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**PREGONES THEATRE:
A THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE SOUTH BRONX**

by

Eva C. Vásquez

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2001

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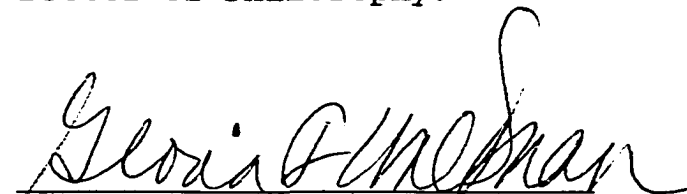
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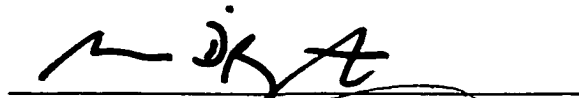
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Abstract

**PREGONES THEATRE:
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Adviser: Professor Gloria Waldman

During the past thirty years Latin American theatre has emerged as one of the most dynamic, activist, and politically committed theatres of modern times. Consequently, theatre researchers around the world have been showing their interest in discovering the wealth of the theatrical and dramatic production in Latin America. As a consequence of massive migration from Latin America to the United States, many practices in the Latin American theatre have been transplanted to this country in order to fulfill the cultural needs of immigrant groups. An example of this phenomenon is clearly seen in the Puerto Rican theatre produced in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century.

Among the many groups that have produced Puerto Rican theatre on the mainland are: The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América, Teatro de Orilla, Jurutungo and Teatro Cuatro. All of these groups have been primarily concerned with the Puerto Rican search for identity and the preservation of the Puerto Rican culture. A group that is presently focusing its work on these same goals from both social and political perspectives is Teatro Pregones. Pregones stands, after the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, as the second oldest established Puerto Rican theatre group in the United States.

This dissertation is a case study which analyses the presence and the work of Teatro

Pregones in the United States during the years 1979 to 1993. My goal has been: a) to trace the history of the group, b) to offer a detailed analysis of Pregones's plays and productions, c) to analyze Pregones's contribution as a theatre company to Puerto Rican and Latin American communities in the Bronx and, through touring, across the United States.

The work of this dissertation focuses on the history of some of the company's more than twenty productions including: La colección, Areyto de pescadores, High Noon-Al Mediodía, La Caravana, El Abrazo-The Embrace, Migrants!, Voices of Steel/Voces de Acero, and Medea's Last Rosary, and their continuing successful struggle for survival.

Because of the paucity of published material, this dissertation relies for the most part upon primary materials located in the files of Pregones Theatre, at 700 Grand Concourse Avenue in the Bronx. Their files offer a rich variety of primary sources: general information, original scripts, promptbooks, workshops, publicity material, photos, reviews, videos, programs, and resource materials. I also include in this research interviews with three of the associate directors of Teatro Pregones.

For my mother María Cristina Sánchez
and my
Grandparents Julia Rivera and Jesús Angel Sánchez,
without whose example, love, dedication and support
I would have never gotten this far.

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Although this project felt many times like a solo performance, there is no such thing as solo when writing a dissertation. This work would not have been possible without the love, encouragement, support and patience of a large number of people who have accompanied me during the many phases of my long journey. First of all, I would like to thank my friends and theatre colleagues of Teatro Pregones for welcoming me in what was my first theatrical home in New York, and for their cooperation and enthusiasm in helping me research and document the first years of their ongoing history. Rosalba Rolón, Alvan Colón-Lespier, Jorge Merced, Judith Rivera, and Magaly González, *¡un millón de gracias!*

I am in infinite debt to Dr. Gloria Waldman, director of my project, for helping me complete this work and for her constant encouragement, emotional support, and useful language corrections. Thank you for not letting me give up, for welcoming me in your home, for thinking about me all this time, for supporting my acting career and for caring.

I am grateful to the members of my committee, Dr. Marvin Carlson and Dr. Miriam D'Aponte for their support, insight, thoughtful suggestions and infinite patience. I especially thank Dr. D'Aponte whose Theatre of Color course inspired me to make the voice of my Puerto Rican people be heard within its huge variety of native accents.

Speaking of accents, I would also like to thank Rick Armstrong, Jody Rosen and Consuelo Corretjer who helped me with language skills when English words failed me.

During all the years that I worked on this project I was fortunate to share my ideas and experiences with people who helped me keep my sense of humor and my sanity, while contributing with any piece of information that would make my work easier. Thank you Wanda Arriaga, Pablo Cabrera, Luis Caballero, Tata Cañuelas, Lourdes Centeno, Roberto Gorbea, Luis Felipe Meléndez, Jorge Monteagudo, José Cheo Oliveras, Yeidy Rivero, Idalia Pérez Garay, and Soledad Romero. I would also like to thank Hale Gurland for his support, constructive criticism, and technological help. I love you.

Last, but not least, I am grateful to the members of my family: my brothers Carlos Vázquez and Gilberto Vázquez, my father Gilberto Vázquez, my uncle Jesús A. Sánchez (Tío Jr.), my aunt Gloria Esther Sánchez (Titi Gloria), and very specially to my grandparents Julia Rivera and Jesús A. Sánchez for being the best grandparents ever. To them and to my mother María Cristina Sánchez I owe all of my strength, my spirit and this work. *Los adoro, ¡Bendición!*

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Table of Figures.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Puerto Rico: A Brief Socio Political Background and Its Effects on the Puerto Rican People.....	1
A Brief History of Puerto Rican Contemporary Theatre.....	10
A Brief History of Puerto Rican Contemporary Theatre in New York.....	40
Chaper 2: A Brief History of Teatro Pregones.....	72
Founding of the Company.....	72
Early Productions.....	98
<u>La colección</u>	98
<u>Areyto de pescadores</u>	115
Chapter 3: Defining a Group Methodology.....	132
Pregones's Philosophy, Brechtian Influences and the Use of Collective Creation Theatre Techniques As a Personal Method.....	132
Creation of a Common Language Intelligible to the Multicultural Community of the South Bronx.....	146
<u>High Noon-Al Mediodía</u>	146
<u>La Caravana (Caravan)</u>	153
Boal, the Theatre of the Oppressed, and Its Relationship to Pregones:	
<u>El Abrazo- The Embrace</u>	154
Chapter 4: Reimagining Puerto Rican Theatre on the Mainland.....	169
<u>Migrants!</u>	170
<u>Voices of Steel/Voces de Acero</u>	181

<u>Medea's Last Rosary</u>	192
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	207
Appendix 1: Photographs.....	216
Appendix 2: Interview with Rosalba Rolón, Artistic Director of Pregones Theatre. (Spanish).....	222
Appendix 3: Interview with Alvan Colón-Lespier, Associate Director of Pregones Theatre. (Spanish).....	238
Appendix 4: Interview with Jorge Merced, Artistic Director of Pregones Theatre. (Spanish).....	251
Bibliography.....	261

Photographs

Figure 1: <u>La colección</u> (1984).....	216
Figure 2: <u>High Noon/Al Mediodía</u> (1985).....	217
Figure 3: <u>High Noon/Al Mediodía</u> (1985).....	217
Figure 4: <u>Migrants!</u> (1987).....	218
Figure 5: <u>Migrants!</u> (1987).....	218
Figure 6: <u>Migrants!</u> (1987).....	219
Figure 7: <u>Migrants!</u> (1987).....	219
Figure 8: <u>Voces de Acero</u> (1990).....	220
Figure 9: <u>Voces de Acero</u> (1990).....	220
Figure 10: <u>El último rosario de Medea</u> (1993).....	221

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

PUERTO RICO: A BRIEF SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE

The purpose of this chapter is to present the overall sociological background of Puerto Rico, and to discuss its effects on the Puerto Rican people and consequently on the creation and development of a Puerto Rican theatre. The analysis presented simplifies the effects of colonialism. This analysis does not intend to be an in depth examination of the Puerto Rican social, political and cultural realities. Such an analysis would require a much broader presentation of facts evaluated in ways that go beyond the interest of this particular study. Nevertheless, I will attempt to summarize those aspects of the Puerto Rican socio-economic background that have contributed to the cultural development of political theatre groups both on the island and on the mainland.

Puerto Rico is a tropical island in the Caribbean Sea, 100 miles long by 35 miles wide, with a population of about three and a half million people. When the Spaniards came to the island in 1493, they found it inhabited by Araucan Indians. At first, the Indians thought that the newcomers were immortal gods. It was not until they witnessed proof of the Spaniards' mortality that they began to fight against colonization.¹ About two hundred years later, however, the Indians were decimated for several reasons: wars, slavery and the acquisition of diseases brought to the island by the colonizers. As a consequence of slavery, black slaves from Africa were introduced into the country. Due to the short period of co-existence among the three races, and to the great incidence of interracial coupling, Puerto Ricans became an ethnically mixed population.

For almost four hundred years Puerto Rico's language, religion, government and general culture were ruled by the Spaniards. Despite an attempt at rebellion in 1868 by a strong group of separatists, known as "El Grito de Lares" (The Cry of Lares), it was not until 1897 that the island won its economic and political independence from Spain. That

¹This incident has been immortalized in a famous legend known as the "Legend of Salcedo."

independence given by virtue of the "Carta Autonómica" (The Letter of Autonomy) was blocked and frustrated by the Spanish American War following which, as agreed in the Treaty of Paris, the Philippines and Puerto Rico were ceded by Spain to the United States in 1898. From that moment to the present, and unlike other American countries, Puerto Rico has suffered the consequences of being one of the few remaining examples of a colony.² In 1900, under the Foraker Act, the first civil government was established on the island. The governor was to be appointed by the president of the United States without the consent of the Puerto Rican people. This kind of imposition became a custom: for example, the concession of U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans with the Jones Act of 1917, on the eve of World War I, which allowed for the conscription of Puerto Ricans into the U. S. Army. The Puerto Rican people had not asked for a change of citizenship; indeed, many of them were opposed to it.³

Since 1898, Puerto Rico has gone through a process of rapid Americanization, marked by a rapid change of political, economic and social structures, which in turn has had enormous consequences for the Puerto Rican people. Contradiction and a sense of torn allegiances stand at the core of the Puerto Rican way of life. An example of such a major contradiction is the language policy in Puerto Rico. After the arrival of North American troops on the island in 1898, one of the most striking consequences was the abrupt imposition of English as the language of instruction in public schools. English was taught as the first language, while Spanish was subordinated as a second language in a country where the majority of people were native Spanish speakers. This contradictory situation prevailed in schools for fifty years from 1898 until 1948. Since their native tongue was not sanctioned by the schools, huge numbers of young students dropped out of the school system while on the other hand, those who remained were instructed by native

²When the term America is used throughout this work, it refers to the whole territory of America, from Canada to Argentina and not only to the United States of America as traditionally used.

³Rubén Berríos Martínez, La independencia de Puerto Rico (México: Editorial Línea, 1983), p. 78.

Spanish speakers not properly trained to teach in English. As a result, despite the immersion of Puerto Rican children in an English language educational system, Puerto Ricans did not become bilingual. Rather than the acquisition of a foreign language, the Puerto Rican population received a poor education in English, while simultaneously being forced to ignore their own language. Rather than empowerment through bilingualism, the imposition of English became for many islanders a tool of repression. It was not until the 1949-50 academic year that Spanish was declared by law the vehicle of instruction in public schools (Berríos Martínez, pp. 67-68). Furthermore, it was not until the summer of 1991 that Spanish became the official language of the island.

By the time Spanish was reestablished as the main language of public school education in 1950, the process of transculturation was already quite advanced. As Rubén Berríos points out:

...education in Puerto Rico is set out to create servile minds which serve the empire in Puerto Rico and to denigrate everything national, everything native. In Puerto Rico we are taught to exalt the values of the United States of America. All of us in Puerto Rico know the stories about George Washington, who was a great revolutionary, and it is good that we learn about him; however, when we know that Washington chopped down a cherry tree and we do not know the town in which Ramón Emeterio Betances, the father of the Puerto Rican nation was born, things are not well. (Berríos Martínez, p. 78)⁴

Even today, from the early stages of Puerto Rican education children are trained to recognize many important figures and events of North American history at the expense of their own history. Puerto Rican national heroes remain unknown. As a consequence of not being taught their own history, many islanders are not able to experience pride in their strength as a community, and become passive witnesses of their own colonization. This

⁴"...la educación en Puerto Rico está encaminada a crear mentes serviles que le sirvan al imperio en Puerto Rico y a denigrar todo lo nacional, todo lo patrio. En Puerto Rico se nos enseña en las escuelas cómo exaltar los valores de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica. Todos en Puerto Rico conocemos los cuentos sobre Jorge Washington, y es bueno que conozcamos sobre él, que fue un patriota independentista norteamericano; pero cuando sabemos que Washington cortó un árbol de cerezas y no sabemos en qué pueblo nació Ramón Emeterio Betances, el padre de la patria puertorriqueña, las cosas andan mal."

“passive” attitude has in many cases created a historical gap which fosters a state of collective amnesia which in turn helps to define Puerto Ricans as a colonized people. In his seminal text, The Colonizer and the Colonized, Albert Memmi draws a picture of a colonized person:

We should add that he draws less and less from his past. The colonizer never recognized that he had one; everyone knows that the commoner whose origins are unknown has no history. Let us ask the colonized himself: who are his folk heroes? his great popular leaders? his sages? At most, he may be able to give us a few names, in complete disorder, and fewer and fewer as one goes down the generations. The colonized seems condemned to lose his memory.⁵

In view of Memmi's observation, it does not seem random that the history of Puerto Rico is taught only at the high school level where in one semester or one year (in the most fortunate cases), young people have to rush through learning what should have been taught and learned all during their formative years. At the college level a course in the History of Puerto Rico is a requirement only for students of the Humanities. It becomes clear then, that the history of Puerto Rico is treated as a specialized course for islanders (Berríos Martínez, p. 78).

Those factors concerning education, citizenship , and language are not necessarily the most acute consequences of colonization that the islanders suffer or live with. It could be argued that the presence of the United States on the island informs practically all the important aspects of the Puerto Rican way of life. For instance, among the powers the Congress of the United States has over Puerto Rico, Rubén Berríos lists:

- 1) Power over military service.
- 2) Power over forced land expropriation.
- 3) Power over the declaration of war.
- 4) Power over tariffs and customs taxes.
- 5) Power over foreign relations.
- 6) Power over currency.
- 7) Power over navigation and freights.
- 8) Power over aviation and freights.

⁵Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p.102.

- 9) Power over aerial space.
- 10) Power over external communications.
- 11) Power over nationality and citizenship.
- 12) Power over bankruptcy.
- 13) Power over emigration and immigration. (Berríos Martínez, pp. 67-68)⁶

...and the list goes on.

All these powers that clearly show the Puerto Rican people's situation as colonized are masked under the formula of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (Estado Libre Asociado) which since 1952 has shaped Puerto Rican political and economic ambivalence.

Following the occupation of the island by the United States, agricultural policy was abruptly reversed. With the ultimate goal of defending North American economic interests on the island, coffee cultivation was set aside as the main crop of the Puerto Rican economy and was replaced by the growth of sugar cane. As a consequence of this sudden shift in the economy, Puerto Rican agricultural workers began a massive migration from the mountains at the center of the island to the coasts where the sugar cane industry was developing. Until then Puerto Rico had been one of the poorest countries in Latin America. Besides economic problems there were health problems which included: high rates of infant mortality, hunger and disease. This situation did not change as expected. Since Puerto Rican sugar cane workers received extremely low salaries, their employment was temporary and the capital earned by North American companies was not reinvested in the

-
- ⁶1) El poder sobre el servicio militar.
 - 2) El poder sobre la expropiación forzosa.
 - 3) El poder sobre la declaración de guerra.
 - 4) El poder sobre tarifas en impuestos de aduana.
 - 5) El poder sobre relaciones exteriores.
 - 6) El poder sobre la moneda.
 - 7) El poder sobre embarques y fletes.
 - 8) El poder sobre aviación y fletes.
 - 9) El poder sobre espacio aéreo.
 - 10) El poder sobre las comunicaciones externas y sobre la radio y la televisión.
 - 11) El poder sobre la nacionalidad y la ciudadanía.
 - 12) El poder sobre la bancarrota.
 - 13) El poder sobre la emigración y la inmigración."

island. Eventually sugar cane agriculture became industrialized, a process that extended into the future in 1948 when Luis Muñoz Marín became the first elected Puerto Rican governor of the island and the father of the Estado Libre Asociado (ELA). The Estado Libre Asociado or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico brought more drastic political, social and economic changes to society. Although these changes had been operating in Puerto Rico since the island became a U.S. territory, it was with the establishment of the ELA in 1952 that rapid economic changes were pursued. If it is true that an abrupt change from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy had been transforming Puerto Rico since the forties, it was not until the fifties that these changes are institutionalized thanks to an economic plan known as Operation Boot Strap (Operación Manos a la Obra). This plan, whose main strategy was to attract foreign capital investment to the island, was expected to fulfill the goals of developing the Puerto Rican economy and creating jobs for Puerto Ricans on the island.

The economic strategy envisioned by Governor Muñoz Marín and his economic advisors fostered the investment of foreign (mainly North American) capital by providing economic incentives such as: tax exemptions, low wages, subsidized utility services (electric and water services) and transportation. Due to a lack of vision, the development of agriculture, which at this point depended almost solely on sugar cane production, suffered the consequences of foreign competition and disappeared almost completely from the island. Meanwhile the Puerto Rican government's industrial plan to create employment based on foreign capital investment failed because the government's investment benefited only foreign investors. Such industrialization, after all, required more modern machinery brought from abroad and utilized fewer Puerto Rican human resources. Moreover, the development of agriculture was no longer an alternative. Worst of all there was no employment for those who used to be sugar cane workers. People who had moved en masse from the countryside to the coast during the development of the sugar cane industry and the development of Puerto Rican industrialization found themselves moving again,

from Puerto Rico to the United States, in an attempt to cope with the Puerto Rican economic crisis. What had begun as an enchanted dream ended up in economic chaos that has extended to the present, causing the period 1940-1970 to be correctly labeled the years of the great Puerto Rican migration.

If the economic crisis created by the commonwealth's economic plan has served to divide the Puerto Rican people between those who left and those who stayed, the lack of political definition masked by the commonwealth formula has served to further divide Puerto Ricans. Throughout the history of political parties in Puerto Rico, since the nineteenth century, there have been three ideological tendencies: the liberal, the conservative, and the separatists. These tendencies have manifested themselves in a variety of political movements:

The liberals have been called reformists, autonomists, unionists and populars. The conservatives have been called unconditionals, republicans, statesmen and progressive, while the separatists have been called independents and nationalists. These names correspond to the main political parties and movements. Tens of parties, [...] support the three fundamental ideological principles in Puerto Rico.⁷

At present, those three tendencies are supported by the three leading political parties on the island: the Popular Democratic Party, with its commonwealth formula, the New Progressive Party, with its ideology of annexation, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party, with separatism from the United States as its main goal.

People's affiliation with a political party has often threatened some aspect of the Puerto Rican way of life. Political fanaticism has turned, for example, into civil violence, despair and confusion, only reinforcing the need for a radical redefinition of political status:

⁷Fernando Bayrón Toro, Elecciones y partidos políticos de Puerto Rico (Mayaguez, P. R.: Editorial Isla, Inc., 1984), p. 7.

"Los liberales se han llamado reformistas, autonomistas, unionistas y populares. Los conservadores se han llamado incondicionales, republicanos, estadistas y progresistas, mientras los separatistas se han llamado independentistas y nacionalistas. Estos nombres corresponden a los principales partidos y movimientos políticos. Decenas de partidos, [...] sostienen los tres fundamentales principios ideológicos puertorriqueños."

Contradictions abound in Puerto Rico's present status. How can it be that a citizen of the United States, as every Puerto Rican resident is, cannot vote for the president of the United States? Yet, by moving to the mainland-which any Puerto Rican has the unfettered legal right to do- that same individual may vote for president. Why is a male Puerto Rican required to register for the draft of the U.S. Army? And if Puerto Rican residents may not vote for president, isn't it hard to understand why they may vote in the Republican and Democratic party primaries for the selection of a presidential candidate for whom they cannot vote in the general election?⁸

It is these contradictions which define the essence of the Puerto Rican sense of identity in Puerto Rico and in the United States. Politics as well as language, economy and education are important elements in the formation of concepts such as identity, self image, a sense of nationhood and a sense of freedom. These concepts, in the case of the Puerto Rican people, have been crippled in many ways by a strong attempt at Americanization through mass media, fashion, music and language. Later it will be seen how the search for and the definition and redefinition of a Puerto Rican identity is essential to the development of Puerto Rican theatre.

Many elements have to be taken into consideration with regard to Puerto Ricans' self image. Education, for example, plays an essential role in the development of positive or negative self esteem. There has been a historic belittling of the Puerto Rican image. For example, the confusion of the original inhabitants' (Araucan Indians) pacifism with passivity has been perpetuated throughout history. Many Puerto Rican children have been mistakenly taught since childhood that their nature as Puerto Ricans includes being passive, lazy, dependent, and hospitable people. In a study concerning the self image of the Puerto Ricans in the passive-aggressive dimension, Alba Nydia Rivera, a Puerto Rican psychologist, concludes in comparing the self image of students with that of workers that:

Within the context of the educational system we can point out two important aspects: in the first place, one could conclude from the result, that the educational system has been successful in the propagation of the image of the Puerto Rican as docile, since the students manifest having such a perception. One could also adduce the fact that the present educational system assigns the student a passive role in which s/he listens and patiently learns what the professor

⁸Pamela S. Falk, ed., The Political Status of Puerto Rico (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1986), xi.

says while the professor presents him/herself as the absolute authority of knowledge. In view of these results we could predict that in order to create a collective perception of strength and courage, we need to place individuals in work situations. Therefore, it would be logical to think that maintaining a high unemployment rate breeds perceptions of passivity, docility and dependency.⁹

By changing this attitude at school, however, the problem of poor self-image is not solved. There are other factors besides education working against a positive collective perception of Puerto Ricans. Those factors are reinforced by mass media in the form of television programs and movies in which Puerto Ricans are depicted in stereotypical ways. In many films Puerto Ricans are presented as criminals, alcoholics, drug abusers as well as unemployed and dependent people, with an emphasis upon their country of origin. Most importantly, the standards by which Puerto Rican people and culture are being judged have been neither disseminated nor propagated by Puerto Ricans themselves. These standards are dictated by those who belong to a foreign mainstream. Consequently, enduring damage is done when people internalize a stereotype and feel powerless to change it. However, by creating the right social conditions, a change in self image can be fostered:

...the presence or absence of these aspects and/or perceptions are the products of social, historical, political and economic realities; we are not destined to die (neither as individuals nor as a collective) being docile. On the contrary, if the necessary social conditions are created and fostered we have, both in possibility and in action the seed of assertiveness, courage and strength. (Rivera, p. 62)¹⁰

⁹Alba Nydia Rivera, Hacia una psicoterapia para el puertorriqueño (San Juan, P.R.: CEDEPP, 1984), p. 61.

"Dentro del contexto del sistema educativo podemos señalar dos aspectos importantes: en primer lugar, podría concluirse por los resultados, que el sistema educativo ha tenido éxito en la propagación de la imagen del puertorriqueño como dócil, ya que los estudiantes manifiestan tener dicha percepción. Pudiera, además, aducirse el hecho de que el sistema educativo actual le asigna al estudiante un rol pasivo donde éste escucha y aprende pacientemente lo que dice el profesor y donde el profesor se presenta como la absoluta autoridad del conocimiento. A la luz de estos resultados podríamos predecir que para crear una percepción colectiva de fortaleza y valentía hace falta colocar a los individuos en situaciones de trabajo. Por otro lado, sería lógico pensar que mantener un alto índice de desempleo engendra en los individuos percepciones de pasividad, docilidad y dependencia."

¹⁰"...la presencia y/o ausencia de estos rasgos y/o percepciones son producto de una realidad social, histórica, política y económica; y no estamos destinados a morir (ni como individuos, ni como pueblo) siendo dóciles. Por el contrario, si se crean y fomentan las condiciones sociales necesarias tenemos en potencia y en acción la semilla de la asertividad, la valentía y la fortaleza."

This is one of the aspects the author would like to prove with this study: that Puerto Rican theatre which emphasizes its own power to represent the people's desire for social change may be a tool in developing a positive image of Puerto Rican culture and people. Such theatre demonstrates, for instance, that passivity is just another label and not an innate feature of Puerto Rican culture. This work offers Pregones Theatre as a leading example of such theatre. This study will evaluate the history of Pregones Theatre as a theatre in tune with the Puerto Rican reality of an ethnically mixed collective, with a different language from that of its current colonizers, and featuring a well defined Spanish background, a strong North American influence, and a solid Caribbean tradition. It will also prove that Puerto Rican people need theatre which articulates their relationship to their own history and their culture. Even more to the point, Puerto Rican people need theatre which permits them to explore their Puerto Ricanness (*puertorriqueñidad*).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUERTO RICAN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

In order to understand the phenomenon of Pregones Puerto Rican Theatre in New York it is important to understand what has been taking place in the Puerto Rican theatrical milieu both on the island and on the mainland. What follows is an attempt to summarize the emergence and development of political theatre groups in Puerto Rico. Due to the particular political situation of Puerto Rico, and the fact that Puerto Rican theatrical talent constantly moves back and forth from Puerto Rico to New York and vice versa, it is necessary to study this phenomenon as a continuum of Puerto Rican theatre rather than as an independent movement.¹¹ Although it is possible and on occasion strictly necessary to look at both movements as separate entities, when it comes to political theatre groups it is appropriate to observe similarities in the development of Puerto Rican theatre in New York and in Puerto Rico.

¹¹The phenomenon of the Puerto Rican revolving door migration has been widely studied and examined by Puerto Rican sociologists, economists, filmmakers and literary writers. Among the many works on this subject is: Carlos Antonio Torres, Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini and William Burgos eds. The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994).

Since the Spanish colonization, Puerto Ricans have been fond of theatre going. Plays were imported for the most part from Spain and Mexico.¹² Nevertheless, due to strong censorship on the part of the church and the military, a Puerto Rican national playwriting tradition did not develop until much later when plays written by Puerto Rican writers were produced in the second half of the nineteenth century. Alejandro Tapia y Rivera was the first national playwright who examined the presence of Spain in Puerto Rico from a critical point of view. Along with Tapia y Rivera, Eugenio María de Hostos also stands out as a proponent of a Puerto Rican national theatre. Hostos, primarily an educator and literary figure, wrote two essays addressing the need for theatre concerned with society's education: "De teatro" (About Theatre) and "De teatro nacional" (About a National Theatre). But it is not until the change of sovereignty, from Spain to the United States, that a national theatre emerged after the year 1900.¹³

Angelina Morfi in her essay "1900-1960: El surgimiento de un teatro nacional" (1900-1960: The Emergence of a National Theatre)¹⁴ credits the years 1900-1960 as the period during which many plays evaluating Puerto Rican social, political and economic realities came into public light. These plays shaped the beginnings of the development of a Puerto Rican theatre concerned with issues such as: the Puerto Rican search for identity, the examination of traditional values versus new values, problems of transculturation, racial identity and migration. Although this sixty year period seems to be broad, it will be adopted in this work as a general division and subdivided into shorter periods according to Morfi.

¹²For a concise history of early Puerto Rican theatre see: Emilio Pasarell, Orígenes y desarrollo de la afición teatral en Puerto Rico (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Casa Baldrich, 1951).

¹³Eugenio María de Hostos, Hombres e ideas, Obras Completas Tomo XIV (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Borinquen, Editorial Coquí, 1969) "De teatro", p. 124; "De teatro nacional", p. 130.

¹⁴Angelina Morfi, "1900-1960: El surgimiento de un teatro nacional" in Escenario de dos mundos: Inventario teatral de Iberoamérica #4 (España: Centro de Documentación Teatral, c 1988), pp.99-107.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century the production of plays with themes examining the experience of colonialism emerged from within a national theatre concerned with Puerto Rican reality. The colonial experience, whether Spanish or North American, is denounced in such plays as: Tres banderas (Three Flags, 1912) by Eugenio Astol, Don Pepe (1913) by Jesús M. Amadeo, Por mi tierra y por mi dama (For My Land and My Lady, 1929) by Matías González García, El Grito de Lares (The Cry of Lares, 1914) by Luis Lloréns Torres and many years later a resurgence of this theme is seen in La resentida (The Resentful One, 1944) by Enrique Laguerre.

Theatre concerned with the struggle of Puerto Rican workers had already emerged during the first decades of the twentieth century. In plays like La emancipación del obrero (Worker's Emancipation, 1903), by Ramón Romero Rosa, and Redención (Redemption, 1906), by José Limón Arce, the ideas of what was known as “teatro obrero” (workers' theatre) are present.¹⁵ This theatre was determined to educate both workers and their families. Denunciation of exploitation, class awareness and class action towards change were among the most important issues addressed by this proletarian theatre. The use of dialogue, *Bufo* theatre (a popular Caribbean comic theatre that emphasizes the grotesque and bawdy),¹⁶ and the inclusion of children were all elements used to bring the doctrine of socialism to the community. In Angelina Morfi's words:

Romero Rosa and Limón Arce exploit the dramatic genre to offer proletarian propaganda in order to create an awareness of the economic situation and to a larger extent, the radical transformation of society. These are vital chronicles that official histories do not include and that, at the same time, show us how Marx, Bakunin and other theoreticians' ideas were assimilated along with those of novelists such as Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorki and Emile Zola and how works concerned

¹⁵See Rubén Dávila Santiago, Teatro obrero en Puerto Rico (Río Piedras, P.R.: Editorial Edil, 1985).

¹⁶Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez in his essay "An Octopus with Many Legs: U. S. Latino Theater and Its Diversity" defines *teatro bufo* as "a nineteenth-century Cuban minstrel theater form" in José Can You See?: Latinos On and Off Broadway (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), p. 106.

with workers' aspirations are a challenge to the idea that art is an exclusive patrimony of the privileged classes. (Morfi, 1988, p. 100)¹⁷

In this way theatre was instrumental in creating a class awareness that developed into a strong socialist movement during the early part of the century.¹⁸

Also concerned with the problems of the working class, but from a feminist point of view, Luisa Capetillo wrote a series of controversial plays. With women's issues at the center of her dramatic production, Capetillo expressed her ideas against the traditional role of women in plays such as En el campo, amor libre (In the Countryside, Free Love) and Matrimonio sin amor, consecuencia el adulterio (Marriage Without Love, the Result, Adultery, 1916).¹⁹

The transition between the 30's and the 40's brought new life to the Puerto Rican theatre. Old themes developed into new theatrical forms with improved dramatic structures. One event that was important for the development of the Puerto Rican theatre was the creation of the Primer Certamen Literario del Ateneo Puertorriqueño (First Literary Contest of the Puerto Rican Ateneo). The plays that won were: Manuel Méndez Ballester's El clamor de los surcos (The Cry of the Land), Fernando Sierra Berdecía's Esta noche juega el joker (Tonight the Joker Plays), and Gonzalo Aroche de Toro's El desmonte (Dismantlement).

¹⁷"Romero Rosa y Limón Arce aprovechan el género dramático para hacer propaganda de las ideas proletarias orientadas a conseguir de inmediato reivindicaciones económicas, y a más largo plazo, la transformación radical de la sociedad. Son crónicas vitales que las historias oficiales no incluyen y que, a la vez, nos muestran cómo se asimilaban ideas de Marx, Bakunin y otros teóricos y de novelistas como Víctor Hugo, León Tolstoi, Máximo Gorki y Emilio Zola y obras ligadas a las aspiraciones obreras son un reto a la idea de que el arte es patrimonio exclusivo de las clases privilegiadas."

¹⁸For a more detailed account of the theatrical production during the first third of the twentieth century see Angelina Morfi, "El teatro en Puerto Rico en el primer tercio del siglo XX" in Revista Interamericana, vol IX no. 2, Summer 1979, p. 255.

¹⁹In Spanish see: Norma Valle, Luisa Capetillo, Historia de una mujer proscrita (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cultural, 1990) and in English, Norma Valle and Gloria Waldman, The Story of Luisa Capetillo, A Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist (NYC: Peter Lang Publishers) [Forthcoming.]

Concern with the working class that appeared during the first decades of the century continued in the theatrical work of what is known as the "30's Generation" and carried on to the "40's Generation." The issue of the *campesino* struggle in a country with changing political, social and economic structures to the detriment of the rural working class is examined in the work of Manuel Méndez Ballester in plays such as El clamor de los surcos (The Cry of the Land, 1938) and Tiempo muerto (Dead Time, 1940) and Gonzalo Aroche del Toro's El desmonte. These works present the struggle of the Puerto Rican peasant in a country where working the land is no longer a viable option. Thus the moral destruction of the *campesino* is illustrated by a repudiation of traditional standards of honor, provoked by economic need.

Different from the plays that won the first and third prizes of the contest, Esta noche juega el joker presented audiences with the first theatrical account of the Puerto Rican migration to New York in the island's literature. Still an optimistic view of the advantages of living in the big city, Sierra Berdecía's play introduced the theme of migration further developed by the 50's generation with a completely different interpretation. The other important event for the evolution of a Puerto Rican national theatre during the transition years of the late thirties was the appearance in 1939 of Emilio S. Belaval's essay "Lo que podría ser un teatro puertorriqueño" (What a Puerto Rican Theatre Could Be). In his essay Belaval calls for a theatre in which every element addressed Puerto Rican reality: choice of themes, means of production, playwrights, actors, directors, designers, in other words, a theatre for Puerto Ricans by Puerto Ricans. Belaval's essay, together with the creation in 1940 of the Sociedad Dramática Areyto (Areyto Dramatic Society), co-founded by Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero and Méndez Ballester, became the first officially organized movement towards the creation of a Puerto Rican national theatre. In 1941 this movement was strengthened by the creation of the University of Puerto Rico Drama Department, founded by Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero. The creation of the Drama Department was an effort aimed at developing the talents of Puerto Rican theatre professionals in the areas of

acting, directing, make-up, scenery, costume, lighting designs, and education. There is no doubt that it was the 40's generation that planted the seed for what Angelina Morfi calls the Golden Age of Puerto Rican theatre: the generation of the 50's (Morfi, 1988, p. 104).

Puerto Rican identity became a recurrent theme in the theatre that emerged from the 50's generation. The most outstanding playwright of this period, René Marqués, stands out as a spokesperson for Puerto Rican social, economic, personal, and political identity. In such plays as El sol y los Mc Donald (The Sun and the Mc Donalds, 1950), La muerte no entrará en palacio (Death Shall Not Enter the Palace, 1953), La carreta (The Oxcart, 1953) and Los soles truncos (The Fanlights, 1958), Marqués scrutinizes the meaning of being Puerto Rican and reveals how this identity is affected by social, political and economic changes that provoked its disintegration.

Another author who deals with the issue of identity, but from a racial stand point, is Francisco Arriví. In his plays Sirena (Siren, 1957) and Vejigantes (Masquerade, 1958), Arriví explores the ethnically mixed nature of Puerto Rico and exposes the sensitive issue of race. Both plays examine the lives of Puerto Rican women of black ethnic backgrounds who have to struggle with self acceptance and face social structures which are not tolerant of their ethnicity. Self discovery, self acceptance and self pride are central themes of these plays.

Of all the themes in this emerging national theatre, there is none more important for the purpose of this study than the theme of migration. Migration to the United States has become the Puerto Rican's main tool for economic survival since the beginning of this century. It is a complicated phenomenon that has extended the borders of the island to the island of Hawaii. Thus migration has become a central theme in modern Puerto Rican literature, addressing a painful reality that has marked the lives of many Puerto Ricans as a commuter nation:

That human archipiélago extends from the island of Vieques in the eastern Caribbean, through the island of Puerto Rico, on to New York, New Jersey, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, all the way to the other side of the world, as far

as Hawaii. In all these places, and in many others that will remain unnamed, there are Puerto Ricans proud of their ancestry and their nationhood. However, the crucial fact is that every day, five thousand of them are literally up in the air, coming and going to and from Puerto Rico and the United States. If there is one quality that characterizes us as a people, it is our imperative to commute, our transient nature.²⁰

Among the plays produced during the fifties, René Marqués' La carreta (The Oxcart), first produced in 1953, and Pedro Juan Soto's El huésped (The Guest, 1956) have dealt with this issue. It is also important to point out that these plays created a vehicle for understanding a process too often ignored. La carreta and El huésped have been widely represented in both Puerto Rico and the United States and are the plays that have created a bridge between the Puerto Rican culture on the island and the Puerto Rican culture abroad. This theme will be re-examined later in this chapter with the discussion of Puerto Rican political theatre in New York.

The works of these playwrights of the 50's generation reflected a Puerto Rican way of life that was new and developing. These themes were then adopted for further development by younger generations of theatre people. Several institutions helped this generation continue what had begun through individual efforts: the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP), and the Office for the Development of Theatre (Oficina de Fomento Teatral), a branch of the ICP. In 1955 the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was founded as a government supported cultural entity to foster the preservation and development of Puerto Rican culture. In 1958 the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture created the First Festival of Puerto Rican Theatre. The festival served to unite all the scattered efforts toward a focused goal, to reinforce a strong Puerto Rican theatrical tradition and to develop new talents. The festival was also instrumental in bridging the gap that existed between Puerto Rican theatre and theatre produced in the rest of the world:

²⁰Juan Manuel García Pasalacqua, "Puerto Ricans: Migrants or Commuters?" in The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994) p. 103.

During this fruitful decade (1958-68), Puerto Rican theatre not only achieved national success, but also acquired international prestige and fame, by making contact with other countries of the hemisphere, through the yearly publications of the Institute, through seminars and theatre encounters, that allowed us to receive the visits of distinguished researchers, authors, critics and intellectuals of other neighboring countries, and by various grants and economic support to pursue studies abroad, do research and realize other activities.²¹

Consequently the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture worked to advance the development of Puerto Rican theatre as a well established cultural institution.

In contrast to the bureaucratic organization of Puerto Rican culture, many social, political, and cultural events in the sixties demanded a different kind of theatre. The transition from the sixties to the seventies brought to public attention radical changes focusing on international politics. The United States was at war with Vietnam. In the Caribbean, the Cuban revolution had occurred. Around the world students were rebelling against alienating governments and educational systems. Worldwide, a theatrical movement more in tune with social, economic and political realities was in demand. The birth of groups such as Teatro Experimental de Cali in Colombia, Teatro Arena in Brazil, and the emergence of Teatro del Escambray in Cuba, Teatro La Candelaria in Colombia, The San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Teatro Campesino in the United States, among many others, was imminent. Puerto Rico was not an exception.

Since the sixties Puerto Rican theatre has reflected the impact of the world's political events in plays that emphasized a tendency towards social realism, psychological awareness, and more recently, the absurd:

The absurd is no more than the life of a colonized country, out of communication with its immediate surroundings, illogical in its behavior, alienated,

²¹Edgar Quiles, "1960-1987: La voluntad de existir" in Escenario de dos mundos: Inventario teatral de Iberoamérica #4 (España: Centro de Documentación Teatral, c1988), p.108.

"Durante toda esta fructífera década (1958-68), el teatro puertorriqueño no sólo tuvo proyección y acogida interna, sino que también adquirió prestigio y fama internacional, al entrar en contacto con otros países del hemisferio, a través de las publicaciones que realizaba anualmente el Instituto, de seminarios y encuentros teatrales, que nos permitían recibir la visita de distinguidos investigadores, autores, críticos e intelectuales de otros países vecinos, y de múltiples becas y ayudas económicas para proseguir estudios en el exterior, realizar investigaciones y otras actividades que se realizaban."

paradoxical, a victim of exogenous powers. All of this renders its existence absurd. (Quiles, p. 110)²²

Figures such as Myrna Casas with her Absurdos en soledad (Absurdities in Loneliness) and La trampa (The Trap), René Marqués with El apartamento (The Apartment, 1964) and Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro (Carnival Inside-Out, 1962), and Francisco Arriví with his Cóctel de Don Nadie (Mr. Nobody's Cocktail, 1964), experimented with the relationship between Puerto Rican identity and absurdity, framed by a lack of self awareness and aspirations for a dreamlike reality that supposedly existed out of Puerto Rico, in the United States.

This tendency towards the psychological and the absurd can be found in the works of playwrights who, like Jaime Carrero and Luis Rafael Sánchez, openly focused on social and political issues as well. Carrero, with a more popular style, became one of the favorite playwrights of politically committed theatre groups. Luis Rafael Sánchez, influenced by a theatre of the "active image," a term coined by Francisco Arriví that refers to a symbolic theatre enlivened by a metaphoric use of the stage,²³ and practiced by directors Myrna Casas and Victoria Espinosa, also became influential with his play La pasión según Antígona Pérez (The Passion According to Antígona Pérez)²⁴ in which:

The mise en scène manifested something that had been in gestation in our theatre: an experimental theatre movement, born on the street, and derived from the political struggles that were fought at a national level against the Vietnam War and obligatory military service, as well as other economic, military and environmental problems, like mineral exploitation and the use of our country for military bases. (Quiles, p. 111)²⁵

²²"El absurdo no es más que la vida misma de un país colonizado, incomunicado con su entorno inmediato, ilógico en su comportamiento, enajenado, contradictorio, víctima de fuerzas exógenas a él, que hacen de su diario vivir un total absurdo."

²³"Un teatro simbólico animado por una libre excitación de la escena" (p. 126). See, Francisco Arriví, Areyto Mayor (San Juan, P. R.: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1966), pp. 125-126.

²⁴Enjoying a revival at The Spanish Repertory Theatre in New York City, November, 2000.

²⁵"El montaje puso de manifiesto algo que se estaba gestando en nuestra escena: un movimiento escénico experimental, nacido de la calle, resguardado por las luchas políticas que se venían dando a nivel nacional contra la guerra de Vietnam y el servicio militar obligatorio, así como otros

With Antigona Pérez Sánchez was somehow validating the existence and work of street theatre groups that had been examining all of these social and political issues. These groups paralleled the institutionalized theatre developed by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and emerged to address the need for working towards raising Puerto Rican social and political awareness. From this movement the most political Puerto Rican theatre groups came to light.

Politically committed groups were, in one way or another, a response to all the social changes taking place. Among these social changes one that had a strong impact on Puerto Rican society was the Vietnam war. The Vietnam conflict demanded the participation of Puerto Rican soldiers in a war foreign to them, provoking anger among many islanders. Groups struggling for Puerto Rican independence from the United States organized to help youngsters in refusing to go to war. One such group was the Alvelo Puerto Rican Youth Defense Committee, created by actress-dramatist Piri Fernández de Lewis.

The Alvelo Committee enacted a strong campaign against Puerto Rican participation in the Vietnam War and the military occupation of Puerto Rico. An interesting feature of this group was the use of theatre in their educational campaign. Plays like El grito en el tiempo (A Cry Through Time), a collection of plays, songs and poems commemorating the centennial anniversary of El Grito de Lares, and El tributo (The Tribute), a historical retrospective reflecting on the universal struggle against war, were both written by Piri Fernández in 1968, and were represented throughout the island at rallies, political events and protests.

Other groups that formed during those years, presenting a strong political agenda, were El Tajo del Alacrán, Anamú, Teatro Pobre de América, and, perhaps less political but equally important, Teatro del 60. These groups were also a response to the social turmoil

problemas de índole económica, militar y ambiental, como la explotación minera y el uso de nuestro país para bases militares."

happening throughout the world. Along with the Vietnam war, the Cuban revolution, and rebellions on academic campuses around the world, the Black Power movement, the Civil Rights movement, the Feminist Movement and the Puerto Rican struggle for equal rights in the United States influenced these groups' works. In Puerto Rico students were not only protesting their own participation in the Vietnam conflict, but were also protesting the presence of the R.O.T.C. on the University of Puerto Rico campuses. It was also a time in which the curriculum at the U.P.R. was being questioned by students who were demanding more participation in academic affairs that affected them. Indeed, the lack of an education focusing on Puerto Rican issues was strongly criticized, creating conflict between students and the U.P.R. administration.

With such a background, groups like El Tajo del Alacrán came to light as an alternative to mainstream theatre, as an attempt to create an authentic Puerto Rican theatre examining contemporary issues from a popular perspective. Most importantly, El Tajo del Alacrán aimed to develop a popular audience. Recounting the story of the birth of the group, Lydia Milagros González, its artistic director, says:

So the idea of producing a different kind of theatre emerged, one that would expose the current issues that we were debating as a people. A light hearted theatre, that would be critical the way people are critical; "jokingly, but talking seriously." It should be a theatre that takes to the streets, protests, or is right there with the protesters. It should be a theatre that reflects the tastes of the moment, the culture of the moment, what is current. A theatre to go where the people are.²⁶

To this end the group created their own plays to present material more in tune with their intention of instilling a political awareness in popular audiences. Social and political empowerment were a must. Nevertheless, political awareness was to be detached from any possible political affiliation, since the group itself was not affiliated with any political

²⁶Lydia Milagros González, Libretos para El Tajo del Alacrán (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura de Puerto Rico, 1980), p. 5.

"Así surgió la idea de hacer un teatro en otra onda. Un teatro que planteara los problemas actuales en que nos debatíamos como pueblo. Un teatro de tono jocoso, que hiciera sus críticas como las hace el pueblo; "en relajo, pero hablando en serio." Debería ser un teatro que saliera a la calle, que protestara o que acompañara las protestas. Un teatro que reflejara los gustos del momento, la cultura del momento, lo que estaba en el tapete. Un teatro para ir al pueblo."

institution. El Tajo del Alacrán also strove to instill in the people a need to go to the theatre. These plays were written examining and evaluating the role of the working class and middle class in the Puerto Rican social composition, lending a theatrical voice to a class otherwise under-represented or misrepresented in the national theatre. Although such plays were sometimes presented in traditional theatres, they were usually presented in public squares, basketball courts and on the street corners of urban and rural slums so that their target audience would be able to attend them.

In its five short years of existence (1966-1971) the group produced twenty two pieces which encouraged self criticism, dealing with a variety of themes ranging from unemployment, alienation of youth, corruption, consumerism, annexation and pro-independence sentiments. Some of these themes had never been examined in the pre-existent theatre. At the core of the group's agenda was the use of theatre as a tool that would foster the liberation of the Puerto Rican people:

We were in search of a theatre that would represent the people more authentically and that at the same time would be a tool of political struggle for the liberation of our people.

We were always very clear about what we meant by "political." There was no need to affiliate with any organization. We were in conflict with the existing ones. By "political" we conceived the fostering, through the real social conflicts posed by theatre, of the reality that Puerto Ricans were indeed struggling in a battle of affirmation, were indeed dealing with their real problems within their possibilities, that we were not "weak" nor "on our knees", nor lazy or silly as we were taught to see ourselves. This, as I see it, was the thought that best characterized our craft. We wanted Puerto Ricans to hear on stage, their own voice, the voice of their struggles, the voice that reflects their strength. (González, 1980, p. 10)²⁷

²⁷ "Íbamos en busca de un teatro que representara más auténticamente al pueblo y que a su vez fuera un instrumento de lucha política por la liberación de nuestra gente.

Siempre estuvimos bien claros en lo que queríamos decir con "político". No había necesidad de afiliarse a ninguna organización. Estábamos en conflicto con las existentes. Como político concebíamos el promover, a través de los conflictos reales-sociales que planteaba el teatro, la realidad de que el puertorriqueño sí libraba una batalla de afirmación, sí bregaba con sus problemas reales y dentro de sus posibilidades, que no éramos "débiles" ni "eñangotaos", ni vagos o tontos como nos han enseñado a vernos. Este, a mi modo de ver, era el pensamiento que más caracterizaba nuestro quehacer. Queríamos que el puertorriqueño oyera en el escenario, su propia voz, la de sus luchas, la que refleja su fuerza."

In order to attain this goal the group looked, in its initial stages, to Bertolt Brecht as a model to follow in its effort to struggle against politics and war. Indeed, Brecht was also to be used as a model by other Puerto Rican theatrical groups on the island and abroad.

El Tajo del Alacrán (The Slash of the Scorpion Blade), named after a street weapon that produces a deep scar, gradually left its mark on the Puerto Rican theatre by acknowledging the needs of a particular audience and lending itself to an evolutionary process that would fulfill these needs. In this process González identifies three distinctive phases: 1)1966-69, the period in which the group was formed and trained in workshops by director Pablo Cabrera. During this period the group was trained in acting techniques that helped them in creating original plays written by members of the group. They also produced two major shows: Brecht de Brecht (Brecht on Brecht), presented as part of the Ateneo's Experimental Theatre Festival in 1967, and Estamos en algo (We're Really On to Something) , a collection of original pieces and songs presented in Café Teatro El Laberinto during the same year. Another achievement of El Tajo during this period was the beginning of their detachment from conventional theatres in order to perform on the streets. This effort was very well received by the audience. 2)The second phase took place in 1969 when they produced a second play called La nueva vida (The New Life), another collection of original pieces also presented at the Ateneo's Experimental Theatre Festival. A short film project, Leonora, about middle class consumerism was written and filmed, but was never edited for lack of funding. Although El Tajo del Alacrán had established itself as a reputable experimental theatre company, during this period it recognized flaws that had to be corrected if it ever expected to fulfill its agenda:

The characters still possessed certain qualities that the middle class attributes to the working class. Some of the ideas were confusing. Some critical tones were too aggressive. Many stereotypes remained that reflected racial and class prejudices. (González, 1980, p. 10)²⁸

²⁸"Los personajes conservaban rasgos que la clase media atribuye a la clase trabajadora. Algunos planteamientos estaban confusos. Algunos tonos, demasiado agresivos. Quedaban muchos estereotipos que reflejaban prejuicios raciales y de clase."

With these flaws in mind it moved on to a third phase. 3) The third period (1970-1971) was one in which the group focused on developing the talents of people with enough sense of discipline and commitment to guarantee a certain artistic and professional quality to their work.²⁹ From this effort the "Cabezudos" or "Cabezotes" project evolved. These are huge headed characters from the Puerto Rican carnival tradition. With the help of younger members of the group, the "Cabezudos" presented short mimed stories on the streets, attracting the attention of passers-by who would follow them from one acting area on the street to the next chosen acting area. The plays written for this project were: La tumba del jíbaro (The Jibaro's Tomb), La venta del bacalao rebelde (Rebel Codfish on Sale), Las huelgas (Strikes), La despropiación (The Eviction) and ¡Qué importa un muerto más! (What Does One More Dead Person Matter!). All of these plays addressed the concerns and worries of their lower middle class audiences who rather than attending the theatre were visited by it in their own neighborhoods (González, 1980, p. 17).³⁰

The result of the project was well received in the communities visited by El Tajo del Alacrán. Still, funding the project was a difficult task. A season of political cinema devised to support the project was a financial failure. Since the group was so politically involved, yet detached from any political institution, financial support from any cultural organization was out of the question. On the other hand, depending on their basically poor audience to support the project would have been a contradiction. Consequently, economic reasons lead to the dissolution of the group. Some of the group's work, however, survived its demise. The most outstanding of all the works by Lydia Milagros González, Gloria la bolitera (Gloria, the Lottery Vendor, 1971) became a classic piece of popular theatre produced in the seventies. Crude in its approach to the theme, poetic in its delivery and embellished by popular music, the story narrates the life of a hard working woman who

²⁹Among the people who formed part of the core group were: Juan Alberto Terrassa, Mario Vissepó, Esther Mari and Lydia Milagros González.

³⁰The "Cabezudos" street theatre project visited poor rural and urban areas, government land taken over by homeless families, and lower middle class neighborhoods.

engages in the "*bolita*," illicit lottery activity, in order to survive. Well known by audiences around the island, it was also performed by other popular and political theatre groups providing a continuum for the ideas posed by the discontinued El Tajo del Alacrán. Among the groups which survived and carried on the political theatre work after the disappearance of El Tajo del Alacrán was Anamú.

Anamú, "la yerba que el chivo no mastica" (the weed that the goat does not chew), was named after a plant that has two opposite properties: on the one hand it is poisonous; on the other hand it is tremendously medicinal. Anamú (1972) had its origins in the Compañía del Consejo General de Estudiantes (Theatre Company of the Student Council, 1971) of the University of Puerto Rico. This student company was extremely political and was characterized by its practice of collective creation, a method widely employed by popular and political theatre groups in Puerto Rico. As the Compañía del Consejo General de Estudiantes, the group was concerned with the political and social issues affecting the lives of Puerto Ricans.³¹ It was also involved in student strikes protesting the presence of the R.O.T.C. on the University of Puerto Rico campus and against an authoritarian, anti-student academic administration.

In an attempt to raise money for the Student Council, the Compañía del Consejo General de Estudiantes produced Tadeus Rosewicz's El archivo, directed by Victoria Espinosa. Previous to that production, the company had always acted as a complement to demonstrations, strikes and meetings. From the experience with El archivo and having become a serious theatre group, the company was invited to participate in the First Festival of Latin American Theatre celebrated in 1971 at Coop-Arte, a theatre in Barrio Obrero, owned by a collective of the same name. For this event Rosa Luisa Márquez, a member of the group, approached Pablo Cabrera to direct their piece.³² As Cabrera recalls: "There

³¹See, José Monleón, "Con Luis Rafael Sánchez," América Latina: teatro y revolución (Caracas, Venezuela: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1978), pp. 172-173.

³²Among the members of this student company were: Rosa Luisa Márquez, Alvan Colón-Lespier, Jorge Rodríguez, José Luis Ramos Escobar, Ricki Muratti, María Mar, Coqui González, Marta Ruiz, Antonio Pantojas, Sunshine Logroño and Edgar Quiles. In Preciosa y otras tonadas que nunca

was no work to produce. Despite the energy this group had there was no written piece for them" (Cabrera, personal interview).³³ Cabrera devised a collage of Puerto Rican short stories and poetry by different contemporary authors including: José Luis González, Lydia Milagros González, Pedro Pietri, Alfredo Matilla and others. The vehicle was modeled after a piece entitled. A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories (1971) that Cabrera had directed for the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York. It was entitled Preciosa y otras tonadas que no llegaron al hit parade (Preciosa and Other Tunes That Didn't Make The Hit Parade), and was a success. Actor Edgar Quiles reflects:

This was a very enriching experience, above all, because it allowed the group to make contact with the Latin American groups that visited us (from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Venezuela) and that made the national collectives re-evaluate their work and their responsibility to the social and economic vindication of our people. For a while we abandoned the perspective of "guerrilla theatre" (improvised, agit prop, brief, sporadic and propagandistic) characterized by works limited to the university milieu, and assumed a line more directly committed to the struggle of Puerto Rican workers. (Edgar Quiles, 1988, p. 116)³⁴

From this recognition of social responsibility Anamú emerged as a politically committed non-academic theatre group.

They organized weekly meetings during which acting workshops were developed aimed at strengthening the actors' interpretive skills. Different from El Tajo del Alacrán, Anamú had a clear political agenda through its direct affiliation with socialism and the struggle for Puerto Rican independence:

llegaron al hit parade, Victoria Espinosa, who had previously collaborated with the group, also participated as an actress. Pablo Cabrera, personal interview. June, 1996, New York City. Future references to this interview will be identified as "Cabrera, interview."

³³"No había un trabajo que montar. Con la energía que tenía el grupo no había una obra escrita para ellos."

³⁴"Esa experiencia fue enriquecedora, sobre todo, porque permitió establecer contactos con grupos latinoamericanos que nos visitaron (de Argentina, Chile, México, República Dominicana y Venezuela) y que llevaron a los colectivos nacionales a replantearse su trabajo y su responsabilidad con las reivindicaciones sociales y económicas de nuestro pueblo. Se abandona por un tiempo la perspectiva del "teatro de guerrilla" (improvisado, agitational, breve, esporádico, propagandístico) caracterizado por la gestión reducida al medio universitario; se asume una línea más directamente comprometida con la lucha de los trabajadores puertorriqueños."

Our artistic activity is committed to national liberation and the construction of socialism. We understand that committed art is not only one whose content and form judge reality and propose changes in it, but also where the cultural worker, the artist, should be immersed in the political process, associating and collaborating with the liberation movement of their country. Only within the framework of total class struggle, participating in it and getting nourishment from it, will the artist be able to acquire the ample vision that art should have, in a country that struggles for the construction of a society which would truly provide the possibilities for the complete development of human beings, work and art. (Quiles, 1988, p. 117)³⁵

Consequently Anamú engaged in the task of producing and performing plays for a working class audience that would see itself as the protagonist of these pieces; the common worker was represented as being aware of his or her own predicament as a member of the working class. During the three years that the group existed (1972-1975) the plays produced by the company addressed the issues of oppression, class and political struggle. Among the original pieces of collective creation produced by the group were: Este solar es mío y tú lo sabías (This Is My Land and You Knew It, 1972) by Jorge Rodríguez and Emanuel Logroño, addressing the takeover of land by homeless families; Bahía Sucia-Bahía Negra (Dirty Bay-Black Bay, 1972) by Jorge Rodríguez, Rosa Luisa Márquez, Emanuel Logroño, Enrique Seda, Vicente Castro and Alvan Colón, protesting against a ship's oil spill on the south-west shore of the island; and Ya los perros no se amarran con longanizas (Dogs Are Not Tied With Sausages Any More, 1973) by Jorge Rodríguez and José Luis Ramos, denouncing the high cost of living.

Anamú also produced adaptations of Latin American plays. This was the case with Aquí es donde el zapato aprieta y la lucha empieza (When Your Shoes Hurt Your Feet the Struggle Begins), adapted from Historias para ser contadas (Stories To Be Told, 1972) by

³⁵"Nuestra actividad artística está comprometida con la liberación nacional y la construcción del socialismo. Entendemos que arte comprometido no lo es sólo porque su contenido y forma enjuicien la realidad y propongan cambios a ésta, sino que el trabajador de la cultura, el artista, debe estar inmerso en el proceso político; ligándose y colaborando con el movimiento de liberación de su país. Solamente enmarcado en el conjunto total de la lucha de clases, participando y nutriéndose de ésta, podrá el artista obtener la visión amplia y abarcadora que debe tener el arte, en un pueblo que lucha por la construcción de una sociedad que verdaderamente brinde las posibilidades para el desarrollo pleno del hombre, el trabajo y el arte." (Excerpt from Anamú's unpublished "Manifiesto")

the Argentine playwright Osvaldo Dragún and La huelga (The Strike, 1972) by Jaime Barbín. In this same vein their most popular play was El asesinato de X (The Assassination of X, 1973) which helped the company gain political status within the Socialist Party by performing agit prop pieces at protests and demonstrations throughout the island.

Other pieces produced by Anamú involved the production of plays written by Puerto Rican playwrights whose ideas reflected the group's advocacy of anticolonialism. Among these plays were Pipo Subway no sabe reir (Pipo Subway Doesn't Know How to Laugh) by Jaime Carrero. The play depicts the life of a Puerto Rican adolescent living in New York, his obsession with buying a bicycle, and his mother's inability to fulfill his desire due to her constant pregnancies and their low family income. Conceived by Pablo Cabrera to be a traveling piece, Pipo was not only performed in many Puerto Rican towns on the island, but also in several Puerto Rican communities in the United States, with money from the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. The company produced another Carrero play, Flag Inside, about the return of a Puerto Rican Vietnam veteran's body for burial by his family in Puerto Rico. Lydia Milagros González consistently reflected the colonial aspects of Puerto Rican life in plays such as Gloria la bolitera and La pantomima del hombre que dijo que no (The Pantomime of the Man Who Said No), included in Anamú's repertoire directed by Victoria Espinosa and Pablo Cabrera respectively. In 1975 Anamú merged with the group Moriviví to become a new entity named Colectivo Nacional de Teatro (National Theatre Collective); this new group continued the political struggle for Puerto Rican independence within a socialist framework.³⁶

³⁶Moriviví, like Anamú, emerged from the Compañía del Consejo General de Estudiantes. Among other groups related to the university experience were: Teatro de Orilla, Teatro de Protesta, Teatro Popular Universitario and Teatro de Guerrilla. See: Edgar Quiles, p. 117; José Luis Ramos Escobar, "Génesis y desarrollo del teatro popular en Puerto Rico," in Intermedio, num.3-4, 1988; Roberto Ramos Perea, "Perspectivas de la nueva dramaturgia nacional," in Perspectiva de la nueva dramaturgia puertorriqueña (Puerto Rico: Ateneo Puertorriqueño, 1989), p. 12; Roberto Ramos Perea, "De cómo y por qué la nueva dramaturgia puertorriqueña es una revolución...", in Perspectiva de la nueva dramaturgia puertorriqueña (Puerto Rico: Ateneo Puertorriqueño, 1989), p. 41.

In spite of the loss of *El Tajo del Alacrán* and *Anamú*, the critical role they played in the development of contemporary Puerto Rican theatre remains. The use of themes and the treatment of issues that had previously been ignored by Puerto Rican playwrights, issues such as the creation of works that addressed the struggles of the working class, the divorce from theatrically conventional spaces and direct communication with an audience that was invited to participate as active agents for social change rather than as mere spectators, are some of the aspects that highlight their importance.³⁷ After their disappearance, other groups emerged that shared their commitment to produce political and popular theatre. Nevertheless, it was *El Tajo del Alacrán*, *Anamú*, *Moriviví* and *El Colectivo Nacional* which contributed to the formation of what Roberto Ramos Perea calls the beginning of the formation of a new Puerto Rican dramaturgy. These groups advocated theatre as revolution, a stance that situated Puerto Rican theatre squarely within the context of the new Latin American theatre, with deep roots in the theatre practices of Bertolt Brecht, Augusto Boal and Enrique Buenaventura.³⁸

³⁷Ramos Perea, pp. 47-57. In his essay Ramos Perea lists a series of characteristics that became the specific contributions of the theatre produced by the generation of 68-75. The following features distinguish this generation from any previous generation producing conventional theatre:

1. The audience is not a passive entity.
 2. The new Puerto Rican dramaturgy addressed new themes and daring situations that had previously been feared or barely treated by the playwrights of other generations.
 3. Breaking with conventional space and a revolution in language.
 4. The new Puerto Rican dramaturgy, aside from creating art, sees itself as the embodiment of a historic document.
 5. The major figures in the new Puerto Rican dramaturgy are cognizant of their own capacities and limitations, but they don't give up; they struggle. If they give up, they do it with a violent battle where they risk everything.
 6. The problem of national identity.
-
- "1. El público no es un ente pasivo.
 2. La Nueva Dramaturgia puertorriqueña abordó nuevos temas y situaciones muy atrevidas que antes eran temidas o tratadas someramente por dramaturgos de otras generaciones.
 3. La ruptura con el espacio convencional y la revolución del lenguaje.
 4. La NDP, además de arte, construye en sí misma un documento histórico.
 5. Los personajes de la NDP se afirman en sus propias capacidades y limitaciones, pero no sucumben, luchan. Y si sucumben, lo hacen en el fragor de una batalla violenta donde ponen todo en juego.
 6. El problema de la identidad nacional."

³⁸The influence of Brecht, Boal and Buenaventura is a constant characteristic of the New Latin American Theatre as seen in the works of Latin American theatre critics such as Beatriz Rízk, Marina

If the existence of theatre groups like El Tajo del Alacrán and Anamú was crucial to the development of the new Puerto Rican dramaturgy on the island, the existence of similar groups in the United States was of equal importance for a dramaturgy that had seen the Puerto Rican community extend to the mainland. Such is the case of Pedro Santaliz (b. 1938) whose group, Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América, echoes the idea of New York as an extension of the island. After many years of commuting between Puerto Rico and New York, Pedro Santaliz moved back to the island in 1975 bringing with him the Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América.³⁹ Many of the original members of that company were working with new Puerto Rican groups in New York. Santaliz nourishes his theatre company by enrolling new members from the specific communities in which he works. In most cases, a

Pianca, Gloria Waldman, Judith Weiss and Fernando de Toro. Rizk in her book El nuevo teatro latinoamericano: una lectura histórica, analyzes the emergence and development of the new Latin American theatre movement, as well as the evolution of the collective creation method proposed by Enrique Buenaventura. The study, transformation and application of Brechtian techniques is clear in Rizk's analysis of the New Latin American Theatre form and structure:

Two things are clear with respect to Buenaventura and by extension to the New Theatre: the influence of Brecht and his epic-dialectical theatre, and the need for creating a method that although assimilating foreign notions, would result in a praxis of their own. (Rizk, p. 38)

"Dos cosas quedan en claro en lo que respecta a Buenaventura y por extensión al Nuevo Teatro: el influjo de Brecht y su teatro épico dialéctico, y la necesidad de la creación de un método que aún asimilando nociones que vienen de fuera resulte de una praxis propia."

Brecht's influence in the New Latin American Theatre has, of course, been examined within the context of a Latin American reality. This application of Brechtian theories and techniques has been discussed in a symposium organized by ATINT (Asociación de Trabajadores e Investigadores del Nuevo Teatro). See María H. Lima, ATINT Symposium: "Brecht in Latin America," in Brecht Yearbook 13 (Detroit: Wayne state University Press, International Brecht Society, 1984) p.91. Marina Pianca in her book El teatro de nuestra América: Un proyecto continental 1959-1989, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1990), highlights the importance of Brecht's influence for a Latin American theatre of political and social concerns. Pianca also analyzes Boal's and Buenaventura's influence in the emergence and further development of a New Latin American Theatre movement (pp.71-91).

Placing the Puerto Rican theatre produced by groups like El Tajo del Alacrán, Anamú and El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América within the context of the New Latin American Theatre Movement has been a task assumed by critics writing about Puerto Rican theatre like: Bonnie Hildebrand Reynolds, "La Nueva Dramaturgia Puertorriqueña en el contexto del Nuevo Teatro Latinoamericano," Revista del Ateneo Puertorriqueño, año III, num. 8, Mayo-Agosto, 1993, p. 139.; Roberto Ramos Perea, Perspectiva de la Nueva Dramaturgia Puertorriqueña and Gloria Waldman, Luis Rafael Sánchez: pasión teatral (Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1988), among others.

³⁹The Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América was founded in New York by Pedro Santaliz. The company's profile presented here summarizes the group's work after Santaliz's move to Puerto Rico. A profile of the company's work in New York will appear later when discussing Puerto Rican theatre in New York.

person only collaborates with the company for as long as a specific production involves his or her community. Thus the Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América has become an ever changing institution that has survived to this day.

Using community issues as the basis for his plays, Santaliz has helped community members express their concerns through popular theatre. At the same time he has developed his own way of writing which derives from the particular circumstances in which he creates his plays. Santaliz's works evolve mostly from improvisations. They follow a Brechtian model where a narrator usually recounts or maintains the thread of the story while also uniting the episodes; these are sometimes disparate and sometimes follow an Aristotelian story line. The use of Brechtian devices and improvisation are a consequence of working with communities where performing plays is not a common practice. The creation of a work starts with a training process for participants who have never been actors before or who have never attained a level of education that would help them interpret written work. Sometimes reading is even hard for them. Therefore improvisation is the most effective device to create, and eventually perform, a piece:

One of the most difficult of all processes is making actors understand my vision. It requires constant pushing and prodding and there is no order in its preliminary phase. I work as a sculptor sculpting the stone. To make seven children of La Perla understand that they are playing the parts of Taíno or Caribe indians in a play about colonization, "El cemí de Maboya," is even harder. When I write the scripts for them, they don't know how to read them. They have difficulties in reading them and the intonations and subtleties of the lines have to be explained to them. Then I use improvisation. At the end of this process, through which both they and I have gone blindly, the story takes shape and one emerges which makes sense to all of us.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Pedro Santaliz, *Teatro* (Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1992), p.8.

"Uno de los procesos más difíciles de todos es hacer que los actores entiendan mis visiones. Es un machaqueo constante y no hay orden en su etapa preliminar. Yo trabajo como un escultor esculpiendo la piedra. O mucho más difícil, hacer que siete nenes de La Perla entiendan que están haciendo de indios taínos o caribes en una obra sobre la colonización: "El cemí de Maboya". Cuando yo les escribo los libretos, ellos no los saben leer. Tienen dificultades para leerlos y hay que explicarles las entonaciones y matices de las líneas. Entonces recorro a la improvisación. Al final de este proceso, en que ellos y yo vamos ciegos, se va redondeando la historia y surge una historia que tiene sentido para ellos y para mí."

Of course, not all of Santaliz's creations evolve in exactly the same way. Some of his actors are more comfortable with improvisation than others. Some need a written line to guide them. Santaliz's method adapts to the needs of his actors. Years of experience have helped him in developing a personal method of acting that is not only used in community theatre, but that is also taught in several academic institutions where he has worked. He is presently at the Maricao branch of the University of Puerto Rico.

After developing a piece, the task is to find the audience to present this finished work to. The audiences that enjoy Santaliz's plays are not necessarily used to going to the theatre. Thus the theatre comes to their community even if they don't expect it. The audience typically surrounds the acting area, walks on it, engages in dialogue with the actors and comes and goes. It is a constantly changing audience whose members benefit from watching the performance for as long as they please. Here is where Brecht's theory of epic theatre comes into play. By employing a narrator who connects the episodes, Santaliz keeps the audience's attention, invites them to reflect on what they are watching, and helps them to understand the plot. Although aesthetically Brechtian, these narrators do not serve the purpose of distancing the audience, but rather of connecting them to the realities that affect them. The narrator offers an invitation to experience and accept the theatrical event. The use of comedy and fantasy also stand as Brechtian devices. In effect, they help the audience to recognize the tragedy of colonialism, with its attendant malaise, that is alternately hidden and recognizable in their daily lives.

Another important influence in Santaliz's theatre is Jerzy Grotowski's poor theatre, after which the Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América was named. Santaliz's theatre relies on the actor as its most important element. In the development of his theatre, scenery and lightning are not a priority:

It is very difficult to take scenery to the various neighborhoods we perform in and I prefer to remunerate the actors with the money I would have used for scenery. I understand, nevertheless, that if there were scenery that would also be good. I emphasize the actor's transforming art over scenery. Let the actor be the one who

creates the overall illusion through facial expressions and the ability to concentrate on a character and play it well.⁴¹

Here, a separation from Brecht is easily seen. The actor is the central figure in this theatre. The actor is the only agent needed to take over a public space and transform it into a theatrical space. Actors in Santaliz's company have to be dynamic, able to make quick changes and to transform themselves. This process of transformation is part of the training that youngsters receive under Santaliz's tutelage.

Santaliz's theatre is truly popular theatre. It is made by the people for the people. It takes into consideration popular issues and is performed in a language intelligible to a popular audience. It is a real example of empowering the people to confront, evaluate and solve their problems as a community. Among Santaliz's plays, Cadencia en el país de las maravillas y sus amigos de la Cochinchina o el rey príncipe sapo (Cadencia in Wonderland and Her Friends from Conchinchina or the Frog Prince-King, 1973) stands as a play that exemplifies the ideas posed by El Teatro Pobre de América. A fantasy play plagued with reality, Cadencia evaluates and denounces the social implications of colonialism: drugs, poverty and deprivation, in contrast with the world of fantasy and fairy tale played by the characters. The contradiction between fantasy and reality, the sublime and the ridiculous, the ordinary and the extraordinary, is what defines the Puerto Rican colonial status and therefore the core of Santaliz's work in pieces like: El rito del esclavito Para-Niguas, del brujo esclavo Sala-serio y de sus amigos del país de los ñañigos (The Rite of Para-Niguas the Slave, Sala-serio the Witch Slave, and Their Friends from the

⁴¹Pedro Santaliz, "Diversiones y condiciones del teatro popular de los barrios de Puerto Rico: Acercamiento de El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América," in Imágenes e identidades: El puertorriqueño en la literatura (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1985), p.175.

"Es muy difícil llevar escenografía al barrio y yo prefiero remunerar a los actores con el dinero que usaría para la escenografía. Entiendo sin embargo, que si hubiera escenografía también sería bueno. Yo delego más en la discreción del arte transformador del actor. Que sea él el que dé la ilusión de todo a través de la mueca y del buen sentido que él tenga para concentrarse en un personaje y hacerlo bien."

Ñānigo Land, 1975), Sirope en el país al que no fue Cadencia y sus amigos los batateros de la Babel Baquiné (Sirope in the Land Where Cadencia Didn't Go, and His Friends from Babel Baquiné, 1975), La culata del niño Dios de Belén (The Backside of the Child God from Bethlehem, 1975), Roy Miguel se fue del baile y desapareció (Roy Miguel Left the Dance and Never Came Back, 1975), El caserío perfecto (The Perfect Housing Project, 1976), Serenito se cayó frente a Padín (Serenito Fell Down In Front of Padín, 1976) and many others.⁴²

Political at heart, Santaliz's plays are a reaffirmation of "Puerto Ricanness." He reconfigures the idea of a Puerto Rican identity affected by alienating politics that drown the people in fantasy, unreality and absurdity. He proposes a theatre that deals with the absurdities of colonialism rooted in the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico and in socialism:

... the correlation that my theatre has with independence and socialism is intrinsic to my being and to everything that has happened in Puerto Rico to date. It conforms

⁴²Although Santaliz's work as a playwright has been constant and prolific, his plays are very seldom published. This is probably due to the improvisational aspect of his plays which are intended to serve as guides rather than final versions. Nevertheless, four of Santaliz's plays: Olla (The Pot), El castillo interior de Medea Camuñas (The Interior Castle of Medea Camuñas), Las sombras del chisme o la historia amorosa de Evaristo y Matera (The Shadows of Gossip or the Love Story of Evaristo and Matera) and El teatro personal de Meaño Laracuate (Meaño Laracuate's Personal Theatre) are published in the volume Teatro by Pedro Santaliz, to which we have alluded before. About this phenomenon Gloria Waldman says:

As I have mentioned before about Santaliz, if you want to see his plays, you won't find them in print. You'll have to go to the end of the world and beyond, maybe to the Bronx or barrio Guaypavo in La Perla, to experience them. But it's always worth it because they always provide the viewer with a direct communal experience between oneself and the community. His plays have always offered the possibility of awareness, of observing and participating in the development of a popular culture, and of choosing between accepting the level of culture and life that currently exists, or taking an active part, day after day, in raising that level, expanding horizons, discovering alternatives. (Gloria Waldman, "El circo romano de Santaliz," El Nuevo Día, September 3, 1981, p.56.)

"Como he comentado sobre Santaliz en otra ocasión, si quieres ver sus obras, no las vas a encontrar impresas. Habrá que ir hasta el jurutongo y más allá, tal vez hasta el Bronx o el barrio Guaypavo en La Perla, para experimentarlas. Pero siempre vale la pena porque siempre proporciona una experiencia directa y comunal con el pueblo y con uno mismo. Siempre ofrece la posibilidad de una toma de conciencia; de observar y participar en el desarrollo de la cultura del pueblo. De escoger entre aceptar el nivel de cultura y vida que actualmente existe, y obrar activamente, a diario, para levantar ese nivel, abrir horizontes, iluminar alternativas."

to a dramatic, artistic order of a popular nature, and to the fact that we live in a period of immediacy and emergency. (Pedro Santaliz, Teatro, p.9)⁴³

Bringing a message of cultural, social and political identity to Puerto Ricans has remained the mission of El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América.

If the emergence and evolution of theatre within the context of street and popular theatre groups was of extreme importance for the creation of a new national dramaturgy, the acknowledgment of this up and coming theatrical movement by theatre companies of the establishment was of equal importance. A traditional theatre company, also born from the university experience of the sixties, Teatro del 60 became an advocate for contemporary, mainstream Puerto Rican theatre, although this was not the original agenda of the group.⁴⁴ Founded by Dean Zayas in 1963, with drama and art students from the University of Puerto Rico, the group's main goal was the creation of a space where young people could do theatre.⁴⁵ The original agenda of the group was to produce relevant theatre pieces from the European and North American tradition. During its first stage Teatro del 60 focused on producing a theatre that was not being produced on the island, European avant-garde and theatre of the absurd for example. Different from other groups born during the same period, Teatro del 60 was not founded upon any political principle or affiliation. However, through the group's contact with Latin American theatre companies, they experienced a

⁴³"...toda la correlación que mi teatro tiene con la Independencia y el Socialismo es intrínseca con mi ser y con todo lo que ha pasado en Puerto Rico en estos días. Subvertido a un orden artístico dramático de carácter popular. Porque vivimos en una época de inmediatez y emergencia."

⁴⁴Idalia Pérez Garay, personal interview, New York City, August 2, 1996. Future references to this interview will be identified as: "Pérez Garay, personal interview."

⁴⁵Among the members of the first generation of Teatro del 60 were: Carlos Nieves, Soledad Romero, Ligia Rolón, José Manuel Torres Santiago, Miguel Angel Suárez, Pedro Santaliz and Ernesto Concepción. A second generation was formed in 1967 which included: Fernando Aguilú, Sharon Riley, Florita Pérez Garay, Idalia Pérez Garay, Luz Minerva Rodríguez and Daniel Lugo.

radical change towards a direction more in tune with the new Latin American theatre movement.⁴⁶

Teatro del 60 entered a second stage of production (1970-1979) in which not only relevant Latin American plays were produced such as Santa Juana de América (Saint Joan of America) by Andrés Bello and La noche de los asesinos (Night of the Assassins) by José Triana, but a personal aesthetic based on collective theatre techniques evolved. This second phase was also marked by the presence of Carlos Ferrari, an Argentine playwright who had established himself on the island. For the first time, Teatro del 60 had a playwright, making it possible for the collective to develop its own work.⁴⁷ The company was not only acclaimed for its enormous talent and the excellent quality of its international theatre productions, but also for the premiere of Puerto Rican plays developed and written by Ferrari for the group: Juan Bobo, Amor en el caserío (Love in the Housing Project) and Puerto Rico Fua.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Heriberto Ferrer, "Diez espectáculos para la memoria," in Escenario de dos mundos: Inventario teatral de Iberoamérica #4 (España: Centro de Documentación Teatral, 1988), p. 130.

⁴⁷Pérez Garay, personal interview:

We had a playwright in the house. We had a director who would direct his own plays. We had a man who was inside the group. And he was a man who, if everyone else would get paid \$5.00, would get paid \$5.00 too. He would not get paid any better than anyone else. Ferrari became part of the family. He also came to do theatre about the history of Puerto Rico. Even if it was a classic play, he would adapt it to the Puerto Rican reality.

"Teníamos el dramaturgo en la casa. Teníamos al director que dirigía sus propias obras. Teníamos a un hombre que estaba metido dentro del grupo. Y era un hombre que si todo el mundo cobraba \$5.00, él cobraba \$5.00. El no cobraba más que nadie. Ferrari se integra al grupo como familia también. Fue un hombre que vino a hacer teatro de la historia de Puerto Rico. Aunque fuera un clásico él lo adaptaba."

⁴⁸J. A. Collins comments:

The production, by Teatro del Sesenta under the direction of Carlos Ferrari, is easily the highlight of the Institute of Culture's Eleventh International Theater Festival; and that is no small compliment because this year's Festival has been without a doubt the best the Institute has ever given us...

Rarely, anywhere, have I witnessed a work of the theater so infectiously thrilling; it compares favorably with the magnificent Brook production itself which I experienced at the Aldwych theatre in London, on a gruelling July evening nearly a decade ago.

J. A. Collins, "Sesenta's "Marat-Sade" Infectiously Thrilling Theatre" in Contemporary Theatre in Puerto Rico: The Decade of the Seventies (Puerto Rico: Editorial Universitaria, 1982), p. 144.

Characteristic of this period is the use of comedy to examine Puerto Rican reality rooted in poverty, colonialism and a lack of historical awareness. Although these themes had been examined by the Puerto Rican theatre and produced by elitist institutions such as the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the Ateneo, it was necessary to develop an audience composed of ordinary people willing to attend the theatre. Teatro del 60 fulfilled this goal:

We wanted to create an historical awareness of Puerto Rico; in effect a kind of theatre that would make my parents attend. Our theatre reached the people. We broke barriers. We made the people of Bayamón stand in line. A lot of people from that period learned to love their history and became *independentistas* by seeing our plays. In the moment of truth it is what you do that defines you. When it comes to doing theatre, I like to see who I'm doing theatre for, who it's directed to. I want my mother to go to the theatre. There are a lot of people who to this day remember Puerto Rico Fua and Pedro Navaja. We became patriots. (Pérez Garay, personal interview)⁴⁹

It was Puerto Rico Fua (1974) which marked a milestone in the history of Teatro del 60. For the first time in the history of Puerto Rican theatre, a play ran for an entire year to full houses. Before Puerto Rico Fua, no play had enjoyed a life longer than a two to four week run.

The formula behind Puerto Rico Fua was the adoption of cabaret and vaudeville techniques to highlight the history of Puerto Rican colonialism since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. By using Puerto Rican folk music, typical folkloric dances, songs, clowns, carnival, and a lot of humor, the history of Puerto Rico, official or not, was retold to Puerto Rican audiences for their reconsideration. The outcome was a play that was both highly entertaining and didactic. Although the play was rejected by leftist theatre groups

⁴⁹ "Queríamos crear una conciencia histórica de Puerto Rico. Un tipo de teatro que hizo que mis papás fueran al teatro. Nuestro teatro llegó al pueblo. Nosotros rompimos barreras. Hicimos que la gente de Bayamón hiciera fila. Mucha gente de esa época aprendió a amar su historia y se hizo independentista al ver las obras nuestras. A la hora de la verdad es la práctica lo que define. A la hora de hacer teatro a mí me gusta ver a quién se le hace el teatro. A quién se dirige. Yo quiero que mi mamá vaya al teatro. Hay mucha gente que a estas alturas se acuerda de Puerto Rico Fua y Pedro Navaja. Hicimos patria."

that thought Puerto Rico Fua was a reactionary piece because it seemed to oversimplify the problems of colonialism, it proved very successful not only in Puerto Rico but also in the Second Festival of Latin American Theatre in Caracas, Venezuela, and the festival in Nancy, France, where it was acclaimed for representing not only the history of the island, but that of all Latin American countries (Pérez Garay, personal interview).

By 1978 the differences between Teatro del 60 and the Left had been reconciled. The company had produced an adaptation of Pedro Juan Soto's short stories Spiks that they took to the Festival Mundial de la Juventud (World Youth Festival) in Cuba. The Sylvia Rexach Theatre, the home of Teatro del 60 from 1972-1988, was open for a variety of artistic expressions which included: the presentation of leftist music groups such as Haciendo Punto en Otro Son and the acclaimed singer Lucecita Benítez; the creation of theatre groups like Taller de Histriones; and its use as a rehearsal space by theatre groups such as La Rueda Roja.

In 1979 Carlos Ferrari left Teatro del 60 to create his own company, Nuestro Teatro. His departure marks a third phase in the history of the company. The new phase is characterized by the development of playwriting talent within the company. From this period, José Félix Gómez's Disco fieras (Disco Beasts, 1979), Florita Pérez Garay's El gran pinche (The Big Bobby Pin, 1979), and Pablo Cabrera's La verdadera historia de Pedro Navaja (The True Story of Pedro Navaja, 1980) are among the most characteristic works. With these plays Teatro del 60 manifested its concern with creating an authentic Puerto Rican theatrical voice and with developing pieces based on national and social issues despite any political affiliations. The incredible success of La verdadera historia de Pedro Navaja, superseding that of Puerto Rico Fua, made it clear that Puerto Rican audiences were hungry to see mainstream theatre that reflected their realities.

La verdadera historia de Pedro Navaja, based on John Gay's Beggar's Opera, and Pedro Navaja, a popular song by the now internationally known Panamanian singer and star of film, stage and television, Rubén Blades, made history in the Puerto Rican theatre.

The play not only enjoyed an almost two year run, but was also an example of artistic solidarity among Puerto Rican actors and singers who donated their talents in order to keep the show alive. The idea was to rotate the play's characters among well known artists, stimulating the return to the theatre of people who had already seen the play several times and would not mind seeing the show again performed by their favorite artists. The ultimate goal of this effort was to help Teatro del 60 buy the Sylvia Rexach Theatre. The company bought the theatre, but could not keep it because of poor management. By losing their space, the dream of owning a theatre shattered into pieces at a loss of more than \$100,000.00. Teatro del 60, a company that up until that moment had never received any kind of public subsidies to support its activity, suffered an economic crisis. Yet, the company is still alive today due to a strong spirit of survival.⁵⁰

The company celebrated its 37th birthday in August 2000 with optimism for the future. It has entered what the members call the "era of proposals," applying for public and private funds to keep their work alive.⁵¹ In this way Teatro del 60 has been able to develop a project called Teatro Sin Paredes (Theatre Without Walls) that has enabled them to produce pieces like Mete mano...es cuestión de bregar (Act Now, It's Time to Get Involved), about the AIDS crisis in Puerto Rico. Teatro Sin Paredes has addressed the company's need to travel throughout the island to bring Puerto Rican theatre to a diversity of communities, whether in schools, public squares, parks or theatres. Thirty seven years after the foundation of the company it remains a space for young theatre people to develop their ideas.

⁵⁰In her own words: "We have an incredible spirit of survival. We are a group with artistic quality that doesn't need walls to do our work." (Ibid.)

"Tenemos un espíritu de sobrevivencia increíble. Somos un grupo con calidad artística que no necesita paredes para hacer su trabajo."

⁵¹Idalia Pérez Garay, Conferencia de teatro puertorriqueño, organized by Ollantay Cultural Organization (Pedro Monge, Director) at Hunter College, April 6, 1996.

The work done by groups like El Tajo del Alacrán, Anamú, El Teatro Pobre de América and Teatro del 60 stands as representative of a movement rather than as isolated or unique cases. Subsequently, other groups and authors picked up where these groups left off and developed a Puerto Rican theatre focused on the Puerto Rican condition. Among these efforts it is noteworthy to mention the work of groups like Moncho Conde's El Gran Quince and Zora Moreno's Flor de Cahillo, groups that have developed from the community theatre experience, and years later Brunilda García's Cimarrón, which has evolved around the examination of Puerto Rican historical issues. Authors like Jaime Carrero, Luis Antonio Rosario Quiles, Walter Rodríguez, Jaime Ruiz Escobar, Jacobo Morales, Juan González, Zora Moreno and José "Papo" Márquez are also characteristic of this period and the precursors of what Roberto Ramos Perea calls "nueva dramaturgia puertorriqueña."⁵²

As mentioned before, the island of Puerto Rico has expanded its borders to the United States and especially to New York City. It was there that the other part of the theatrical movement described above took place. As a consequence, both movements not only nourished each other, but in many cases complemented each other. Often, plays from Puerto Rico were presented in New York, as in the case of Papo Márquez, for example,

⁵²Some of the most distinctive works by these authors are: Jaime Carrero, Flag Inside (1966), El caballo de Ward (Ward's Horse, 1971), Pipo Subway no sabe reír (Pipo Subway Does Not Know How to Laugh, 1971), Noo York (1972), La caja de caudales FM (The FM Safe, 1976), Lucky Seven (1979); Luis Antonio Rosario Quiles, El juicio de Víctor Campolo (The Trial of Víctor Campolo, 1971), La movida de Víctor Campolo (Víctor Campolo's Move, 1973), El juego de la trampa (The Con Game, 1978) and El censo (The Census, 1980); Walter Rodríguez, La descomposición de César Sánchez (The Decomposition of César Sánchez, 1973), Línea viva (Liveline [with Maritza Pérez], 1973) and La persecución de Octavio Pérez (The Persecution of Octavio Pérez, 1976); Jaime Ruiz Escobar, 31 (1974) and Pensarás que todo lo que has visto puede ser cierto (You'll Think That What You See Is True, 1978); Jacobo Morales, Muchas gracias por las flores (Thank You for the Flowers, 1973), Cinco sueños en blanco y negro (Five Dreams in Black and White, 1975), Aquella, la otra, éste y aquél (She, The Other One, This One and Him, 1978) and Una campana en la niebla (A Bell in the Fog, 1979); Juan González, Doce paredes negras (Twelve Black Walls, 1971) and La plena murió en Mayagüez (The Plena Died in Mayagüez, 1976); Zora Moreno, El afroantillano (The Afro Antillian, 1975), Dime que yo te diré (Tell Me and I'll Tell You, 1975), Con machete en mano (Machete in Hand, 1976), Coquí coriundo vira el mundo (Coquí Coriundo Moves the World 1981); José "Papo" Márquez: Esquizofrenia Puertorricensis (Puerto Rican Schizophrenia, 1975), La terapia (Therapy, 1980) and Amordio (Love-Hate, 1981).

whose Esquizofrenia Puertorricensis (Puerto Rican Schizophrenia), starring himself, was presented by Miriam Colón's Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, and then by Spanish Repertory Theatre and whose La terapia (The Therapy) was presented by Duo Theatre, directed by and starring himself and the renowned Dominican actress, now deceased, Ilka Tanya Payán. The following is a recounting of the Puerto Rican theatre that evolved in New York City until the seventies when Pregones Theatre was born.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUERTO RICAN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE IN NEW YORK

In order to better understand the emergence and development of the Puerto Rican theatrical movement in New York a brief history of the Puerto Rican presence in New York is relevant. A significant Puerto Rican presence in New York can be traced to the second half of the nineteenth century when Puerto Rican sugar merchants would come to the United States to expand their business opportunities in defiance of the commercial regulations from Spain, which limited Puerto Rican trade to Spain's colonies. New ties were established with the United States despite Spanish regulations that fostered commercial links less convenient to Puerto Ricans. By the same token, the children of these sugar cane merchants would come to New York for a better education. Eventually, a commercially based Puerto Rican community was established in New York.

Together with these commercial exiles, the other important group of immigrants were political exiles, well educated and mostly involved with the movement for independence from Spain. In fact, the Grito de Lares uprising of 1868, which later became a central theme in Puerto Rican literature, including theatre works such as René Marqués's Mariana o el alba (Mariana or the Dawn), was planned by Puerto Rican exiles in New York. Another movement that emerged during this period was for the independence of the Antilles, which served to strengthen the social, political and cultural relationship between Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban separatists in New York.

The existence of a Puerto Rican community in New York fostered the migration of highly skilled Puerto Rican workers in search of better job opportunities, an example of which was the migration of tobacco workers who, although poorer than their fellow Puerto Rican migrants, were well educated as well as politically involved, as recalled by Bernardo Vega in his memoirs.⁵³ Social and cultural clubs, as well as newspapers and political groups emerged to take care of the needs of this up and coming immigrant group. Mutual concern, preservation of a national culture and language, and love of their country were at the center of these Puerto Rican *hermandades* (brotherhoods). Of course, Puerto Ricans were not the only Hispanic group in New York City. Spaniards, Cubans and Dominicans were also living out their political, economic, or voluntary exiles in New York City. Establishing a strong Hispanic community was a shared task.

With the U. S. acquisition of Puerto Rico in 1898 as a consequence of the Spanish American War, a larger number of Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States in search of better living opportunities and jobs. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the replacement of a coffee oriented economy for a sugar oriented economy did not prove beneficial to Puerto Ricans. A highly industrialized sugar cane agriculture, foisted upon Puerto Rico by the United States and covering most of the island's cultivatable coasts, did away with the jobs of many coffee workers. This abrupt change provoked a demographic displacement from the island's mountains to the coasts. At the same time, the adaptation of Puerto Rico to a partially industrialized way of life did away with the jobs of many artisans, thus creating an economic crisis. A consequence of this crisis was the massive migration of Puerto Ricans from the island's coasts to the United States, a movement that was further fostered by Puerto Ricans' acquisition of U. S. citizenship in 1917. This newly acquired U. S. citizenship made it convenient for recruiters to target Puerto Ricans as easy

⁵³ César Andreu Iglesias, ed. Memorias de Bernardo Vega: Contribución a la historia de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York (Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1988), pp. 38-45. In English, Memoirs of Bernardo Vega: A Contribution to the History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

candidates for the U. S. labor force. Paperwork and red tape were minimal, if not unnecessary, and the economic conditions on the island made the need to leave Puerto Rico a desired alternative to unemployment, hunger and disease. Most Puerto Ricans left their homeland with the idea of returning as soon as their personal economic conditions changed. Even those who were not thinking of returning to the island could do so if necessary, but emigration was essentially seen as something temporary.

With massive migration the Puerto Rican presence in New York became more perceptible.⁵⁴ Although the migrants found a well developed Hispanic and Puerto Rican community, with more visibility they also found hostility from non-Hispanic neighbors.⁵⁵ Strong resistance became the best weapon against such hostility. Language, for instance, was preserved in music, newspapers, theatre and church. Puerto Rican traditions were maintained through their restaurants, theatres, record stores, *bodegas*, *botánicas* and all sorts of commercial businesses that would provide the community with their specific needs. The Puerto Rican community experienced rapid growth. During the twenties, “Spanish” Harlem was mostly Puerto Rican. By 1930 the Puerto Rican population in New York had increased by 37,544 people.⁵⁶ With such a dramatic increase in the Puerto

⁵⁴For more information on issues concerning the Puerto Rican presence in the United States see: Clara Rodríguez, Historical perspectives on Puerto Rican Survival in the United States (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996). Also see Virginia Sánchez-Korrol and Oscar Alers, The Puerto Rican Struggle: Essays on Survival in the United States (Maplewood, New Jersey: Waterfront Press, 1984). Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City (Berkely, California: University of California Press, 1994. Second Edition).

⁵⁵See the description of the Harlem Riots of July, 1926 as recounted by Bernardo Vega in Andreu Iglesia's book (pp. 173-176).

⁵⁶Pablo Figueroa, Teatro: Hispanic Theatre in New York City/1920-1976 (New York; Presented by the Off Off Broadway Alliance, Inc. in cooperation with El Museo del Barrio, 1977), p. 14. Figueroa says:

The cultural beach-heads that the Spaniards had secured during the early 20's in places such as East Harlem were now passing over to Puerto Rican hands. According to the 1920 census there were only 7,364 Puerto Ricans living in New York City, but by the time of the 1930 census the number had increased to 44,908. Of this number there were 34,715 Puerto Ricans living in Manhattan, mostly in and around East Harlem. It is estimated that by the end of 1935 the number of Puerto Ricans living in New York had climbed to nearly 50,000.

Nicolás Kanellos in his book A History of the Hispanic Theatre in the United States: Origins to 1940 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 125, adds:

Rican population, the demand for cultural events that would help the Puerto Rican community remain connected to their homeland became obvious. Up until that point such cultural events were provided either by Puerto Rican *hermandades* and social clubs, or by Spanish theatre companies that specialized in the production of zarzuelas (Spanish operetta), comedies and dramas in Spanish. La Compañía de Teatro Español was one of the most instrumental Spanish theatre companies to assume this important task.

As Pablo Figueroa asserts, “Indeed, the 20’s and 30’s were a golden period in the Hispanic Theatre in more ways than one” (p. 13). There was theatrical material, an audience willing to go to the theatre, professional talent and available space. Such a productive theatrical period was strongly affected by the consequences on the Hispanic community of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and World War II. During such difficult times theatre became a vehicle to raise money to support political movements such as the Spanish Republican movement and the Puerto Rican independence movement (Kanellos, pp. 117-123).

A different and distinctive aspect of the connection between theatre and the political turmoil that evolved during the thirties is the birth of a Puerto Rican dramaturgy in New York concerned with the political events affecting the Hispanic world and more specifically Spain and Puerto Rico. As Nicolás Kanellos recounts:

While it is true that Cubans and Spaniards made up the majority of theatre artists in New York City and that their works dominated the stage in the 1920's and 1930's, it is also true that Puerto Rican drama emerged at this time and, it seems, accounts for a more serious and substantial body of literature. Two of the first Puerto Rican playwrights appear to have been socialists whose dramas supported the Spanish Republican cause and working class movements: José Enamorado Cuesta (1892-1976) and Franca de Armiño (a pseudonym). (p.139) ⁵⁷

Not only was the population becoming more and more Puerto Rican but also more derivative of rural areas of Puerto Rico, which accelerated the evolution of public tastes toward musical variety, slapstick comedy and cinema.

⁵⁷ José Enamorado Cuesta is the author of the revolutionary play *El pueblo en marcha* (The People on the Move). Franca de Armiño is the author of *Los hipócritas* (The Hypocrites, 1937), of which Kanellos says:

While full of propaganda, Marxist theory, and stereotyped characters, *Los hipócritas* is a gripping and entertaining play that reflects the tenor of the times, as far as the Depression, labor organizing, and the Spanish Civil War were concerned. As can be seen in the number of leading

During this same period, another movement which found support among theatre goers was the Puerto Rican Nationalist movement. As an advocate of Puerto Rican independence, Gonzalo O'Neill developed his theatre pieces to raise awareness of the Puerto Rican colonial situation:

While Franca de Armiño and José Enamorado Cuesta were calling for a workers' revolution, Gonzalo O'Neill was championing Puerto Rican nationalism and independence from the United States...From his very first published dramatic work, La indiana borinqueña (1922, The Indians of Puerto Rico), O'Neill revealed himself to be intensely patriotic and interested in Puerto Rican independence. His second published play, Moncho Reyes (1923), was a three-act biting satire of the current colonial government in Puerto Rico. Although both of these works enjoyed stage productions, it was his third play, Bajo una sola bandera (1928, Under Just One Flag), which debuted at the Park Palace Theater in New York in 1928 and at the Teatro Municipal in San Juan in 1929, that deserves the greatest attention for its artistry and thought, which also made it a popular vehicle for the Puerto Rican nationalist cause. (Kanellos, pp. 115-116)

The audience's reception of these plays explains the use of theatre as an arena to discuss and evaluate Puerto Rican political and social problems and justifies the use of theatre as a fundraising device to support the Nationalist movement (Kanellos, 117). Fundraising had been practiced since the beginning of Puerto Rican migration and continued into the 1940's when the emergence of new Puerto Rican theatre companies in New York coincided with the intensification of the struggle for Puerto Rican independence in both New York and Puerto Rico. With the emergence of a strong Puerto Rican community and a shift in the audience's interests, theatres like the Park Palace and El Teatro Hispano changed the kind of shows they produced. Theatrical presentations were dropped in favor of movies and variety shows that proved to be more profitable than conventional theatre (Figuroa, p. 16).⁵⁸

theatre people that took part in fundraisers for socialist, Puerto Rican nationalist, and Spanish Republican causes, the sentiments expressed by Armiño were not unpopular. (p. 140)

⁵⁸Figuroa says:

At El Hispano the variety show was the main attraction. It always had a theme around which the acts were arranged. And it was in the productions of those shows that Señor del Pozo and his colleagues showed their talent in knowing how to attract the community. Looking at

Still, the emergence of Puerto Rican theatre companies and workers' unions provided interested audiences with significant theatre. Among the companies born during this period were the Compañía Teatral Puertorriqueña, the Sociedad Cultural Puertorriqueña, the Compañía Alejandro Tapia y Rivera and the Compañía Teatral Betancourt together with the Mutualista Obrera Puertorriqueña (Kanellos, p. 119). Of importance to this study is the fact that these companies, both neglected and under-researched were the precursors of Puerto Rican political theatre in New York.⁵⁹

During the post-war period of the 1940's, the Hispanic community of New York received a new wave of Puerto Rican migrants. A product of the Puerto Rican economic strategy known as Operation Boot Strap, described earlier in this chapter, islanders migrated to New York as a response to the changes in the employment structure on the island, and to the strong demand for workers in the United States. By the time these new members of the community arrived in New York, the Hispanic theatre had already accommodated itself to the tastes of the Puerto Rican working class. By presenting plays which reflected life in the *barrios* of New York, Puerto Ricans reflected on issues

some of the programs for the 1938-39 season, one notices, for example, that on the week of October 21-27 the show was called *Musas Tropicales*, a review of Caribbean customs...

Although artists from Spain still appeared among the singers and dancers presented at El Hispano during this period, the overwhelming majority of the artists hailed from the Caribbean and from Central and South America. And this reflected the artistic philosophy of the administration. They were bringing to a Puerto Rican and Hispanic American community the cultures of their respective lands. For this reason, by the early forties, El Hispano had become the cultural center of hispanic Harlem, allowing its administration to proudly proclaim that in the 1937-38 season half a million tickets had been sold. And we must remember that this was at a time when the Hispanic population in the city numbered only 136,615 souls.

⁵⁹Kanellos gives a good account of the Hispanic political theatre in the first half of the twentieth century. Concerning the lack of documentation of that area he asserts:

Many of the above theatrical functions were preceded and /or followed by political speeches and fundraising activities. It was common for prominent Hispanic socialists to take part in these events and support them with speeches and lectures...Just how many political or agitprop Hispanic theatres were active and how many political fundraisers took place during these years is difficult to assess. News of them only appears sporadically in the Spanish-language press, which, naturally, was more interested in covering commercial, ad-purchasing entertainment. Obviously the press was more reticent about relationships with openly political and possibly socialist or communist organizations, given that most of the community, including the owners and workers of the press, was alien. Therefore, we have today only vestiges of what may have been a very important chapter in the history of Hispanic theatre in the United States. (p. 121)

pertaining to their newly acquired way of life in plays such as Juan Martínez's Nueva York de noche (New York Nights, 1938), Sucedio en Harlem (It Happened in Harlem) and De Puerto Rico a Nueva York (From Puerto Rico to New York, 1939). Kanellos notes that the latter play, written by Frank Martínez in 1939, especially examines issues of migration, acculturation and adaptation to the new environment in a piece that predates René Marqués's La carreta (Kanellos, 135).

During the 40's Puerto Rican theatre and Hispanic theatre in general entered a period of crisis probably due to the audience's preference for variety shows and musical entertainment. In order to justify the lack of economic success, theatre abandoned its effort to please the working class audience and turned elitist. This situation is well described by Pablo Figueroa in the following passage where he connects what happened in the 40's to the current relationship between theatre and audiences:

It was during this period of the 40's, 50's and early 60's that theatre going habits were set which are still plaguing the Hispanic theatre today. To justify the small audiences, the theatre makers began to convince themselves that theatre was a precious art form meant for an elite and not for the masses. And with this attitude among its artists, the Hispanic theatre went further underground, effectively giving up its role as a vital force in the cultural life of the people. In turn, the Hispanic community went about its business of living, totally ignoring the existence of the Hispanic theatre movement.

The sad part of all this was that the growing Puerto Rican community of those two decades needed relevant drama as a hungry man needs food. And the community flocked to wherever that drama was available. Radio became its major source. A series of radionovelas (soap operas) and other dramatic programs like El suceso de hoy (It Happened Today) created by José D. Cerón Hijo became very popular. And whatever negative criticism may be said about the artistic and social values of these programs, one thing must also be said. They gave some perspective and focus to the lives of a struggling people. If the Hispanic Theatre had taken on that challenge, today, instead of it being a struggling movement, it could now be a major cultural force in this city. (Pablo Figueroa, p.18)

This situation of the gap between theatre and popular audiences was not acknowledged by the Puerto Rican theatre in New York until the premiere in 1953 of La carreta (The Oxcart) directed by Roberto Rodríguez Suárez. With La carreta, René Marqués's epic story of a Puerto Rican family's pilgrimage from the mountains of the island to New York, this gap was bridged. One of the main reasons for the success of this production was the selection

of a theme that represented the experience of a good number of Puerto Ricans in New York:

The production ran for five performances during a weekend period. And every single performance was sold out. But more important than the fact that La carreta was a box office success, was the fact that a community of people, who lacked the habit of going to the theatre, were enjoying and loving a theatrical experience that touched them deeply. (Figueroa, 22)

La carreta called people's attention to a Puerto Rican theatre previously ignored, one of relevance to the working class community. It was by reviving the important social function of theatre in a specific community that the Puerto Rican theatre emerged from oblivion, turning Roberto Rodríguez, director of the play, into the "father of modern Puerto Rican drama in the United States."⁶⁰ Ironically, despite the success of the play, lack of funds made it impossible to continue presenting it.⁶¹ Nevertheless, a positive outcome of this effort was the birth of a new theatre group, El Nuevo Círculo Dramático, founded by Roberto Rodríguez and actress Miriam Colón in 1954.

El Nuevo Círculo Dramático became the first Hispanic group to own a theatrical space, on Sixth Avenue between 43rd and 44th streets. It was a space devoted to the development of high quality Hispanic theatre productions.⁶² In fact, it was the space where many important figures of the Latino theatre today got their initial training and experience (Antush, p. xii). Yet, the survival of the group and the theatre basically depended on the members' personal sacrifices. Most of the money raised from benefits and

⁶⁰John V. Antush ed., Nuestro New York: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Plays (U.S.A.: A Mentor Book, 1994), xii.

⁶¹"The following weekend the community, thinking that there would be further performances, lined up to buy tickets only to be told that the play's run was over. Unfortunately, the play was never repeated under such circumstances." (Figueroa, p. 22)

⁶²The plays produced by the company during its four years life included: ¿Dónde está la luz? (Where's the Light?) by Cuban playwright Ramón Ferreira, directed by Humberto Arenal in 1956; La casa de Bernarda Alba (The House of Bernarda Alba) by Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca, directed by Roberto Rodríguez Suárez in 1957; Marianela, by the Alvarez-Quintero brothers; and El caso de la mujer asesinadita (The Case of the Murdered Lady), by M. Mihura and A. de la Iglesia, directed by William Leyton. (Figueroa, p. 23)

special events as well as donations were allocated for the maintenance of the space, making it difficult to survive its fifth year of existence. To make matters worse, the theatre was closed by the Fire Department in 1960. However, with the sixties, a new generation of theatre people became the hope for a revitalized Puerto Rican theatre movement in New York.

The decade of the sixties marked an important moment in the history of the United States. A critique of the status quo resulting in revolutionary thought and action were at the center of powerful movements such as the civil rights movement and the Black power movement which in turn influenced the Puerto Rican community. This social revolution created an environment for the emergence of significant politically committed theatre groups such as: The San Francisco Mime Troupe (1959), the Bread and Puppet Theatre (1962), El Teatro Campesino (1965), the Free Southern Theatre (1963) and the Black Arts Repertory Theatre (1962), among others.⁶³ It also became a prolific period for the emergence and development of a visible Puerto Rican theatre movement in New York.

Puerto Ricans benefited from the Black power movement socially, politically and artistically. In fact, it was during the sixties that Puerto Ricans aligned with African Americans to attain rights, and privileges denied to them before the civil rights movement:

In the 1960's the civil rights movement and the Black social revolution brought us even more self-awareness. The question of whether Puerto Ricans were Black or White was posed. Color became not just a question of how White your physical countenance appeared, it symbolized a political and social philosophy. At that time we aligned ourselves politically with the Blacks, thereby defining ourselves as a people of color. Out of this time of frustration and anger came a sense of pride and self-worth. For the first time in decades we were motivated to political action. Programs such as Affirmative Action, bilingual education, and open enrollment in colleges and universities were implemented. Puerto Rican politicians began to strive and campaign for a voice in city politics. Toward the end

⁶³For a good account of the theatre of commitment which emerged from the sixties experience see C.W.E. Bigsby, A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama: Beyond Broadway Volume Three (U.S.A.: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

of this decade there emerged poets, writers, visual artists, performers, musicians, and composers from within our community.⁶⁴

Also instrumental to the emergence of a Puerto Rican awareness movement was the creation of institutions such as Aspira and the Young Lords Party.⁶⁵ These institutions realized that Puerto Rican organization and activism were the most effective answer in order to solve the problems that affected them. They became advocates for the Puerto Rican community, demanding action when attention to their problems was denied. It is against this backdrop that a Puerto Rican theatrical movement focusing exclusively on Puerto Rican social and political struggles came into existence.

From the variety of groups that emerged during this period, only the work of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Teatro Pobre de América, Teatro de Orilla and Teatro Cuatro will be examined as representative of the whole movement. Puerto Rican theatre in the United States varies in content, language and form, ranging from conventional theatrical aesthetics to street theatre. In spite of the variety, however, commitment to "Puerto Ricanness" is what defines its essence. As Rosa Luisa Márquez and Lowell Fiet explain:

...it is committed to *puertorriqueñidad*-to defining, enriching, preserving, and strengthening the meaning of being Puerto Rican, demonstrating that Puerto Ricans have a cultural heritage and language that life on the mainland cannot erase, that being a Puerto Rican means more than simply being a member of the lower paid, most poverty-ridden minority in the United States. The message becomes apparent in the work of all Puerto Rican theatre groups, whether they are well funded and relatively conventional organizations such as the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, agitprop troupes such as Teatro de Orilla (Streetside Theatre) or "Nuyorican" groups such as the Nuyorican Poet's Cafe. *Puertorriqueñidad* as a definable and

⁶⁴Nicholasa Mohr, "Puerto Ricans in New York: Cultural Evolution and Identity" in Images and Identities: The Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts, Asela Rodríguez Laguna ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), p. 160.

⁶⁵For a capsule account on Puerto Rican organizations see: Antonia Pantoja, "Puerto Ricans in New York: A Historical and Community Development Perspective," Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin vol. II, No. 5, Spring 1989, pp. 21-31; Carlos Rodríguez Fraticelli, Amílcar Tirado, "Notes Towards a History of Puerto Rican Organizations in New York City," Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin Vol II, No. 6, Summer 1989, pp. 35-47. For more information on the Young Lords Party and their meaningful contribution see: Pablo "Yoruba" Guzmán, "La vida pura: A Lord of the Barrio" The Village Voice, Vol. XL No. 12, March 21, 1995, pp. 24-31.

distinguishing characteristic; as a source of tradition, heritage, and pride; and as a fountain of cultural wealth remains the clearest theme.⁶⁶

As seen earlier in this chapter, commitment to *puertorriqueñidad* is a constant quality of the Puerto Rican theatre on the island.⁶⁷ In fact, it is *puertorriqueñidad* that further strengthens the relationship between theatre on the island and the mainland, a relationship based on a mutual nourishing and sharing of talent and ideas. Nevertheless, we concur with Márquez and Fiet's assertion that "the most important factor distinguishing the mainland theatre from its island counterpart is the nature of immigrant life in urban communities in the United States" (Márquez and Fiet, p. 427).

In many respects, music and poetry served to maintain the artistic link between the Puerto Rican community and artists from different disciplines, including theatre. On the one hand, Puerto Ricans in New York had lost their contact with traditional theatre, but on the other hand they never lost their contact with a poetic tradition always reflected in their language and music. This close contact explains the use of poetry and live music in most of the Puerto Rican popular, street and agitprop theatre produced during the sixties. In 1965, for the first time, the New York Shakespeare Festival celebrated a Noche puertorriqueña de poesía y música in Central Park's Delacorte Theatre, capitalizing on this special link between Puerto Ricans, poetry and music. The extremely well attended event featured the talents of old and new Puerto Rican voices:

The audience that packed the theatre was Puerto Rican. All of the 2,300 seats at the Delacorte theatre were occupied, and there was also a crowd of 400 or 500 people listening to the program, through speakers, outside the theatre that had been rigged up in anticipation of the large crowd. The Puerto Rican community was looking for a collective expression; Spanish was the language it understood and that it identified with in its struggle for survival in this society; the park, and the fresh air,

⁶⁶Rosa Luisa Márquez and Lowell A. Fiet, "Puerto Rican Theatre on the Mainland," in Maxine Schwartz Seller, ed. Ethnic Theatre in the United States, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), p.420.

⁶⁷See Bonnie Hildebrand Reynolds, "Puertorriqueñidad: The Force Behind the Development of a Puerto Rican Theater," in Asela Rodríguez Laguna ed. Images and Identities: the Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), pp 47-59.

provided the informal atmosphere, of ritual and participation that was indispensable to reach the audience.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, despite the effort to repeat this successful experience at Carnegie Hall, once removed from the "safe" environment provided by the park, the success of this event did not repeat itself. When the same show was presented at Carnegie Hall, Puerto Ricans, who felt completely comfortable when an event reflecting their culture came to the park, did not find their way to a theatre where they had never felt welcome (Fragoso, p. 5). Yet, the success of this event in Central Park was living proof of the existence of a Puerto Rican audience hungry to see itself represented in an aesthetic form. About the relationship between a Puerto Rican audience and art, Márquez and Fiet comment:

This audience, usually poor and frequently Spanish rather than English speaking, is more familiar with popular and native music and dance, films, and television than with live theatrical performance. Their native culture has been transplanted and maintained in the United States not through the arts but through the continuous observance of religious customs and holidays, native foods and drink, clothing styles, social mores and gestures, and language.

Theatre has been a conscious afterthought in the process of transculturation. It serves as a specialized artistic tool for educating and arousing awareness. Music, clothes, food, and language are agents of adjustment, making the sense of cultural displacement less severe, whereas the theatre is analytical. It incorporates the more passive agents into its mode of access and communication, but its task is more far reaching: it constantly compares minority and majority cultures, standards of living, attitudes, and beliefs; it celebrates native cultural manifestations, raising them to a position of equity with the modes of the majority culture; and it actively asserts the right to exist without erasing the Hispanic heritage or ties with the island of Puerto Rico. Total assimilation is viewed as cultural suicide, a one-way process reiterating the absorption of other migrant populations into the majority culture. The theatre exists as a voice and a conscience for a community of people demanding to survive as Puerto Ricans. (Márquez and Fiet, p. 310)

⁶⁸Víctor Fragoso, "Feria: Notas sobre la expresión teatral de la comunidad puertorriqueña en Nueva York," (Nueva York; Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 1976), p.5.

"El público que abarrotó el teatro era puertorriqueño. Los 2,300 asientos del Teatro Delacorte estaban ocupados y había una multitud de 400 ó 500 escuchando el programa fuera del teatro, por los altoparlantes que habían sido dispuestos anticipando la nutrida concurrencia. La comunidad puertorriqueña buscaba la expresión colectiva; el español era el idioma que entendía y con el cual se identificaba en su lucha por la sobrevivencia en esta sociedad; el parque, el aire libre, proveían la atmósfera informal, de ritual y participación, que era indispensable para conmover al público."

It is precisely from this effort to address the theatrically hungry Puerto Rican community that a revival of La carreta came as a precursor to a theatrical tradition which resulted in the creation of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre was founded by actress Miriam Colón in 1967.⁶⁹ The emergence of the company was due to an effort on the part of Puerto Rican artists, led by Colón, to take their art to the streets. The project was mostly financed with public funds granted through Mayor John Lindsay's Summer Task Force. The company's first production was a revival of the acclaimed René Marqués play La carreta, which had been successfully staged both in English and Spanish to the delight of Puerto Rican as well as non Puerto Rican audiences (Antush, p. xiii).⁷⁰ Ever since the summer of 1967, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, a professional, nonprofit, bilingual theatre company has provided culturally deprived communities with theatre from Puerto Rico and other Latin American countries.

The primary objectives of the company, as elaborated in its original founding document, are to:

- 1-Promote identification and self esteem in alienated ethnic minorities.

⁶⁹For a complete accounting of the history and development of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre see Rosa Luisa Márquez, "The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company: The First Ten Years" (Ph. D. diss., Michigan State University, 1977). Also see Elisa De La Roche, ¡Teatro Hispano! Three Major New York Companies (New York: Garland, 1995).

⁷⁰"Another milestone in the development of the New York Puerto Rican theatre occurred on December 19, 1966, the English -language opening at the Greenwich Mews Theater of The Oxcart for an Off-Broadway run of eighty-nine performances. This auspicious beginning had been gestating since its 1953 Spanish -language world premiere in New York had caught the imagination of the widely acclaimed Puerto Rican actress Miriam Colón. She herself became the driving force who introduced The Oxcart to North American audiences in New York. Miriam Colón persuaded her husband, George Edgar, to finance Charles Pilditch's translation of the play and its English production. Lloyd Richards directed the play with Raúl Juliá in the role of Luis and Miriam Colón re-creating her role as Juanita. Miss Lucy Boscana, one of Puerto Rico's leading actresses, came to New York to re-create her role as Doña Gabriela. Miriam Colón and others founded the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre (PRTT) primarily to bring this play, free of charge, to the people of New York. In 1967, funded largely by Mayor John Lindsay's Summer Taskforce, Miss Colón's troupe toured New York City's parks and playgrounds performing The Oxcart in English and Spanish."

- 2- Increase understanding and tolerance between the different national and ethnic groups.
- 3- Bring free, high quality entertainment to neighborhoods which cannot afford to pay Broadway or off-Broadway prices.
- 4- Provide a constructive outlet for boredom, restlessness and frustration.
- 5- Be a source of wholesome entertainment and cultural enrichment for the community.
- 6- Offer community participation, vocational opportunity and talent development to our youth.⁷¹

In order to fulfill its goal of taking theatre to the people, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is composed of several working units: the touring unit, which operates during the summer and brings the plays, free of charge, mostly to economically deprived communities; the training unit, which offers free of charge training to youngsters in areas such as acting, dance, voice and movement; the playwrights unit, where new plays are developed at beginner and advanced levels; and the permanent theatre where a wide range of Puerto Rican, Latin American and contemporary world drama is presented.

As is the case of all Puerto Rican theatre companies in New York, language and choice of plays are extremely important issues. Regarding language choice, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre presents its plays in both Spanish and English, alternating performances in both languages, when performed on their main stage in their home, a former fire station on 47th Street. Otherwise the company presents its plays in either language according to the personal preference of the community being visited as part of the traveling unit project during the summer. However, the use of Spanglish is strongly discouraged by the company, although it is used when it is strictly necessary to understand a particular situation such as with Edward Gallardo's Simpson Street.

In terms of the choice of works, content and possible impact on the audience determine whether a play is culturally relevant, and therefore chosen by the company.⁷²

⁷¹Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company: A Proposal," New York, 1 May 1967, p. 1.

⁷²Colón says:

I think a lot about, first, content; second, possible impact. You see, our audiences are very mixed because we choose 90 percent of the locations to be in the areas where there is more unemployment, more poverty, and more deterioration in the neighborhood.

Above all, plays should have a social message reflecting a strong Hispanic tradition to the audience, be it Puerto Rican or not. Colón asserts in her proposal to New York City for funding a Puerto Rican theatre, that a Puerto Rican theatre company's purpose is to emphasize the problems of the particular community it represents, in order to be helpful and contribute to the search for solutions and answers :

The solution to the problems of the Puerto Ricans in New York is a complex one. A theatre will not be the answer, but a theatre can help, for it can dramatize the problems of a people, can instill in them pride in their rich cultural heritage, open new perspectives, release aggressions and suggest solutions.⁷³

This is where the choice of Puerto Rican plays seems logical in an attempt to cope with the specific needs of the audience being addressed. Thematically, for the most part, plays produced by The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre reflect the lives of Puerto Ricans whether on the island or on the mainland. Such is the case, for example with René Marqués's La carreta; Manuel Méndez Ballester's Encrucijada (Crossroads), which chronicles a Puerto Rican family's adaptation to a New York environment which changes them; René Marqués's Los soles truncos (The Fanlights), about the process of personal, cultural and political resistance experienced by three Puerto Rican sisters on the verge of losing their cultural identity to a new political power, the United States; and, of a more universal nature, Luis Rafael Sánchez's La pasión según Antígona Pérez (The Passion According to Antígona Pérez), a Latin American allegory denouncing the social and political injustices suffered by the continent.⁷⁴

Márquez, "The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company: The First Ten Years," Interview With Miriam Colón, p. 172.

⁷³Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre, Including The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre," Submitted to the City of New York, May 1969, p. 2.

⁷⁴Some other plays, produced by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, which reflect the lives of Puerto Ricans are: Piri Thomas's The Golden Streets, Pedro Juan Soto's El huésped (The Guest), Roberto Rodríguez's Las ventanas (The Windows), Luis Rafael Sánchez's Los ángeles se han fatigado (The Angels Are Exhausted), Jaime Carrero's Noo Yall and Pipo Subway no sabe reír.

From the awareness of the power of theatre to help people understand and survive their particular historical, political and existential conditions, a re-evaluation of the 1967 objectives of a Puerto Rican theatre emerged in 1972, focusing specifically on ethnic objectives pertinent to the Puerto Rican community.⁷⁵ From this reconsideration a new way of viewing Puerto Rican realities sprang. In many respects, nostalgia for the homeland led to the production of plays that were somewhat pessimistic in that they proposed no way out of the generally challenging circumstance of being a Puerto Rican in New York other than going back to the island. In contrast, poetry made it possible to validate the experiences of New York born Puerto Ricans. The emergence of a literature which evolved from urban living conditions was also acknowledged in a show titled Piri, Papoleto y Pedro, dirigidos por Pablo (Piri, Papoleto and Pedro, Directed by Pablo).

Piri, Papoleto y Pedro , dirigidos por Pablo (1975) represented a breakthrough for the company. The play was based on the work of three Nuyorican poets: Piri Thomas, Papoleto Meléndez and Pedro Pietri. Despite the examination of Puerto Rican issues in New York in the theatre, it was not until the emergence of Nuyorican literature, especially poetry, that these issues were examined from the perspective of Puerto Ricans born and raised in the city. Due to the prominent role played by poetry in the cultural life of Puerto Ricans in New York, it is not surprising that theatre became a showcase for Nuyorican poetry. The production also posed a dramatically different attitude towards life in the United States; an attitude which derived from the emergence of a validated Nuyorican

⁷⁵In 1972 The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre stated that the objectives of the company would include:

1. Promote ethnic identification and self-esteem in an otherwise alienated ethnic minority group.
2. Increase understanding and mutual respect between Puerto Ricans and the rest of the community.
3. Serve as an outlet of expression for Puerto Rican creative talents in acting, writing for the theatre, scenic design and execution, costume design and execution, props, etc.
4. Widen the job margin for youngsters for careers in the theatre.
5. Acquaint New York students and the community in general with the rich reservoir of Puerto Rican drama.
6. Expand the activities of its present traveling theatre to reach more deprived areas, more schools.

aesthetic.⁷⁶ Although Nuyorican poetry showed a cynical attitude towards life in New York and its attendant difficulties, return to the island was not looked at as the only possible solution. In contrast to the pain suffered by Puerto Ricans as a result of poverty and discrimination, there was a strong sense of humor and hope in the work of the Nuyorican poets reflecting a strong will for survival. Thus a new element in the Puerto Rican equation, the voice of New York born Puerto Ricans, emerged to complement the important objective of mutual nurturing between theatre on the island and on the mainland.

⁷⁶The theatricalization of Nuyorican poetry, a widely known performing method evolved into what Pablo Figueroa calls New Rican Theatre; a movement that by the end of the seventies was still young and developed into a variety of well known groups as this author asserts:

The last part of the Hispanic Theatre movement is just now beginning to emerge. It may be called the New Rican Theatre. It is being produced by the new generation of Puerto Ricans born on the mainland. Such groups as the Latin Insomniacs, the Nuyorican Poets Café, El Teatro Ambulante, Teatro Otra Cosa, Ricans Organization for Self Advancement Theatre and Puerto Rican Bilingual Workshop are some of the most active in this area. (Pablo Figueroa, p. 26)

Nuyorican poets and artists in general were not only well attuned to their aesthetic preferences, but also were clear about their literary techniques and their awareness of a Nuyorican aesthetic. In the words of Miguel Algarín, a member of the movement and founder of the Nuyorican Poets Café:

Puerto Rican literature is alive and well in New York. Its vibrancy stems from Point Zero. When you have nothing and can expect nothing, anything you do is something, so that our experience makes it possible for us to write poems that describe our condition without fearing that they might be too personal or too lost in the detail of the day and not metaphysical enough...

The Nuyorican aesthetic has three elements to it. The first is the expression of the self orally and the domination of one language or both to a degree that makes it possible to be accurate about one's present condition: psychic, economic, or historical-and I think the first steps are always oral. The second reality of the Nuyorican aesthetic is that if we are to safeguard the future, we must create a dialogue among ourselves about setting up systems of protection and mutual benefits. The urban centers of the Northeast present the greatest challenge, but if we ignore it, we will find that in the next ten or fifteen years there will be roving urban youth gangs in numbers of fifteen to twenty, all self-dependent, but both mutually aggressive against any other gangs. We need to lay down a groundwork for the future by establishing a constitution for survival on top of tar and concrete.

Regarding the ways in which we use the languages: English has a stress system; Spanish has a syllabic system. I think that Nuyorican verse is a combination of both and it is also doing something that Charles Olson took great pains in his essay of projective verse to clarify, which is that the kingpin of English written verse is the syllable...and we can prove it by our poems and the Black man in America can prove it, because the more he depends on the syllable, the more the language can become his.

The last thing about the Nuyorican aesthetic has to do with art: transformations before the public eye are a very important way of psychic cure. In other words, the creation of places where people can express themselves-expressly created for that purpose. People will come, and they will bring their writings. And if you, as guide of the place, have generosity of spirit, you will find that you will have created a center for the expression of self and for people to transform themselves before the public eye.

Miguel Algarín, "Nuyorican Aesthetics," in Asela Rodríguez Laguna ed., Images and Identities: The Puerto Rican in Two World Contexts (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987), p. 163.

The constant exchange of material, talent and ideas concerns all Puerto Rican theatre companies in the U. S. Mutual sharing of talent and theatrical material between the island and New York is fostered by companies that travel from the island to present their work at the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. This effort is reinforced by the production of a variety of Latin American and Spanish works by: José Ruibal (Spain), Fernando Arrabal (Spain and France) and Federico García Lorca (Spain); Emilio Carballido (Mexico); Jorge Díaz (Chile); Alfredo Dias Gomez (Brazil); and Edilio Peña and Isaac Chocrón (Venezuela); Roberto Cossa and Osvaldo Dragún (Argentina).

To date, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has provided the New York community with the best of Puerto Rican, Latin American and U. S. Latino theatre both in English and Spanish. It has established a tradition based on pride and preservation of native culture, and has won a respected place in the professional theatre of the United States. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has been a pioneer for many other Puerto Rican theatre companies which, no matter how ephemeral their life, have continued the contribution started by Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. Today, more than thirty years after its founding, Puerto Ricans, as well as theatre people in general, continue to proudly view the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre as an early expression of the Hispanic theatre's power.

Of all the offspring of Puerto Rican theatre companies which emerged during the sixties, one worthy of attention is the Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América, founded by Pedro Santaliz in 1968. A graduate of the University of Puerto Rico Drama Department, Puerto Rican playwright and poet Santaliz studied in Puerto Rico, France and the United States. The Teatro Pobre de América was born in New York as a complement to a political movement for Puerto Rican independence from the United States called the "Movimiento Pro Independencia Casa Puerto Rico" (Santaliz, "Diversiones y condiciones...", p. 173). As a cultural component to the movement, Puerto Rican artists who had recently migrated

to the United States organized poetry recitals that included the works of Puerto Rican patriots Luis Palés Matos, Juan Antonio Corretjer and Julia de Burgos, among others.⁷⁷

Similar to the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, the socially oriented Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América's main goal was to bring theatre to the people by performing in public spaces. They generally performed in public housing projects and deprived sectors all over New York City. In Santaliz's own words, "We were Puerto Ricans in New York discontented with the situation of Puerto Ricans in New York, the minorities. We were not happy. We wanted to bring a message of culture and identity to our own people."⁷⁸ Thus Santaliz's theatre is conceived and produced as a true popular theatre created for the people. It is different from the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in that its involvement with the people goes beyond visiting a community and presenting a play. Young unemployed members of the community typically became engaged in the play's production, which requires time for training, rehearsing and performing. This kind of work was possible thanks to publicly funded grants which included The New York State Council on the Arts. The money received was allocated for paying actors since the nature of the company did not demand special sets or technical requirements.

El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América combined professional actors with inexperienced young actors. The company constantly renewed itself because its involvement with a particular community was only sporadic. Professional actors were also hired as needed. This policy gave participants the opportunity to train, albeit for a short period of time, in professional acting techniques. Similarly, they discovered the power of theatre to transform their community. Invariably performing in Spanish, the company provided community members with an outlet to channel frustration due to unemployment,

⁷⁷Among the original members of the group were: Ramón Pabón, Walter Rodríguez, Angel Luis Méndez, Lourdes Cabezudo, Soledad Romero, Alex Colón Mijón, Víctor Fernández Fragoso, Eric Vargas and others. Shirley Chesney also figures as the group's mentor.

⁷⁸Eneid Route-Gómez, "At 56, Pedrito Santaliz Still a Child at Heart," The San Juan Star, Sunday, February 6, 1994, "Venue," p. 3.

street problems, and drug addiction. Describing this experience, Víctor Fragoso, a former member of the group, now deceased, said:

For them theatre is an artistic expression of their struggle for survival in this society. Spanish is always used as the language of communication... The theme of drugs, well known as a ghetto experience, is treated in the company's theatre pieces. Works combine fantasy and reality, the world of children's games and the crippling world of the ghetto, sense of humor with a social message. Plays have an unfinished air to them, something open to the unpredictable. (Fragoso, p. 7)⁷⁹

Non professional community participants in the productions of the Teatro Pobre de América took part in the creative process of a piece, since plays evolved from improvisation. They became proactive members of the ensemble, rather than mere followers of a method. Santaliz's difficulties with this technique were discussed earlier in this chapter, but the outcome had positive implications.⁸⁰ For one thing, Santaliz considers his theatre an antidote to the addiction to television that Puerto Ricans suffer from:

My theatre represents the effort of going to the housing projects to bring this message of popular theatre and besides a theatre where the actors, in many cases, live in those very projects and that's where they get their training...The idea is for the people to substitute the bad art of commercial television for the ancient art of theatre, a theatre that brings them interesting characters, reasons for action fights, and even grand heights of imagination. (Santaliz, "Diversiones y condiciones...", p. 173)⁸¹

Santaliz's plays help participants to focus on those problems which affect them as Puerto Ricans. Among the most typical plays produced by the company which summarize the

⁷⁹"El teatro es para ellos una expresión artística de su lucha por la sobrevivencia en esta sociedad. Se emplea invariablemente el español. ...Se trata el tema de las drogas, conocido porque es una de las experiencias del gueto. Se combina la fantasía con la realidad, el mundo de los juegos infantiles con la crueldad del mundo atrofiante del gueto, el sentido del humor con el mensaje social. Las obras todas tienen un carácter de cosa sin terminar, abierta a lo imprevisto."

⁸⁰Due to Santaliz's commuter nature, El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América moved its headquarters from New York to Puerto Rico in the mid seventies. A recounting of his work in Puerto Rico appears in the section of this work on Puerto Rican theatre on the island.

⁸¹"Mi teatro representa el esfuerzo de ir a los caseríos a llevar este mensaje de teatro popular, y, además, es un teatro en el que los actores en muchos casos, son de los mismos caseríos y ahí es que se entrenan. ...La idea es que la gente sustituyera el mal arte de la televisión comercial por un arte antiguo como el del teatro, un teatro que le llevara buenos personajes, motivos de acción, peleas y hasta las grandes cimas de la imaginación."

ideas described above are: El grito en el tiempo (A Cry Through Time, 1968), Cemí en el palacio de Járlem (Cemí in the Palace of Harlem, 1969), Chebelto Cofresí (1970), Isla de las lechozas (Island of the Papayas, 1970), Gueybaná (1970), Animales y congas (Animals and Congas, 1971), Felices días...danza para compadritos (Happy Days...a Dance for Compadritos, 1971), Guarapos (Sugar Cane Juice, 1971), Los Presos (Prisoners, 1971), Isla sin nombre (Island Without a Name, 1972), Culantrillo (1972), Los angelitos y sus velas y sus angelitos (Little Angels, Their Candles, and Their Little Angels, 1973), Traqueteo (Getting Over, 1973), Oda al rey de Járlem (Ode to the King of Harlem, 1974) and La fábula de Rico y Puerto (The Fable of Rico and Puerto, 1974).

From these, Cemí en el palacio de Járlem, a play that deals with the issue of drugs and their effect on the Puerto Rican community, is one of the most representative of the group's works as well as one of the most acclaimed. Consistent with the Teatro Pobre de América's style, Cemí en el palacio de Járlem was an epic narration depicting a harsh reality for which Santaliz proposes the solution that Puerto Rico should become socialist and independent from the United States. Also consistent with the style of this company, the play features live Puerto Rican music, an element widely employed by Puerto Rican popular theatre companies both on the island and the mainland.

Being a New York born company that commuted from New York to Puerto Rico, where it finally settled permanently, the Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América stands as a symbol of those Puerto Ricans who continually commute between the island and the mainland in search of better job opportunities. Whether in New York or Puerto Rico, the Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América has contributed to the history of Puerto Rican theatre offering a rich tradition which survives to this day in a vibrant and prolific manner:

To continue producing theatre is an act of faith, a strong faith in the power to create, which fears nothing, that simply goes to these public housing projects to remind the residents and teach them about the beauty of theatre within our culture because in the housing projects people are divided, they scarcely live to survive, but there are always people who want to join the theatre...In one sense, I'm happy that I always

find people who follow me so that I can do my work, my theatre, and communicate what I want to communicate in my workshops. (Santaliz, 1985, pp. 176-177) ⁸²

Settled now in Puerto Rico and totally committed to its popular audience, the Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América will never have commercial success, but it will always serve the important task of bringing the magic of theatre to deprived communities and of empowering them to adopt theatre as a powerful voice to represent their social, political and personal needs and struggles.

The history of Puerto Rican theatre in New York is one in which the efforts made by pioneering companies have benefitted upcoming companies, with the goal of creating a continuum nourished by the contribution of newcomers. Such is the case with Teatro de Orilla, a group that enjoyed a short but fruitful life. Founded by Soledad Romero and Rafael Acevedo in 1971, both Puerto Rican theatre people and educators, the group's main objective was to empower Puerto Ricans through education. Like Miriam Colón and Pedro Santaliz, Soledad Romero obtained her education at the University of Puerto Rico where she was also influenced by the Teatro Rodante Universitario, the traveling theatre unit of that institution.⁸³ Years of theatrical experience and political involvement would serve her

⁸²"Seguir haciendo teatro es una fe. Es una fe juglaresca. Una fe dura de crear un tejido y una fuerza de carácter que no le tiene miedo a nada y que sencillamente va a estos caseríos a recordarles y a enseñarles sobre la belleza del teatro dentro de la cultura porque los caseríos están bien escindidos y la gente vive escasamente para sobrevivir. Pero siempre hay personas que quieren unirse a las filas del teatro...En cierto sentido, yo estoy contento de que siempre encuentre gente que me sigue para yo hacer lo mío y hacer mi teatro y describir lo que yo quiero describir en mi taller."

⁸³The Teatro Rodante unit was founded by Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero in 1946, as part of the Drama Department of the University of Puerto Rico, in an effort to bring high quality college theatre to deprived sectors of the island. Miriam Colón, Pedro Santaliz, Soledad Romero and many other Puerto Rican theatre people who received their education in that institution, served their dramatic apprenticeship with the Teatro Rodante as a source of work, experience and inspiration.

John V. Antush, in analyzing all the influences that made the emergence of a modern Puerto Rican theatre in New York possible wrote:

The several Puerto Rican theatre companies that have attracted widespread attention in New York City did not quicken to life in a vacuum. Nor were they mere imitators of other street and guerrilla theatres. Although there were cross-influences with other experimental theatre groups, to be sure, the Puerto Rican companies in New York evolved out of a rich theatrical tradition going back to the *teatro rodante* in Spain. The University of Puerto Rico's renowned theatre department, headed

well in the following years. Upon her arrival in New York, she worked with William Nieves's Puerto Rican Ensemble.⁸⁴ Later, she collaborated with the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre and Santaliz's Teatro Pobre de América until she finally co-founded Teatro de Orilla.

Teatro de Orilla saw in theatre an effective tool to contribute to the development of popular education. Education was seen as a political weapon, detached from politics but related to the political struggle for people's empowerment. In Romero's own words:

Political work is not necessarily that of a political party, because here, in New York, I never belonged to any political organization. For us, the way to channel this kind of work is through education. It includes helping Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans to learn to use their language, know who their thinkers and philosophers are, know that we have a rich cultural heritage. We have to give them a solid cultural base, help them know their history, their culture.⁸⁵

by Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero, whom Miriam Colón called 'a teacher who was totally ahead of his time,' developed a traveling unit fashioned in the spirit of Federico García Lorca's *La Barraca*, which had taken theatre to outlying towns and communities throughout Spain. UPR's Teatro Rodante Universitario used a bus and a trailer that opened up into a platform stage to reach the people in town squares, hospitals, schools- wherever the stage could be opened up for production... These traditional Hispanic techniques of staging focus acutely on the crucial questions of political freedom and personal dignity. When the time was ripe, the Puerto Rican theatre was ready to play its part in one of the continuing enterprises of the sixties: the integration of the United States into the rest of the Americas; the moral transformation, no less, of all America. (Antush, xv)

⁸⁴The Puerto Rican Ensemble, a company that evolved from the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre and continued the task of bringing theatre to the much deprived sectors of the Puerto Rican community, was founded by William Nieves in 1968. Its main objective was to bring social and political theatre to the Puerto Rican communities in New York including the presentation of music, poetry and short stories. Nieves had also been involved in the creation of a Puerto Rican student movement at City College and the creation of El Caney, a social and cultural club in El Barrio. For more information on The Puerto Rican Ensemble see: Yeidy Rivero, "Puerto Rican Political Theatre in New York City in the Sixties and Seventies" (M.A. Thesis, Stony Brook University, 1993). Regarding the influence of the Puerto Rican Ensemble on the evolution of Puerto Rican theatre in the mainland, Márquez and Fiet say:

The impact of the Puerto Rican Ensemble led to the establishment of two theatre groups: Pedro Santaliz's *El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América* (New Poor Theatre of America), and Teatro de Orilla, directed by María Soledad Romero and Rafael Acevedo. Their work represents a significant advance in the creation of theatre in the Puerto Rican community. They follow other third world groups in defining theatre as a vehicle promoting change. Popular Antillian traditions of folklore, music and dance, and comedy intermesh in works with deep Afro-Antillian-American roots and direct social meaning. (p. 439)

⁸⁵Soledad Romero, personal interview, April 3, 1996.

"El trabajo político no es necesariamente de partido, porque aquí en Nueva York yo no he pertenecido a ninguna organización. Para nosotros la manera de canalizar ese trabajo es a través de la educación, de educar. Y ayudar a educar no tiene que ser exclusivamente en lo político. Desde que los puertorriqueños y los latinoamericanos aprendan a usar su idioma, conozcan quiénes son sus pensadores, sus filósofos, que nosotros tenemos un cúmulo cultural muy antiguo. Hay que dar solidez en la base cultural; lo que es tu historia, lo que es tu cultura".

Theatre becomes a necessary tool that helps the Latino community, which is simultaneously culturally rich and at the same time deprived, to connect with its traditions and history. One of the main objectives of the group was to create social awareness through popular theatre that would truly identify with the people; theatre that would promote the preservation of their Hispanic culture and reinforce their cultural identity. Poetry, live music, short stories and popular theatre pieces were the sources from which Teatro de Orilla developed its repertoire to reach the community. In order to convey its message, Romero considered community grassroots work as one of the main keys to the success of this kind of street theatre. By the same token, a lack of relationship with the community becomes its downfall. Perhaps what unites the different Puerto Rican theatre companies in spite of their differences is their level of commitment to their community.

Teatro de Orilla differed from the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in that it was derived from an educational community as opposed to a purely theatrical community. It also differed from the Teatro Pobre de América in that members of the collective were professionally trained as actors, writers and educators as opposed to being untrained members of the community. Nevertheless, Teatro de Orilla borrowed from both precursors

Although Teatro de Orilla is not affiliated with any political organization, its commitment to the independence of Puerto Rico is implicit in the kind of work they do. According to Ms Romero, the preservation of Puerto Rican culture, language and identity typically has been a task performed by those artists committed to the struggle for Puerto Rican independence:

Part of the work of *independentistas* is to do cultural work. We are not talking about a homeland in the air. We are talking about a homeland that exists, a nation that has its history. To live without a history is part of the problem. When you don't live with a history, you are on the outside and you can't connect. That is one of the consequences of ignorance and poverty; you can't relate facts with their continuity. That has happened in theatre. There are some voids and we have to reconstruct the history of Puerto Rican theatre.

"Parte del trabajo de los independentistas es el trabajo cultural. Nosotros no estamos hablando de una patria en el aire. Es una patria que existe, es una nación que tiene historia y vivir sin historia es parte del problema. Cuando tú no vives históricamente, tú estás fuera y no puedes conectar, no puedes relacionar. Ese es uno de los problemas de la ignorancia, de la pobreza; tú no relacionas los hechos y la continuidad que hay. Eso ha ocurrido en el teatro. Hay algunos vacíos y nosotros tenemos que construir la historia del teatro en Puerto Rico."

their methodology, play choices and production techniques. Conceived to be a materially poor company, Teatro de Orilla traveled light. With a minimum of scenery, costumes, lighting and sophisticated technical equipment, the company presented its works in parks, schools, churches, colleges, performance spaces, prisons and neighborhoods. Citing theatre's impact on deprived sectors of society, Romero comments about the importance of performing in prisons:

Another important task is the work in prisons. We're not going to idealize jail. There are people there who have committed some truly terrible crimes and others who are there for minor crimes; those are the ones we work with...I was affected by seeing so many Hispanics, so many Puerto Rican youths imprisoned, generations of men who could have been working and studying, who ended up like that because of poverty and the absence of values. There are so many contributing factors... (Ibid.)⁸⁶

Teatro de Orilla tried to educate its audiences in the face of the corrosive elements destroying the community, thus creating a sense of awareness and pride that would help build an ideological foundation. Without certain material, social, spiritual and personal conditions it is almost impossible to change society and Romero is aware of this reality: "Theatre does not change societies. Theatre shows you the way, but it doesn't change you. You have to have an ideological foundation" (Rivero, p. 48).

Similar to the Teatro Pobre de América, Teatro de Orilla concentrated on the actor's performance, with a minimum of technical baggage, as well as on the delivery of a strong social message, keeping in mind the audience's need for entertainment. The emotional, social and political impact of its performances superceded the artificiality of the theatrical illusion. Teatro de Orilla used two methods to develop its repertoire: the

⁸⁶" Otro trabajo importante es el trabajo en las prisiones. No vamos a idealizar la cárcel. Ahí hay gente que ha cometido unos delitos realmente terribles y hay otros que están por cuestiones de menos calibre y es con esos con los que se trabaja...Me afectó ver a tantos hispanos, a tanto puertorriqueño joven preso. Generaciones de hombres que podrían estar educándose y trabajando y que la pobreza los haya llevado a eso; la pobreza y la ausencia de valores. Son muchos los factores..."

traditional production of plays and short story adaptations, and collective creation. In both cases the company operated as a collective where each member would contribute to the final product.

The repertoire of the company included a wide range of Puerto Rican, Latin American and European plays such as: Preciosa por ser un encanto por ser un edén (Precious Because You're Enchanting, Because You're an Eden), by Puerto Rican Alfredo Matilla about the violence and alienation caused by a lack of human values; Los dos verdugos (Two Executioners), by the Spaniard Fernando Arrabal about the effects of religion, morality and devotion on a country at war; Puerto Rican Obituary, based on the poem by Nuyorican writer Pedro Pietri about the conditions of life in the Puerto Rican ghettos of New York; Historias para ser contadas (Stories to Be Told), by Argentine Osvaldo Dragún about class struggle; La farsa del hombre que dijo que no (The Farce of the Man Who Said No), by Puerto Rican Lydia Milagros González about the struggle for survival in the presence of invaders; and Bayaminiña, adapted from a short story by Pedro Juan Soto about the difficulties of adapting to an environment that is linguistically and politically hostile.⁸⁷

Noteworthy in the group's work are its collective pieces. Probably the two most important works of the company's repertoire are collective creations. ¿Este tren para en Delancey? (Does This Train Stop at Delancey?, 1972), profiles the frustration of a Puerto Rican woman trying to adapt to a new way of life, a new language and a new environment. The play is a collection of short stories by Pedro Juan Soto, Lydia Milagros González and José Luis González, unified by a central story, poetry and live music. It was also with ¿Este tren para en Delancey? that Teatro de Orilla opened its newly acquired performance space at 214 E. 2nd St. on the Lower East Side.⁸⁸ Peloalambre no se rinde o las

⁸⁷ Rafael Acevedo, El Teatro de Orilla: Repertorio, Fall 1971. Courtesy of Soledad Romero.

⁸⁸The performance space in the Lower East Side was offered to Teatro de Orilla by the Youth Mobilization Project with funds from by the New York Council on the Arts.

tribulaciones de un pueblo gulembo (Nappy Hair Won't Give Up or the Tribulations of a Torn Country, 1973), explores issues of Puerto Rican ethnicity focusing on its black heritage and on racism, from the perspective of a black Puerto Rican woman who tries to communicate her history of slavery, as well as the heritage of her African traditions. The play flows from one story to another through a dream sequence that connects the piece with the help of music and dance. It is based on personal experiences shared, discussed and developed by the group from improvisation.⁸⁹ With the participation of two professional musicians in the piece, Nelly and Sammy Tanco, music, an important element in all of Teatro de Orilla's plays was featured as another character in the play, commenting in its unique fashion on Puerto Rican ethnicity and its influence on Puerto Rican culture.

In 1978 Teatro de Orilla disintegrated. Many factors contributed to the dissolution of the group. Among these factors were: personal conflict among the members of the group, lack of funding resulting in personal economic sacrifices on the part of members of the group and failure to raise and keep a community based audience:

By 1977-78 things had changed. It had a lot to do with political activity. The atmosphere towards the end of the sixties and mid seventies was very different from the eighties in the United States. Communities changed. Grassroots organizations changed. Monies were not allocated to funding grassroots

⁸⁹Soledad Romero, Personal Interview, April 3, 1996. About the creation process of Peloalambre no se rinde o las tribulaciones de un pueblo gulembo Romero says:

Peloalambre is a play where I drew on personal experiences, as did Manuel Ramos Otero, who wrote other scenes. Angel Luis Méndez and Etna Iris Rivera, both of them poets, were also with us and we began to work with two black Puerto Ricans from Santurce, Sammy Tanco and his sister Nelly. We set the play in Loíza; in other words it was a play that had ethnic roots and I wanted to deal with returning to the roots of the coast of Puerto Rico. We sang Ismael Rivera's songs, and it was really improvised theatre. Everything was written collectively and we tried to give it certain unity. It was a piece that I later used as a project for the graduate studies I was doing in Buffalo on popular theatre and collective creations.

"Peloalambre es una obra donde yo puse toda una serie de experiencias personales y Manuel Ramos Otero también trajo información y escribió otras escenas. Estaban Angel Luis Méndez y Etna Iris Rivera, que son poetas y nosotros comenzamos a trabajar con un grupo de puertorriqueños negros de Santurce, que eran Sammy Tanco y su hermana Nelly. La desarrollamos en Loíza, o sea era una obra que tenía sus raíces y yo quería bregar con ir de vuelta a la raíz de la costa. Se cantaban canciones de Ismael Rivera, era teatro improvisado. Todo lo escribimos colectivamente y tratamos de darle cierta unidad. Eso fue un trabajo que luego yo utilicé como proyecto para los estudios que yo estaba haciendo en Buffalo de teatro popular y teatro colectivo."

organizations, which were the ones that kept the flame alive. People who came to see our plays were those who always attended the theatre, so we did not feel the presence of the community any longer. (Ibid.)⁹⁰

The ever increasing crime rate in the neighborhoods where the group performed, the lack of serious criticism to stimulate the formation of a consistent audience, and the lack of sufficient funding, were also contributing factors to the dissolution of the group.

Yet the theatrical continuity that made possible the evolution and emergence of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, The Puerto Rican Ensemble, The Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América and Teatro de Orilla, created the conditions for its own preservation. So, when Teatro de Orilla dissolved as a group, its members went to work with newly emerged groups. A new group took over the performance space and the difficult task left by Teatro de Orilla. This group was Teatro Cuatro, founded by Oscar Ciccone in 1974.⁹¹ A politically committed community based theatre company, Teatro Cuatro's mission was to present art that reflected the expression, identity and language of the people it represented. In its consideration of the central role of the audience, Teatro Cuatro had much in common with its precursor companies. It differed radically from other companies in its commitment

⁹⁰"Hacia los años 77-78 habían cambiado ya las cosas. Tiene mucho que ver con la actividad política. Lo que nosotros vivimos a finales de los sesenta y a mediados de los setenta era un ambiente diferente a lo que ocurrió luego en los ochenta en los Estados Unidos y particularmente en la ciudad de Nueva York. Las comunidades cambiaron. Las organizaciones de base cambiaron. Dejó de fluir dinero para organizaciones base que eran las que mantenían la llama viva, las actividades. La gente que venía a ver las obras era gente que va siempre al teatro, pero no veíamos la presencia de la comunidad."

⁹¹ Oscar Ciccone was a member of the Argentine group Once al Sur, a company which toured throughout Latin America and the United States at the beginning of the seventies. When the group dissolved in 1974, Ciccone decided to return to New York where he had already established contact with Teatro de Orilla in 1971. In 1975 Teatro Cuatro was founded, fostering an important process that had been overlooked by other companies, that of integrating U.S. Latino theatre into the theatrical world of Latin American popular theatre. See Marina Pianca, *El teatro de nuestra América: un proyecto continental 1959-1989* (Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, Series Towards a Social History of Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures, 1990) p. 284.

to the Puerto Rican Lower East Side community and the political education campaign which operated from within the company to give social significance to its theatrical work.

The group, with the exception of Ciccone, consisted mostly of dispossessed and uneducated Puerto Rican members of the community, with no previous training in theatre. Their training process was not only theatrical, but also socio-political, thanks to the exchange of ideas and lectures given to members by politically involved people from Latin American countries. The idea was to help participants understand the political and social processes that had created and fostered their actual living conditions. Teatro Cuatro, a group that collaborated closely with the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, provided its participants with tools to help them understand the stigma attached to them due to years of unemployment, educational disparity, welfare dependency, drug addiction, drug dealing, prostitution and crime. All these evils are seen as direct consequences of political ignorance. Socialism was proposed as a possible solution to the adverse conditions many Puerto Ricans experienced.

Although the preservation of identity is an important issue, it is not the most important one when compared with the need for social and political awareness. To Ciccone, Puerto Rican identity is not at risk, whereas the consequences of unbearable living conditions take precedence over the identity issue:

We don't have to begin by debating an identity problem; we debate social problems like racism, education and drugs, for instance.....in other words, any of the mechanisms devised by imperialism to subject a social class, to enslave it through welfare, false financial aid and the tools which contribute to paralyzing people and impeding their development.⁹²

⁹²José Monleón, América Latina: teatro y revolución (Venezuela: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1978), p.180.

"No tenemos que empezar debatiendo un problema de identidad; debatimos un problema social, como puede ser el racismo, la educación, la droga...Es decir cualquiera de los mecanismos que maneja el imperialismo para someter a una clase, para lumpenizarla, a través del "well fare", las falsas ayudas y los instrumentos que paralizan o impiden su desarrollo."

In order to evaluate the living conditions of Puerto Ricans and Latinos in the Lower East Side, the company interviewed members of the community. The personal experiences of the group members were also helpful in identifying social problems as part of their developing political education. From these interviews, plays that addressed the specific problems of the community evolved. Free plays like ¿Qué encontré en Nueva York? (What Did I Find in New York?), which included live music, were advertised throughout the community by word of mouth, music and flyers. A discussion followed each performance providing the space to talk about issues presented in the plays. Theatre was not only proposed as a tool for education and entertainment, but as a tool for transformation.⁹³

By educating the community and contributing to its political awareness the lives of the group members were transformed through theatrical expression. Once this goal was attained within the community, sharing it with similar groups became necessary. In addition, it was necessary to create connections between New York Latinos and their Latin American counterparts in the United States and abroad. Eventually isolation was identified as a problem confronted by Latino theatre groups. The solution was to integrate the New York Latino theatrical community into the rest of the U.S. Latino theatre community. A first step for Teatro Cuatro was to attend the VI Festival Chicano in 1975, a unique opportunity to network. The experience fostered a transformation in the company's vision which encouraged the development of an organizational structure. Another important consequence of attending the Chicano Festival was that the foundation for the creation of a Latin American Popular Theatre Festival in New York was laid.

In 1976 Teatro Cuatro organized the Primer Festival de Teatro Latinoamericano (First Latin American Popular Theatre Festival) in the Lower East Side sponsored by the

⁹³ About the work of Teatro Cuatro Marina Pianca comments: "Their objectives were not simply to create a new group committed to its community, but rather towards developing an organizational structure from which to create a theatrical and cultural base for the future" (Pianca, p. 285).

"Sus objetivos no estaban dirigidos simplemente a crear un nuevo grupo vinculado a su comunidad, sino más bien a desarrollar una estructura organizativa desde la cual conformar una base teatral y cultural para el futuro."

New York Shakespeare Public Theatre. The event not only gathered Latino theatre groups from around the United States, but also groups from Latin America.⁹⁴ It was successful in manifesting the need for unity among Latin American theatre groups and Latino related groups in the United States, as expressed in its printed program:

...above all, this First Latin American Popular Theatre Festival reaffirms our identity, our culture, our voice of protest in this society and our determination to struggle. Finally, it reassures us that our geographical location does not affect our relation to the rest of Latin America, but rather confirms that right where we are, we are part of the whole.⁹⁵

The festival proved to be instrumental in acknowledging a theatrical connection seldom explored until that point. U.S. popular Latino theatre was now seen as part of a Latin American popular theatre movement struggling against acculturation, exploitation and lack of education. It was not regarded as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a continuum. Nevertheless, due to economic problems which also affected the functioning of the company, it was not until 1980 that a Second Latin American Theatre Festival was produced.⁹⁶ The festival was received with much optimism fostering a future in which U.S. popular Latino theatre became an integral part of the popular theatre movement not only in the United States, but also in Latin America, expanding its influence beyond local borders and opening the doors to a cultural contribution more in tune with the reality of many Latinos and, more specifically, Puerto Ricans in the United States.

⁹⁴ The festival was attended by diverse groups including: La Candelaria (Colombia), La Rueda Roja (Puerto Rico), Teatro Universitario de Trujillo (Perú), Mass Transit Street Theatre (U.S.A.), Los Trashumantes (Panamá), Antillas (Dominican Republic), Teatro Urbano (U.S.A./TENAZ) and others.

⁹⁵ Program to the First Latin American Popular Theatre Festival, August 5-15, 1976.
 "...más que nada, este Primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano reafirma nuestra identidad, nuestra cultura, nuestra voz de protesta en esta sociedad y nuestra determinación de lucha. Y por último, que nuestra situación geográfica es un hecho que ni nos aleja ni nos acerca del resto de América Latina, sino que, justo en nuestro punto, somos parte de un todo."

⁹⁶ The Second Latin American Popular theatre Festival took place in New York from August 14-23, 1980. Among the participants were: Grupo Tablazos and Taller de Histriones (Puerto Rico), La Candelaria (Colombia), Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (México), The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre (New York), Teatro Liberal (Arizona), and Srribiri Bensaed (Panamá). See Pianca, p. 290.

Contemporaneous to the groups just discussed, many other Puerto Rican theatre groups continued the work of preserving Puerto Rican culture through their craft. Groups such as the Puerto Rican Ensemble, Teatro Jurutungo, Grupo Guazábara, the Nuyorican Poets' Café, La Virazón, the Hostos Community College Theatre Ensemble, and others, have contributed to keeping Puerto Rican theatre alive in the United States.⁹⁷ A detailed study of these groups is beyond the scope of this work and remains open for further investigation. Some of these groups have disappeared or merged with others; some have continued working despite the difficulties they have faced.

Among the groups that emerged from the seventies and managed to evolve to the present, Teatro Pregones stands as an example of theatrical perseverance and survival, giving social and consequently political significance to its work. For twenty years now this company has struggled to take high quality Puerto Rican theatre beyond its immediate community of the South Bronx, where the company resides, to communities throughout the United States, Latin America and Europe. Pregones Theatre is part of a mostly overlooked theatre history in the United States, that of diversified ethnic theatre groups. The following is an effort to document its history, contribution and projection towards the future with the hope that someday the contributions of Puerto Rican theatre groups will be acknowledged, not as a separate chapter in the history of American theatre, but as an integral part of it.

⁹⁷ In talking about the difficulties of documenting the work of Puerto Rican theatre companies in the United States Márquez and Fiet say:

The work of many Puerto Rican groups in the United States has been sporadic and difficult to record. Their impact is not diminished, however. In rejecting many of the principles of the conventional stage, groups exist without such conveniences as grants, theatres, salaries for artists, and continuous acting ensembles. These conveniences are frequently seen as encumbrances rather than advantages, tying groups to specific locations and production modes. Much work arises to meet a specific situation and has no extension beyond it. Groups form for one performance, or for two or three years of continuous production, then merge with other companies or disband until a new situation calls forth the original impulse that brought the members together. Plays are often collective enterprises without standard published scripts and at times focus so intensely on a community that word-of-mouth advertising entirely supplants printed handbills and programs. (Márquez and Fiet, p. 443)

CHAPTER 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TEATRO PREGONES

FOUNDING OF THE COMPANY

Pregones Theatre, together with the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, is one of the few Puerto Rican theatre companies that has enjoyed a long life in New York and is one of the principal Latino theatre groups in the United States. It was founded in 1979 through the initiative of three Puerto Rican theatre people: Rosalba Rolón, David Crommet and Luis Meléndez. The original idea envisioned by these artists was to produce a show consisting of a sample of different Puerto Rican theatrical works. The main motivation to produce the show was the limited number of Puerto Rican voices in the developing Latino theatre in the city.¹ They felt that the production of Puerto Rican works was somehow neglected in New York due to a lack of Puerto Rican theatrical producers.

They planned some twenty to twenty-five performances of an isolated show without any long term commitment to the project. Not necessarily thinking about consolidating as a group, these three artists engaged in the task of researching and compiling plays representative of one hundred years of Puerto Rican theatre. After an intense six month search and discussion of sixty-five texts, they created a show which included scenes from prominent plays spanning one hundred years of Puerto Rican theatre history. The title of the show was Pregones: A Puerto Rican Theatre Collection and it featured scenes from reknowned playwrights such as: Luis Rafael Sánchez, René

¹When Rolón, Crommet and Meléndez decided to produce a show, all of them were already working with Latino theatre companies in New York. They were by no means dissatisfied with the theatre produced, but they noticed a limitation as to what was being offered in terms of Puerto Rican theatre. Rosalba Rolón lists a series of important factors that made it eminently necessary for these artists to produce strictly Puerto Rican theatre: 1. Puerto Rican theatre, written by Puerto Rican playwrights was being overlooked by Latino theatre producers; 2. Producing Puerto Rican theatre was not posed as a future priority for these companies either; 3. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, probably the only company able to supply the demand for Puerto Rican theatre, was limited to what it could produce. The company was in the middle of rehabilitating the old firehouse, its present home; 4. There were only two Latino theatre companies, The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre and Repertorio Español, that included traveling as an important part of their mission. All these factors taken into consideration, together with the fact that there was also a limited offering of theatrical activities for people who, like these artists, were recently migrated Puerto Ricans, made it seem logical to produce an alternative theatre able to fill the gaps. (Rosalba Rolón, Artistic Director of Teatro Pregonés, personal interview, December 18, 1996)

Marqués, Manuel Méndez Ballester and Ramón Méndez Quiñones. All the scenes were linked by “pregones”² which marked the transition between scenes, giving unity to the play and eventually becoming the name of the company.

Pregones: A Puerto Rican Theatre Collection, also known as La colección, was presented in its original version to a group of Latin American theatre people and professors. From this experience a group of collaborators and mentors of the group emerged. The reception of the play was positive. It became so popular that the demand for performances in diverse communities, universities, cultural centers and churches superseded the expectations of its creators. An ephemeral production ended up becoming a seriously committed theatre company due to the recognition of a huge need for these kinds of plays. Little by little and almost by accident, Pregones incorporated as a company as it acquired experience, performance engagements and the moral commitment to a community demanding the existence of this kind of theatre. The community contributed to the theatre's existence through its unwillingness to let this project die. As a consequence of assuming the challenge to continue the project, responsibility for improving the work of the company became important.

The company developed aesthetically through the integration of music into its shows, a practice widely used in Latin American theatre, especially in political and popular theatre. Ever since Mexican playwright Emilio Carballido suggested the idea, Pregones has included musicians as an integral part of its cast, letting music become another character within the piece. Today, the use of live music and dance is one of the innovative features that characterizes Pregones's work and distinguishes it from other Latino theatre companies. Within the group's structure musicians are also valuable as actors. Similarly all actors in the company must have some musical or singing ability in order to facilitate the assimilation of autochthonous Puerto Rican musical forms into its work.

²The word “pregón” designates the cry of the street vendor. It was common in Puerto Rico and it still is, to hear street vendors chanting melodious rhymes that announced their merchandise or the kind of service they offered. From this tradition the company adopted its name.

Originally, the mission of the company was solely to produce high quality Puerto Rican theatre in Spanish. Being a theatre company founded by recently migrated artists, they thought that offering Puerto Rican theatre in Spanish was their natural mission, one with which they could identify and for which they were ready to provide a wide range of offerings. In Rolón's own words:

Our original mission was to help Puerto Rican theatre to become known. As we understood it, it was a theatre created by Puerto Rican playwrights. Also, it was a little bit didactic. We even stated that it was only in Spanish, which reflected our lack of connection with Puerto Ricans here [in New York]. That was a transformation that the group had to go through. Honestly, even though we had musicians in the group who grew up here [in New York], we saw [Spanish] language as a political weapon, as a way to reinforce a series of things for us. It took us a long time, almost ten years, to begin working in English. We thought that somehow Spanish was a necessary connection for people here, but we were not in a legitimate position to make that claim since there were no New York born Puerto Ricans in the core of the group, making decisions, for us to have that kind of information. On the other hand, every group chooses its market. Our market was not Pedro Pietri's market, for instance.... We felt very pleased with our decision.³

The main market of the group was mostly Puerto Rican and Latino adults who had recently migrated. This situation persisted for several years. Experience and the search for new forms of aesthetic expression, together with the understanding of parallel realities which affect Puerto Ricans in New York despite their place of origin, have made Pregones expand its mission to areas originally overlooked by the group. The final acceptance of a New York way of life which is sometimes radically different from Puerto Rico, made the

³Rosalba Rolón, personal interview, December 18, 1996. Future references to this interview will be identified as "Rolón, interview."

"Nuestra misión original era dar a conocer teatro puertorriqueño. Como lo entendíamos nosotros era escrito por autores puertorriqueños. Era incluso un poquito más didacta. Llegamos al punto de decir que era solamente en español y un poco reflejaba nuestra falta de conexión con el puertorriqueño de acá [Nueva York]. Esa fue una transformación que pasó el grupo. Sincera y honestamente, aunque teníamos músicos en el grupo criados acá [Nueva York], entendíamos el idioma [español] como un arma política, como una forma de reafirmación de una serie de cosas. Nos costó mucho, casi diez años, empezar a trabajar con el inglés. Pensábamos de alguna manera que esto [el español] era una conexión necesaria para la gente de acá, pero no estábamos en una posición legítima para hacer ese reclamo porque en el "core" del grupo, tomando decisiones, no había puertorriqueños criados acá como para que nosotros tuviéramos esa información. Por otro lado, cada grupo escoge su mercado. Nuestro mercado, principalmente, no era el mercado de Pedro Pietri. ...Nosotros nos sentimos muy contentos con nuestra decisión."

members of Pregones question the rigidity of its mission. Today, Pregones's mission includes presenting plays and adaptations of plays, poetry and narratives pertinent to issues affecting the Latino community in general, and the Puerto Rican community in particular:

The mission of PREGONES THEATRE is to create and perform innovative and challenging theater, of the highest quality possible, rooted in Puerto Rican traditions and popular artistic expressions and to present performing artists from diverse cultures, with the aim of offering Puerto Rican and other Latino communities an artistic means to question, reaffirm and enhance our roles in society.⁴

The company has continued growing since its inception in 1979. It has experienced a transformation in its structure by inviting, for the first time, New York born Puerto Ricans to join the group as core members.⁵ Not only was Pregones accepting the realities of its existence in an environment different from Puerto Rico, but it was also assuming a responsibility towards a part of its community that was being ignored. This awareness caused Pregones to understand that part of the Puerto Rican diaspora that was rooted in New York was not necessarily Spanish speaking, but felt, and was indeed, equally Puerto Rican. For those members of the group who were born on the island, this process of transformation and acceptance of a new reality turned into a most satisfying experience:

.....we realized that our suitcases were always packed and we never went anywhere. On a personal level we saw that we began to become part of a Niuyorican life, like a second home and we began to understand and accept this as a second home. We became acquainted with the politics and the people of the city and we realized that we were part of this apparatus, that our political apparatus was not that of Puerto Rico any longer. It is a difficult process because it implies a radical break from your roots.... The play High Noon marked the beginning of our recognition of being part of all this. We began to receive acknowledgment from the local leadership. We also began to recognize that we came here with lots of prejudices that were hard to eliminate. I began to learn who the local journalists were, the local politicians and the important Puerto Rican merchants. Whether they spoke Spanish or English didn't matter. To me, that was the richest moment of our history; the moment when we made a transition to a new reality, a bilingual reality

⁴Pregones's MISSION STATEMENT.

⁵José García and Judith Rivera, former Associate Director of Pregones now living in Puerto Rico, were instrumental in bringing a New York born Puerto Rican voice to the company, a decision that represented a departure from the original mission of the company.

where we have some plays in Spanish and others in English. (Rolón, interview)⁶

With time, issues including the existence of non Spanish speaking Puerto Ricans, working class issues, and issues of political, social and personal struggle were included in Pregones's agenda, allowing the company to mature with a more artistically committed body of work. Although inclusive of Latin American and working class issues throughout its history, Pregones has emphatically remained a Puerto Rican theatre collective.

The history of Pregones can be divided into different phases. The initial phase dates from its establishment in 1979 to the acquisition of the group's first office space on 104 Street. in El Barrio, Manhattan. Due to the ephemeral quality of Pregones's original project, the idea of establishing a center of operations was out of the question. Rosalba Rolón remembers the operational method of the company as completely rudimentary. Costumes, props and instruments were carried through the city in garbage bags. The train was the only possible means of transportation and, of course, there was no division between working space and home. Without any experience as producers, without any known model to follow and, above all, without funds, the founding members of Pregones dealt with all the managerial aspects of the production from their own homes.

Youth, a strong sense of commitment to Puerto Rican theatre, and their political consciousness, gave Rolón, Crommet and Meléndez the enthusiasm necessary to engage in this daring project. Their idea was received with enthusiasm by well known theatre people who became their mentors, Emilio Carballido from Mexico and Enrique

6". . .vimos que nosotros siempre estábamos con la maleta hecha y no íbamos a ningún lado. A nivel personal vimos que comenzamos a integrarnos a la vida como niuyorkinos, como un segundo hogar, a entenderla y aceptarla como un segundo hogar. A entender la movida política, a conocer a esta gente y ver que nosotros éramos parte de esta maquinaria, que nuestra maquinaria política no era la de Puerto Rico. Es un proceso muy difícil porque es como cortar la raíz ...La obra High Noon fue el comienzo de reconocer que somos parte de esto. Entonces empezamos a recibir reconocimiento del liderato de acá. Empezamos a reconocer que venimos con muchos prejuicios y que tarda mucho tiempo el quitarse los prejuicios. Comencé a empaparme de quiénes son los periodistas de aquí, los políticos de aquí, los comerciantes puertorriqueños importantes, que hablaran español o inglés, no importaba. Ese fue para mí el momento más rico de toda nuestra historia; el momento en que hacemos una transición a una nueva realidad, una realidad bilingüe, una realidad donde tenemos unas obras en español y otras en inglés."

Buenaventura from Colombia, and collaborators like Dolores Prida, Víctor Fragoso, Delfor Peralta, Brenda Feliciano, Angelo Cruz and many others. Collaboration became an important *modus operandi* for the company. It was through collaboration that Pregones became popular by word of mouth. It was also through collaboration that Puerto Rican painter Félix Cordero offered a space that he was remodeling for his own use as the group's first office space.⁷ The building was cold and uncomfortable due to construction, but it forced Pregones to face the responsibility of maintaining a center of operations. Having an office confirmed and validated the consolidation of the group as a theatre company.

Once the group was officially formed and established, it embarked on its second stage of evolution. An important characteristic of this period is the inclusion of musicians as core members of the troupe. Also, an outside director, Delfor Peralta, was invited to evaluate and reshape the play La colección, which toured for five years thanks to the increasing demand of interested institutions. With the consolidation of the group new challenges emerged, the first of which was the issue of its next production. The idea of producing a new piece was never considered by the members of the collective. The only thing they knew for sure was that they constituted a traveling theatre company and they were not contemplating settling in a specific theatrical space. They also thought that they had found a niche in the specific market among recent Puerto Rican immigrants. Nevertheless, Pregones's constant activity in the Bronx triggered the idea of re-evaluating the company's agenda and establishing itself in that borough.

In an effort to improve the quality of arts in the Bronx, William Aguado, Executive Director of the Bronx Council on the Arts, approached the company expressing the need for a theatre group like Pregones in the area. Such a professional theatre group never existed in the Bronx. The idea of moving out of El Barrio was attractive to the company,

⁷In the meantime Pregones was using rehearsal space donated by Teatro Cuatro and the Museo del Barrio under the administration of Jack Agüeros.

since it positioned Pregones in a highly needy location without the cultural competition going on in El Barrio. William Aguado convinced them and in 1983-84 Pregones established itself on Longwood Avenue in the South Bronx.

Moving out of Manhattan represented a new period where audience development in the Bronx emerged as a fresh challenge for a company that had hitherto been solely dedicated to traveling. Pregones could finally count on its own rehearsal space to facilitate its work. Also, through collaboration with Reverend Roberto Morales, Rector of St. Margaret's Church, Pregones had use of a performance space in that institution. Besides the performances, theatre workshops were offered to neighborhood youth by Pregones's members Sandra Rodríguez and Alvan Colón Lespier. When Father Roberto Morales, with whom the company had established a good rapport, was offered the position of Rector of the parish at St. Ann's church, the history of this company experienced a dramatic twist. Father Morales was aware of the importance of collaborating with Pregones in order to keep an up and coming artistic community in the Bronx. Once he was established in his new home, Morales offered part of the church's gym to the company as a storage space for equipment, scenery, costumes and props, which the company accepted with pleasure. Three months later he decided to offer the whole space to the company as its home base. For the first time Pregones had its own theatrical space.

The news that a professional theatre company was being established in the South Bronx was received with eagerness. It attracted a great deal of attention from the media and cultural entrepreneurs who waited with enthusiasm for the inauguration of Pregones's space. Equipping and conditioning a theatre was, nevertheless, a major effort. Tony Santiago, a Board member of Pregones, contacted Mr. Gene O'Donovan, President of Hudson Scenic Inc., a company that was in charge of making the scenery for well known Broadway shows such as Cats, Les Miserables and The Phantom of the Opera. Fortunately, Mr. O'Donovan was delighted to help. Hudson Scenic was located only a few blocks away from St. Ann's Church and many of its employees lived in the Bronx.

Helping build a theatre in the area was for Mr. O'Donovan like a dream come true. In those days all the curtains of the musical Cats had to be replaced by new ones despite their excellent condition, a luxury that only Broadway could afford. They were recycled for Pregones's theatre project. All the scaffolds, lights and labor too, were donated by Hudson Scenic. All of this came to a total of about \$100,000.00 which Pregones received free of charge. Likewise, the Department of Cultural Affairs informed the company of a theatre that was about to close and was willing to donate seats for Pregones's theatre. Thanks to all these efforts, on December 5, 1985 Pregones Theatre inaugurated its first theatre space at St. Ann's Church, at 149 Street and St. Ann's Avenue in the South Bronx. It was the first professional theatre established in that area.

The environment created was one of intimate contact between the family of Pregones and the community of the South Bronx. During the administrations of Father Morales and his successor Father Barrios, a harmonious relationship between Pregones and its host institution existed. For almost ten years Pregones provided affordable, or free of charge, family entertainment to the community. In this theatre performances by Pregones and local and international artists, workshops for young adults, a theatre component to St. Ann's after school program, and a large number of other activities including two International Latino Theatre Festivals, organized by Pregones, took place.

Regretfully in 1994, as a consequence of conflicts with the new administration of St. Ann's Church, that eliminated many community oriented programs, Pregones left its theatrical space to embark on a new adventure. Ironically, the forced exodus from St. Ann's Church came at an opportune time. Although the company's departure from St. Ann's was somewhat premature, it had already contemplated searching for a new theatrical home. Among the factors that forced the company to contemplate such a move were: 1. After a few years the work of Pregones was not seen as a novelty any longer and people were interested in seeing the troupe perform in other spaces. 2. The community in which Pregones was based was increasingly becoming more dangerous and the audience was

reluctant to come to the theatre. 3. Hostos Community College in the Bronx had developed a new Performing Arts Center, affording a convenient location that Pregones could take advantage of in its effort to further develop its audience.

Pregones found a new home on the Grand Concourse near Hostos Community College . Today they have transformed their own office space on 700 Grand Concourse to embrace a small performing area with a capacity for fifty to sixty people. An important concern of the company is to be able to offer the same intimate atmosphere that they were accustomed to providing to their audience. In the meantime the company has developed solid relations with other Latino theatres in order to produce its plays as coproductions of Pregones with these companies. The company has been well received in other theatres including: Repertorio Español, The Hostos Center for the Arts, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, the auditorium of Lincoln Hospital and The Bronx Museum, as well as continuing their constant touring activity throughout the United States and abroad. By moving out of their cherished theatre and performing in alternative spaces, Pregones has increased its audience by three hundred percent. Still, establishing close contact with its audience and creating an environment where the whole family is welcome, where people can eat and drink while watching a play, where people are personally greeted and received by the performers, is not possible in a borrowed or rented space. Therefore, buying a larger space that the group could make into its new home is one of the most important items on Pregones's agenda, and reflects the spirit which characterized the troupe in its twenty years of continuous work.

To study the twenty year body of work of Pregones Theatre, we will evaluate the influences that led to the development of the company as we know it today. In the previous chapter the political, social and artistic influences that shaped the Puerto Rican cultural production of the seventies were elaborated. Those influences are present, in one way or another, in the work of Pregones: from its creative process, choice of themes, use of autochthonous music and movement, to the adoption of a variety of Latin American

theatrical aesthetics. Rolón's perception of the company's cultural identification is that Pregones is closer to Latin American theatre than to mainstream theatre in the United States. Its proximity to Latin American theatre has to do with the theatrical language employed by the company, the use of images, and a methodology many times ignored or overlooked in the United States:

I believe that Pregones borrows from Latin American and North American theatrical traditions, but is clearly Latin American in its theatrical language. We have noticed that when we travel in the United States to give workshops introducing concepts that are legendary in Latin American theatre, the American participants believe that they are discovering something new, although it is something that has been practiced in Latin America for more than twenty years... The existence of a Latin American theatrical tradition keeps us connected to a Latin American and Caribbean style theatre. It is important to keep it that way, but in a manner coherent with the dynamism of New York and North America, because that is part of our lives as well. (Rolón, interview)⁸

Above all, Pregones's work is Puerto Rican theatre and not necessarily a representation of United States theatre as Alvan Colón Lespier clearly states:

Sometimes, in some international forums, people feel that we are part of what they call "North American national theatre," but we tell them that in the United States that does not exist. The so called North American nation does not have that supposed hegemony over the various cultural expressions that coexist in this country. A clear example is the Chicano theatre, Eskimo theatre, or even Black theatre. These groups would vehemently resent the labeling of their theatrical work as simply American theatre. Even more so with us. I have the feeling that precisely because this is not known in Puerto Rico, many times it is not accepted that there is a Puerto Rican theatre being produced outside of the island. For some people what we do is a "Nuyorican" thing. Our theatre is based on a reality: the transfer of labor caused by capitalism, which has caused millions of workers, from around the world, to relocate here and forces us to transcend those isolating barriers. There are those who do not understand this, but what we represent is Puerto Rican theatre produced in the United States and not something else.⁹

⁸"Yo creo que Pregones toma de las corrientes teatrales latinoamericanas y norteamericanas, pero evidentemente sigue siendo un teatro latinoamericano en el lenguaje. Nosotros nos hemos dado cuenta de que cuando viajamos en los Estados Unidos a dar talleres de cosas que son tan y tan legendarias en el teatro latinoamericano, ellos creen que descubrieron lo último en la avenida y es algo que se había hecho hace más de veinte años en el teatro latino.... Eso [la existencia de una corriente teatral latinoamericana] nos hace más fieles al estilo latinoamericano y caribeño. Es importante mantenerlo de esta manera, pero que sea coherente con la energía nuyorkina y norteamericana, porque es parte de nuestra vida también."

⁹Juan Ramón Duchesne, "Pregones: Hacia un nuevo teatro," *Claridad*, 16 al 22 de agosto, 1985.

In the face of the so called hegemony of an "American" culture which pretends to define itself as a uniform, monocultural and middle class, writer, interdisciplinary artist and journalist Guillermo Gómez Peña reacts, reimagining the concept of America and expanding its definition to acknowledge a more complex and diverse continent than what mass media makes it seem:

...The need of United States culture to come to terms with the Latino American "cultural other" has become a national debate...

It's 1989 in this troubled country mistakenly called America. The current Latino and Asian immigration to the United States is the direct result of international conflicts between the so-called "First" and "Third" Worlds. The colonized cultures are sliding into the space of the colonizer; and in doing so, they are redefining its borders and its culture. (A similar phenomenon is occurring in Europe with African immigration.)

The First and Third Worlds have mutually penetrated one another. The two Americas are totally intertwined. The complex demographic, social, and linguistic processes that are transforming this country into a member of the "Second World" (or perhaps Fourth World?) are being reflected in the art and thought produced by Latinos, blacks, Asians, Native Americans, and Anglo-Europeans. Unlike the images on television or in commercial cinema, depicting a monocultural middle-class world existing outside of international crises, contemporary United States society is fundamentally multicultural, multilingual, and socially polarized. So is its art...

Let's get it straight: America is a continent not a country. Latin America encompasses more than half of America. Quechuas, Mixtecos, and Iroquois are American (not United States citizens). Chicano, Nuyorican, Cajun, Afro-Caribbean and Quebecois cultures are American as well. Mexicans and Canadians are also North Americans. Newly arrived Vietnamese and Laotians will soon become Americans. United States Anglo-European culture is but a mere component of a much larger cultural complex in constant metamorphosis.

This pluralistic America within the United States can be found among other

Suplemento En Rojo, p. 16.

"A veces se pretende, en algunos foros internacionales, que nosotros integramos lo que ellos llaman un teatro "nacional norteamericano," pero nosotros les indicamos que en los Estados Unidos no existe eso.

La llamada nación estadounidense no tiene esa pretendida hegemonía sobre las distintas expresiones culturales de las nacionalidades que cohabitamos en este país.

Un caso muy claro es el teatro chicano, otro el teatro esquimal, o el mismo teatro negro. Si los presentas a ellos simple y llanamente como teatro estadounidense, te mandan a buen sitio. Nosotros más todavía.

Tengo la sensación de que precisamente porque se desconoce eso, en Puerto Rico muchas veces no se acepta que exista un teatro puertorriqueño fuera de la isla. Para algunos lo que nosotros estamos haciendo es una vaina 'neorrican.'

Pero nuestro teatro se basa en una realidad: los movimientos de transferencia de mano de obra del capitalismo mundial que obligan a millones de trabajadores de todas partes a convivir aquí, nos plantean trascender esas fronteras tan aislantes. Hay quien no entiende eso, pero nosotros representamos al teatro puertorriqueño que se hace en Estados Unidos y no otra cosa."

places in the Indian reservations and the Chicano barrios of the Southwest, the black neighborhoods of Washington or Detroit, or the multiracial barrios of Chicago, Manhattan, San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Miami. This sui generis America is no longer part of the First World. It still has no name or configuration: but "as artists and cultural leaders, we have the responsibility to reflect it."¹⁰

Since its beginning, a clear identification with Puerto Rican theatre has made it possible for the company to develop a close relationship with Latin American groups, theatre practitioners and theoreticians. Communication has been possible through Pregones's participation in international Latin American theatre festivals. In these festivals the evaluation of Latin American realities is part of the artistic proposal of each attending group, an intention embraced by Pregones whose main concern is to stage themes and situations affecting the Latino community in general and the Puerto Rican community in particular in the United States through the examination of present social relations and dynamics.

If there is one word that defines the work of Pregones, it is the word nationalistic. Pregones, similar to the previously discussed Puerto Rican theatre companies, is emphatically committed to offering a positive image of Puerto Ricans, an image that is usually manipulated by mass media in humiliating and destructive ways that affect people's perception of reality and leads to prejudice. Sandra Rodríguez, a former member of Pregones expresses how she felt the play Migrants! offered an alternative to such degrading images of the Puerto Rican:

People feel that because you are going to work with the community you have to bring them a theatre about junkies, about prostitutes, about the ghetto mentality. Part of the purposes of Migrants! was to break the myth of Puerto Ricans in the United States, about Puerto Ricans begging, about Puerto Ricans living in the slums.¹¹

¹⁰Guillermo Gómez Peña, "Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm," in The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980's (U.S.A.: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990), pp. 93-95.

¹¹Diana Coryat, Working a Dream, video. New York: New York University Film Department. 1986-87. Historical Archives of Pregones.

Rosalba Rolón adds:

There are reasons why things are the way they are and that is the reason for Migrants! We need to raise up [sic.] the level of understanding, for ourselves first and for others, as to the fact that we came here with a purpose, that we are part of a political plan, we are a working migration that this, the South Bronx [sic.] and this situation that we see here in the community, is the result of that plan to bring us here and now it is in our hands to resolve it, and to make it better. No one is giving us a hand. We have to do it on our own. (Rolón, interview)

Pregones has assumed as its task the evaluation of the political and social conditions that have fostered the current living situation of many Puerto Ricans. Self representation becomes an alternative to the alienating and disturbing images of "the Puerto Rican other" presented by the mass media and years of colonization. A nationalistic theatre becomes the natural answer to evaluating the living conditions of a people otherwise misrepresented by television, movies and mainstream theatre.¹²

¹²By definition Puerto Rican theatre is nationalistic. This characteristic of Puerto Rican theatre responds to the condition that has determined the political situation of the island. Observing the position of Puerto Rican playwrights who stress nationalism in their writings, Luis Rafael Sánchez claims:

Puerto Rican theatre is essentially nationalistic, on the other hand it has to be nationalistic. In Puerto Rico there is an unsolved political problem and, since a fundamental part of the intellectual movement is separatist, *independentista*, the subject that is always examined on stage is that of the annihilation of our personality as a country. In other words: transculturation, the issue of Puerto Ricans in New York as an oppressed minority, and Puerto Rican participation in conflicts that link them to the United States.

"El teatro puertorriqueño ha sido esencialmente nacionalista, y por otro lado, tiene que serlo; porque en Puerto Rico hay un problema político que no se acaba de resolver, y como una parte fundamental de la intelectualidad es separatista, es independentista, el tema que siempre examina escénicamente es el de la desaparición de nuestra personalidad como pueblo, es decir la transculturación, el problema de los puertorriqueños en Nueva York como minoría oprimida, la participación de los puertorriqueños en los conflictos que les atan a los E.E.U.U."

On the other hand, like Pregones, Sánchez defends the idea of a Puerto Rican theatre of Latin American reaffirmation:

Somehow I have attempted to create a theatre that is Puerto Rican, but also fosters a reinforcement of our Hispanic-American heritage. It seems to me that as Puerto Ricans we have that natural link. ...I believe this Hispanic reaffirmation to be logical, first of all for our geographical position. But also, I think that our incorporation to the Hispanic world could result in a profound benefit for our people; by "people" I mean our people, who have been educated to always look at Hispanic America with suspicion.

"De alguna manera yo he querido crear un teatro que sigue siendo puertorriqueño pero que sea también un teatro de afirmación hispanoamericana - porque me parece que ese es el vínculo natural de nosotros como puertorriqueños. ...Creo que nuestra afirmación hispanoamericana, en primer lugar, es la sensata por nuestra posición geográfica. Pero también, me parece que nuestra

Art, education and entertainment are the main goals of the company. Political education is part of a natural process that results from the audience's contact with new information. It is part of a more complex process that the company is aware of, but does not assume as its personal task. Yet the group has a political point of view that derives from the choice of works, themes and texts to be produced. Heirs of Augusto Boal, they too see theatre as a political weapon that is ultimately expected to have a direct or indirect political impact on the audience,¹³ as Rolón explains:

Not all the themes that we choose are political. However we expect that every theme we explore will have, in the ample sense of the word, a political impact. But our finality is art for art's sake, in other words, that art would become so important that people could not live without it. I believe that idea is highly political, although for years we struggled with that concept, because we all came from a background of strong political activism... We went through a period where, if you had asked me this same question fifteen years ago, I would have answered yes. And now I say yes [that we do political theatre] but for other reasons. For many years we adopted the aesthetics of popular theatre, which represents a political aesthetic in terms of discourse. Our current aesthetic, since one transforms and grows, relies on artistic elements that liberate political thinking, but do not impose it. (Rolón, interview)¹⁴

incorporación al mundo hispanoamericano puede resultar en un beneficio profundo para nuestro pueblo; por "pueblo" me refiero a nuestra gente, que siempre mira Hispanoamérica con una gran desconfianza, porque se le ha educado para eso."

Gloria F. Waldman, Personal interview with Luis Rafael Sánchez in: Luis Rafael Sánchez: Pasión teatral (Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1988), pp.342-3.

¹³ The idea of theatre as a political weapon is clearly expressed by Augusto Boal in his foreword to Theatre of the Oppressed:

...all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them.

Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error - and this is a political attitude.

In this book I also offer some proof that the theatre is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination.

Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed (New York: Theatre Communication Group, 1985), Foreword.

¹⁴"No todos los temas son políticos. Todos los temas que nosotros tratamos, esperamos que tengan en el sentido amplio de la palabra un impacto político. Pero el fin es el arte por el arte, es decir, que el arte sea tan importante que la gente no pueda vivir sin eso. Yo creo que eso es altamente político, aunque batallamos con ese concepto muchos años, porque todos veníamos de una actividad política muy grande... Pasamos por una etapa donde, si tú me hacías esta pregunta hace quince años, yo te decía que sí. Y ahora te digo que sí [que hacemos teatro político] pero por otras razones. Por muchos años nos amparamos bajo la estética del teatro popular, que era una estética política en términos de discurso. La estética nuestra ahora, como uno se transforma y crece, descansa mucho sobre elementos artísticos que liberen el pensamiento político, no que lo

Within the context of Teatro Pregones, theatre as a political tool is more a matter of personal motivation than the mission of the company. The recurrence of political themes within the work of Pregones is the consequence of examining issues that affect the Puerto Rican community, issues that are rooted in politics. Nevertheless, art is the main intention in the production of a play. Pregones has produced theatre that is strictly political in content and intention only in specific instances. However, from the analysis of themes and subjects from its repertoire, an effort to present a different social and political vision of reality is inferred as a political choice. Although agit prop is never imposed as part of Pregones's artistic purpose, the group analyzes social and political conditioning in order to break the myths that perpetuate those conditions.

Since Puerto Rico is a country where political crisis is always manifest, and political crisis is one of the issues examined by Pregones, the idea of a theatre for art's sake might seem contradictory in a country where the mere act of producing theatre in Spanish, or bilingually, could be seen as a political act. Diana Taylor in her study of a Latin American theatre of crisis, questions the idea of art for art's sake in a society where lack of political commitment implies the manifestation of an ideology:

To analyze the relationship between different examples of theatrical activity in societies in crisis, however, we must go beyond the two positions posited above: the critical premise that theatre is not or should not be political; and the activist's position that theatre is only a part of the political process. Theatre is always in the world, and always political insofar as it covertly manifests an ideology. The difference, as George H. Szanto makes clear in Theatre and Propaganda, lies in the manner in which that ideology makes itself felt by the audience. He distinguishes three kinds of theatre: agitation, integration, and dialectical.¹⁵

According to Taylor's view of the kind of theatre produced in political crisis, Pregones theatre would fall in the category of dialectical theatre since it serves a demystifying purpose; it is not political propaganda, but it is not alienated from politics either. In this regard the task of Pregones is comparable to different models such as: Piscator's "epic

machaquen."

¹⁵Diana Taylor, Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), p. 19.

theatre," Brecht's "dialectic theatre," Buenaventura's theatre of "de-conscientization" and Boal's "theatre of the oppressed" (Taylor, p.19).¹⁶ In order to present her conclusions about dialectical theatre and its identifiable models in the Latin American theatre of crisis, Taylor adopts George Szanto's definition of dialectical theatre in Theatre and Propaganda:

The most difficult theater to create, though not at all difficult to understand, is the theater of dialectical propaganda. It is a theater which attempts to demystify, by depicting separately, interactively, and always clearly, the basic elements which compromise a confused social or historical situation...
...a theater of dialectical propaganda, as a theater of cognitive clarification, will present detailed and structured information through a dramatic medium in order to depict, for its audience, circumstances not previously understood. It will demystify relationships between individuals and institutions, individuals and individuals, institutions and institutions, so as to show, first, the nature of passions and of economic and social laws, and second, to demonstrate methods by which human beings can control both themselves and their institutions...A theater of dialectical propaganda exaggerates its clarifications of previously mysterious circumstances and relationships in order to play these off against established misrepresentations, unexamined conventions, and, increasingly often, outright falsehoods.¹⁷

On the other hand, aesthetically speaking, the work of Pregones features many qualities of the political theatre that developed in Latin America, Puerto Rico and the United States at the end of the sixties. Yeidi Rivero, in her work on Puerto Rican theatre in New York, identifies three major influences in the work of Pregones: Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Augusto Boal. In her study of four Puerto Rican political theatre companies in New York between the sixties and the seventies, she concludes that the theories of Bertolt Brecht and Jerzy Grotowski were very influential in the aesthetic choices of El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América, Teatro de Orilla, Teatro Jurutungo and Teatro Pregones. Regarding political theatre Rivero claims that Brecht and Augusto Boal were particularly

¹⁶Taylor defines dialectical theatre as one that establishes a clear cut ideology:

"Other kinds of theatre do not deny or hide their ideology. Contrary to theatre shrouded in magic, or aesthetic mystique, Piscator's "epic" theatre, Brecht's "dialectic" theatre, Buenaventura's theatre of "desconscientization," and Boal's "theatre of the oppressed" emphasize that theatre is work: people produce it; others consume it; it serves specific aims within or against specific institutions."

¹⁷George H. Szanto, Theater & Propaganda (U.S.A.: University of Texas Press, 1978), pp. 75-77.

influential in the work of Pregones. In summarizing the influence of these theorists on Pregones's work Rivero says:

Of the four theatre companies studied in this paper, Pregones is the only one that has been using the theories of Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Augusto Boal. From Bertolt Brecht the group acquired the theories of political theatre in terms of organization and the structure of plays they present. First, they conceive themselves as a collective company in which all the members contribute to the play's performance concepts and structure. Second, the style of many of its plays can be defined as "epic theatre" in which play structure is episodic rather than realistic. Moreover, the plays created by Pregones can be closely associated with the "didactic plays" written by Brecht. Besides using Brecht's dramaturgical ideas they write songs which sustain the play's action. Third, there is no realism in their production style. All the sets, costumes and character transformations are made in front of the audience and thus break any possibility of realism in their productions.

Jerzy Grotowski constitutes a challenge for Pregones. As Pedro Santaliz had done before them, at the beginning Pregones used the ideology of poor theatre as a way of eliminating all the technological devices of theatre, and making the actor the central focus or major element in a production. Because it has had close contacts with Grotowski's principles of actor training through their liaisons with Latin American theatre groups, Pregones has been trying to train its actors in Grotowski's physical method.

One of the major theoretical innovations of Pregones company is its use of the techniques and methodology of Augusto Boal. After sending one of the members of the company to a Boal workshop, Pregones began to use the Forum technique as part of its traveling theatre...¹⁸

Their influence, according to Rivero, is not only aesthetic, but also political, although not necessarily direct. It does not come from a conscientious study and adoption of methodology and theory, but from a conscientious adoption of a diversity of Latin American theatrical aesthetics that have been consistently termed Brechtian and Grotowskian. Although a common assumption that there is a general influence exercised by European theatre on Latin American theatre has been acknowledged in a diversity of studies, many Latin American theatrical practitioners do not acknowledge such an influence. Trying to analyze the Latin American theatre in European terms may prove reductive in Latin American theatre criticism as Diana Taylor sees it:

¹⁸Yeidi Rivero, "Puerto Rican Political Theatre in New York City in the Sixties and Seventies" (M. A. Thesis, Stony Brook, 1993) pp. 67-68.

As I argue in this study, however, the plays' multiple uses of recognizable techniques propose visions of reality very different from those advanced by First World authors. With few exceptions, we cannot speak of a Latin American theatre of the absurd, or even a clear-cut Latin American Brechtian epic theatre. Within their specific Latin American contexts, these forms undergo change and become something quite different as they transform the received codes to become intelligible to their own audiences. What the foreign scholars have failed to recognize is that these "borrowings" in fact are part of an ongoing process of transculturation. "Transculturation," denoting the transformation of cultural material as it passes from one society to another, is a term coined by Fernando Ortiz (Cuba) in 1940. Ortiz describes what he sees as a three -part process in the acquisition of foreign cultural material which results in the loss of the autochthonous culture but then yields a new original...(Taylor, p. 15)

In a Latin American context, what may be considered a Grotowskian adoption of poor theatre techniques could simply translate into an economic inability to reproduce sophisticated theatrical devices, leading to an aesthetic preference towards physical images over a technical production apparatus. By the same token, a departure from "First World" theatrical methods and techniques, more than lack of sophistication points to a conscientious rejection of technical devices which lack meaning to part of the Latino theatrical world as observed by Guillermo Gómez Peña:

Much of the contemporary work produced by the Latin community is often regarded as anachronistic and traditional by the art world. Why? Innovation for innovation's sake. New York's art obsession doesn't really make sense to us.

"Innovation is not a value per se in our culture." What we consider avant garde or original generally deals with extra-artistic concerns or concerns related to our tradition and the historical moment. Because of this, our art never seems experimental enough for a monocultural observer.

The misunderstanding increases when the art world discovers that most of us aren't that interested in the gratuitous use of high technology or in the creation of special effects as an end in itself. Our rejection of unnecessary technology is seen as an underdeveloped attitude rather than a political stand. (Gómez Peña, p. 99)

Likewise, no Latin American theatre company really claims to be Brechtian, Artaudian or Grotowskian although some aesthetic characteristics of Brecht's epic theatre, for instance, are recognizable in the aesthetics of many political theatre groups and these characteristics have been validated by such scholars as Beatriz Rizk, Judith Weiss and Marina Pianca, among others. Yet the problem of producing a fair criticism of Latin

American theatre, a criticism that would be neither reductive nor Eurocentric, also applies to Latino theatre in the United States. Three major problems are posed when trying to analyze this theatre: the need for defining the right terminology to understand the phenomenon of Latino theatre; the need for understanding the diverse manifestations of Latino theatre within its own context and framework as opposed to a mythical global context that equalizes every possible example of Latino theatre; and the need to study U.S. Latino theatre in its diversity as a valid art form seeking control over its political and cultural destiny.¹⁹ In this regard, it is more accurate to say that the New Latin American theatre movement that emerged and evolved since the fifties has been more useful in Pregones's theatrical production than European models. In other words, Pregones's proximity to Santiago García Ortega's Teatro de la Candelaria from Colombia, Enrique Buenaventura's theory and practice of collective theatre, also from Colombia, Augusto Boal's theories and techniques from Brazil, Cuba's collective Teatro del Escambray, Peru's collective Yuyachkani, as well as the Puerto Rican political theatre movement have been a stronger direct influence in the work of Pregones's Theatre.

Some of the characteristics that identify Pregones with the Latin American theatrical tradition are: a powerful use of visual imagery, the use of autochthonous folk music, the use of narrative as a favorite source of theatrical material, the use of drama as a tool for demystifying colonization and the adoption of a theatre of collective creation as the main method of production for the company. The validation of language difference as a way to

¹⁹Gómez Peña comments on these three points in his essay "Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm":

In order to describe the trans-, inter-, and multicultural processes that are at the core of our contemporary border experience as Latino artists in the United States, we need to find a new terminology, a new iconography, and a new set of categories and definitions. "We need to re-baptize the world in our own terms." The language of postmodernism is ethnocentric and insufficient. And so is the existing language of cultural institutions and funding agencies. Terms like "Hispanic," "Latino," "ethnic," "minority," "marginal," "alternatives," and "Third World," among others, are inaccurate and loaded with ideological implications. They create categories and hierarchies that promote political dependence and cultural underestimation. In the absence of a more enlightened terminology, we have no choice but to use them with extreme care. (p. 94)

empower audiences who do not necessarily speak Spanish is another characteristic of Pregones's work that coincides with Latin American practices of cultural integration and validation.²⁰ Nevertheless, Spanglish is not encouraged by the company as a valid way of communication. In this regard Spanish or English, or Spanish and English, are adopted as the only ways of spoken communication.

Of course, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, all these characteristics of Latin American theatre that Pregones features in its works, are adopted in ways coherent to its existence in a New York context. Theatre administration, fund raising, proposal writing and extensive work beyond the artistic creation are realities dictated by the struggle for survival in this New York context. These are some of the aspects that had been overlooked by other Puerto Rican theatre companies which disappeared shortly after their birth. A peculiar characteristic of Pregones theatre that distinguishes it from other Latin American theatre companies on the East Coast, is that the company is administered by the artists themselves. Rosalba Rolón, actress, director and founder of the company, is the Artistic Director of Pregones. Alvan Colón, actor and director, Jorge Merced, actor and director, and actress Judith Rivera figure as Associate Directors of the company. They all manage the curatorial aspects of production and take part in the decision making process that affects the development of the company in terms of goals, vision and mission. Also, they have direct participation in writing proposals, audience development, performance booking, and all other administrative chores.

In the beginning, fear of delegating administrative work to strangers got in the way of developing an administrative staff different from the artistic staff. Today, the ever increasing governmental budget cuts and the consequent reduction of the company's annual budget have made any attempt at expansion and developing such a staff impossible:

Economically speaking, things are tough for all theatre groups. This year we are

²⁰ See Alvan Colón Lespier, "Teatro Pregones: Finding Language in Dialogue," in Mark O'Brian and Craig Little, eds., Reimaging America: The Arts of Social Change (PA, Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), pp.251-254.

operating with \$40,000 less than last year. Our budget last year was \$505,000. This year we are operating with \$477,000 and for a small group, that difference is enormous. It means being unable to hire someone. We are also afraid when we see other theatres shutting down, and we're still open. (Rosalba Rolón, interview)²¹

The company truly needs to grow administratively because the artistic work is suffering as a consequence of the multiple tasks required of the artists. The amount of administrative work generated by the demand for their artistic product has, ironically, affected the amount of artistic work produced. On the one hand Pregones has managed to maintain the artistic quality of its productions, while on the other hand there are many works waiting to be produced that end up being postponed in order to take care of administrative demands.

As with any theatre company that intends to operate continuously on a day to day basis, fundraising becomes one of the most important aspects of its existence. Pregones has a privileged position in that the company has generated enough funds to enable its directors to make a living working in theatre. This is not the situation for most Latino theatre companies where artists don't generally survive doing their craft. Besides providing a salary for the four artists/directors of the company, Pregones provides jobs for more than twelve people who compose its staff, musicians and guest artists.

Generating the necessary money and fundraising strategies were important survival skills to develop in order to guarantee a future for the company. Adapting to this reality was also part of the maturation process that Pregones had to undergo. In the beginning, not receiving public or private funds was understood by members of the company as a political asset, a statement that was in agreement with Pregones's struggle against colonialism and its subsequent economic dependency. As Rolón asserts:

²¹"Las cosas están económicamente malas para todos los grupos de teatro. Nosotros estamos operando con casi \$40,000 dólares menos que el año pasado. El presupuesto nuestro el año pasado era \$505,000 dólares. Este año estamos operando con \$477,000 y esa diferencia, para un grupo pequeño, es enorme. Es el no poder contratar a una persona. Nos da miedo el que otros teatros cierren y nosotros abramos."

We were always very proud and felt very "politically correct" that: "We do not receive funds, and we are an independent theatre." Public funds are like a trap; once you start receiving them, you become an addict and if you don't know how to manage them, they wind up controlling you. We learned not to be dependent on a single source. (Rolón, interview)²²

Many Latino artists working in the United States and Puerto Rico have expressed their frustration about not wanting to depend on public funds yet not being able to survive if they don't (see the case of Teatro del 60 in Chapter One, p. 39). Often a pragmatic attitude towards these funds is adopted which posits the ends as being more important than the means, as explained by Oscar Ciccone, founder of Teatro Cuatro (also see Chapter One):

Our work consists somehow, in creating the consciousness that we should take those government funds -because if the government gives it to us we shouldn't reject it - but always on the alert so that it doesn't wind up putting us to sleep, like one more drug among all the drugs that are handed out all year round on the Lower East Side...We are one among many programs created by the United States as an opiate, or an apparent element of concern for Hispanic communities...In our case we are lucky - and I say lucky because in this country it is very difficult to work in a different way- that this kind of financing has allowed us to create a work structure and develop it, so that with or without funds, Teatro 4 will continue. Because it's no longer based on the existence of those funds, but on its concrete insertion into the reality of the community.²³

After studying and practicing different strategies, Pregones has adopted one that suits it well. In that process the members have become experts in fundraising, not only solving financial problems for the company but also becoming consultants for other developing theatre companies.²⁴ The company has followed standards proposed by the

²²"Nosotros estábamos siempre bien orgullosos y éramos bien panfletarios con eso: 'No recibimos fondos y somos teatro independiente.' Los fondos son como una trampa, que una vez que los empiezas a recibir, te vuelves adicto y si no los manejas bien, te llegan a controlar. Nosotros aprendimos a no depender demasiado de una sola fuente de fondos."

²³"Nuestro trabajo consiste, de alguna manera, en crear la conciencia de que hay que tomar ese dinero del gobierno - porque si éste nos lo da, no lo vamos a desperdiciar - pero estando alerta para que no sirva para adormecernos, como una droga más de las que se distribuyen dentro del Lower Eastside durante todo el año...Nosotros formamos parte de un programa más de los que han creado los Estados Unidos como un opio, o elemento de aparente preocupación por las comunidades hispanas...En nuestro caso tenemos la suerte -y digo suerte porque en este país se hace muy difícil trabajar de otra manera - de que esa subvención nos ha permitido crear una estructura de trabajo y profundizar en él, hasta llegar a un punto en el que, con o sin fondo de ayuda, el Teatro 4 seguiría. Porque ya no se basa en la existencia de ese fondo sino en su inserción concreta en la realidad."

In José Monleón, *América Latina : teatro y revolución*, p. 185.

²⁴ In an effort to help young theatre companies and inexperienced artists cope with all the economic demands of producing and promoting artistic work in New York, Rosalba Rolón has published a

industry in that it tries to equally balance the sources of its total budget. This balance proposes that no more than one third of the total budget should come from government grants, no more than one third should come from private corporations and foundations and definitely one third of the total income should come from money earned by the company itself.

Ever since the troupe reached the desired status of earning one third of its total budget, Pregones has stressed the need to operate in this fashion. The ever increasing government budget cuts and the spectre of extinction which these cuts cast upon existing companies, have become a motivation to maintain this budget planning as a standard. Yet Pregones is still struggling to balance the amount of money received from the government compared with the amount of money received from private funding. In this regard the group counts on public funds such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Department of Cultural Affairs to cover 40% of its total budget, with much less coming from corporations and foundations.²⁵ It is for this reason that Pregones is trying to develop a reliable strategy that would include a larger contribution from the private sector:

Of all the non-profit organizations, art is the only one that has the potential to make money, because it offers a product that people buy. But our reality is that we can not charge huge amounts of money to our community. Forty thousand people may come, but they are only paying \$3.00. On the other hand, these corporations and foundations have money that they have to give away. That's their obligation. It's not a favor; they have to do it by law. We have to reach a balance, since the worst thing for an organization is for all of its money to come from the government. (Rolón, interview)²⁶

manual which provides orientation on how to raise funds. See Rosalba Rolón, Manual práctico e ilustrado para escribir propuestas y otros padrenuestros (Guía para recaudar fondos publicada por Teatro Pregones, 1996).

²⁵Besides the above mentioned governmental support, Pregones receives generous support from: Arts International, AT&T Foundation, Bronx Delegation to the New York State Assembly, Chase Manhattan Bank, Citibank, Con Edison, Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation, Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, New York Community Trust, Philip Morris, Ruth Mott Fund, The New York Tribune Foundation, National Performance Network. From Pregones al día, The Newsletter of Pregones Theater, January, 1997.

²⁶ "De todos los non-profits, el arte es el único que tiene potencial de hacer dinero, porque tiene un producto que la gente compra y paga por eso. Pero ante la realidad de nosotros no podemos

Balancing the budget, diversifying the sources of the company's income and creating a sufficient reserve of money to allow Pregones to work in times of economic crisis have turned out to be three of the most important tools of survival for the company.

Fortunately, Pregones has developed its capacity to work at a level of sophistication that allows the company to continue operating despite difficult times for arts groups. Yet the continued threat of the disappearance of all public funding mechanisms is a cause for concern. The de-funding of small independent arts groups disregards the vital role of arts in society to the detriment of Puerto Rican and Latino communities. As Alvan Colón argues:

At a municipal level, the Department of Cultural Affairs is confronting the real possibility of extinction. Government bureaucrats think of the arts as a tourist attraction. Consequently, only those institutions which contribute to the development of tourism in the city will survive. Let's think for a moment, how important is tourism to the Latino and Puerto Rican communities as opposed to how important are the artistic and cultural organizations of our Latino and Puerto Rican communities for us?²⁷

In the meantime, Pregones is committed to providing a strong channel of expression for Puerto Rican and Latin American cultures which are growing stronger and are reaching an important place of recognition in society.

Nowadays Pregones stands as the only professional Puerto Rican traveling theatre company in the South Bronx. During its twenty years of existence Pregones has toured extensively through the northeast United States, Central and South America, the

cobrarle a nuestra comunidad grandes cantidades de dinero. Pueden venir cuarentamil personas, pero están pagando \$3.00. Por otro lado, estas corporaciones y fundaciones tienen dinero que tienen que dar. Esa es su obligación. Eso no es un favor, por ley tienen que hacerlo. Hay que lograr un equilibrio y lo menos saludable para una organización es que el dinero venga del gobierno."

²⁷"A nivel municipal, el Departamento de Asuntos Culturales se enfrenta a la desaparición. Los burócratas del gobierno piensan en las artes como una atracción turística y sólo aquellas instituciones que contribuyan al desarrollo del turismo en la ciudad se salvarán. Pensemos por un momento ¿cuán importante es el turismo para nuestras comunidades latinas y puertorriqueñas y pensemos ¿cuán importantes son las organizaciones artísticas y culturales de nuestras comunidades latinas y puertorriqueñas para nuestras comunidades?"

Alvan Colón Lespier, "Pregones, un teatro puertorriqueño," *El Batú*, Año 2 Núm. VIII, marzo-abril, 1996, p. 12.

Caribbean, Spain, Portugal, the former U.S.S.R. and Korea. The company has also attended prestigious international theatre festivals and symposiums: the First International Theatre Workshop of the International Theatre Institute of UNESCO in Cuba, the Second Meeting of Latin American Theatre Practitioners in Nicaragua and several Latino theatre festivals in New York including the Second Festival of Latin American Popular Theatre, organized by Teatro Cuatro; Joseph Papp's Festival Latino at the Public Theatre; and the XIV Festival of TENAZ (Teatros Nacionales del Aztlán), which prompted the creation of Pregones's own festival, *Teatro-Festival!* in 1990.

Among the numerous awards received by Teatro Pregones are: the 1987 Frederick Douglas Award, presented to Pregones by the North Star Fund, for outstanding contribution to the struggle for political, social, and economic justice; the 1988 ENCORE Award from the Arts and Business Council of New York; the 1990 Special OBIE Award, for excellence in the arts from The Village Voice; the 1990 ACE (Critics Award) Special Award; 1992 City of New York Mayor's Award for Arts and Culture; 1991 and 1992 Urayoan Award; three 1994 ACE Awards for Best Production of the Year (*Medea*) and Best Supporting Actors; and the 1996 Bronx Council on the Arts Award.

Teatro Pregones has over twenty productions in its repertoire²⁸ performed in a variety of combinations which include: the Main Stage Program, producing major bilingual plays with live music including original, collaborative creations and adaptations; Teatro Matinee, bilingual performances for children and young adults for schools where artistic programming has been severely cut; the Visiting Artists Series, bringing local and international professional performing companies to Pregones; the Touring Residencies, performing in universities, community centers, churches, schools and major theatres

²⁸ La colección: One Hundred Years of Puerto Rican Theatre; El Circo; Areyto de pescadores; High Noon...Al Mediodía; People Again; La ofrenda; El antillano; The Caravan; The Mugger; Cantata a Lares; The World of Muddy Waters; Migrants! Cantata a los emigrantes; Remote Control; The Embrace; Voices of Steel; Medea; The Wedding March; El Apagón; Tangalátin; Baile cangrejero; Fábulas del Caribe; Quintuples; Allentales; Translated Woman; La otra orilla; Monkey's Tail & Other Tales; El bolero fue mi ruina.

nationwide and abroad; the Pregones “Embrace” Theatre AIDS Program, presenting topics connected with AIDS and the Latino community; workshops, free of charge for children and youth of the Bronx including a series of presentations; Special Projects, including the Latino Theater Day for Seniors, the Regional Theater Workshops, and various collaborative projects with other theatre groups; and La Ruta Panorámica, a network designed to link Pregones with sister organizations in Boston and Philadelphia to present local, national and international Latino artists throughout these cities.²⁹ Pregones is the representative organism in the United States of the International Theatre School of Latin America and the Caribbean (EITALC) and is also a member of: Arts New York, The Hispanic Federation, Arts Presenters, Bronx Council on the Arts and the National Performance Network.

I will now analyze Pregones's development of a diversified methodology and their creation of a unique language, both critical elements in promoting a meaningful Puerto Rican and Latino theatre in the United States, characteristics which have earned the group a prominent place in the Latino theatre movement both here and abroad.

²⁹About Pregones Touring Puerto Rican Theater Collection, 1993, p. 2, and updated version, 1996. Pregones files.

EARLY PRODUCTIONS

La colección³⁰

The first play produced by Pregones in 1979 was La colección: One Hundred Years of Puerto Rican Theater (also known as La colección or Colección teatral puertorriqueña). As the title suggests, this work consists of a collage of important plays from the last hundred years of Puerto Rican theatre. The creation of this piece evolved from several months of pre-production research, before a first version of the play was presented at Rutgers University. On that occasion an overture to the play was recorded by Puerto Rican singer Brenda Feliciano and tenor Angelo Cruz who, enthusiastic about this project, donated their talent for the opening performance. The overture to La colección consisted of a series of Puerto Rican popular songs chosen by these artists for their relevance to the scenes, with the collaboration of Víctor Fragoso who eventually became the first director of the play.³¹

The scenes represented in La colección were from: Luis Rafael Sánchez's La farsa de amor comprado (The Farce of Purchased Love) and Los ángeles se han fatigado (The Angels are Exhausted); René Marqués' La carreta (The Oxcart) and Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro (Carnival Inside-Out); Manuel Méndez Ballester's Bienvenido Don Goyito (Welcome Don Goyito); Ramón Méndez Quiñones' Un jíbaro (A Peasant); and Pregones's La serenata (The Serenade). The unifying theme is the denunciation of the new ways of life imposed on Puerto Ricans by colonization. Each one of these scenes explores a different aspect of the political and social relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, revealing the resultant personal conflict and struggle against existing social conditions. The choice of these specific scenes is representative of the nationalistic political

³⁰To see a photograph of La colección go to Appendix 1, Fig. 1, p. 216 of this work.

³¹Some of the people who collaborated on the original project were: Rosalba Rolón, David Crommet, Luis Meléndez, Socorro Santiago, Martha de la Cruz and Víctor Fragoso. Other members of Pregones who participated in La colección throughout the five years the play was performed were: Alvan Colón, Freddy De Arce, Roberto Lugo, Heriberto Mateo, Sandra Rodríguez and Julio Santana.

tendency embraced by the company in its work.

La colección opens with a scene between Pirulí 1 and Pirulí 2 from La farsa del amor comprado (1959) by Luis Rafael Sánchez. The Sánchez play, whose structure and dramatic style derive from the *commedia dell'arte*, with a Puerto Rican twist, evolves around a love triangle between Arlequín, General Cataplún and Colombina. Combining a typical *commedia dell'arte* story with Puerto Rican folklore in its use of music, language and popular humor, Sánchez presents a satire of Puerto Rican society through the theatrical illusion of a play within a play.³² The farce takes place at two different levels: a love triangle, as well as a theatre company presenting the story of the love triangle. Both of these stories, separate and intertwined, create humorous chaos which is a commentary on the Puerto Rican people and their society. As the introduction of La colección, Sánchez's play opens the piece with a buoyancy that establishes the style of subsequent scenes in the play. On the other hand, the seriousness of the criticism of Puerto Rican society establishes the mood for the whole piece. In the first scene of La colección, from La farsa del amor comprado, two characters allude to several theatrical styles to justify a mixture of concepts which provoke the chaotic situation of the plot, and represent the thesis and antithesis of the Puerto Rican character: "...all this conceptual mess is an integral part of the plot."³³ With this clear reference to the socio-political situation of Puerto Rico, they state the lack of a defined political status which fosters a series of personal battles within the Puerto Rico-U.S. relationship:

Pirulí 1 & 2: Here is the long awaited moment!
 Music: Bring up the lights.
 Let the curtains rise.
 The chaos is part of the farce.

³²For more about La farsa del amor comprado see: Eliseo R. Colón Zayas, El teatro de Luis Rafael Sánchez, (España: Editorial Playor, 1985), pp. 62-70 and Gloria F. Waldman, Luis Rafael Sánchez: Pasión teatral (Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1988), pp. 193-208.

³³Teatro Pregones, Colección teatral puertorriqueña (Unpublished, 1979). p. 1.1.4. (Pregones's files).

All of this madness,
all of this farce, we and you,
an endless ronde that laughs and sings. (p. 1.1.5)³⁴

With the happy invitation to let the theatrical illusion begin, this introductory scene segues into the reflections of a Puerto Rican prostitute in Los ángeles se han fatigado (The Angels are Exhausted).

Los ángeles se han fatigado (1962) is a dramatic monologue also written by Luis Rafael Sánchez.³⁵ In this scene, an aging, mentally disturbed prostitute, reflects on the decadence and degradation of her existence. Angela, rich and beautiful in her youth, became a prostitute after her family lost its social status. Moving from Yauco, the cradle of her family's wealth, to San Juan, where she fell in love with a pimp called Santiago, Angela surrendered her aristocratic manners and European class ambitions to prostitution. Abandoned by Santiago, whom she possibly killed in revenge for abandoning her, Angela seeks refuge in the arms of the American marines who visit San Juan. Confronted with her own hopelessness in the face of her abandonment and her undesireability, she finds shelter in a state of delusion and dementia. Lonely and drunk as she is, she remembers her former lover's abandonment and consequent pain. She also remembers her encounters with her former U.S. clients, the "angels" who came to take the place of Santiago, using her and leaving her.

Beautiful and classy as she used to be, Angela once was the most desirable

³⁴"Pirulí 1 & 2: ¡Es la hora soñada!
Música: Enciendan las luces
las cortinas abran
el desbarajuste es parte de la farsa.
Toda esta locura y toda esta farsa
nosotros, ustedes
una ronda larga que ríe y que canta."

³⁵For more information on Los ángeles se han fatigado see: Gloria Waldman, Luis Rafael Sánchez: Pasión teatral (Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1988), pp. 237-249. Also see: Eliseo R. Colón Zayas, El teatro de Luis Rafael Sánchez (Spain: Editorial Playor, 1985), pp. 72-75; and Matías Montes Huidobro, Persona vida y máscara en el teatro puertorriqueño (Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, Ateneo Puertorriqueño, Universidad Interamericana, Tinglado Puertorriqueño, 1986), pp. 519-524.

prostitute of Old San Juan. With time, and madness, she is no longer the bearer of illusion, as her nickname "Ilusión" evokes. Faced with reality, humiliation and the self-awareness of the loss of her morals, wealth and beauty, Angela understands what she has become.

Her existence is compared to Puerto Rico, highlighting Puerto Rico/U.S. relations:

Angela: Angela Santoni Vincent, Princesa de Yauco! Borracha indecente, vieja, sucia, puerca, puerquísima. (Escupe) Hey, you guy...come here...kiss me. I want somebody to kiss me. Anyone. Any man. Just for twelve dollars, twelve...For twelve dollars you can get me from head to foot. Sure! Sure I'm a miss. Sure! Well... okay...if you do not believe me I will say the truth. No, I'm not...But I am the most beautiful lady from Old San Juan...A bargain. For an angel from the States a whore from Puerto Rico.³⁶

Tragically, no one will pay for her services any longer. Disgusted by her, her former "angels" mock and reject her. The protagonist, bereft of a sense of pride, sees her clientele abandon her like Santiago did. Yet there is a limit to her humiliation; defeated, she retreats into herself, her own ruins, escaping into madness, liberating the only part of herself that can be freed, her bird Hitler. Angela's story refers to the political history of Puerto Rico, as theatre critic José Villafaina observes:

This woman's own personal history of falling into disgrace is only a reflection of the historical circumstances suffered by her country, whose experience it perfectly parallels. This character, in her grave state of delirium, symbolizes beauty and innocence seduced, dishonored, prostituted, exploited and abandoned (by 'Santiago...y cierra España!'³⁷) to be consequently 'saved', confused, 'commercialized' and wasted to the point of dementia by the American 'Angels'.³⁸

This scene, in contrast to the lighter mood established by the opening scene of La

³⁶Teatro Pregones, p. 1.2.7.

³⁷The war cry supposedly uttered by Saint James and his Christian soldiers in their battle against the Moors during the Reconquest of Spain, whose intention was to purify Spain from Arab "infidels."

³⁸José M. Villafaina, "Unos ángeles...fatigantes y un Retablillo...ingenio," El Nuevo Día, August 26, 1974, p. 29.

"Todo el proceso histórico de conducta engendrado en esta mujer caída en desgracia no es más que un reflejo del proceso histórico de su pueblo cuya idéntica conducta enlaza perfectamente. La simbología que el personaje deja entrever en su estado grave de delirio nos habla de la belleza e inocencia seducida, deshonrada, prostituida, explotada y abandonada (por 'Santiago... y cierra España!') para después ser 'salvada', confundida, 'comerciada' y desgastada hasta la locura (por los 'Angeles' americanos)."

colección, presents the audience with the first negative image that defines Pregones's view of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Sánchez's poetic account of the decadent prostitute who epitomizes the relationship of the island to the United States, itself a symbol of abuse and abandonment, presents a fatalistic vision of the United States involvement in Puerto Rico, considered by some to be the salvation of the island, and by others, its downfall, in light of high rates of alcoholism and drug addiction caused by a weak economy and consumerism. With that sobering image in mind, Pregones switches to examining some comedic aspects of the tragic-comic Puerto Rico/U.S. situation.

From a more humorous perspective Bienvenido Don Goyito (Welcome Don Goyito, 1965) by Manuel Méndez Ballester, reveals the dilemma of accepting a future of progress at the expense of Puerto Rican identity. In an effort to accept the demands of the historical moment, Don Goyito, a rich *jíbaro* (peasant) who has recently moved to a wealthy neighborhood in the city, tries, without any success, to adapt to the luxuries and technological advances of progress in a materialistic society. In his conversation with Juan, an assimilated peasant better known as Johnny, Don Goyito expresses his frustration with the constant superfluous expenses and the waste of non cultivated land:

- Johnny: Listen, you have a fabulous house.
 Goyito: It sure is. Do you know how much I paid for it? A hundred grand. American money.
 Johnny: This is a palace.
 Goyito: I don't know what a palace is. What I do know is that this is a waste before God's eyes. Tell me if you need such a huge house to eat and sleep. A house so full of junk. That pond over there that they call a "swimer pul." A kitchen worth two thousand pesos, and two acres of yard that should be planted with malojillo, yerba and guinea.
 Johnny: How can you think about that, Goyito. That's OK for the country. 39

39

- Johnny: Oye, tienes una casa estupenda.
 Goyito: De rechupete. Sabes cuánto pagué por ella? Cien mil de a rajar po' el lomo. American money.
 Johnny: Esto es un palacio.
 Goyito: Yo no sé lo que es un palacio. Lo que yo sé es que esto es un despilfarro ante los ojos de Dios. Dígame usted si pa' comer y dormir se necesita una casa tan grande con tanta burundanga: la charca esa que aquí le dicen suimer pul: una cocina de dos mil pesos, y dos cuerdas de patio que debían estar sembrás de malojillo y yerba y guinea.

Don Goyito's inability to keep up with his new lifestyle puts him in the uncomfortable position of feeling like a stranger in his own house. The customs of the city are foreign to him; the swimming pool, the bathing suits, and the custom of socializing while drinking cocktails do not appeal to him. Don Goyito's inability to speak English at seventy years old alienates him even further than his inability to adjust to U.S. customs. To cope with his new reality, Don Goyito understands that he must learn English, the "language of the future." The other scene Pregones chose to close the first act of La colección also presents the comical predicament of learning English at an advanced age. In this scene, Don Goyito tries, without success, to learn English with the help of Susi Plepp, a private tutor. The scene evolves into a mixture of comic linguistic innuendos that once again remind the audience of the Puerto Rican identity issue:

Goyito: Father, mother, brother, sister.
One, two, three, four.
My name is Puerto Rico.
My country is Don Goyito.⁴⁰

Johnny: Cómo vas a pretender eso, Goyito. Eso está bien en el campo.
Teatro Pregones, p. 1.3.13.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 1.3.23. About this particular rhyme, which attempts to reproduce that of a *cuarteta jíbara* (peasant quartet), Matías Montes Huidobro says:

This rhyme in English represents a satire if we relate it to traditional peasant improvisation. At the same time, the intentional distortion is highlighted by the humor of the last two verses, which makes a lot of sense since, after all, if the jíbara represents the Puerto Rican essence, at an intuitive level Don Goyito subconsciously identifies "country" with "name." The character, who memorizes his lesson like a parrot, reveals a subconscious level of lexical wisdom. Don Goyito's lexicon produces a nationalistic effect which contrasts with the idiomatic interferences of English. Matías Montes Huidobro, Persona: Vida y máscara en el teatro puertorriqueño (Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe/ Ateneo Puertorriqueño/ Universidad Interamericana/ Tinglado Puertorriqueño, 1986), p. 225.

"Toda la rima en inglés representa una sátira si la relacionamos con la tradicional improvisación jíbara. Al mismo tiempo, la distorsión intencional se acrecienta con la comicidad de los dos últimos versos, que tienen mucho sentido ya que, después de todo, si el jíbara representa la esencia puertorriqueña, intuitivamente don Goyito no hace más que identificar subcientemente "country" con "name." El personaje que aprende la lección como un papagayo manifiesta un subcientente de sabiduría léxica.

El léxico de don Goyito produce un efecto nacionalista que contrasta con las interferencias idiomáticas del inglés."

This linguistic joke ultimately equates Don Goyito with Puerto Rico and by extension, with being a *jíbaro*, with a solid sense of a Puerto Rican identity, not yet corrupted by acculturation although necessarily affected by it. Throughout his attempt to learn English he questions the validity of giving up his identity, his traditional values and his heritage in exchange for material values and a completely foreign culture. With this reflection in mind the first act of La colección closes, having revealed the vicissitudes of a modern Puerto Rican *jíbaro*.⁴¹

The second act of La colección opens with a scene from Ramón Méndez Quiñones's Un jíbaro (A Peasant, 1878). If Don Goyito is the modern representation of the Puerto Rican peasant detached from his countryside, trying to adjust to the hectic life of the metropolis, the characters in Méndez Quiñones's piece are *jíbaros* in their own domain, the domain to which Don Goyito returns at the end of Méndez Ballester's play, the countryside of Puerto Rico. Méndez Quiñones, one of the first Puerto Rican playwrights to examine the *jíbaro* figure in Puerto Rican literature, presents us with a portrait of the Puerto Rican peasant as a national figure. Socorro Girón asserts:

Jíbaro, an adjective initially used to describe the peasant as brutish, animalistic, illiterate, clumsy, and stupid, because they would not live in the walled city of San Juan and, was consequently far from "civilization," was also used to describe the native, the creole, the Puerto Rican whether from the mountains or the coast.⁴²

In his play, Méndez Quiñones attempts to present the *jíbaro* as a figure who defies the above negative stereotypes imposed on him. Moreover, the playwright emphasizes his

⁴¹For more information on Bienvenido Don Goyito see: Matías Montes Huidobro, Persona vida y máscara en el teatro puertorriqueño (Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe/ Ateneo Puertorriqueño, Universidad Interamericana/ Tinglado Puertorriqueño, 1986), pp. 218-228. For more on Manuel Méndez Ballester see: Angelina Morfi, Historia crítica de un siglo de teatro puertorriqueño (Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1993), pp. 349-362.

⁴²Socorro Girón, Vida y obra de Ramón Méndez Quiñones, 3rd edition (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1991), p. 57.

"Jíbaro, que en sus comienzos fue adjetivo para designar al campesino como bruto, animal, analfabeto, torpe, estúpido, porque no vivía en la ciudad murada y por lo tanto lejos de "la civilización" fue también usado para designar al nativo, al criollo, al puertorriqueño tanto de montaña adentro como de litoral."

theme by praising many qualities in his character which include a deep sense of honor, the central theme of the play. Other characteristics featured by Méndez Quiñones in this play present a more balanced and realistic vision of the *jíbaro* by contrasting both positive and negative qualities as observed by Angelina Morfi:

The central character of his work is the peasant, definitively "planted" there on the Puerto Rican stage. He reveals him in all his picturesqueness, with his customs and weaknesses, trying to provoke laughter through his original ways, his lack of education and his archaic linguistic expressions.⁴³

to which she adds:

Un jíbaro presents positive qualities of the peasant such as a sense of honor, courage, loyalty, respect for family ties, frankness, emotional sincerity, and the capacity to forgive as well as the negative qualities of authoritarianism, aggression, pride and suspicion. (Morfi, p.91)⁴⁴

To a great degree, the idea of a Puerto Rican identity evolves from these qualities. That sense of identity will be reinforced in many other plays that also use the *jíbaro* as the central figure of the Puerto Rican identity issue. Similarly, the *jíbaro* as a central theme in Puerto Rican theatre gradually found its way into many different plays, revealing other aspects of this character, be they comic or tragic, as in Manuel Méndez Ballester's Tiempo muerto or René Marqués's La carreta, for instance.

As mentioned earlier, Pregones selected Scene Seven of Un jíbaro to open the second act of La colección. The scene represents an instance of *jíbaro* customs and behavior through an interchange between Don Leonisio and Cañuto. In this dialogue Cañuto visits Leonisio in an effort to figure out whether a stray horse that has destroyed

⁴³Angelina Morfi, Historia crítica de un siglo de teatro puertorriqueño (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1993), p. 91.

"El personaje central de su obra es el jíbaro, dejándolo definitivamente "planta" en el escenario puertorriqueño. Lo destaca en su aspecto pintoresquista, con sus modos y debilidades, tratando de provocar la risa a través de sus actitudes peculiares, su falta de instrucción y su expresión lingüística tan apegada al arcaísmo."

⁴⁴"Un jíbaro nos presenta cualidades positivas del campesino como el sentido del honor, la valentía, la fidelidad, el respeto a los vínculos familiares, la franqueza, la sinceridad de los sentimientos, la reconsideración de actitudes, la capacidad para perdonar. También se nos presentan actitudes negativas como el autoritarismo, la agresividad, el orgullo y la desconfianza."

several properties belongs to Leonisio. Once Cañuto denies any possible ownership of the horse, they discuss damages that the animal caused and the waste of time and money that it would take to make the owner pay for these damages. This scene examines the issues involved in solving problems through common sense justice without going to the authorities, alluding to a way of life in which honor, good will, common sense and folk wisdom are trusted more than any law imposed from without. The second part of the same scene continues to explore Puerto Rican folklore by revealing an important aspect of *jíbaro* wisdom related to health and botanical knowledge. When asked about his mother, Cañuto informs Leonisio of her health problems. In an effort to relieve her suffering Cañuto describes the many possible solutions that opinionated *jíbaros* offered him, adding to the comedy of the scene:

Cañuto: They told me that it was dropsy,
 others said air in the blood,
 others said lack of food,
 and others that it was witchcraft.
 Siña Benita my neighbor
 told me that I should rub her
 with a little bit of blessed water
 to break the spell.
 My future mother-in-law
 told me to take a black duck
 selected by a first born Juan
 and with the "caro" herb
 and the feathers, boiled
 in a pot by Siña Amparo;
 it should be put in three quarts
 that will be reduced to two,
 a Juan de Dios should pick up
 the flowers of yellow sage
 and basil
 and goat's grass and citronella
 and with millet leaves
 she should take it four times a day.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Although I am working with an original copy of *La colección*, some of the pages corresponding to several scenes are missing. Such is the case with the scene from *Un jíbaro*. I am therefore using a reproduction of the play that appears in Socorro Girón's book to replace the lost scene. Consequently, this quote is not directly from *La colección*'s script but from Girón's book, p. 83. Due to the difficulties of producing a good English version of the *jíbaro* language, which defies translation, I am providing the reader with a translation that captures the sense of the dialogue but does not intend to be a translation that fully captures the idiosyncratic features of the Puerto Rican peasant language.

"Man dicho qués tropesía

With this sampler of Puerto Rican folkloric customs, Pregones confirms its preference for the figure of the *jíbaro* as a symbol of Puerto Rican identity and an important cultural icon, preserved by many yet lost to others under the pressures of devastating political, economic and social circumstances.

In contrast to the portrayal of *jíbaros* previously presented in Bienvenido don Goyito and Un jíbaro, Pregones uses a scene from René Marqués's La carreta (The Oxcart), to explore the aspect of *jíbaro* life most relevant to the Puerto Rican immigrants in New York. La carreta, the epic drama of a Puerto Rican peasant family in its pilgrimage from the countryside of the island to the city slums of San Juan and eventually to the Bronx, presents the tragic fate of the Puerto Rican. The play demonstrates that Puerto Rico's boundaries are not limited to the island itself, but extend also to the United States. An aged *jíbaro* interviewed by Stan Steiner suggests:

There is not one Puerto Rico. There are four Puerto Ricos. There is the Puerto Rico of the island. There is the Puerto Rico of San Juan. There is the Puerto Rico of the United States. And there is the largest Puerto Rico of all--the state of

otros que sangre con biento,
 otros que farta é alimento,
 otros que jechicería.
 Me dijo Siña Benita
 la besina de aquí arlao
 que la debía habel fletao
 con un poco é agua bendita
 pa poel sacaye er jechiso.
 Y la que bá a sel mi suegra,
 que coja una pata negra
 pol mano é un Juan primeriso
 y con el bejuco er caro
 y las plumas, tó cosio
 en un cardero jerbío
 se lo jaga siña Amparo;
 que lo ponga en tres cualtiyos
 pa ejayo reusío a dos,
 y que coja un Juan de Dios
 las flores er cariaquiyo
 y albacaca simarrona
 yerba é cabro limonsiyo
 y con las jojas er miyo
 den po er día cuatro tomas."

mind.⁴⁶

Confronting economic, psychological and social challenges in both the countryside and San Juan, the family depicted by Marqués ventures through these four worlds in search of a more promising future which fails to fulfill its expectations. In their search they find themselves in New York living in a world of linguistic, spiritual and cultural differences that threaten to destroy their souls, and consequently, their national identity. It is within that context, that the scene Pregones chose to depict takes place between Juanita and Luis.

In this scene Juanita and her brother Luis confront each other with their personal demons. Luis, encouraged by Juanita, has dragged his family from Puerto Rico to New York with the hope of a better economic future. Successful to some degree in providing his family with material prosperity, the price they have had to pay for this progress is too high:

Juanita: How's your job goin'? (Luis continues eating and doesn't answer. Juanita gets up.) That new radio must have cost you a pretty penny. (Pause.) Looks like you're really makin' progress. (Pause.) Of course, mamá would have rather had a new armchair. (Approaching the rear door, changing her tone.) Have you noticed how old she seems? (In a low voice, full of emotion.) Her days are numbered, Luis.

Luis: (Turning half-way round.) Shut up!

Juanita: (Turns around.) She used to be as strong as the trunk of an *ausubo* tree. The hurricanes couldn't blow her over. But up here she's gettin' all bent over like a dry stalk o' sugar cane. She's wrinkl'n' up on us like a dried fig.

Luis: (Getting up violently.) Shut up! She's better than ever.

Juanita: Her hair is turnin' the same color as this gray, American sky. And her hands...you remember her hands? When she used to grab the handle of the millstone and turn it, her hands looked like a giant's hands. And when the corn came out as yellow flour, it seemed like a miracle from her own hands and not the work of the handle and the stones. I was a little girl then and her hands were big and strong. I saw her hands today. And they were so small, and they shook so when she tried to button her sweater!

Luis: She's strong. She's better than ever. She's strong, I tell you!

Juanita: And she doesn't scold us anymore. Have you noticed how she doesn't scold us anymore? But she looks at me. She looks at me in such way! And it's worse than a scolding.

Luis: She don't need nothin'. She's got everythin'. Everythin'.

Juanita: Are you sure, Luis?

⁴⁶Stan Steiner, *The Worlds of the Puerto Ricans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. xvii.

Luis: I've given her what I've always wanted to give her, a decent life. She's got clothes and she's got food. And a real good bed. And she can rest whenever she wants to. And she's got all the money she needs. And I've given her all that. That's why I've been workin' so hard. That's why I work overtime. So she can live right.

Juanita: I know now you've gotten what you wanted.

Luis: And I brought her to this neighborhood from Harlem. So she can live better here. And we don't owe nothin' to nobody. Two months ago I sent Doña Isa the last cent she lent us for the plane fare. When have we ever been better off? Never!

Juanita: Yeah, you're makin' money all right.

Luis: And I'll keep on makin' it. More and more. Money. Not to be poor, understand? That's what's important.⁴⁷

Ironically, along with the apparent economic progress that they find in New York comes loneliness, more poverty, discrimination, crime, and in Juanita's case, even prostitution. While Luis is willing to conform to his surroundings, Juanita claims that she will take responsibility for her own destiny and her identity, not allowing anybody to dictate how she should behave or act:

The thing is I don't feel like behavin' right any more. And just what does behave right mean? One day we left our little farm in an oxcart 'cause we were goin' in search of freedom. The mountains were closing in on us, and we fled to the sea. But the sea closed in on us too, and we fled from the sea. Now we're closed in by buildings that look like mountains and seas of people who push us and shove us. If this is freedom, I wanna enjoy it alone. Without answerin' to anybody. You got that? I'm gonna drive my own cart and lead the oxen wherever I want. (The Oxcart, p. 116)

Thus Juanita rebels against the depressing life she has found in New York by leaving her family and becoming a prostitute. A sector of the *jíbaro* population in the United States has also rebelled against oppressive, humiliating and diminishing conditions by returning to Puerto Rico. Pregones's play also returns to Puerto Rico, but not to the island Juanita and her family left, but to a Puerto Rico obviously changed by foreign influences.

When the scene from La carreta fades out, a scene from René Marqués's Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro begins. The scene, as adapted by Pregones, has two parts culled

⁴⁷The scene, as used by Pregones in the script of La colección, was presented in its original Spanish version. The English version provided here is from: René Marqués, The Oxcart (U.S.A., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), pp. 112-113.

from the opening and closing scenes of Marqués's play. In the opening scene of the play, in contrast to the ideal Puerto Rico that Juanita and Doña Gabriela longed to return to, this Puerto Rico is one of intolerance, aggression and violence. The audience realizes the absurdity of the fabric of this Puerto Rico, composed of its natives, its Cubans, as well as its mainland U.S. immigrants. This scene recreates a traffic jam as a symbol of modern Puerto Rico. Characters complain about their inability to move anywhere. Trying to channel their frustrations, people blame each other, resorting to verbal assaults:

Voice of a woman: It had to be a man who made this traffic jam! Imbecile!
Why don't you move?
Voice V: Run me over if you're in a hurry, stupid bitch, don't you see that I can't budge?
Voice of a woman: You animal! If my husband were here he would punch you in the face.
Voice V: With you and your husband I wipe my...
Voice of a North American: God Dammit, what the hell is going on here?
Voice IV: Stop the jabbering, dammit.
Voice of Cuban habanero: Listen man, what's wrong with these fucking Puerto Ricans? In Havana we never had traffic jams like these.
(La colección, p. 52)⁴⁸

Marqués describes the city in this scene as "San Juan, or any similar city in the hemisphere that is called "new," without anyone really knowing what such novelty consists of," and the time is carnival (p. 53).

In Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro, a farce about Puerto Rican innocence compromised by foreign interests, Rosita's innocence is sacrificed to Mack, who symbolizes the American establishment. Angel, a Puerto Rican artist in search of

48

Voz de mujer: Tenía que ser un hombre quien formara este tapón! Imbécil! ¿Por qué no sigue?
Voz V: Páseme por encima si tiene prisa, vieja estúpida, ¿no ve que no puedo seguir?
Voz de mujer: ¡Animal! Si estuviera mi marido aquí le rompería la cara.
Voz V: A usted y a su marido me los paso yo por...
Voz de norteamericano: God Dammit, what the hell is going on here?
Voz IV: Acaben y dejen el bembeteo carajo.
Voz de habanero cubano: Oye chico ¿qué les pasa a estos jodíos puertorriqueños? En la Habana no teníamos congestiones así.

innocence and in love with Rosita, confronts the establishment in an effort to either change it or destroy it, claiming, "You don't hate the system, or love it. It just keeps going, it changes or it's destroyed. That's all."⁴⁹ From the struggle to maintain Puerto Rican identity, an identity threatened by the American establishment, the carnival of the play evolves, becoming a parable of Puerto Rican political reality:

Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro overflows in creative imagination as the author utilizes all the visual and auditory resources of contemporary theatre to move the daring parable within a free farcical style. Music, sound, expressionistic and onomatopoeic dialogue, choruses, ballet, primitive rites and modern rituals, circus acrobatics, masks, costumes, parades, lights, all contribute to the carnivalesque whirlwind where laughter- -the apparent happiness and frivolity of a materialistic and mechanized world- -hides the tragedy of a people who dizzily lose or, even worse, sell their most authentic values.⁵⁰

The characters of the play stand in opposition to this corruption and loss of authentic values.

From the opening scene of Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro, Pregones moves to the closing scene, where Rosita's prostitution to Mack and Angel's defense of his beloved girlfriend from such sacrifice has already occurred. The closing scene provides a powerful commentary on artistic responsibility and the preservation of Puerto Rican identity despite the mercantile demands of foreign interests. When Angel expresses his desire to die with his beloved Rosita, Tía Matilde tells him:

Do you think that I saved you so that you can die like a stupid Romeo over the dead body of sacrificed innocence?. . . No! This is not the time to play the lyre, but the drums. This is not the time for tears, but to strike. This is not the time to die, but to live. Listen well, Angel. Time is flying. There is an island to defend, there is a world to save, your world. (Standing in front of him she takes off the *guanín* -medal worn by the Taíno indian chief- and puts it around his neck.) For love, for

⁴⁹René Marqués, Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro (Río Piedras, P.R.: Editorial Antillana, 1971), p. 114.

"...Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro se desborda en imaginación creadora utilizando el autor todos los recursos visuales y auditivos del teatro contemporáneo para mover la audaz parábola dentro de la más libre modalidad fársica. Música, sonido, diálogo expresionista y onomatopéyico, coros, ballet, ritos primitivos y rituales modernos, acrobacias circenses, máscaras, disfraces, comparsas, luces, todo contribuye al torbellino carnavalesco donde la risa- aparental alegría y frivolidad de un mundo materialista y mecanizado- oculta la tragedia de un pueblo que vertiginosamente va perdiendo o, peor, vendiendo sus valores más auténticos."

⁵⁰ F. Vázquez Alamo, "Breve análisis crítico," in Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro, p. 11.

art, for freedom. Live and fight! (La colección, p. 57)⁵¹

Once Tía Matilde delivers this message, Angel assumes his artistic responsibility towards his people and culture by resisting colonization through his art. Yet the eternal dilemma of whether theatre and life can become one or are forever set apart, emerges at the conclusion of the play, as noted by F. Vázquez Alamo:

...giving a dramatic twist to the the farce, the author confronts us before the curtain drops with the eternal problem of the essence of theatre. Where does the farce end and where does life begin? Are the actors clowns or are we? Which is the real "carnival," the actors' ("inside" on stage) or ours' ("outside" in the audience)? (p. 18)⁵²

Thus the parable extends to the personal, political and social spheres of Puerto Rican life outside the theatre where everything seems to be a carnival where a never ending celebration hides what the author considers the dire reality of the island. Tía Matilde makes the similarities between the theatrical situation and "real life" more apparent, inviting the actors to take off their masks and join the carnival lived by the audience, as she exclaims, "Let's be clowns and hypocrites just like they are! Take a bow, actors! Take a bow! (La colección, p. 60).⁵³

As seen in the above summary, each scene reflects the island's headlong rush towards Americanization, a move frustrated by decades of cultural resistance and the tenacious clinging to their national identity. With this performance *Pregones* highlights the nationalistic nature of Puerto Rican theatre. The relationship between Puerto Rican theatre and nationalism is common ground for Puerto Rican playwrights, theatre producers and

⁵¹"¿Crees que te he salvado para que mueras como un estúpido Romeo sobre el cadáver de la inocencia sacrificada?[...] No! No es hora de hacer sonar liras, sino tambores. No es hora de lágrimas, sino de golpes. No es hora de morir, sino de vivir. Escucha bien, Angel. El tiempo apremia. Hay una isla que defender, hay un mundo que salvar, el tuyo. (ya frente a él se quita el "guanín" y se lo pone al cuello a él.) Por el amor, por el arte, por la libertad. ¡Vive y lucha!"

⁵²"...dándole un dramático giro a los términos de la farsa, el autor nos confronta antes de caer el telón con la eterna problemática de la esencia teatral. Dónde termina la farsa y dónde comienza la vida? Son los actores los farsantes o lo somos nosotros? Cuál es el verdadero "carnaval", el de ellos, actores ("adentro", en escena) o el nuestro ("afuera" en la sala de espectadores)?"

⁵³"¡Seamos farsantes e hipócritas, como ellos! ¡El saludo, actores! ¡El saludo!"

scholars and not unique to Pregones. It is not a coincidence that all the plays represented by Pregones in La colección deal with Puerto Rican identity threatened by Americanization as well as the struggle for cultural survival. Puerto Rican playwright and critic Roberto Ramos Perea in his essay "Escritura dramática en Puerto Rico: hacia la reafirmación del contexto" (Dramatic Writing in Puerto Rico: Towards the Reaffirmation of the Context) concludes that until the island attains a clear political definition, its socio-political condition will determine the dramatic production of Puerto Rican playwrights.⁵⁴

The group also establishes itself as a theatre company concerned with Puerto Rican nationalism and the survival of Puerto Rican culture, a concern that future Pregones plays such as Areyto de pescadores, Voices of Steel, Migrants and Medea, will reflect. The use of autochthonous music and movement, the return to Puerto Rican theatre classics, and the use of traditional imagery such as masks, puppets and the figure of the *pregonero* (street vendor) as a symbol of Puerto Rican identity, reinforce Puerto Rican nationalism as an alternative to cultural and political colonialism. The positive depiction of the *jíbaros* represents a symbol of Puerto Ricanness in a clearly nationalistic way, creating connections with the many urban *jíbaros* living in New York.

Pregones strongly criticizes one hundred years of U.S. colonization throughout La colección. This struggle against cultural colonialism, widely seen in Puerto Rican theatre,

⁵⁴Roberto Ramos Perea, "Escritura dramática en Puerto Rico: hacia la reafirmación del contexto," in Peter Roster and Mario Rojas, eds., De la colonia a la postmodernidad: Teoría teatral y crítica sobre teatro latinoamericano, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1992), p. 379.

We cannot discuss the new directions in the national dramaturgy without first making allusion to the socio-political condition of our country which, without turning this into a vain leftist lamentation, is a determining factor in this kind of artistic discussion. . . .

. . . This constant socio-political debate has defined the national theatrical agenda as one that has been, is and will be condemned to struggle, paradoxically, for its right to be Puerto Rican, its Puerto Ricannization.

"No podemos referirnos a las nuevas direcciones en la dramaturgia nacional sin antes hacerlo someramente sobre la condición sociopolítica de nuestro país, que sin que suene a vana lamentación izquierdista, es determinante en este tipo de discusión artística. . . .

Este constante debate sociopolítico ha determinado el quehacer dramático nacional que ha estado, está y al parecer estará condenado a luchar, paradójicamente, por su puertorriqueñización."

is a characteristic shared by Latin American theatre where neocolonialism is a major issue. For instance, in her study of Colombian collective theatre creations, Beatriz Rizk identifies a clear resistance to neocolonialism in the work of Enrique Buenaventura.⁵⁵ In his own work, Buenaventura calls for a rescuing and recovery of all the elements of native culture within the ethnic diaspora of Latin America to avoid what he calls cultural genocide. Thus, he proposes a theatre based on the popular manifestations of culture to counteract the damages imperialism and colonialism have caused. As Rizk points out:

It is about the reappropriation of themes, elements and forms that have contributed to the formation of our cultural patrimony to transform them, in order to recontextualize them by relating them to a historical process that continues in present time. (Rizk, p. 25)⁵⁶

Just as Buenaventura's theatre expresses a concern with colonization in Latin American theatre, so Pregones, with its piece La colección, documents the existence of a Puerto Rican theatre which denounces its culture's imminent threat of extinction as a consequence of colonialism. La colección successfully goes beyond its historical purpose of recording one hundred years of Puerto Rican theatrical history to comment on present conditions affecting Puerto Ricans.

Since the formation of Pregones the company has adopted the collective creation method as its preferred method of working. Still revising and reshaping La colección two years after its first performance, Pregones produced at least four versions of its work. The most complete or final one was directed by the Argentine Delfor Peralta and presented in 1984 at the Joseph Papp Festival Latino. This collective creation method, served as a springboard for its second piece.

⁵⁵Beatriz Rizk, Buenaventura: La dramaturgia de la creación colectiva, (México: Grupo Editorial Gaceta, S.A.), p. 25.

⁵⁶"Se trata, pues, de una reapropiación de temas, elementos y formas que han contribuido a la formación del patrimonio cultural para transformarlos, devolviéndoles su historicidad concreta al relacionarlos, de paso, con un devenir que se continúa en el tiempo presente."

Areyto de pescadores (Fishermen's Tale)

After several years of touring and presenting La colección in diverse settings, Pregones recognized the need to create new pieces to develop a repertoire and evolve as a group. In the initial phase of Pregones, a strong attachment to political and social issues on the island determined the type of stories the company would enact. Thus the struggle between the U.S. Navy and the people of Vieques was seen as a potentially ideal theme for Pregones's new piece, Areyto de pescadores, a play depicting a Puerto Rican working class issue and the struggle for independence.⁵⁷

To understand the creation of Areyto de pescadores and its importance within the Puerto Rican and Latino communities, a brief history of Vieques is necessary.⁵⁸ A small island ten miles off the east coast of Puerto Rico, Vieques was originally settled by the indigenous Taíno people. When the Spaniards arrived in Boriken, sibling *caciques* (Taíno indian chiefs) from Vieques, named Cacimar and Yaureibo, became active in defending Puerto Rico from the Spaniards' attacks. After Cacimar's death in battle, Yaureibo engaged in an anti-colonial expedition to Borikén, returning to Vieques with several Spanish prisoners of war. The Spaniards retaliated by invading Vieques, attacking its inhabitants, destroying their town and enslaving the survivors of this attack, leaving the island virtually unsettled in approximately 1514. After this incident and despite several attempts by English invaders to take over the island of Vieques in 1688 and 1717, Vieques remained a Spanish territory.

It was not until 1811 that Don Salvador Meléndez, Governor of Puerto Rico,

⁵⁷"Their interest in Puerto Rican nationalism was not a matter of choice; it was something they felt they could not avoid." Caron Atlas and Ted Hanna, "Theatre of Commitment: The Latino Festival in New York," Theatre Times (A Publication of the Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York) Vol. 3, No. 7 May- June, 1984, p. 1.

⁵⁸For information on the history of Vieques see Robert L. Rabin Siegal, Compendio de lecturas sobre la historia de Vieques (Vieques: Archivo Histórico de Vieques, 1994). Most of the information concerning the history of Vieques that appears in this section comes from the article by the same author, "Cronología Histórica de Vieques: Cinco Siglos de Lucha de un Pueblo Puertorriqueño," on pages 71-79 of the same book.

ordered the official colonization of Vieques by Don Juan Roselló. After the beginning of an organized colonization of Vieques, Don Teófilo José María Le Guillou, a French landowner from Haiti, arrived in Vieques, becoming one of its founders and eventually governor. Between 1832 and 1843 Le Guillou devised a plan for the political and economic development of Vieques. Under the ruling of Le Guillou, with permission of the Spanish government and under a 1815 treaty, plantation owners from Guadalupe and Martinique settled in Vieques, developing a powerful economy based on agriculture. By the second half of the 19th century the sugar industry was well developed in Vieques, with at least six important sugar plantations: Arcadia, Esperanza, Playa Grande, Resolución, Santa Elena and Santa María. Slaves, free workers from Vieques and ex-slave migrants from the surrounding English colonies, who became the settlers of Vieques, worked these plantations. By the time Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States, Vieques's economy depended almost entirely on its sugar cane industry.

When the United States military arrived in Puerto Rico in 1898 a change in the economy of the island occurred along with the change in political power. The sugar cane industry, not of major concern to the American powers in Vieques, suffered dramatic decay and faced an uncertain future, forcing landowners to raise the price of their product. During the years of economic adaptation, the development of the cattle raising industry became an important source for the survival of the people of Vieques. The soil was fertile, the water was good and the surrounding areas were excellent fishing banks, thus agriculture, farming and fishing kept the people of Vieques working and earning a decent living, although many of Vieques's inhabitants were poor. Unfortunately, the people's traditionally stable and modestly prosperous way of life was dramatically reversed with the advent of the Second World War.

Devising ways of ensuring national security became a main concern for the U.S. military. Because of its strategic location and Puerto Rico's status as a U.S. territory, Vieques, as well as Culebra, a neighboring island which is also part of Puerto Rico, became

important points in the development of a defense plan created by the U.S. Navy.⁵⁹ In 1941 the U.S. Navy acquired two thirds of the island of Vieques, by purchase or forced expropriation. Twenty six thousand acres of land of a total of thirty three thousand acres became the territory of the Navy in an attempt to create a barrier consisting of a triangle of military bases on Culebra in the north, Vieques in the southeast and Ceiba, on the west coast of Puerto Rico. To fulfill this purpose, the expropriation of land and banning of *viequenses* from their own territory following the decay of the sugar industry turned into a bitter reality for the islanders as documented in the following passage:

. . . in 1938 the people of the tiny island were made aware of their own powerlessness with a shock from which the entire population is recovering only now. Because of the colonial relationship with the United States, Puerto Rico has never been free to trade with any other country, and yet neither was the sugar produced in Vieques and on the main island ever in demand by the mother country. The market at best was uncertain, prices unpredictable, and the small Viequense sugar industry suffered during the 1930's. Landowners there grew doubtful of its continued profitability.

To the United States Navy, the cloudy future of the sugar industry proved very convenient for their strategy regarding the Caribbean. Between 1938 and 1945, in collaboration with the internal government of Puerto Rico and the latifundia of Vieques, the Navy succeeded in acquiring 26,000 of the island's 33,000 acres for its exclusive use, leaving only 7,000 acres at the center to the Viequense people.

Owners of large amounts of land on the island were easily persuaded to sell, in the light of low sugar prices and the imminence of World War II. In the increasing patriotic euphoria of that time, Puerto Rican politicians became convinced that sacrificing Vieques to the American military was in the interests of the national security of the United States. The injustice of expropriating thousands of poor Puerto Ricans from their homes- -with less than ten days prior notice- -was covered over with promises of jobs and economic prosperity to be brought by the building of two military bases on the eastern and western ends of the island.⁶⁰

⁵⁹In 1975, after years of protest, the U.S. Navy agreed to leave Culebra. Many of the practices that originally took place in Culebra were transferred to Vieques, putting an extra burden on the people of that island:

Culebra, since the Navy left, has had some success with tourism and the opening of small factories. The people of Vieques know that if the Navy leaves, they can do the same or better, being a larger island. Documents made public in federal court have revealed that the Navy, since it ceased operations on Culebra in 1975, has repeatedly made false statements concerning its operation on Vieques, when the opposite has proved to be true.

Louise Cripps Samoiloff, Human Rights in a United States Colony (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1982), p. 118.

⁶⁰Vieques and Christians (Bayamón, Puerto Rico: Movimiento Ecueménico Nacional de Puerto

Thus the island of Vieques witnessed the beginning of a nightmare that has not yet ended . Attempting to survive the imminent disappearance of the sugar cane industry, inhabitants of Vieques resorted to fishing as their mainstay. Nevertheless, the U.S. Navy interrupted Viequenses' efforts to improve and meet their economic needs. Not only were Viequenses banned from inhabiting their own land, but they were also banned from navigating Vieques's surrounding waters which were now being used for naval practices. Similar attempts at agriculture and cattle raising development have also been frustrated.⁶¹

Since the arrival of the U.S. Navy in Vieques, islanders have suffered the consequences of having the colonial power move into what had been their own backyard. Not only has the population of Vieques changed by the thousands, with most inhabitants relocating or leaving the island altogether, but those who stayed did not get a piece of land of their own in exchange for what they considered their homes.⁶² Nor were the promises

Rico PRISA, Inc., 1981), p.15.

⁶¹Agricultural development became, in fact, an important source of survival soon after the establishment of the U.S. Navy in Vieques:

In the late '40's a brave effort, at least, was made to put the island on a sounder economic base. 700 acres of the Martineau Farm and 3500 acres from the Eastern Sugar Company land were administered by the Puerto Rico Agricultural Development Company (PRACO). PRACO established herds of pure bred cattle and a flourishing dairy industry in Martineau. Hatcheries producing up to 18,000 fresh eggs a day, palm groves producing coconuts for market and a pineapple plantation were also undertakings. Above all considerations, the activities sponsored by PRACO offered employment. During this period, according to Amadée Bonnet, there was virtually no unemployed.

Promising as all this would appear, it did not last. Activity on excess Navy land, as on Martineau, may have been alarming to the Navy...

Elizabeth Langhorne, Vieques: History of a Small Island (Vieques, Puerto Rico: The Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, 1987), pp. 64-65.

⁶²Ibid, pp. 62-63.

In one stroke of a pen the settled life of a small island was turned upside down. First, of course, came the necessary acquisition of land. Examination of the records of civil actions from November '41 to February '43 reveal that an average of \$47 an acre was paid to eight owners for a total of more than 21,000 acres. Some additional acreage was acquired, but the above figures give an adequate picture of the Navy's expropriation of Vieques land. . . .

The Navy did their best to resettle the huge percentage of the population thus displaced. Three thousand out of some nine thousand inhabitants either left on their own, or were resettled by the Navy on St. Croix. Many more, perhaps another 4,000 were relocated in some 800 acres on Vieques itself, in Santa María and Montesanto, designated as resettlement areas for those who elected to remain even on this fraction of their native land.

of jobs and prosperity met by the Navy.⁶³ Furthermore, a new population of thousands of Navy sailors and Marines became their new unwanted neighbors, bringing with them problems ranging from the disruption of public peace to street fights and prostitution as described in this account by the Puerto Rican National Ecumenical Movement:

While prostitution flourished, drunken Marines on leave filled the streets, and the local laws were literally subordinated to the power of the military presence, the consciousness of the Viequense people began to develop. Preludes to organized resistance found expression in gangs of youths who defended themselves and their families against the outrages committed by arrogant soldiers. The 1950's was a time of danger: it was unsafe for women to walk the streets for fear of rape and sexual harassment, beaches were littered with unexploded bombs and live grenades which killed and wounded Viequenses--many of them children. Marines who broke into homes or otherwise destroyed property went unpunished. (Viequenses and Christians, p. 17)

The families of Vieques have seen their lives suffer from a military presence that shows no respect for their right to live in peace, own a home, and make a decent living.

Along with a wide range of social problems that soldiers created and the military

⁶³With the exception of some roads and facilities brought to Vieques by the Navy for its own use, this institution has done little to improve the quality of life of the people of Vieques. The jobs generated during the period when the bases were built proved to be temporary. Besides, the U.S. Navy has blocked any attempt at continuing a normal life in Vieques, thus creating a rate of unemployment that has on occasion reached over sixty percent. The ever-increasing presence of the Navy in Vieques and its indifference to the people of Vieques has been brought to the attention of the Congress of the United States, since the situation has created discomfort and tension between Viequenses and the Navy. The Navy has responded with more indifference and an imperialistic attitude as documented in this article in the Philadelphia Inquirer:

Residents of the island have argued that its use for bombing practice has inhibited economic growth and adversely affected cattlemen and fishermen as well as attempts to generate tourism.

The Navy bought 78 percent of the island's 33,000 acres in 1941 and has since restricted the use of some of its beaches, waters and farmlands.

One Navy official at the hearing estimated training exercises are carried out on Vieques during about "50 percent of the daylight hours" during each year.

Responding to a question by Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (D. Calif.) about whether more could be done to improve the economy of the island, Hidalgo said, "We're (the Navy) not a social welfare organization."

"Nothing must be done to degrade, to make more difficult or economically burdensome, the training and readiness of our Navy-Marine Corps team," Hidalgo said.

In addition, he said, "Anything that deprives our nation of the Vieques training range or jeopardizes its use would be a severe blow to our national security."

Cliff, Haas, "Navy Says it Must Use Island as Target Range," Philadelphia Inquirer, Thursday May 29, 1980, p. 6-A.

authorities overlooked, the Navy's presence on Vieques caused many other problems. The physical and moral consequences of the U.S. Navy's presence that the people of Vieques suffered include the extreme damage to the flora and fauna of Vieques, creating an ecological imbalance and imminent destruction; the use of Vieques as a storage for high technology military weapons, turning Puerto Rico into strategic attack target for United States' enemy countries; the inability to fish in the surrounding waters, preventing a considerable number of fishermen from earning a living and forcing them to turn to welfare as their only possible solution to the resulting economic crisis; the constant damage to fishing equipment such as nets, traps and boats from military practices; the death of hundreds of cattle caused by military practices, creating an economic loss which the Navy did not reimburse; the constant risk of danger to the lives of the people of Vieques; damage to the health of the people of Vieques by the constant bombing and excessive noise generated by this kind of activity.⁶⁴ In time, the level of unhappiness and frustration ensuing from this difficult situation turned the Viequenses's original passivity into determined resistance against the U.S. Navy's presence on the island. It is against this background that Pregones created the play Areyto de pescadores, after two years of researching, interviewing people and working with activist groups in Vieques. Unfortunately the play is just as timely today as it was in the eighties, given this year's international headlines when David Sanes, a local, was killed in April 1999. Massive protests, arrests and civil disobedience continues.

Areyto de pescadores, a one act play written by Edward Gallardo in collaboration with Pregones, illustrates the situation experienced by the people of Vieques, from the perspective of a poor, working class family who stayed on the island and had to witness its destruction at the hands of the military. It contrasts the resistance and determination to

⁶⁴See: Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, Gobierno Municipal, Resolución Num. 21 "Para solicitar del congreso de los Estados Unidos y del gobierno de Puerto Rico la suspensión total y definitiva de ejercicios militares de todo tipo en nuestra isla y aguas costaneras" (Vieques, Puerto Rico, Serie 1976-1977).

gain independence from the U.S. Navy with the overpowering rule of the Navy and its ability to defeat the people through unemployment, genocide and indifference. As the play begins, the deafening sound of the military air-to-land and ship-to-shore bombing is heard, a sound that will constantly remind the audience of the powerlessness of the people of Vieques to escape the circumstances affecting them. Two sisters, Monse and Yolanda, discuss the difficulties of living under the current circumstances. Yolanda left Vieques several years ago and lives in Fajardo, a town on the northeast coast of Puerto Rico. As the lover of Paulie, an American factory owner, she enjoys all the luxuries and advantages of money and credit cards. In contrast Monse, a housewife married to Luis, stayed in Vieques while her husband works at a local pharmaceutical factory. Not owning their own home, they live in a humble dwelling. Fear of losing their modest house to military practices has become an everyday concern for Monse:

Monse: These bombings keep up, pretty soon there won't be a house on the island.

Yolanda: No big loss.

Monse: Don't talk like that. Remember you used to live here too.

Yolanda: There are some things not worth remembering...⁶⁵

Moving out of Vieques is the only possible solution suggested by Yolanda who, indifferent to her sister's difficult economic situation, tries to convince Monse to escape her stark reality by inviting her and her husband to take a trip to Europe.

Francisco, a Vietnam veteran and brother of Yolanda and Monse, arrives at Monse's house to announce the news of a fisherman's confrontation with the Navy. Despite Yolanda and Monse's attempts to belittle Francisco's struggle and convince him to forget the Vieques issue and take care of his pregnant wife instead, Francisco stands with the people of Vieques. Different from Monse and Luis, who have accepted what the Navy has given them, Francisco has joined the protesters who resist the military presence on the

⁶⁵Edward Gallardo, *Areyto de pescadores* (English version, unpublished), Act I, Scene 1. Pregones Files.

island. He announces that twenty-one people have been arrested as a consequence of a confrontation with the Navy, alluding to a real situation in Vieques in 1979.⁶⁶ Francisco tries to awaken his family to the struggle for the liberation of Vieques. Monse, in contrast, is concerned about the anti-Navy activity in which Francisco is involved.

- Monse: I saw you and those friends of yours on television last night.
 Francisco: Instead of watching us on the news, you and Luis should have been there fighting with us.
 Monse: Why, so we could have been arrested too?
 Yolanda: Arrested? Pero, what happened?
 Monse: This idiot and his friends thought they could challenge the whole U.S. Navy yesterday with their little fishing boats. They wouldn't let the maneuvers start.⁶⁷
 Francisco: It worked, didn't it?
 Monse: For a few hours... but they are still going on today, no? So tell me, was it worth getting thrown into jail for?
 Francisco: I wasn't thrown into jail.
 Monse: No? Then where the hell were you all night? You had Elena half out of her mind. She thought you were dead.
 Francisco: I stayed over a friend's house.
 Monse: You have your own house. You don't need to stay nowhere but there.
 Francisco: Had my own house. The Department of Defense owns it now, like it does the rest of the island. All I've got now is a damn shack that's falling apart. (pp.4-5)

These two contradictory forces struggle to survive under the same roof: Monse, the passive character who blindly believes that the law will be enforced by the Puerto Rican

⁶⁶On May 19, 1979 an ecumenical service was held in Playa Caracas, protesting the Navy's presence on the island. In order to get their point across in support of the fishermen of Vieques, the service took place on a restricted beach where the U.S.Navy has exclusive access. However, in accordance with Puerto Rican law, beaches are public, thus this action should have not been considered trespassing. An estimated one hundred people attended the service conducted by Roman Catholic Bishop Antulio Parrilla; Disciple of Christ minister Reverend Wilfredo Vélez and Episcopal cleric Reverend Andre Treviathan. However, only twenty-one of the hundred were arrested on charges of trespassing, including the three religious officials. An important victim of this arrest, Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal, was sent to serve his six month sentence in a federal jail in Tallahassee, Florida. The tragic case of Rodríguez Cristóbal is also addressed by Pregones in the play, as will be seen later.

⁶⁷The company makes another allusion to a real situation. On February 6, 1978, a group of fishermen on thirty little boats challenged the military activity by entering restricted waters and placing themselves between the attacking battleships and the target area. This action, which forced a halt to the military practices that were supposed to occur between the U.S. Navy and Brazil's Navy, was daring and dangerous, making U.S. Navy officials understand that an open battle between the U.S. Navy and civilians was a dangerous possibility (see Elizabeth Langhorne, p. 67). Within the context of the play the two events, that of Playa Caracas and that of the fishermen against the U.S. Navy, were conflated into one incident.

government, and Francisco, the proactive one who will defy the military domination of the island:

Francisco: I wasn't arrested Monse, but other people were. Including Angel Cristóbal.

Monse: Angel, you mean Luis' friend?

Francisco: Yes, Luis' friend...

Yolanda: Angel Cristobal? Didn't I used to go out with him?

Francisco: I doubt it. He never had too much money.

Monse: Francisco, can't you understand that I'm worried about you? What you're doing is dangerous. You can get hurt.

Francisco: Somebody's gotta do it.

Monse: But why you?

Francisco: Why not me?

Monse: Because you can't just think of yourself anymore. Your wife is gonna have a baby, or did you forget that? Dios mío, Francisco, what's she gonna do if something happens to you?

Francisco: She's worse off if I just sat around and did nothing to try and change things.

Monse: You and your revolutionaries aren't changing anything. All you're doing is making things worse for everybody.

(A bomb explodes)

Francisco: How can they get worse?

Monse: Mira, if you want to change things, do it the right way.

Francisco: This is the only way left.

Monse: Dios mío, Francisco. There are politicians to do it. Educated men who get paid to change things.

Francisco: Yeah, and look at the great job they've done. (pp. 5-6)

As a consequence of the Vieques-U.S. Navy conflict in the public sphere, many family, economic, class and political problems emerge in the private sphere. The whole family has been torn apart: Yolanda has alienated herself from her relatives and her hometown, living in a world of fantasy paid for by her lover's money; Francisco, the Vietnam veteran, is constantly reminded of the nightmare of war by the military practices on Vieques; Monse is concerned with the impossibility of her family to improve its economic situation; and Pedro, their father, is mentally ill, although he is the only one able to "foresee" the moral and material consequences of the war fought between the military and Viequenses.⁶⁸ Pedro's children, however, ignore his constant allusions to war, the

⁶⁸Vieques and Culebra have one of the highest municipal rates of mental illness on the entire island of Puerto Rico.

ecological destruction of the island, and the future consequences of the systematic physical destruction of Vieques, believing that Pedro's poor mental health is a consequence of the abrupt expropriation of his land and the loss of his beloved wife to cancer, without observing the realities underneath the surface of his dementia.

The overall situation worsens when Luis loses his job. After sixteen years of working for the Arcadia Chemical Plant, Luis expects to get promoted to manager in the shipping department. When the promotion does not materialize, Luis quits his job out of frustration. Not able to collect unemployment and having been a hard worker and provider all his life, his only alternative is to become a fisherman as he had been, long before working for the chemical plant, thus creating a predicament for the family since fishing is no longer a profitable activity. The economic burdens of unemployment bring many changes for their family as they are confronted with the need to change their lifestyle when Monse goes to work at the local supermarket, becoming the main provider, while Luis tries everything to find a non-existent job.

Meanwhile Francisco's involvement with the Vieques struggle brings further problems to his household. Unhappiness and fears for the future make him detach himself from Elena, while she longs for an escape from her fears of having a deformed or unhealthy baby "like many other kids that are born here" (p. 21). Elena and Francisco argue over their differences about fighting for Vieques. Elena wants things to change for them as a family, but Francisco cannot conceive of a change in their personal situation without a change in the community affairs that affect them as a family:

- Elena: You care more about fighting than you do about me. Jesus Christ, you're always going off leaving me alone... And when you come home half the time it's like I'm not even there. Since you came back from the Army you're like a different person, Francisco. I can't remember the last time you smiled. The last time you were happy about anything.
- Francisco: Bueno, maybe the day I can fall asleep without being afraid I'm gonna see my brothers in my dreams. ...That I'm not gonna see them being blown up into so many pieces it's like they never even existed. ...Being ...Shit, and all for a country who wouldn't even let us vote for the damn president that sent us there! Coño, maybe when that day comes I can find things to be happy about. (p. 22)

Such happiness never comes. As Francisco and Luis become more involved in their personal problems, the obligation to develop social awareness emerges as a compelling need. The bitter task of forcing Luis to realize who their true enemy is falls on Francisco, who tries desperately to connect Luis's personal struggle to the community struggle for social justice:

Francisco: I really don't understand you, you know that? Damn it, Luis, instead of jumping all over me all the time, why don't you ever try listening to me. Why don't you come to one of our meetings?

Luis: Ay, please...

Francisco: Yeah, sure. You'd rather fight with me than against your real enemies.

Luis: What are you talking about? What enemies?

Francisco: What enemies? Sometimes I can't believe you're that dumb.

Monse: Francisco, por favor...

Luis: No. Let him talk.

Francisco: Damn it, Luis, your whole life you've been playing at being something you're not. You and my sister. You think because some Americano pats you on the back and says that he likes you that he's your friend, your compadre, your brother. And where has that gotten you? All it's ever gotten you has been a kick in the ass!

Monse: Ay, cállate ya!

Francisco: I can shut up but it still doesn't change the truth.

Luis: You think you know everything, don't you.

Francisco: Not everything, but I do know I'm not gonna let anybody do to me what's been done to you. I'm not gonna let anybody use me for sixteen years and then throw me away like I'm a piece of garbage when they're finished using me.

Luis: Mira, don't go using my job as an excuse for your bullshit. And that's all it is, bullshit!

Francisco: You really can't see what's happened to you, can you? Losing your job is only part of it. You're like this island itself, Luis. You've lost your heart, your spirit, your balls man! (p. 29)

Monse and Luis ignore the injustice and human degradation around them, and instead prefer to live in a state of denial, hoping for a better future despite the difficulties in their lives. They choose not to participate in the struggle, maintaining a rather passive attitude towards their own predicament, although they try desperately to move on with their lives. They look for jobs, but there are none for most of the people; they avoid living on federal aid, the only solution to their poverty; they look for help, but find no answers, yet

fail to connect their poverty and their misery to its real source, the U.S. Navy occupation of Vieques. They do their best, but their best is not enough since they are in a silent war with a power larger than themselves. To make matters worse, Yolanda visits her family in Vieques every time she gets a new gift from her American lover and feels it necessary to remind Monse of her own misery. Accustomed as she is to luxuries, it is impossible for Yolanda to relate to her sister's desire to live a simple life.

Yolanda: Forgive me, I forgot for a moment who I was talking to. Monse, when are you finally gonna learn that there are bigger dreams in life than a net full of fish?

Monse: I'm a simple woman Yolanda, I don't need big dreams. Besides, they always seem to lead to big disappointments.

Yolanda: You'll never change. ...My God, Elena, she used to drive me crazy when we were growing up. Here I'd see all the tourists and the soldiers' wives wearing fancy clothes and going around in big cars, with all that money to spend ...but this one, all she ever wanted out of life was a nice little house by the beach so that she could spend her old age looking out at the ocean. Jesus, just the thought of it still makes me sick.

Monse: And I still don't see what's wrong with wanting that.

Yolanda: I guess there is nothing wrong. ...If you're a sea gull.

Monse: Ay, Yolanda, your tongue is so long, one day you're gonna find it stuck up your ass.

Yolanda: Fine, so long as I'm not in Vieques when it happens.

Monse: You really can't understand that other people have different dreams than you do.

Yolanda: Sure I can. Except that what you wanted was never a dream. It was a Goddamned nightmare. All that is your damned peasant mentality holding you back as usual. You know, Monse, if Luis hadn't spent so much time making these little toy boats of his...

Monse: They're not toys...

Yolanda: Well whatever they are.... If he hadn't spent so much time with porquerías, he would have had more time to figure out how to make a dollar.

Monse: Oh, yeah, the great American dream, how to make a dollar. Well, I'll settle for my dreams, Yolanda, because I know there's no amount of money that can give Luis that look he gets when he's doing what he loves. That should have been his life Yolanda, being a fisherman, carving his boats, peasant mentality or not.⁶⁹

Having been pro-American since childhood, Yolanda blames her family's misfortune on what she calls their "peasant mentality." Enjoying the advantages of living

⁶⁹Ibid, pp. 8-9 (Folder II, contains Scenes four to end)

with a rich American man, she understands that her family would be better off if they surrendered their emotional attachments and romantic dreams for the benefits of "progress" and the luxuries of the American dream. Yolanda fails to realize the price she has paid to enjoy her dream. She has deliberately forgotten who she is and how to love and respect her relatives and herself in accordance with her family standards. She has become an outsider in her own family, selling herself in exchange for luxuries, credit cards, and trips, while delegating the responsibilities of taking care of her father to the same people she criticizes for not escaping from their local.

Yolanda vents her anger through her obsession with "progress" and her impatience with her sister, stuck in a place with little future. She also resents her father's refusal to abandon Vieques, which she interprets as lack of love for his children. She parades her only weapon to defend her case in front of her family, the constant acquisition of gifts and trips to far away places, as though trying to convince them of the material advantages of relinquishing their dreams. Her family in turn resents her alienation and lack of commitment to them. When Yolanda visits her sister, showing off a new fur coat, patronizing Luis with a birthday card with money, and trying to seduce them with the promise of a better life with the help of her lover, she is forced to confront the hypocrisy behind her American dream:

Luis: No, you don't need nothing from us now. You've got your Paulie to take care of you now. Coño Yolanda, I am sick and tired of you coming here just to show me up, you hear? And I'm even more tired of having to listen to excuses about that bastard Paulie of yours.

Yolanda: You're paranoid Luis, you know that?

Luis: No me vengas con esa mierda! Shit, you don't think we notice that the only time you ever come around is to show off whenever Paulie buys you something new? Even today Goddamn it!

- Yolanda: What the hell does what my Paulie buys me have to do with anything?
- Luis: You don't think I want for your sister to have some nice things too. You don't think it's embarrassing for me that I've never been able to get them for her?
- Yolanda: If you really wanted her to have nice things Luis, you would have pushed a little harder to get them for her. For one thing you would have moved her out of this ridiculous shack years ago. Out of Vieques where you could have gotten a decent job instead of spending half of your life doing some Goddamned idiot's work!
- Luis: This shack was good enough for you for how many years. That idiot's work supported you for how long?
- Yolanda: Oh, don't give me that shit.
- Luis: It supported you and your brother and your father Goddamn it! How much money went on doctor bills for him, Yolanda, huh? What? You think that was free? Did you even bother to ask where it came from? No, just so long as it wasn't from yours or your damned Paulie's pockets. Carajo, hasta when your mother died. How the hell do you think she was buried? That funeral cost me three thousand dollars Yolanda. You and your son of a bitch Paulie were supposed to pay for half of it, Yolanda.
- . . .
- Yolanda: Look, I'm not gonna stand here and be insulted by you because you're jealous of anybody who's done good... Who's made it out of here.....Who's got anything!
- Monse: Got anything? Bruta, maybe Luis hasn't given me a fur coat or a fancy car or any other shit Paulie's given you, pero at least he was man enough to give me his name. At least he married me! (Ibid., pp. 16-18)

Not only has Yolanda forgotten her parents, but she has prostituted herself to a man who has no intention of marrying her, just as Luis was used by Mike, his North American boss, with no intention of promoting him to a better position.

Luis in fact had tried to get help from Paulie, just as he tried to get help from Mike before, but found only indifference. Caught in a no win situation, he surrenders to his own lack of courage to fight back, and decides to leave Vieques as many others have done before him. The death of his close friend Angel highlights the sadness of losing hope and leaving as a consequence of the fear of confronting the status quo. When Luis communicates to Elena the news of their moving from Vieques, she tells him of Angel's assassination.⁷⁰ Within the structure of Areyto de pescadores this incident serves as a final

⁷⁰ After the arrest of the twenty-one people at Playa Caracas, Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal was sentenced to six months in jail to be served in the Tallahassee Federal Correctional Institution in Florida. Several months into his sentence, Cristóbal was found hanged in his solitary prison cell. The official report of his death claimed that Rodríguez Cristóbal committed suicide. However, there was physical evidence that the contusions and bruises found on Rodríguez's body could not have been self inflicted

warning about the injustice on Vieques and a final appeal to Luis's sense of responsibility towards his family, community and friends.

Elena: Angel Cristóbal is dead!

Luis: What?

Elena: They found him hanging in his cell. They say he committed suicide.

Luis: Suicide?

Elena: That's what they say, but you know damn well it's not true. He was all beaten up...And the way the knots were tied there was no way he could have done it himself.

Luis: Oh my God, Elena, I'm sorry.

Elena: If you are really sorry, then finally do something about it.

Luis: There's nothing left to do.

Elena: Isn't there? (They stare at each other. In the distance the maneuvers can be heard beginning.)

Pedro: There's a war going on, only nobody knows it. (Ibid., p. 20)

Although the incident revolving around Rodríguez Cristóbal is not dealt with in detail, within the structure of the play it serves to change Luis's attitude towards the Vieques issue, since the death of a close friend makes Luis realize that the struggle has touched him closer than he admitted before.

The play does not reveal whether Luis will abandon Vieques or not. Nevertheless, his newly acquired take on reality is clear. Whether he stays or not, Luis has discovered the power to make up his mind about joining the struggle of the Viequenses and Puerto Ricans in changing the situation in their community. The degree to which the Vieques conflict extends to Puerto Rico as a whole is evident in Francisco's final speech addressed to the people of Vieques, suggesting that one may escape from Vieques, but that will not end the problem. In his overtly political concluding speech, Francisco calls for a stronger sense of nationalism as the way out of a humiliating and alienating reality that goes beyond the borders of the little island of Vieques and its surrounding waters, standing as a symbol of the Puerto Rican struggle for independence:

Angel Cristóbal is dead! There is no lie about that! I wish to God there was. The

injuries and, thus, the official version stating that he committed suicide appears false. To date the mystery over the death of Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal has not been solved. Most people believe the death was an assassination rather than a suicide. See Louise Cripps Samoiloff, p. 131.

only lies being given to us are of how he died! (Pause) When the United States took over our island, to use their own words, they came 'In the cause of freedom, justice and humanity.' But I ask you, freedom for whom? Justice for whom? The same kind they showed to the American Indians when they robbed them of their lands? The same humanity shown to the African slaves they forced to work that land? The great democratic America, a country whose democracy is as false as her history books! . . . In only ten years of American humanity, our land became no more than an American owned, American run plantation. Our land, which our fathers were so proud of, which they fought against the Spaniards to keep, to have something to leave their children, now serves as military bases. . . . And in return they give us protection. . . . That is why we have a representative in Congress, but no vote. . . . Why so many of our young men were killed in World War II, in Korea, in Vietnam, but could not vote for the president who sent them there. No, we are protected from that too. They have brought us technology. We are a progressive nation now. A progressive nation of paupers!

(Luis enters and starts watching him)

Our farms have been replaced by factories. Factories without enough jobs for our people. But we are a progressive nation. . . . A nation looking forward. . . . Looking forward to total destruction! They build chemical plants here, because they are environmentally unsafe. . . . Because they will not let them to build them in the U.S. . . . Factories that dump their chemicals in our waters so that our fishing industry is becoming extinct. . . . And it's not only Vieques. . . . It's Barceloneta. . . . It's Arecibo. . . . It's Puerto Rico! But let us not say the Americans are unjust. . . . In return for our precious land, . . . our waters, . . . our health, . . . they send us food stamps. That is the price for our freedom. . . . For our dignity. Their humanity has caused a nation of self reliant people to become beggars. . . . Beggars who must flee their homeland, not looking for a better life, but looking only to survive. . . . Nationalism is the only salvation because it causes to be reborn in each of us the conscience of a free man, for whom dignity is priceless, and who cannot conceive why he should not have the right to direct the destinies of his children or of his homeland. Compañeros, I beg you with all my heart to stand up and shout, "Free my people! Free my soul! Viva Puerto Rico Libre!" (Ibid., p. 22)

With this call Areyto de pescadores closes, posing a final question to its audience: confronted with these injustices, where will they stand? Even though the preference of the company is clearly aligned with the independence of Puerto Rico, the company's intention is not to impose this idea on the public, since in Puerto Rico itself the complicated political issue of self determination remains unresolved. The major point of Areyto de pescadores is how lack of commitment to a cause, and fear of such a commitment, are problems that need solutions in order to cope with the major issues posed by colonialism.

Independently of where the audience stands, Pregones's position is that it shares the social responsibility to change situations that affect it. Each sibling, Yolanda, Monse and Francisco, stands for a different platform within the political status question: Yolanda, an advocate for statehood; Monse and her husband, defenders of the status quo of the

island; while Francisco stands for the independence of Puerto Rico. The issue of Vieques, however, goes beyond the sphere of political status as the company discusses how a real situation of abuse, powerlessness and destruction affects a person's perception of his or her own sense of political power and his or her willingness to commit to engaging in dramatic action and active resistance. Unfortunately, the Vieques-U.S. Navy conflict has not yet been resolved. Vieques has not had the same luck that Culebra had in convincing the U.S. Navy to leave its land. To date, important issues concerning the people of Vieques and the island's territory are being debated. While this situation prevails, Pregones's effort to depict the suffering of a Puerto Rican family affected by the military presence is a powerful piece in support of Puerto Rican workers, Puerto Rican people in general, and Puerto Rican independence. Whether this situation changes or not, the work remains a significant piece of national historical documentation, marking a breakthrough in Puerto Rican political theatre produced in New York, not only illustrating the situation of abuse, but also possibly empowering people to action.

CHAPTER 3: DEFINING A GROUP METHODOLOGY

PREGONES'S PHILOSOPHY, BRECHTIAN INFLUENCES AND THE USE OF COLLECTIVE CREATION THEATRE TECHNIQUES AS A PERSONAL METHOD

The methodology that defines the work of Pregones is the Latin American collective creation theatre practices by Pregones coincides with a social and political agenda that in many respects abolishes several characteristics of mainstream theatre such as the division between actors, directors and playwrights as demonstrated in the work of other influential alternative theatre groups in the United States such as The Living Theatre, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, The Bread and Puppet Theatre, and The Teatro Campesino. Although the collective creation technique is not unique to Latin American theatre,¹ it is from Pregones's connection with Latin American and, more specifically, Puerto Rican theatre that the company emerged.² Likewise, the adoption of collective theatre model. To create a product of equal artistic value as that of mainstream theatre, but with a direct relevance to the community they serve, these collective theatres differentiated themselves from the theatre of the dominant culture through the use of unconventional theatrical spaces with sophisticated scenery and lighting, the abolition of individual authorship, and the creation of a new relationship with the audience involving active participation.

As mentioned earlier in this work, Bertolt Brecht, Enrique Buenaventura, and Augusto Boal are distinct influences on the work of Pregones. These influences are not

¹Theodore Shank, "Collective Creation," *The Drama Review* vol. 16, num. 2, June 1972, pp. 3-31. Groups that Shank listed that employ collective creation techniques include: The Other Company, Stage Two, The Agit Prop Theatre, the Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST), Freehold Theatre Company, and the People Show in London; the Christianhaungruppen in Copenhagen; the Dancer's Workshop (San Francisco), the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Firehouse Theatre (Minneapolis), and Mabou Mines (New York) in the United States; the Orbe-Recherche Theatrale (Paris), Theatre de Chene Noir (Avignon) in France; Bewegungstheater (Moving Theatre) in Holland; the Narren Theatre, and Royal Dramatic Theatre, in Stockholm; the Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory in Poland; the Odin Theatre in Denmark; Gruppo Sperimentazione Teatrale in Rome; and the Hoffmann's Comic Theatre in West Berlin.

²Significant to note is that from the original Pregones, all members were born and raised in Puerto Rico. By the time they came to the United States most of their theatrical experience came from socially and politically oriented theatre groups on the island.

present in the group's work as imitation, but rather they figure as points of departure for the creation of a theatrical product that is clearly identifiable as Puerto Rican theatre. After seeing many of the plays produced by Pregones and speaking with members of the company, many characteristics of the troupe's plays can be identified as Brechtian, although the group does not claim to produce Brechtian theatre. Nevertheless, Brecht and his theories are well known and discussed by the group and some areas of convergence should be acknowledged, as pointed out by Yeidi Rivero.³ First, the epic element of Brechtian theatre, which implies an episodic structure to plays as opposed to an Aristotelian structure, is present in pieces such as La colección, where a collage of clearly independent scenes serves as an attempt to historicize the effects of colonization on Puerto Rican culture as recorded in one hundred years of Puerto Rican theatrical history. In the performance, the use of a bare stage, live music, and short interludes where actors interrupt the action to create the transition between scenes, all serve to create a Brechtian alienation effect. By interrupting the action between scenes, identification with a particular situation in the play is not possible, thus creating a constant shift from comedy to tragedy that allows the audience to observe the colonization experience from an emotional, yet detached, point of view. The arrangement of scenes, rather than evoking an emotional response of rage, powerlessness, and perhaps rebellion from the audience, challenges any possible emotional response by surveying people's awareness of colonialism. Still, objective and emotional identification is possible for most of the audience by viewing a familiar experience, that of colonization. Says Brecht:

In short, the spectator is given the chance to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history. The idea is that the spectator should be put in a position where he can make comparisons about everything that influences the way in which human beings behave.⁴

³Yeidi Rivero, "Puerto Rican Political Theatre in New York City in the Sixties and Seventies" (M.A. Thesis, Stony Brook, 1993) pp. 3-9 and 63-77.

⁴Bertolt Brecht, "On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre," in Brecht on Theatre, translated by John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 86.

Two other productions that follow an epic theatre structure with similar intent are Migrants and Voices of Steel. In these two plays another characteristic of Brecht's theatre is demonstrated: "human behaviour is shown as alterable; man himself as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them" (Brecht, p. 86).

Another device that could be interpreted as Brechtian is the use of music as a character within the play. Pregones's music is used as an element that enhances the action, either as a narrative device to advance the action of the play, a commentary on a specific situation, or a translation device which allows non-Spanish speaking audiences to understand an action in English or vice versa, as in High Noon: al mediodía. However, music, as well as movement, also serves to rescue and preserve autochthonous features of the Puerto Rican popular culture, a main goal of the Latin American theatre movement, concerned with popular cultural production.

For Pregones, as for Brecht, music is an integral part of the mise-en-scène, never just background. In Pregones's pieces music represents a part of the Puerto Rican heritage that promotes an understanding of Puerto Rican reality in the audience. In each of the plays produced by the company and analyzed here, music research and original music composition has been part of the collective creation process. Original music composed for specific plays emerges from traditional and non traditional Puerto Rican musical patterns and becomes an integral part of the whole piece. A Pregones piece without music is difficult to conceive of, since live music has become one of the most distinctive characteristics of the troupe. Music embellishes and moves the plot forward, as in Medea, where the play takes place against the background of the *rosarios cantados* of the Fiestas de Cruz (Chanted Rosaries of the Festivals of the Cross), upon which the music and songs were based. Clearly in plays such as High Noon, Migrants, Voices of Steel and Medea,

the use of music coincides with the variety of characteristics that Brecht attributes to music in the Epic Opera.⁵ In many respects music in Pregones's pieces serves the double purpose of orienting the audience while also standing as a work of art in itself, both dependent and independent of the play. The art form that Puerto Rican music is becomes a significant cultural contribution worthy of preserving and promoting through theatre.

A third aspect of Brechtian influence on the company's work appears in Pregones's position on the issue of education and entertainment. Pregones does not claim to be an educational theatre company, yet many of its works are didactic. Although the company claims to produce art for art's sake, its choice of themes and issues discussed in its art imply an educational component. High Noon for instance, presents an attempt at educating hospital workers about the benefits of joining their local unions, while Migrants fosters education about the history of Puerto Rican migration to New York. A third example of this tendency, Voices of Steel, attempts to educate audiences about the conditions in which Puerto Rican political prisoners live in United States federal prisons. A still clearer example of the merging of education and entertainment in Pregones's theatre is The Embrace, which seeks to educate Latino audiences about how to deal with the AIDS crisis. Although based on Boal's techniques of the theatre of the oppressed, the play's educational and entertainment purposes correspond to Brecht's idea that "theatre remains theatre even when it is instructive theatre, and in so far as it is good theatre it will amuse."⁶

The Brechtian influence on some aesthetic and political aspects of Pregones Theatre is not surprising, as Brecht became instrumental in the formation of what is known today

⁵ Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," in Brecht on Theatre, p. 38.

Epic Opera
The Music communicates
music which sets forth the text
music which takes the text for granted
which takes up a position
which gives the attitude.

⁶ Bertolt Brecht, "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction," in Brecht on Theatre, p. 73.

as the New Latin American Theatre as seen in the writings of Latin American theatre theorists Enrique Buenaventura, Santiago García Ortega and Augusto Boal.⁷ Brecht's theories were also influential in the formation of a significant number of Puerto Rican theatre groups that emerged at the end of the sixties as part of the Latin American Theatre Movement whose goals were to evaluate, criticize and denounce the deplorable living conditions in the colony. In this respect groups such as El Tajo del Alacrán, Moriviví, Colectivo Nacional Puertorriqueño, and Teatro de Guerrilla, saw in Brecht the ideal means of defending the struggle for Puerto Rican independence and of proposing socialism as a possible answer to Puerto Rico's problems. These ideas, aesthetically and politically echoed by the Puerto Rican theatre movement that evolved simultaneously in New York, were inevitably represented by groups that, like Pregones, received nourishment from the three sources: the New Latin American Theatre, Puerto Rican theatre on the island, and Puerto Rican theatre on the mainland.

An important point of departure from Brecht in the work of Pregones involves the company's position on the political mission of theatre. Like Boal, Pregones coincides with Brecht in its belief that theatre will always evolve from a political position, but different from Brecht, Pregones does not assume that a political education will necessarily have to

⁷See footnote 37 in Chapter 1. In her analysis of the New Latin American Theatre movement, Beatriz Rizk identifies several points of Brechtian influence. Some of the characteristics of the New Latin American Theatre that she attributes to Brechtian influence are reflected in the application of sciences at the service of art. For example Rizk discusses the use of research, history, and sociology as a means to study the social and cultural relations that create existing historic and political conditions. (See, Beatriz Rizk, El nuevo teatro latinoamericano: Una lectura histórica, p. 38).

Rizk also lists some structural aspects of the New Latin American Theatre that are reminiscent of Brecht, asserting that the structure of plays in the movement is episodic and constantly seeks to interrupt the action to comment on it. Latin American theatre also shows a tendency towards a conscientious historicity in its creation of plays that are rich in characters, forcing actors to play multiple parts.

Aesthetically speaking, scenery is not as important as costumes in an attempt to offer a practical and concrete message. The use of masks is widely employed and actors present themselves as different from the characters they represent. On occasion, actors speak in third person preserving their individuality as actors creating a distancing effect desired by Brecht in an effort to avoid identification and empathy. (Rizk, pp. 38-49).

For a comprehensive study of the New Latin American Theatre in Puerto Rico see the introductory chapter of: Gloria Waldman, Luis Rafael Sánchez: Pasión Teatral (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1988), pp. 15-20; and the First Part of the same book, "El Teatro Contemporáneo en Latinoamérica," pp. 21-75.

precede the enjoyment and full understanding of a theatrical piece.⁸ Despite the strong political commitment of company members, a commitment reflected in many of Pregones's plays, the company does not assume that "without Marxist knowledge and a socialist outlook it is impossible today to understand reality or to use one's understanding to change it."⁹ For Pregones, theatre is a place of entertainment where political realities can be represented and discussed, but should only be a place for political propaganda if the company chooses so.¹⁰ Pregones's main concern is not political theatre, as conceived by Brecht, but a theatre that provokes political thinking. Ultimately, the company's work should fulfil Pregones's mission of "creating innovative and challenging theater rooted in Puerto Rican traditions and popular artistic expressions."¹¹ In creating such a theatre the company, with its clear political agenda, expects to have its audience question their historic, social, political and cultural existence.

Pregones's philosophy evolves primarily around serving the community where it exists, striving to provide the Puerto Rican and Latino community of the South Bronx, in all its diversity, with a meaningful art related to their life experiences in an effort to validate their struggles, their needs, their culture, their triumphs and their defeats, mainly through the evaluation of their history as a people and their place within that history, within their

⁸Augusto Boal, The Theatre of the Oppressed (New York: Theatre Communication Group, 1985), Foreword.

. . . all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them.

Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error-and this is a political attitude.

⁹ Bertolt Brecht, "Cultural Policy and Academy of Arts," in Brecht on Theatre, p. 270.

¹⁰According to Rosalba Rolón, once in a while the company enjoys producing strictly political theatre. As an example of this preference Rolón offers what the company calls its "Repertorio Patriótico" (Patriotic Repertoire), a collection of short propaganda pieces. Yet, people's entertainment is a main concern in the production of these pieces as Rolón admits: "Since we have learned something along the way, we hope to provide it with an attractive and entertaining aesthetic for people to enjoy." ("Como hemos aprendido algo en el camino, esperamos brindarle una estética bella, entretenida y que a la gente le guste.") Rolón, personal interview.

¹¹ See Pregones Theater mission, chapter 2, p. note 4.

culture, and within their community.¹² In the words of Alvan Colón: “Community is neither an abstraction nor a funding concept for us. It is the cornerstone upon which our work is built.”¹³ Pregones favors the use of collective theatre techniques above others because of its commitment to its community . A collective creation offers options to a community otherwise underrepresented or misrepresented, if represented at all, by mainstream art:

Like our significantly larger cousin institutions, the main motivation for our existence is artistic. We are not involved in charity work, nor is our thrust therapeutic role playing. Rather, we are trying to bring forth the aesthetic views of people and communities that are not often represented in the culture as a whole. We are trying to capture and make vibrant the stories, histories, dreams and songs of people like ourselves. Many of us have had extensive training in theater, but have chosen to work outside the more prominent professional channels because we find it more gratifying to create work for an audience of our actual peers, those with whom we have a deep and personal relationship.(....) In a very real way, the artist is merely an extension of the audience. The works that are staged, the stories that are told, the songs that are strummed and drummed may be new, but they are never alien, they may be old but are not irrelevant. I wish that were true for all theater. (Colón-Lespier, p. 7)

In order to best serve the community of the South Bronx it is Pregones’s philosophy to make its audience feel at home. At a performance in its own theatrical space, the audience

¹²Although the group’s philosophy in its original mission was to serve the Puerto Rican community exclusively, the demographic changes in the South Bronx population have made it imperative to serve a wider range of diverse groups within the community, as Alvan Colón explains:

We consider ourselves to be a Puerto Rican theater because the main foothold of our work is Puerto Rican culture and its multiple popular artistic expressions. When staging a play we explore a wide spectrum of choices available to us through our music, our oral traditions, our traditional dances, and urban experiences. Puerto Rican coastal and highland musical genres and dance forms, contemporary Latin jazz influences, Spanish and African tales and the urban experience of living in New York are common sources for the development of our plays.

Within this there is a lot of diversity. When Pregones began, the population of the South Bronx was almost exclusively Puerto Rican. Now there are increasing numbers of Dominicans and other Latin Americans who are part of the community. There are people of all ages, races, social and economic classes. This diversity, which is reflective of the diversity of Latino culture as a whole, is also reflected in our company. Our artists are from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and New York. They are fair-skinned, dark-skinned, mestizo, bilingual, monolingual. All of us draw from our respective heritages in the development of our work.

Alvan Colón-Lespier, “Grassroots and Diversity,” New Traditions, The Non-Traditional Casting Project Newsletter. Volume 2, Issue 4, Summer 1995, p. 6.

¹³ Ibid., p. 6

will never feel estranged by the sophistication of what Enrique Buenaventura calls "bourgeois theatre,"¹⁴ since at Pregones the audience will find itself reflected in the artistic work.

The above mentioned relation between Pregones and its audience is characteristic of the company's identification with the New Latin American Theatre Movement. According to Beatriz Rizk, one area of emphasis in the development of the New Latin American Theatre was the creation of a polemic relationship between artists and a new audience which she identifies as comprised of the working class, the common people, and the poor. The new connection between audience and artists takes place when the audience is capable of self- recognition in the work of art, as proposed by Rizk:

This polemic relation, although 'not polemic in an antagonistic way but in a dialectical way, in other words, a polemic which supposes a unity in interests and objectives at the same time it discusses an unresolved issue not able to be resolved within fixed structures or norms: that of social relations;' takes place precisely when a new concretized reality becomes an artistic expression. It is new because it is a reality, that of the majority, that up until now had not been the reason for creative enthusiasm. In other words, this relationship is based on the mutual understanding that what is going on onstage matters to everyone and has to do with the problems of the society to which the audience as well as the actors belong. It has to do with the way in which both groups, audience and actors, perceive this reality that is capable of being represented, and most important of all, capable of being transformed.(Rizk, pp. 14-15)¹⁵

¹⁴ Enrique Buenaventura, "El Nuevo Teatro y sus relaciones con la estética," Comisión de Publicaciones del TEC. (Cali, 1979).

¹⁵ The words within quotation marks come from: Enrique Buenaventura, "Artistas y obreros en el Nuevo Teatro," Documentos políticos 133, (Bogotá, 1978) pp. 30-34.

"Esta relación polémica, aunque 'no polémica en forma antagónica sino en forma dialéctica, es decir, una polémica que supone la unidad de intereses y de objetivos pero que discute sobre un objeto que no está resuelto y que no se resuelve con esquemas fijos ni con dogmas: las relaciones sociales;' se efectúa precisamente al hallarse convertida en expresión artística una nueva realidad concretizada. Nueva porque es una realidad, la de la mayoría, que hasta ahora no había sido motivo de entusiasmos creadores. En otras palabras, esta relación está basada en el entendimiento mutuo de que lo que está sucediendo en escena le importa a todos, le concierne a todos, tiene que ver con los problemas de la sociedad a la que pertenecen tanto el público como los actores y a la manera como ambos perciben esta realidad que es susceptible a ser representada, y lo más importante de todo, que es también susceptible a ser transformada."

In choosing themes of Puerto Rican national, historical and cultural identification, Pregones creates plays that contribute to the examination of existing living conditions, the assumption of personal, social and political responsibility for these existing conditions and, ultimately, the transformation of those conditions into better ones. In adopting the collective creation as its method of production, the company provides its community with plays that concern the unique social, personal and political identity of the South Bronx.

Another feature of the New Latin American Theatre shared by Pregones is that of dispelling old myths that have perpetuated poor living conditions for Puerto Ricans. La colección, for example, documents the history of Puerto Rican colonization through a hundred years of Puerto Rican dramatic literature. In Areyto de pescadores a view of the un-official history of Puerto Rico, that of the dispossessed, dispels the myth of the peaceful relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Subsequent plays such as High Noon, Caravan, Migrants, The Embrace, Voices of Steel, Y tu aguela a'onde e'tá, make a similar attempt at deconstructing stereotypical notions about Puerto Ricans through the representation of a personal history as lived and perceived from within the community as opposed to the image imposed from without.

In order to create effective pieces that address important issues in the community, input from all the members of the company is fundamental. The process of choosing one theme over another varies, but most of the time it is a matter of personal choices agreed upon by the core members of the group. In most cases a lengthy process of investigation involving interviews, visits to libraries, writing and re-writing, improvisations and discussions takes place before a piece is finally written and rehearsed. This protracted process is consistent with the ideas and method of collective creation developed in Latin America during the sixties by Enrique Buenaventura and widely used by groups like Teatro Experimental de Cali, Teatro Acción, La Mama and La Candelaria in Colombia and a variety of groups in the rest of Latin America.¹⁶

¹⁶Other groups that have employed the collective creation method mentioned by Rizk are: Teatro Escambray and Conjunto Dramático de Oriente in Cuba; Libre Teatro Libre de Córdoba in Argentina;

Among the characteristics that distinguish the collective creation method from other theatrical methods is the abolition of individual authorship in favor of a collective authorship.¹⁷ Although the plays may be shaped by a playwright, the process of researching and improvising scenes for a piece is acknowledged by giving the collective the authorship over the written and produced material. Nevertheless, co-authorship between Pregones and a playwright often occurs as with Areyto de pescadores, co-written with Edward Gallardo, and High Noon, co-written with Dolores Prida. In other cases the company adapts its pieces from non-dramatic works such as poetry, short stories, and novels, which function as pretexts for the dramatic piece; this is the case for Pregones's The Caravan, a children's play based on the poem "La elegía del Saltimbanqui" by Puerto Rican poet Luis Palés Matos, El apagón (People Again), based on José Luis González's short story "La noche que volvimos a ser gente" (The Night We Became People Again), and Translated Woman, based on a case study documented by Cuban writer Ruth Behar, narrating the passage and struggles of Mexican immigrant Esperanza Hernández.¹⁸

Overall, Pregones has favored the adaptation of narrative for its pieces over any other genre. Also, Pregones exhibits a preference for creating its own pieces from research as seen in plays such as Voices of Steel and Migrants. Nevertheless, original dramatic pieces have also been produced, such as Manuel Torres Santiago's Medea, a Puerto Rican version of the classic play based on a true story, and La otra orilla (The Other Shore), based on the play Obra póstuma by Spanish playwright Eusebio Colange. Although not all of the pieces are written by Puerto Rican authors, their significance for the Puerto Rican community makes these plays ideal candidates to be performed by the company, as Rolón explains:

Teatro Arena in Sao Paulo; Grupo El Aleph in Chile; Cuatrotablas, Perú; and Rajatabla, Venezuela among others. See Beatriz Rizk, pp. 71-72.

¹⁷For further analysis of the collective creation method in Latin America, see Beatriz Rizk, pp. 69-84, and Gloria Waldman, pp. 39-41.

¹⁸Ruth Behar, Translated Woman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

Our mission has changed to include our own adaptations of works. This is pretty new. For example, we have Translated Woman by a Cuban writer, depicting a reality seen through our own eyes. [...] We also have La otra orilla (The Other Shore) based on a play by an Andalusian, Obra póstuma, that he wrote to document what is happening in the Caribbean waters. Although these are not Puerto Rican authors, thematically it has to do with our reality. A long time ago we arrived at the conclusion that we are going to be very specific in our work, because inherent in it lies a universal aspect. When one is very specific with one's work it is possible to touch many more realities than when one tries to seize it all and in the end one does not talk about anything. Nevertheless, if a person sees that we understand a Puerto Rican or Latino theme very well, that person will make associations with his or her own reality. (Rolón, personal interview)¹⁹

Therefore once a specific theme is deemed relevant to the Puerto Rican and Latino community, the company anticipates its universal relevance which prompts its production.²⁰

¹⁹"Nuestra misión ha cambiado para incluir adaptaciones nuestras. Eso es bastante nuevo. Por ejemplo tenemos Translated Woman de una escritora cubana, sobre una realidad vista a través de los ojos nuestros.... También tenemos La otra orilla basada en una obra de un andaluz, Obra póstuma, que escribe sobre todo lo que está pasando en las aguas caribeñas. Aunque no son autores puertorriqueños, temáticamente tiene que ver con nuestra realidad. Llegamos a la conclusión hace mucho tiempo de que vamos a ser muy específicos en nuestro trabajo, porque hay un aspecto universal. Cuando uno es específico en su trabajo toca muchas más realidades que cuando uno trata de abarcarlo todo y a la larga no hablas de nada. Sin embargo, si una persona ve que nosotros entendemos un tema puertorriqueño de principio a fin, o de la comunidad latina aquí, esa persona empieza a hacer asociaciones con su propia realidad."

²⁰Universality, however, is a debatable issue. Universality in the theatre is an issue widely discussed by theatre people and often challenged by artists who understand that "universal" is a reductive term that arbitrarily favors mainstream artistic production, while masking a more eurocentric political agenda. Theatre, even when specific, is universal, provided it addresses the lives of any particular ethnic or cultural group as Chicano playwright Anthony J. García explains:

I remember hearing an African American actor speak about how he was an actor who just happened to be black. I thought, what a wonderful luxury, to only be coincidentally oppressed.... The ability to separate cultural environment from artistic expressions has always been the farce that Euro-American artists perpetuate to justify the forcible dominance of Euro-American aesthetics. Was Shakespeare a playwright who just happened to be English? Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner did they not express their own national identities? Yet they are considered the standard of what is art of universal quality, while the work of Chicano, African American and Asian American art is considered culturally specific. Many artists fear that to place a title, such as Chicano, in front of your art often confines you to a single category.

I call myself a Chicano playwright because I write about my reality. I write because it is what I do best. I write because for centuries our history and our lives were defined by those who sought to destroy it. I write because my mother is a great story teller, and she taught me. My stories are about people. Because that is what make us real, the ability to laugh, and cry and even learn. And if somebody who is not Chicano or Latino digs my work, that's cool. But I am not writing for them. Do you think that Shakespeare gave a shit if some long-haired guy from Denver's Westside liked his work? Hell no. He was writing for the English, because that was his reality.

Despite the characteristics Pregones shares with the collective theatre movement, an important point of departure from the movement involves the role of the director within the creative process. Different from the general tendency within the collective creation movement where the directorial task is mostly abolished and its responsibility is assumed collectively, Pregones grants major importance to the director. No matter how collectively controlled the development of ideas, research, improvisations, and creation of a theatrical text are, the director acts as an outside observer who brings unity and coherence to the *mise-en-scène*, of vital importance to the company's working methodology.

With the evolution of the New Latin American Theatre Movement, the relevance of the creative process in the production of plays is another important trait that characterizes the work of Pregones Theatre. Researching a theme, improvising upon that research and discussing possible outcomes around the production of a play comprise the most essential aspects of the collective creation method. In her study of the methodology supporting the idea of a collective creation, Beatriz Rizk identifies five main steps that are consistent with most of the work of Pregones: 1. Research that will help in identifying the social and aesthetic objectives of the company. 2. The elaboration of a text with its critical and methodological analysis. 3. Improvisations based on that text. 4. The actual production of a play, and 5. Confrontation with an audience (Rizk, pp. 73-81). In all the cases examined in this study, Pregones follows this methodology to a greater or lesser degree. Once the play is finally produced and presented to an audience it is open to changes based on identifiable needs. Therefore one is likely to find more than three versions of a specific play, for as Rizk asserts: "two of the essential characteristics of the New Theatre: the polemic and the dialectic, are the result of this relationship of creative participation with the audience" (Rizk, p. 79).²¹

Anthony J. García, "On Being a Latino Playwright," *Ollantay*, Vol.1, num. 1, January 1993, pp. 37-38.

²¹"... dos de las características esenciales del Nuevo Teatro: lo polémico y lo dialéctico, resultan de esta relación de participación creadora con el público."

To understand how Pregones develops a polemic and dialectic relationship with its audience, as well as Pregones's motivation to focus on the production of plays that share the experiences of Puerto Rican and Latino families in New York, a demographic analysis of the area is necessary.²² According to data extracted from the Hispanic Federation Survey and the 1997 Population Survey U.S. Census, in 1996, 1,226,583 Puerto Ricans, and 2,058,391 non Puerto Rican Latinos lived in the New York Metropolitan Area. Puerto Ricans constitute the largest group of Latinos in New York, comprising 44% of the Latino population, followed by 23% of Dominicans. Other groups, including Ecuadorians, Cubans and Colombians, are below 5% each. Of the total Latino population, 29% lived in The Bronx, 27% in Brooklyn, 22% in Manhattan, 20% in Queens and 2% in Staten Island.

Regretfully, this increasing Latino population sees itself severely affected by a variety of factors that keep them at the bottom of the U.S. social ladder.²³ One factor affecting the Latino income situation is purely economic. Of all the Latino population in New York the Hispanic Federation Survey reveals that 22% earn a yearly family income between \$10,000 and \$20,000 dollars, and 23% earn less than \$10,000. These are shocking figures that are consistent with research that affirms that Latinos are the poorest population in the United States, even experiencing a decline in income.²⁴ In New York

²²Most of the data provided is from 1995-97 surveys including: The Hispanic Federation Survey, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the New York City Department of City Planning, and the 1990-1996 Population Survey U.S. Census.

²³Carey Goldberg, "Hispanic Households Struggle Amid Broad Decline in Income," The New York Times, January 30, 1997, p. A16. According to scholars who study the Latino population, the factors that contribute to such high levels of poverty include:

Structural changes in the economy that have drastically reduced well-paid blue collar jobs.

The failures of institutions like schools to retain Hispanic students and provide them with a marketable education, resulting in a widening gap in graduation rates from both high school and college.

Discrimination among employers who see Hispanic immigrants, particularly those who speak poor English, as disposable workers.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.1-16A. In Goldberg's own words:

The data [of the latest Census Bureau statistics] show that in 1995, the median household income rose for every other American ethnic and racial group except the country's 27 million Hispanic residents, for whom the figure fell 5.1 percent. The downturn, which affects the United States-born as well as the newly arrived across a broad spectrum of socio-economic indicators, has baffled social scientists and it has prompted some to warn that many Hispanic residents, members of the

only, the rate of unemployment among Latinos is 28% compared to 51% of Latinos who work full-time, 11% who work part-time and 6% who are retired (1996 Population Survey U.S. Census). Puerto Ricans figure as the poorest ethnic group on this economic ladder.²⁵

Low family income is a factor that is definitely worsened by a pessimistic future where education stands as another determining factor working against any possible change in poverty conditions. Research has made public the conclusion that the decline in income among Puerto Ricans and Latinos in the United States is most definitely a direct consequence of poor education. In 1997, only 17% of the Latino population attained a college education. Approximately 24% of the same population had some college education, while 26% completed high school. A high 27% of the Latino population in the United States of America had less than a high school degree. In agreement with these figures the 1990 U.S. Census brought to light that in New York only a low 49.4% of Latinos graduated from high school, compared to 82.3% of the non-Latino population. These figures are alarming if we consider that projected for the year 2000, Latinos will constitute 29% of New York's total population, the second largest group after whites, 35%, and followed by blacks, 26%.

Furthermore, if the economic and educational situation are important factors in determining the issues of relevance to a group constantly afflicted with unemployment, low wages and exploitation, language stands as an issue that perpetuates the economic problem. As explained by Wayne Cornelius, director of the Center for United States Mexican Studies at the University of California at San Diego, "limited English proficiency is the single most important obstacle to upward mobility among Mexican immigrants."²⁶ The same situation

country's fastest-growing ethnic or racial group, may become entrenched as its working poor...Hispanic residents now constitute nearly 24 percent of the country's poor, up eight percentage points since 1985.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 16A.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 16A.

applies to the Latino population in New York. Of the total population of Latinos in New York, 8% speak Spanish only, while 4% speak English only. Between these two extremes coexist several levels of bilingualism revealing that 25% of the population speaks mostly Spanish and some English, while 19% speaks mostly English and some Spanish. On the other hand, 43% of the Latino population in New York claims to be able to speak both languages equally.

Aware of the levels of poverty in which Puerto Rican and Latino populations in New York live, especially visible in The Bronx and caused by the lack of education, employment, and English language skills, Pregones has worked to develop a theatrical language intelligible to the working class of the South Bronx. The play High Noon-Al mediodía stands as the first example of this particular linguistic strategy created by Pregones.

CREATION OF A COMMON LANGUAGE INTELLIGIBLE TO THE MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY OF THE SOUTH BRONX

High Noon-Al Mediodía: Reaching the Working Class of the South Bronx

In 1984, Pregones, in collaboration with District 1199 Hospital Workers Union, staged the work High Noon-Al Mediodía. The play, which “reflects the dynamics of unionized workers in their struggle to make their union strong,”²⁷ was the result of the company’s interest in exploring labor relations in New York City. The work delved into Latino workers' struggle to organize in the midst of an overwhelming and tense climate provoked by increasingly unstable working conditions. According to Rosalba Rolón, the initiative came from President of District 1199, Dennis Rivera's invitation to explore the world of workers’ unions (Rolón, personal interview). During the period of conversations and research that led to writing High Noon, two themes stood out, namely the dearth of

²⁷ Update: Pregones Newsletter (New York, c. 1984), p.1

leadership among the growing Puerto Rican and other Latino union membership, and the struggle to democratize the union to encourage greater Latino participation.²⁸ The main purpose of the play was, therefore, to educate the working class public to the need to become active in the decision making processes of labor unions and defend their rights as workers. With this play, Pregones joined the respected tradition of proletarian Puerto Rican theatre.²⁹

In the United States the task of educating Latino workers through theatre was popularized by Chicano theatre artist Luis Valdez and his Teatro Campesino. His purpose was to raise the consciousness of farm workers about the exploitation they were subject to and the fact that they had the power to change their working conditions. Following the model originated by R.G. Davis and The San Francisco Mime Troupe, Luis Valdez, once a member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, advanced the idea of a theatre to educate workers who, for the most part, were Chicanos and Mexicans. Valdez was able to implement his educational work through solidarity with the union organized and led by César Chávez.³⁰

²⁸ Alvan Colón-Lespier, Associate Director of Teatro Pregones, personal interview, New York, September 4, 1997.

²⁹ Rubén Dávila Santiago points out that from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, there was already in existence a theatre movement concerned with the needs of the working class. That movement's principal goals were to develop the workers' talents, to educate and inform them about the events and social problems that affect their lives, and to promote socialist ideas. See Rubén Dávila Santiago, *Teatro obrero en Puerto Rico (1900-1920)* (Río Piedras: Editorial Edil, 1985). The concern about working class matters was not a phenomenon unique to the working class in Puerto Rico, but one that was similarly examined in European and North American theatres, although the direct influence of these movements is not so clear. See Raphael Samuel, Ewan McColl, and Stuart Cosgrove, *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935: Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, History Workshop Series, 1985).

³⁰ César Chavez was the organizer and leader of the National Farm Workers Association that together with the agricultural Workers Organization Committee went on strike against the grape growers of Delano, California. The NFWA began as an independent organization in 1962 and became part of the AFL-CIO in 1966. It was while trying to convince the agricultural workers to join the strike, that Luis Valdez put his theatrical proposal to the test as an educational tool to effect social change for the workers during the 1965 strike.

Valdez's theatre had to overcome many obstacles, such as the intimidation that the workers experienced because of their precarious economic situation resulting in exploitative living and working conditions, the low educational level that impeded access to better job opportunities, and a language barrier that made communication between employers and workers impossible. As the only means of overcoming those obstacles, Valdez created the concept of the *Actos*, a series of short pieces that used simple visual elements, clearly identifiable by the workers, representing the social conditions that beset them, and proposing a labor strike and the formation of a union as a means to resolve worker-employer difficulties. Pregones's High Noon shares many features with the *Actos*, perhaps a coincidence, but most likely the result of familiarity with Teatro Campesino's work in the United States, and of the work of troupes such as El Tajo del Alacrán, Anamú, and Moriviví in Puerto Rico. Note how High Noon's achievements coincide with the chief goals of Valdez's *Actos*:

1. To inspire the audience to socialization
2. To highlight specific points about social problems.
3. To satirize the opposition.
4. To show or hint a solution.
5. To express what people are thinking.³¹

The play High Noon contains each of these goals in its tragicomic representation of worker-employer relations in a hospital of a large city.

The play is populated by a diverse group of employees that includes maintenance workers, dietitians, laboratory technicians, and others. Beyond labor relations, friendships and kinships develop. Nevertheless, the climate is tense because the hospital manager, Miss Willoughby Perkins, has been forced by the Board of Directors to fire one hundred fifteen employees. While she complains about the difficulties of her job, she justifies her position of privilege within the organization with the lyrics of the following tango:

Oh, it's so lonely at the top

³¹ Luis Valdez, Actos (San Juan Bautista: Cucaracha Press, 1971), p. 6.

It's so lonely at the top
Where nobody really knows
What goes on behind closed doors.

If the workers really knew
How I hate to give bad news
Pressured, of course, by the board

When the government says "cut"
I cut paychecks I cut jobs
I cut services against my will.

I am always under stress
It's not an easy load to bear.
That is why to keep my paycheck
High is fair.³²

The satirization of the employers as perpetrators of abuses against the working class begins at this point in the play. At the same time that the play satirizes employer abuses, it also critiques the workers' indifference to situations that affect them, their ignorance regarding the role of the union as defender of their rights, and the lack of worker participation—other than at social parties—in union matters.

Only after massive firings occur do the workers realize the power that the union has as a negotiator for secure working conditions. Little by little, because of mutual need, what had once been mainly camaraderie and socialization after work becomes a sense of responsibility toward one another. When they see their coworkers being fired, the feelings of vulnerability motivate the workers to take concrete action in order to change the oppressive situation. They begin to take an active part in the negotiation process that will help them survive the crisis at the hospital that threatens their families' financial security. Pregones, through High Noon, supports the strength of the union as a solution to many problems faced by the working class, as expressed in the performance's closing song, performed bilingually:

La fuerza de los que se juntan
Puede derrumbar murallas.

³² Teatro Pregones, with Dolores Prida, High Noon, Al Mediodía (unpublished, 1984) p.3.

Ha de sembrar en nosotros
La fuerza que está en nuestra voz.

La fuerza de los que trabajan:
Manos negras, manos blancas,
Brazos firmes que levantan
La fuerza que está en nuestra voz

The strength of those that walk together
Moves and crumbles all the walls
Bringing up in our spirits
The song that is our love.

The song of those that work together:
Hands in black, hands in white.
Labor voices that will build
The union that's born in our hands. (High Noon, p. 30)

Through this presentation, Pregones seeks to open a dialogue with its audience that will help raise their consciousness regarding oppressive working conditions and the need to take responsibility in the process of freeing themselves from these conditions.

The main challenges that Pregones faced creating this play were how to gather accurate information about the working conditions and the struggles of the hospital workers and what language to use as an effective vehicle to reach Puerto Rican and other Latino workers conversant in two tongues, English and Spanish, with diverse levels of linguistic dominance in both. To create High Noon, Pregones used the method of collective creation that they have employed since its inception. The materials gathered during the investigative phase came from interviews with hospital workers and organizers of the hospital workers' union (Colón-Lespier, personal interview). The text was developed from the material after experimentation and improvisation, which resulted in a musical play portraying the plight of the Latino worker in New York. In addition, they discovered strategies to represent the set of problems and the language diversity of the hospital workers.

Exploration of the linguistic patterns used among the hospital workers led Pregones to adopt a new political and linguistic strategy that made the company's work accessible to a wider audience. According to Colón-Lespier:

What is interesting about High Noon is the exploration we did of what we then called linguistic strategies. How could we communicate with a wider audience without having to provide a simultaneous translation of the Spanish or consecutive translation into English? Right then and there, we designed, or rather discovered how: there were characters who did not speak English. There were also characters who did not speak Spanish, as it truly was at the workplace. Because they worked together, they figured out how to communicate among themselves. So we worked using that reality as a spring board. How did we do it? We incorporated those characters and the way in which they communicated in real life, into the play . (Colón-Lespier, personal interview)³³

Music was used to overcome the language hurdle, serving as mediator between the public of Latino Spanish speakers and English speakers. Through song, the simultaneous translation of a scene was achieved, as can be seen in the following segment:

Angel (spoken)
 Four years, four years.
 Five days a week.
 One hundred and sixty hours
 A month, \$3.35 an hour, 8 hours
 A day. Painting chairs.

At night, during the break,
 The guy from the union,
 With a confident smile,
 Would tell us about unions
 And the bosses.

He'd say, without an union they'll
 Give you a raise if they want to,

Many times the bosses' thugs ran
 Him out of the shop
 But he returned

When they punched out the tires
 Of the union organizer's car,
 The Haitian took him home.

³³ "Lo interesante de High Noon es la exploración que hacemos de lo que en ese momento llamamos estrategias lingüísticas. ¿Cómo poder comunicarnos con un público amplio sin tener que repetir el texto en español traducido simultáneamente al inglés, o consecutivamente al inglés? Entonces, ahí diseñamos o descubrimos un mecanismo y era que había personajes en la pieza que no hablaban español, como se daba en la realidad del centro de trabajo. Lo que pasaba era que por estar trabajando juntos, los trabajadores desarrollaban un mecanismo de comunicación y empezamos a trabajar partiendo de esa realidad. ¿Cómo podíamos hacerlo? Incorporamos esos personajes y tal cual ellos lograban comunicarse unos con otros en la vida real, también lo hicimos en la pieza de teatro."

The Haitian gave out the union
Cards. The majority of us signed up.

After four years, we had elections
And the union won. The next day
The boss didn't show up, but he sent
His son, who said: "No hard feelings.
We're one big happy family.

The following day the gates were
Closed. They had moved shop.

Here I carry boxes.
but it is a union job.

(Sung)
Cuatro años.
Cinco días.

Tantas horas.
A miseria por pintar.

Al descanso,

El muchacho,

Sonriendo confiado,
Nos habla de la unión.

Contestaba mis preguntas.

Lo corrían los matones,
Y volvía y volvía.

Pero un día de maltrato,
el haitiano lo ayudó.

Y firmamos las tarjetas.
Y creamos nuestra unión.

"No hard feelings. I love you all",
el jefe sonrió.

Al otro día, la traición. (High Noon, p. 14)

Language selection and the adoption of efficient linguistic strategies within the community has been one of the great debates within Latino theatre troupes in the United States. They have had to make a political choice regarding which language would best foster communication with a wider Latino audience. Spanish is preferred by the older

generations and the recent immigrants, but not with the younger generations who have felt the pressure to assimilate to the American way of life at the expense of their parents' language.³⁴ This has created a situation portrayed in the plays where "often the older generations of actors, representing characters of parents and grandparents, were the carriers of the native language and would address their 'children' in Spanish, but received answers from them in English, thus reenacting onstage the trauma of the progressive loss of a common language."³⁵ This linguistic reality within the diverse Latino communities in the United States has challenged theatre groups to decide whether to use the Spanish language as a demonstration of political resistance or whether to integrate English into their plays in recognition of its prevalence as a survival strategy within the community.

La Caravana (Caravan)³⁶

The importance of the bilingual intention in La Caravana goes hand in hand with the need to encourage the preservation of Spanish within the Puerto Rican and other Latino communities in New York. Through its staging the children who participate have the opportunity to realize that being bilingual in their community is empowering. This happens when the children are given time within the play to summarize its plot in English or Spanish, depending on the language in which the work is being performed. With great pride, the bilingual children in the audience translate the plot while they learn that their ability to speak two languages is validated by an artistic piece. Also, the children who participate are given the opportunity to enjoy a theatrical experience that validates their

³⁴ See Pedro Pedraza, "Language Maintenance Along New York Puerto Ricans," in Lucía Elías-Olivares, Elizabeth A. Leone, René Cisneros, and John Gutiérrez (eds.), Spanish Language Use and Public Life in the United States of America (Berlin; New York; Amsterdam: Mouton, 1985), pp.59-71. Also, Juan Flores, "Broken English Memories," in From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity (New York; Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 49-61.

³⁵ Eurídice Arratia, "Teatro Festival: The Latino Festival Theatre," The Drama Review, vol 35, #2, Summer 1991, p. 177.

³⁶ Alvan Colón-Lespier, Caravan in Joe Rosenberg, ed., ¡Aplauso!: Hispanic Children's Theater (Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 1995), p. 20.

culture of origin through language. And any child in the audience who is not bilingual can understand the plot and the advantages of speaking more than one language.

The central theme of the play is not limited to bilingualism; it includes the theme of personal power as a tool to overcome oppressive situations. The imposition of English monolingualism is but a portion of that oppression. The plot is a free adaptation of the poem Elegía del saltimbanqui (The Elegy of the Acrobat) by Luis Palés Matos. The oppression is embodied by the character of Beatriz, a young woman who works as assistant to Saltimbanqui. He seeks to oppress her through non-paid work. Beatriz realizes she is being exploited and rebels against him. Ironically, when given the chance to be free, Beatriz becomes the oppressor of the man who once enslaved her. It is at this time in the play that the children get another chance to test their power to change the course of the plot, when the action is stopped so that the young audience can discuss the options for saving both characters from oppressing each other.

BOAL, THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED, AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PREGONES: EL ABRAZO-THE EMBRACE

"Yesterday I was told that AIDS is God's punishment. They also told me that one of the nice things about AIDS is that it has forced women and their husbands from fooling around..."³⁷ With this statement the Pregones theatre troupe provokes its audience to think about HIV and AIDS in the community. In search of theatre relevant to the Puerto Rican and other Latino communities in the South Bronx, Pregones began a project in 1987 that became an artistic response to the AIDS crisis. Based on research done jointly by Pregones and health workers, it was named El abrazo (The Embrace). Its purpose was to provide efficient educational information and preventive alternatives to a crisis that has greatly impacted Puerto Rico and all the Latino communities in the United States.³⁸

³⁷ Fragment of a poem with which the play En mi familia no (Drugs? Not in My Family), developed by Pregones as part of the project: El abrazo (The Embrace), unpublished work, c. 1987.

³⁸ To read a full analysis of the increase of the death rate caused by AIDS in the Puerto Rican and other Latino communities in New York, see: Bárbara S. Menéndez, Steve Blum, Tejinder P. Singh, and

In spite of the higher AIDS mortality rate suffered by the Latino community in the United States, the presentation and discussion of this topic, with respect to the minority communities, has not been explored theatrically by the dominant culture in a responsible manner. Alberto Sandoval states in his essay "Staging AIDS: What's Latinos Got to Do With It?":

AIDS is not only a medical crisis but a crisis of representation. Two issues complicate the AIDS crisis: Who gets AIDS? How is the person with AIDS represented? The diversity of AIDS cases becomes problematic when we consider that dominant cultural representations are produced by an Anglo-American population with access to the mainstream. By the year 2050, when there will be a cure for AIDS (I hope), and the cultural archives of the plague are reviewed, the researchers will recover an archipelago of cultural constructions and register who was infected and affected by AIDS in the 1980's and 1990's. The record will show that many white middle-class males contracted, experienced, suffered, and died of the virus.³⁹

In an effort to include minorities in the theatrical representation of the AIDS crisis, Pregones joined the educational campaign to disseminate information that would help prevent the spread of the disease within the community. Several factors motivated the company to embrace the challenge of using entertainment as a means to promote AIDS education: the need to develop a play that would explore the different aspects of the impact AIDS has had on the Latino community; the absence of an artistic response sensitive to the increase in suffering experienced by that community; and the need to break with the many prejudices within the community that negatively affect the possibilities of overcoming this crisis.

For the creation of theatrical works about AIDS to have a positive impact on the public, changes were made in the approach to the educational techniques that had been previously developed in the community. A very important contribution of The Embrace is

Ernest Drucker, "Trends in AIDS Mortality Among Residents of Puerto Rico and Among Puerto Rican Immigrants and Other Hispanic Residents of New York City, 1981-1989," Boletín del Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Bulletin Volume VI, numbers 1 & 2, Spring 1994, pp. 14-21.

³⁹ Alberto Sandoval, "Staging AIDS: What's Latinos Got to Do With It?," In Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas, eds., Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, & Theatricality In Latin/o America (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 49.

its bilingual and bicultural character, which made the work relevant to Latinos in New York and an effective vehicle to reach wider audiences. Until then, very little effort had been made to create educational campaigns that were responsive to the previously described linguistic and cultural diversity within the Latino community in New York. The use of English and Spanish broke the linguistic barrier so that anyone in the community could understand the play regardless of their language dominance. Its bicultural focus responded to previously failed educational campaigns devoid of understanding and sensitivity towards the recipient community. Bilingualism and biculturalism were employed as additional tools to raise consciousness while using positive role models for the community. The company further elaborates:

We believe that the impact of The Embrace goes beyond the instructional and enters the realm of positive "role modeling." Its absence is rampant in our communities and our children suffer all their adult lives because of this. Experts suggest that a major sociopolitical concern impacting on minority AIDS prevention is the fact that many blacks and Latinos will be likely to listen more carefully to a prevention message emanating from people of color than they will to one from white, male, middle-class authorities or even governmental health officials.⁴⁰

Another important contribution made by the project was the shift of the main focus from the individual to the family. Thus part of Pregones's effort to provide an alternative around AIDS education, that would be sensitive to the needs of the Latino community, was its focus on the family as the target of its educational campaign.⁴¹ Since the family is the most valuable institution within the Latino community, it must originate the changes in attitude and the elimination of prejudices regarding AIDS, to ensure a successful educational campaign leading to prevention.⁴² In addressing the family, Pregones became

⁴⁰ Magaly Jiménez, Jorge Merced, and Rosalba Rolón, "Embrace Study Report," (no date), p.2.

⁴¹ Update: Pregones Newsletter (New York, c. 1984), p.1

⁴² This is discussed in the report submitted by the company where the authors point out: One of the most important cultural values among Latinos and other people of color is familism, or the emphasis of the family as the primary social unit and source of support (Marín & Triandis, 1985; Sabogal, Marín, 1987). The strong familistic orientation of Latino culture creates a number of obligations, as well as a source of perceived support in times of trouble. Latinos feel a strong

part of the community support network whose purpose was to influence the behavior of high risk individuals. Support was sought as well for those who were not suffering from the disease, but were sharing their lives with people who had AIDS or were engaged in high risk behaviors.

If the selection of a context that would be bilingual, bicultural, and family oriented was a determinant in the creation of efficient educational tools for the community, the choice of a theatrical method that would support that context was of equal importance. A complete exploration of the techniques invented by the Brazilian theatre artist Augusto Boal became the best alternative to develop a campaign of intervention, as is explained by the troupe:

Given that AIDS is a behavior-bound disease; that the rate/frequency of HIV infection continues to be on the rise and that there is no effective cure for AIDS; effective intervention campaigns (Taylor 1986; Hovland 1953; Winett 1982; Zimbardo, Ebbson & Maslach 1977; Mc Guire, 1984; Leverthal 1970) suggest that in order to change people's health beliefs, the messages that are being sent out must follow several principles of prevention:

- 1 Interventions must occur in a context of recognition with messages that are geared to specific behaviors. These messages must be colorful, vivid and concise with targeted exposure that provides realistic limited goals.
- 2 Messages must motivate—not scare; should empower; must be relevant to target population and must avoid information overloads.
- 3 Utilize a communication source which is prestigious and trustworthy. (Such as Community Based Theatre).
- 4 Provide an interesting case history or dramatic story to grab and maintain attention and increase comprehension and memory using multiple models in multiple settings depicting the prescribed behavior and models being reinforced for these.
- 5 Make action recommendations that are easy to implement with clear and direct instructions concerning how, when, and where to act.
- 6 Provide strong arguments at the beginning and end of a communication, as people are best able to remember the first and last arguments they hear.

need to consult with other family members before making a decision, an obligation to help others in the family economically and emotionally, and a strong sense of love and nurturing toward their children (Marín). The Embrace is created within a Latino cultural content. The impact of AIDS on the family, and specially on the children, could be a key factor in motivating the behavior change of high risk individuals. A key component of maintaining safer sex behavior is developing networks of community support for behavior change; the family is the basic unit of a community, and it offers a most appropriate environment in which to commence this process. (Final Report, p.2)

A careful analysis of the Forum Theatre techniques utilized in Pregones's EMBRACE THEATER COLLECTION indicates that all the above criteria is thoroughly met. (Jiménez, Merced, Rolón, p. 1)

In creating a repertoire of plays sensitive to the concerns and needs of the Latino community, with The Embrace, Pregones provided its audience with tools that encouraged critical thinking about the AIDS crisis and the need for attitudinal change in this regard. The most effective way to show the impact of AIDS and prejudices against the disease was to encourage the public's participation in the development of the work, allowing them to take on the roles of the characters involved in a specific situation. In particular, several people in the audience were encouraged to take the place of the character identified as The Oppressed. This was Pregones's adaptation of the techniques originated by Augusto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed, in the service of health education.

Augusto Boal's theories, as proposed in his work on the Theatre of the Oppressed, assert that the main objective of Forum Theatre is to serve as a liberating act for the spectator.⁴³ By taking an active part in the play, the audience becomes an agent in the search for answers to the problem presented by the actors. The goal is to get the public to take responsibility for the examination, and later for the solution to the problem. The best way to obtain audience participation is to create a set of rules to serve as a mechanism to allow the audience to interrupt the play whenever a change in course is necessary. The individual in the audience who interrupts the action commits him or herself to taking on the role of any actor whose actions must change in order to achieve liberation from any given oppressive situation. Thus the artist is not responsible for offering choices, but rather for offering the key to open the door to foster the public's discussion of the problem and the discovery of liberating alternatives.

To accomplish the desired effect with Boal's proposed model as a point of departure, Pregones followed rules to guide the process of examining and solving

⁴³ For more information about the Theatre of the Oppressed and the techniques of Forum Theatre, see: Augusto Boal, Teatro del Oprimido (Theatre of the Oppressed) 1 y 2 (México: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1980), pp. 15-60 (Tomo 1), pp. 37-48 (Tomo 2).

problems within the social, political, or community based group. A summary follows of the format, that according to Boal, must be followed when creating Forum Theatre. First, the public must discuss the political or social problem that it wants to solve within the community, so that after reaching a consensus, it will entrust the artists with the task of distilling a theatrical performance in which the audience can identify the characters and their individual ideologies. Following an initial representation of the problem, the audience is asked whether they are in agreement with the solution proposed by the actors. The solution must show a political or social "mistake" in order to provoke a discussion that will lead to the public's participation. After the public expresses its disagreement, the play is performed again, this time giving the audience permission to interrupt and take the place of any character. Within this work scheme the character known as the "Joker" plays a very important role. The Joker can be any of the actors in the play, and functions as intermediary between the public and the artists. It is this character who explains the rules of the game and provokes or encourages the audience to participate in the substitution of characters. But the actor who has been replaced remains on stage to assist the acting spectator in the task of maintaining a realistic context for his or her interpretation of the character. Once a character is substituted by a member of the audience, all of the other actors will take an aggressive stance against the audience-actor. The task of the audience-actor is to overcome all the obstacles put before him or her in the search for solutions. The substitution of characters can take as long as necessary to find a satisfactory solution. A forum follows, where the proposed solutions are discussed, and the group chooses the best possible solution, without the actors' direct intervention.

Initially Pregones's exploration of Forum Theatre techniques was not necessarily a consequence of an in-depth study of Boal's proposals. In fact the development of their repertory's first play stemmed from the need to explore the topic of AIDS and the adoption of theatrical techniques compatible with the theme. The adaptation of Boal's techniques came about as a natural response discovered through the intuitive practice of the technique;

although they had seen it previously, they did not know it well. Jorge Merced, Associate Director of Pregones and director of the El abrazo project, described the process:

For the first version of En mi familia no, which we did at the end of '87, or in the fall of '87, I played the part of Tito, Alvan played the man of the house, Rosalba played my sister, and there was no Joker. As part of the group's research, we had already explored the skills needed for the Theatre of the Oppressed. We saw that it was a kind of theatre that we were interested in learning more about. Alvan had seen the use of Forum Theatre techniques in Cuba. He became interested and brought it to us to see if we would be interested also.

At that time there was nothing in the community. During those weeks Heriberto Sánchez Soto—who was working with the New Jersey AIDS Project—showed up, and told us that he needed to see something in theatre that presented the impact of AIDS in the community. We began to talk about AIDS. He told us about many cases and events that were happening.

After he left, we got on the stage to work and explore what we would be interested in, or would work, or would be theatre worthy. We chose that little scene [in En mi familia no]. We knew nothing. We were going by what Alvan had seen. Everything was based on intuition. We did it once and it worked, more or less, but we had no idea how to develop it.⁴⁴

The need to contact Augusto Boal came from the difficulty of fully developing the work already done. Pregones wanted to improve the group's skills with the technique and consequently create a Forum Theatre and an AIDS repertory for the company. They contacted Boal, who extended an invitation for several members of Pregones to train with him in Brazil. For the members who participated, the experience was a validation of the work already created, and a realization that they were on the right track to accomplish what

⁴⁴Jorge Merced, personal interview. New York, March 3, 1997.

"En la primera versión de En mi familia no, que hicimos a finales del 87 o en otoño del 87, yo hacía Tito, Alvan hacía el hombre de la casa, Rosalba hacía de mi hermana y no había "Joker." Como parte de la investigación del grupo ya se había incursionado en las destrezas de Teatro del Oprimido. Vimos que aquí había un tipo de teatro en el cual nos interesaba ahondar y Alvan había visto una muestra que se hizo en Cuba donde se usaban las técnicas de teatro foro. Le interesó y lo trajo para acá a ver si nos interesaba.

Para ese tiempo no había nada en la comunidad. En esas semanas apareció Heriberto Sánchez Soto, que estaba trabajando con el New Jersey Aids Project, diciéndonos que él necesitaba ver algo en teatro sobre el impacto del SIDA en la comunidad. Empezamos a hablar del SIDA. El nos habló de muchos casos y cosas que estaban pasando.

Cuando él se fue nos fuimos al escenario a trabajar y explorar qué cosas nos interesaban, o funcionaban, o eran teatrales. Escogimos esa escenita [En mi familia no]. No sabíamos nada. Estábamos basándonos en algo que Alvan había visto. Todo era basado en una práctica intuitiva. Lo hicimos una vez y funcionó, más o menos, pero no teníamos una idea de cómo desarrollarlo."

the company wanted so much: to create a play that would help eliminate prejudices about AIDS.

The contact with Boal led to an examination of the similarities and differences between his work and Pregones, that could be used to create a product that would meet the particular needs of New York Latinos. Among the differences found by the group, Jorge Merced mentions the following:

Boal is much more spontaneous. He does not believe in spectacle, but in a totally organic thing that comes up in the moment. We belong to another tradition, where the audience wants to see a show; they're coming to see a show. Our approach was one of "Okay, you'll see a play." The character of Joker, the facilitator between the public and the actors, is just another character for Boal. We had already given him a separate costume and bells to stop the action. Boal's scenes are very long plays that provide an extensive background. We created scenes that would not last more than fifteen minutes, to allow time for public participation. The play had to be totally flexible, since it was bilingual. It also needed that we include a health educator—Magaly Jiménez—as part of the staff, and the play had to be easily transportable and compact. That is typical of us [Pregones]. When Boal saw what we were doing he was amazed. Until then, no one had done anything about AIDS [with the Forum Theatre techniques]. (Jorge Merced, personal interview, March 3, 1997)⁴⁵

The importance of plays with AIDS as a central theme was not only that it was an innovation using the techniques of the Forum Theatre, but also that it was urgently needed, as demonstrated by the audiences' responses. For the first time, as a preventive measure in the crisis, an educational effort was attempted where the opinion and the active participation of the public were taken into account.

Many of the particular elements that Pregones elaborated as they adapted the Forum Theatre to their own work were the result of learning through the work process. For

⁴⁵"Boal es mucho más casero. No cree tanto en un espectáculo, sino que cree en una cosa totalmente orgánica que surge y ya. Nosotros pertenecemos a otra tradición donde el público quiere ver un "show," va a ver un "show." Nuestro acercamiento era, "Bueno, usted va a ver una obra de teatro." El personaje del "Joker," el facilitador entre el público y la escena, para Boal es una persona más. Nosotros ya le dimos un vestuario aparte y unas campanas para que pudiera detener la acción. Las escenas de Boal son obras larguísimas que dan todo un trasfondo. Nosotros tuvimos que adaptarlo a escenas que duraran 15 minutos lo máximo, para darle tiempo a la gente de intervenir. La obra tenía que ser totalmente flexible a ser bilingüe. También requirió que incluyéramos en el staff a una persona que fuera una educadora de la salud, que fue Magali Jiménez. A hacer un paquete de esto que pudiera viajar en un tren y que fuese compacto. Esas son cosas que son nuestras [de Pregones]. Cuando Boal regresó y vio lo que estábamos haciendo, quedó maravillado. Para ese tiempo nadie había hecho nada sobre el SIDA [utilizando el teatro foro]."

example, a health educator was included as a figure complementary to the plays because of the public's need for information and knowledge regarding the disease. Judging by the public's passionate response, the works that were staged within the repertory of El abrazo were impressive and effective enough to begin a communal dialogue about AIDS.⁴⁶ It was not Pregones's intention to become health educators, but the urgent need for education in the community made them reconsider the configuration of the project so that the public could engage in a responsible dialogue with the artists and the health educator.⁴⁷ During

⁴⁶ The repertory of the The Embrace is made up of seven short pieces in which the techniques of Forum Theatre are employed. The following is a summary of the works as it appears in their marketing package for the project:

Drugs? Not In My Family – A close knit family is shaken by news that the wife's brother, who lives with them, might be using drugs. He was best friends with a guy in the neighborhood who died because of AIDS. The husband wants him out, the wife is to bring the news to her brother. The brother claims that they've been unfair.

Gays? Not In My Family – Homophobia (fear of gay/lesbian people) strikes the heart of a close knit family when news that one of its members might be gay reaches the comfort of their home. Tito is accused of being gay and, therefore, of having AIDS. Overlooking the grief and pain that Tito is feeling for the loss of a friend because of AIDS, he is asked to leave the household immediately.

Masks – The different faces of denial are seen when a group of people meet at the funeral of one of their neighbors who died because of AIDS. The pain, curiosity, and frustration drive them to blame each other for present and past tragedies amongst them. Two of the women, who feel they have the right to protect the funeral ceremony against antisocial behavior, prevent the third woman from going in.

Se murió Carmen – How should a wife go about negotiating safer sex practices with her husband? For years she has been the "perfect wife." She has allowed her husband to blindfold her while he goes out with his friends. She has had no other choice but to trust him. Her husband's ex-girlfriend, Carmen, has just died because of AIDS. Even though the husband tries to prevent her from seeing reality once again, the wife sees the necessity to take off the blindfold. Can she go against her traditional role? What needs to happen for her to take that step?

The Engagement – Lucy, a nursing student, and Victor, a teacher, are engaged. The couple hasn't seen each other in about two weeks. They have agreed to meet for lunch at the hospital where Lucy is doing her internship. Victor arrives a little early. When he asks for Lucy, he is directed to the AIDS ward. He sees her saying goodbye to one of the patients. Outside the hospital, Victor and Lucy have a very heated argument. Victor expresses his concern for the type of contact Lucy has with AIDS patients; he asks her to choose between their relationship and her work in the AIDS unit. Victor is scared. Lucy still loves him.

The Science Class – When a group of students and their parents find out that the husband of one of the teachers has just died of AIDS, pressure is put upon the administration to remove the teacher from the school. The students are confused. "No AIDS in our school" is chanted up and down the school corridors, while the students decide between their favorite teacher and going along with their friends.

605-B – Three college students have registered for a special program abroad. They are at an office, waiting for information regarding lodging accommodations for the trip. As they wait for their room assignments, they confront their own as well as each other's feelings towards sex and AIDS. The more they talk, the more they realize how different they are. When all lodging accommodations are given, they realize they have been placed in the same room for the entire program.

⁴⁷ Merced comments on the reason to incorporate a health educator into an artistic work:

Since AIDS had not been discussed before in our community, the lines that formed to talk to us, after the performances, were enormous. We were seen as better than doctors. We were the only ones—supposedly—who had the knowledge to answer questions such as: "How can I talk to my

the trial period, after the public reached an agreement about the problem posed by the performance, the characters would invite questions from the audience about their actions and possible high risk practices. The actors would answer them according to the characters' personalities. It was then that Magaly Jiménez, the health educator, would intervene to clear doubts and dispel misconceptions and prejudices about HIV, AIDS, and possible methods of prevention.

The health educator's intervention was of great importance in reaching the public, however the audience's direct participation in the work's development was the core of the project and the most important aspect of community education, as Boal states. The theatre experience, adapted by Pregones and modeled after Boal, is a liberating one for the participating audiences, where they learn to identify and fight against oppression in society. With regard to the liberating aspect of the project, Jorge Merced says:

Although *El abrazo* is a response to an actual and urgent reality, it is not accurate to define it as contingency art. That is, art that is meant to solve an urgent problem. Nor is it issue or propaganda art, because the political premise of the work is to encourage self determination, beginning with the closest circle of the concentric circles that represent our society, that is the family circle. *El abrazo* is not "campaign" art, because the premise is about a problem that we will be dealing with all our lives: liberation. As we all know, oppression has different manifestations at different times in history. These manifestations of political, racial, social, economic, sexual, psychological, and recently, biological oppression, also include oppression by the family and self-oppression. The result is censorship and self-denial, all of which are present in our community.⁴⁸

Thus the public's direct intervention in the recognition and elimination of oppressive attitudes is the most valuable educational element of the project. Change is not provoked by

son about AIDS?", or "How do I tell my sister that her husband has AIDS?" We would say: "We are not psychologists, nor health workers." Sometimes, someone would break down crying and you could feel the pain and the confusion. (Jorge Merced, personal interview, March 3, 1997)

It fell to Magaly Jiménez, who appeared as the project's health worker, to answer and discuss any question from the public. In addition, she gave general and specific information about the disease and known preventive methods. She also gave out English and Spanish literature containing information about the disease, the centers for help, and support groups.

⁴⁸ Jorge B. Merced, "Teatro y SIDA", *Boletín del Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños*, volume VI, numbers 1 & 2, Spring 1994, p. 175.

external stimuli, but in the enacting of new non-oppressive alternatives elicited by the community group. Echoing Boal's vision, Pregones uses the technique in such a way that:

...instead of taking something from the spectator, it gives the public the desire to practice in the real world that action which was rehearsed in the theatre. The exercise of these theatrical forms creates a sort of dissatisfaction that needs to be dealt with through real action. (Augusto Boal, 1980, p. 42, Volume I)

The audience's emotional response to the group of works that make up El abrazo is clear proof that it is possible to effect a change in attitudes towards AIDS and its direct or indirect victims after experiencing participation in the plays. The public's immediate interest in getting information and education about HIV and AIDS is additional proof that action begins when the barriers that impede education are torn down. In the process of eliminating the barriers created by prejudice and ignorance the public learns to deal with real life situations. Although the action on stage is not reality, it does constitute a rehearsal of reality that prepares the public to act in a similar fashion. The spectator takes on the role of an oppressed character and acts to change the oppressive situation, thus turning the theatrical experience into one of concrete action.⁴⁹

El abrazo was meant to be more than just entertainment.⁵⁰ Pregones's concern with implementing programs that could be incorporated into the educational network

⁴⁹ This concrete action experience is achieved with the adaptation of a format following the parameters established by Boal and taking into consideration the particular needs of the public in New York:

- 1 Participants are asked to watch a ten minute scene portraying the problem.
- 2 A "Joker," an almost invisible character that remains with the audience throughout the scene, stops the action at its point of crisis.
- 3 Participants are asked if they agree with the dynamics portrayed in the scene.
- 4 The participants are informed that the scene will be played again but this time they have the right to come on stage, replace the actor who portrays the most oppressed character and lead the scene in the direction that she/he thinks is most appropriate.
- 5 The other actors have to face a newly created situation, responding instantly to all the possibilities that it may present until a new participant comes on stage.
- 6 After several interventions, the "Joker" stops the action and closes the show.
- 7 The HIV Educator joins the cast for an exchange with the audience where issues relevant to the piece are discussed. Facts about AIDS are discussed at this time with the audience.

The presence of the Joker is an aspect of the proposals by Pregones and Boal, instrumental to guaranteeing that the public feels comfortable on stage. In addition to being the character who has the power to freeze the action in the staging of El abrazo, this character is also the facilitator who employs several warm-up exercises that help the individual spectator to relax and feel comfortable with the rest of the audience. The warm-up takes place just before the public is invited to take an active part in the scene.

⁵⁰ The main objectives of El abrazo, as stated in the 1991-92 season's report were:

against AIDS led the company to test its program "scientifically," to measure change in public attitudes after seeing the play.⁵¹ The research, designed jointly by Pregones, Magaly Jiménez, and Dr. Alex Carballo-Diéguéz, was made possible with the help of the Health Services Improvement Fund, Inc., and the gift of data processing and analysis services provided by the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies of the New York

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- To make a series of residencies of The Embrace exclusively for Bronx audiences.
 - To conduct such residencies in conjunction with Bronx community based organizations which could use the project as an educational tool to provide education and prevention services on HIV/AIDS.
 - To reach out primarily to Latino audiences, particularly to women and teenagers, with a resource that is culturally and ethnically connected to them.
 - To empower people to formulate individual action plans to change behavior and/or keep themselves and their families at low risk.
 - To encourage people to get involved in social and communal activities that will lower the resistance to topics related to AIDS.
 - To conduct a series of workshops with service providers, teachers, health aides, and volunteers in the Bronx, using the Forum Theatre techniques in order to improve their group-facilitating skills.
- ("The Embrace AIDS Theatre Project Final Report," 1992, p. 2.)

⁵¹Originally the company did not take to the idea of using scientific methods to measure the effectiveness of their artistic work. The initial non-acceptance of the test was motivated by how unfair scientific methods are when measuring the effectiveness of the arts, as they highlight the quantity of work, downplaying the quality. As noted by Magaly Jiménez, Jorge Merced and Rosalba Rolón in the project's Final Report:

Community based organizations, within communities of people of color, have experienced difficulty in developing and implementing effective evaluation processes. This situation is even more critical for Community Based Theaters like Pregones. Traditionally, processes have been mandated (required) by funding sources as a means to measure the amount of work done per dollar given. Requirements for the most part have been a quantitative nature, not qualitative. Very rarely have Community Based Theaters received the technical assistance or financial resources necessary to develop and conduct evaluation processes that would be meaningful for the Community Based Theaters' perspective. (p. 4)

But once Pregones obtained the funding for such an investigation that would ultimately serve the community, they undertook the responsibility of designing their research tool with the assistance of health workers and expert researchers in Latino studies. Another concern was the Latino public's response to yet another investigation that would only take into account the company's goals and would not be sensitive to the subjects under investigation. That kind of research would be totally contradictory to the premises that Pregones set when beginning The Embrace project, as noted in the following statements:

Concern: ...in the past, communities of color have been subjects of investigations that produce no beneficial results for the participants. We have been targeted over and over as guinea pigs in all sorts of scientific research which have resulted in stigmatization, scapegoating, and socially devaluating groups of Latinos and Blacks.

Solution: The Embrace Theatre AIDS Project (PETAP) was designed specifically to counteract these negative forces of stigmatization, scapegoating, social devaluation, and many others that still prevail for our communities. However, we needed to make sure that the evaluating instruments, the consent forms, the outreach tools, and all other pieces of literature given to participants, were as culturally, socially, politically, and linguistically sensitive as The Embrace is. (pp. 4-5)

State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University.⁵² Another determinant factor in the design were the ideas contributed by several institutions that provide services to the communities where subjects for the study, in this case women, would be recruited.⁵³

The study, Knowledge and Attitude Change in Latinas' Approach to HIV Issues Following Participation in a Theatre Experience, determined the percentage of change in attitude and the learning about HIV and AIDS through participation in a performance of the The Embrace project. The research design led to the formation of two groups of Latinas: one was the control group, the other, the intervention group. The implementation plan began with recruitment of volunteers (Jiménez, Merced and Rolón, Embrace AIDS Theatre Project Final Report, p. 7) . Four community service agencies helped with that task, namely the South Bronx Early Childhood Center, the I.S. 162 Adult Education Program in the Bronx, the Boriken Health Center, and the Pelham Fritz Housing Project in East Harlem. Both groups of women filled out a questionnaire in their language of preference that determined their opinions regarding a variety of cognitive factors and attitudes about HIV. According to experts, these attitudes contributed to a lack of prevention among Latinas. The questionnaire delved into the following:

⁵² HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies, New York Psychiatric Institute, New York, NY.

⁵³ The involvement of community service groups was very important to the design process of the study, as stated by Pregones:

We brain stormed our ideas with people from different service areas in churches, day care centers, AIDS networks, schools, health centers, and even out in the streets. We made sure we shared our objectives and collected people's concerns, for we believe that community input in the development of a service that will impact that community is of key importance and essential to the success of such service. (Final Report, p. 5)

The Embrace project was, at all times, a collaborative effort with community organizations. Among many groups that supported the project by subsidizing presentations on their premises are: Early Childhood Center, 139th Street, Bronx, NY; Oberlin College, Ohio; Kutztown University, Pennsylvania; the Women's Correctional Facility, Rikers Island; Lola Rodríguez de Tió School, Bronx; Lincoln Hospital, Bronx; Bronx AIDS Services, Bronx; Promesa, Bronx.; Prospect Park, Brooklyn; Queens College, Queens, NY; J.H.S. 80, Bronx; HELP Project Samaritan, Bronx; United Bronx Parents; Narco Freedom, Bronx; Project Bravo, Bronx; Hoe Avenue Boys Club, Bronx; P.S.30 (Parents), Bronx; and Health Force, Bronx.

- 1) insufficient knowledge about the disease; 2) feelings of vulnerability; 3) submissiveness to men; 4) uneasiness to discuss sexual issues with partners; and 5) fatalism (the feeling that external circumstances, such as fate, govern our lives); 6) distancing from those infected or at risk.⁵⁴

Once the questionnaires were filled out, and the participants received refreshments, the control group was dismissed. Meanwhile the intervention group was exposed to a performance of El abrazo, after which the group filled out the same questionnaire. Three months later, the control and intervention groups were asked to answer the same questionnaire.

The research done prior to the study was successful, as was the cooperation of the community organizations in recruiting and motivating the women to stay with the study until its end, and the follow-up given to the participants during the three months that the study lasted. A relaxed atmosphere that eliminated feelings of insecurity and discomfort usually associated with such studies was achieved. Proof of the success of this research was that the initial 230 women remained until the end, thanks to the following strategies:

- Having evaluation instruments that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the target population.
- Having a strong partnership with the participating community agencies.
- Having fun strategies to serve as incentive, changing the atmosphere from a boring pre and post test scientific investigative approach, to one of challenge, excitement and sharing a fun experience with other women. These strategies worked effectively for both the intervention and the control groups.⁵⁵

Another proof of the study's success was that its results confirmed Pregones's thesis, which was as follows:

⁵⁴ A. Carballo-Diéguez, Magaly Jiménez, Knowledge and Attitude Change in Latinas' Approach to HIV Issues Following Participation in a Theatre Experience, (Preliminary Report), no date, p.2.

⁵⁵As the Final Report elaborates, in order to obtain the participants' total commitment to the study, several tactics were employed:

- * Fliers inviting women to "Participate and Win." Participants were assigned lucky numbers that would be included in a \$200 lottery once they completed the study.
- * Inspirational messages on colorful plastic cards carrying participants' lucky numbers were given to them.
- * Free tickets for Pregones Theatre were offered to all participants and their families. (p. 8)

Analysis of the responses to the questionnaire provide support for the hypothesis that The Embrace produces a statistically significant change in several areas assessed. After exposure to the theatre experience, the women showed an improvement in knowledge about HIV, a decrease in feelings of invulnerability to the disease, a decrease in submissiveness toward men, particularly their husbands, and an increase in willingness to provide refuge and shelter to those infected or at risk. The assessment also showed that The Embrace can slightly modify the fatalistic attitude that many Latinos have towards AIDS. (A. Carballo-Diéguez, Magaly Jiménez, pp. 21-22)

The Embrace project enjoyed successful performances for six years, from 1987 to 1993. Pregones decided to end it, however, in spite of public acclaim, in order to focus on the creation of new projects having nothing to do with HIV or AIDS education, or Boal's Forum Theatre. By the time it ended, Pregones had come to represent the vanguard in experimenting with the topic, and had served as an instrument for the development of new initiatives through workshops offered to health professionals, with the purpose of teaching them how to use Boal's techniques in their work.

CHAPTER 4: REIMAGING PUERTO RICAN THEATRE ON THE MAINLAND

During the initial years of the company's formation, Pregones produced a body of work that demonstrated its ability to develop a methodology that resulted in an identifiable aesthetic¹ with its own ideology, yet clearly influenced by the Latin American theatre movement.² This methodology has been shaped by the reality of Puerto Ricans who live in New York, and has resulted in the creation of works that are examples of the adoption, development and use of techniques in a body of theatrical works, meaningful for the community in the Bronx. We will examine three plays: Migrants!, Voices of Steel/Voces de acero and Medea's Last Rosary, which illustrate the work done by Pregones to restructure, in its own style, the image of Puerto Rican theatre in the United States. We will emphasize three fundamental aesthetic aspects of Pregones's creative process: ³ the use of image theatre, a noticeable preference for the use of historical and literary intertextuality, ⁴ and the

¹ In his study of Brecht's influence on Latin American theatre, Fernando de Toro notes that troupes that show characteristics that may be identified with the German playwright's style, result not in imitation, but rather in aesthetics of their own. Regarding the development of art aesthetics, Toro reminds us that, without fail, it is always the result of ideology:

Art aesthetics-regardless of what they are-are rooted in an interpretation and a concept of reality. It is the convergence of the idea about the function of art and the artist when he or she formulates specific aesthetic parameters. No aesthetics are produced in a vacuum. They are always born from concrete and specific ideologic concepts.

"Una estética acerca del arte-cualquiera que sea parte de una interpretación y de una concepción de la realidad, de una idea acerca de la función de la obra de arte y del artista que finalmente convergen en una formulación esteética. Ninguna estética parte de un vacío sino de unos conceptos ideológicos concretos y precisos."

Fernando de Toro, Brecht en el teatro hispanoamericano contemporáneo, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1987, pág. 13.) Similarly, it is evident that Pregones's own aesthetic is the result of the rigorous application of an ideology that binds politics and art, showing its awareness of the social function of its art.

² With regard to other troupes in the United States who employ Latin American Theatre techniques, see: Beatriz Rizk, "El teatro hispano en Nueva York", Escenario de dos mundos: Inventario teatral de Iberoamérica, Volume 2 (Spain: Centro de Documentación Teatral, 1988), p. 307. Also, Jorge Huerta, "El teatro chicano contemporáneo, redefinir la revolución", in the same volume, p. 325.

³ The other two basic aspects of the aesthetic developed by Pregones are: the inclusion of linguistic variations, and the investigation of the political and social history of Puerto Ricans, both discussed in the preceding chapter.

⁴ Fernando de Toro, Theatre Semiotics: Text and Staging in Modern Theatre (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 36-39.

development of a musical language based on the traditions of Puerto Rican and Latin American popular theatres.

Migrants! (1985)

In keeping with Pregones's tradition, Migrants! Cantata a los emigrantes is a collectively created work. Through brief sketches, visual images and much use of intertextuality, the history of the migratory process of Puerto Ricans is recreated. The play also sheds light on the effects of colonization on the island and on the continent. By recreating relevant historical events, from the arrival of the Spaniards to the concession of United States citizenship to Puerto Ricans and their participation in United States' wars, the company reestablishes the links of historical continuity between the island and the continent. In addition, through historic reconnection, the work is an homage to the tenacity of the Puerto Rican who moves tirelessly from one territory to the other in search of better employment, educational and housing opportunities, as stated by the company in the following program note:

Why Migrants?

At present there are approximately 3 million Puerto Ricans in the United States; 1.6 million in New York alone.

Why did we come here in the first place?

We've been pushed and pulled ever since the U. S. took the Island in 1898. Some have stayed and given birth to a second and third generation, some have returned to the Island, and others still are in never ending transit between here and there.

With this collective creation we weave through various social, historical economical and personal factors that have influenced our migratory process.

This is our homage to the courage and endurance of those who came and worked before us. ⁵

The work contains several historic events as seen through the experiences of the common person who has suffered the effects of history-perhaps not even understanding these experiences nor his/her own role in this history.

All the events portrayed in the play are based on historical documents, oral

⁵ Migrants! Cantata a los emigrantes, Pregones's 10th Anniversary Celebration (Playbill), 1989.

testimonies, and poems and writings of the members of Pregones. Texts taken from poets, writers and institutions including Guillermo Baralt, Juan Antonio Corretjer, The Center for Puerto Rican Studies, the Historical Archives of Mexico, José Ramón Meléndez, René Marqués, Hugo Margenat, Rosalba Rolón, Amanda Soto Vélez and Clemente Soto Vélez—the Puerto Rican poet to whom the work is dedicated as representative of the migrant—were among the writings gathered to make Migrants! By including historic and literary texts as primary sources for the creation of the play we are reminded, once more, of the importance of intertextuality in the way Pregones uses research and recreation of history to develop its works. In addition, it is a recognition of the need to encourage the development of collective memory by acknowledging and recovering already existing theatre works. With regard to the employment of intertextuality, be it as direct quotation, recreation of historical events, fictionalization of historic events, or through the adaptation of existing texts, Toro's contribution must be recognized:

At the basis of the concept of productivity is the fact that the text makes a work out of language, but at the same time, the text is worked on by other texts because every text is the assimilation and transformation of many texts; that is, inside every text an intertextuality exists and functions. (Toro, p. 36) And he adds: ...categories are not terribly useful for dealing with the various characteristics of the dramatic text, for in the theatre, and especially in modern and contemporary theatre, dramatic texts from other eras and from other contemporary authors are often used in a new way. One only has to think of Man and Superman by Bernard Shaw, Heroica de Buenos Aires by Osvaldo Dragún, Lear by Edward Bond, or Die Mütter by Bertold Brecht. This form of intertextuality is purely literary, but there are also historical forms of intertextuality or intertext. This intertextuality can be with reference to form or to content. For example, as a basis for its text, a dramatic text can refer to a historic event found in historical texts. This is the case in Galileo Galilei and Die Tage der Commune by Brecht, Santa Juana de América by Andrés Lizárraga, Revelo 1929 by Jorge Goldenberg, Lautaro by Isidora Aguirre, La denuncia by Enrique Buenaventura, etc. In this way intertextuality can be divided into two generic areas: either historic intertextuality or fictionalized historical intertexts, such as those mentioned, or literary intertextuality or fictitious intertexts that have been recoded. (Toro, p. 38) ⁶

This tendency to use historical and literary intertextuality was present from the

⁶ For the three works studied here: Migrants!, Voices of Steel/Voces de acero and Medea, both historic and literary intertextuality are in evidence.

beginning in the company's creative process, however the identification of the previously mentioned texts is not as literal or as direct as in Pregones: Puerto Rican Theatre Collection. Different from The Collection, that marked the birth of the company, and employed Puerto Rican theatre pieces that commented on the literary, political and social history of the collective, Migrants! is an examination of the historic situation of the immigrant illustrated by other literary sources. In evidence here is a departure from the style that originated the company. In Migrants! the text is a recoding of historic and present reference material which is in and of itself a new text. It confirms Jonathan Culler's proposal that intertextuality requires the reciprocal participation of one text within the discursive space of a particular culture and the possibilities that a specific culture finds to understand itself within a determined text.⁷

The use of sensory images with emphasis on the visual image as a complement to the written text lends importance to the dramatic discourse turned into gesture. Similar to what we find in much of the new Latin American theatre, Pregones widely uses the image to develop a rich vocabulary that imposes a specific view of the world. Regarding this particular view of the world and the organization of the theatrical space through the use of the image, Augusto Boal highlights this need to favor the use of the image in art in a society where television and its manipulation of the image serves to counter art. Boal advocates the use of images that, more than imposing a manipulated view of the world, encourage looking into different worlds. He defines the images that encourage reflection and creativity over imposition, "subjunctive and conditional images: that is, images which allow us to think, to imagine, to invent; images which instill doubt or allow fancy."⁸ It is not an imposition of ideology through the image, but a liberation from that type of imposition through artistic aesthetics. To be art, the theatre must stimulate our senses without

⁷ Jonathan Culler, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics Literature and Deconstruction (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1981) p. 103.

⁸ Augusto Boal, Legislative Theatre (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 81.

interfering with them when it offers images that contribute to the unlimited growth of the spectator.

. . . the artist is a person who helps us to see that we tend only to look at, and to listen to what we tend only to hear. And I think I should go further: the true painter goes beyond the mere mixture of colours and shapes, and manages to see darkness: manages not only to see things in darkness, but actually to see darkness, as Rembrandt does; the true composer transcends the mere ordering of sounds and manages to hear, and make us hear silence, as Beethoven does. Just as the true psychoanalyst is able to hear the word which is not spoken. (Boal, 1998, p. 81)

To understand the use of the "subjunctive image," it is necessary to describe the work in detail.⁹ Structurally, Migrants! consists of nine short episodes with transitional images that link them. While most of the sketches tell of events that took place in Puerto Rico, the transitional images portray the life of Puerto Rican immigrants in New York. There is a clear contrast here between scenes based on historic events and the transitional scenes that refer to the life styles of the immigrants.¹⁰ Although the use of images does not necessarily constitute a unique characteristic of transitions between scenes, it is in these transitional moments where the images appear more clearly due to the absence of oral communication. In general, it can be stated that the creation of multiple images that Boal identified as sensuous, mnemonic, imaginary and symbolic, is certainly a primary element in the staging of the work.¹¹ The play opens to two small platforms on stage. The

⁹ This description is based on the video: Migrants!, from Pregones performance in Boston, May 19, 1987. (Pregones Historical Archive, 700 Grand Concourse, Bronx, New York)

¹⁰ It is understood that Pregones's play has a double reference, as described by Fernando de Toro (Brecht en el teatro hispanoamericano, p. 17). This concept refers to the duality between the historic reference-where history is used to shed light on present history-and awareness of living in the present and documenting actual history. Both types of references are inextricable from one another in the company's artistic works. As seen in La colección, the collage of literary pieces that make up the play is also a reflection of the political conditions that have afflicted the country to the present. The same may be said of Areyto de pescadores, where a historic event is fictionalized: the struggle of the fishermen of Vieques Island to recover their lands and waters-as in High Noon-where the springboard is present history to create and artistic work. In Migrants!, the use of both kinds of references is even clearer. Scenes that allude to history are interlaced with images that refer to the present social problems of Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States.

¹¹ According to Boal, there are four basic kinds of images: "The sensory image-something that people see and agree to call by the same name" (Boal 1998, p. 77). "The mnemonic image-the observer completes what he is actually seeing with the elements which existed in other circumstances, but are not

decoration of "two feet by two feet pieces of colored fabric are used as props and costumes to create a mood." The actors shape them according to the scenery, props, and wardrobe as each scene is played. It has an ingenious result, creating an effect that is not only visually attractive, but also of symbolic importance to the performance text.

The first scene recreates the arrival of the Spaniards to the island of Borikén. For that episode, the actors used cloth to simulate a ship (sensory image) and take their places inside the vessel as the shout of "Laaand!" grows to become the Latin American children's song "Once there was a very small ship" ("Había una vez un barco chiquitito"). At the end of the song, the image of the ship breaks and the cloths become cloaks worn by the Spaniards during the Conquest (sensory image). This brief introduction is followed by the first episode.¹² I. "Juan González, soldier, spy, and interpreter for the Spanish Crown during the conquest of the Americas, is called to testify at a royal hearing to verify the truth of his exploits and to determine if he is deserving of the riches and rewards he is claiming." Once the actors portray some of the fragments of the historic documents that tell of Juan González's trial, the final image of the trial is frozen (transitional scene a). The stage lighting changes from warm colors to cold ones and the actors represent winter images (mnemonic image). The former cloaks become scarves, coats, hats, etc.. (sensory image). The actors are seen in a new environment, New York, while they wait for and get on a train (mnemonic image). After establishing a contrast of images between past and present, the scene shifts to the island to dramatize the history of slavery with the legend of Carabalí.

The second episode illustrates the suffering inflicted by slavery through the story of

now present" (p. 78). "The imagined image. In this case, we are dealing with a 'projected image,' that is, each observer projects onto the existing image memories, desires, or fears that each observer has, consciously or unconsciously" (p.78); and "the symbolic image." "These are images_ where such and such an action means such and such a thing; they have no value as prospective language, they denote only the signification which is attributed to them" (p.79).

¹² To explain the succession between episodes and transitional scenes, the episodes will be identified with roman numerals, and the transitional scenes, with lower case letters. The descriptions of episodes enclosed by quotation marks are cited as they appear in the program for the celebration of the company's tenth anniversary.

an escaped slave, symbolic of all slaves. II. "Slavery. The legend of Carabalí, the trial of the slaves, and three municipalities are questioned as to why the slaves are discontented." In the telling of the story of the runaway slave Carabalí, several symbols materialize into images which can be easily recognized by the audience: 1. Slavery represented by the actors being pilloried (the cloths become pillories); 2. The sacrifice of the captured runaway slave, as a substitute for the Christ figure, on a cross made of a pattern created by lights (symbolic image);¹³ 3. The relationship between mother and son-both slaves-in recreating the image of the Pietà sculpture (symbolic image); 4. Representation of the abuse of slaves by the masters, dramatized in a sugar cane cutting scene, where the cloths become machetes, symbolizing the fight for liberation (mnemonic image, imagined image); and 5. The eventual rebellion of the slaves, who kill the foreman José María Colón, is a logical consequence of all the images represented previously in the slavery tableau. From the death of the foreman there is a transition to the trial of the slaves ("imagined" image) where the fate of the slaves is decided while a chorus of the actors sing jazz and spirituals. Most of them will be executed.

In transitional scene b, the chorus breaks and reunites to prepare the three male actors who will delight the public-by using the cloths as turbans-with a parodic transvestite interpretation of the discussion of the slaves' discontent. In this scene, the three actors embody the municipalities of Mayagüez, Guaynabo and Guayama. They attempt to report the reason for discontent among the slaves to the Spanish governor in Puerto Rico. The three "women" are involved in an afternoon of sewing (mnemonic image) while they gossip about the Spanish government and avoid the governor's questions.¹⁴ Only after the governor's repeated insistence, the three municipalities coincide in admitting in unison that the "abolitionist propaganda" is the root of slave discontent and the episode closes.

After transitional scene c, that portrays a group of Puerto Ricans standing in line,

¹³See Appendix 1, Fig. 4 , p. 218 of this work.

¹⁴See Appendix 1, Fig. 5, p. 218 of this work.

in the cold, "to punch into work" (mnemonic image) under dim lighting, the play returns to the past with a scene that alludes to the independence movement that spawned the Lares uprising. III. "Puerto Ricans rise against Spanish colonial rule-El Grito de Lares, the symbol of our nation". The scene takes place in 1868 and portrays the moment when the rebellion against Spanish rule is decided and the first Puerto Rican flag is created, slowly shaped by the cloths while the actors move towards one of the platforms saying their lines (symbolic image, sensory image).

Suddenly, the sound of a whistle breaks the image as the Master of Ceremonies introduces the Circus, representative of the arrival of the United States in 1898 (symbolic image). IV. "The circus comes to town. On the 25th of July of 1898, U. S. troops, under the command of General Nelson Miles occupy the island of Puerto Rico." In this parody, the images revolve around the seduction of the Puerto Ricans through magic, executed by the Master of Ceremonies. After establishing the circus with music, giants, dancing acrobats and baton twirlers-all symbols of this new presence in the island-everyone's attention is directed to the magician and Master of Ceremonies' offerings, pulled out of his hat to gain the confidence of the natives (imagined image, symbolic image). First, the magician offers food, represented by a dead chicken. Then he offers industrialization, symbolized by a yo-yo. Finally, he offers dollars which are also produced magically. During the entire scene, everyone on stage dances to the monotonous, mechanical rhythm produced by the magician, who orchestrates the action meticulously. But one woman refuses to follow by saying, "I am from the earth, I am from the hurricane!," presenting the first act of resistance to the presence of the new "masters." But the magician organizes his new followers in a colorful carousel that elicits a new reaction from the woman, when she sees her compatriots join in the mechanical rhythm (symbolic image): "Ya la tierra no se siente nuestra. And the land didn't feel ours any longer."

The story returns to transitional scene d, where the actors greet each other while they gather behind a post placed horizontally that, as the actors regroup, they raise, until it

is above their heads. The pole is a cloth that turns into a picket while the actors march in protest towards the front of the stage with raised fists (symbolic image).¹⁵ The sound of a repressive whistle breaks the scene giving rise to a series of images of police inflicted violence (mnemonic image), until the stage is empty.

With the following scene we are taken back to Puerto Rico during the First World War. By that time Puerto Ricans had coexisted with the United States, giving rise to several themes open to debate. V. "A small town plaza. A romantic couple ...a U.S. soldier and his wife...Two friends argue over staying in Puerto Rico and the limitations of having 'just a Puerto Rican citizenship'." Simultaneously, several situations develop in the square. The soldier's wife wants to stay on the island, but the impending war impedes it. The romantic couple, oblivious to the presence of the others, are involved in a flirtation assisted by fan language, guitar music and poetry. A couple of friends plays checkers while discussing the difficulties of traveling abroad with a Puerto Rican passport. While the soldier's wife tries to convince him that there must be a way for him to remain stationed in Puerto Rico, the woman from the romantic couple attempts to convince her paramour to marry her. One of the chess playing friends tries to persuade the other that the solution to the island's economic difficulties is to find work in the United States. At once, all become disenchanted with the existing situation. The woman from the romantic couple becomes angry and leaves her mate, the woman from the United States proposes that Puerto Ricans fight in the United States war, and the two friends fight over their disagreements regarding the country. A group of girls join the scene in the town square and discuss the relationship of one of them with a young man from the United States. Although she does not understand him well, she is very much in love and is willing to go with him to the United States. After revealing these political, economic and personal dilemmas, the scene closes as the soldier's wife shouts: "So you're telling me that after all we've done for these people they can't even go to war? Well, it's clear. They can't even speak English! Of course they can't go to war!"

¹⁵See Appendix 1, Fig. 6, p. 219 of this work.

Meanwhile, in a simultaneous dialogue, one of the checker players exclaims to the other: "I would have to be dead for them to take me there!" The stage is emptied. However, the seeds of migration have been planted, with many Puerto Ricans marked by the process even now.

When the actors return to the scene, they are on board a ship on the way to New York. VI. "Our ancestors take the boat." (symbolic image, sensory image). While the actors look around in amazement, anxiety, fear, incredulity, they become pieces of a sort of mechanical showcase and freeze (imagined image). Puerto Ricans face the experience of immigration, illustrated by several personal histories VII. "In New York and Puerto Rico our testimonies are heard," until an actor dressed as a newspaper runs through the stage (symbolic image) announcing that the United States Congress has given citizenship to the Puerto Ricans. VIII. "U. S. Congress makes Puerto Ricans American citizens-Mambrú goes off to war." The actors become entangled in the cloths (imagined image) while they sing an adaptation, a sort of danse macabre of the children's song "Mambrú se fue a la guerra," and a young Puerto Rican soldier, a hero of the United States Armed Forces, parades seriously to a place on a pedestal that will turn him into a heroic statue (imagined image, symbolic image, sensory image). The actors, who are singing and mourning the death of Mambrú, fall dead themselves, while in the background only the figure of the Puerto Rican sacrificed to the war remains standing as a symbol of the price paid for United States citizenship. With this pessimistic view of the historic future of the Puerto Ricans, the company stands up (symbolic image) and renders homage to the Puerto Rican migrants who struggle regardless of where they are, but above all, honors those who stayed and experienced the difficulties of a new country. IX. "And we worked, and we worked, and our lives as Puerto Ricans living in a new land serves as foundation for Latino communities throughout the country."

The above description shows how the symbols created through the visual images are an element that Pregones has employed in their search for the development of a

language that can be understood by a public that may not share the same oral idiom, but shares the language of a popular imagery that overcomes any linguistic barrier. In the specific case of this play, not only are visual images with popular meaning used (the cross is a symbol of Christian tradition; the Pietà represents motherhood and compassion; the ship, the massive movement of Puerto Ricans between the island and the continent; the flag created for the Lares uprising, the nationalist independence movement; the circus represents colonization), but also, there is emphasis on the transformative character of history. As the actors change objects, wardrobe and scenery with the aid of the cloths, the power of the individual as an agent of change through action is also materialized on the scene. The play takes us, through an ever changing succession of symbols, to the realization that the historic past and the present of Puerto Ricans are the result of a sequence of events that have transformed reality, not the outcome of unconnected random happenings.

The music in this play makes a clear allusion to children's play, signifying Puerto Rican reality where the melody, familiar and at the same time strange by virtue of its arrangement, changes from harmless to bitter reality. This transformation is observed in the structural unity of the episode placed between two children's melodies, "Había una vez un barco chiquitito" and "Mambrú se fue a la guerra." The first is an invitation to take part in the theatrical game and the latter becomes a hymn to death, whose shocking effect is counter to child's play:

Mambrú went off to war
 What a pity
 What a pity
 What a sorrow.
 Mambrú went off to war
 Will he ever be back? (4X)
 Will he be home for Easter?,
 What a pity (2X)
 What a sorrow.
 Will he be home for Easter?
 Or home for Christmas Eve?
 A slow ship is arriving
 What a pity (2X)
 What a sorrow.
 A slow ship is arriving

What news will it bring back?
 Will it bring back? (2X)
 What news will it bring back?
 It's that Mambrú has died.
 What a pity
 What a pity
 What a sorrow.
 It's that Mambrú has died.
 He's going to be buried
 To be buried (2X)
 He's going to be buried.
 The coffin's made of gold
 What a pity
 What a pity
 What a sorrow.
 The coffin's made of gold
 The cover's made of glass
 Made of glass (2X)
 The cover's made of glass.

Once again, the music is a character that comments on the situation. Through folklore, the composition of original works, the adaptation and the recovery of children's games, the music makes a contribution towards examining the experience of immigration from its earliest phase (the longing for childhood) to its most developed phase, where the contribution of traditional and folkloric popular music is important to the survival and preservation of national identity. The music serves, in turn, to analyze immigration, to reevaluate Puerto Rican history, and encourage pride for Puerto Rican heritage from a unique and inseparable position from the other two fundamental aspects of the staging: the text and the image.

The theme is as important as the creative elements in the play, because the final premise is recognition of the generations of Puerto Ricans who think of New York or any other part of the United States as home. About this aspect, which defines the new generations of Puerto Ricans in the metropolis and distinguishes them from the generations who thought of migration as temporary, Pregones presents another interpretation of history: that it is possible to remain in the United States, to struggle and survive, without disloyalty towards the country of origin. The solution to the problems of Puerto Ricans is

not necessarily to return to the island with money, but to take responsibility and power wherever they are. To assume one's power, a sense of identity is necessary. The historical account created by Pregones through the play Migrants! serves as a stepping stone to the complex process of assuming responsibility for historical circumstances. The consequences of taking historic and political responsibility is the theme of the company's next production.

Voices of Steel / Voces de acero (1989)

If Migrants! gives homage to those Puerto Ricans who had the courage to leave the island to seek better living conditions, Voices of Steel / Voces de acero honors those who have given their lives for the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. The play was born out of the company's concern for the inhuman conditions that many political prisoners were subjected to in federal prisons in the United States.¹⁶ The play opened to the public after a year of research with the members of the troupe making contact with several of the prisoners. In time, some of the actors were able to meet with several of the prisoners, and exchanged ideas that enriched the staging (Colón-Lespier, personal interview). The result was a movement and text piece with music, created collectively. In addition to being a look at and commentary about life in prison, the play is also an effort to publicize the plight of these Puerto Ricans and to foster understanding of their commitment to political struggle.¹⁷

¹⁶ On August 11, 1999, President Clinton announced that he would grant parole to 11 of the 16 Puerto Rican political prisoners if they agreed to 14 conditions, among them, condemning their previous actions and repudiating violence as a political tactic. After long deliberation on the part of the prisoners, and in spite of the controversy raised by the offer, ten out of the eleven accepted the conditions proposed by President Clinton and were freed on September 1999. See Gerson Borrero, "Aunque con condiciones, indulta a once presos políticos," El Diario/ La Prensa Aug. 12, 1999, p. 2; Maritere Arce, "El precio de la lucha contra el colonialismo," El Diario/ La Prensa Aug. 12, 1999, pp.3-4; Gerson Borrero, "Presos políticos puertorriqueños aceptan el indulto," El Diario La Prensa Sep. 8, 1999, p. 2. Also see: Eduardo Aguiar, director, ¿Hasta cuándo? produced by El Comité Pro Derechos Humanos (Committee for Human Rights); Puerto Rico, 1996; and Lisa Rudman, producer, Have You Seen la Nueva Mujer Puertorriqueña?, 1988. Both are documentaries, available at The Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library, Hunter College, New York.

¹⁷ The effort to publicize the life and works of political prisoners in Latino theatre in the United States is not unique to Pregones. Jorge Huerta, in his article, "El teatro chicano contemporáneo, redefinir la revolución," informs us of this tendency in Chicano theatre, which served as precedent to the political theatre begun by Teatro Campesino:

Nevertheless, in approaching this topic it does not pretend to be didactic. It is allegorical, as pointed out by the company in its description of the work:

Voices of Steel/Voces de acero is a collective creation incorporating movement, theatre, poetry, and music about the will to survive in a world of uniform color, smell and lighting. Our research into the conditions of detainment that Alejandrina was subjected to, led us to create this piece.¹⁸ We informed our characters, created

Before Teatro Campesino, political theatre in the poor districts was very limited, if it existed at all. A Chicano student, Tomás Ybarra Fausto, conducted several interviews with a man who was part of a theatre company that toured, in the latter part of the 1920's, performing in Spanish. The company was El Cuadro México-España. It staged the story of Aurelio Pompa, a Mexican immigrant unjustly persecuted for a crime he did not commit. He was trying to organize the Mexicans and the Chicanos which led him to become one of the first political prisoners [in the United States]. El Cuadro dramatized his story, followed by a call to the public to lend moral and financial support to his cause. The request was made after the presentation, in an effort to save Pompa from certain execution. Unfortunately, he was unjustly executed, but El Cuadro México-España became one of the first political theatre troupes in the 20th century, preceding Teatro Campesino and all of the other companies that followed after Teatro Campesino. (Huerta, p. 327)

"Antes del advenimiento del Teatro Campesino, el teatro político en los barrios estaba muy limitado, si es que existía. Un estudiante chicano, Tomás Ybarra Fausto realizó una serie de entrevistas a un señor que pertenecía a una compañía teatral hispanoparlante en gira a finales de la década de los años veinte. Esta compañía, llamada El Cuadro México-España, representaba la vida de un mexicano injustamente perseguido por un crimen que no había cometido. El inmigrante, Aurelio Pompa, intentaba organizar a los mexicanos y a los chicanos y debido a esto se convertía en uno de los primeros presos políticos. El cuadro representaba su historia, seguida de un llamamiento al público en busca de apoyo moral y financiero. La petición se hacía después de la representación, en un esfuerzo por salvar al señor Pompa de una ejecución segura. Desafortunadamente, el acusado halló la muerte a manos de la Injusticia, pero El Cuadro México-España se convirtió en uno de los primeros teatros políticos del siglo XX, predecesor del Teatro Campesino y de todos los grupos que siguieron a éste."

Less than a decade later the practice of fundraising for the defense and liberation of political prisoners was also taking place in the East Coast of the United States, among the Puerto Rican theatre troupes as evidenced by the two following accounts:

On May 1, 1936, *La Prensa* announced that the Campoamor stock company was going to participate in a benefit at the Star Casino Theatre to raise funds for Puerto Rican nationalist prisoners. The announcement was made openly and without commentary, despite the grave political nature of the event and [the situation] of the activists who were seeking independence from the United States. (Kanellos, p. 132)

In October, there were also two extraordinary functions: a performance of Luis Llorens Torres's *El Grito de Lares* to raise funds for Puerto Rican political prisoners, at which Gilberto Concepción de Gracia spoke in defense of Albizu Campos; and a benefit performance for Club Cubano Julio A. Mella, with thirty entertainers from all over the city. (Kanellos, p. 134)

¹⁸ Alejandrina Torres is a Puerto Rican *independentista* accused of seditious conspiracy, tried and sentenced to 35 years, who was one of the four women designated to serve time in Lexington Control Unit, a 100 foot long block with 16 cells, completely self-contained and classified as a high security unit (HSU). She is one of ten Puerto Rican political prisoners who were freed in September 1999.

by ourselves and not portraying actual prisoners, with the conditions and consequences of the treatment. The focus is allegorical and not didactic. The design is stark and evocative of the isolation and timelessness prevailing in HSU. ¹⁹

This essentially poetic work is offered to the public as an artistic proposal that suggests solutions, as it questions the existence of oppressive punishment mechanisms that violate the human rights of political prisoners.

With Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, Pregones predominantly employs moving images, to illustrate the deplorable living conditions of these prisoners, thus providing one of the most interesting aspects of the staging. ²⁰ First, the spoken language of the play is made up of a series of monologues that reveal important details about the lives of these individuals placed in isolation by the penal system. The monologues are structurally linked by songs that serve as transitions between scenes. On the other hand, the combined movements of the actors describe living conditions that all of them suffer, achieving through images what might be impossible to express with words. The use of images as well as words, coincides with Severino Joao Albuquerque's study of violence in Latin American theatre, a document that has been very useful in describing this work. ²¹ Regarding the use of the spoken word as a means to report about collective violence, Albuquerque asserts:

As a reporter of violence, experienced individually and collectively, a character reflects the brutal political climate that stifles parts of the continent. (p. 42) In such circumstances, each victim of violence assumes the status of a collective representative, while his or her stage persona produces in the addressee the emphasis necessary for a successful report of the violence experienced. In light of the extent of actual violence on the continent, it seems clear that the eliciting of a Latin American audience's sympathy will depend largely on a work's deft exploration of the sociopolitical context and correct application of the referential

¹⁹ Pregones Theatre, Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, playbill, 1989.

²⁰ D. J. R. Bruckner, "A Prison Experience in Movement and Music," The New York Times, Aug. 20, 1990, p. C14.

²¹ Severino Joao Albuquerque, Violent Acts: A Study of Contemporary Latin American Theatre (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

function of language. (p. 43)

In the case of Voices of Steel/Voces de acero the language of body movement provides the vocabulary for an effective exploration of the living circumstances faced by the prisoners. It is through the repetition of movement that we become aware of the movements that define and symbolize the deprivation of freedom and the high degree of commitment that accepting that life entails. Voices of Steel/Voces de acero is a cry against the cruel consequences of taking on such a responsibility through the portrayal of diverse levels of torture that coincide with its denunciation in the Latin American theatre:

Aware that "theatre does not need to confirm the existence of torture but rather understand it" (Neglia 1983, p. 101), and always in consonance with their political involvement, playwrights of the period have resorted to the eloquence of the theatre in order to express their repugnance toward such practices. Pointing to the fact that depictions of torture in contemporary theatre date back to Sartre's World War II plays, Alfonso Sastre establishes an important distinction between two dramatic approaches to the issue. While for an existentialist playwright "the torture that a group of combatants underwent served as a catalyst for an existential revelation about those characters, so that the denunciation was a by-product, of sorts, of the existential analysis," those contemporary Latin American playwrights who have included torture scenes in their works are practitioners of an intensely committed theatre, their plays intended not so much as a "revelation of the sensibility of the victim in an extreme situation, or as a mere psychological analysis of the victimizer" as "a denunciation of the system that originates those situations." (Sastre 1972, pp-7-8), (Albuquerque, pp. 174-175) ²²

With its denunciation *Pregones* portrays several of the levels of violence identified by Albuquerque: verbal violence, non-verbal violence, the representation of repression and resistance, and the representation of the unrepresentable.²³

²² The works quoted by Albuquerque are from: Emilia Neglia, "El tema de la tortura en el teatro hispánico," *N/S* 8, no. 16, 1983: pp. 91-102; and Alfonso Sastre, "Alentador despegue de la actual dramaturgia latinoamericana," *Conjunto* 13, 1972, pp. 5-9.

²³ Ibid. In addition, Albuquerque identifies the representation of the violent double, but that level of violence is not included in Voices of Steel/Voces de acero. Of the four levels of violence mentioned above, we wish to highlight the representation of non-verbal violence more so than the representation of verbal violence, although we are interested in examining several aspects of the latter, such as the one Albuquerque has called "bombardives." Other aspects of verbal violence will be examined later in the work El último rosario de Medea, where the poetic structure of the play emphasizes the verbal imagery over visual imagery.

Beyond the mere representation of violence, the ritualization of violence leads to the development of the scenic language in Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, which Nora Eidelberg discusses in her study of that theme:

The rituals are manifested in a repetitive and circular fashion, encompassing the entire piece, or segments of it, producing the illusion of stasis that also affects the temporary element. With these techniques an author exposes fixed and repressive social and political systems and proposes to the spectator the notion or need to break with those outdated systems.²⁴

This description applies to Voices of Steel/Voces de acero which depicts the ritualized representation of violence that can also be found in the following classic Latin American plays: El menú (The Menu) by Enrique Buenaventura, El señor Galíndez (Mr. Galíndez) by Eduardo Pavlovsky, and Night of the Assassins by José Triana. In Voices of Steel/Voces de acero there are two expressions of ritualized violence: the spoken, and gestured, which complements the spoken when it verifies or contradicts it.

The contradiction between gesture and oral text becomes clearer in the presence of the prison guards, for example, as seen in the following excerpt of the play:

Guard: You can sleep here. (a)
The bed is still fresh, (b)
If you are squeamish, (d)
rinse the tin spoon and it will be like new. (e)
Trust us. (f)²⁵

Each line of this speech is accompanied by a movement, identified with the lower case

²⁴Nora Eidelberg, "La ritualización de la violencia en cuatro obras teatrales hispanoamericanas," Latin American Theatre Review, Fall 1979, p. 29.

"Los rituales creados se manifiestan en forma repetitiva y/o circular, abarcando toda la pieza o segmentos de ella, produciendo una ilusión de estasis que afecta igualmente al elemento temporal. Con estas técnicas los autores exponen al espectador la noción o la necesidad de una ruptura con esos sistemas caducos."

²⁵Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, Collective creation by Pregones, 1992, p. 6 (Courtesy of Pregones Theatre) The lower case letters next to each line have been added by us to facilitate the explanation of the movement.

"Aquí puedes dormir.
La cama aún está fresca,
sólo la ocupó un hombre.
Si eres delicado,
enjuaga la cuchara de estaño y quedará como nueva.
Quédate confiado con nosotros."

letters, that is part of a choreography that repeats itself throughout the work in a ritualistic manner. As the guard "invites" ²⁶ the prisoner to enter his cell, his gestures are of an extreme non-verbal violence, with an over layer of subtle verbal violence: (a) the guard kicks the prisoner from his cell to center stage; (b) the guard stands before the prisoner, establishing physical superiority over him; (c) the guard stands over the prisoner with one foot on either side of him, while the prisoner remains lying on the floor; (d) the guard makes a move that lifts the prisoner as if pulled by the shirt at chest level; (e) the guard lets the prisoner go, dropping him to the floor; (f) the guard sends the prisoner to another cell, as a symbol of the sudden changes to which political prisoners are subjected. One interesting characteristic of this elaborate choreography is its quality of contained violence, characterized by the absence of true physical contact between prisoner and prison guard, despite the perfect correspondence and coordination between their movements.²⁷ This highlights the power that movement has to create violent images: "Among the many ways whereby body movement can express violence in a performance are signs that involve moving about onstage (kinesic signs), as well as signs originated by the mere posturing, positioning, or orientation of the actor's body in relation to other actors, the audience, stage props, and setting (proxemic signs)" (Albuquerque, p. 90).

There are several moments in the play in which movement is more powerful than the spoken word: the repeated walks that represent the moves from cell to cell, the physical and emotional violence, the visiting hours, the recreation times, the strip searches, the moments when the prisoners seek sexual privacy in their cells, and finally, the beatings. That many of these rituals take place without a word being spoken is testimony about a way of life where what is reported with speech is not necessarily representative of what is experienced with gesture or physical expression. Conversely, the most expressive spoken

²⁶ The term "invitation" was used by Pregones to designate the scenes in which the prisoners are accompanied by the guards to their cells as they receive a very mechanical speech introducing them to each new space.

²⁷ See Appendix 1, Fig. 9, p. 220 of this work.

moments are limited in movement due to the size restriction of the cells, an example of non-verbal violence based on the set (Albuquerque, pp. 115-117). The space on the set, designated for the cells, becomes a non-verbal violent gesturing of the kind of torture and punishment at maximum security prisons. Wilma, one of the play's characters, mocks the cell she is about to enter:

So this is the infamous control unit? Very impressive! You know, O'Connor, this cell is the same size as my apartment was. It's easy to clean and all the colors match: the floor is white, the walls are white, the ceiling is white_ How did they know that white is my favorite color? All white and no windows. I hate windows. You've done everything possible to please me. (*Voices of Steel/Voces de acero*, p. 12)²⁸

Wilma denounces that passive aspect of torture, endured by political prisoners in their living conditions, that effectively, without words, contributes to their demoralization and spiritual annihilation. Thus, throughout the play, the verbal and non-verbal subtext is constantly violent even in the moments of apparent calm.

As indicated previously, if we use Emmanuel Levinas's definition of violence, the repetition of rituals increases the degree of violence. "Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons, as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance; making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action."²⁹ To better understand these ritualistic and repetitive sequences, a description of the staging is necessary. Ironically, these sequences lead nowhere but to the reaffirmation of the commitment to political struggle. The only scenery on stage consists of five small ramps, representing cells in a maximum security prison.

²⁸"¿Así que esta es la famosa unidad de control? ¡Vaya, impresionante! ¿Sabes una cosa O'Connor? Esta celda es del mismo tamaño del apartamento que yo tenía. Fácil de limpiar y todos los colores pegan: blanco en el piso, blanco en las paredes, blanco en el techo...¿Cómo adivinaron que el blanco era mi color preferido? Todo blanco y sin ventanas. Yo odio las ventanas. Ustedes han hecho todo lo posible por complacerme."

²⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Alphonso Lingis trans. (Pittsburgh, Pa., Duquesne University Press, 1979), p. 21.

Masks hang over the cells, which the actors use at times, switching from portraying prisoners to portraying jailers.³⁰ On other occasions, the masks hang over the cells as representatives of the strict surveillance over the prisoners.³¹ Lighting is generally gloomy, and the cells and costumes are uniformly austere.³² The play opens with a scene that resembles a cabaret more than a prison cell. Perhaps it is entertainment for the prisoners. One of the actors sings a rhythmic *bolero* into a microphone under a spot light, accompanied by a group of musicians. The song, made popular by Puerto Rican singer Davilita, serves as a prologue and expresses the feelings of *independentistas* regarding Puerto Rico's political situation.

The bamboo has all the sadness contained in my homeland,
if you haven't noticed that, like you, it suffers in silence,
and has the same sadness as the noble Indian who long ago witnessed
how a tyrant stole his happiness from him and his Borikén.
From that moment on, there seems to have been a curse,
and the bamboo remains silent while it seeks our freedom...(Voices of

³⁰See Appendix 1, Fig. 8, p. 220 of this work.

³¹ To avoid using a large number of actors, all of the players portray guards and prisoners. This makes possible an interesting on-stage transformation, which despite creating a sense of complexity, should be looked at from the point of view of its real motivation—practicality—and not possessing any symbolic meaning. In no way does the actor's shift from victim (prisoner) to torturer (guard) represent both qualities in the characters of this piece. The masks symbolize a violent change of attitude among prisoners and prison guards. See Albuquerque, p. 84, regarding the use of masks to show violent changes in theatrical pieces.

³² The lighting in *Voices of Steel/Voces de acero* is in keeping with Albuquerque's definition: "Lighting is often used to circumscribe the areas on stage where intimidations (*Última instância*, pp. 52-53), interrogations (*A represa*, Kuhner 1980, p. 28), solitary confinement (*Milagre na cela*, p. 42), and torture take place." (Albuquerque, p. 106). Light is also employed as a form of violence in *Voices of Steel*, where the actors' movements allude to sensory deprivation through exposure to white light twenty four hours a day:

Voice: For you Evangelina, a room and one bed.
Angel: Why is the bed bolted to the floor?
Why are the windows painted on the outside?
Wilma: Ni el aire entra aquí.
Marta: La luz del sol no puede entrar.
(Looks around. Looks up to the bright neon lights)
Tan blanco todo. ¿Y ventanas? ¿No hay ventanas?
Voice: No windows, Evangelina, no windows. (*Voices of Steel/Voces de acero*, p. 4).

steel, p. 4)³³

The singer stops to say: "Men and women are in dark cells for shouting out loud. And so they put them in there." Then the entire stage is lit, breaking the illusion of the cabaret and showing the reality of the cells, with a prisoner in each one. At the same time, the whole ensemble sings a very fast, urgent paced *bomba* that moves like a hurricane:

Riding through the land
lashing the sea,
that devil wanted
to take over my home (3x)

With this introduction, of an intertextual nature, Pregones highlights the strength of popular music as a vehicle for social and political commentary.³⁴

The work then recounts the stories of five Puerto Rican Nationalist prisoners. The play begins by presenting the prisoners, portrayed by the actors with prison guard masks, followed by monologues in which each actor narrates an aspect of the character's involvement with the independence movement or with life in jail. Although the names are fictitious, the descriptions of the Nationalists, their sentences and histories, are based on the lives of real prisoners. This is another example of what Fernando de Toro calls a "fictionalized historical intertext" (Toro, Theatre Semiotics, p. 38). In this way, a picture is drawn that does not pretend to document the story of any specific political prisoner, but rather the cumulative experiences of all the political prisoners.

The duality, individual/collective, is established from the beginning of the play, where the individual appears to lose his/her identity behind the uniformity of costume,

³³"Toda la tristeza que hay allá en mi tierra la tiene el bambú,
y si no has notado que sufre en silencio lo mismo que tú,
que en él hay la pena de aquel indio noble que en tiempos de ayer
vio cómo un tirano le robó su dicha y su Borikén.
Desde aquel momento parece que ha sido una maldición
y sigue en silencio mientras tanto busca nuestra redención..."

³⁴ See the documentary by Pedro Rivera and Susan Zweig, Plena is Work, Plena is Song, New York, 1982.

incarcerating space and rituals, while each monologue is a personal reaffirmation of the commitment to the collective struggle for Puerto Rican independence. The characters appear as a collective, yet are presented individually:

VOICES OF THE GUARDS

Angel Figueroa, 30 years old, painter, charged with illegal possession of weapons.
Marta Ortiz, 37 years old, mother of three children, charged with illegal possession of weapons.

Samuel Ortiz, 50 years old, Marta's husband, charged with seditious conspiracy.

Wilma Acevedo, 27 years old, photographer, charged with illegal possession of explosives.

Evangeline Robles, 46 years old, working mother, charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government of the United States. (Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, pp. 9-11)

This choreography is meticulously staged. Using it as a point of departure, the characters' stories begin to unfold. The play continues as the prisoners' monologues alternate with scenes or fragments of scenes that show the previously mentioned jail rituals or flashbacks, illustrating a significant aspect of these people's lives before incarceration. For example, there is a flashback in which Evangelina remembers her school farewell in Puerto Rico, and the transition to living in the United States, where she suffered discrimination that awakened her commitment to independence (Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, pp. 9-11). Another example appears in the reconstruction of dream-like images of the meeting, engagement and wedding of Marta and Samuel Ortiz, who according to the mimed storytelling, were separated just after their wedding ceremony was interrupted by a raid (Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, p. 14).

Each of the stories tells of the abuses suffered by the political prisoners.³⁵ Among the abuses denounced in the work are: the transfer of prisoners from one cell to another or

³⁵ Regarding the abusive treatment of Puerto Rican political prisoners, see Nina Rosenbaum's documentary Through the Wire, Daedalus Productions, 1990. It explores the living conditions and sentencing of Alejandrina Torres, the political prisoner who received a 35-year sentence for "seditious conspiracy." According to the film, this doubles any sentence given in most states for violent crimes or murder. Also see the documentary about the female political prisoners, Cada guaraguao tiene su pitirre, directed by Alejandro Molina in 1992, and produced by Centro Juan Antonio Corretjer and the National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War.

one prison facility to another without warning (pp. 4, 6, 7, 22); physical torture carried out in cells that are kept brightly lit twenty four hours and are painted completely white (pp. 8, 12, 20); the impossibility of physical contact with visitors or of communication among the prisoners themselves or with their families (pp. 15, 19, 20); the continuous strip searches (pp. 14, 22); the visits for the purpose of sexual abuse by the prison guards (pp. 15, 19); denial of prescribed medications or sanitary conditions (pp. 13, 17); and continuous surveillance through cameras in the cells (pp. 8, 14).

The stress that the struggle for survival produces in the individual in an environment that equates the political prisoner with the common criminal, turns the prisoners' tolerance of their conditions into rebellion, as a defense mechanism that strengthens resistance. This is a very important premise of the Puerto Rican independence movement. After refusing to be searched yet again, the prisoners show their scorn. The guards then attack them physically in an effort to demoralize them and weaken their militancy. Ironically, the prisoners physically rise from the humiliation, alive and defiant, confirming the premise that: "body posturing and position are used in order to express group cohesion and power" (Albuquerque, p. 91). When Evangelina, who later dies of a long term illness made worse by a beating, does not respond with the same physical strength as her comrades, she joins the display of strength by singing a tune of hope and premonitory warning, which confirms that in this type of work, "for the most part, songs are used to recall past struggles or to suggest future rebellion" (Albuquerque, p. 115).

They will not make me give in
 They will not make me give in
 I have faith that God
 I have faith that God
 will not forsake me
 I believe in my people
 I believe in my people
 They will not abandon me
 They will not abandon me. (*Voices of Steel/Voces de acero*, p. 24)³⁶

³⁶"No me van a doblegar
 no me van a doblegar
 tengo fe en ese Dios mío
 tengo fe en ese Dios mío

In recognizing this patriot who has struggled until her death, the rest of the prisoners reaffirm their commitment to the cause, thus demonstrating their will to resist and the seriousness of their political commitment:

Marta: They will not make me cry. I swear!, Evangelina. Not a tear.
 Samuel: Live and fight, Samuel, live and fight.
 Angel: For art, for life, for liberty.
 Wilma: I will always hear with joy the cry for freedom from my comrades.
 (Voices of Steel/Voces de acero p. 25)³⁷

Similar to Migrants!, which is open ended in its resolution, no concrete solution is offered to the complex problems of the Puerto Rican prisoners. Nevertheless, the message of the continuing struggle for Puerto Rican independence, and the strength of the commitment to that cause, are etched in the audience's mind. To the same degree, the humanist focus of the work is also embedded in the audience's memory, regardless of their individual political beliefs:

The famous old poem notwithstanding, iron bars do a prison make, and one comes away from Voices of Steel/Voces de acero wondering whether there might not be some other way for humanity to express its disapproval of unlicensed conduct. Whatever the intentions of the company, the piece speaks to the human condition, not merely a political situation. And that is what makes it worthwhile. (D. J. Bruckner, 1990, p. C14)

Unfortunately, the violence denounced in Voices of Steel/Voces de acero is reflected in other aspects of Puerto Rican daily life, in the breakdown of the family and in the roles played by the mass communication media, religion, and politics in that breakdown. These

que no me abandonará.
 Tengo fe en el pueblo mío.
 Tengo fe en el pueblo mío
 que no me abandonará."

³⁷"Marta: No me sacarán ni una lágrima. Te lo juro, Evangelina, ni una lágrima.
 Samuel: Vive y lucha, Samuel, vive y lucha.
 Angel: Por el arte, por la vida, por la libertad.
 Wilma: Oiré siempre con júbilo el grito que lanzaron mis compañeros."

will be the focus of Pregones' next production, Medea's Last Rosary.

Medea's Last Rosary

Medea's Last Rosary further explores the theme of violence, as manifested in a crime of passion that reflects a corrupt society. The play, which won the ACE (Asociación de Cronistas del Espectáculo) Award for 1994, is an adaptation by José Manuel Torres Santiago of Euripides' play Medea. Although it was staged through collective experimentation, the production process differed from previous ones. It was the first time that the company faced the challenge of working with an already written play. Pregones had previously collaborated with several playwrights, as in the case of Eduardo Gallardo in Areyto de pescadores and Dolores Prida in High Noon. In the production of those texts, the company participated in the writing process, as prescribed by its parameters for collective creation. Medea was a new undertaking because the troupe had to adapt the work to the company's own style. Therefore the text underwent many changes during experimental rehearsals and discussions before the actual public presentation. The final product integrated all of the theatrical elements that distinguish Pregones's plays: music, images, and of course, intertextuality, derived this time from the revision of a Greek classic and applied to a current Puerto Rican situation. ³⁸

The story takes place at a public presentation by Medea, an actress of renown who decides to murder her husband, a popular television producer, because he has left her for a younger woman. ³⁹ To achieve greater impact with the staging, director Alvan Colón-

³⁸ The use of intertextuality through the adaptation or loose version of other texts is common practice in Latin American Theatre. In her study of the works of Enrique Buenaventura, Beatriz Rizk writes about "a look at our own present through the experiences of other peoples." She observes the use of intertextuality through the use of: translations, adaptations and variations on a theme as another way to exercise the author's craft (Rizk, 1991, pp 118-136). Rizk analyzes the adaptation and "nationalization" of works such as Shakespeare's Macbeth, by Ramón del Valle Inclán's Tirano banderas, Los inocentes, an adaptation of Emmanuel Robles' play titled Montserrat, and Luis Valdés' Las dos caras del patrón. The Greek Medea is a favorite play used for adaptation in Latin American dramatic literature. Other adaptations include: José Triana's Medea en el espacio (1960) and El palacio personal de Medea Camuñas by Pedro Santaliz.

³⁹ The plot is based on the true story of Puerto Rican actress, Lydia Echevarría, and her murdered husband, television producer Luis Vigoreaux. The case shook Puerto Rico, where she served 13 years and

Lespier sets the story against the backdrop of the traditional rosaries sung in May during the Festival of the Cross (Fiestas de Cruz) as it takes place in a town square in Puerto Rico.⁴⁰ Through this setting the company removes the original classic flavor, creating a distance, and establishing a link to its audience's popular culture, coinciding with Diana Taylor's proposition that "Much twentieth century theatre, from Artaud to Grotowski to Beck, to the Bread and Puppet group to Barba, attempts to expand its power to transform social and individual consciousness by becoming more ritualistic" (Taylor, 1990, p. 227). According to Colón-Lespier, this was one of the most important achievements of the staging. The audience's reaction, therefore, is not surprising: "During its first public appearances the cast and the author were surprised when at some performances the public sang along with the People's chorus as Medea went through the most anguishing moments on stage".⁴¹

Once again the company explores the duality, individual/collective, and the influence of politics and social processes on decisions made as a people. Setting the development of the plot in a public square in Puerto Rico erases the individual space and propitiates the judgment of the effects that our actions have on our society and vice versa, as told by Torres Santiago in his analysis of the protagonist:

Medea is the tragedy of a woman portrayed through the tragedy of a people, portrayed through the tragedy of a woman; and in the interaction between the woman and the people, the tragedy of the peoples of Latin America. But this is not a political play as presented in discursive literature. It is political in the corruption, deviation and degradation that are a part of everyone in a society and state that are corrupt.. . .

eight months of a life sentence as the mastermind behind the killing. She was released in February 2000.

⁴⁰ For the only in depth study of the Festival of the Cross (Fiestas de Cruz), see Norma Valle, *Fiestas de Cruz: tradición y devoción en la comunidad puertorriqueña* (San Juan, Puerto Rico, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1985). Also, José Artemio Torres's film, *Fiestas de Cruz en Puerto Rico* [16 mm], Puerto Rico. Available at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies library, Hunter College, New York).

⁴¹ "En su primera representación resultó una sorpresa para el elenco y el autor que el público, en algunas funciones, se pusiera a cantar con el coro del Pueblo que en el escenario entonaba los cantos de la Fiesta de Cruz en medio de las pasiones más angustiosas que en escena vivía Medea." José Manuel Torres Santiago, "Una Medea puertorriqueña en Nueva York," *Claridad*, Jan. 29-Feb. 4, 1993, *En Rojo*, p. 26.

Medea is guilt and innocence, light and shadow, the tormented being that invents liberation by taking justice into her own hands. She is a combination of freedom and death. She is contradiction, but contradiction as manifested in the most critical parts of our people's historical submissiveness by the forces of feudal slavery and the traumas of modern day domination. She represents the disturbance of the Latin American spirit as it faces the disaster of its life disgraced and degraded by foreign powers. (Torres Santiago, 1993, p. 26)⁴²

Within the plot, the murder of a well-liked public figure becomes an effrontery that threatens to destroy the social order. Throughout the play, Medea seeks to explain her actions as a heroic demonstration of what the free-thinking individual can do to oppose the collective Puerto Rican being whom she describes as having colonial mentality. The People, instead of the Greek chorus, seek a sacrificial lamb to rid themselves of all the personal, colonial and political problems that afflict the Puerto Rican people. As in Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, Medea's Last Rosary falls within the scheme of the two forms of violence identified by Taylor as crisis and oppression:

The paradigm of crisis, as I have noted, includes the initial subjective-objective collapse that provokes disorder and undifferentiation, followed by the implementation of the strictest order, the differentiation and exclusion of a group into a grotesque other, and the persecution and scapegoating of the marginalized group or individual. The paradigm of oppression includes the deforming, though often less overt violence that casts the victim as grotesque other in the repressive self/other binary. In connection with these two major paradigms, we see numerous secondary manifestations: revolutionary violence (response to oppression), institutionalized violence (criminal governments, torture and terrorism associated with both oppression and crisis), behavioral disorders and seemingly gratuitous acts of cruelty (again, related to both crisis and oppression). (Taylor, pp. 61-62)

In Medea's case, the murder of her husband is a mechanism that triggers social chaos. The

⁴²"Medea es la tragedia de una mujer a través de la encarnación de la tragedia de un pueblo a través de la encarnación de la tragedia de una mujer; y en la interacción de la mujer y el pueblo, la tragedia de los pueblos de América Latina. Pero no se trata de un drama político en el sentido que se expone en la literatura discursiva sino en la parte de corrupción, desviación y degradación que cada quien tiene en una sociedad y un estado corruptos.. . . Medea es la culpa y es la inocencia. Es luz y sombra. Es el ser atormentado que por la justicia de sus manos inventa un liberación. Es un complejo de libertad y muerte. Representa el espíritu de la contradicción. Pero la contradicción según se manifiesta en las zonas más críticas del ser de nuestros pueblos sometidos históricamente por las fuerzas de la esclavitud feudal y los traumas de la dominación moderna. Es la perturbación del espíritu latinoamericano ante la hecatombe de su vida desgraciada y degradada por los poderes ajenos."

people satisfy their need for sacrifice and thirst for violence through sensationalist escapism and the idolatry of a popular television personality, in contrast with the contempt they feel for Medea. The colonial situation of Puerto Rico and the state of demoralization that this entails are the central themes of this work. Excessive passion, as in the Greek tragedy, leads to the disintegration of individuals, family, and eventually society, always ready to point to and punish other people's evil doings, unaware of their own failures as both individuals and part of the collective.

The play's music serves as structural framework and is based on the traditional rosaries sung during the Festival of the Cross in Puerto Rico.⁴³ Another success provided by the play's musical environment, is the importance of religious symbols within a society where there are contradictions between deep-rooted religious beliefs on the one hand, and disintegration brought about by gossip, alcohol, partying and disconnection from the political processes, on the other. The characters who represent the people are staunch defenders of the altar that is at the center of the stage. But once they are at a certain physical distance from it, they behave in an "unchristian" manner, becoming the first to cast an accusatory stone at the protagonist. For example, we see this change in behavior when the chorus members who represent the People try to prevent Medea from approaching the altar, a gesture of non-verbal violence: "It can also occur that a character positions him or herself in another character's way, thus performing an act of violence by impeding the other person's movement" (Albuquerque, p. 93). All the religious piety disappears before a reality where the moral values that supposedly sustain Christian faith are reduced to violence.

As in the other two plays discussed in this chapter, the image plays an important role in the staging of Medea's Last Rosary. The visual, as the result of the word turned

⁴³ The text written by José Manuel Torres Santiago was not conceived as a musical. The play was transformed by the decision to set it within the context of the sung rosaries employed in the Festival of the Cross, and the public liked it immensely as it was accustomed to the real celebration held at the same space where the play was staged in Saint Ann's Church in the Bronx.

gesture, becomes vitally important. For example, the sequences that were not in the original text, but were added by the company, clarify their vision of the play. In this manner, the choreography of the additional sequences functions with the music to become an important element within the theatrical ritual. Among the images added by the company, the mime sequence, describing the planning and execution of the murder of Medea's husband, is outstanding. It is illustrative of the "physical aggression" category, as the account of the murder comes alive in the recreation of a violent death (Albuquerque, p. 97). Albuquerque states: "The reporting of a violent event is also effectively accomplished when a dead character relives the violence that led to death" (p. 45). The sequence is presented as a hallucinatory flashback experienced by the protagonist. As in this visual narration, the use of frozen images of short duration throughout the play helps create a collection of pictures of a typical town square. This provides visual enrichment for the work and critical commentary about a society where crimes of passion frequently tarnish the more positive images embedded in folklore and traditions. The contrast between the still images of the people-chorus and the hectic movements of the main character remind us in turn that despite the collective stagnation, the individual continues to develop. Another quality of movement in the piece is the constant relationship of action and reaction that exists between Medea and the People. This relationship is not only verbal, but also physico-mechanical, and aids in the play's escalation of tension up to the tragic end.⁴⁴

Within the non-verbal violent discourse in Medea, we note other aspects studied by Albuquerque that enrich the visual value of the work and that fall into the category of theatrical image: 1. The use of wardrobe for violent purposes (Albuquerque, p. 83). The sequence of the telling of the plan and execution of the murder of *el Amado* (the Beloved), Medea's husband, done with choreography (p.10).⁴⁵ In the sequence, symbolically more

⁴⁴See Appendix 1, Fig. 10, p. 221 of this work.

⁴⁵ This sequence was created by Pregones and is not part of the text used in the production. However its placement within the spectacle informs us that it is inserted into page 10 of the text.

than literally, the murder of the character is played out by taking away his clean jacket and instead, putting a bloody one on him. 2. We also see what Albuquerque describes as violent movement of characters that injure other characters by merely advancing toward their victims (Albuquerque, p.93; Medea, pp. 14-15, 36, 69-70), or surrounding them (Albuquerque, p. 93, Medea, pp. 1, 31). 3. Physical aggression is another example of non-verbal violence (Albuquerque, p. 95), when the People injure the protagonist with cans and bottles (pp. 30, 37), and when they finally grab her in one of her hallucinations (p. 33). 4. Lastly, the use of props as murder weapons, which Albuquerque calls "signs at second degree" (p. 99). In defining this concept, Albuquerque adopts the description by Tadeusz Kowzan in the essay "The Sign in the Theatre," where "signs at second degree" are those that "can obtain semiological value at the higher degree." ⁴⁶ An example of this that can be seen in the play is the employment of a flower as Medea's suicide weapon. She cuts her throat with a rose that the Beloved's ghost gives her at the dramatic end of the play (p. 70).

Although this play shares the use of images and non-verbal violence with Migrants! and Voices of Steel/Voces de acero, Medea's Last Rosary differs from them in that it exhibits a higher degree of verbal violence, equal to and occasionally greater than the non-verbal violence. Perhaps the reason for emphasizing verbal expression derives from the author's intention that "the spectacle must not take the place of the dramatic text. It [the spectacle] must come from the text in such a way that the text is not subordinate to the spectacle" (Torres Santiago, 1993, p. 26). To insure the supremacy of the text over the other elements in the staging, the writer provided instructions for the actors as follows:

The movement is demonstrated through the acting and the acting comes from the faithfulness with which the actors maintain textuality. Textuality is portraying the drama as the writer conceived it. It is loyalty to the work of art. It is the play which makes the actor and not the reverse, as those who know nothing about the dialectics of a work of art may think.

⁴⁶ Tadeusz Kowzan, "The Sign in the Theatre," Simon Pleasance trans. Diogenes, 1968, No. 61: 52-80.

This play aspires to contradict some reigning trends which make the theatre a spectacle that desecrates the author's artistic concept. It aspires to return to the concept of theatre as literature: as dramatic poetry. (Torres Santiago, 1993, p. 26)⁴⁷

Given the above quote, it is not by chance that the text of Medea relies more on the verbal expression of the actors than on instructions for movement on stage, or stage directions.⁴⁸ Even so, the spoken language used in the play is symptomatic of a disorderly world, in the same manner that non-verbal language was used in Voices of Steel/Voces de acero.

Albuquerque's study of violence in Latin American theatre is very helpful in the analysis of oral expression in Medea's Last Rosary. He states: "If verbal language, on the one hand, by allowing us to assign names to people and things (and at the same time to understand the relationships that exist among them) facilitates the imposition of order in our

⁴⁷"El movimiento se demuestra actuando y la actuación emerge de la fidelidad con que actrices y actores mantengan la textualidad. La textualidad es representar el drama según lo concibió el creador. Es mantener lealtad a la obra de arte. Es el drama quien hace al actor o a la actriz y no a la inversa como consideran quienes desconocen la dialéctica de la obra de arte.

Se aspira en esta obra cotradecir algunas corrientes imperantes donde el teatro es sólo espectáculo que descrea el concepto artístico del autor. Es volver ciertamente a la corriente que fue y es en esencia el teatro como género literario: poesía dramática."

⁴⁸ As shown by the staging of *Pregones*, Torres Santiago's proposal is limiting. Parallel to the text written by the author, there is another text which teaches about the representation, which is necessary to include in the analysis of the work. The importance of distinguishing between the written text and the representational text is widely discussed by Enrique Buenaventura, who states:

The written text is one of the idioms of theatre, but it is neither, as some within a specific tradition may think, the fundamental language and much less the one that gives sense to the others. The tradition I am referring to does not go beyond the nineteenth century. During that century the battle was fought about the supremacy of the language of the written text over the other theatre languages. ("Teatro y literatura," conference given at Cornell University, April 1987, quoted in Rizk, 1991, p. 125)

"El texto literario es uno de los lenguajes del teatro pero no es, como suele creerse dentro de una cierta tradición, ni el lenguaje fundamental, ni mucho menos el que otorga sentido a los otros. La tradición a la que me refiero no se remonta más allá del siglo XIX. Fue en este siglo cuando se dio la pelea sobre la supremacía del texto literario sobre otros lenguajes en teatro."

Buenaventura adds:

The *mise en scène* is neither a representation, translation, or materialization in images, of a written text through actors. The *mise en scène* produces signifiers, and it is in itself a verbal/non-verbal text that establishes a dynamic-dialectical relation with the written text. ("El Nuevo Teatro," Publicaciones del CEDRA (1988): p.2.)

"La puesta en escena no es una representación, ni una traducción, ni una "materialización" en imágenes, a través de actores, de un texto escrito. La puesta en escena produce significación, es en ella misma un texto verbal y no verbal, que establece una relación dinámica y dialéctica con el texto escrito."

world, on the other hand, it expresses the collapse of order at the personal or social level" (Albuquerque, p. 30). In an effort to express the breakdown of moral order in Puerto Rican society, Torres Santiago employs language that exemplifies several characteristics of verbal violence that Albuquerque defines as: "abusives," "provocatives," and "reportives," and the use of violent descriptions in the "side text," a term Albuquerque uses for stage instructions.

Albuquerque defines as "abusives" all verbal expressions derived from an offensive vocabulary or profanity (Albuquerque, pp. 31-37). Within the context of Medea's Last Rosary, the exchange of this kind of verbal violence manifests in two ways: accompanied by the threat of physical violence, as at the end of the first act where the people lunge at Medea at the same time that they insult her (Medea, p. 37); or through vocabulary that indicates a greater degree of sophistication, as in the use of verbal violence (Albuquerque, p. 35). Similar to the poetic quality of the text written by Torres Santiago, Medea displays intentionality in her choice of insults against masses:

Medea: Imbeciles and silly people.
 Useless.
 Parasites.
 Spongers.
 People who have no self respect. (Medea, p. 35)⁴⁹

But with the same intention she utters somewhat more refined insults:

Medea: The powerful are stupid men.
 They are stupid and they carry out the laws.
 Then, you all came in packs,
 angry mongrels, hungry mastiffs,
 voracious wolves, predatory hyenas,
 bloodthirsty jackals. (Medea, p. 36)⁵⁰

⁴⁹"Imbéciles y tontos.
 Inútiles.
 Parásitos.
 Vividores.
 Gente que no se respeta."

⁵⁰"Estúpidos señores los del poder.
 Estúpidos ejecutores de la ley.

She also speaks with vulgarity touched by sophistication:

Medea: Sad is the life of the unschooled.
 They go by unnoticed.
 They leave no tracks in their paths.
 Only feces,
 filth,
 pestilence.
 Things that time will erase. (Medea, p. 44)⁵¹

In her use of offensive language, Medea attempts to demean the people, who from her sense of superiority, she thinks she has risen above. In spite of her efforts to refine her language, the protagonist is aware that with these insults she is violating the order established by her role as a public figure. By employing offensive words Medea speaks to a people who are hungry for justice and who no longer listen to the one who was once their adored television leading lady.

As soon as the protagonist appears in the public square to participate in the religious ritual about to take place, a distance between the people and Medea is created, that will be broken by verbal provocation, "provocatives," the use of offending language with the purpose of humiliating or inciting the opponent to anger (Albuquerque, p. 38). Provocations have an important place within the drama's development. They appear in the non-verbal language of the play when the protagonist is physically threatened or cornered, as well as in the verbal discourse where the "provocatives" are the main communication style between the people and Medea. Thus we see that when the people provoke the

Entonces vinieron ustedes en jauría
 satos furiosos, mastines hambrientos,
 lobos voraces, hienas depredadoras."

⁵¹"Triste es la vida de los brutos.
 Pasan sin pasar.
 No dejan huella en los caminos.
 Sólo excrementos,
 suciedad,
 peste.
 Cosas que el tiempo borra."

protagonist's anger with their comments about her daughter's possible complicity in the murder, Medea's reaction is violent.

Medea: (enraged)
 I will never fear.
 No one has the right to condemn her or me
 with useless anger.
 They're all alcoholics and drug addicts.
 They're all parasites and servile.
 They have no principles, they love oppression,
 they grovel like slaves,
 they surrender for a few pieces of silver,
 they sell themselves to foreigners
 and to any pimp who sets foot on this land.
 No, I will not give in.
 I will not go on my knees
 nor go to jail. (The people jeer)
 . . .

Consequently, the people are provoked to respond by turning their fury into physical violence:

People: ¡Evil woman!
 Your soul is poisoned.
 You moralize and preach
 but your hands are stained with blood.
 You are arrogant.
 You think you're a heroine.
 You think that you have just done a heroic deed.
 But you are alone.
 You have no stage.
 You have no following.
 You are friendless.
 All you have left are the blood stains.
 You are covered with blood. . .

(Someone throws a stone and hits Medea above the right eyebrow. Writhing in pain, she covers it with her hands. Then, she stands and looks at the blood on her hands). (Medea, pp. 24-26)⁵²

⁵²"Jamás el miedo arribará a mis plantas.
 Ningún pueblo tiene derecho a condenarla ni condenarme
 con iras inútiles.
 Pueblo de alcohólicos y drogadictos.
 Pueblo de parásitos y sometidos.
 Pueblo sin principios, amante de la opresión,
 adulator de cadenas,
 entregado por míseras monedas,
 vendido a los extranjeros
 y a cuanto chulo asoma sus
 pies por estas tierras.
 No, no me dejaré vencer.
 No doblaré mis rodillas
 ni pisaré la cárcel. (El pueblo abuchea)

Demonstrations like this, in conjunction with non-verbal violence, establish the tension between the people and the protagonist, who alternately adopt the roles of judge and accused.

"Reportives," another manifestation of verbal violence that shares credit with the provocative speeches in the play, on occasion reveal details about the protagonist's life. Such is the case of the old women, who represent the marginals of society, and are "the habitual revealers of personal and sensationalistic stories, the rumor mongers, accusers, counsels and judges in the courts of the soul" (Torres Santiago, 1993, p. 26). They are the ones who delve into Medea's past while recounting her frustrations, acts of cruelty, and evil deeds with a humorous tone ranging from judgmental to scornful to gossipy (Medea, pp.4-10). While this initial recounting by the old women presents a sensationalist and distorted image of the protagonist, the report that Medea herself renders tells us of her triumphs, violent motives, concerns, and frustrations (Medea, pp. 45-56).

But the most effective "reportive" is Medea's admission of guilt as she tells of the horrible crime, confirming that "this instance of verbal violence is often more forceful than actual scenes of physical violence both in print and on stage" (Albuquerque, p. 42). Attempting to free herself from suffering and the people's persecution, Medea justifies her crime and recounts the details of the murder of her beloved:

. . .
 ¡Perversa mujer!
 Tienes el alma envenenada.
 Moralizas y moralizas
 pero en tus manos hay lodo y sangre.
 Eres arrogante.
 Crees que eres una heroína.
 Crees que has vuelto de una gesta.
 Pero estás sola.
 No tienes escenario.
 No tienes público.
 No tienes migos.
 Sólo posees la sangre.
 Estás vestida de sangre. . ."

Medea:

These are my hands.
 They are no longer mine.
 With them I embraced the assassins,
 I caressed their tense necks.
 They were blinded with lust.
 I seduced them, I made them surrender to my will.
 They gave in like loyal bloodhounds. . . (Medea, pp. 61-62)⁵³

Further along, feeling triumphant and free of fear, the protagonist faces a tragic end as she confesses:

Medea:

I am not afraid.
 I came to die
 and crossed the threshold of death.
 I held death in my hands,
 and laughed with happiness,
 and laughed from sweet revenge,
 and laughed from satisfied hate,
 and laughed to see him humiliated,
 and laughed while stained with his blood
 and laughed at rotten justice
 at rotten life,
 at my soul, rotten with disgust,
 and all the desperation
 and my perversity
 turned into a shadow
 lost forever,
 stark, shadowy wild thing,
 dead and desolate
 Dead! (Medea, pp. 69-70)⁵⁴

⁵³"Aquí están mis manos.
 Ya no son mis manos.
 Con ellas abracé a los asesinos,
 los acaricié en sus cuellos tensos.
 Estaban ciegos de lujuria.
 Los seduje, los sometí a mi voluntad.
 Se me entregaron como sabuesos
 fieles. . ."

⁵⁴"Nada temo.
 Llegué a la muerte
 y crucé la muerte.
 La tuve en mis manos.
 y reí de felicidad
 y reí de la venganza hermosa
 y reí del odio satisfecho
 y reí de verle humillado
 y reí cuando me bañé con su sangre
 y reí de la justicia podrida
 de la vida podrida
 del alma podrida

Not only does the protagonist state her acceptance of the crime committed, but also weaves with her own words the strands that lead to her destiny as she cuts her throat with a rose.

Finally we note the "side text" (didascalia) that the author includes in the work as an example of violent speech (Albuquerque, p. 67). We have only two examples of violence of this kind in Medea. The first involves two instances of throwing stones at the protagonist (Medea, pp. 26 and 37). The other example is the author's instruction as to the tone that the protagonist should assume in a speech: "Suddenly, she becomes violent." (Medea, p. 47). The rest of the violent scenes are not indicated in the "side text," but in the director's choice of stage directions.

As observed in the previous examples, behind each violent element, verbal or not, there is a clear premise: corrupt political conditions lead to corruption socially, personally and familiarly. This is the final message from the protagonist:

Medea: Yes, there is something rotten in this land.
We have let her down.
With our silence, we have abandoned her.
We have let foreigners take her without resistance.
One day we will discover
that we, too, are foreigners
and it will be as if the masks we wear
rule us. (Medea, p. 63)⁵⁵

Thus, the proposition is proven that "what began as a simple personal trial will, in the end,

de todo el asco
y toda la desesperación
y mi perversidad
vuelta ya una sombra
perdida para siempre
cruda fiera de sombra
muerta y desolada
¡Muerta!"

⁵⁵"Sí, hay algo podrido en esta tierra.
La hemos dejado caer.
La hemos abandonado al silencio.
La hemos abandonado a los extraños y no resistimos.
Entonces un día descubrimos
que nosotros también somos extraños
y es como si las máscaras
que nos pusimos nos gobernarán."

become a direct allegory about the social conditions of a community."⁵⁶

Different from the other two works where Puerto Rican individual and collective survival are the basis for a message of resistance and hope, Medea's Last Rosary, despite its pessimistic tone, does not leave us with the same feeling. Medea saves her individuality through suicide. The collective is annihilated by the destruction of the social order brought about by Medea's act of murder, and is tainted by the responsibility for the suicide of a woman who was judged by the people, although deprived of a fair trial. Therefore, Medea's sin in taking justice into her own hands is imitated by the people, heralding society's downward spiral. Although this play's end is not as open as the others, the possibility of a worsened chaotic state is left unresolved as Medea confesses before her people and reveals the monsters within her soul.

As we have observed, Pregones's artistic work has a describable and definable aesthetic. With the analysis of these three pieces, reflective of a greater degree of artistic maturity, we have pinpointed elements present in all of the company's productions: the use of referent present history and literary history for intertextuality; codes of popular imagery and of the visual image as a language particular to the company, as well as the use of music. Since Medea's Last Rosary, the company's new plays have explored different aspects of this aesthetic, demonstrating the consistent development of a particular ideology which has up to now ensured the company's longevity. For twenty one years Pregones has served as an artistic and social conscience for its community, creating an increasingly sophisticated body of work which has been embraced by new companies, critics and the public alike.

⁵⁶ "Lo que comenzó como un mero juicio personal se convertirá, finalmente, en una alegoría directa sobre la propia condición social de una comunidad." Alberto Minero, "Medea se muda a Puerto Rico," El Diario-La Prensa, 15 de feb., 1991.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The intention of this investigation was to document the formation and history of the development of the theatre troupe known as Teatro Pregones, as a promoter of social change in the South Bronx. Although defined as a company that does political theatre, and despite the constant attention it gives to the Puerto Rican political situation in its works, it is evident that the artistic intention of Teatro Pregones is not to deliver political propaganda, but rather to preserve and promote the cultural values and development of the Puerto Rican and other Latino communities on the east coast of the United States. Their work evolves from the Puerto Rican experience on the island as well as on the mainland, and includes the experiences of other Latin American brothers and sisters who have contributed to changing the composition of the Latino population that inhabits the South Bronx in New York, and the rest of the United States. While incorporating both Puerto Ricanness and Latinness, Pregones has contributed to the development of theatre that is idiosyncratically Latin American in the way it creates, produces and executes its work, carving a niche for itself within the theatrical world in the United States.

One of the most important themes examined in this study is the need to recognize the continuity that exists among Puerto Rican theatre groups that preceded Pregones in Puerto Rico and the United States. Pregones is not an isolated Puerto Rican theatre company, but a logical consequence of an endeavor that has been consistent and in keeping with a historical process. In tracing the history of the groups that emerged as part of the political theatre movement that took place world wide in the latter part of the 1960's and beginning of the seventies, we have identified common goals between Pregones and groups such as El Tajo del Alacrán, Anamú, El Nuevo Teatro Pobre de América, Teatro del 60, The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Teatro de Orilla, Teatro Cuatro, and many other groups that set out to educate the communities of Puerto Ricans from their political, cultural and theatrical vantage point, about personal, social and political problems. In spite of the

shared commitment to encourage the awakening of Puerto Rican social conscience, the lack of communication and organization, internal and between groups, contributed to the disappearance of some of these groups, and the interruption of a process that should have been continuous. This apparent lack of continuity, together with the specific struggle that each troupe confronted, vis à vis its social and political environment, led Rosalina Perales to identify many of these theatre companies under the rubric of "theatre of friction."¹ The dearth of historical documentation about these groups is also a serious detriment to the establishment of necessary patterns of continuity. Fortunately, new generations of Puerto Rican theatre practitioners and scholars have been assuming the task of compiling documents and initiating studies to shed light on this little-known generation.²

Pregones, like the other companies mentioned, not only has the commitment to entertain, preserve, and educate the community, but also to offer artistic productions that potentially will encourage the development of political activism in its audience. Given the political situation that greatly influences Puerto Rican theatrical production, it is impossible to study the artistic contribution of Teatro Pregones without recognizing that their work is born from the colonial experience, as pointed out by Roberto Ramos Perea.³ Thus we see that in many instances the unresolved political situation between Puerto Rico and the United States, in addition to a predilection for a Latin American theatrical aesthetic, rather than the

¹Rosalina Perales, "Teatro de fricción, o las nuevas corrientes del teatro puertorriqueño," Reflexiones sobre teatro latinoamericano del siglo veinte (Buenos Aires: Instituto Internacional de Teoría y Crítica de Teatro Latinoamericano, Editorial Glerna/Lemcke Verlag), pp. 73-82.

² Among the pioneers who have encouraged the study and documentation of groups belonging to the generations that Rosalina Perales defined as "teatro de fricción" are: Roberto Ramos-Perea, who has launched a historical archive of the Puerto Rican theatre. He is also the founder of the theatre magazine titled Intermedio. Other scholars that have shared in this endeavor are: Edgar Quiles, José Luis Ramos Escobar, Rosa Luisa Márquez, and José Félix Gómez.

³ Roberto Ramos Perea, "Escritura dramática en Puerto Rico: hacia la información del contexto," in De la colonia a la postmodernidad: teoría teatral y crítica sobre teatro latinoamericano (Buenos Aires: Editorial Glerna/Instituto Internacional de Teoría y Crítica del Teatro Latinoamericano, 1992), p.379.

aesthetic of the colonialist dominant culture of the United States, determines the subjects for investigation, experimentation and staging by the company.

Without studying the historical reality of Puerto Rico as a colony, its official Commonwealth status notwithstanding, it is very difficult to understand the development of this kind of theatre of political denunciation.⁴ Through the selection of themes pertinent to the Latino community, Pregones seeks to bring to life pieces that help define the historical relationship between the public and its culture, and to help them recognize the capability that they have to effect changes in the historical process. Similarly, the company has also promoted the strengthening of Puerto Rican identity and self esteem, whose absence is evidenced within the population in the high dropout rates, poverty, drug addiction, and other social ills that plague the community. The works Pregones produces serve to convey a positive image of active participants in a historical process. The public is offered direct contact with island reality in works such as La colección and Areyto de pescadores, but it is also exposed to the problems that beset Puerto Ricans in the continental territory, as portrayed in High Noon, Voces de acero, and Migrants! The troupe has also demonstrated an interest in dramatizing events of a more immediate nature when it staged didactic works such as El abrazo. Each of the works studied shows an effort to present a theatre that examines a set of problems faced by Puerto Ricans, while striving for universality by focusing on the search for social justice.

Pregones's work also resulted in the creation of positive artistic models inside and outside the community. By relinquishing the competitiveness of the theatre, as it is experienced in the dominant culture, and by giving priority to the specific needs of its community, the troupe has demonstrated its capabilities to strengthen the collective via art.

⁴ In December of 1998 one more plebiscite—truly a referendum, because it did not comply with the requirements of international law— was held in Puerto Rico to survey the feelings of the Puerto Rican people regarding the island's unresolved political status. It is not surprising that economic dependence and fear of change due to that dependence, steered the vote towards "none of the above," as proof of the people's rejection of annexation to the United States, as well as to independence, thus confirming a desire for no change.

Their clear identification with the community's culture has created the necessary conditions for a warm support of their work by a public eager to see itself represented in the arts in ways that portray their desires, triumphs, defeats, and struggles with fairness, as protagonists not as outsiders. However, as demonstrated by other groups which we have also studied, the laudable desire to offer high quality theatre is not enough to ensure its survival.

In its twenty one year history there have been many factors that have made it possible for Pregones to remain strong and consistent in the struggle to survive and stay active, in spite of problems that have affected them. One reason for its survival is the fact that its administration is in the hands of the artists who have decided to expand upon their professionalism to master the art of raising and managing funds, marketing, publicity, and the development of grassroots connections. In taking over these responsibilities, they showed that both artistic and managerial interests were equally important. The members of Pregones have proved that it is possible for artists to take total creative and fiscal responsibility for their company, while still maintaining their place within the local, national, and international theatre community. With this accomplishment Pregones is consistent in embodying its goal of showing the public how to take responsibility for the political, social and historical processes that bear on their lives. This is clearly demonstrated as Pregones asserts its political commitment by taking part in associations, panels, and committees such as the National Performance Network, the Network of Cultural Centers of Color, Arts New York, The Hispanic Federation, Bronx Council on the Arts, and the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, all organizations focused on the discussion, analysis and struggle to reclaim the theatre from the political and economic crises that universally threaten its existence. Through their involvement in the political aspects of a theatre's ability to function, Pregones has not only earned and maintained its position in the theatre community, but has also opened doors for other groups that have a similar commitment. The company is proof that only through political participation can it serve as a

means to strengthen a Latino theatre community that is still struggling to exist and to gain respect as an equal within the greater community; a community that has yet to distinguish between subgroups such as Mexicans, Chicanos, Cuban-Americans, or Puerto Ricans.

Pregones's identification with a Latin American aesthetic is another contributing factor to this long-lived group, because the public has identified with its own cultural traditions and has not been alienated by an aesthetic that, although admirable and attractive, is not necessarily of practical use to the public. The members of the company have stated that although on the one hand their aesthetic has changed constantly, on the other, there are elements in the artistic production of the troupe that are consistent with a creative aesthetic that derives from the *nuevo teatro latinoamericano*. Among these elements are the use of live music and the incorporation of Brechtian techniques. Live music is one of the characteristics that identifies Pregones with the work of many Latin American groups, as well as with the political theatre groups that preceded it in Puerto Rico and in the United States.

Another element that explains the particular aesthetic developed by Pregones is the adoption of theories and techniques related to the collective creation movement initiated by Enrique Buenaventura. Through this technique an artistic production is based on collective research, experimentation, and production. Hierarchies and structures that place a distance between director and actor, playwright and actor, and others, are abolished in favor of creating something in which the group contributes to the end result. We can see in Pregones's productions that the investigative process and the experimental phase are indispensable in shaping the work for presentation to the public, who judges it during the developmental stage in order to give it final shape.⁵ For this reason, the company's

⁵It is important to note that in the company the figure of the director is the only one that is never abolished.

archives hold several versions of a same piece that show the troupe's commitment to shape their public offerings to the needs of the creators and the recipients.⁶

In the play El Abrazo we see how the influence of Latin American theatre has shaped Pregones's aesthetic, as it employs techniques from the Theatre of the Oppressed, developed by Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal, specifically by encouraging audience participation to solve the problems that beset Latinos as a group. The interest in developing a language that the community understands is another element that identifies Teatro Pregones with the struggle for social justice that the new Latin American theatre promotes. Linguistic sensitivity, that recognizes the need to communicate within a collective where more than one language is spoken, led Pregones to adopt a linguistic policy in keeping with the circumstances present in the South Bronx, consequently, the use of English or Spanish, or English and Spanish within the same staging.

Other aesthetic elements, such as transforming non-scenic spaces into scenic spaces, and the absence of complex props is consistent with the collective creation techniques that the troupe employs. However, the proof of Pregones's commitment to the Latin American theatre is the use of social, cultural, political, and historic research as its foundation: from the one hundred years of Puerto Rican theatre that inspired Pregones's first play, La colección, to the struggle to regain power and conserve a healthy quality of life presented in Areyto de pescadores, to the unknown history of the Puerto Rican political prisoners who struggled for the liberation of the island in Voces de acero, to the celebration of the challenges faced by Puerto Ricans in New York in Migrants!, or the adaptation of a Greek classic play to Puerto Rican reality in Medea. History and its social ramifications serve as a backdrop to a creative process that reaffirms Puerto Rican identity. Each of the works staged by Pregones seeks to recognize the different faces, dreams and desires,

⁶ For the purposes of this investigation only the most recent versions are being mentioned.

triumphs and defeats, joys and sorrows that make up the fiber of Puerto Ricans as socio-historic individuals.

Several factors that have also contributed to Pregones's identification with the Latin American theatre movement have been the constant communication with Latin American theatre groups through workshops, conferences, and festivals, the search for new and diverse forms of expression through training with other theatre groups, and the constant flow of new and young talent that find their first home in the United States with Pregones. The company continues to offer its space to visiting theatre groups of various ethnicities from the United States and Latin America. All of these factors help the company to stay artistically young and vital.

A history of artistic commitment, with a definite aesthetic based on solid social commitment to its community, would seem to ensure Pregones's continued existence. Among the company's immediate projects is finding additional space to house a new theatre.⁷ The goal of the troupe is to provide the artistic community with a laboratory to train new generations of theatre people interested in learning the techniques of the Latin American theatre. Pregones recognizes that there is a great need for workshops that supply this type of professional training. The Latino theatre community in the United States does not generally sponsor workshops to develop theatre, techniques and talent as its Latin American counterpart does. Its absence creates the need to travel abroad or to invite artists to impart their technical and artistic knowledge in brief seminars, though what is really needed is continuity and years of training.

Another priority for the company's future, which is also in keeping with the artistic aesthetic of Pregones, is the creation of projects related to musical education. To achieve this goal Pregones has already established partnerships with like-minded organizations that share an interest in strengthening the indispensable role of music in theatre. By becoming a

⁷ Based on personal interviews with the Associate Directors of Teatro Pregones: Rosalba Rolón, Alvan Colón-Lespier, Jorge Merced, and Judith Rivera, from 1996 to 1997.

model, Pregones strives to promote the development of a theatrical community with musical education, and a community of musicians with theatrical education.

To achieve the previously mentioned goals the development of the company's administrative abilities is a priority. Although the management of the company by its artists has so far been beneficial, the increasing offers of work and the need to develop other artistic projects require personnel dedicated to theatrical administration that will support the company's associate directors. This does not mean a separation between artistic and managerial labor, but rather a relief from the increasing burden upon the artists. The company took the first steps to achieve managerial expansion by hiring Jacqueline Rodríguez-Mont in September 1998 as Director of Operations, a post presently occupied by Magaly González, currently the General Manager of the company.

Through its different programs and projects, Teatro Pregones has begun to achieve its articulated goals. In its work as a theatre company it has reached a high level of professionalism and served as an example and source of pride for the Puerto Rican and other Latino communities in the United States. As an artistic, political, and activist troupe, Pregones has guaranteed its place within the wider international artistic community. As a presenting company it has widened the horizons of a public that historically has been deprived of artistic and cultural exposure.⁸ As a traveling troupe, it has dispersed its own artistic vision as well as the vision and talent of local and international troupes to its audiences. Pregones is at the forefront of the struggle to preserve and disseminate Puerto Rican culture as an integral part of the heterogeneous North American culture, echoing with its example what Luis Rafael Sánchez has defined as Puerto Rican theatre with projections towards the future:

⁸Among the international artists and theatre companies presented by Pregones between 1995 and 2000 are: Ballet de San Juan (Puerto Rico), John Santos and the Machete Ensemble (California), Agua Sol y Sereno (Puerto Rico), La Tropa (Chile), Orquesta de Cámara Concierto (Puerto Rico), dancer/choreographer Paulette Beauchamp (Puerto Rico), Ernesto Concepción (Puerto Rico), Franklin Caicedo (Chile-Argentina), Yuyachkani (Perú), and Xiomara Fortuna (Dominican Republic). Magaly González, telephone interview, August 9, 2000.

...it is a theatre of positive affirmation, although I wouldn't say that it is an optimistic theatre in the same way that a French comedy is, but it is rather a revolutionary optimism. It is a willingness to transform the future, not as a showcase of what the country could be, but as an examination of its possibilities. It is a theatre that examines the working class struggle, a theatre that in a very simple way, with an accessible modern day Puerto Rican language, attempts to contribute to the understanding of what indeed could be done.⁹

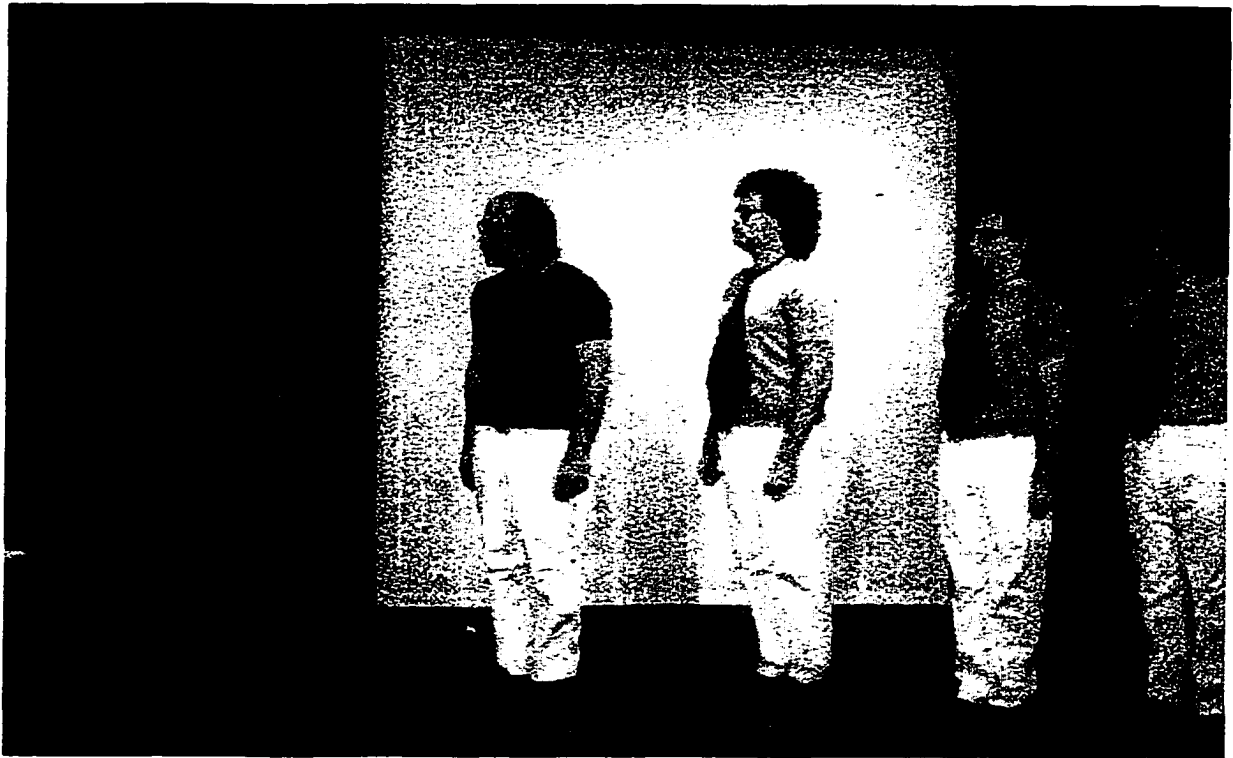
⁹José Monleón, "Con Luis Rafael Sánchez," América Latina: teatro y revolución (Caracas, Venezuela; Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1978), p. 170.

"...es un teatro positivo de afirmación, que yo no te diría que es un teatro optimista, en el sentido que pueda serlo una comedia francesa, sino un optimismo revolucionario, una disposición a transformar el futuro, si no en el sentido de que provoca una especie de escaparate de lo que puede ser el país, sí en cuanto al examen de sus posibilidades. Un teatro que hace un examen de las luchas obreras, un teatro que, de manera sencilla, con un lenguaje muy asequible y del Puerto Rico de nuestros días, intente que el público entienda qué es lo que realmente se puede hacer."



La colección.

Fig. 1. *From left to right:* Heriberto Mateo, Julio Santana, Rosalba Rolón, Alvan Colón-Lespier, Roberto Lugo, Sandra Rodríguez, and Luis Meléndez (1984). Courtesy of Pregones Theatre, Bronx, New York.



High Noon/Al Mediodía

Fig. 2. *Top from left to right:* Rosalba Rolón, Alvan Colón-Lespier, Freddy de Arce, Miguel Camarero, and Roberto Lugo. Courtesy of Pregones Theatre, Bronx, New York.

Fig. 3. *Bottom from left to right:* Rosalba Rolón and Sandra Rodríguez. INTAR Stage II, Duo Theatre (1985). Courtesy of Pregones Theatre, Bronx, New York.





Migrants!

Fig 4. *Top from left to right:* Rosalba Rolón, Julio Santana, Dianilú Cora, Judith Rivera, José García, Jorge Merced, Alvan Colón-Lespier, and Macella White.

Fig 5. *Bottom from left to right:* Julio Santana, José Manuel Meléndez, and Alvan Colón Lespier (1987). Photographs by Ricky Flores. Courtesy of Pregones Theatre, Bronx, New York.





Migrants!

Fig. 6. *Top from left to right:* Judith Rivera, Alvan Colón-Lespier, Marcella White, Sandra Rodríguez, Cristina Rieke, and Rosalba Rolón.

Fig. 7. *Bottom from left to right:* Jorge Merced, Sandra Rodríguez, José García, Alvan Colón-Lespier, Rosalba Rolón, Cristina Rieke, and Jorge Merced (1987). Photographs by Ricky Flores. Courtesy of Pregones Theatre, Bronx, New York.



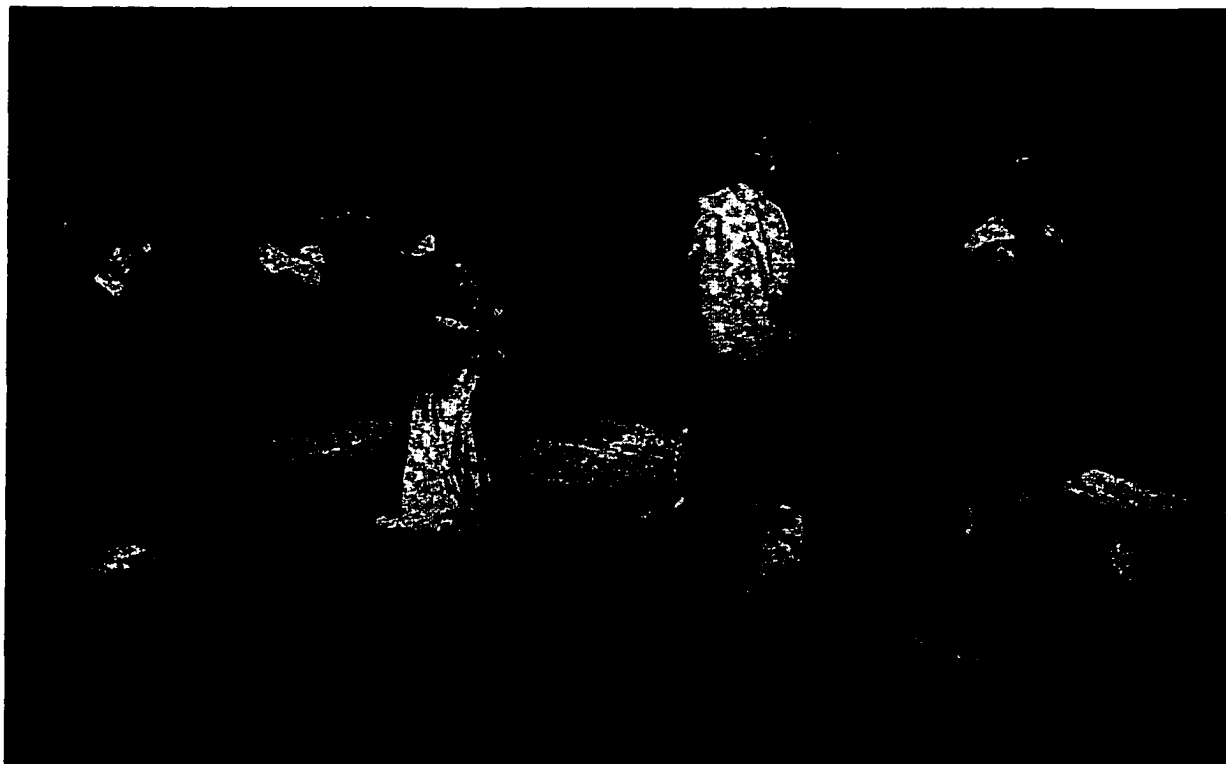


Voces de acero (Voices of Steel)

Fig. 8. *Top from left to right:* Judith Rivera, Jorge Merced, José García, and Sandra Berríos.

Fig. 9. *Bottom:* Jorge Merced and Rosalba Rolón (1990). Photographs by Roberto Lugo. Courtesy of Pregones Theatre, Bronx, New York.





El último rosario de Medea (Medea's Last Rosary)

Fig. 10. *From left to right:* Eva C. Vázquez, Rafael Decena, Jorge Merced, Yeidy Rivero, Rosalba Rolón, Axel Cintrón, Judith Rivera, and Marcella White. Pregones Theatre at St. Ann's Church, Bronx, New York. Courtesy of Pregones Theatre.

Appendix 2

Interview with Rosalba Rolón

Artistic Director of Teatro Pregones

Bronx, New York

October 18, 1996

¿Cómo fue creada la compañía?

En junio de 1979 nos reunimos Luis Meléndez, David Crommet y yo, quienes somos los miembros fundadores del grupo, con la idea de elaborar una producción a lo largo de seis meses.

Hubo una serie de factores y casualidades que contribuyeron a despertar nuestro interés en este proyecto. Luis Meléndez había formado parte del grupo Moriviví, una compañía de teatro popular en Puerto Rico. También, algunos de nosotros, yo por ejemplo, estábamos trabajando en teatro latino en Nueva York. Para 1979 había varios teatros establecidos como: Repertorio Español, Thalia, INTAR, Teatro Duo, el Teatro Rodante Puertorriqueño, El Portón y varios esfuerzos de otra gente.

El teatro puertorriqueño escrito por autores puertorriqueños no tenía salida y sentíamos que no era una prioridad en estos teatros porque los intereses eran otros. Tampoco eran teatros cuya misión era hacer teatro puertorriqueño. Nosotros estábamos contentos con el trabajo pero queríamos que se hiciera algo alternativo.

Eso coincide con el hecho de que el Teatro Rodante Puertorriqueño (TRP) estaba a punto de abrir su espacio. La compañía estaba presentando en una iglesia y se estaba remodelando el "firehouse." Entonces, la temporada del TRP estaba un poco limitada.

Por otro lado, Pedro Pietri y Estrellita Artau estaban haciendo su trabajo individual. En cuanto a las cosas a las cuales teníamos acceso como puertorriqueños de Puerto Rico, no como puertorriqueños criados acá, Miriam [Colón] estaba haciendo ese trabajo pero también con limitaciones. En los otros teatros como Repertorio Español ,

por ejemplo, tenían unas piezas en su repertorio, pero no era su misión [producir teatro puertorriqueño].

Escuchábamos a los productores hablando de la dificultad de tener un público. Repertorio y Miriam [TRP] eran los principales teatros rodantes y veíamos que mucha gente no venía, pero por otro lado los otros teatros no viajaban. Con todo ese análisis teníamos la energía de desarrollar ideas.

El primer problema era ¿qué obra?. Entonces surgió de un chiste; ¿por qué no hacemos todas las obras a la vez? De ese chiste y de la discusión surgió la idea de "¿por qué no buscamos escenas claves de piezas claves de teatro puertorriqueño y hacemos una serie de viñetas o de cosa de cabaret sencilla?" Entonces comenzamos a trabajar nosotros tres.

Leímos sesenta y cinco textos por seis meses. La producción final fue de nueve textos. Comenzó un entusiasmo de la gente por lo que estábamos haciendo. Contamos con el apoyo de Dolores Prida y Víctor Fragoso, quien fue nuestro consejero artístico y, eventualmente, director de la pieza.

Hicimos una primera presentación a gente divina: profesores universitarios, activistas, estudiantes, etc. Brenda Feliciano, soprano, y Angelo Cruz, tenor, se metieron a un estudio con Víctor y nos hicieron una obertura con distintos temas musicales relacionados con la obra. Había una cantidad de colaboradores.

Emilio Carballido fue a esa presentación. Nos hizo una crítica; era un pecado usar música grabada. Era la época en que el teatro político no usaba música grabada. En nuestro primer grupo también contamos con Socorro Santiago y Martha de la Cruz. Víctor Fragoso había estado colaborando con Teatro 4, que tenía músicos, y corrió la voz y entonces vinieron nuestros dos primeros músicos: un percusionista y un guitarrista y cantante. De ahí en adelante no volvimos a usar música grabada hasta Quíntuples, por la especificidad de la obra.

Pensábamos hacer veinte o veinticinco funciones por ahí. Así era como hablábamos porque nosotros conocíamos el mercado. Víctor fue muy instrumental. Como era profesor, sugirió que presentáramos en la universidad. Cobramos doscientos dólares por esa primera función. Ibamos cargando en bolsas plásticas de basura las máscaras y las cosas de la producción completa. Era una cosa muy doméstica. Fue tan interesante esa primera función en Rutgers. Aquello fue una cosa tan maravillosa que sólo pasaron varios días antes de recibir llamadas de varias universidades, que fueron nuestros primeros clientes.

¿Cómo determinaron que debían adoptar el método de creación colectiva?

Estaba en nuestra naturaleza el trabajo colectivo. También era la época de desarrollo del trabajo colectivo. Buenaventura venía y nos quería mucho. Teníamos mentores que eran una gran inspiración.

Por ahí seguimos hasta que decidimos formar el grupo. Esa fue una segunda etapa y ya en esa etapa los músicos estaban incluidos y formaban parte y tomaban decisiones.

Desde el principio nos gustó tener un director que dirigiera la pieza, contrario a la práctica de la creación colectiva, aunque en realidad pecábamos un poco de lo que peca la creación colectiva al no dar crédito al director. Pero en realidad había alguien desde afuera dirigiendo. Siempre creímos que tener a un director era lo más adecuado. También vino Delfor Peralta, un director argentino divino, y yo dije: "vamos a traer a Delfor para que le de una miradita al proyecto."

Hicimos el proyecto casi cinco años antes de cerrarlo. La otra cosa era que no lo dejaban caer al piso los pedidos. Incluso lo hicimos en un Festival Latino. Fue de las últimas veces que lo hicimos. El asunto era que queríamos hacer un trabajo nuevo. no sabíamos ni cómo comportarnos como compañía de repertorio. Podíamos hacer ese trabajo toda la vida. No sabíamos qué era lo que teníamos que hacer. No había modelos

de trabajo como lo que estábamos haciendo, ni nadie que hubiera durado con una producción cuatro años. Estuvimos con miedo.

¿Cuándo y cómo surgió la posibilidad de tener un espacio?

Desde el principio sabíamos que no íbamos a tener un espacio, que esto era viajar. Por una serie de circunstancias podíamos hacerlo; éramos solteros, era una gran aventura y no queríamos la responsabilidad de un espacio. En el Bronx era donde más viajábamos.

Bill Aguado, que empezaba su trabajo como Director Ejecutivo del Bronx Council on the Arts, me llamó y hablamos. Operábamos desde nuestras oficinas, en nuestras casas. Llegó el momento en que ya verdaderamente el trabajo estaba empezando a arropar nuestra vida privada. Al principio no molestaba. Uno va madurando. Nos dimos cuenta de que necesitábamos una vida. En la 104, al lado de lo que era Teatro 4, Félix Cordero, el pintor, tenía un edificio que estaba arreglando y ahí fue nuestra primera oficina formal. Era un lugar que estaba bajo construcción, no había calefacción y nos calentábamos con un fogón. Allí fue la primera vez que adquirimos otro tipo de responsabilidad que nos gustó.

De ahí Bill nos expresó que hacía falta un grupo en el Bronx y no lo había. Nos empezó a gustar la idea de irnos a un espacio donde no hubiera la competencia terrible de Manhattan y, sobre todo, en el Barrio donde siempre había tanto. En el Barrio en ese momento el auge era de las artes visuales por el Taller Boricua y el Museo del Barrio.

Ahí fue que abrimos, en el 83-84 de Longwood Avenue, nuestra primera oficina. Era un salón de clases de un edificio que se tomó para las artes. Dijimos: "¡Contra, qué chévere que nos sirve pa'ensayar!" Hasta ese momento Teatro 4 siempre nos prestaba su espacio. Había una buenísima amistad. El Museo del Barrio también nos prestaba incondicionalmente, por dos años, un salón para trabajar. Prestado; nunca tuvimos que pagar nada.

De Longwood Avenue fue que surgió nuestra amistad con Roberto Morales y empezamos a dar talleres y ya veíamos que estábamos madurando no solamente como grupo, sino como personas. Nos parecía chévere viajar, pero nos empezó a gustar el tener un público que cultivar en un lugar. Había una gran atención de los "funders" y de la prensa: "que se sepa qué está pasando."

Cuando Roberto estaba, no en St. Ann's, sino en Santa Margarita, empezamos a hacer talleres que daban Sandra y Alvan. Entonces él se enamoró del trabajo. Quería hacer algo a largo plazo y en eso le ofrecieron la rectoría de St. Ann's y entonces vimos que aquello era como el reto del demonio, porque en aquella comunidad no había pasado nada. El gimnasio nos lo prestó para guardar las cosas y ensayar. Como a los tres meses él nos dijo que había tomado su decisión y quería ofrecernos el espacio como teatro.

Un día, un miembro de nuestro board, Tony Santiago nos dijo que había conocido a alguien que conocía a alguien que hacía escenografías de Broadway y que estaban ubicados apenas a cuatro bloques. Entonces, Tony los llamó y les dijo: "Miren, estamos haciendo esto aquí, por si ustedes tienen materiales que descarten." Y el dueño de la compañía Hudson Scenic se interesó en visitarnos y cuando vio aquel espacio nos dijo: "Si ustedes me permiten yo voy a hacer un teatro aquí. Ese va a ser mi regalo, porque en mi negocio el dinero lo hace Broadway, pero mis empleados todos viven en esta comunidad, mi pan yo lo hago aquí." Eran los escenógrafos de Cats, Les Misérables... En esa época él tenía que renovar el cortinaje de Cats, que cada cierto tiempo lo renuevan porque se pueden dar esos lujos, y entonces un día se apareció un truck enorme frente a la iglesia con todo ese cortinaje de Cats. El lo trató para fuego y todo y empezaron a construir. Al final del día todos esos trabajadores venían gratis. Fueron casi cien mil dólares en donaciones entre trabajo y materiales.

En eso nos llamó el Departamento de Asuntos Culturales para decirnos que había un teatro cerrando, que tenían butacas y que si las queríamos. Fue tanta la euforia sobre

ese proyecto... En realidad, ellos hicieron nuestro espacio y nosotros no clavamos ni un clavo.

Abrimos el 5 de diciembre de 1985.

¿Cuál es la misión de Teatro Pregones?

La misión original: Dar a conocer teatro puertorriqueño. Como lo entendíamos nosotros era escrito por autores puertorriqueños. Era incluso un poquito más didacta. Llegamos al punto de decir que era solamente en español y un poco reflejaba nuestra falta de conexión con el puertorriqueño de acá. Esa fue una transformación que pasó el grupo.

Sincera y honestamente, aunque teníamos músicos en el grupo criados acá, entendíamos el idioma como un arma política, como una forma de reafirmación de una serie de cosas. Nos costó mucho, casi diez años, empezar a trabajar con el inglés. Pensábamos de alguna manera que esta era una conexión necesaria para la gente acá, pero no estábamos en una posición legítima para hacer ese reclamo porque en el "core" del grupo, tomando decisiones, no había puertorriqueños criados acá como para que nosotros tuviéramos esa información. También, cada grupo escoge su mercado. Nuestro mercado principalmente no era el mercado de Pedro Pietri. Nuestro mercado era inmigrante básicamente. Ya era un público adulto, un público recientemente inmigrado. Nosotros nos sentimos muy contentos con nuestra decisión, pero vimos que nosotros siempre estábamos con la maleta hecha y no íbamos a ningún lado y a nivel personal vimos que comenzamos a integrarnos a la vida como niuyorkinos, como un segundo hogar, a entenderla y aceptarla como un segundo hogar. Comenzamos a entender la movida política, a conocer a esta gente y a ver que nosotros éramos parte de esta maquinaria, que nuestra maquinaria política no era la de Puerto Rico. Es un proceso muy difícil, porque es un poco como cortar la raíz.

Cuando Judith entra al grupo, ya no como un músico incidental, sino como una actriz, Judith trae una carga. José entró un poquito antes. Pero lo más interesante es que todo el mundo pensaba que iba a ser una relación explosiva y fue una relación de tanta

belleza. Entonces eran dos puertorriqueños hablándose el uno al otro y decíamos: "Pero, ¡Contra! a José se le haría más fácil decir esto en inglés y ¿por qué él no tiene el derecho de decirlo en inglés?" Entonces pasamos por un proceso de aprendizaje. Un proceso para ellos de reafirmarse. Eso fue un proceso precioso y fue a través de la obra High Noon, que fue precisamente con la unión de hospitales que nos comisionó.

La obra High Noon fue el comienzo de reconocer que somos parte de esto. Entonces empezamos a recibir reconocimiento del liderato de acá. Empezamos a decir, "espérate, espérate," porque venimos con muchos prejuicios y tarda mucho tiempo eso en quitarse.

La otra cosa, comencé a empaparme de quiénes son los periodistas de aquí, los políticos de aquí, los comerciantes puertorriqueños importantes que hablaran español o inglés, no importa. Ese fue, para mí, el momento más rico de toda nuestra historia. El momento en que hacemos una transición a una nueva realidad; una realidad bilingüe, una realidad donde tenemos unas obras en español y otras en inglés y el que las ve las ve.

¿Cómo comenzaron a utilizar la imagen en movimiento como parte integral de sus piezas?

Se nos presentaron nuevos retos con la cuestión del movimiento. Siempre usábamos movimiento, pero descansábamos más en la música y las canciones. El cuerpo tomó una importancia que no tenía antes. Entrenamos con gente que tenía entrenamiento de baile. También hizo mucho bien nuestra participación en seminarios que tomamos en encuentros de teatro en Brasil, Cuba, Nicaragua y en Francia. Eso fue bien importante porque ahí trabajamos con gente que estaba pasando por el mismo proceso. Eramos de la misma edad, pero los que proponían los cambios eran gente mucho más vieja, de sesenta, setenta, ochenta años.

De pronto oías a Santiago García proponiendo algo que dejaba atrás todo lo que había hecho antes. De pronto decía: "Es legítimo que cada miembro del público decida qué es lo que ustedes quieren decir."

¿Con qué estética relacionas el trabajo de Pregones, ¿con la estética latinoamericana o con la estadounidense?

Yo creo que Pregones toma de ambas (las corrientes de teatro latinoamericano y teatro americano), pero evidentemente Pregones sigue siendo un teatro latinoamericano en el lenguaje.

Nosotros nos hemos dado cuenta de que cuando viajamos en los Estados Unidos a dar talleres de cosas que son tan y tan legendarias en el teatro latinoamericano, ellos creen que descubrieron lo último en la avenida.

Cuando fuimos a Moscú trabajamos con el director Alex Tovakov. El vino acá, un hombre muy versado en el teatro latinoamericano y un hombre que incorporó en el teatro ruso toda esta cosa de la imagen que había propuesto el teatro colombiano y el teatro argentino. Entonces, de pronto vemos que el Departamento de Drama de Columbia proponía la imagen como una nueva forma de teatro, algo que se había hecho hacía más de veinte años en el teatro latino. Eso nos hace más fieles al teatro o estilo latinoamericano o caribeño. Es importante mantenerlo de esta manera, pero que sea coherente con la energía niuyorkina y norteamericana, porque es parte de nuestra vida también.

Aquí hemos visto también el teatro que parte de la tradición. Lo hemos visto en el teatro afroamericano. Toda esta cosa del "storytelling" que aquí está muy desarrollada en el teatro. En el caso de nosotros, está muy desarrollada en nuestras familias, en las iglesias, pero aquí está propuesto como una forma de teatro. Eso lo hemos aprendido y lo hemos incorporado.

¿Cómo logran conciliar las propuestas del teatro latinoamericano con la realidad niuyorkina?

Creo que hemos desarrollado un lenguaje coherente con toda una tradición que traemos latinoamericana y todo el ritual que hemos sabido aprovechar. De la misma manera que la misión ha cambiado para hacer también adaptaciones nuestras. Eso es

bastante nuevo. Por ejemplo, tenemos Translated Woman, de una escritora cubana, sobre una realidad vista a través de los ojos nuestros. Entendemos que nosotros no tenemos autoridad moral para hablar de las fronteras, de lo que pasa un inmigrante, pero son temas que nos interesan. ¿Desde qué punto de vista lo vamos a decir? desde el punto de vista de quien lo ha vivido y nosotros lo interpretamos para que nuestra gente lo pueda entender.

También tenemos La otra orilla basada en una obra de un andaluz, Obra póstuma, que escribe sobre todo lo que está pasando en las aguas caribeñas. Puerto Rico también se impacta por lo que pasa en la República Dominicana. Aunque no son autores puertorriqueños, temáticamente tiene que ver con nuestra realidad. Llegamos a la conclusión hace mucho tiempo de que vamos a ser muy específicos en nuestro trabajo, porque hay un aspecto universal. Cuando uno es específico en su trabajo toca muchas más realidades que cuando uno trata de abarcarlo todo y ser muy universal y a la larga no habla de nada. Sin embargo, si una persona ve que nosotros entendemos un tema de principio a fin de algo puertorriqueño, o de la comunidad latina aquí, o de lo que sea, esa persona empieza a hacer asociaciones con su propia realidad. Eso fue lo que me pasó a mí cuando vi Obra póstuma en España, que yo me identifiqué. Ellos no estaban hablando de los puertorriqueños, estaban hablando de los dominicanos y los cubanos hundiéndose en las balsas.

¿Qué aspectos administrativos han contribuido al éxito de Pregones?

La compañía la corren artistas. Esa es una cosa que decidimos y que ha funcionado. Somos cuatro artistas corriendo el aspecto curatorial y de visión. Yo, como directora artística y como el miembro más viejo de la compañía y Alvan, Judith y Jorge como directores asociados, somos quienes seleccionamos y proponemos trabajos. Nosotros somos ultimadamente responsables por lo que suceda. Hace como cuatro años atrás, con la ayuda de un amigo, vimos que hacían falta otras dos personas, multifuncionales como nosotros, pero en el área administrativa. Entonces lo hicimos de

esa manera. Conseguimos un dinero y ahora tenemos un equipo artístico y otro administrativo. Pero la realidad es que el equipo artístico todavía está muy encumbrado con la cuestión administrativa. Parte por miedo a delegar. Ya nosotros sentimos que nosotros como artistas ya llevamos a Pregones a lo más que podíamos administrativamente. Ya Pregones no da para más administrativamente. Para que Pregones dé para más hay que traer administradores. Es tanto el trabajo que se ha generado, que no damos a basto para la demanda. Hay proyectos que no podemos hacer porque requieren horas de trabajo administrativo.

Hicimos un plan el año pasado y estamos esperando respuestas de "grants," hemos reducido la cantidad de "grants" y hemos aumentado la cantidad de dinero ganado, para lanzar la posición de un "Administrative Associate" que va a manejar y escribir propuestas conmigo.

¿Cómo les afectó el tener que mudarse de St. Ann's Church para Grand Concourse?

Cuando vimos nuestro público crecer realmente fue cuando cerramos el teatro. En los últimos dos años en St. Ann's vimos que el público se había reducido. Yo creo que la novedad pasó. El vecindario no se estaba mejorando. El público estaba deseando vernos en otros lugares. La compañía ya no era una compañía fresca o nueva. El público ya estaba resistiendo el vecindario. Todo llega a su fin.

Coincide eso con la creación del Centro de Hostos. Empezamos a estudiar el aspecto de "business," de tener un teatro en donde "location, location, location" era muy importante. Cerramos el teatro por otras razones, no por estas. Problemas con la nueva administración de la iglesia. Y cuando nos mudamos, nuestro público creció 300%. Cualquier cosa que anunciamos en Repertorio y en el Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre tenía demanda. Dijimos: "¡Contra, hay una gente ahí esperando!" Nuestra lista de dos mil nombres aumentó a diez mil.

La parte desagradable de eso es que en tu espacio tú puedes ofrecer un calor y unas cosas que no puedes ofrecer en un lugar que no es el tuyo. Eso lo echamos de

menos. No tiene que ser un espacio grande. Puede ser un espacio donde atendamos al público de cincuenta en cincuenta. En esas estamos. Nos dieron un "grant," J. & Gibman, para habilitar un espacio, para computadoras, para ir al próximo espacio.

Estamos coqueteando con la idea de otro edificio y no hemos descartado la idea de tener los dos. Las cosas están mal económicamente para todos los grupos de teatro. Nosotros estamos operando con casi cuarentamil dólares menos que el año pasado. El presupuesto nuestro el año pasado era \$505,000.00. Este año estamos operando con \$477,000.00 y esa diferencia, para un grupo pequeño, es enorme. Es el no poder contratar a una persona. Nos da miedo que otros cierren y nosotros abramos. Las colaboraciones con Miriam y Gilberto van bien. Mientras haya escenarios disponibles vamos a ver cuánto podemos desarrollar esto.

¿Has logrado una buena relación con otros grupos existentes?

Sí, eso es básico. Es que es otra generación. Fíjate que esos grupos entre sí no son grandes amigos, o no lo han sido en el pasado. Es una generación que luchó y sufrió mucho para establecerse y ha sido protectora de su propio espacio y no tenía una tradición de colaboraciones entre ellos, pero la están empezando a tener. Nosotros venimos de una generación que todo lo hace en grupo. Tuvimos la buena fortuna de que como siempre le tuvimos respeto a esa gente, son ahora nuestros padrinos y ha habido ocasiones en que ellos no se pueden comunicar bien entre ellos, pero se comunican bien a través de nosotros.

¿Qué dificultades económicas representa para ustedes el competir por fondos con otras compañías?

Yo parto de la premisa de que mientras más haya, mejor.

Nosotros estábamos siempre bien orgullosos y éramos bien panfletarios con eso: "No recibimos fondos y somos teatro independiente." Los fondos son como una trampa que, una vez los empiezas a recibir, te vuelves adicto y, si no los manejas bien, te llega a controlar. Nosotros aprendimos a no depender demasiado de una sola fuente de fondos.

Lo que hemos desarrollado, y es lo que ha desarrollado la industria y a nosotros nos va bien, es que ninguna fuente provea más de una tercera parte de los fondos, queriendo decir que el gobierno no sea más de una tercera parte, que las corporaciones y fundaciones no sean más de una tercera parte, que una tercera parte sea ganado.

Con Allentown fue la primera vez que alcanzamos ganarnos la tercera parte, porque ese proyecto nos dejó dinero. Se sintió tan bien, que no lo hemos dejado bajar. Por eso estamos agarrados de eso. Una tercera parte de nuestro presupuesto total tiene que ser ganada. Todavía el gobierno cubre un 40% de nuestro presupuesto total y las corporaciones y fundaciones contribuyen menos. Es decir, todavía tenemos que aumentar las corporaciones y fundaciones para que el gobierno no sea tanto. NEA, NYSCA y DCA es el 41-42% y eso, con una amenaza continua de que lo van a quitar, sería grave.

De todos los non-profits, el arte es el único que tiene potencial de hacer dinero, porque tiene un producto que la gente compra y paga por eso, pero ante la realidad de nosotros no podemos cobrarle a nuestra comunidad grandes cantidades de dinero. Pueden venir cuarentamil personas, pero están pagando \$3.00.

Además, estas corporaciones y fundaciones tienen dinero que tienen que dar. Esa es su obligación. Eso no es un favor, por ley tienen que hacerlo. Es lograr un equilibrio y lo menos saludable para una organización es que el dinero venga del gobierno.

Tener una reserva de dinero es esencial. Nosotros tuvimos la suerte de que el dinero que nos dio esa organización [J & Gibmar] parte es para crear una reserva de dinero que no se puede tocar. Somos muy pequeños para un endowment. Tampoco tenemos el tiempo de escribir todas las propuestas que se tienen que escribir.

¿Qué cambios ha experimentado el proceso creativo de la compañía?

El proceso ha variado durante los años. Me encanta el potencial dramático de la narrativa. Migrants! prácticamente yo lo fui componiendo imaginándome una adaptación de cuentos, imaginándome ese diálogo. Es un ejercicio que me gusta. Algunas de las obras que tenemos son adaptaciones que yo he hecho. A veces nos

preocupa porque no estamos haciendo tanto teatro que surge de textos, pero no deja de ser teatro. Es otro acercamiento al teatro.

Algunas cosas las hacemos por pura necesidad. Te puedo decir que Baile cangrejero, que tiene cerca de doscientas representaciones, se hizo en un momento en que no teníamos un centavo, donde necesitábamos hacer cosas movidas con dos actores. El proyecto de Judith de "storytelling" [Wedding March] surgió como algo similar, un proyecto con una actriz.

¿Cómo es el proceso de selección de piezas para la compañía?

El proceso no es un método estudiado para escoger trabajo. Es bastante improvisado. Descansa mucho en los objetivos individuales. Lo que sí creemos es que los objetivos individuales son importantes dentro de un grupo.

Para Areyto de pescadores trajimos a un escritor. Todo ha surgido de cosas muy informales. Tres obras que en ese momento eran temas importantísimos en nuestra comunidad. En el caso de Areyto, cuando surgió la situación en Vieques, nosotros fuimos a tener a Vieques a bregar con esto. Cuando Voces de acero, trabajamos con los presos políticos. Nosotros no hemos podido escaparnos de eso. Primero, casi siempre ha surgido porque hay una actividad. Nos piden una presentación en determinada actividad y de ahí surge la observación de una problemática que nos lleva a querer explorar un tema en específico. De ahí surgen nuevas obras. No había teatro acerca de esos temas.

En High Noon, por ejemplo, Dennis Rivera, que es el presidente de la unión 1199 de trabajadores de hospitales, nos hizo un acercamiento. En ese momento la Unión de Trabajadores de Hospitales estaba atravesando por una crisis terrible. Dennis era muy amigo nuestro. Había un grupo de trabajadores organizando lo que eventualmente iba a ser el "take over" de la unión para restablecer la democracia dentro de la unión y todas estas cosas que no estaban siendo así. El sugirió el tema.

¿Consideras que la labor de Pregones es crear piezas de teatro político?

No. Todos los temas son políticos por una razón u otra. Todos los temas que nosotros tratamos esperamos que tengan, en el sentido amplio de la palabra, un impacto político, pero el fin es el arte por el arte. Es decir, que el arte sea tan importante que la gente no pueda vivir sin eso. Yo creo que eso es altamente político aunque batallamos con ese concepto muchos años, por supuesto, porque todos veníamos de una actividad política muy grande. Los 70 dejaron a uno así. Si no lo hacías te sentías muy mal. Uno se sentía responsable ante ese movimiento.

Pasamos por una etapa donde, si tú me hacías esta pregunta hace quince años, yo te decía sí, por supuesto, y ahora te digo sí, por supuesto, pero por otras razones. Por la estética, por ejemplo, porque nos amparamos por muchos años bajo la estética del teatro popular, que era una estética política en términos de discurso. La estética nuestra ahora, como uno se transforma y crece, descansa mucho sobre elementos artísticos que liberen el pensamiento político, no que lo machaquen.

De vez en cuando nos encanta hacer cosas que tengan un matiz estrictamente político. Tenemos una colección de obritas de diez minutos que le llamamos el Repertorio Patriótico y estamos locos por presentarlas. Las hemos abandonado con el tiempo, pero siguen siendo vigentes. Estamos coqueteando con la idea de reponerlas, pero como hemos aprendido algo en el camino, esperamos brindarles una estética bella, entretenida y que la gente la disfrute.

¿Qué efecto tienen los quehaceres administrativos en la producción artística? ¿Se afecta negativamente el trabajo artístico?

Como organización no hemos tomado decisiones inteligentes cuando hemos tenido la oportunidad. Esa transición que hicimos cuando trajimos a Magaly tenía que haber sido una transición más radical para que nos liberara más a nosotros. Nosotros tenemos como cinco o seis piezas que no hemos desarrollado porque no tenemos el tiempo y hace tiempo tenían que estar hechas. Teníamos este sentido tan protector de la compañía y traer toda esta gente nueva de momento habría sido alarmante. Ahora que

miro hacia atrás yo pienso que si yo lo volviera a hacer, en ese momento en que la Ford Foundation nos dió \$100,000.00 para cambiar la estructura del grupo, yo hubiera traído un equipo de gente.

La cuestión administrativa afecta el trabajo artístico. ¡Claro que sí!, lo afecta. No la calidad. La calidad se da, pero se da con mucha más dificultad. Es más difícil de obtener porque le puedes dedicar menos tiempo y la cantidad de producciones disminuye. Se afecta la productividad artística al no entrenarnos juntos todos los días.

Tenemos una presencia bastante sólida, un nombre que la gente reconoce. Es una compañía legítima dentro del panorama teatral de la ciudad, en la comunidad hispana, entre los otros teatros. Somos la segunda generación del teatro latinoamericano. Hemos logrado establecer esa base confiable. Muchos artistas han pasado por nosotros. Nosotros aceptamos que Pregones es un proceso lógico para un actor venir, hacer una serie de cosas y seguir su vida. Yo creo que es un recurso importante.

¿Cómo recibe el público isleño el trabajo de Pregones?

Nuestra relación con Puerto Rico es bien poca. La prensa en Puerto Rico a nosotros nos corresponde muy bien, pero no nos han visto allá. Muchos artistas ven a Pregones como un lugar a donde ir. Hay un respeto general por la compañía como estructura organizativa. Con la compañía de teatro, como no la han visto, a lo mejor nos ven y nos odian, a lo mejor nos ven y les encanta. Es más como una cosa platónica.

Por otra parte, en los últimos tres años hemos desarrollado en Puerto Rico, a través del Fondo Permanente, una relación muy interesante de ayuda técnica porque siempre, desde que nos formamos, hemos luchado mucho por los derechos de los artistas en Puerto Rico. Lo logramos haciendo talleres, seminarios, siendo intercomunicadores entre instituciones y llenando propuestas.

¿Cuándo y cómo surgió la posibilidad de tener un espacio?

Definitivamente en Estados Unidos, fuera de Nueva York, Pregones es una compañía bien respetada y un modelo. Lo mismo podría hacer otra compañía si viajara.

¿Cuáles son tus proyecciones sobre el futuro de Teatro pregones?

Entre las proyecciones de la compañía está, primero que nada, el seguir montando los trabajos. Segundo, desarrollar proyectos de música. Hacer "partnerships" con músicos y fomentar la enseñanza de la música. Tercero, nos interesaría trabajar a nivel profesional con el entrenamiento de actuación. Hace falta escuela. No hay en los Estados Unidos esa cosa de taller constante que hay en Latinoamérica. Hay necesidad de adiestramiento. Hay una generación joven, de veinte años, que nos interesa. En cuarto lugar nos interesa cultivar una nueva generación de actores.

Mucho de eso es seguir lo que estamos haciendo. Nos interesa el curso que llevamos, de proseguir estas colaboraciones con compañías diferentes y trabajar con el adiestramiento.

Nosotros sentimos una gran responsabilidad hacia los artistas que vienen tras nosotros. Eso es algo de lo que mucha gente se asombra. Yo creo que una comunidad tiene que preservarse. La única forma de preservarla es si se transmite. La comunidad judía lo ha logrado hacer. Tenemos ese impulso. Me gustaría que pudiéramos tener más tiempo para dedicarlo a esos esfuerzos. Si a nosotros nos tomó diez años, no hay razón para que a otra persona le tome diez años.

Appendix 3

Interview with Alvan Colón-Lespier
Associate Director of Teatro Pregones

Bronx, New York

September 4, 1997.

¿Qué experiencia teatral tenías antes de llegar a Pregones?

En Puerto Rico trabajé con una compañía que se creó a partir de un grupo que se formó en el Consejo General de Estudiantes para hacer una representación en una Muestra de Teatro Latinoamericano. Luego un grupo de los que participaron en esa producción nos quedamos juntos y formamos un grupo que se llamó Anamú, que fue uno de los grupos de teatro popular más importantes en Puerto Rico durante la década de los setenta. Viajamos muchísimo. Hacíamos trabajo en distintas comunidades y luego abrimos una pequeña salita, una salita experimental en Barrio Obrero, en la Avenida Eduardo Conde. Entonces, esa fue mi primera experiencia antes de integrarme a Pregones y, además, cuando vine a Nueva York trabajé como director del Training Unit del Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. En el 1981 me acerqué a Pregones y empecé a hacer trabajo de producción con la compañía y luego fui asumiendo otros roles y empecé a trabajar como actor y empecé a continuar desarrollándome en el área de producción dentro de la compañía y de ahí en adelante hasta el día de hoy.

Mi primera obra con Pregones fue El circo. Luego nos invitan al Festival de Teatro Latino que organizaba el Teatro Cuatro con los auspicios del Public Theatre y ahí trabajé en una obra que se llama Areyto de pescadores que es una obra que escribió Eduardo Gallardo y la dirigió Délfór Peralta. Entonces, luego había una obra que ya Pregones tenía en repertorio que se llamaba La colección y en esa me integré como actor y encargado de producción.

¿Cuáles son tus labores dentro de la compañía?

Tengo una responsabilidad artística y tengo una responsabilidad administrativa y diría yo que también representativa de participación en distintas organizaciones regionales o nacionales que son organizaciones de membresía relacionadas con la actividad artística en el país.

La cuestión artística durante los últimos años se ha limitado a dirección. He dirigido varias piezas y dentro de esto también soy responsable de la producción. A veces funjo como el director de producción o a veces funjo como director técnico. A veces hago diseño de luces. Entonces, en las cuestiones administrativas soy responsable del programa de jiras y residencias de la compañía. Yo soy el que organizo esas jiras y residencias. Soy responsable de contratar o de que nos contraten, yo soy el que hago las negociaciones con los auspiciadores que nos van a contratar.

La otra cuestión representativa es más como advocacy, o algo así, pues Pregones pertenece al National Performance Network, que es una organización nacional en los Estados Unidos que agrupa alrededor de cincuenta o cincuenta y dos organizaciones, artistas y promotores culturales alrededor de todos los Estados Unidos. El propósito del National Performance Network es proveer un "venue" para que los artistas puedan exponer su trabajo. Nosotros, a través del National Performance Network, podemos presentar otros artistas aquí en el estudio o en alguno de los otros teatros donde trabajamos y el NPN nos ayuda a subsidiar los gastos. También soy parte del "steering committee," que es como el cuerpo de gobierno del NPN, establece cuál va a ser la política de operación de la organización, discute los planes, etc.

Además de eso, también soy miembro de la junta de directores del Association of Performing Arts Presenters que es una organización nacional que agrupa a gente, artistas individuales, compañías de teatro, de danza, de música. Es una organización de servicio. Tiene cerca de dos mil afiliados.

A través de mi participación en esas organizaciones, lo que yo trato de hacer es proveer un punto de vista, proveer una voz desde la perspectiva nuestra. Desde la perspectiva puertorriqueña en particular y desde la perspectiva latina en general para que las organizaciones y el panorama cultural tome en cuenta las necesidades nuestras, los anhelos nuestros, la desesperación nuestra.

Por favor, define la labor de Pregones

Tratamos de crear trabajos que provean una oportunidad para que nuestro público, y los artistas que trabajan en las producciones, cuestionen y reafirmen su rol en la sociedad. Para retar y buscar nuevos espacios. Todo partiendo desde una perspectiva histórica y cultural bien específica que es la nuestra, la puertorriqueña. Entonces una cosa que hacemos es que también presentamos a otros artistas. Tenemos un programa de "presenting." Presentamos artistas de distintas culturas. No tienen que ser necesariamente latinos o no tienen que ser necesariamente puertorriqueños, pero hacemos esas presentaciones con el espíritu de compartir con nuestro público la experiencia de presenciar o participar de la experiencia de observar teatro, danza y música que están arraigados en culturas diferentes a la nuestra, pero que siempre se encuentran paralelos o se encuentran similitudes en nuestra cultura.

¿Tú dirías que eso es una labor política?

Yo diría que sí, lo que pasa es que, como yo veo las cosas, el trabajo que nosotros hacemos alberga una visión política como alberga cualquier otro trabajo, pero nosotros, o por lo menos yo, siempre digo que a mí me gusta hacer arte por el arte, teatro por el teatro. Entonces, eso se puede malinterpretar, pero yo lo califico de la siguiente forma: el discurso estético tiene algo que decir que el discurso organizativo político no dice o es incapaz de decir; algo que el discurso filosófico no puede decir o es incapaz de decir; algo que el discurso religioso o moral y ético no dicen o son incapaces de decir, porque no les corresponde a ellos decirlo; nos corresponde a nosotros como artistas decirlo. Entonces es un arte que se hace con la finalidad de hacer ese arte, no es un arte que se hace con la

finalidad de complacer, no es un arte que se hace con la finalidad de lucro comercial, ese no es el objetivo principal, no es un arte comercial, no es un teatro comercial. Está dirigido a explorar temas que son urgentes, relevantes, críticos en nuestra comunidad y por ende tiene implicación política, como la tiene, pues, el arte comercial de Broadway, que tiene sus implicaciones políticas.

Proceso de creación

Las ideas surgen de una necesidad muy particular de los integrantes del grupo en cada caso. En La colección, que fue la obra inicial de la compañía, pues surge como una respuesta a lo que los integrantes de la compañía veían como una ausencia de un mayor número de producciones de teatro puertorriqueño en la ciudad, tomando en cuenta que en la ciudad habíamos más de un millón, seiscientos mil puertorriqueños, y al momento había una compañía de teatro puertorriqueño establecida y, quizá, dos o tres iniciativas.

Entonces, los integrantes en el momento dicen: "¡Caramba!, si hay tantos puertorriqueños y hay una riqueza teatral en nuestra cultura, pues vamos a trabajar sobre eso." Entonces, así es que se decide crear esa pieza, La colección, que era una antología. Entonces se hizo una investigación bastante extensa de obras clave de la dramaturgia puertorriqueña. Eso se hacía a través de distintos centros culturales puertorriqueños en la ciudad, teatros y universidades a través de la región. O sea, que surge de esa necesidad que tienen los integrantes del grupo.

En el caso de High Noon estábamos de alguna forma en conversación con unos amigos que trabajaban en el Sindicato de Trabajadores de Hospitales de la Ciudad de Nueva York, la Unión 1199, que en ese momento estaba atravesando por un momento bien difícil en la historia de la evolución del sindicato, porque la participación de los puertorriqueños y los latinos en la dirección del sindicato era muy escasa, aunque la membresía en el sindicato iba creciendo y creciendo, especialmente la membresía puertorriqueña y latina. Entonces, había una campaña dentro de la unión para democratizar la unión y proveer mayor participación.

Nos empezamos a reunir con trbajadores de hospitales, con orgnizadores de la unión y recopilamos información anecdótica de la experiencia de ellos como trabajadores y entonces creamos esta pieza musical. Y la música, pues, se desarrolla. El texto lo desarrollamos partiendo de la anécdota y la investigación que hicimos y la música se desarrolla a partir de patrones musicales tradicionales puertorriqueños.

¿Cómo fue recibida la pieza por los trabajadores?

Fue muy exitosa. No solamente la presentamos a grupos de trabajadores de hospitaes, sino que la presentamos a nuestro público general. Era parte de nuestro repertorio y viajábamos con la pieza por universidades, centros culturales y otros teatros.

¿Esa sería la primera pieza de índole bilingüe dentro de la compañía?

No, porque en La colección ya había una escena de Bienvenido Don Goyito donde adentrábamos en esta cuestión del bilingüismo. Lo interesante de High Noon es la exploración que hacemos de lo que en ese momento llamamos estrategias lingüísticas. ¿Cómo poder comunicarnos con un público sin tener que repetir el texto en español traducido simultáneamente al inglés, o consecutivamente al inglés. Entonces, ahí diseñamos o descubrimos un mecanismo y era que había personajes en la pieza que no hablaban inglés y había personajes en la pieza que no hablaban español, como se daba en la realidad del centro de trabajo. Lo que pasa es que por estar trabajando juntos, pues los trabajadores desarrollaban un mecanismo de comunicación y empezamos a trabajar partiendo de esa realidad. ¿Cómo podríamos hacerlo? Incorporamos esos personajes y tal cual ellos lograban comunicarse unos con otros en la vida real, también lo hicimos en la pieza de tetro.

Una de las cosas que hicimos que era muy efectiva era que había un personaje que hablaba español y tenía un momento en la pieza donde estaba pasando por una crisis donde estaba a punto de perder el trabajo después de muchos años. Simultáneamente había un telón blanco, que era el único elemento escenográfico, donde con la iluminación se veía un actor detrás de este telón que canta una canción donde se recoge la esencia del

monólogo en inglés. Entonces, esa fue una de las exploraciones que hicimos con la cuestión del idioma.

Otra de las cosas que hicimos bilingües, que fue bien interesante, fue cuando hicimos La caravana. La caravana era una pieza de teatro pra niños. La pieza se componía de dos historias. Una historia era la leyenda de la gran calabaza, una adaptación de un mito taíno. Entonces, lo que hacíamos era que esa obra la presentábamos a grupos de niños que estabn en programas bilingües. O sea, que había niños que hablaban español y había niños que hablaban inglés. El primer cuento de La caravana, el gran cuento de la calabaza, era un cuento que se hacía totalmente en español, pero en dos momentos durante el montaje del cuento uno de los actores detenía la acción y le preguntaba al público si había estudiantes que no entendían español y efectivamente los niños alzaban la mano. Entonces les preguntaba a los niños que entendían español si sabían inglés y efectivamente alzaban la mano los niños que sabían español y sabían inglés. El actor les pedía a los niños que sabían español e inglés que se tomaran un momentito para que les explicaran a los que no sabían español. Era un momento muy importante en la vida de esos niños, porque ellos lograban reconocer el poder que ellos tenían al saber dos idiomas. Era como un incentivo y ellos salían de allí bien orgullosos por tener ese estatus dentro de la clase. En las otras escenas seguimos con el patrón que habíamos explorado en High Noon, que era el de personas que hablaban inglés únicamente o en español únicamente.

¿De dónde surge la idea de crear Voces de acero?

Voces de acero surge como una preocupación de miembros del grupo sobre la situación por la cual estaban atravesando unos puertorriqueños que están presos en cárceles de los Estados Unidos, unos de ellos porque fueron acusados y encontrados culpables de conspiración sediciosa por tratar de derrocar al gobierno de los Estados Unidos. Lo que nos perturbaba eran las condiciones inhumanas a las que estaban sometidos estos hombres y estas mujeres en estas cárceles. Empezamos a hacer

investigación sobre estas condiciones. Pudimos conseguir información a través de una tercera persona que consiguió información a través del Freedom of Information Act, que en ese momento estaba haciendo investigación para hacer un documental que luego se transmitió en PBS aquí en los estados Unidos. La cantidad de información escalofriante que recogimos ahí, pues, todavía nos conmovía más. Un grupo de nosotros tuvo la oportunidad de pasar unos días con un grupo de los que ahora están presos, y otros ya salieron., y ellos nos contaron su odisea dentro del sistema penitenciario aquí en los Estados Unidos. Decidimos recoger todo ese material, experimentar con él y desarrollarlo en una pieza de movimiento, de música y de texto. El texto muchas veces fue basado en conversaciones con estos puertorriqueños y puertorriqueñas. Esto se hizo basado en el método de creación colectiva muy común durante los años 60 y 70 en América Latina desarrollado por Enrique Buenaventura, la gente del Teatro la Candelaria, otras cosas de Boal de teatro imagen. Entonces partíamos de ahí e incorporábamos elementos de creación colectiva y los adaptábamos a nuestra realidad y así desarrollamos la pieza. Fue un proceso interesante, porque no nos dimos plazo para terminarla, sino que teníamos el material, queríamos hacer el proyecto, teníamos el espacio y teníamos el tiempo y dijimos "¡Vamos a trabajar!" Nos lanzamos y estuvimos muchos meses trabajando en eso antes de estrenar la pieza. Después que la pieza se estrena, la pieza vuelve de nuevo a la mesa de trabajo y la re trabajamos y rediseñamos. Se escribe más música, se incorporan nuevos artistas y lo interesante es que cada nuevo artista añadía un color que la pieza no tenía anteriormente. Fue un proceso muy lindo. Tuvo buen recibimiento de parte del público general.

¿Cómo se gesta y desarrolla un proyectos de residencia

Pueden surgir de dos formas. Puede ser que un auspiciador se acerque a nosotros y nos demuestre su interés en que vayamos a trabajar y presentemos un show en su comunidad, o puede ser que nosotros contactemos a un auspiidor y le digamos; 'Mira, nosotros tenemos este show...'

Con mucha frecuencia, en el noreste de los Estados Unidos, en la región de Nueva Inglaterra, de Philadelphia, de New Jersey inclusive, lo que hacíamos era una presentación. Llegábamos el día antes, o llegábamos el mismo día y montábamos y presentábamos, pero nos dimos cuenta que había mucha gente en el público que tenía un interés más allá de ver la presentación. Querían tener otro tipo de experiencia. Empezamos a hablar con los auspiciadores de la posibilidad de no sólo presentar, sino de tener algún tipo de charla, dar algún tipo de taller y poco a poco fuimos elaborando un método de trabajo en ese tipo de ambiente. Eso nos condujo a través de los años a diseñar un programa bastante abarcador en términos de que comprendía visitar una comunidad y hacer una o más presentaciones de una obra y trabajar con los vecinos de esa comunidad en desarrollar habilidades o desarrollar destrezas teatrales y técnicas, hasta diseñar ya unas charlas o seminarios donde se comparte con los vecinos y participantes otras destrezas que no son puramente artísticas, sino destrezas administrativas. Todo con el ánimo de que sean más las personas que estén haciendo este tipo de trabajo, porque creemos que mientras más gente esté haciéndolo, mejor es para todo el mundo. También la fortuna de que dentro de la industria teatral y de danza no comercial durante años en este país, se ha desarrollado el concepto de residencia que fundamentalmente es presentaciones y actividades paralelas educativas y las actividades educativas pueden tomar la forma que quieran. Entonces hay organizaciones que pueden conseguir fondos para desarrollar este tipo de residencia.

La residencia de Allentown, Pennsylvania, fue significativa en términos de que fue una residencia bien extensa y bien abarcadora porque cubrió mucho terreno por la participación en la residencia de distintas instituciones en la región del Lehigh Valley en la región de Pennsylvania, pero esa no es una residencia típica, sino que fue una residencia muy particular, muy especial. La residencia típica es una residencia que va entre cinco a diez días de duración y lo que ocurre durante esa residencia es que un grupo de la compañía va a estar allí durante todo el tiempo y esos artistas van a desarrollar las

actividades educativas que pueden ser talleres sobre creación colectiva, talleres sobre movimiento, talleres sobre música y teatro, talleres sobre narrativa, talleres sobre narrativa de texto y talleres administrativos. El grueso de la compañía llega o al final de la residencia o al principio de la residencia y está para hacer las presentaciones para el público general o para niños y estudiantes.

¿Alguna vez han realizado trabajo en prisiones?

Sí, en Ann Arbor, Michigan. Allí hicimos un taller en una prisión. Fue una experiencia bien conmovedora porque entre los presos había gente que estaba allí de por vida. Nosotros, como somos gente de afuera, no tenemos nada que ver con el sistema correccional, no tenemos nada que ver con nada que pueda beneficiarlos o hacerles daño, nos ponía en la posición de crear el espacio donde estos seres humanos fueran capaces de brindarnos lo mejor que ellos tenían y ellos estaban allí por hacer cosas muy malas.

Ellos estaban trabajando una escena y nosotros trabajamos con ellos en el desarrollo de personajes. Les proveíamos asistencia técnica en actuación. Lo que estuvimos allí fueron horas. Desgraciadamente interrumpimos el taller, porque hicieron un simulacro de una situación donde los presos se sublevaran y toman rehenes. no estuvimos envueltos en el simulacro, pero cuando empezó el simulacro nos tuvimos que ir y todo el mundo se fue con las lágrimas en los ojos porque "¿Cómo nos pueden hacer esto?" Ellos sabían que iba a haber ese simulacro y nos dieron esa fecha aún sabiendo. Ahí uno tiene que ser bien claro.

¿Cuáles son tus proyecciones sobre la compañía?

Ahora ha pasado una cosa bien interesante y es que la compañía es una compañía que está administrada por los mismos artistas. Eso es una espada de doble filo. Yo creo que esa es una particularidad de una compañía de este nivel de presupuesto, por así decirlo. En la industria no es solamente en el teatro latino, sino en el teatro off-Broadway en general, una de un puñado.

El ser una compañía corrida, administrada y regida fundamentalmente por los que hacemos el trabajo artístico, nos da la ventaja de tener poder administrativo y a a los artistas sobre nuestro trabajo. No hay enajenación alguna, pero por otro lado la carga administrativa mientras la compañía crece, mientras hay más demanda de trabajo, mientras queremos hacer más trabajo, entonces la carga administrativa crece. A veces estamos en una disyuntiva, porque el tiempo es finito y las capacidades llegan a un límite. Estamos en ese umbral, donde ya es necesario que incorporemos en la estructura administrativa gente cuyo interés sea primordialmente administrativo en función de la labor artística, pero que el trabajo sea fundamentalmente administrativo. Eso nos va a permitir cruzar esa etapa. estamos en eso activamente, buscando y dando los pasos hacia desarrollar esa estructura administrativa que no dependa tanto de nosotros los artistas que trabajamos en la compañía.

Lo otro es el desarrollo del estudio. Tenemos un estudio que es un espacio íntimo. Estamos hablando de cómo explotar al máximo las posibilidades que ese espacio ofrece. No solamente para nosotros, sino también para otros artistas que no tengan espacio y que tengan necesidad de un espacio para poder desarrollar trabajo o inclusive presentar trabajo.

Ahora mismo estamos en esa etapa de organizar el desarrollo del estudio como un laboratorio. Una de las cosas que a nosotros nos gusta hacer... nosotros partimos de la premisa de que mientras más, mejor y no hay razón por la cual un artista o grupo de artistas deba sentirse amenazado por la existencia, la presencia o el crecimiento de otro grupo de artistas y nosotros hemos sido claros en eso desde el principio. Desde que empezamos a trabajar hemos tenido esa visión. Aquí estamos todos haciendo esto y hay mucho que hacer. Mientras más gente haya haciéndolo, mejor es. Mucha gente, por lugar de origen, o por su formación política, o por experiencias de trabajo en otros lugares, vienen al teatro o vienen a esta empresa de hacer teatro no-comercial en los Estados Unidos y Nueva York particularmente, con concepciones equivocadas. Es una

actitud dañina para el medio, la industria, el artista y para el público. Eso va a redundar en escasez. Entonces, nosotros desarrollamos una serie de iniciativas que algunas están ligadas a los programas de residencias, algunas no están ligadas a los proyectos de residencia, sino que están ligadas al trabajo de "advocacy" o solidaridad. Es difícil porque uno tiene que poner a un lado los prejuicios que uno tenga. Por ejemplo, en el caso mío hay formas y estilos que no me interesan, pero que hay que hacerlos. Alguien tiene que hacerlo y yo creo que nuestra comunidad y nuestro público debe tener la experiencia. Por ejemplo, disfrutar de un ballet clásico europeo, de un concierto de música de cámara, de un performance. Entonces, con eso en mente, tenemos que poner al lado una serie de prejuicios que cargamos para que se haga posible esa experiencia de crecimiento artístico y desarrollo cultural. Aparte de que es bien bueno que los artistas se enfrenten ante nuestro público y lo hemos hecho.

A través de los últimos dos años hemos desarrollado un proyecto de colaboración artística entre nosotros y dos organizaciones artísticas más. Una de ellas es de teatro de las Apalaches, donde se unen los tres estados: Tennessee, Kentucky y West Virginia. Entonces esta gente es una comunidad de artistas nacidos y criados allí y están muy arraigados a la cultura particular de las Apalaches, que no es como ninguna otra cosa aquí en los Estados Unidos y no tiene nada que ver con la cultura dominante de los Estados Unidos. Ellos tienen una compañía de teatro que lleva ya trabajando veinte años.

Hay otro grupo de teatro en New Orleans, Louisiana y este es un grupo de teatro afroamericano muy arraigado en la cultura afroamericana de esa región de Louisiana. Una región muy rica y de mucha influencia europea, caribeña, indígena y todo.

Empezamos un proyecto trayendo a la compañía de teatro de las Apalaches, para compartir el trabajo de ellos con nuestro público y hacer una serie de intercambios. Luego ellos nos llevan a nosotros a Kentucky. Fue cómico porque unos puertorriqueños de Tennessee leyeron en el periódico que nos íbamos a presentar allí y guiaron un fracatán de horas para ir a ver a Pregones allí. Mucha de esa gente en su vida había visto

a un puertorriqueño. Eso fue una cosa excelente. Hay muchas cosas en común en las culturas. Hay muchas cosas en común entre la historia política de esa región y la historia política de Puerto Rico. Son muchos los paralelos.

Luego trajimos a la compañía de New Orleans y la presentamos para nuestro público. Y luego fuimos a New Orleans y nos presentamos para el grupo de ellos. Durante estas visitas siempre buscamos el momento de que las tres compañías pudieran hacer algo juntas. Cuando trajimos a la compañía de Nueva Orleans una de las presentaciones que organizamos fue como un cabaret en donde los artistas de las tres compañías ocupamos el escenario una noche haciendo distintas muestras de nuestro trabajo para el mismo público y lo hilamos como un show de cabaret. Nos gustó mucho la idea y ahora estamos desarrollando un proyecto artístico que incluye las voces de las tres compañías e incluye a los artistas de las tres compañías. Ese proyecto esperamos que esté jirando a través de todos los Estados Unidos en la temporada del 98-99. La compañía de las Apalaches se llama Roadside Theatre y la de New Orleans Jukebox Theatre.

¿Qué papel juega la música en las producciones de Pregones?

Siempre nos gusta incorporar la música en vivo en nuestro trabajo. Nos gusta que la música cumpla un rol indispensable en el trabajo teatral.

Influencias

Yo creo que todo tiene que ver con todo y nosotros no estamos ajenos en nuestro desarrollo teatral a las influencias. Hay influencia de Brecht, puede haber influencia del musical norteamericano, hay influencia de la tradición puertorriqueña popular donde la música es una constante, es algo vital y nos gusta explorar con eso. Una de las ocasiones en las cuales yo derivé placer en esto fue cuando hicimos Medea. El proceso nos sorprendió con todo el descubrimiento que se hizo, con todo lo que hicimos con ese texto y cómo de una idea que en un momento el director no sabía cómo era que iba a encajar una festividad popular puertorriqueña con un texto que fuera totalmente ajeno a eso se

pudo concretizar al integrar la música. Mediante trabajo y experimentación logramos integrar el elemento popular con ese texto al incorporar la música de los rosarios cantados de las Fiestas de Cruz.

Appendix 4

Interview with Jorge Merced

Associate Diretor of Teatro Pregones

Bronx, New York

March 3, 1997

¿Cómo llegaste a Pregones?

Llegué en enero de 1987. Yo estudiaba en City College y allí había trabajado con Judith y Sandra, que ya eran miembros de Pregones. Me uní a la compañía cuando ya estaban en St. Ann's, recién inaugurado el teatro con la obra Migrants! Antes de eso había completado un programa certificado en danza en Alvin Ailey.

¿Cuáles son tus responsabilidades dentro de la compañía?

Cada año las responsabilidades cambian. Yo he trabajado en todo lo que tiene que ver con mercadeo, la imagen del grupo, diseño gráfico, producción y talleres en las jiras. Me he encargado de diseñar y llevar a cabo talleres de actuación, sobre trabajo de imagen, uso de la música en el teatro y narrativa.

¿Cómo definirías la metodología de trabajo de la compañía?

Es una metodología de grupo desarrollada a través del trabajo en taller. El estilo viene de toda la tradición del teatro latinoamericano. También de la tradición brechtiana. Cosas desarrolladas por nosotros: cómo se adapta la música, por ejemplo, al trabajo del actor, mucho de las adaptaciones dentro de una narrativa y cómo decides cuáles son teatrales, cuáles tienen posibilidades, todo eso lo hacemos en un estilo de taller.

¿Cómo se integra la música a las piezas de Pregones?

La música viene siendo un personaje. Se desarrolla, de acuerdo a la obra que sea, en un personaje en sí. A veces el mismo músico es el que lo encarna por su presencia física y a veces es la música en sí la que encarna ese otro personaje que hace un comentario que sea tanto para expandir un punto, para ilustrarlo, para hacer una analogía

de lo que se está diciendo, para hacer un resumen o para ambientar, pero se mantiene bien, bien claro que es un personaje. Nunca es música de fondo.

Quien nos influyó en este aspecto de la música fue Emilio Carballido quien al principio nos dio la recomendación de que necesitábamos tener la música mucho más presente. Luego cada obra fue desarrollando eso más y más hasta ahora.

Oportunidades de entrenamiento

Primero, tuve la suerte de trabajar en el primer taller de la Escuela Internacional de Teatro de América Latina y el Caribe en Machurrucutu, Cuba. Allí trabajé con Yuyachkani con Miguel Rubio y Teresa Rally y todas las demás personas que vinieron a darnos talleres como Eugenio Barba, Osvaldo Dragún y luego lo que se compartía con los demás talleristas: Rosa Luisa Márquez y Antonio Martorell, de Puerto Rico; Santiago García Ortega de La Candelaria en Colombia y otro compañero de Chile cuyo nombre no recuerdo en este momento.

Después de esa experiencia vino Brasil. Estuvimos trabajando allá un mes cuando empezamos a hacer la investigación de teatro del oprimido, para luego aplicarla al proyecto de El abrazo de teatro y SIDA. Luego fui otra vez con Boal a París y estuve diez días trabajando con él en un festival.

Aparte de eso tuve la experiencia de Nicaragua donde estuve con la gente del Bread and Puppet. También he participado en una serie de talleres en California. En ese aspecto, una compañía te da el apoyo para participar en todos esos lugares. Ser artista individual es distinto.

¿En qué está basada la técnica de trabajo de Pregones

Es una basada en el artista, donde el artista tiene que ser dueño del trabajo y ante eso es un negocio. Al tú administrar tu arte, tu propio trabajo, eres dueño de él y eres quien decide cómo se manifiesta. Eso es bien importante, porque a la hora de crear te da más certeza. Tu vínculo y tu entrega es mucho más que si estuvieras trabajando para otros productores.

Es creación colectiva la mayor parte del tiempo, aunque a veces llegamos a optar por modos más tradicionales con director, asistente de director y actores, pero usualmente cuando llegamos a ese proceso es cuando ya hemos pasado por la etapa de que todo se ha pensado. Colaboramos todos en la creación de cualquier cosa.

¿Cómo se hace la investigación?

Cuando este proyecto, "El bolero [El bolero fue mi ruina]," yo traje la pieza hace cinco años. Cada año hice una nueva lectura de la pieza hasta que ya sentí la necesidad de despegarme del texto y entonces integramos a Rosalba y a los músicos. Pero usualmente nos dividimos. Cada cual hace algo. Luego, después de haber hablado muchísimo y de haber establecido el hilo conector y el estilo que queríamos, pues podíamos darle forma. A veces, una persona sola se encarga de conseguir la información y repartirla. A veces nos dividimos cosas de acuerdo a la necesidad y al tiempo que tenga disponible cada cual.

Cuando fuiste a Brasil ¿ya tú sabías a qué querías aplicar el conocimiento adquirido?

¿Ya tenías una agenda de qué era lo que iba a pasar con tu entrenamiento allí?

Había una agenda bien clara. Habíamos hecho una escena. La primera escena de En mi familia no, que la hicimos a finales del 87 o en el otoño del 87. Hicimos la primera versión de esa pieza. Yo hacía Tito, Alvan hacía del hombre de la casa, Rosalba hacía de mi hermana y no había Joker. Como parte de la investigación del grupo ya se había incursionado en las destrezas de teatro del oprimido. Vimos que aquí había un tipo de teatro en el cual nos interesaba ahondar y Alvan había visto una muestra que se hizo en Cuba donde se usaban las técnicas de teatro foro. Le interesó y lo trajo para acá a ver si nos interesaba.

Heriberto Sánchez Soto estaba trabajando con el New Jersey AIDS Project. Habíamos leído un artículo que salió en El Diario/La Prensa, bien horrible, sobre el SIDA y cómo habían respondido los artistas ante la crisis. Sentíamos que eso no podía ser así. La gente va a creer que nadie está haciendo nada en cuanto al SIDA. Para ese tiempo no

había nada en nuestra comunidad. En esas semanas apareció Heriberto diciéndonos que él necesitaba ver algo en teatro. Empezamos a hablar del SIDA. El nos habló de muchos casos y cosas que estaban pasando. Cuando él se fue nos fuimos al escenario a trabajar y explorar qué cosas nos interesaban o funcionaban o eran teatrales.

Escogimos esa escenita. No sabíamos nada. Estábamos basándonos en algo que Alvan había visto. Todo era basado en una práctica intuitiva. Lo hicimos una vez y funcionó, más o menos, pero no teníamos una idea de cómo desarrollarlo y en eso conocimos a Boal y entonces él nos invitó a que fuéramos a trabajar allá con él.

¿Cuál fue el impacto de trabajar directamente con Augusto Boal?

El efecto fue uno de validar lo que habíamos hecho y ver que sí estábamos en el camino correcto. Eliminar las cosas que no estaban funcionando. Pulir nuestro acercamiento al teatro foro, pero sin tener que ser religiosamente fanáticos de las propuestas de Boal y adaptarlas a las nuestras. Por ejemplo, Boal es mucho más casero. No cree tanto en un espectáculo, sino que cree en una cosa totalmente orgánica que surge y ya. Nosotros pertenecemos a otra tradición donde el público quiere ver un "show," va a ver un "show." Nuestro acercamiento era, "Bueno, usted va a ver una obra de teatro." El personaje del Joker, el facilitador entre el público y la escena, para Boal es una persona más. Nosotros ya le dimos un vestuario aparte y unas campanas para que pudiera detener la acción. Las escenas de Boal son obras larguísimas que dan todo un trasfondo. Nosotros tuvimos que adaptarlo a escenas que duraran 15 minutos lo máximo, para darle tiempo a la gente a intervenir.

La obra tenía que ser totalmente flexible a ser bilingüe. A que cuando entráramos a un lugar, si la necesidad era en español, era en español y si era en inglés, en inglés. A incluir en el "staff" una persona que fuera un educador de salud, que fue Magaly Jiménez. A hacer un paquete de esto, que pudiera viajar en un tren y que fuese compacto. Esas son cosas que son nuestras, no de Boal. Cuando Boal regresa y ve lo que estamos haciendo, quedó maravillado. Para ese tiempo nadie había hecho nada sobre el SIDA.

¿A qué tipo de público se le presentó esta pieza?

Desde un principio vimos que este no podía ser un show donde la gente pagara. Hicimos todo lo posible por buscar el auspicio de otras fundaciones o de las organizaciones que eran los patrocinadores de algún evento X o Y, para que el público viniera a estas actividades gratis. Se presenta como una obra de teatro. El público en general asistía. Había otras obras que eran para un público bien específico. Máscaras era solamente para mujeres y, aunque se le permitía a los hombres ver la función, una vez comenzaba la parte de teatro foro, todos los hombres se tenían que salir del espacio. Este era un espacio donde la mujer tenía que sentirse sin la presión de tener la posibilidad de que un hombre viniese a contradecir lo que ella estaba pensando. El teatro foro lo que te ofrece es un espacio para tú desarrollar una respuesta. Había ocasiones en las que para que la mujer pudiese ver la totalidad del problema, no podía haber hombres allí. Tenía que ser la discusión de mujer a mujer. Siempre aguantábamos la salida de Alvan para cuando las mujeres ya habían discutido el problema y tenían una solución. Uno nunca sabe quién está en el público y quién está pasando por una situación similar.

¿Se fue la situación de las manos alguna vez?

Ahí fue cuando yo, que había estudiado más a fondo a Boal, me convierto en el Joker de la compañía y actúo como facilitador de la obra. Ya tenía yo mis herramientas en mi sitio para detectar cuándo algo podía ser catastrófico y saber dónde detenerlo para hacer que la persona no tuviera que involucrarse tanto y pudiera analizar lo que estaba pasando.

Fue un proceso de aprendizaje que toma tiempo. Al principio no se prevé lo que puede suceder o, a veces, tú hasta quieres que eso pase para que sepan bregar con todas las situaciones. Pero, como te dije, en ese momento nadie estaba hablando sobre el SIDA y no sabíamos la pasión con la que iban a responder. Nosotros nos íbamos a las iglesias, a veces después de un sermón hacíamos esto allí mismo en el altar. Íbamos a todas partes. Como no se había hablado del SIDA anteriormente en nuestra comunidad, las

filas eran enormes después de la función para hablar con nosotros. Nos veían como a más que médicos. Eramos las únicas personas que supuestamente teníamos la sabiduría para decirles "¿cómo yo voy a hablar con mi hijo sobre el SIDA?; ¿cómo yo hablo con mi hermana y le digo que su esposo está pasando por esto?" Les decíamos: "nosotros no somos sicólogos, no somos trabajadores de la salud," y ahí fue cuando nos vimos con la necesidad de traer a Magaly, que es trabajadora de la salud. A veces había gente que se esmelenaba a llorar y tú sentías ese dolor y esa confusión.

Esto fue esencial, primero porque fuimos los que abrimos las puertas a todo lo que se está haciendo ahora. Luego, empezaron a darse cuenta las instituciones de que lo que estábamos haciendo funcionaba y de que la prevención era importante en cuanto al SIDA. En nuestras comunidades todos los modelos que se hicieron eran copias al carbón de lo que estaba haciendo Pregones. Empezaron a salir "request proposals" en todas partes para utilizar el teatro como medio preventivo. Si no fuera porque fuimos a iglesias, auditorios, hospitales, etc., tal vez todo lo que se ha hecho con la prevención del SIDA no se habría hecho. /Hasta Magic Johnson nos dio dinero todo un año para apoyar nuestro proyecto! Se dio cuenta que éramos los únicos haciendo esto.

Al principio era una cosa muy local dentro de la comunidad. Luego nosotros nos responsabilizamos por buscar el dinero en distintas fundaciones. Una vez establecimos a Magaly, la organización Borinquen fue la primera organización con la que trabajamos en conjunto para hacer alrededor de 30 presentaciones en El Barrio.

Esto creó su impacto. Una vez comenzamos a cobrar popularidad, se nos plantea "hay que probar esto científicamente." A lo cual nosotros nos negamos al principio diciendo que no se puede medir el arte a través de reglas científicas. Una obra de teatro es exitosa si tenemos el público ahí y ve esta obra y el público participa de ella y encuentra ese terreno común que le permita desarrollar la respuesta a la pregunta que le hacemos a través de la obra. Pero esa era nuestra medida.

Era una época de desesperación total donde se estaban buscando cuáles eran las medidas para poder combatir el SIDA y dentro del área de prevención y educación se estaba buscando una respuesta. Se nos ofrece, ya que estábamos teniendo este éxito, hacer este estudio. Vimos que era importante para que se estableciera esto como una forma viable de llevar educación y prevención. Dijimos: "bueno, si lo vamos a hacer tenemos que ser nosotros quienes diseñemos esto." Entonces Magaly vino, hicimos todo el estudio y se lo sometimos a Alex Carballo Diegues, quien fue el sicólogo principal dentro del estudio. Entonces vinieron todos estos científicos a enseñarnos a diseñar el instrumento y a aplicarlo.

Se mostró que esto sí era válido como un instrumento de prevención. No medía el arte en términos de cómo el arte funcionaba como una forma de prevención y educación. Se medía qué aprendió el público y si su actitud en cuanto al SIDA cambió de alguna manera u otra. Sí cambian la actitud, que es lo importante. Eso no se había logrado de ninguna otra forma. A veces, hasta con consejería individual, era muy difícil.

Por todo lo visceral que tiene el tú montarte en un escenario y hablar, no solamente hablar de lo que tú crees, sino actuarlo, la obra logra su efecto. No es lo mismo decir "la gente debe hacer esto," que decir "ay, yo tengo que hacer esto." Y la premisa es que tú tienes que subir al escenario y hacer el papel de la persona que está pasando por la opresión y el discrimen. Una vez te encuentras tú en esos zapatos, cambias. Ya no es una cosa abstracta, tienes que hablar de ti. Es un cambio total.

¿Qué pasa si deciden que otro personaje, no el previsto, es el oprimido?

Ahí es cuando el diálogo empieza a pasar, pero se señala "eso es cierto, es así, pero, ese personaje que usted señala como el más oprimido, ¿está ejerciendo opresión en otro personaje?" Ahí es que tú empiezas a analizar si, al un personaje ejercer opresión en otro, ya no es necesariamente el más oprimido. No es negar la problemática, sino identificar quién es el que recibe más opresión.

Inspiramos a mucha gente a hacer ese tipo de trabajo. Teatro Vida vino después de nosotros basado en teatro educativo con situaciones.

Por favor, descríbeme una función común y corriente

- I. Se doblaban paneles y se empacaba todo lo que iba a viajar en tren.
- II. Magaly, con anterioridad, proveía información para promover el evento.
- III. Se preparaba la mesa del educador.
- IV. Se montaba todo en diez o quince minutos.
- V. Se determinaba el idioma de preferencia.
- VI. El "host" daba la bienvenida.
- VII. Magaly se comunicaba con el público.
- VIII. Espectáculo.
- IX. Orientación con la educadora de la salud.

Hubo un momento en que se paraba la acción, Magaly venía al escenario y se sentaba con los personajes y la gente les podía hacer preguntas a los personajes sin tener que venir al escenario (eso pasaba luego de las intervenciones del público). Magaly, entonces facilitaba la información. Luego los personajes se iban, Magaly se quedaba y daba un taller sobre SIDA.

Yo empezaba la obra con un poema. Rompía con el poema y explicaba al público. Practicaba lo que iba a pasar con el público. Definía qué era oprimido. Se explicaba cómo serían las intervenciones del público y todas las herramientas para ellos apropiarse de la obra. Cuando llega el momento del clímax, esto Boal no lo hace, nosotros somos los que paramos la acción la primera vez. Con Boal, es el público quien para la acción. Aquí, cuando yo veía que la acción estaba a punto de explotar, yo paraba la acción y preguntaba: ¿Ustedes están de acuerdo con la acción? ¿Ustedes creen que esto debe cambiar? Hacíamos un calentamiento con el público, se hacía la obra otra vez y esta vez era el público quien detenía la acción.

La mayoría de las veces a la gente había que detenerla. Había momentos bien peligrosos. A Alvan le tocaban personajes opresores y a veces había que parar la acción porque había mujeres que querían tirarle a Alvan con una silla o darle con algo. Una persona que no está acostumbrada a lo que es el teatro, se para allá arriba y cree que esta es la vida real.

Especialmente, cuando bregábamos con los niños nos pasaba eso mucho. De pronto había un llantén y había que sacar a la maestra. Era la primera vez que bregaban con el problema y luego que lo hacían, el haber tomado las riendas de sus vidas los hacía reaccionar con emoción. Tenían que llorar. Era una experiencia esencial para todo el que participaba.

¿Por qué cerraron el proyecto?

Uno, porque la demanda era tal, que era o hacer solamente esto y olvidarnos de todo el trabajo de Pregones, o dedicar tiempo a nuestras otras facetas. Yo creo que hicimos lo que queríamos hacer con el SIDA, que fue regar la palabra y hacer que la gente se diera cuenta de lo que estaba pasando y empezaran a hacer. Hicimos muchos talleres también con profesionales para que ellos usaran esto en sus trabajos. Se hicieron muchas versiones. El último año que hicimos el proyecto fue hace dos o tres años. Cándido Tirado también nos hizo una obra para adolescentes. Ya en ese momento nos dimos cuenta que estaban pasando otras cosas que estaban tomando importancia como el desarrollo artístico del grupo y proyectos nuevos que nos interesaban. No nos interesaba ser una compañía que bregara únicamente con el SIDA y/o con teatro foro. Desde el 87 hasta el 93 ya eran 6 años de trabajo y decidimos cerrar esa etapa. Tuvo mucho éxito.

¿Cuáles son tus proyecciones sobre el futuro de Pregones?

Luego de El abrazo comenzamos a trabajar más con las adaptaciones de cuentos al escenario. Dedicamos mucha energía a eso. Se desarrolló el aspecto de ser también una compañía presentadora. Ser productores de otros artistas. [El bolero fue mi ruina]

Es bien importante seguir manteniendo este teatro vivo por la naturaleza del trabajo. Pero que nos permitiera trabajar más en lo artístico. Me emociona tener este espacio ahora, que es más íntimo. Tenemos proyectos interesantes que pueden darle ímpetu a nuestra compañía. Me interesa seguir promoviendo el trabajo de personas gay.

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VI. Scripts

All of these plays are original pieces not published anywhere. Dates listed are those of production rather than copyright. Authorship is credited according to information given by Rosalba Rolón (Co-founder and Associate Director of Pregones Theatre).

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VII. Videos

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Historias. Pepatián (guest artists).

Los indocumentados, 3/4". Entrevista a Rafael José (canal 41). Teatro del Sesenta (guest artists).

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Medea. 3/3/91.

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Migrants! & La caravana.

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TEATROFESTIVAL 93, 3/4". *Teatruras*, Teatruras (guest artists).

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