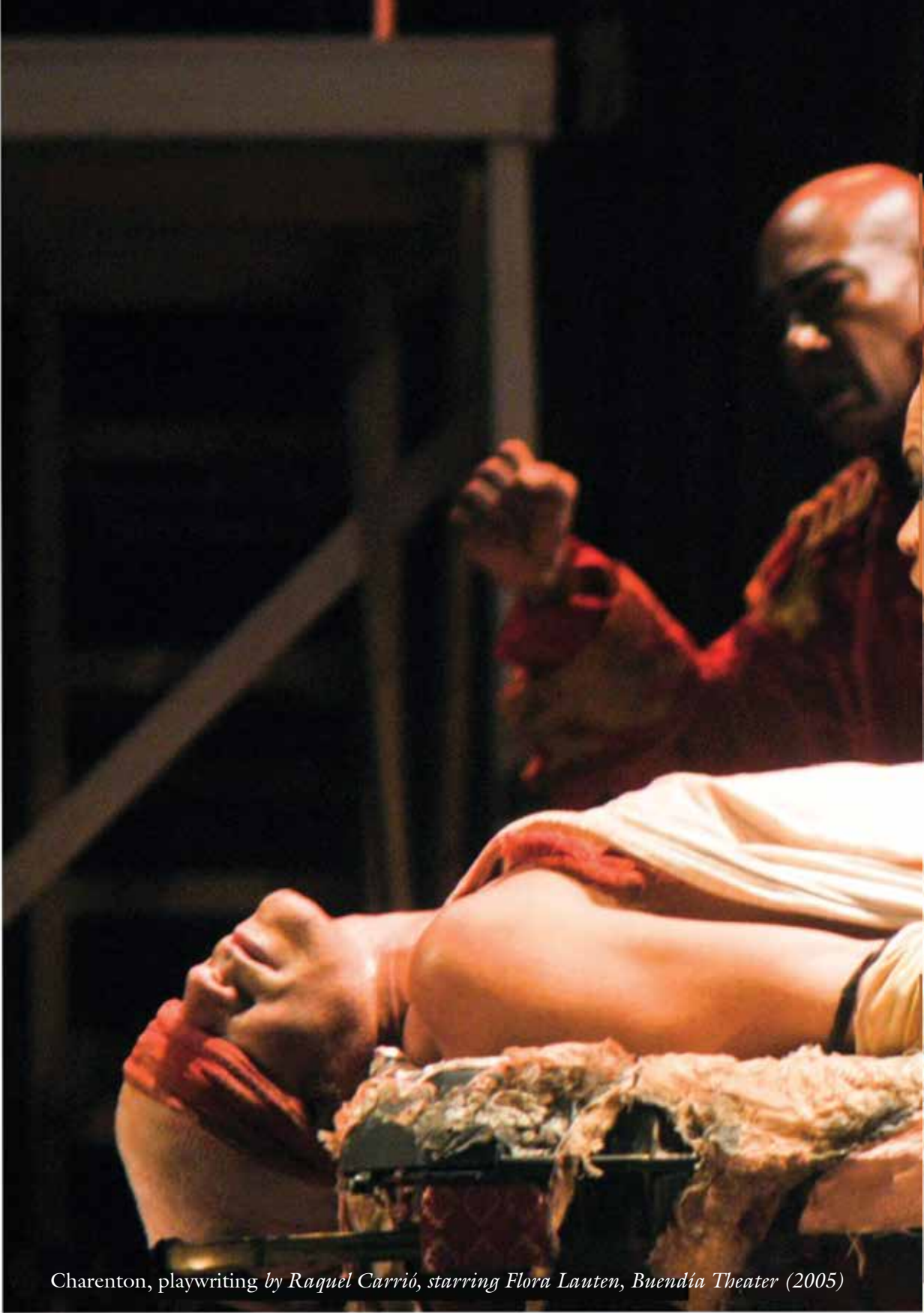


Morir del cuento, *playwriting and direction by Abelardo Estorino, Estudio Theater (1983)*.

all works that share values that associate the revolutionary ideology with artistic quality. And Armando Suárez del Villar continued his rescue of nineteenth century Cuban classics.

The creation of the Ministry of Culture in 1976 to replace the National Council of Culture - in which a group of employees had led the unfortunate process that Ambrosio Fornet called the “gray quinquennium” - was the State’s response to correct mistakes, re-establish the artists affected and recover them to do their work; a process that gradually yielded positive results, but was incapable of healing all the wounds. Many artists resumed their creation, but their poetics revealed a lag or a clear deterioration, which only time and effort will save them from.

The Theatre Festival of Havana, created in January 1980, displayed a scenario that was recovering its balance, and only once with a competitive nature boasted the best of a wide range of options: Roberto Blanco with *Cecilia Valdés* revitalized a classic of Cuban culture and of the lyric genre, of strong tradition, with the prospect of more fully exploring its dramatic potential, and in *Yerma* he brought together actors and dancers from the National Dance of Cuba, in a remarkable disciplinary integration. Berta Martínez and Estúdio Theatre with *Bodas de sangre* performed Garcia Lorca from a Brechtian perspective, and with a refined staging questioned the social nature of contradictions. Mario Balmaseda and the Bertolt Brecht Political Theater, with *Andoba*, combined the moral and social debate of an outlaw with the search for an expressive language capable of communicating with broad sectors of the public. And Elio Martín and the



Charenton, playwriting by Raquel Carrió, starring Flora Lauten, Buendía Theater (2005)



Escambray Theater, with Albio Paz's *La vitrina*, chose humor and absurdity to lash out at residues of tradition that undermine the aspirations of a new morality.

Individual names and groups established expressive tendencies in a promising scenario, in which plural searches converged. The polarity between the new theater and the lounge theater – a defensive mechanism of tradition nurtured by the institutional enthusiasm against the new theater – was gradually converted into a natural and reciprocal assimilation of meaningful themes and procedures.

In drama, an experimental text transgressed the realistic linear discourse: Abelard Estornino's *Morir del cuento*, “a romance to be performed,” dove deep in its mission to seek the truth. The questions about the causes for the suicide of a young man reveal family tensions that reflect the conflicts of a classist society. *Odebi, el cazador*, by Eugenio Hernández Espinosa exalts man's right and need to discover his identity. *Los hijos*, by Lázaro Rodríguez, gave enriched continuity to the conflicts of the peasants from the viewpoint of a generation that opts for a personal development that involves abandoning the land. *La verdadera culpa de Juan Clemente Zenea*, by Abilio Estévez, chose another antislavery poet to analyze its ethical conduct. *Galápagos*, by Salvador Lemis, talks to children about ecology and destruction, without paternalism. *Weekend en Bahía*, by Alberto Pedro, discussed the Island-exile separation through the reunion and confrontation of a couple of old lovers. And *Timeball*, by Joel Cano, reinterpreted the national history and some stereotypes through the audacity of a playful and random structure.

Plays by new authors on themes related to youth paved the way for a new morality, and some of them, imperfect, after the mark of marginal conducts, display social signs that led the works of young writers in the 1990s to mobilize the ethical debate. An experienced author like Eugenio Hernández Espinosa warned, with *Calixta Comité*, about certain crises of values by choosing a protagonist who oscillates, in an almost criminal way, between revolutionary intransigence and maternal feelings. The Escambray Theater with Rafael González's *Molinos de viento*, directed by Elio Martín, denounces the practice of academic fraud before it became a problem accepted by educational authorities, and brings out double moral standards that affect other spheres of society, while combining audacity with farce and critical realism in the moral sphere.

The 1980s was laden with revolutionary utopia and the theater experienced another explosion of authors and plays full of affirmative energy and committed to the historical process. The discourses of the time reflect, in a deliberate and even emergent way, problems that were the subject of discussion in the immediate reality (in the case of culture, the discussion between popular versus populist), with works that projected the transforming action of the theater, understanding it also as a vehicle of propaganda. This gave the works a triumphant tone and a rhetoric that would lead, at the end of the decade, to a rupture in

favor of more metaphorical and elliptical *mise en scène*, more closely linked to the image and its polysemy.

In those years, events and formulas of promotion and confrontation were systematized by the institutions; new spaces were opened; theater editions increased and *Tablas* magazine was founded to promote and rank the national theater through a critical exercise. Communication with the audience also increased, thus creating a large and heterogeneous public, mostly young. Exchange with the world also intensified significantly.

In turn, symptoms of creative stagnation emerged - not by chance coinciding with symptoms of exhaustion of the social development model -, expressed in the slower pace of productions and their variable quality as well as in the dissatisfaction of many vis-à-vis the inertia that affected the work of most of the groups due to the evolution of interests and artistic lines that remained attached to rigid forms of organization.

The young people graduating from the Higher Art Institute (ISA), founded in 1976, had since 1981 been joining the groups and institutions and did not resign themselves to wait for the big role, as they had much higher aspirations. They demanded space and incentives and the end of the artistic crisis that affected many traditional groups. Those youths joined groups or, in more extreme cases, created new ones when the institutionalized collectives were not interested in their work or failed to meet their artistic interests, committed as they were to the full conception of theatrical act, the creative process and the relationship with the audience. The youth then asked the institution for support or ventured on their own to then claim said support as a right, thus setting a precedent unknown to previous generations. New authors like Salvador Lemis, Ricardo Muñoz, Carmen Duarte and Joel Cano, among many others, wrote plays that complemented one another in stage setting and confrontation.

Flora Lauten, a remarkable actress, a disciple of Revuelta, member of the Los Doce group and the Escambray Theater and founder, together with peasants, of La Yaya Theater, created the Buendía Theater with a group of ISA alumni and a research laboratory in performance and image language, from the perspective of young people, to talk about their interests and concerns. This lab also incorporated experiences of explorations in analogies and homologies learned in workshops and exchanges with the Colombian theater and the legacy of theatrical anthropology.

There she staged *La emboscada*, by Orihuela, a crucial play in which the Escambray Theater addressed the fight against bandits from a playful and imaginative approach. With *El pequeño príncipe* she proposed the first approach to the theme of exile seen from within, and with *Electra Garrigó* she interpreted Virgilio Piñera from the standpoint of the circus to strip the sentimental education of Cubans of its sacred character. Ferrer's *El Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Lila, la mariposa* marked, along with Vicente's *Galileo Galilei*, the beginning of a

“rectification process” in the theater, which demanded a leading an active role for young people, and these plays are a mandatory reference to understand the future.



Photo: Courtesy of the author

La puta respetuosa, by Jean Paul Sartre, directed by Carlos Díaz, *El Público Theater* (2005).

Reuelta re-staged *Galileo Galilei* with professional actors and acting and theater students from ISA, and introduced a debate between old and young, master and student, professionalism and empiricism, routine and daring, life and theater, as a unique adventure of knowledge. Tensions exploded with *La cuarta pared*, written by Victor Varela in his tiny living room during a year’s work that culminated in the Obstacle Theater: it rescues incomplete experiences and questions the legitimacy of obsolete, subsidized and inert structures that are expressions of old ideas.

The State’s answer came in the form of decentralization policy promoted by the Ministry of Culture for all areas related to artistic creation, a result of development - creation resists administrative formulas and statism -, of the spirit of the error rectification process and of the debates that preceded the Fourth Party Congress. A new dialectic and open structure was engineered to protect the survival of groups with coherent artistic life and make room for new flexible projects, with possibilities for adjustments. But its implementation was hindered by a mechanical application, exacerbated by the global context. The fall of the Berlin Wall, which ended up dragging with it the “real” socialism and bipolar

balance of the world as a result of the inception of the economic crisis, precluded the materialization of self-management and self-control formulas. The main festivals lost their objectives. Subsidy and material support decreased, although wages were not affected – which are guaranteed to date; the number of theater performances was reduced and a phase of instability ensued, to which some responded with the exodus in search of better luck, and others with an impressive and moving demonstration of strength and will to act. It was a defensive reaction to safeguard core values taken by those who saw themselves as active vectors of culture, which was understood as one of the bastions of the nation.

Photo: Courtesy of the author



Chamaco, by Abel González Melo, directed by Carlos Celdrán, Argos Theater (2006).

Carlos Días' American theater trilogy that premiered at the National Theatre was an eloquent symbol with its apparent luxury and transgressive vocation; like *Vagos rumores*, Abelardo Estorino's daring rewriting and synthesis of *La dolorosa historia...*, an ethical reflection conducted from the knowledge of the context of the artist's social responsibility, in which he experimented with spatiotemporal contexts and intertextual references and gave another lesson in greatness.

Abilio Estévez and Alberto Pedro established a watershed right at the beginning of the 1990s: *Un sueño feliz*, *Perla marina*, *La noche* and *Santa Cecilia* recreated atmospheres and values despised in the cultural life of the nation

and reaffirmed Estévez as a true master of language for play-acting with a high poetic level. Alberto Pedro with Mío theater staged a version of Bulgakov's *El maestro y Margarita* [The Master and Margarita], questioning authoritarianism. The same author, in *Manteca*, thrilled the audience with a bitter reflection on the risk of losing utopias, and defended the transterritoriality of Cuban culture in *Delirio habanero*.

Playwriting endured voids and, at the end of the decade, the lack of continuity and relevance. Another look shows how theatrical narrative gained unprecedented strength in those years, and from the stages relevant plays were written with staging "by the author".

The pace of Cuban theater changed. The great masters created at an increasingly intermittent pace: Revuelta debuted Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Sanchis Sinisterra's *Ñaque o de piojos y actores* [Ñaque or of lice and actors], encouraged another workshop with young people and bid farewell with a fleeting *Café Brecht* and *La Zapatera prodigiosa*. Berta Martínez explored mechanisms of the Cuban vernacular in Spanish zarzuelas and re-staged plays with new casts. Roberto Blanco produced plays by Abilio Estévez, and staged beautiful and effective performances such as *Electra Garrigó*, marked by the tribute to its debut in 1948, and *De los días de la guerra* and *Yerma*, with methods that no longer work in the same way.

Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, who staged *Obba y Changó* in the 1980s, portrayed, with *Mi socio Manolo*, popular characters of strata that were not often addressed by our theater; while in *Lagarto Pisabonito* he included the puns and festive tone typical of Cubans in a highly theatrical discourse; and lastly, in *Alto riesgo* he introduced an ethical debate on corruption.

Since the Buendía Theater Flora Lauten had continued her creation process linked to the training of actors, and staged productions of strong impact, in addition to intertextual rewritings with playwriting by Raquel Carrio. The group participated in a circuit of major international events and its profile has become more universal and more Cuban because of a different look. Young directors emerged, many as a result of the teachings of the already mentioned authors. Carlos Díaz and Raúl Martín, Blanco's "sons"; Carlos Celdrán, Nelda Castillo, Boris Villar and Antonia Fernández, Lauten's heirs; Marianela Boán and Rosario Cárdenas, with proposals for orthodox dances; Victor Varela, Ricardo Muñoz, Jorge Ferrera, Joel Sáez, Julio César Ramírez, Rosario Cárdenas and Ariel Bouza gained space, backed by the critics and the loyalty of their audiences. Renovation was accelerated. The economic crisis and travels abroad in search of better professional or life opportunities generated losses.

From intermediate generations, José Milián witnessed and developed a catharsis of his own and others' negative experiences: *Si vas a comer, espera por Virgilio* is a shared space to defend culture. Héctor Quintero, a popular chronicler of everyday life, returned intermittently with *Te sigo esperando* and *El lugar*

ideal and re-stages *Contigo pan y cebolla*, but the theatrical approach, while still mobilizing an audience, is but the simplicity of languages.

If the value of the group was rediscovered in the 1980s, the first decade of the new century misses the continuity of some and imposes more open formulas, which take into account the impact of the market and the endless flight of actors to the movies, TV or short and long-term contracts overseas. Patterns were reconfigured under complex conditions, which required greater self-management possibilities. The few exceptions were the main stars of the beginning and end of centuries and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Because if the 1990s was marked by disorder, fragmentation and atomization - also as a result of the economic crisis in the social sphere, which marked the individual and collective consciousness against the grain of political aspirations -, the affirmation of the social space of culture and the recognition of the role of the artistic avant-garde were a motivating factor. The theatrical languages praised prior experiences, overcame false dichotomies and set the conceptual and critical tone. Theatrical events beat the inertia and invaded the spaces, which since then have been insufficient.

The Cuban theatrical scenario is home to the realistic recreation that caters to the criticism of customs, often times coupled with comedy (and resumed by different types and forms of humor), anthropological research exploring the work of actors from their ancestral memory, psychological experiences that recover daring and relegated paths, combinations of sources and styles. Many actors resort to quotations - which reformulates the legacy - to parody, with deliberate critical action consubstantial with our identity, and to a transgressive perspective. The scarce dialogue between the Cuban drama and performance begins to be tentatively reversed.

Plays by Amado del Pino, Norge Espinosa, Abel González Melo, Ulises Rodríguez Febles and those rewritten by Raquel Carrió mark the ethical debates of a vital dramatic theater, while Estorino and Hernández Espinosa point out the causes, hazards and consequences of migration in *Medea sueña Corinto* or the cycle *¿Quién engaña a quién?*, respectively. A very young group that called itself "the brand new", would showcase their weapons on stage.

Flora and the Buendía Theater prove to be in tune with the spirit of those times with *Charenton* - created from *Marat-Sade* -, *La balada de Woyzeck* and *La visita de la vieja dama*, rewritings in which the originals interact with far more current ideas and theories of knowledge. They explore the individual's role in the fate of a Revolution and the risks we are taking in the present. Their language, which is peculiar in their care for visual magnificence and very theatrical in the use of masks, elaborate textures and presences, has been internationalized in favor of a more focused, effective, austere and synthetic theatrical discourse.

With the Argos Theater, Carlos Celdrán established an effective dialogue with his audience. He declares himself against theatricality per se and seeks a

balance between word and image based on the revision of the psychologist tradition, which proposes to the audience a real and possible image through his theatrical behavior. With plays such as *Roberto Zuco*, *El alma buena de Se Chuan*, *La vida es sueño*, *La señorita Julia*, *Vida y muerte de Pier Paolo Pasolini*, *Stockman*, *un enemigo del pueblo*, *Chamaco* and *Talco* (the last two by the Cuban Abel González Melo), Celdrán evades dichotomies between poetic imagination and realism to focus on what is being told and on the whys, as well as on the performance. He seeks “a transparent performance in which the actor can merge his personal and social biography with the biographies of the characters he embodies, within the illusion and reality synthesis necessary to open a frontal dialogue with contemporaneity.” From the expressiveness of theatrical compositions with the actor as the center, an effective “updater” with no simplistic translations, Celdrán combines technique, ethics and politics, merges the paths of tradition, incorporates audiovisual media and puts a signature of vital contemporaneity on his discourse.

Carlos Diaz is now the most baroque of our directors, although his work cannot be reduced to a style because of his frequent forays into different trends. The experienced heir of a popular tradition such as *Charangas de Bejucal* and a passionate follower of the myths of our stages, he is a creative cannibal of as many classic or international references as he deems necessary to serve his purposes of putting together discourses in which the *choteo* (Cuban and popular way of expressing oneself through jokes and puns) joins the pastiche, the music and the show of the party.

Since the American theater trilogy integrated by *Zoológico de cristal*, *Té y simpatía* and *Un tranvía llamado deseo*; *Las criadas*, *La niñita querida*, by Virgilio Piñera, *El público*, *Calígula*, *Escuadra hacia la muerte*, *María Antonieta o La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes* – a spectacular drama with a strong presence of dance –, *Las brujas de Salem*, *La Celestina*, *Icaros*, by Norge Espinosa, *La puta respetuosa*, *Las relaciones de Clara*, *Fedra*, *Tango* and *Ay, mi amor...*, among others, the languages of Díaz, sometimes shockingly gaunt (transvestitism, nudity and high contrasts), and others refined in their careful formality, attack social masks, dismantle fallacious authoritarianism and examine concepts such as family and insularity, starting from the present, with casts that include renowned and new actors, while exploring the space of its crowded Trianon headquarters with walkways over the audience, the audience on stage, or proposals in which performance invades other spaces.

Raúl Martín left the El Público group and founded the Theater de La Luna, the most consistent stage of Virgilio Piñera – *A boda*, *Electra Garrigó*, *Los siervos*, *El album*, staged *El enano en botella* and *Santa Cecilia*, by Abilio Estévez, *Delirio habanero*, by Alberto Pedro, plus *Seis personajes en busca de un autor*, *Heaven* and *La primera vez*. His proposal calls for sensoriality, integrates music and choreography into movement from the search of Cubans, with a cast

of effective actors, while aspiring to a theater that incorporates smell and other senses.

For music he chooses themes that interact with the texts and with the signs of popular culture, recognizable by the public. The objects on stage show an evident playful sense: the set design is based on a modular concept and keeps craft as an expressive value. The actors move easily on stage and are careful in conveying the farce and formalized performance, which is markedly critical, and as a result of a demanding preparation they sing and dance. The majority of the audience frequenting this theater is made of young people and university students, who interact with the skits from the audience.

Nelda Castillo and *Ciervo encantado* hold a special place: it is a laboratory of quest into the roots of Cubans, which interprets the story from the point of view of the experiential, corporeal and ancestral memory of each of its performers, who are trained hard and fully to look beyond the trivial and tangible. Linked to the cabaret or close to performance in the link to the ritual and level of risk, they created *De donde son los cantantes*, *Pájaros de la playa* (from the work of Sarduy), *Visiones de la cubanosofía* and *Variedades Galeano*, raw examinations of ourselves.

Julio César Ramírez and the D'Dos Theater, the Danzabierta group, Ariel Bouza and the Pálpito Theater coexist with Tony Diaz's Mefisto Theatre, determined to recover the traditional musical theater with young performers, and complete a scenario which the limited space prevents me from discussing and including here, as it very much deserved, the theater for children. Outside the capital we have: in Santa Clara, the Theatre Studio, a center of anthropological searches around the actor and his milieu which, led by Roxana Pineda and Joel Sáez is projected into other areas of theoretical and practical exchange; and in Mantanzas, the Teatro de las Estaciones, with remarkable performances that combine puppetry and actors, under the direction of Rubén Darío Salazar and Zenén Calero, artists of the International Puppetry Workshop.

With the country condemned to the reorganization of an economic model that will undoubtedly impact on culture and art, the theater is an essential rhythm of human conduct that will follow, from the ethical reflection and the participatory commitment it has always cherished, the society we are already building.

Notes

- 1 See: Graziella Pogolotti, “Prólogo”, in: *Teatro y revolución*, La Habana: editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980, p.7-30; Rine Leal, *Breve historia del teatro cubano*, La Habana: editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980; vv.aa., *Festival de Teatro de La Habana/1980* (memorias), Havana: Editorial Orbe, 1982; Raquel Carrió Ibietatorremendía, *Dramaturgia cubana contemporánea. Estudios críticos*, La Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1988; Freddy Artiles, *Teatro y dramaturgia para niños en la Revolución*, La Habana: editorial Letras Cubanas, 1988; Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, “Una dramaturgia escindida”, prólogo (y cronología), in: *Teatro cubano contemporáneo. Antología*, Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992, p.11-127; Rosa Ileana Boudet, “Prólogo”, in: *Morir del cuento. Diez obras teatrales*, La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 1993, p. IX-XX- XIV; Vivian Martínez Tabares, *Didascalias urgentes de una espectadora interesada*, Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1996; V.M.T., “Problemática, diversidad y espacio de debate en el teatro cubano”, *Temas*, n.14, p.69-79, Apr./June 1998; Heidrun Adler and Adrián Herr (ed.) *De las dos orillas: Teatro cubano*, Madrid-Frankfurt am Main: Sociedad de Teatro y Medios de Latinoamérica, Vervuert-Iberoamericana, 1999; V.M.t., “Mirar atrás desde el XXI”, *Tablas* (edición antológica 1982-2002); Tercera Época, v.50, p.147-56; Norge Espinosa, “Las máscaras de la grisura: teatro, silencio y política cultural en la Cuba de los 70”, Jan. 2009, available at: <www.criterios.es/pdf/10espinosamascarasgrisura.pdf>; “Teatro Cubano Contemporáneo” (dossier), *Paso de Gato* año 7, n.37, p.5-6, 26-56, Apr./June 2009; Abel González Melo, *Festín de los patíbulos*, Havana: editorial Letras Cubanas, 2009; “Theater in Kuba/Theater in Cuba”, special monograph of *theater der zeit*, Berlin, 2010, among others.
- 2 Cf. “No estábamos arando en el mar” (lectura by Virgilio Piñera entitled: “El teatro cubano” at José Martí Nation Library). *Tablas*, n.2/83, p.36-46, Apr./June. 1983.
- 3 It would take this play sometime to reach the stage, as it involved explorations related to subjectivity and to what would soon be defined as “otherness.”

Abstract – Cuban theater, in its multiple forms of expression, has maintained a dialogue with the country’s cultural, social and political life. The development of Cuban drama over the last five decades coincides with the period when, after the triumph of the Revolution, Cuban society engaged in a complex process of learning and building a new order. Dramatic creation, comprising both written plays and discourses on acting, is related one way or another with the splendors, bungles and setbacks of revolutionary life through languages and styles that embrace Realism and other experimental theatrical trends of the 20th century, such as dance and new technologies. Cuban drama is not a complaisant creation, but an art form that, not without problems and with acute critical perspective, enables us, Cubans, to reflect about who we are and how we live.

Keywords: Theatre, Drama, Acting, Groups, Revolution.

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