EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Jennifer S. Ponce de León,
Richard T. Rodríguez, and
Randall Williams

WITH A FOREWORD BY
Cherríe Moraga

AND AN AFTERWORD BY
Juana María Rodríguez

Ricardo A. Bracho

Plays

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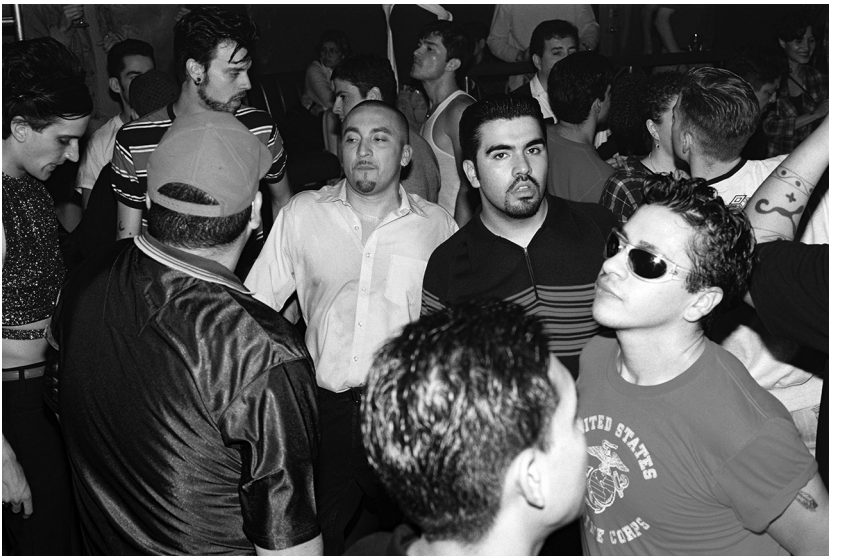
Duke University Press *Durham and London* 2026

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Project Editor: Liz Smith
Designed by Dave Rainey
Typeset in Garamond Premier Pro and Peridot Devanagari
by Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Bracho, Ricardo A., [date] author | Ponce de León, Jennifer, [date] editor | Rodríguez, Richard T., [date] editor | Williams, Randall, [date] editor | Moraga, Cherríe writer of foreword | Rodríguez, Juana María writer of afterword
Title: Puto : plays / Ricardo A. Bracho ; edited by Jennifer S. Ponce de León, Richard T. Rodríguez, Randall Williams ; foreword by Cherríe Moraga ; afterword by Juana María Rodríguez.
Other titles: Plays
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2026. | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025022034 (print)
LCCN 2025022035 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478032908 paperback
ISBN 9781478029496 hardcover
ISBN 9781478061670 ebook
Classification: LCC PS3602.R326 P886 2026 (print) |
LCC PS3602.R326 (ebook) | DDC 812/.608—dc23/eng/20251118
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025022034
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025022035

Cover art: rafa esparza, *paños puñales. you can see it in their faces. uno (faggot handkerchiefs . . . one)* (detail), 2011. Blue ball point pen, blood, urine, saliva, black ink on white waist boxer. Courtesy of the artist.



This, all of this is for
Horacio N. Roque Ramírez
How could you leave us?
With so much love,
Bracho

Patrick "Pato" Hebert, from *Yo Soy Lo Prohibido Series*, 1996.

THE PHILOSOPHER

wishes to apply the theatre ruthlessly to his own ends. It must furnish accurate images of incidents between people, and allow the spectator to adopt a standpoint.

THE ACTOR

wishes to express himself. He wants to be admired. Story and characters serve his purpose.

THE ACTRESS

wishes the theatre to inculcate social lessons. She is interested in politics.

THE DRAMATURG

puts himself at the Philosopher's disposal, and promises to apply his knowledge and abilities to the conversion of the theatre into the theatre of the Philosopher. He hopes the theatre will get a new lease of life.

THE ELECTRICIAN

represents the new audience. He is a worker and dissatisfied with the world.

—Bertolt Brecht, Characters of the Messingkauf,
The Messingkauf Dialogues

US-SEER

Come home come home don't stay out too late. Bleached Bones Man may get you n take you far uh cross thuh waves, then baby, what will I do for love?

—Suzan-Lori Parks,
Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom

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UNO

Perhaps I was invited to write the foreword to *Puto: Plays* because I knew the puto-playwright before he was a playwright (I can't speak to the puto part). Ricardo Bracho—just a boy of nineteen, hair down to his ass, and a considerable beauty in his own right (write).

He slaps a thin leaf of poems onto my UC Berkeley lecturer's desk. I scan the work, his eyes watching me, and in minutes I wonder of the sort sitting in front of me. He, so young. A tactile queer lust in his language and an entitled rebellion in his voice. No shame.

Years later, we would reminisce about that moment, he admitting he thought me just a bit "crazy" when I had expressed awe at the plain courage of the work. He was freer than I; that much I knew for sure.

We would go on together as queer camaradas. After Berkeley, he came to work with me in my recently formed Drama Divas—a queer youth of color Writing for Performance group at Brava Theater in San Francisco. We collaborated in this project (and many others) throughout the 1990s, including the premiere production of *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*, which I midwifed, and the birth of my son (which he did not).

Everybody got history. You live long enough, you got more history. Ricardo and I have history.

DOS

At the time of this writing, he's looking at fifty-five and I, seventy-two. Hard to believe on both counts. I knew Ricardo best as an emergent writer-thinker who came of age in the age of AIDS. We were familia, yes, he and I and all of us queer and "colored" folk of the period. There was something particularly special about these young gay men who had found feminism, something my generation of brothers knew little about because they didn't have to, not yet, until they started dying in droves.

From birth, Ricardo was fiercely framed by a communist "overeducation," as he describes his parentage. His queerness was evident from his earliest childhood "Sissy" years, followed by a critical feminism garnered through women of color classmates and teachers at UC Berkeley (Barbara Christian, Myrtha Chabrán, and Norma Alarcón, to name a few). These influences may not be "intersectional," which Bracho critiques, but they did inform sites of identity and the name-calling thrown at us that have coalesced and collided at the multiple junctures in Bracho's own thirty-five years of thinking and writing.

One singular example comes to mind. Sycorax is a character in Bracho's 1999 play *Fed Up: A Cannibal's Own Story*, in which Bracho gives embodied voice to this unseen and much-maligned figure—the "witch" mother of Caliban—in Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* The speech Ricardo ascribes to her is one of the strongest women of color monologues written by a man that I had ever heard. Although not included in this volume, it is emblematic of the feminist anticolonial promise that has always marked Bracho's work.

Like the artist Martín Ramírez of Bracho's *The Mexican Psychotic*, Ricardo is a brilliant outlier who may one day unwittingly find himself similarly "exoticized" by his own self-naming. But for many of us, Ricardo is just our queer Chicano intellectual. A "whore" perhaps, and a Marxist yes, but not capitalized, not to us; his política, more lowercased, residing among la plebe, where the word *subaltern* is never uttered.

TRES

First and foremost, Bracho is a writer. He is less interested in form and more interested in critique. Much of his works are, in fact, dramatized essays composed by one of the best-read people on the planet (in English). Through those works we glean a worldview that refuses any easy place to settle. Here language may even obfuscate truths. Here queer desire is ravenous even when being well fed, while daily it battles a bought-off world and the writer's own pitiful devils that are never to be mentioned.

Emotion may not be Bracho's forte—his gift of gab twists and averts the personal into a tight knot of crossed-armed "Yo-sé-todo. ¿Y qué?" Still, the best of Ricardo's work resides in his deep love for those "amorous men"—the "Adonis and Adán(s)" of the world making out behind the curtain of the Drama.

His is a deeply compassionate heart for "colored boys," their losses and findings in the midst of a remembered revolutionary communist father and dying queer compas. In this sense, Bracho is the queer's queer ("old-school gay," as he puts it). Perhaps that's why his people love him. He is unbeatable in this regard. *And who's gonna fight Bracho with words, anyway?*

CUATRO

The oeuvre of Ricardo Bracho's work is being published for the first time—a visionary project on the part of the coeditors, given that many of his plays have seldom been fully produced on a main stage. There are reasons for this: It is not safe work; it is not commercial and it is also Chicano. His work resides in that dearth of radical transgressive writing outside the restrictions of academia and the "American Theater." It thrives on the intracultural, the unspoken, and the underrepresented that neither Black nor White criticism has really considered. His texts depict the broken taboos that shape many lives. And there is much to learn from the portraiture.

Perhaps over the years I have come to understand Ricardo as an installation artist of sorts (something I've learned through my partner, artist Celia Herrera Rodriguez); that you can't fully know what a "Work" is until you are there in the room with it, whether a gallery, a museum, or a storefront church, putting together the puzzle of the final pieces, the afterthoughts, the re-visions. To that end, as a playwright, I would like to see more of Bracho's work re-vis(ion)ed, embodied on stage, better known. This is not a bourgeois aspiration but a playwright's requirement.

Perhaps this collection will help get him there.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am a Bracho of the Westside Brachos, so I must first thank my late father and mother, Humberto Bracho and Martha Abreu, for a singular, beautiful childhood, which I hope to never outgrow; and for their disciplined tutelage, which my unruly ass still resists.

My sister, Claudia, and her children, Bianca, Fiona, and Diego, for their strong fashion and (un)common sense; my brothers Francisco for his constancy and Beto for being smarter and funnier than my writing could ever be. We miss our brother, Gus, his wife, Martha, and their eldest, Carlos.

Also, the late Natalie Smith Parra, who became family to us all, and many of the books mentioned within these plays came off her shelf.

I had the honor of having Connie Barrett, Barbara Christian, and Myrtha Chabrán, all gone now, as teachers. I teach and write within the memory of their lessons.

Cherríe Moraga and Celia Herrera Rodriguez for their visionary leadership in my life, art made to liberate, and for every discussion across their kitchen table in Oakland. Also, to the entire Moraga-Herrera clan: Rafa, Camie, and on for being ancient and innocent, tradition and mystery.

Willy Chavarría and Persephone Gonzalez are friends who have become family and their imprint is in me and in these words as well.

Nicole Fleetwood is my water-sign cousin, generous friend, a strong and true light in my life. I thank her for her shine.

Juana María Rodríguez is my femme kaleidoscope mirror. Thank you for your words within here and for dancing across clubs and discourses with me.

Joelle Estelle Mendoza, for her wild ways, for making the music and the instrument, puppets and gardens. You're up next, Gold Star!

I met Augie Robles thirty-five years ago. We were both working on our writing. Last night, we once again communed over words and images. I thank him for his bravery and perversity, for all that he knows and shows of our brown-eyed desires.

Keith M. Harris, Luis Orozco, Javier Hurtado, Rafa Esparza, Joe Jiménez, Brian Bauman, Dino Dinco, Ubaldo Boido, Manuel Gonzalez, Kieran Scarlett, and Loras Ojeda are brothers to me and these wor(l)ds.

Lisa Thompson is my day one sis.

Rafael Melendez es mi luchador.

Edwin Ramoran and Ivan Monforte son mis comadres.

Gary Gerard Robinson and Juan Carlos Cuadrado are my gay fathers.

Cauleen Smith, her work and on-point ethics, laugh, and perception, have been a beacon for me from the first day we met. I will soldier for you all day, any day, Smith.

I cherish each meal and museum outing with Dahlia Elsayed and Andrew Demirjian. They are the best artists, educators, and friends. Sushi, soon.

I don't see Deb Vargas and Erica Edwards nearly enough. But when I do, I am always home.

In the Bay: Rosi Reyes, Rana Halpern, Vero Majano, Prado Gomez and Mariya Sparks, Deborah Cullinan, Sean San José, Saun-Toy Latifa Trotter, Angela and Carmen Reginato, Norman Antonio Zelaya, and Miss Kelly Fox are love. Gina Paoli is my big sis.

Reggie MacDonald is a friend of my mind and I await the next time his hand is in mine.

In LA: Elisa Bocanegra, Xavi Moreno, Armando Molina and Evangeline Ordaz, the late Diane Rodríguez, Cristina Frias, Fabi Torres, Laurie Woolery, Lee Sherman, Sigrid Gilmer, Tina Sanchez, Kila Kitu, Ephraim Lopez, David Leonardo Padilla, Rose Portillo, and Richard Azurdía made art making fiercely fun. Ofelia Ortiz Cuevas and Tisa Bryant, head and heart strong sisters, were wonderful to write and eat with. Hushidar and Hakhamanesh Mortezaie are Persi brilliance. I thank Gerard Gonzales for dim sum mornings and hot spring desert nights, Drain Juarez for dog walks and girl talk. Sofia Gasparian and her beautiful fam, especially my Byzantine Queen, MGM, for keeping the memory of the queers of yesteryear and guerrilla art alive. Old Chola and Ghetto Girl, ¡por vida!

In Chicago: Jaqueline Lazu, Phyllis Griffin, Helen Jun, Marc Pinate, Milta Ortiz, and Ruben David Adorno held me down and lifted me up.

In New York: Joe Mejia, Fernando Mancuello, Seth Abrames, Ela Troyano, Alina Troyano, Andrea Thome, Samiya Bashir, Gabriel Morales, Gabriel Stover, Janelle Rodriguez, David Kazanjian and Josie Saldaña, and Rachelle Mendez made the struggle to make epic work from scraps worth it.

Here in Philly, I thank Christopher Cirillo, man of books, for his third eye. At Penn, Juliet Dempsey, Ava Haitz, Sof Sears, Adrianna Brusie, Nicholas Plante, Emily Dunlop, Andrés González Bonillas, Gigi Varlotta, Mars Berger, Ivanna Berrios, Malkia Okech, Oludare Marcelle, Wenxi Chen, Robert Slovikowsky, Grace Bridy, Deborah Thomas and the Center for Experimental Ethnography crew, the GSWS Gang (Kathy, Melissa, Gwendolyn, and especially Luz, Roz, Maria, and Arielle), Armie Chardiet, and Emma the Great kept me on my pedagogical-artistic toes and taught me, as Gwen McCrae sings, to "keep the fires burning / keep them burning hot."

I miss Michele Serros, Luis Saguar, Assotto Saint, Chris Turnbull, Donald Woods, Roger Romero, David "Cousin Danny" Banerje, Darien Kincaid, Sean Sasser, Tede Matthews, Aaron Olivares, Josh Chambers, dear sweet James Gubera, Nacho Nava, and so many more, each and every day.

This book was Ricky Rodríguez's idea. I love all our conversations across the years/states/escapades and will never forget all he has done for me. We got the green light many years ago, but losses and accomplishments on both sides stalled the book. My longtime comrades Randall Williams and Jennifer Ponce de León would not let the project go, even when another round of deaths took me under. I thank them for their Leninist persistence and caring for my work when I did not. I thank Stephen Wu and Andrews Little for always showing up for me and my shows.

Adela Vázquez, girl, I thought when the day came that I had a book of my work, I would head to your place in SF with it. You would skim through it, pat the cover, and say, "Good for you, girl." And then we would discuss what really mattered: her garden, our barbed-wire hearts, the meal she would be making us, men who are foolish if fine. I can't believe you're gone, but the world should know how much you taught me, inspired me, made some of the characters in these plays and all our lives possible.

Patrick "Pato" Hebert, from *Yo Soy Lo Prohibido Series*, 1996.

EDITORS' ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors are grateful to Armie Chardiet for editorial assistance. Ivanna Berrios assisted in the transcription of talks and interviews by Bracho. Andrews Little's insights improved this book's introduction, and his encouragement and support buoyed this project over many years. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for helping make this book stronger. Finally, thanks to Courtney Berger at Duke University Press for her unfaltering commitment.

INTRODUCTION

Jennifer S. Ponce de León, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Randall Williams

A Raucous Debut

The Sweetest Hangover was Ricardo A. Bracho's first full-length theatrical production. It premiered at Brava Theatre Center in San Francisco's Mission District in June 1997. The play is set in the early 1990s at the fictional Club Aztlantis, part of the Bay Area's booming underground club scene.[1] Outside this ephemeral space of nocturnal liberation, the AIDS pandemic is raging, with San Francisco as an epicenter. Inside this house, djdj lays down hard-driving beats and pulsating rhythms "dedicated to the sonic liberation of the legendary children of life." The collectivity that gathers here every weekend and makes up the "family of Aztlantis" is a multi-everything motley crew that "is *not* based on the superficial real of your color, crotch or couture, but in the treble and bass of your soul, sex and shade." What unites this queer assembly and keeps the dedicated denizens coming back is a shared commitment to dancing all weekend long, taking copious amounts of drugs, having lots of furtive, illicit sex, and enjoying the fuck out of life (while they can) in this House of Libidinal Pleasures created by and for the displaced youth of all diasporas.

By all accounts, Bracho's *Sweetest Hangover* had quite a raucous theatrical debut. According to one San Francisco theater critic, the opening night was "like attending a community celebration—perhaps crossed with the peak hour at a

popular gay nightclub." In other words, the crowd was decidedly *not* your typical bourgeois theatergoing audience; attendees were overwhelmingly young, loud, queer people of color. The critic continued, "The crowd, or a substantial portion of it, greeted the world premiere of Ricardo A. Bracho's 'The Sweetest Hangover' as if it were a celebration of a community that rarely gets to see itself depicted in any genre."[2] Indeed, night after night for the duration of its debut run, *The Sweetest Hangover* succeeded in capturing the theater for a different audience.[3] It was *as if* Club Aztlantis had suddenly reopened, on stage at the Brava Theatre . . . and it had.

Ricardo Bracho was raised in Los Angeles, California, in a Marxist-Leninist household (not unlike the semifictional family in his play *Sissy*). After attending college at the University of California, Berkeley, Bracho lived between the San Francisco Bay Area and New York City until the early 2000s. In addition to writing and partying, Bracho worked in the arts and public health, focusing on theater and creative writing for queer/trans youth of color and Latino gay men, and harm reduction and health/arts education for Latino high-risk populations and incarcerated men. Following *The Sweetest Hangover,* Bracho had his first New York City production, *A to B*, at INTAR in 2002. Through a residency with the experimental theater company Mabou Mines, he began to develop his most formally experimental work, *Mexican Psychotic,* a silent play about the Mexican outsider artist Martín Ramírez. Bracho continued developing *Mexican Psychotic* while working as a Scholar/Artist in Residence at the Center for Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara—a position that brought him back to Los Angeles. LA provides the inspiration and setting for two full-length plays included in this volume: *Sissy*, a semi-autobiographical picaresque set in the 1970s, and *Puto,* a dystopian science fiction set in the near future. *Sissy* was produced by Company of Angels in Los Angeles in 2008, and *Puto* received a 2011 workshop production at the Theater School at DePaul, anticipating Bracho's move to Chicago the following year. While working as Visiting Multicultural Faculty at DePaul's Theater School, Bracho wrote *El Santo Joto: Juan Rodríguez Day*, one of the short plays collected in this volume.

In 2019, Bracho moved to Philadelphia to become the inaugural Abrams Artist-in-Residence in the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program and the Center for Research in Feminist, Queer, and Transgender Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. While holding this position, he produced and directed a workshop production of *Opus Siniestrus,* a feminist play by surrealist painter Leonora Carrington; a video version of his play *Mexican Psychotic*; and "A History of Hands," a multimedia spectacle on the history of queer and trans Philadelphia. In keeping with Bracho's biogeography, the plays collected in this volume have

been assembled in terms of place and time. There are two plays set in California in the early 1990s: *El Santo Joto* and *Sweetest Hangover*. There are three "Mexico plays"—*Ni Madre*, *Mexican Psychotic*, and *Appetites I Have Inherited*—and three "LA plays": *Sissy*, *Puto*, and *A Black and A Brown*.

The worlds Bracho composes are principally peopled by Black and Brown proletarians of varied nationalities and genders. Most are queer and many are immigrants, with phrases in Spanish and Spanglish shaping their dialogue. Equally striking about Bracho's work is what does not appear in it: Bracho's plays are largely unconcerned with representing White US identities or "Whiteness." Also notably absent are heterosexist bourgeois social norms. Queer social practices are not represented vis-à-vis their difference from these but are instead simply coherent within the multiethnic, multilingual, and multiclass lifeworlds Bracho writes. There is nothing in any of this that should be confused with identitarian ideologies or intersectional politics. As Bracho himself has said, "Rather than the intersectional, I am far more intrigued by how various discourses disrupt one another. I would like to form a praxis that could incorporate, in dialectical friction, antihumanism and whoring; a heart that belongs to Fanon, Marx, Luxembourg, and Genet, as well as a fanboy's interest in the Bolivarian Revolution, FARC, the Intifada, and the mythmaking of conceptual prog-rockers, the Boricua and Chicano LA Tejanos, the Mars Volta."[4] Along with the international geopolitics, sexual practices, and select revolutionary writers and artists that fuel Bracho's words, his biogeography has played a major role in helping to contour the gorgeously complex figures who make up his dramatic productions. In this introduction to his work, we will provide a short description of each of the ten plays collected in this volume organized by setting, followed by a brief account of Bracho's ideological engagements and unique form of dialectical theater.

The San Francisco Plays: "Ephemera Is Our Institution"

Bracho's plays *El Santo Joto del SIDA* and *The Sweetest Hangover* are set in the San Francisco Bay Area of the 1990s. Places like the fictitious Club Aztlantis provided a critical, even if brief, respite from the ongoing and systemic "state-sanctioned production and exploitation of group-differentiated premature death."[5] In these works the illicit, furtive desires of young, queer men of color take center stage. Indeed, throughout his oeuvre Bracho insists on the centrality of characters never before seen as central. He counts the uncounted and romanticizes (without sensationalism) the quotidian lives of those who prefer the ephemera of experience and sensation (drugs, sex, dancing, etc.) to durable forms of community organizing and institution-building. Of these ephemera and phenomena—the after-

hours club, house party, the broken-into warehouse that becomes the site for this weekend's rave, and so on—Bracho says, "These are really interesting anti-state formations that don't always . . . have an articulated state critique. [Rather,] they are the politics of resentment and a good, unstructured time. . . . Particularly for urban gay men of color, ephemera is our institution." There is something unique about the jotos and putas and the motley collectivities that receive beatification in Bracho's plays, and *El Santo Joto* and *The Sweetest Hangover* provide us with some of the most exquisite of exemplary figures.

The Sweetest Hangover

The Sweetest Hangover is set in the early 1990s Bay Area inside Club Aztlantis, a fictional club whose name combines two mythical places: the island of Atlantis; and Aztlán, the homeland of the Mexica people. The club serves as a space of provisional freedom where an array of displaced peoples have come together to form a house:[6] Octavio Deseo, a Chicano club promoter; djdj, a Salvadorean DJ; Plum, a Black female college student who performs at the club along with Black drag queen Natasha Kinky; and club regulars Miss Thing 1 and Miss Thing 2, two young gay men, a Black Puerto Rican and a Filipino, who read and shade (in rhyme at times) all the play's goings-on. And finally, Octavio's love interest, Samson, is a Filipino/Chicano tattoo artist by day and by night works security at Aztlantis. In his analysis of *Sweetest Hangover*, the Cuban American performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz argues that "Bracho's multiethnic ensemble signals a new moment in minoritarian performance and cultural work in which the strict confines of identitarian politics are superseded by other logics of group identification."[7] Indeed, what Muñoz identifies in this early play is true for the entirety of Bracho's corpus to date: The social relations, affiliations, and commitments represented in them are not structured by ethno-nationalist ideologies or identitarianism. However, *pace* Muñoz, affect does not perform the trick of constituting a Brown community, and there is no affective racial difference or so-called Brown feeling in *Sweetest Hangover* that miraculously creates a cultural map of a Latino/a/x lifeworld. The ephemeral material space depicted in *Sweetest Hangover* simply does not have an identitarian structure of feeling. Moreover, as we will argue in "Negations and Alignments," such culturalism is anathema to Bracho's aesthetics.

El Santo Joto

Three distinct altars. Three different chairs. Two jotos y una jota. In Bracho's *El Santo Joto* (Saint Faggot), an unholy trinity of Latinx queers have returned to grieve for a generation lost and to expropriate a day of remembrance for their

very own: December 12. Traditionally, this is the historic day that La Virgen de Guadalupe was said to have made her second appearance to a young Indigenous Mexican man, Juan Diego, and provided proof of her appearance in the form of roses growing in the middle of winter. In *El Santo Joto*, however, no virgins appear, and December 12 becomes "Juan Rodríguez Day," marking the day Juan Rodríguez died. Rodríguez, Bracho's friend and colleague, was a leader in gay men of color AIDS work who created the first national HIV media prevention campaign for Latino gay men. *El Santo* memorializes Rodríguez along with a litany of other artists and writers of color lost to AIDS: Essex Hemphill, Reza Abdoh, Sylvester, Marlon Riggs, and Assotto Saint. Their naming signals Bracho's refusal, in his capacity as documentarian, of a disremembered status, and exalts their defiance of all that the state and the church deem unseemly and unholy, if not also immoral and illegal.

The Mexico Plays: Servants of the World Unite!

In his seminal account of mythology, French literary theorist Roland Barthes describes how myth works as follows: "In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves."[8] In Bracho's Mexico plays, the mythic figures of La Malinche (the traitor), Martín Ramírez (the insane), and the exoticized Mexicanos (the maraca boys) in *Night of the Iguana* are recast in a decidedly antimythical mode, replete with complexity, contradiction, and dialectics. Each hitherto mythologized character is imbued with historical materiality and the erasures that attend to their becoming other / becoming myth. This rearticulation from below serves as a counterpoint and antidote to the workings of traditional mythology, which hollows out history and smooths over contradictions as it ushers in timeless essences and moral tales. Works like *Mexican Psychotic* and *Ni Madre* confront romantic pseudo-history and nationalist ideologies with the actual, messy histories of class struggles they obscure. In each of these plays, the folklorish aestheticization of cultural difference and concomitant flattening of history is not only absent; it is also mocked and itself historicized.

Ni Madre

In 2003 producer/director Diane Rodriguez of LA's Center Theatre Group commissioned a national group of Latino/a/x playwrights to do an anthology show based on *Amor Eterno*, a book by Patricia Preciado Martin. Out of this project came Bracho's short play *Ni Madre*. Like every play in the series, *Ni Madre* is set in the lobby of the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. It revolves around La Malinche (Malintzin) in her post-Cortés days. The historical Malinche was the daughter of a Mexica cacique (local ruler) and was enslaved and made to act as an interpreter for Hernán Cortés, the Spaniard who led the conquest of the Mexicas (or Aztec Empire). Within the postrevolutionary Mexican nationalist ideology of mestizaje, which celebrates the supposedly "racial" intermixing of European peoples and Indigenous Americans, the figure of Malinche is made to embody the history of colonialism, such that, as the "mother" of the Mexican people, she is simultaneously a traitor and a despoiled victim.[9]

The play's title is a variation of the Mexican slang expression *ni madre*. It is an expression of categorical refusal akin to the English phrase "No way in hell!" Thus, the title can be read as a refusal of nationalist mythifications of history that mobilize the figure of the mother as a naturalizing metaphor for a nation, imagined as a biological unit. As Bracho says, "I wanted to be sacrilegious with Malinche." Contra Octavio Paz, Bracho's Malinxe is neither castigated as La Traidora (The Traitor) nor La Chingada (The Fucked One), nor is she revered as La Madre del Mestizaje. Rather, the Malinche of *Ni Madre* is much more complex: a highborn Nahua woman who over the course of her life came to traverse class and caste divides via enslavement and concubinage, marriage and motherhood, and who now orders servants around. She is accompanied by her Indigenous servant, Girl, as they are checked into the hotel by another indentured Indian servant, Nana. The result is a unique sci-fi chamber play examining the servant/served dyad, and showing us that servitude connects the past of world conquest and enslavement to the present of global capitalism and superexploitation.

Mexican Psychotic

Written in 2004 and adapted to video two decades later, *Mexican Psychotic* centers on the life of Martín Ramírez, a Mexican worker, immigrant, and self-taught visual artist. It is the most formally experimental play in this collection, and its form carries much of its meaning. Its staging mimics a silent film, with omniscient third-person narration and dialogue appearing as text projected onto a screen behind the actors. Naturalism is eschewed. Scenes that recount the history of Ramírez's life are interspersed with surreal, allegorical episodes and his-

torical anecdotes whose protagonists include Mexican revolutionaries and wild animals that populate Ramírez's drawings. Halfway through the play, its narration reverses and begins anew. These formal features each echo aspects of Ramírez's biography that are featured in the play's narrative: his silence while interned, his exposure to Hollywood films, and the mythologization of his biography by professionals who commercialized and promoted his art. The alienation effects they produce underscore the play's thematic concern with the misrepresentation and marginalization of proletarian histories within dominant historical (including art historical) narratives. It is decidedly Brechtian, insofar as it formally produces a sense of alienation that spurs cognitive reflection, including on the apparatus of representation itself.

While paying homage to the disturbing beauty and historical significance of Ramírez's art, *Mexican Psychotic* is principally concerned with the alienating and exploitative social relations Ramírez experienced during his lifetime. It recounts key elements of his biography: from growing up in poverty in Mexico to working on the railroads in California, to his arrest and long internment in a California psychiatric hospital; his dedication to drawing, and the eventual "discovery" of his art by a psychiatrist who introduces it to the art world. The play's most striking formal feature—wherein its narrative is suddenly stopped, rewound, and revised—reiterates the play's critique of the petit bourgeois professionals who marketed Ramírez's art and a mythicized figure of him for their own profit. By exposing them as unreliable narrators, the play also exposes to scrutiny its own claims to authority vis-à-vis the artist's biography. While *Mexican Psychotic* corrects popularized misrepresentations of Ramírez biography, it does not attempt to offer authentic, unmediated access to his past. It also refuses any desire for a biographical interpretation of Ramírez's art. Instead, it foregrounds the transnational history that shaped Ramírez's life and informed his art, while also acknowledging that many of the details of his biography are lost to history—a fact that itself reflects Ramírez's social position as an immigrant and worker. At the same time, the play's form also reminds us that Ramírez's drawings are indeed a manifestation of history (not some mystical notion of genius or madness, often cultivated by bourgeois art history), and that this is indeed what makes them so marvelous.

Appetites I Have Inherited

In *Appetites I Have Inherited* we are privy to a pointed and revealing conversation between two Mexican actors, Adonis and Adán, who discuss the utility and attendant disposability of them, and of Mexico, to the Hollywood film industry. They are on a break from performing silent roles in *The Night of the Iguana* (1964), a John Huston–directed Hollywood film that was shot on the Mexican

isle of Mismaloya. In the film, the two Mexican actors represent exoticized sexual objects. Speaking no lines, they inexplicably dance around in tiny shorts while playing the maracas, respond to an undifferentiated "Pepe," and essentially serve as adornments to the sexual fantasies of the film's White protagonists. This is represented most memorably perhaps when they go night swimming with their boss, a lusty resort owner played by Hollywood star Ava Gardner.

Appetites I Have Inherited imagines the artists consigned to sexy silence in Huston's film having much to say about their skills and the industry in which they work. Cognizant of the minor yet essential roles delegated to those made to represent sexual and racial otherness by the US culture industry, Adonis and Adán are well aware of their talent despite being cast in lesser roles. Reading the film's scene as not only superficial but vacuous for how all Mexican men are rendered "Pepe" ("Todos somos Pepe," notes Adán), the two exchange information about which Hollywood could care less and channel this deep knowledge to charge their ascribed one-dimensional roles. Parsing out an all-encompassing "Pepe" to additionally account for "Pedro," these two create not a docile or conniving duo that one might expect from a characteristic Hollywood treatment, but instead a pair of amorous men whose shared kiss tops the signifying force of the film's clichéd screen kiss with Gardner.

The Los Angeles Plays: "Have You Been to LA?"

In 2020, when Bracho was asked if he intentionally wrote his play *Puto* without White characters, Bracho quipped, "Have you been to LA? . . . There are White people, but who knows where they are. They're like behind a gate somewhere, in the Palisades, in Malibu. They don't matter in the day-to-day of life, so they don't matter here." He later added, "That's always intentional: I write about Black and Brown people not only 'cause it's what I know, but that's what I'm advancing."[10] In his reply, as in his work, Bracho provincializes White identities with a historical fidelity attuned to the historically multinational, multilingual composition of the working classes of the United States and Mexico. This reality is rarely reflected in representations produced by the United States' capitalist culture industries, including and especially those sited in the very Brown City of Angels itself. Calls to rectify these industries' historically racist representations are too often met with the production of tokenistic, folklorish pablum defanged of social critique, or liberal-reactionary historical revisionism with a multicultural cast (of the Lin-Manuel Miranda variety). Against this backdrop, Bracho's representations of nationality, race, and language are intentional engagements in ideological struggle within the realm of culture.

According to Bracho, his representation of non-White multilingual communities reflects a social reality he has always known, having been raised by Mexican communists in the multiethnic, multilingual metropolis of Los Angeles. As he noted in the 2015 interview included in this volume, "I was raised in internationalism. I was a child of overeducated people whose neighbors were also Mexican immigrants, but also, they were gardeners and maids. And Belgian miners and Black project organizers and various South American intellectuals, and political folks were always coming through my door."[11] The internationalism Bracho describes, as a form of proletarian ideology as well as daily social practice, is foundational to the two plays included in this volume that are set in Los Angeles: *Sissy* and *Puto.* Both are peopled by Mexican, Central American, and Chicanx proletarians and feature communist protagonists. The latter are portrayed without romanticization but, rather, with a comedic sympathy for their struggles with their own and society's contradictions.

Sissy

Bracho began writing *Sissy* in 1996, while *Sweetest Hangover* was in rehearsals, and it became his first full production in his hometown of LA in June 2008. *Sissy* is a day-in-the-life tale set in Westside Los Angeles in July 1979. While in *Ni Madre* Bracho confronts and transforms an ur-myth of Mexican nationalism, Malinche, his play *Sissy* does something similar in its representation of the Mexican American family and its heterosexist mythologization in Chicano nationalism. The protagonist, Sissy, is a clever-tongued Chicano kid raised in a Marxist-Leninist household (like Bracho himself) who is turning twelve years old on this day. Much to Sissy's chagrin, his birthday party is overshadowed by the world-historic significance of the day, the overthrow of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle and the momentous success of the Sandinista Revolution. While the Sandinista Party takes over in Managua, Sissy leaves the birthday party his family has organized for him and takes flight to be protogay in a quixotic quest across Los Angeles (from Culver City to Boy's Town). In this coming-of-age picaresque tale of the post-'68 generation, Sissy encounters a merry band of multilingual misfits and underrepresented characters of impossible to identify genders, races, and sexualities, who lovingly guide him along his way.

In *Sissy* Bracho has given us a "Chicano family" far more expansive and inclusive than hitherto acknowledged, just as the Sandinistas themselves were busy redefining what constituted a "family" as any group of people living under the same roof who were dependent on one another for economic survival and well-being.[12] Fuck gay marriage; revolutionary remakings of families reject the exclusivity of

the marriage form in favor of expanding our recognition of the myriad ways in which people actually live and survive and love and fight together.

While addressing the nuclear family as a key site of ideological reproduction, *Sissy* also offers a rare portrait of a nuclear family as a site of communist ideological formation. Historical icons of global communism and Latin American anti-imperialism are part of Sissy's family's quotidian lexicon, as are theories like historical materialism and democratic centralism. Recognizing theatergoers' likely lack of familiarity with this lexicon, Bracho and his comrades produced a *Sissy* glossary, with brief descriptions of all the historical events and personages referenced in the play.

Puto

Puto is a dystopian comedy set in a militarized and segregated Los Angeles of the near future. Its plot follows the activities of its eponymous protagonist over the course of twenty-four hours. Puto is a commercial and fine art photographer, but he also has an underground life as a counterfeiter and fellow traveler of the communist cell CREW (Communist Revolution Every Weekend). Puto's artistic work is not of use to CREW, but his dual US/Mexican citizenship and access to dollars are. In this dystopia, the US-Mexico border has been closed, and immigrants and felons are barred from access to US citizenship and dollars. Los Angeles is carved up by internal borders, where Homeland Security agents police mobility, sort citizens from noncitizens, and ensure the latter's containment in ethnic catchment areas.

As Puto's passport allows him unusual mobility across apartheid LA, he delivers messages and contraband for CREW. His motivations for traversing the city are not only political; they are also always libidinal for this play's namesake. As Puto travels across Los Angeles, he meets up with other artists, his comadre and her child, various ex- and potential lovers, and members of CREW. The distance between CREW's concerns and the posh lifestyle of artists and intellectuals (the "check-writer bumper-sticker crowd") is made plain. The play's narrative arc leads Puto to resolve this contradiction, and ultimately he decides to commit class suicide and become a cadre of CREW. This transformative decision is a synthesis of his creative, political, and libidinal desires, which are themselves thereby transformed. The play closes looking toward a future with armed struggle against the US state on the horizon. As Bracho has said, "I think of *Puto* as a dystopia that becomes utopic at the end, 'cause we're going to win this thing."[13] Its utopianism manifests itself in its affirmation that the decolonization and socialist transformation of society is possible, but that it can be achieved only through organized armed struggle.

The "abysmal point of inspiration" for *Puto* was the police's repression of an immigrants' rights march held in Los Angeles on May Day in 2007. As Bracho has explained, he wanted *Puto* to uncover the systemic violence that was on display that day, in an effort to "make the unseen seen in terms of the state and its imperial machinations."[14] It does this through allegory, estrangement, and a Marxist dystopian realism that grounds itself in history.

Through its dystopian realism, *Puto* addresses how US elites' class warfare has historically relied on racist forms of social control, stratification, and repression that are regularly exercised through state and parastate violence. The play not only shows how such dynamics have and could potentially operate within the United States; through its critical interrogation of citizenship and borders, it also calls attention to the mechanisms of control and repression imperialist capitalism exercises on an international scale. It thereby "reveals the interrelated uses of citizenship, borders, criminalization, incarceration, and racism to control and divide the global proletariat and thereby intensify its exploitation."[15] By simultaneously depicting a plausible dystopian future sited in LA, while also metaphorically representing history at an international scale, *Puto* "demonstrates that what may appear from one perspective as a potential fascist future" is already history for persons "rendered hyper-exploitable or expendable" by (neo)colonial class relations.[16] Bracho has described *Puto* as the most overt and literal in its politics among his plays: "Every single word: I wanted to mean it. . . . It's a hammer to the head. It's a hammer and sickle to your head, rather."[17]

A Black and A Brown

Bracho has repeatedly remarked on the formal challenge of representing the machinations of the US state: "How do you expose the state, because its operations are everywhere and nowhere, . . . but not have it Bread and Puppets style, like Uncle Sam with a big dollar sign on him (which I'm not above—though I don't like to, 'cause then you have to make an actor play that part and it's kind of a bummer after a while)?"[18] Bracho grappled with this question when police repression of the immigrant rights movement inspired his penning of *Puto*. In 2020, he returned to this same challenge: exposing the violence of the bourgeois state to enable the analysis of it. This time, however, Bracho was writing from Philadelphia—a city that was occupied by the National Guard and put under a 6 p.m. curfew because its denizens protested against racist police killings. Yet the racist policing evinced in his writing is not exceptional but, rather, institutionalized across the entire US territory. Its scope was made plain by the 2020 protests and riots that rocked the entire country, repudiating the police's killing of George Floyd and so many others.

A Black and A Brown is an excavation, through dialogue and memory, of the powerful role of state violence in racialization and subject formation. It involves a Zoom session between A Black and A Brown. The gay couple are filling out an online Marxist questionnaire on interpellation and state-mandated death. The solidarity between the two characters in Bracho's play is dialectical rather than intersectional; that is, solidarity is predicated on negotiation rather than facile concurrency. It is sexual and political rather than some surface-level genuflection before the altar of well-worn clichés of collectivity. It also returns us to the site of the nocturnal, that generative temporal moment that brings Bracho's men in close proximity to those populating the pages of Jean Genet, John Rechy, and Samuel Delany. After all, as A Brown quotes the first surrealists, "the revolution begins at night."

As it was at the time of Bracho's first play, *The Sweetest Hangover*, a plague is spreading, cops are still beating and killing poor Blacks and Browns with impunity, the youth have taken to the street, and our characters are horny, one slightly more than the other. All is still as it shouldn't be. Within Bracho's Marxist worldview, our formation as subjects emerges from the material practice of our lives. Just as we are subjects in and of history, shaped by it, we also act to shape history.

Negations and Alignments

The plays included in this volume, which do not exhaust Bracho's oeuvre, are evidence of his commitment to formal experimentation (no two plays have the same form) and to the representation of history from below. Few other US playwrights have so successfully combined these formal-ideological aims. Yet despite his unique contributions to American theater, many of Bracho's works have yet to be produced. Though this may seem paradoxical, Bracho's work teaches us otherwise. That is, it pushes us to recognize the class politics of the bourgeois cultural apparatus and concomitant conditions of artistic labor: a condition Che Guevara described as an "invisible cage," where "those who play by the rules of the game are showered with honors—such honors as a monkey might get for performing pirouettes. The condition is that one does not try to escape from the invisible cage."[19] Bracho has not played by the rules of the game. In his plays and other work, he has been an outspoken critic of US empire and its cultural apparatus, including liberal identitarian discourses that predominate in institutions where he works.

On Queer of Color Critique and Sexual Liberation

At the 2014 annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Bracho delivered a manifesto with the fittingly dialectical title "A Proclamation on, of, and by Negation." In it, he distinguished his own politics regarding sex and gender from discourses prevalent in contemporary academic theorizing: "I'm not queer, though I do use the term to describe the grouping of perverse us. . . . I am old gay, languaged in the Black and Brown gay club, dive bar, drug den, rave and underground house scene, which meant then butches and femmes and switches of varying hue and genitalia and trans before the term was in use."[20] Yet, more than a generational difference, what impels Bracho to mark his distance from much of contemporary queer culture is its incorporation into the institutions and ideologies of US imperialist liberalism in what Michael Warner refers to as its "retreat from its history of radicalism into a new form of postliberationist privatization."[21] Bracho has said of this historic shift, "One of the reasons I call myself gay is because it used to stand as adjective to the noun *liberation*, though this is well before the North American gay's rightward drift, what Keith Harris terms the heterosexualization of homosexuality and what I call the constitution of the gay and lesbian neoliberal norm."[22] On numerous occasions Bracho has endeavored to mark the difference between his own political alignments and those imputed to his work by academics. Metaphorically describing himself as being "on the sale rack at the Queer of Color Boutique," Bracho critiqued this intersectionalist school of thought:

> The other overdetermining way me and mine get talked about or are given the permission to narrate, to use [Edward] Said's term, is via the rubric of "queer of color." My fundamental problem with this "queer of color" formation is political. Because as far as I can tell, it isn't or, if it is, it participates in the liberalized discourses of the academic circuit and politely accepts these limits in order for a seat at the table. . . . Both academically acceptable Chicano cultural nationalism and queer of color critique are unacceptable for the art I want to make and the artists and politics with which I seek alignment.[23]

While critiquing culturalist discourses that have been promoted by the US academy, Bracho instead seeks ideological alignment with cultural traditions of revolutionary Marxism, anarchism, and anticolonialism. In this regard, the history of gay liberation serves as a key historical referent for the sexual politics in Bracho's life and work. Born in the cycle of antisystemic struggles of the 1960s, and catalyzed by the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, the Western metropolitan gay

liberation movement theorized the struggle for sexual liberation as inextricable from the struggle to end imperialist capitalism and militarism, sexism, and racism. When speaking about theorists and artists associated with this movement who have most influenced his life and work, Bracho has frequently cited Mario Miele, Gayle Rubin, Guy Hocquenghem, Monique Wittig, Jean Genet, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, as well as Richard Dyer, Cherríe Moraga, Amber Hollibaugh, Jan Zita Grover, Cindy Patton, and Jeffrey Escoffier, among others.

On the political front, Bracho's preferred historical reference for gay liberation has long been Third World Gay Revolution, an organization of largely Black, Asian, and Puerto Rican gay men and drag queens whose 1970 manifesto includes demands for

- the right of self-determination for all Third World and gay people, as well as control of the destinies of our communities;
- the right of self-determination over the use of our bodies;
- liberation for all women;
- full protection of the law and social sanction for all human sexual self-expression and pleasure between consenting persons; and
- a revolutionary socialist society where the needs of the people come first.[24]

This sexual liberationist ethos is evidenced in Bracho's unabashed celebration of sexual practice and desire in his plays, as well as their representation of myriad forms of social bonds that are forged not through the logics of property or bourgeois law but through eroticism, care, communication, solidarity, and shared political commitments.

Puto most clearly demarcates the liberationist sexual ethos Bracho embraces from liberal queer politics. The play celebrates the eroticism entwined in political organizing, and it "casts the pursuit of sexual freedom and self-determination as integral to the communist struggle for human emancipation."[25] The play also includes a biting critique of queer assimilation to US militarism and imperialist liberalism in the figure of Carlos Moreno, a gay police officer. Through its critique of Carlos, as well as of careerist artists and academics, *Puto* insists that the individualist pursuit of fulfillment (whether sexual or professional) has nothing to do with the practice of liberation, as it could just as easily be operating against the liberation of others.[26]

On Cultural Politics and Decolonization

Decolonization is a noun. It is the colonized seizing the state, usually violently. Bringing your abuela's tablecloth to your college campus does not mean that you have decolonized that space. I know this makes me statist, but I don't care.
—Ricardo A. Bracho, "A Proclamation on, of, and by Negation"

Bracho's representations of racial and ethnic difference defy the cultural essentialist and identitarian logics that suffuse many products of US culture industries. His plays pointedly refuse the identitarian precept that individuals' political alignments follow from their ascriptive identities and that political constituencies are formed around such identities. For instance, in *Puto* the one character who is clearly on the other side of the proverbial barricade (or, in this case, border checkpoint) from that of the communist protagonists is a gay Chicano cop who is simply seeking personal gain in a system that pays him to betray his fellow racialized workers.

Nonetheless, according to Bracho, identitarianism and culturalism have been wrongly attributed to his work by US academics. In "It Is the Libido," a lecture delivered at Stanford University in 2008, he stated,

> As an extra-academic intellectual I am often perturbed at how me and my work get talked about when I and they circulate in the US university. . . . Besides getting called an activist, something I have never been, I am often spoken of as a cultural nationalist. Even in my college MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán] era, I have not spent one day of my life as such. I have an abiding interest in the political nationalism of colonized peoples, formed mainly by my reading of Fanon and Cabral. However, even in his acute analysis of and advocacy for the violent seizure of the state by the colonized, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon includes a chapter [titled] "On the Pitfalls of National Consciousness." Cabral's far more logistical readings of revolutionary violence and national sovereignty collected in *Return to the Source* were also a product of his position within internationalist Third World Marxism.

In this talk, Bracho emphasized the difference between Chicano cultural nationalism, which accommodates US racial liberalism and hegemonic identitarian ideologies, and revolutionary Marxists' understanding of national liberation struggles—that is, as class struggles waged against the forces of colonialism and neocolonialism within the context of a global struggle for human emancipation from imperialist capitalism. He also explained his critique of cultural nationalism with reference to Aijaz Ahmad's argument that "the ideology of cultural na-

tionalism is based explicitly [on a] tendency towards national and civilizational singularization that lends itself much too easily to parochialism, inverse racism and indigenist obscurantism, not to speak of the petty bourgeoisie's penchant for representing its own cultural practices and aspirations, virtually by embodying them as so many emblems of a unified culture."[27] Bracho acknowledged the importance of other Chicana/o/x writers' interrogation into what he terms "the Chicano question" (Marxist shorthand for the national question as applied to Mexicans within the United States). After noting that he was particularly influenced, in this regard, by the writers and visual artists Lorna Dee Cervantes, Helena María Viramontes, Cherríe Moraga, Rudy Acuña, José Montoya, and Celia Herrera Rodriguez, he concluded, "I don't think the answer to the 'Chicano question' in their work or mine is 'yes.'"

Bracho's understanding of the national question is influenced by Marxist analyses developed around the world since the early twentieth century. Indeed, the "Chicano question," as Bracho calls it, has been analyzed in light of communist theories of nationhood and revolutionary strategy by multiple Marxist organizations.[28] Yet, just as Marxist epistemologies have been actively repressed within US politics and culture in the context of counterrevolutionary revanchism, Marxist organizing and theorizing have been marginalized in Chicano politics, as well as in scholarly accounts of its history. Despite the presence of Marxist cadre within the Chicano movement, Chicano studies was often dominated by "ideologically flexible" "capitalist friendly forms of cultural nationalism," as Ben V. Olguín and Edward Giardello write. After subsequent years of capitalist and imperialist revanchism, "the liberal reformist as well as blatantly free-market-oriented trajectories of el movimiento inevitably metastasized into contemporary proto-right-wing ideological nodal points in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x departments, programs, and centers throughout the nation," they argue.[29] This history helps to explain why Bracho described himself in a 2012 manifesto as an "LA Mexican who is tired of Chicano grammars of struggle."[30]

Bracho's clarification about not being an activist is consonant with his insistence on distinguishing art practice from political organizing, and his refusal to romantically inflate the political consequence of the former. He made this point clear in his 2014 talk "Anger and Love," which he delivered at Human Resources in Los Angeles: "We need to let go and ease up and kick the fuck back on some of our rhetoric, including and especially the sloppy and basic use of *decolonizing* and *decolonized*. Decolonization is done with guns. And, in instances when it is not, the insurgent colonized have been met with the hegemon's firepower: Grenada, Venezuela, Bolivia, Honduras. One's tears or poems or drawings do not decolonize anything, even if you are the ascendant class well-educated descendant of colonized subjects, as many of us Brown and Black artist-intellectual types are."[31] This

is, at once, a withering appraisal of contemporary forms of idealist theorizing in which the concept of decolonization is not only disconnected from actual political struggles against imperialism but also, in practical terms, emptied of meaning. It is also a critique of the tendency among "artist-intellectual types" to romantically inflate the political consequence of the individual works or ideas of professional intellectuals like themselves. While this characteristic has been attributed to the petit bourgeoisie (or professional managerial class) in general, it has also been specifically historicized by Adolph Reed Jr. as a symptom of US professional intellectuals' increasing isolation from concrete political movements since the 1960s, as well as the weakness of the organized left in the United States, in general.[32] Reed's critique of US intellectuals' embrace of "cultural politics" (i.e., resistive cultural practices) and concomitant disinterest in self-conscious, organized political activity (particularly if it hopes to exercise state power) is rooted in his class analysis of the social position intellectuals occupy. He writes, "Cultural politics and identity politics are class politics. They are manifestations within the political economy of academic life and the left-liberal public sphere—journals and magazines, philanthropic foundations, the world of 'public intellectuals'—of the petit bourgeois brokerage politics of interest-group pluralism."[33] This Marxist critique of US identity politics and cultural politics, which overlap and mutually reinforce each other, sheds light on Bracho's avid public rejection of these ideologies, as well as his critical representation of their entwinement in his public talks and plays.

An interrogation of the class position of US artists and intellectuals of color, which Bracho has offered in public talks, is a central theme of *Puto*. As Bracho has said of the play, "I always tend to have characters in a play who are an artist and they're always . . . it's a fraught position. . . . I wanted to always be self-critical about how I make my money."[34] *Puto*'s plotline and dialogue repeatedly demarcate the labor of political organizing from the activities of professional intellectuals and artists, who are referred to as "the check-writer bumper-sticker crowd." The play situates US "artist-intellectual types" (including women and racialized persons) within the labor aristocracy (a class stratum that enjoys more wealth and protections than the rest of the global proletariat), and it shows how this poses material disincentives to their making practicable contributions to revolutionary praxis.

On Dialectical Theater and Marxism

After attending Anton Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya* (1898), the renowned Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy was said to have exclaimed, "Where is the drama? What does it consist of? It doesn't go anywhere!" The demand that dramatic theater must *do something* and must *go somewhere* has a rather long history (and bourgeois class

fix) that continues to linger on in various contemporary guises. The historic durability of this idea of the "well-made play" derives from the fact that, whatever are its specific contents or privileged forms, at any particular conjuncture, it is always and necessarily *antidialectical*. In other words, for a play to be "well made," dialectics must be subsumed by plot (structure/causality) and contradiction superseded by resolution (coherence/unity).

Beginning in the 1920s, the great German playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht took aim at the antidialectical imperatives of bourgeois theater and began to develop a counter-theory, which he initially called "epic theater." Toward the later years of his life (mid-1940s to early 1950s), Brecht reworked this conception of theater under the new heading "dialectical theater," presented as a series of dialogues called *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, or "theory in dialogue form" (*Viel Theorie in Dialogform die Messingkauf*).[35] For us, Bracho's plays have their genealogical origins here, in these scattered, unfinished, never-to-be-completed fragments, scenes, notes, and plans that comprised Brecht's postwar effort to rethink the political and ideological capacities of theatrical production and produce a new theory of dialectical theater. From *Sweetest Hangover* to *Puto*, Bracho's form of aesthetic praxis is insistently dialectical. The drama, or dramatic effect, is generated by dialectics, both as form (dialogue) and method (materialism). À la Brecht, Bracho turns dialectics into "a source of enjoyment," eliciting pleasure "from the unexpectedness of zigzag development, the instability of every circumstance, [and] the joke of contradictions."[36] So, *what happens* in a Bracho play? Dialogue happens. Conversation turns lyrical. Theory battles. Contradictions motor. Dialectics direct. Ideology takes center stage.

A good example of Bracho's artistic praxis can be gleaned from his method of constructing characters. As he has explained in talks and interviews, despite not being a Hegelian, Bracho does utilize a Hegelian model of subjectivity, or identity formation, to craft characters in his plays: "I do use Hegel in his tripartite identity formation because it's a really great makeup of character. A subject in itself, a subject for itself, and a subject for others, that's basically a character on the stage. It's a very easy formula, and I learned it from Norma Alarcón in a lecture she was giving. I was like, 'Oh! That's how you make a character in a play.'"[37] As Bracho suggests here, using a dialectical conception of subjectivity to write his characters is quite convenient, and it is so in two critical ways. First, it installs a defamiliarizing, dialectical dynamic element at the level of the character that mitigates against the types of closure that typically attends the capitalist-modernist ideology of the individual. And second, it is convenient because it resonates directly with, and critically on, the contemporary subject of identity politics. In other words, the *subject* of identity politics and the *character* in traditional theater are

complementary ideological analogues that underwrite the cultural foundations for US imperialist capitalism. Both are conceived as self-contained, whole, noncontradictory, unified unto themselves, and essential, and both serve as forms of ideological capture and political containment. Identitarianism is marked by a corralling and marshaling of struggles and possibilities for liberation into the grammar of liberal pluralism, while the protagonist or character of the well-made play imposes a structure of containment (the grammar of the free individual) that serves to coordinate and enclose habits of thought and sense-making within those of the dominant culture and repel those that are irreconcilable. It is, then, in and through this method of character writing, working out how that subject might be a subject for others—others on the stage, others in the audience, readers of the play, and so on—that Bracho's politics can be understood to permeate and constitute his plays, while at the same time being dispersed and diffused along the various lines of dramatic, dialectical flight.

Bracho's plays can be understood as experiments in theorizing in dialogue form. The theatricalization of theory has been something of a consistent feature since his first full-length play back in 1997. As he said in "It Is the Libido," "The tweakers of my first play *The Sweetest Hangover*, these beautiful criminalized gay men of color and their sisters, came to me through puns. I wanted to question two questions, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and Leo Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave?,' only in my versions they became 'Can the subaltern fuck?' and 'Is the rectum a rave?'"[38] Indeed, this has been the case throughout his entire body of work. As he says of a more recent unfinished work, "It is less of a play than a staged essay, or form, involving characters, dialogue, movement, singing, and reading." Bracho's staged experiments are not, however, simply exercises in style, or the stylization of theory. Rather, his provocations serve a sharply different purpose by being directly inscribed within the circumstances of class conflict, the history-making movement of decolonization, and the struggle between global capitalism and international communism. It is this situated alignment that provides a link between provocative experimentation and the struggle for a radical transformation of society, and it is these linkages that confer on Bracho's work a peculiar type of pleasure and relevance. As Bracho says of his desire(d) praxis: "I want to be a Marxist critic of empire and neoliberalism even as I am a race man with a serious jones for dick. I want this criticism to exceed my practice as a playwright and in the beginning and end of my every day, I do want my political alignments to matter more than my chosen craft. I have been a Marxist and a cocksucker for far longer than I have been a theater artist."[39]

As even a cursory survey of the plays collected in this volume reveals, each of Bracho's plays differs markedly from every other in terms of their formal and ge-

neric qualities. The playwright has never sought to repeat or refine a particular style or format. He has never worked within the same genre twice. Rather, with each successive play, Bracho adopts a different set of formal mechanisms and dramatic techniques with which to experiment. The intent is not to perfect the formal conventions and produce the well-made play—which matters only if your intent is to reproduce the dominant ideology—but, rather, to rework those conventions and forms in ways that *counter* the dominant, or better, as Brecht says, "take a hammer to it." It is through his various attempts to rework (or hollow out) traditional theatrical forms and scripts—such as the protagonist, the plot, the arc, causality, the one-act play—that Bracho attempts to leverage the ideological field and advance an internationalist politics of culture.

NOTES

1. The portmanteau "Aztlantis" references two mythical places that have a powerful allegorical function: the island of Atlantis and Aztlán, the homeland of the Mexica people.

2. Robert Hurwitt, "Celebrating 'Hangover,'" *San Francisco Examiner*, April 14, 1997.

3. As Bertolt Brecht once wrote, the capturing of the theater for a different audience is a goal: "This generation doesn't want to capture the theater, audience and all and perform good or merely contemporary plays with the same theater and to the same audience; nor has it any chance of doing so; it has a duty and a chance to capture the theater for a different audience. [. . .] They are not going to satisfy the old aesthetics; they are going to destroy it." Brecht, "Letter to Mr. X, 2 June 1927," 23.

4. Ricardo A. Bracho, interview with Jennifer Ponce de León, December 4, 2015, in this volume.

5. Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 247.

6. This is inspired by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's description of abolition geography as concerning "how and to what end people make freedom provisionally, imperatively, as they imagine *home* against the disintegrating grind of partition and repartition through which racial capitalism perpetuates the means of its own valorization." Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, 491.

7. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown," 75.

8. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143.

9. The concept of mestizaje has been critiqued for entailing anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism and for celebrating what Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla refers to as the "de-indianization" of Indigenous Mexicans that has resulted from European colonization, i.e., the separation of Indigenous people from their cultural patrimony and the destruction of their forms of social organization that causes their renouncing of a distinctive identity. See Bonfil Batalla, *Mexico Profundo*, xvi. On mestizaje, see also Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Age of Development*, 212.

10. Ricardo A. Bracho, talk at the University of Pennsylvania, Fisher-Bennett Hall, February 18, 2020.

11. Bracho, interview with Ponce de León, December 4, 2015.

12. For a critique of normative Chicano family arrangements, see Rodríguez, *Next of Kin*.

13. Bracho, interview with Ponce de León, December 4, 2015.

14. Bracho, interview with Ponce de León, December 4, 2015.

15. Ponce de León, "After the Border Is Closed," 746.

16. Ponce de León, "After the Border Is Closed," 746.

17. Bracho, talk at the University of Pennsylvania, February 18, 2020.

18. Bracho, talk at the University of Pennsylvania, February 18, 2020.

19. Guevara, "Socialism and Man in Cuba."

20. Bracho, "A Proclamation on, of, and by Negation."

21. Quoted in Liu, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas*, 1. See also Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*; Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*; Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*; Spade, "Under the Cover of Gay Rights"; and Nair, "American Gay."

22. Bracho, "It Is the Libido."

23. Bracho, "It Is the Libido."

24. Third World Gay Revolution, "What We Want, What We Believe," 364–67.

25. Ponce de León, "After the Border Is Closed," 762.

26. Ponce de León, "After the Border Is Closed," 759–60.

27. Ahmad, *In Theory*, 8.

28. See, for example, Tenayuca and Brooks, "The Mexican Question in the Southwest"; August 29th Movement, *Fan the Flames*; League of Revolutionary Struggle, "The Struggle for Chicano Liberation"; Mariscal, *Brown Eyed Children of the Sun;* and Gómez, *The Revolutionary Imaginations of Greater Mexico*.

29. Olguín and Giardello, "The Forgotten Foundations of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Studies," 214–15.

30. Bracho, "A Proclamation on, of, and by Negation."

31. Bracho, "Anger and Love."

32. Reed, *Class Notes*, vii–x.

33. Reed, *Class Notes*, xxii.

34. Bracho, talk at the University of Pennsylvania, February 18, 2020.

35. Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*.

36. Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, 277.

37. Bracho, talk at the University of Pennsylvania, February 18, 2020.

38. He goes on: "I knew I wouldn't be writing about actual subalterns but rather the metropolitan minoritarians who are sometimes their stand-ins, to use Gloria Anzaldúa's term, which Ruth Wilson Gilmore quotes in her trenchant essay 'Terror Austerity Race Gender Excess Theater,' which I saw her give in 1990-never-you-mind and remains central to my playwriting praxis." Bracho, "It Is the Libido." See Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, 154–75.

39. Bracho, "It Is the Libido."