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Redefining the contours of hispanicity in '92: José Sanchis Sinisterra's *teatro fronterizo* and the V Centenario

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ABSTRACT

The showcasing of José Sanchis Sinisterra's *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* within the V Centenario was significant for various reasons. The event bestowed legitimacy upon a playwright who foregrounded marginality as a matter of principle and aesthetic. He promoted theater as a catalyst for social and political reforms while insisting on institutional support for theater to thrive.

Directed by José Luis Gómez, the 1992 production of *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* represents a striking marriage of center and fringe while paying homage to the director and playwright's cosmopolitan artistry and revisionist mission. Like most of Sanchis's plays, *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* reveres and resists the authority of Spain's theatrical canon. It meanwhile interrogates Spain's relationship with its colonialist *past* and encounter with its Other (non-European cultures) both symbolized by America, and it does so precisely at a time when national debates over historical memory and immigration were beginning to dominate public life. The critical response to this performance helps to assess *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*'s effectiveness in engaging society and reshaping attitudes in relation to these topics. Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's *The Couple in the Cage*, performed contemporaneously as part of the Edge '92 festival, in Madrid's symbolically charged Plaza Colón, offers a further yardstick for evaluating the play's impact in this regard.

KEYWORDS

Performance; V Centenario;
José Sanchis Sinisterra; José
Luis Gómez; Lope de Aguirre

Fracaso, sí. ¿De qué otro modo designar el resultado de estos años transcurridos en la frontera de la existencia? ¿Cómo nombrar, si no fracaso, la exigua cosecha que los trabajos y los días han proporcionado a este terco proyecto que inicia su décimo aniversario desde la misma penuria de sus orígenes?

—José Sanchis Sinisterra (1988, 24)

Such are the pessimistic terms in which José Sanchis Sinisterra reviews the string of misplaced aspirations and broken dreams that he attributes to his first ten years as the director of what is widely considered to be one of Spain's most significant Transition-era theater enterprises: the Teatro Fronterizo, which Sanchis founded in Barcelona in 1977, significantly, the year in which Spaniards participated in the first post-Franco era elections and thus gave the green light to initiating processes of institutional democratization.¹ What is most striking about Sanchis's reflection are the strong similarities between the basis for his negative assessment and the terms in which so many intellectuals and

stage artists engaged in the so-called *batalla teatral* during the 1920s and 1930s, an equally important transformational juncture in Spanish social and political history. Like his predecessors, Sanchis denounces, above all, a failing infrastructure, the lack of institutional support (material and financial) and a pact of mediocrity linking a dominant class of money-driven theater entrepreneurs peddling ostentatious, undistinguished and anodyne stage productions to a receptive and newly commodity-driven society: “todo estaba previsto y calculado para dar en la diana de la general complacencia” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1988, 25). The consequences of this fatal embrace for Spanish theater culture on the national level – a generalized acceptance of “complacencia” – was a matter of considerable alarm for Sanchis just as it was for the distinguished generation of critics active during the 1920s and 1930s, many of whom were energetically engaged with the great project of political reform that was the Second Republic: Luis Araquistáin, Ricardo Baeza, Juan Chabás, Enrique Díez-Canedo, Jacinto Grau, Ramón Pérez de Ayala and Cipriano de Rivas Cherif, among others.² The coinciding of demands for stage-based “investigación”, “experimentación” and “el sentido del riesgo inherente a la creación artística” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1988, 24) within the framework of what were two profoundly transitional junctures in Spanish history is certainly not arbitrary. José Sanchis Sinisterra is simply one of the most vocal, relentless and eloquent Transition-era exponents of a belief that has driven leading stage artists since time immemorial: that politics, society and a nation’s theater (in its multiple dimensions spanning all aspects of playwriting and stage production) are inextricably intertwined, that they feed on and, at the same time, nourish the common principles and practices that define the body politic and that moments of profound social and institutional renewal therefore offer leading stage artists a unique opportunity to intervene in national projects and help define the emerging order in meaningful ways. The construction of a truly democratic state would necessarily be predicated on the construction of a truly democratic *society*, a process in which the stage should prove instrumental, as both spark and mirror.

Setting the stage in 1992

In view of these considerations, it is highly significant that a mere three years after Sanchis offers his assessment, Luis Yáñez, chair of the Comisión Nacional Quinto Centenario and a key member of the ruling Socialist Party, should invite José Luis Gómez to organize a major theatrical performance in conjunction with what was billed in the press as the celebration of Spain’s “discovery” of the New World. Of equal importance is Gómez’s decision to ask Sanchis for permission to stage *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*, which eventually appeared in Madrid’s Teatro María Guerrero in March as one of the “platos fuertes del programa teatral promovido por el V Centenario” (Muñoz 1992). The significance of Gómez’s role in the *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* theater event cannot be overstated. To begin with, Gómez’s involvement in the María Guerrero national theater company was anything but a novelty at this point. Having trained abroad in the 1960s and 1970s under the tutelage of such renowned figures as Jacques Lecoq in Paris, Jerzy Grotowski in Warsaw and Lee Strasberg in New York, Gómez returned to Spain where he put his global training to local use. From 1979 to 1981 he codirected, with Núria Espert and Rufino Tamayo, the newly founded Centro Dramático Nacional (CDN), a project that, like the Teatro Fronterizo, emerged in tandem with the new state and thereby signaled how Spain’s theater culture,

both mainstream and marginal (*alternativo*), was embracing the same spirit of renewal that pervaded the country in the aftermath of Franco's death – the economic downturn, social unrest and political violence notwithstanding. As director of the CDN, of the Teatro Español (1983–1984) and of the semipublic Teatro de la Abadía that he founded in 1994 with support from Madrid's regional government (González 2004), Gómez made a series of bold and incisive decisions regarding programming, aimed generally at elevating the status of Spanish national theater. His staging of José María Rodríguez Méndez's *Bodas que fueron famosas del Pingajo y la Fandanga* as the inaugural performance at the CDN, under the direction of Adolfo Marsillach, is a case in point. With state support, he managed to showcase a contemporary Spanish author, one who had been marginalized during the Franco regime, in a high-profile, high-quality production that could serve as a source of inspiration for aspiring Spanish playwrights. Meanwhile, his highly acclaimed productions of Lorca – *Bodas de sangre* (1985) and *Don Perlimplín* (1990) – and of Calderón – *Absalón* (1983) and *La vida es sueño* (1992) – provide a distinctly Spanish canon-based prism of reference that served no doubt to validate Gómez's more innovative programming in the public eye. No choice is more significant in this regard than Gómez's decision to stage Manuel Azaña's *La velada de Benicarló* at the CDN in 1980, a move that helped to rescue the legacy of the Spanish Second Republic from its Franco-era oblivion while bestowing upon that legacy the dignity of being showcased on the hallowed stages of the new democratic regime, in dialogue with Spanish playwrights, both experimental and canonical, from all periods of national history. Few, if any, of Spain's stage directors surpass Gómez in terms of his ties to the theater-stage component of the renewal projects that characterize Spanish culture during the period in question (1977–1992), nor do many surpass him in terms of the *legitimacy* of those ties. Avowedly nonpartisan, Gómez's reputation as an artist garnered him the respect and lucrative support he needed during this period to advance his agenda through the stage, whether via the national (Spanish) or regional (Madrid) Ministries of Culture, irrespective of the party in power.

By choosing to stage *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* under the aegis of the V Centenario commission, Gómez was able to advance the primary causes that he had embraced since returning to Spain in the 1970s: to support the creative endeavor and aesthetic renewal of contemporary Spanish theater by bringing the works of promising young artists onto the nation's foremost stages and placing them in dialogue with the greatest authors of Spain's classical tradition and to leverage the stage for the purpose of fostering a public reappraisal of Spain's relationship with its past and with dominant trends abroad. Gómez reaffirmed these principles explicitly and repeatedly in interviews that he gave throughout the 1992 theater season. He insisted on the "critical" dimension – "este montaje es crítico" – of Sanchis's portrayal of the sixteenth-century caudillo, thereby echoing a point that Sanchis himself defended: "En la obra late una crítica a Lope de Aguirre en medida en que éste acaba convirtiendo su tentativa de revuelta en una carnicería indiscriminada" ("Sanchis Sinisterra estrena" 1992). Gómez went so far as to proclaim that the very survival of Spanish theater depended on the willingness and ability of stage directors like himself to accept the challenges posed by such important works as this one, which defy conventions and challenge prevailing aesthetic judgment and expectations:

[E]n España es cada vez más difícil hacer trabajos de este tipo. Esta es una obra de riesgo, de un autor contemporáneo y con exigencia textual. Ahora sólo se representan los títulos grandes y conocidos y poco a poco se dejará de escribir teatro. (Monjas 1992)

Gómez's was a project of *national* renewal with *cosmopolitan* aspirations, in short. The occasion of the 1992 V Centenario invitation offered Gómez, the actor/director, the opportunity to advance it in these terms while codifying formally the longstanding artistic partnership that he had cultivated with the author/director José Sanchis Sinisterra for over a decade, a relationship that had already borne considerable fruits. In the early 1980s, Gómez directed Sanchis's adaptations of Calderón's *La vida es sueño* and *Absalón* (1981 and 1983) at Madrid's Teatro Español. In 1987 he directed and starred in Sanchis's *¡Ay, Carmela!*, the high-profile success that helped to maximize Sanchis's reputation as Spain's leading playwright of the early democratic era – a reputation bolstered further by the popularity of Carlos Saura's 1990 film adaptation of the play. As to the play chosen for the 1992 celebrations, it should be noted that Sanchis began composing an earlier version of the piece in 1977, titled originally *Crímenes y locuras del traidor Lope de Aguirre*, completing it in 1986 for what ended up being a short and unsuccessful run. José Luis Gómez's visionary insights into the power and poetry inherent in Sanchis's "teatro de ideas" led him to request permission to stage – and revise – this "obra de riesgo" for the 1992 celebration, a decision that resulted in the subsequent publication of a revised version of the play under its new title, *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*. Whether Gómez's and Sanchis's intellectual, artistic and generational bonds are indeed on a par with Bernard-Marie Koltès and Patrice Chéreau's "hermanamiento artístico", as one critic has suggested (Ortega 1992), the 1992 festival, with its 70 million pesetas (roughly 420,000 euros) of state funding, was clearly the catalyst for the two to work as a team in order to bring to fruition a project that Sanchis had nurtured since the birth of Spain's democracy and to produce what by all accounts became a *theater event* of national proportions. The 1992 V Centenario extravaganza thereby legitimized a partnership closely identified with Spain's Socialist-era theater culture at a symbolic moment of national reflection and on the very stage where Gómez launched his quest for the new theatrical nation in 1978.

Lope de Aguirre, traidor: the theater event

We turn now to details of the performance in order to outline the magnitude of *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*, not in isolation as a piece of dramatic literature, but in its dimension as the *theater event* that it became in 1992 on a national – even international – scale, thanks to its staging in a series of concrete and highly significant venues (Wiles 1980, 1–9). After its premiere in Torrejón de Ardoz in January, Gómez's version of the play completed its preliminary run in Barcelona, Reus, Segovia and Zaragoza, prior to opening in Madrid's Teatro María Guerrero, where it was staged throughout the month of March. It traveled abroad in April, appearing at international theater festivals in Caracas, Venezuela, and Bogotá, Colombia, before returning to Spain later that month to appear in Pamplona. Subsequent performances were organized throughout May and June in Almansa, Toledo, Seville, Logroño, Málaga, Córdoba, Cáceres, Salamanca and Bilbao. The play's 1992 national tour culminated in July at Barcelona's Teatre Poliorama, as a major feature of the Festival Olímpic de les Arts that was organized in conjunction with the city's Olympic Games.

The venues throughout Spain where Gómez's production was hosted serve in several ways to contextualize the performance socially and politically and to speculate on its reception, broadly speaking, at a national level. With the exception of the nearly month-long run in Madrid in the month of March, *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* was mostly showcased in short (usually two-day) runs in Spain's most venerable theaters, that is, in locales that were founded, like the Teatro María Guerrero, in the nineteenth or early twentieth century and that recall, in terms of their design, the Italian baroque prototype that prevailed during that period: proscenium stage, horseshoe auditorium and seating plan with various gallery levels rising above the main floor, ornate interiors, decorated often with gilded finishings and brocade or embroidered curtains (red and gold tend to dominate). These are rigidly codified performance spaces redolent of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture and suggestive of the social and economic status and privilege associated with that class. As such, these theaters predate the twentieth-century innovations in theater design and performance space aimed at facilitating experimentation in terms of audience-actor arrangement and interaction. They counter, in short, the bare-bones "empty space" symbolism and primitive or austere essentialism that are associated with contestatory, anti-bourgeois avant-garde aesthetics and that would align more closely with the "rough" and "holy" style and intentionality of such experimental "obras de riesgo" as the Sanchis-Gómez production.³

Cartography suggests similar disparities for, when mapped onto Spain's urban social, economic and political power grid, these theaters reveal the performance of *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* '92 as unfolding at or near that grid's epicenter throughout the nation. Reus's Teatro Fortuny and Segovia's Teatro Juan Bravo are on each city's Plaza Mayor. Logroño's Teatro Bretón is adjacent to the seats of La Rioja's regional judicial and fiscal administration whereas Toledo's Teatro Rojas is near that city's cathedral, the seat of the Primate of the Spanish Church. The theaters are predominantly *public* or *official* (managed by the municipal government) and many sport ostentatious symbols designed to flaunt that status. Zaragoza's official coat-of-arms, with a gold lion against a red background and topped by a crown, presides over the proscenium arch in its Teatro Principal, lending events hosted there a certain regal air. These airs of legitimacy were reinforced by the programming of *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* within the region or city's official program of festivities: Castilla-León's "Teatro en Primavera" in both Almansa and Toledo, Extremadura's "Festival de Cáceres", Salamanca's "Feria Universal Ganadera" and Barcelona's "Festival Olímpic de les Arts". The Seville performance formed part of the Expo 92 celebrations, and it took place in the Teatro Lope de Vega, which was built, along with the adjacent María Luisa Park, for the 1929 Ibero-American Exposition. Programming-related factors along with specific aspects of theater design and geography demonstrate the extent to which the packaging and delivery of the *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* spectacle at these and other provincial junctures had the effect of replicating, to one degree or another, the core symbolism of the March staging of the play in Madrid's Teatro María Guerrero, Spain's Centro Dramático Nacional. Thanks largely to the various aspects of this national tour, the officialdom invested in the Gómez-Sanchis spectacle of state appears to have permeated the nation over the first several months of the year.

These factors, along with the generous 420,000 euro budget (70 million pesetas) that critics were wont to publicize (Monjas 1992; "José Luis Gómez presenta" 1992), suggest a large-scale celebration of canonicity and – or *as* – power, a kind of "centrality" that

seems at odds with the *fronterizo* (alternative) spirit that motivated Sanchis throughout the early democratic era. The synergy of play and context is an important reminder of how the authority of the past is woven into the fabric of daily public life, and of how important cultural events can end up nourishing a community's tradition-based power dynamic. The various stages of *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*'s expansive pilgrimage prompted a flurry of attention in the press, a reminder of the role newspapers can play in sustaining and even amplifying the dynamic outlined here. Critics writing in the capitals tended to focus on performances in Barcelona, Zaragoza, Madrid and Seville, but those writing in the provinces were often attentive to performances that were both distant and local. Details concerning the July Festival Olímpic performance in Barcelona, for instance, were picked up from the EFE wire service as far away as Seville and Santa Cruz de Tenerife, where, owing most likely to the linguistic and cultural ties that these regions share with Latin America, local populations expressed a noteworthy pride.⁴ Generally speaking, the reception of this "obra de riesgo" was mixed. Some criticized the play's innovative treatment of history ("suena a lejano, a historia muy pasada", Arco 1992; "el montaje demanda un conocimiento previo de esa controvertida figura histórica", "Un duro montaje" 1992) or its unconventional dramatic structure ("la ausencia de una real dimensión dialéctica", Benach 1992). Yet praise for the lyricism of the text, imaginative directing, excellent acting, lighting and sound effects, multicultural casting and linguistic pluralism was sufficient to propel a strong interest in what others – including the director himself – deemed the preeminent production of the season, even the decade: "probablemente estamos ante el espectáculo más importante de la temporada teatral española" (Ortega 1992); "hace 10 años que no me sale un espectáculo tan redondo y potente" (Gómez as quoted in Díez 1992). We shall return to the play's reception and to the role of press-based criticism below, but for now suffice it to say that, owing to the wide repetition in newspapers around the country of fragments of Gómez's, Sanchis's and even Luis Yáñez's and José Luis Galiardo's interpretations of the play ("antidogmático", "una reflexión sobre el sueño de libertad bañado en sangre", "la utopía anegada en sangre", "la caída del ángel soberbio que osó alzarse contra el Poder Supremo"⁵), the triumph that was *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* '92 was delivered to Spanish society heavily cloaked in a prefabricated paradigm of understanding. The ideas that circulated throughout Spain formed yet another national network of signification, similar to theater architecture, design and location, that enhanced the semiotic force of the performance spaces and locations as coterminous paradigms of meaning for interpreting the play. The performance achieved the dimension of a national event owing ultimately to the brisk and ongoing critical debate that it generated on the broadest scale from January to July, regarding themes that are central to Sanchis as a playwright and that resonate with special poignancy when transmitted via the hallowed venues described above: namely, freedom and power, Spain's relationship with its past and its Others and the role of the stage in helping society process these concerns.

His status as a leading playwright and his friendship with José Luis Gómez notwithstanding, José Sanchis Sinisterra's abiding interest in Spanish national theater traditions, history and nationhood made him a logical choice for the V Centenario's cultural programming. Over the years, Sanchis prepared numerous adaptations of works by leading representatives of the national as well as international canon for different purposes, and these adaptations are a hallmark of his career. I have already mentioned his collaborations in the

early 1980s with Gómez in productions of Calderón and Lorca. His adaptations of plays by Fernando de Rojas, Shakespeare and Brecht, or his dramatizations (*dramaturgias*) of narrative pieces by Melville, Kafka, Joyce, Cortázar and others (Sanchis Sinisterra 1994) formed the basis for his actor training at his Barcelona-based Teatro Fronterizo and within the framework of workshops that he was invited to offer for emerging playwrights abroad (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996a), and many of these pieces enjoyed a successful stage life of their own (Sanchis Sinisterra 2002, 2012). In general, these endeavors demonstrate the inextricable link that Sanchis draws, in his thinking and action, between pedagogy and creativity. They confirm, moreover, his commitment to treating the literary canon specifically, and national history more generally, as a laboratory for exploring innovative modes of expression, something that is strikingly apparent in his recasting of Spanish Golden Age popular theater. In *Ñaque o de piojos y actores* (1980), one of his major box office successes of the early 1980s, Sanchis portrays the escapades of two errant rogues (*pícaros*), as conceived originally by Agustín de Rojas in *El viaje entretenido* (1603), in what is an instructive pastiche of popular Golden Age drama styles. Cervantes's *El retablo de las maravillas* (1615) is his model for *El retablo de Eldorado*, a *Trilogía americana* companion piece to *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* in which Sanchis appropriates Cervantes's two puppeteers, Chirinos and Chanfalla, to frame as an "engaño quimérico" the fever for wealth and power that propelled the imperialist quests of Spain's sixteenth-century conquistadores.

Forever attentive to the educational mission of his writing for and about the stage, Sanchis transcends the mere representation of the characters, styles and themes that predominate throughout Spanish theater history by turning his stage into a locus of theoretical reflection on the very notions of theatricality and canonicity. He achieves this through the metatheatrical frame of reference that is diffused throughout so many of his plays, as it is in *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*, and that prompts his audience to reflect not only on tradition as such but on the nature and meaning of tradition vis-à-vis the present, not only on the action onstage but on theater's role within its social network. In *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*, the characters foreground their own theatricality, for example, by concluding their "parloteo" with "frases galanas" in order to "[hacer] mutis" (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 220) or by referring to episodes of their life as an "entremés" (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 248). They sharpen our focus not only on *what* they say but on the *circumstances* or very *act of their illocutions*. Body and voice become uniquely important tools for blurring the distinction between character and actor, the fictional *then-there* and reality's *here-now*. The "Marañón sin nombre" exclaims in the midst of his "extravíos":

Pero mírame a mi: un hombre de mis partes, hecho y derecho, vascongado además, veterano de no sé cuantas guerras y conquistas, lleno el cuerpo de heridas y de proezas la memoria, condenado a dar voces y más voces en este despoblado para significar... (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 219)

Similarly, Pedrarias de Alместo, "Cronista ocasional de la Jornada", punctuates his "confesión" by questioning:

¿Os extraña verme interpeándoo de este modo, sin otros artificios que los propios del caso? Pues así es: puedo comunicar directamente con vosotros aun a pesar del tiempo y la distancia; aun a pesar de esta ficción ... o quizás gracias a ella. (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 246)

Such demonstrative framings of the actor-characters' bodies and voices as something that transcends reality and time are performed as poignant indices of Sanchis's many

theoretical musings in his essays on the relationship between stage and society, past and present. They heighten the spectators' critical consciousness, engaging them in problematizing, along with the playwright, what the interaction of canonical style and national history suggests in *El retablo de Eldorado*: that traditions and the past remain alive through our discursive practices and historical memory, that social and political renewal – the *teaching* of new ways of perceiving the collective self – requires innovative uses of the *modes* of representation that have best defined us. “Solo desde una transformación de la teatralidad misma”, Sanchis insists, “puede el teatro incidir en las transformaciones que engendra el dinamismo histórico” (1980b). With these words, he captures what is most essential to his mission as a multifaceted stage artist – playwright, director, teacher and theoretician – and thereby offers a crucial measure by which to evaluate the *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* spectacle in 1992, particularly in relation to the highly canonized framework within which it was delivered to Spanish society.

Such an evaluation necessitates that we take stock of what became for Sanchis one of the key strategies for his transformative aims: his insistence, in the *Trilogía americana* as in other history- or canon-based plays (most notably *Ñaque*, *¡Ay, Carmela!* and *El cerco de Leningrado*), on instrumentalizing the fronterizo outlook – we see the world through the eyes of social castaways – as a prism for resizing and thereby humanizing historical events and themes of an epic magnitude (the Spanish Golden Age, the Spanish Civil War, the twilight of twentieth-century Marxist idealism). In *El retablo de Eldorado* the Spanish conquest is represented through the experience of the one-eyed, deaf and lame private, Don Rodrigo Díaz de Contreras who, discharged from military service, returns to Spain accompanied by the Nahuatl-speaking Doña Sombra (he alone is able to converse with her in her native tongue). Rodrigo ends up taking his life, having realized the sham that were the myths and dreams – the “fuente de la eterna juventud” – that propelled his quest. He is yet another of “los otros españoles” (emphasis added), “los últimos de la fila”, “los pobres con ansias de conquista” (B. P. 1992) as Gómez describes the nine speakers in *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* who recall and recount in nine successive monologues their personal role in the fateful journey from Peru through the Amazon basin to Isla Margarita. Aguirre's delirious quest for power and wealth is filtered and refracted through the prism of intertwining testimonies that each of the victims of that quest delivers from the shadows of their death. As Gómez suggests, they share their marginality with Sanchis's many other protagonists who, like them, are portrayed as victims of the histories that they seem driven to recall as if by some inexorable force.

Yet it is important to reconcile the outcast status of Sanchis's rememberers with the overtly mainstream basis of the discursive, tradition-based testimonies they offer of their Conradian pilgrimage toward the apocalyptic finale. Regardless of specific influences other works may have had on Sanchis's reconstruction of these characters, Sanchis's play clearly dialogues with the various postwar contributions to the legend of Lope de Aguirre that continued to resonate, to varying degrees, at the time of the play's performance.⁶ More explicit are myriad points of interaction with the sixteenth-century sources, such as Pedrarias de Almeyda's *Relación de la jornada de Omagua y el Dorado* or Lope de Aguirre's letter to Philip II disavowing his and his allies' allegiance to the crown: “[nos des-naturamos] de nuestras tierras, que es España” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 213; Díez Torres 2011, 208). The play is infused with such intertextual echoes, giving the appearance of a palimpsest.⁷ That Sanchis should conclude the work by channeling his reflections on

memory through the voice of the sixteenth-century chronicler is uniquely significant in this regard:

Detrás de mí la soledad terrible y misteriosa de aquel reino salvaje. Entonces tuve miedo, sí, no tanto a perecer por el hambre o las fieras, como a esfumarme así, sin dejar huella, tragado por un mundo sin memoria: estúpido heroísmo sin testigos. (247)

Appropriation as remembrance is shown to be a paradoxical exercise in representing the unrepresentable through Almesto's (and the play's) final intervention, his appeal to testimony ("testigos") so as to eternalize the words and fame of the caudillo whose memory, as Almesto himself affirms, would best be expunged from our hearts and minds and from the annals of history: "mejor echarle a los perros que lo comieran todo, para que su mala fama pereciera y más presto se perdiera de la memoria de los hombres" (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 249). Sanchis is keenly aware of the paradox he perpetuates as an author. He reminds us elsewhere of the uncanny possibility that representations of Aguirre, like those of so many victims of repression, fulfill the tyrant's own sadistic dreams: "Lope profetizó de él mismo que haría 'crueldades y maldades por donde sonase mi nombre por toda la tierra y hasta el noveno cielo', de modo que su recuerdo quedaría 'en la memoria de los hombres para siempre'" (Iraburu 1992).

The heuristic value of Pedrarias's closing statement could hardly be overstated. To begin with, by evoking and clarifying the play's core tension the chronicler-as-character also pinpoints the meaning of the play's unifying paradoxical image. Aguirre himself, the "figura más fantasmal y enigmática de toda la colonización americana" (Ortega 1992), is reduced to a ubiquitous absence that drives the entire work. His figure is evoked but never embodied. The director José Luis Gómez represents his voice as he reads Aguirre's letter to Philip II during one of the choral interludes, but we never see him. We experience him through his sentient effects on those who are haunted by the traumatic memory of Aguirre's deeds, who, bearing witness to these deeds, "se convierten en fantasmas de sí mismos" (Oria 1992). The ultimate paradox for a playwright so deeply committed to mobilizing his "teatro contra el olvido" (Pallol Trigueros and Pérez-Olivares 2018) is evidenced by his leveraging the most perplexing signs of that very "olvido": the dead, the outcast, the ghosts of our traumatic past.

That *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* should reference so suggestively conversations concerning the unfinished settling of Spain's accounts with its legacies of authoritarianism is striking, considering the chronology of both the play's inception and these conversations. As indicated, Sanchis began composing *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* – indeed, the entire American Trilogy project – at the outset of democracy in Spain, and he continued working on it, along with the other two plays, throughout most of the period leading up to the V Centenario.⁸ The project came to fruition when theoreticians internationally were bringing memory studies into the limelight and thereby establishing the groundwork for the wave of interest in testimonials and trauma that would soon overtake both Spain and post-conflict America.⁹ It anticipated by nearly a decade the debates that would flare up in Spain, in relation to Emilio Silva's founding of the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (2000), the excavations of mass graves, the 2007 Ley de la Memoria Histórica and the status of the Valle de los Caídos and Francisco Franco's tomb. Whether guided or not by the influence of Tadeusz Kantor's "Theater of Death" (Doll 2012), Sanchis clearly anticipates through Almesto and others who speak from

beyond – “Te estoy hablando, Señor, desde tu orilla” (“Plegaria póstuma de Ana de Rojas, vecina de la Isla Margarita”; Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 232) – the special role that corpses would come to play in shaping the tensions and discourses concerning Spain’s relationship with its past, discourses that he himself would help to define through his influence on a younger generation of playwrights.¹⁰ He also provides a basis for putting into context the seemingly contradictory logic underlying the various paradigms of power and authority – appropriation of classical literature, performance venues and spaces, official support at all levels – that framed the 1992 performance of a play whose author was renowned for his “oposición al Poder y a los códigos teatrales establecidos” (Aznar Soler 1991, 33). In the end, the traditions that converge in Sanchis’s writing for the stage along with the various dimensions of officialdom in which the 1992 performance was shrouded can be taken to represent interlocking domains of memory and power, a type of *centrality* or authority that, one must assume, the Sanchis-Gómez team was bent on penetrating and thereby disrupting with the revolutionary spirit of their *fronterizo marginality* (Mayorga 2002, 26).

America in our (decolonized?) heart: our past as our Other

Throughout the six-month nationwide performance of Sanchis and Gómez’s *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*, critics writing in the Spanish press reminded Spaniards without fail of the “love” for America that motivated this project. Sanchis composed this piece, readers were told, “desde el amor a América Latina” (Vigo 1992). Gómez was cited often speaking of his – and Sanchis’s – long-standing relations with Spanish-speaking America: “Yo amo y tengo relaciones intensas en América, donde viajo desde hace veinte años” (“José Luis Gómez presenta” 1992); “esta obra trata de los españoles en Iberoamérica –desde el amor a esa tierra” (“José Luis Gómez estrena” 1992); “América no está en nuestro corazón, y debería estarlo, porque nosotros estamos en el suyo, en su subconsciente” (Castro 1992). José Luis Galiardo’s belief that Spain’s relationship with its ex-colonies can be characterized generally speaking as one of “amor-odio” (“La compañía” 1992) accords with Gómez and Sanchis’s treatment of this performance as a means for making amends with a world to which Spain, they claimed, was indebted:

América es una simple coartada para una puesta en escena. Cuando viajas allí, te das cuenta de que España está presente en muchos aspectos. En cambio, América no está aquí, se nota que no cuenta para nada. Por ejemplo, los autores teatrales latinoamericanos tienen muchas más facilidades para estrenar en Alemania que en España. (Gómez as quoted in Escarré 1992)

The variegated portrayal of the conquest that Gómez achieved through the inclusion of actors from Mexico and Colombia, not to mention Portugal, Euskadi and Andalusia, allowed him to concretize onstage the social and linguistic pluralism suggested by the text while advancing this project of cultural reconciliation with Spain’s historic Other. Casting represented an important strategy of *discovery*, in other words, aimed at bringing America “here”, “into our hearts”. Gómez set out to achieve this by conducting numerous auditions over an extended period of time throughout much of Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula (Díez 1992). His efforts produced a performance whose linguistic heterogeneity sparked great interest among critics, thanks, for instance, to the voices of the Mexican Dolores Heredia, Aguirre’s soon to be murdered mestiza daughter (Elvira), who

soliloquizes to her doll in a mixture of languages – “aquí está la paloma, kayqaya urpi, tambi tambi...” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 241) – and of the Portuguese Diogo Doria, Aguirre’s bloodthirsty slaughterer (Antón Llamoso), flaunting the sordid “razones” (details) of his deeds. Heredia, Doria, the Colombian Laura García in the role of Inés de Atienza (Pedro de Ursúa’s mestiza wife) and Manuel Morón, the *seseante* pride of Cádiz,¹¹ in the role of Don Fernando de Guzmán (the short-lived Prince of Perú); thanks to the inflections of their speech patterns, language itself, one of the key text-based “códigos de la representación”, came to suggest the spirit of openness that was sanctioned explicitly by the V Centenario commissioner, Luis Yáñez,¹² and praised by critics who regarded the performance as “antidogmático” and “pluralista” (Benach 1992; Galdón 1992; “Carmelo Gómez” 1992).

It should be noted that the “pluralism” achieved thusly bears the mark of Gómez and Sanchis’s indebtedness to Peter Brook, who promoted a certain – albeit contested – type of interculturalism onstage during the 1970s in experiments aimed at blurring the boundary between performance and ritual (Brook 1968, 42–64; Gibson 1973; Schechner 1977, 112–170).¹³ Like many of Brook’s experiments, Gómez’s portrayal of cultural heterogeneity is rooted in his profoundly symbolic staging of a deeply lyrical text. During the interludes separating the monologues, the actors abandoned their solitary reflections to rejoin the chorus as it circled in the darkness, torches in hand, while chanting in concert their collective vision of Aguirre’s epic journey. Intensely suggestive visual and acoustic effects thereby enhanced the perceived symbolism of the chorus’s circular movement on a broadly existential plane: of inclusion in the face of disaster and death; of pilgrimage through a liminal space and time; of the processual dimension of *communitas* (Turner 1974; Schechner 1977); of the magical and transformative power of “holy theater” to “liberate [us] from the recognizable forms in which we live our daily lives” (Brook 1968, 53–54).

The ritualistic and intercultural “polyphony” suggested by these and other aspects of the text and its performance¹⁴ raise the question of America’s symbolism as conscribed by this work, within the sociopolitical context of the V Centenario and in relation to Spanish cultural history more broadly. The factors discussed above that helped to condition the performance’s 1992 reception underscore a dual-edged role in this regard, one that was both historical and social, by which America came to symbolize not just Spain’s past but its Other. If staging the grotesque “sueño de libertad bañado en sangre” afforded Gómez and Sanchis the opportunity to prod Spaniards into exposing and thereby processing the scars of their authoritarian *past* in anticipation of debates relating to the Ley de Memoria Histórica, one can easily understand how this performance might have interacted with national conversations regarding alterity and national identity in the *present* after approval of the nation’s first Ley de Extranjería, the Immigration Law of 1985 that marked a profoundly transitional moment in the nation’s social and political history. The director himself connects the text and its context in this regard, calling the play a “reflexión de izquierdas” on, inter alia, the “realidad colonizada”, the “Tercer Mundo que los aventureros dejaron tras de sí” and that “ahora llama a nuestras puertas” (as quoted in Pita 1992; Portero 1992). He went so far as to equate the “revolutionary” experience of Aguirre’s Others – “la historia de los otros, los de Aguirre, los que hacen la revolución” – with that of the masses of immigrants who had already begun to redefine the social face of the nation and would continue to do so over the next few decades (Pita 1992; Portero 1992).

To fully appreciate these correlations it is important to recall that the arrival en masse of political refugees of European ancestry escaping military dictatorships in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in the late 1970s and early 1980s¹⁵ was morphing, precisely at the time of the V Centenario celebrations, into what was, for some, the more challenging phenomenon of a more “third world” type of immigration (to cite Gómez) from Andean and Caribbean regions (Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and the Dominican Republic in particular). Spain’s immigrant population grew from an estimated 0.5 percent in 1986 to roughly 12 percent of the total population by 2010 (ca. 5–6 million people). The image and reality of indigeneity and subalternity that were becoming increasingly prevalent on the streets and in the homes of the *madre patria*’s cities and towns was provoking a widespread reappraisal, at all levels of society, of a Hispanicity that had either been accepted glibly or, as occurred during the Franco regime, had been instrumentalized for political gain. In this new context, the very term *hispano* came to designate for many something *different* from or *other* than native European Spanish: schism rather than kinship. The political tug-of-war that would ensue over the original Immigration Law of 1985 – between 1996 and 2004 it was modified by left- and right-wing governments and was challenged in the Supreme Court – revolved primarily around two key questions: how to integrate equitably a work force that was urgently needed for an expanding economy and how to honor the nation’s postcolonial debt to a citizenry that would now require an entrance visa, in accordance with EU regulations. All of this in an age, more broadly speaking, when the transnational flow of peoples, goods and ideas on the global plane was profoundly altering preexisting power dynamics and spawning similar social and political tensions and transformations throughout the world. As Gómez suggests, to one degree or another the performance of *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* speaks to the crises affecting selfhood in the face of an encroaching Other on the personal and national planes: of nationhood rooted in antiquated notions of cultural (ethnic, racial, religious) homogeneity; of sovereign nation-states vying for authority with a whole series of diffused, multifocal power grids, both legitimate (NGOs, the World Court, international treaty organizations) and illegitimate (transnational crime syndicates).¹⁶

As indicated, their various on- and offstage gestures reflect Gómez and Sanchis’s receptiveness to the notions and visions of pluralism and hybridity that come to dominate intellectual thought and artistic creativity in this period. The Gómez-Sanchis spectacle of state seems to be based on an underlying intersection of ideology and stage poetics that aims to dialogue with the postcolonialism that by 1992 had become prevalent in artistic and intellectual circles throughout many parts of the world. The *fronterizo* aesthetic that Sanchis launched in 1977 and developed throughout the 1980s, in plays like *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*, is crucial in this regard. Through the formulas that define this aesthetic – he refers to his stage technique as a “*dramaturgia sin límites*” (Aznar Soler as quoted in Sanchis Sinisterra 2002) – Sanchis aims to celebrate difference and marginality by endowing the plasticity and dynamism of performance with an open-border and acentric vision of contemporary culture. He seeks to disrupt conventional hierarchies while challenging the contours of performance through the creation of a common experience and mutual field of concerns in which performers and public intermingle, in which spectators are dislodged from their passivity. The dramatic monologue – which, as mentioned, is paramount in Sanchis’s contributions as playwright, theoretician, director and teacher – was his prime strategy for achieving this. Sanchis conceives of the monologue as the

means by which his actors openly engage the audience as their interlocutor and thereby raise the spectators' consciousness concerning one of reception theory's key principles: that spectators complete the messaging, realize meanings, finish the work as it were. Sanchis's monologues are thereby crucial for understanding how ideology "se infiltra", through his writing for the stage, "en los códigos mismos de la representación"; how it interacts with "convencionalismos" that pervade the text and the spatial organization of its performance (Sanchis Sinisterra 1980b); how, in essence, it conditions his ideology-based poetics of reception (Sanchis Sinisterra 2002, 249–254). In the end, Sanchis pursues the construction of a democratic society through the construction of the engaged or "receptive" spectator-citizen who is *actively* involved in performance and (as) politics.

Political structures and processes are inevitably rooted in social realities and this is a fact that Sanchis also addresses in highly suggestive ways. In his 1977 manifesto, for instance, Sanchis emphasizes that his *fronterizo* aesthetic, while aiming to model *political* ideals formally, through the spectator-actor interaction described above, is also rooted in the cultural and ethical values that correspond to present-day thinking on hybridity (Sanchis's *mestizaje*, as cited below) and interculturalism. In his Teatro Fronterizo manifesto he states:

Hay una cultura fronteriza también, un quehacer intelectual y artístico que se produce en la periferia de las ciencias y de las artes, en los aledaños de cada dominio del saber y de la creación. Una cultura centrífuga, aspirante a la marginalidad –aunque no a la marginación, que es a veces su consecuencia indeseable– y a la exploración de los límites, de *los fecundos confines*. Sus obras llevan siempre el *estigma del mestizaje*, de esa ambigua identidad que les confiere un origen a menudo *bastardo*. Nada mas ajeno a esta cultura que cualquier concepto de pureza, y lo ignora todo de la Esencia. (Sanchis Sinisterra 1980a; emphasis added)

As can be seen, the implications of Sanchis's reflections transcend the text and its performance to encompass the ethical values and social context iconicized onstage by protagonists who cross meaningful borders and whose identities are profoundly transformed through their interaction with others. His plays bear this thinking out. *Naufragios* portrays the transformations that Álar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca underwent having lived for nine years among Native Americans in what is now the southern United States:

[G]racias a este naufragio [Álar Núñez] logra, no sólo sobrevivir, sino también acceder a una nueva condición humana: la de quien, habiendo experimentado una doble –o múltiple– pertenencia cultural (como español y como indio) ya no puede asumir plenamente, inequívocamente, cómodamente, ninguna. O lo que viene a ser lo mismo, ya puede asumirlas todas ... relativamente. (Sanchis Sinisterra as quoted in Serrano 1996, 32)

In *El retablo de Eldorado*, the fictitious war veteran Don Rodrigo Díaz de Contreras returns home in the company of his alter ego, the Nahuatl-speaking Doña Sombra, to dramatize the "triumfo de la mirada ciega" of Eurocentric authoritarianism over those who, according to Sanchis, "trataron de ver y decir la otredad como parte de una nostredad, de un nosotros más amplio, imprevisible. Comunidad humana sin fronteras, fraternidad" (as quoted in Serrano 1996, 66). Like the multicultural *Lope de Aguirre*, *traidor* cast who in 1992 pilgrimaged through Spain as a "comunidad sin fronteras", these characters remind us of the "bastard" aesthetic that, for Sanchis, celebrates the fertile fringes of a "mestizo" interdisciplinarity by which borderlands are viewed, to quote Martin Heidegger, "not [as] that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, [as] that from which *something*

begins its presencing" (as quoted in Bhabha [1994] 2002, 1).¹⁷ Through the new horizons and self-awareness they acquire, Sanchis's travelers embody and thereby represent – they begin *presencing* again and again – the "holy" cross-fertilization – Sanchis's "fecundos confines" – that for artists like Gómez and Sanchis are most conducive to unimaginable transformations, both collective and individual.

These, in short, are the ideals inherent in Sanchis's contributions as a stage artist in general and in his *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* in particular, ideals that emerge from a performance considered by both Gómez and many of his critics to be "redondo y potente", uniquely successful (Gómez as quoted in Díez 1992). I note that such observations stand in stark contrast to the sense of "fracaso" professed by Sanchis three years prior, while discussing the crisis in state support for the arts that both he and Gómez blamed for Spain's current "crisis de creadores" (Mercero 1992). I hasten to add that they were not alone in making these claims. In the midst of the celebrations, Luis Yáñez, the Socialist government's V Centenario commissioner, also proclaimed: "Si el teatro de calidad no puede sobrevivir, es obligación de las instituciones públicas buscar fórmulas para salvarlo" (Mercero 1992). In view of such observations, the V Centenario Gómez-Sanchis spectacle of state may indeed be considered triumphant for the unprecedented levels of visibility that it was afforded on the nation's premier stages, thanks precisely to the state funding that it received.

While the state funding, attendance and box office receipts constitute noteworthy indices of success, in view of the performance's widely acclaimed "critical" stance and given Sanchis's insistence on theater's need to "incidir en las transformaciones que engendra el dinamismo histórico" (Sanchis Sinisterra 1980b), one has to ask to what extent the performance did actually "intervene" in the historical transformations of the moment, especially with reference to the play's major themes. What did the performance in fact achieve, to put it otherwise, vis-à-vis new "critical" habits of thought that Sanchis hoped to spawn among his spectator-citizens, especially with regard to America and in view of the pivotal dual-edged role that he ascribes to America in this work? This is, of course, a thorny issue, one that is inevitably subject to speculation. The public discussion that the 1992 performance generated, as documented in the press, offers several important clues that might nevertheless suggest possible answers to these questions and that might help us measure *Lope de Aguirre, traidor's* success in accordance with the author's own criteria.

Generally speaking, the desire for a certain equanimity seems to prevail among the critics, at least with regard to the conquest as historical event. The tendency to nuance condemnations of the "oscura ambición de poder y riqueza" with a certain exculpatory attitude toward "our" ("nuestro") imperial dream can be seen, however, when Joaquín Ollero remarks:

Tan dogmática es la actitud neo-imperialista como la de quienes practican una cultura de pseudo-izquierda. Porque si es injusto santificar un proceso de esclavitud, no es menos cierto que *nuestro sueño imperial* tuvo sus responsables para lo bueno y para lo malo y que la inculcación colectiva existe únicamente en la mente de los psicópatas. (1992; emphasis added)

Surprisingly, a similar impulse seems to motivate *Lope de Aguirre, traidor's* director, José Luis Gómez, in his "positive" (Pita 1992) assessment of a colonization "que permite a Latinoamérica ofrecer una extraña *cohesión*, una realidad cultural de gran *vigor* que sólo fue posible porque los iberoamericanos se quedaron en la tierra conquistada" (Gómez as

quoted in Pita 1992; emphasis added). Concern for the “iberoamericanos” who remained behind and for “nuestro sueño imperial” aligns with the limited notions of alterity evoked, as indicated above, by Gómez, in his reference to “los otros españoles, los últimos de la fila, los hombres de Aguirre, los pobres con ansias de conquista” (B. P.; emphasis added). Such references demonstrate the extent to which 1992s *otredad* was limited to what Sanchis himself terms a *nostredad* “más amplio, imprevisible”: one that corresponded to Spanish castaways and their mestizo wives and children. Questions concerning the Native-American/pre-Colombian social and political order that the Spanish conquest destabilized, displaced and decimated – an order that lies beyond the scope of that *nostredad* and that by all accounts was as “cohesive” and “vigorous” as the one that replaced it – were conspicuously absent from the discussion, relegated to what one historian has termed more recently a post-Transition era “política del olvido”.¹⁸

It is understandable that alterity-related concerns raised in connection with the *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* performance should be so inextricably intertwined with how the play’s central themes of freedom and justice were construed in the press and how they were most likely lived by Spanish society in the early years of its new democracy. The question that Aguirre’s servant, Juana Torralva, poses twice – “¿cuál justicia podemos esperar los que servimos de quienes nos gobiernan, estén lejos o cerca?” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 190, 215) – foregrounds Alместo’s final condemnation of Aguirre in particular and, we can assume, of all tyrannies remembered: “¡Viejo traidor! Nunca he de perdonarte el convertir su propio sueño terrible y justiciero en una absurda danza de la muerte” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1996b, 248). That such reflections on freedom and betrayal might resonate within contemporary Spanish society, in the aftermath of nearly forty years of dictatorship, is a notion seconded by Sanchis’s editor, Virtudes Serrano, who, through Alместo’s words, hears the voice of the author as he evokes the broken dreams and fallen utopias of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Other critics writing in the press opined similarly. Aguirre’s profile as an alleged “libertador” was taken to stand for “el sueño de libertad bañado en sangre [de] ETA”, “el gran sueño de libertad que fascinó a toda la izquierda en los años 60” (Muñoz 1992) and for figures who, like Lenin and Stalin, betrayed the very dreams that they themselves had bred (Díez 1992). Above all, *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* came to signify in 1992 the twilight of a modern European revolutionary spirit (“l’enfonsament de les utopies d’esquerra, de la deserció de tots els impulsos revolucionaris” [el hundimiento de las utopías de izquierda, el abandono de todos los impulsos revolucionarios] [“Lope de Aguirre” 1992]). It is important to note, meanwhile, that the horizons of the “dreams” of freedom and justice, as imagined by *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*’s critics in 1992, were decidedly selective, in that they devolved uniformly onto groups whose bloodlines revert to the Peninsula. Such ponderings, as rooted in “nuestro sueño imperial” and in the all-encompassing “nostredad” associated with those dreams, bring to mind Gayatri Spivak’s debunking of high-profile European intellectuals whom she considers to be “complicit in the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self’s shadow” (1994, 75).

The empire strikes back in Plaza de Colón’s Jardines del Descubrimiento: postcolonialism in Madrid, 1992

While Gómez and Sanchis’s *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* was being showcased on the circuit of Spain’s preeminent stages, purportedly “festejando la teórica unión con otras culturas y

otros ámbitos de los que [en] la práctica, paradójicamente, cada vez nos estamos alejando más” (Ortega 1992), organizers of the Edge '92 Biennial invited the US-based performance artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña to present their piece *The Couple in the Cage* in London's Covent Garden as well as in Madrid's Plaza de Colón. The latter performance was scheduled as one of the celebrations of Madrid as 1992 European Cultural Capital. The piece involved Fusco and Gómez-Peña representing a pair of caged “Guatinauis” (fictitious Amerindians) from a previously “undiscovered” island in the Gulf of Mexico. They did so dressed and interacting in such a way as to satirize stereotypical “concepts of the exotic, primitive Other” insofar as these concepts apply to colonized native Americans (Fusco 1994, 143). The pair appeared in public scantily dressed in garish costumes, with bangles and beads, flamboyant feather headpieces, masks and layers of makeup, reminders of Hollywood Westerns that contrasted jarringly with their sunglasses, cigarettes, televisions, tables and other signs of contemporary leisure. A third person clad in conventional present-day attire would at times lead them on a leash or be led by them, as they approached or abandoned the cage, which was their performance space. The performance was structured thusly as a mockery of the exhibition as *strange* of third-world human specimens, a practice that was widespread especially in circuses and fairs throughout Europe and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries²⁰ and that Columbus inaugurated, according to Fusco, when several captive Arawaks were put on display at the Spanish court for two years following his first voyage (1994, 148). The ethnographer's gaze and the ethics of representation were clearly at the forefront of these artists' minds, as Fusco explains in the companion essay (Fusco 1994) and as is made patently clear by the video version of *The Couple in the Cage* (*The Couple in the Cage* 1993). Footage filmed in the style of old-fashioned newsreels parodying ethnography's traditional fascination with the exotic are interspersed among various scenes documenting Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performances. The video concludes with a wacky close-up of the ethnographer affirming authoritatively: “I have described these things not to praise, not to compare, not to condemn, but to show them as they are” (31:02–31:15).

Location was of paramount importance for the Edge '92 organizers just as it had been and continued to be for the performance artists. They regularly sought public arenas that could frame the piece in powerful ways, inflecting it with special meaning (Fusco 1994, 145; Fischer-Lichte 1997, 227). Before and after the '92 celebrations, they performed in public plazas, shopping malls, parks, museums and libraries throughout Europe, Latin America and the United States. Madrid's Plaza de Colón and the V Centenario offered a uniquely significant setting, however, given their aim of satirizing the very experience of “discovery” that was celebrated by the V Centenario and monumentalized by the Madrid city government's 1977 reordering of the plaza, which included the creation of the pedestrianized Jardines del Descubrimiento. The performance unfolded, in short, against the backdrop of the ostentatious and controversial abstract renderings of Columbus's caravels, designed to delineate and define the Jardines,²¹ near the Admiral's neo-Gothic marble statue erected in 1892 for the Fourth Centennial, under the watchful gaze of an oversized Spanish flag, and adjacent to Spain's National Library, an epicenter of Spanish imperial knowledge.

The proximity of the National Library begs the question of “discovery” understood not as a remote moment in history (1492) but rather as the ongoing academic *practice* that Columbus may have fostered and that has since become inscribed in certain traditions

of representation (orientalist, exoticist and so forth). In short, the construction of the Other through our processes of perceiving, knowing and representing constitute the true experience of “discovery” that the Fusco/Gómez-Peña team aimed to spark through an artistic medium for which audience-actor interaction is essential. It is important to note the similarity of aims shared by Sanchis and the Fusco/Gómez-Peña team in this regard. Like the former, Fusco also sought to “incidir en las transformaciones que engendra el dinamismo histórico” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1980b), a mission that she formulated in the following terms:

Our cage performances forced these contradictions out into the open. The cage became a blank screen onto which audiences projected their fantasies of who and what we are. As we assumed the stereotypical role of the domesticated savage, many audience members felt entitled to assume the role of the colonizer, only to then find themselves uncomfortable with the implications of the game. Unpleasant but important associations have emerged between the displays of old and the multicultural festivals and ethnographic dioramas of the present. The central position of the white spectator, the objective of these events as a confirmation of their position as global consumers of exotic cultures, and the stress on authenticity as an aesthetic value, all remain fundamental to the spectacle of Otherness many continue to enjoy. (152)

The effects of this “reverse ethnography”, as Fusco terms it (1994, 143, 163), forced gullible spectators around the globe to enact what she describes as their conscious or subconscious colonialist impulses on the screen that was the performers’ cage. American sailors in Chicago struggled to understand the lack of hair on Fusco’s legs (“it doesn’t grow”; “she rips it out by the roots”) or the couple’s ability to “pick up traditions” (“drinking Coca-Cola”, “eating saltine crackers, that’s American for you!”; 00:16:08–00:16:30). Outraged museumgoers withdrew their museum membership due to the treatment of the “natives” or they wept out of shame for being American (00:23:19–00:24:08). In Madrid, businessmen mocked the performers with “stereotypical jungle sounds”, adolescents taunted them with beer cans filled with urine and a father insisted on defending Spaniards as having been “more benevolent” than the English in their conquest. He staged his “history lesson” for his son’s benefit, according to Fusco (1994, 160). These and the many other examples of spectators interacting with the artists – fondling them, feeding them bananas, seeking to be photographed with them – stand in sharp contrast to the reaction of a woman smiling wryly into the camera, barely restraining her indignation as she exclaims: “I feel like I’m being put on. It’s kind of offensive. It feels like a slap in the face” (00:08:20–00:08:35).

The “slap-in-the-face” effect may in fact be taken as distinctive of interactive performance art as practiced by Fusco, Gómez-Peña and so many others. The differences in approach separating theater and performance notwithstanding, the aims that link *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* and *The Couple in the Cage*, particularly when considered through the common framework of officialdom (locations, theaters, festivals), beg a final reflection on exactly *how* these works managed to “intervene” purposefully “en las transformaciones que engendra el dinamismo histórico” (Sanchis Sinisterra 1980b). As indicated, Fusco’s video documents the “contradictions” that the caged Guatinauis forced out “on the blank screen” of their “cage”. As a testimonial to this effect, the video may in fact be analogous to the press coverage of performances of Sanchis’s play which, on the whole, transmits a general failure among Spanish critics to triangulate Spain’s relationship with America in terms of Spaniards, mestizos and Amerindians. In these terms, Fusco provides

a framework for appreciating the disruptive “reverse ethnography” that Sanchis achieved, working within cultural networks of power and authority, by forcing out onto the “blank screen” of public discourse a widespread complicity with the “política del olvido” that some decried (Escribano as quoted in “El doble relato” 2016; Amón 1977) and that continued to afflict Spain’s relationship with its quintessential Other, which is to say its *past*. Sanchis may be credited, in short, for charting the impaired contours of a *nostredad*, by staging a nationwide/audience-based enactment of a (re)discovery in which America is recognizable and intelligible only through interpretation, translation or miscegenation. We are reminded here of the unintelligible, Nahuatl-speaking Doña Sombra, who in *El retablo de Eldorado* accompanies Don Rodrigo Díaz de Contreras when he returns to Spain, discharged from military service. If this ghostly character is any indication of the limitations that concern Sanchis, by marginalizing her as the conquistador’s shadow, in both the literal and the figurative sense, the fronterizo playwright succeeded in exposing the need for broader discussions concerning the nature of subjectivity and the cartographies of the knowing we that emerge through the self-serving and selective representation of its third-world Other. It may be that the nation’s subaltern is in fact “able to speak” (Spivak 1994), as Doña Sombra shows; it’s just that folks back in the metropolis have as yet to *discover* how to see and understand her.

Notes

1. On 15 June 1977, Spaniards voted to approve the Ley de Reforma Política of December 1976, which authorized the new bicameral parliament to draft a constitution. The new constitution was approved by popular vote on 6 December 1978.
2. Dougherty (1984) summarizes the main threads of the press-based debates that raged in the early twentieth century.
3. I refer here to chapters 2 and 3, “The Holy Theater” (49–77) and “The Rough Theater” (78–119), of Peter Brook’s *The Empty Space* (1968).
4. Critics writing in Extremadura’s *Hoy* and Seville’s *ABC* touted Gómez’s and José Luis Gallardo’s local roots, identifying the former as the “director onubense” (Monjas 1992; “La esperpéntica figura” 1992) and the latter as an “andaluz-extremeño” (Monjas 1992).
5. These and similar interpretations may be found, for instance, in Díez (1992); Llauradó (1992); Rioja (1992); Muñoz (1992); Pita (1992); Castro (1992); Portero (1992) and Vigo (1992).
6. The list includes: Gonzalo Torrente Ballester’s 1941 play, *Lope de Aguirre*; Ramón Sender’s 1964 novel, *La aventura equinoccial de Lope de Aguirre*; Julio Caro Baroja’s 2014 essay *Lope de Aguirre ‘Traidor’ y Pedro de Ursúa o el caballero*; and Carlos Saura’s 1987 film, *El Dorado*. It bears recalling that Werner Herzog’s *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* came out in 1972. Sanchis refers in general terms to his having been inspired specifically by Torrente Ballester’s play and Sender’s novel (Salazar 2009, 112–113). Serrano identifies Sanchis’s inclusion of “los amores de doña Elvira” as a sign of Torrente’s and Sender’s influence given that this material is absent from the chronicles (1996, 27n34, 243–244n76).
7. In her edited edition of *Lope de Aguirre, traidor*, Serrano (1996) documents meticulously in copious footnotes the relationship between Sanchis’s text and the chronicles that it is based on.
8. *Lope de Aguirre, traidor* (originally: *Crímenes y locuras del traidor Lope de Aguirre*), 1977–1992; *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez*, 1978–1991; *Conquistador o El retablo de Eldorado*, 1977–1984.
9. In her 2002 *Los trabajos de la memoria*, translated immediately into English as *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (2003), Jelin prompted a major discussion concerning this topic in the Spanish-speaking world (Moreiras 2002; Moreno-Nuño 2006; Ospina 2019). She did so by drawing on the contributions of key theoreticians writing around the time of the V Centenario

celebrations, or shortly thereafter: Caruth (1995), LaCapra (1998), Agamben (1999) and Ricoeur (1999).

10. The dead figure symbolically in plays by such students of Sanchis Sinisterra as Sergi Belbel (*Morir*, 1994, and *Forasters*, 2004), Lluïsa Cunillé (*Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*, 2004) and Laila Ripoll (*Los niños perdidos*, 2005). Moreiras (2008) offers an insightful analysis of the corpse in the attic in Álex de la Iglesia's 2000 *La comunidad*, relating this movie to Silva's pioneering work and to debates regarding the mass grave excavations.
11. "No ha perdido ese aire malicioso, esa mirada profunda de pimpi, que luce durante los Carnavales cuando sale a la calle para interpretar alguno de los papeles que más le gustan: cadavérico niño de primera comunión o "niña bien" de la Viña. Ahora, es un soldado de fortuna que, por los azares del destino, disfruta de un fugaz reinado entre las ciénagas del Amazonas, amenazado por la siempre temible presencia del vasco Lope de Aguirre. Atrás quedan los años del grupo Cámara y Carrusel, en Cádiz, con los que alcanzó renombre en los círculos del entonces llamado teatro independiente; su paso por el Instituto Andaluz de Teatro y el CAT, como adjunto a la dirección de Roberto Quintana". (Gutiérrez Molina 1992)
12. "Luis Yáñez aseguró que entre los objetivos de la Comisión Quinto Centenario, no se encontraba la del dirigismo cultural. "Hemos querido que fuese un debate absolutamente libre", dijo y añadió "ya en el XVI la corona se planteaba la legitimidad de la conquista y si los indios tenían alma o no" (B. P. 1992).
13. Bharucha argues that in his *Mahabharata*, for instance, Peter Brook "upholds a Eurocentric structure of action and performance ... designed for international audiences" and that it reflects "his affiliations within a system of power that have made India increasingly visible (and economically viable) in the international market" ([1990] 1992, 4–5).
14. "Desde el punto de vista formal, me interesaba también investigar las diversas modalidades del monólogo, cuya aparente uniformidad oculta una compleja polifonía, así como las posibilidades dramáticas del discurso coral, que el teatro contemporáneo parece haber olvidado" (Sanchis as quoted in Martínez 2004, 56).
15. "In 1983 Spain legally recognized the existence of 167 Latin American refugees in its territory, while the research carried out at this time by the Colectivo IOÉ (1987) calculated the actual number to be around 45,000. According to its data, Latin American migrants made up 76 percent of the total refugee population in Spain" (Martín Díaz, Cuberos Gallardo, and Castellani 2012, 817–818).
16. Hannerz offers a particularly suggestive discussion of these themes in the chapter "The Withering Away of the Nation?" (Hannerz 1996, 81–90). See also Appadurai's (1990) theories of the various "scapes" around which contemporary culture is configured on the global sphere (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes).
17. Bhabha ([1994] 2002) uses this quote as the epigraph for his introduction to *The Location of Culture*.
18. According to the historian Rodrigo Escribano, a scholar at the University of Alcalá de Henares's Instituto Universitario de Investigación en Estudios Latinoamericanos, Franco-era interest in the Spanish *conquista*, which subordinated the topic of the "discovery" to questions of empire and the monarchy, yielded after Spain's transition to democracy to attitudes that he describes as follows: "en vez de explicarlo como un proceso plural, es decir, un proceso en que no solo importan los elementos que venían de la península, sino las sociedades que existían en América, se ha practicado una política del olvido" (as quoted in "El doble relato" 2016).
19. "El desengaño del cronista ante la actitud de Lope significa una toma de postura del autor actual respecto a la traición al sueño revolucionario de quienes en nuestro tiempo han sepultado sus iniciales ideas de justicia bajo el peso de una violencia indiscriminada" (Serrano 1996, 64n90).
20. Fusco (1994, 146–147) includes a chronology of various individuals exhibited either alive or dead starting with Columbus's Arawaks and ending with "Tiny Teesha", a woman midget displayed at the Minnesota State Fair in 1992.

21. At the time of its 1977 inauguration, the art critic Santiago Amón decried this monument in the following terms:

Desde una angulación histórica, las tres *esculturas-carabelas* nos remiten al reino del anacronismo. Concebido a favor de los aires triunfalistas del fenecido Régimen, de ningún modo debe verse inaugurado el conjunto monumental de marras, si no es en contra de las nuevas perspectivas políticas, de una democracia que se dice en marcha y de todo un replanteamiento en las relaciones con los pueblos de la América española. (1977)

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