Theatres of Rebellion in Nicaragua

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From the Colony to the Sandinista Revolution

By

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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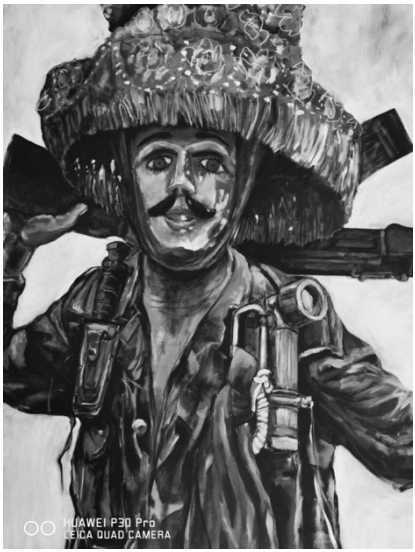
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT



Coloma 2018, painting of a Sandinista fighter with an El Güegüense mask

Theatres of Rebellion in Nicaragua: From the Colony to the Sandinista Revolution examines the crucial connection of Nicaraguan revolts and revolutions to larger notions of social and cultural performance; to theatres of nationhood, nationalism, rebellion, and similar acts of protest, and to links that can be drawn in five hundred years of history. By looking into a larger historical landscape from the colonial period to the Sandinista revolution, I argue in this book that social and cultural landscapes of power and revolt, those highly theatricalized rhetorical and social frames that combine elements of space and bodies representing political, social, and cultural constructs, are crucial in the articulation of Nicaraguan social and cultural life.

Devising a method of research, composition and re-presentation, the book highlights the social, cultural, and political motives of power relations under revolution and revolt. Theatre is capable of framing, be it contingently and

temporally, the social and cultural processes that have become heightened, revealing the social relations in revolution. Tapping into the spirit of self-consciousness, reflexivity, and narrational disruption, uses the conventions of theatre such as audience and actor relations to make the intimacy of subject and agents communication available to audiences and readers.

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I dedicate this book to my daughters and son Gloria Valeria Guevara Perez, Silka Guevara-Nouvet, and Pablo Guevara-Nouvet. Thank you for your unconditional love.

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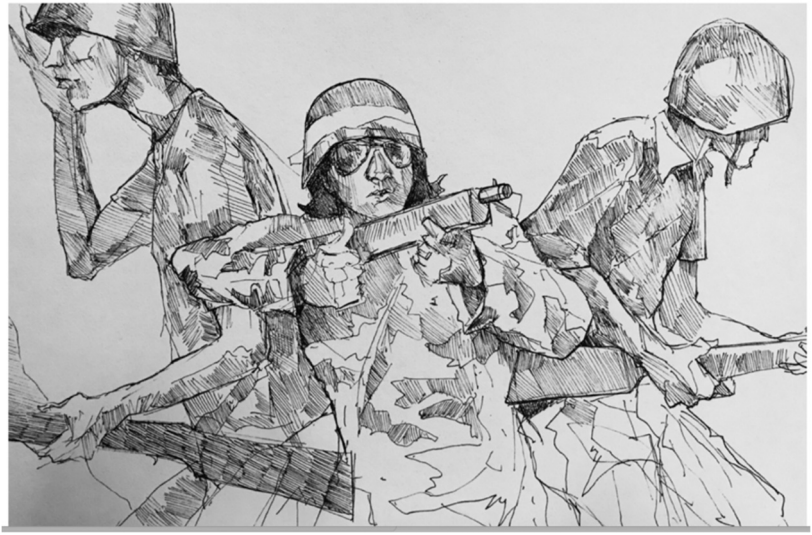
Hamilton, Ontario, 2021

PROLOGUE

GHOSTS OF REVOLUTION AND THEATRE



Drawing by Coloma, 2018. *Nyxtayoleros* theatre group

> "The revolution gave us theatre as a refuge for our emotions." Xavier Ortiz, theatre worker during Sandinista Revolution (Author Interview, 2018).

Introduction

The genesis of this book stems from my first-hand experiences of making theatre as a youth in the Nicaraguan revolution of the 1980s. During this immense national social experiment admired by the world over, I partook in several youth cultural theatre brigades, creating and delivering theatre throughout the countryside. I received training at the newly established National Theatre School, subsequently joining Alan Bolt's *Nyxtayoleros* theatre group.

Since those early years of youthful enthusiasm to my present work as a theatre and performance scholar, the inspiring materials of revolution and theatre have informed my private, social, cultural, artistic, and academic life. Throughout the past decades in my academic explorations, for example, I have delved into topics particularly linked to the intersection of theatre and revolution such as issues of marginal resistance through theatre, cast discrimination, marginality and theatre/performance, and the body and oppression to name just a few.

In the last few years, I started to feel as if I live with the ghosts of the Nicaraguan Sandinista Revolution as constant companions. These ghosts are dead and alive, material, and immaterial, real, and fictive, images and sounds. These ghosts haunt me, they urged me to continue researching and uncovering the layers of that utopic and fruitful experience to illuminate my present and future. This prologue, *Ghosts of Revolution and Theatre*, is my way of conveying my social and personal experiences in context, through the form and content the book will take in the following pages.

As part of the overall research which I have been conducting for more than two decades (see Chapter One), I returned to Nicaragua in 2018 exclusively to talk to those who participated with me during those days of making theatre. The following pages document the conversation I had with one of my closest friends from that time, Xavier Ortiz.

Javier's story is like mine as he was a member of my first theatre group. The group was called "*El Chaparral*" (to commemorate Carlos Fonseca the founder of the Sandinista National Liberation Front who died in combat). That was at the beginning of the Revolution in 1980; at that time Javier and I were 13 and 14 years old respectively. When we formed that group in high school, we had no idea how to make theatre and thus we were guided by one of our school's Spanish teachers, Orlando Montenegro, who took it upon himself to organize the school's first theatre group. Our first play was by Nicaraguan playwright Ciro Molina, about denouncing counter-revolutionary maneuvers against the literacy campaign by the right-wing sectors of Nicaragua. The play was a combination of slogans, modest theatre acting and production training. Subsequently, we participated in a workshop by the renown Cuban theatre company *Escambray* that was touring Nicaragua.

Our theatre work was very simple; it was the pamphlet theatre typical of popular, amateur, working-class activist theatre groups performing during times of political agitation in Latin America and other parts of the world.

Thus, our theatre was a clear form of propaganda with minimal scenic or character development. As 1980 was the year in which the Revolution was poised to engage the country in the national literacy campaign, a titanic task that won much international admiration, we had been chosen by the cultural authorities to stage a play about Carlos Fonseca's revolutionary work and death. In addition to practicing theatre, we also had to teach reading and writing like all literacy brigade members. Xavier, Wilmar Rodríguez – another fellow theatre *brigadista* who later died – and I were the youngest members of the group.

Xavier (sitting) and I, during our early theatre work

After several years of creating theatre together and participating in propaganda tours to the most isolated parts of Nicaragua with a cultural brigade, the Sandinista Army, the Sandinista youth directorate and other popular organizations, Xavier and I, along with other people from our group, were admitted to the nascent National School of Theatre of Nicaragua in 1984.

Conversation

Alberto: Xavier, I do not know if your experience making theatre during the Sandinista Revolution in the 80s was like mine, but I am curious about those years. For me, that experience practically determined, in large part, who I am and how I think today. It has become a guiding principle, a light, a path and constant companion, a reference, a ghost. What about you? How did making theatre during a revolution, as a youth, impact you?

Xavier: For me the revolution was the last utopia; I believed faithfully in the revolution. I still believe in the revolution. What has happened to the revolution afterwards is independent of the dream we had as youth making theatre. For me, that dream of the revolution still exists. And for me that moment was real. Theatre within the revolution was a way of physical, social, and personal expression; it was about freedom in the larger extent of the word. For me, it was an instrument of expression like it could also be playing music, or poetry, literature, and politics itself. There were some of us young people who chose to do politics, our friend Wilmar did that, we chose to do theatre.

Alberto: We all met in those days where we were experiencing the same anxiety of youth, and the most beautiful time of passion typical of youth. But our lives and its exigences were channeled by making theatre about revolution. Theatre was responsible for bringing us all together, for becoming the tool of our individual and social collective expression of a utopia that was being realized.

Xavier: That's because theatre was liberating, theatre created a totally free space for us, we did not need an instrument, we were the instrument.

Alberto: Exactly, our bodies were the instruments that plunged us mind and body into the serious business of revolution (i.e., building equality, anti-imperialism, real social change), though we did not grasp the full meaning of our actions, life, and death.

Xavier: When we have limitations of talent in other instruments outside your body like playing the guitar or drums well, you always have the theatre. Then, the theatre is the salvation for those who want to express themselves.

Alberto: The theatre was the greatest discovery for us. I strongly believe it liberated me not only artistically, but also socially. It gave me the wings to fly the nest. The theatre took me out of the everyday, it took me from the authority of my family and into the business of revolution... changing the

situation of unfairness that was king in our country during the years of dictatorship. We had the illusion of a better future; we were excited to become protagonists of that change by creating the scenarios that will provide the plans for a better and happy future.

Xavier: Yes, of course, the theatre is an emotional catalyst. Because we carried a lot of emotions. Maybe all of us who made theatre at that time had similar personalities. We were young people and wanted to express ourselves, but we did not know how, then the theatre was the space to express what we really felt through characters. The theatre allowed us to be someone else and feel things that we did not allow ourselves to feel. The theatre saved us from having to assume real life positions. The theatre was so liberating that we put on a mask in our everyday life and took the mask off in the theatre. We lived the theatre in our daily life in Nicaragua, like we pretended to be strong. Removing the mask in the theatre allowed us to be vulnerable, to be weak, poetic. In our daily lives we could not express our romantic ideas because as youth and the particularities of the Nicaraguan culture being sexist, we could not afford to be perceived as weak. The theatre was a war trench behind which we found protection.

Alberto: In the theatre almost everything was allowed, it all depended on our creativity and what we could get away with. We made fun of religious dogma as we connected it to class exploitation. We made fun of sexism and violence as we connected it to part of the system of abuse that the Somoza regime had perpetuated and exploited.

Xavier: Yes, everything was allowed. Then if I had to define it, the theatre was a refuge. We took refuge in the theatre. That is, it, the revolution, gave us theatre as a refuge for our volatile emotions both typical of being young and of revolution.

Alberto: Exactly, just as the revolution offered other young people other means of expression. The army, for example, gave other young people the opportunity to express strong emotions and to aspire to the heroic .... What these youths did was more heroic than what we did with our theatre. We risked our lives as well, for example, when we were mobilized to the combat zones to perform, but not like those who risked their lives in the mountains everyday like our friend Wilmar who ultimately died doing his duty.

Xavier: Yes, our friend Willmar was one of those whose conviction was strong. The revolution was also a seedbed of creativity; we had colleagues who began to draw, to paint, while before the revolution they did not dare

do it. They dared to unleash their creativity during revolution. Many found their way of communication through the theatre. The arts were the way to express the joy of being part of the revolution and of being young, open to new ideas and challenges. You remember that during the Somoza dictatorship being an artist was a privilege, and we did not know how to get there.

Alberto: During the dictatorship we had no rights to be artists.

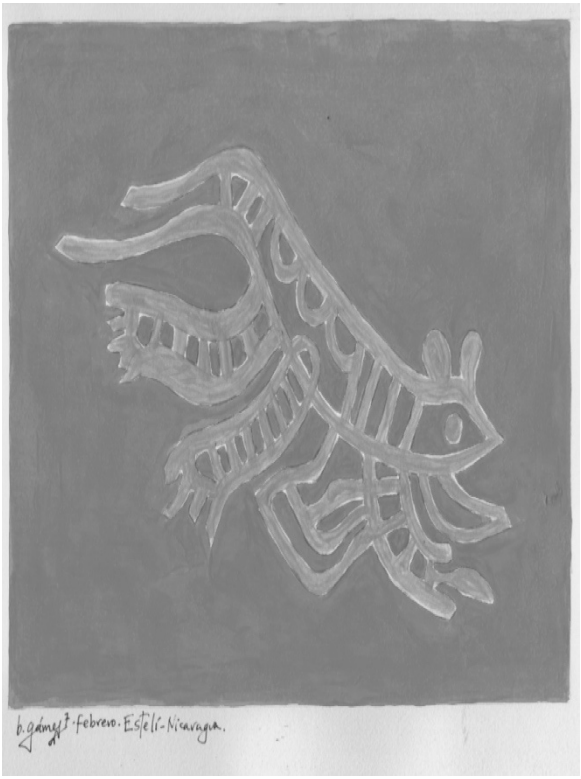
Xavier: The revolution gave us that, it allowed us to be what we wanted to be. And we believed it (laughter)... The revolution itself was the master of all expressions... I still believe that the dream of revolution exists. At the time in the 1980s, I believed that the dream was reality. But, in fact it was only like a mirage. It was others who undertook to undo that dream due to corruption, avarice, and pure opportunism.

Conclusion

The National Theatre School, staffed mainly by volunteering theatre professionals and artists from around the world, was short-lived. The theatrical project was not only about art but also about revolutionary social justice and equity. It was an experiment with a main objective of giving a theatre education to the youth of the country who in the past could only dream about receiving professional theatre training. The theatre school was closed at the end of our first year of studies, at the culmination of 1984. Most of the Nicaraguan budget in the early 1980s was increasingly allocated to defend the revolution from the *Contra* revolutionaries[1]. The school experience was most rewarding for us because we got to share our dreams of making theatre and revolution with theatre students from all over Nicaragua. Concluding our studies, as short as they were, was a small accomplishment not only for the revolution but also for us as individuals. Xavier went to the Soviet Union in early 1985 to study medicine and I, after working sporadically with several arts groups, joined Alan Bolt's theatre group *Nyxtayoleros* where I stayed until 1986 when I emigrated to Canada.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THEATRICAL IMAGINARY AS A TACTIC TO HISTORY



"The memory of an event, particularly of a traumatic one, evolves in the telling, its language is uncontrollable and cannot be anticipated" (Bernard-Donalds, 2001: 130)

Introduction

This chapter, taken as my own *scenario* or plan for the work that follows, is not only an effort to articulate the theoretical and historical import of the book, but is also a way to establish a working theoretical and methodological paradigm from which to frame the entire work. I see this introduction as a *setting* of a play. In a theatrical context, the *setting* can position the play's inner workings in terms of movement of characters, scenic possibilities, theatrical interpretations (styles), the mood, and other physical and social environments. In other words, the *setting* organizes the theatrical piece in its range of prospects, potentialities, and dramatic directions. In the context of this chapter being the theoretical and methodological framework for the book, the setting stands for the theoretical influences, the emerging methodologies, and the historical and political contexts that surrounds the proposed "*presentational remnants*," which in my case is the backbone of this effort. I will unpack this theoretical and methodological strategy in detail below.

The stories, experiences, analysis, and overall foundation of this book grew out of a necessity, a deep need to give form to the extraordinary correlation between theatricality and revolution in the history of Nicaragua, a focus that has occupied most of my adult life. I am using theatricality here in its widest conceptualization, as a code and convention that is theatrical in its forms and depends on theatrical principles such as dramaturgical codes, audience, space, and intentionality to create meaning. The manifestation of such theatricality depends also on societal and cultural codes specific to transformative historical epochs, historical narratives, and social, national, and personal spaces in Nicaragua. The main concern of this book is thus one that aims to illuminate the present and future by looking at the intertwined relationship between revolution and theatricality in the period of social convolutions in Nicaragua. This spans from the time of the colony culminating with the Sandinista Revolution, to our present day.

With a rich history of social and political change, Nicaragua, like many other Latin American countries, possesses a fertile tradition of theatre as a tool for social commentary and revolution. In the last few decades, its oldest play, *El Güegüense*, has become one of the most recognizable symbols and cultural references throughout the country (Guevara, 2010). Through its narratives, located inside and outside the drama, the play has been elevated to the highest position as an identity marker and has become a symbol of both colonial power and dissent. Nicaragua is thus notorious as a country where contemporary power relations of inequality are manifested and

entrenched as public performances. Political positions are frequently presented as social and political scenarios which project desirable futures and outcomes, but also as temporary situations that construct a possible advantage to the forces at play.

Theatres of Rebellion: The Theatrics and Performances of Power in Nicaragua from the Colony to the Sandinista Revolution, as the title implies, among other things, is about examining behind the masks of public personas engaged in the performance of politics, power, and revolt for five hundred years of the country's history. It is simultaneously about the performance of theatre and the theatrics of political life in a country that has experienced a volatile social and political scene entangled with dictatorships and revolutions since the first colonial encounter. The manuscript moreover recalls the unsettled and contested engagements of those involved in the social productions of power and dissent that, to a larger extent, have shaped and reshaped the social fabric of the country. This manifested, for example, in the public spectacles of inclusion of some social groups and the exclusion of others.

To a large extent, the book's grounding stems from my own experiences as a theatre worker, artist, and activist during the Nicaraguan Sandinista Revolution of the 1980s, and on my work as artist and scholar in the fields of cultural anthropology, and theatre and performance studies within the last two decades. During the colossal process of the Sandinista Revolution, an uprising supported around the world as well as maligned by the government of the United States of America, I took part in a youth cultural brigade creating and performing theatre throughout the countryside, received training at the National Theatre School, and subsequently worked with the urban and peasant population as member of Alan Bolt's *Nyxtayoleros* theatre group which was part of the Nicaraguan community theatre movement in the mid-1980s.

Understandably, these early formative theatre and revolutionary years continue to inform my present work as a theatre and performance scholar. I was inspired by the dual symbols of revolution and theatre, and more widely the theatricality of social power and social resistance in the country, and they have influenced my life ever since. Consequently, I have explored topics particularly linked to the intersection of theatre and revolution like the connection of social change in the relationship between colonial and class power, and the resistance to that power in the dramaturgies and performances of the colonial theatre play, *El Güegüense*. Moreover, I have researched, created, and published on the theatricality of power, performance

and nationalism, the aesthetics of violence and affliction, and the body in performance, in research sites as varied as Nepal and Nicaragua (Guevara, 2014, 2014, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008).

Building on my interests and expertise, *Theatres of Rebellion*… attempts to incorporate a large historical period of Nicaragua stretching five hundred years, comprising the many important links between social revolts and power as well as the role of theatre and theatricality in framing such power and resistance. Comprising from the time of the colony, the early 1500s, to the present, the book pays particular attention to the connections between staged public political and social negotiations by social actors of power such as politicians, national heroes, despots, dictators, etc. in the country. It also examines these acts' representations (i.e., public manifestations of power, wars, political writings such as fiction and non-fiction, and the national spaces of protest and revolutions) through my own experiential and experimental form of representation which in this work are "*presentational remnants"* (see definition and explanation below). This period of theatre (theatricalized power struggles, resistance, and revolt) and revolution (actual war of oppression and resistance) has been neglected in theatre studies, social anthropology, and political studies to date.

Academic and Social Contexts

In the past few decades, numerous academic and non-academic works have been authored about many Nicaraguan revolutions, especially the successful Sandinista rebellion that culminated in its triumph in 1979 (Morris 2010; Steffen and Rodgers., 2009; Guevara and Nouvet 2006; Zibechi 2006; Buchsbaum 2003; Zimmermann 2002; Babb 2001; Lancaster 1992; Walker 2019; Schroeder 1987: Kimmens 1987; McMahon 1987; Leiken and Rubin 1987; Rodriguez 1984). Plenty of works have also been dedicated to the development of theatre in Nicaragua. (See, for example, Milan, 2015, Borland, 2007; Westlake, 2005; Field, 1999; Urbina, 1999; Cuadra, 1994; Martin, 1994; Arellano, 1991, 1969; Zepeda—Henriquez 1987; Ruf, 1987; Robleto, 1984; Palma, 1984; Leon-Portilla, 1972; Fernandez De Oviedo, 1971; Brinton, 1969; Pena—Hernandez ,1961; Willis—Knapp, 1956; Perez—Estrada, 1946, and more).

Nonetheless, very little of this work has synthetized the crucial links that have existed between theatre and revolution in Nicaragua from a historical, social, and theatrical perspective that encompasses all the most important periods at once. There are some exceptions to this, but such efforts remain

centered on specific periods, and thus do not offer a comprehensive history that encompasses the span of important events from the time of colonization to the last successful revolution in the 1980s. Lucero Milan's 2015 online book, *Teatro, Politia y Creacion: Una Proximacion al Teatro Justo Rufino Garay*, for example, does a great job at merging the notion of theatre and revolution but nonetheless, this narrative is limited to the realm of the confined history of her theatre group, *Justo Rufino Garay*, and its plays during and after the Sandinista Revolution. Such work, though very important, remains partial and does not tackle the historical antecedents of theatre (political performances of power and rebellion) in the development of social change connected to the imperative colonial discourse and its theatrics. My book, thus, remedies this gap by looking at the crucial connection of Nicaraguan revolts and revolutions to larger notions of social and cultural performances, theatres of nationhood, nationalism, rebellion, and similar acts of protests, and the links to five hundred years of history. Taking a larger historical landscape from the colony to the Sandinista revolution, I argue in this work that social and cultural landscapes of power and revolt, as highly theatricalized rhetorical social frames combining elements of space, bodies, and representing political as well as social and cultural constructs, are crucial in the articulation of Nicaraguan social and cultural life.

On the Power of Performance and the Performance of Power

Centered on extensive scholarly analysis and based on several field research visits to Nicaragua (2018, 2017, 2014, 2010, 2008, 2007), and one major ethnographic research in 2000-2001 on the *El Güegüense* theatre tradition, this rendering primarily adopts performance theory and methodology to re-examine performed social relations and transformations in Nicaragua. The notion of theatricality is highly useful in my approach to help nuance the position of performance as an instrument of ideological power. Theatricality is about engaging social power relations via theatrical devices to present events in spectacular ways. In other words, it is the conscious effort to shape social events by manipulating and controlling our social and political environment. Moreover, theatricality draws attention to how the illusionistic qualities of theatre can be manipulated to control what we see and how we see it. I see theatricality here as a form of re-presenting a social situation shaped by its connections between environments (physical and social spaces), audiences, actors, and social contexts (Goffman 1959, Taylor 1991).

Furthermore, I here incorporate the notion of *scenario* as "one of several possible situations that could exist in the future"[2]. This notion of scenario helps me in framing the performance of power in Nicaragua over the centuries as a creative, imagined, and projected intentionality from social groups to propel a possible outcome or future. The intentionality in theatricality manifested in scenario performances of desire is to activate audiences' actions in social relations where characters, props, roles, supporting casts, scenes, and audiences may be involved. In other words, efforts by protagonists and antagonists in such social systems are geared to win hearts and minds through performances. Performances[3] by way of scenarios and theatricality then can expose an actor's attitudes and intentions in contested histories of human relations. They are important in enacting (Derrida's) grand narratives, ideologies, and thus power. Through performances as theatrical and rhetorical tools, power brokers try to convince larger constituencies of the honesty of a position. They argue for a particular point of view as they are instrumental in convincing people of the position's worthiness. They affect the way we think about most things including ourselves. Performances as theatre, theatricality, or scenarios therefore can convey messages of authority and power and could make them appear as common sense, and consequently make power look invisible, inevitable, obvious, mythological, and even magical. At the same time, performances as theatricalities of power can shed some light on that invisible power. Who wields this power and why?

As important aspects of Foucault's idea of discursive regimes, performances are instrumental in maintaining the status of some groups in society while they are also instrumental in subverting that status. Performances can be thought of as techniques for exhibiting power. In this case, power is a social force that allows a person or group of individuals to mobilize others to overcome resistance. A performance can therefore be ultimately understood as an enactment of power, and of social and political power that can generally be obtained and maintained by coercion or consent. In practice, consent and coercion may occur in all sorts of combinations. Through coercion, individuals and groups obtain and maintain power; using force or the threat to use force. Not adhering to the dominant groups could mean social sanctions, physical violence, or death. Force can be utilized to impose rules or social norms and institutions are established to enforce the power of those rulers by coercion; Nicaragua has a history of five hundred years of coercion.

Even though a state power has repressive forces that can be used to coerce people if necessary, it is less costly and risky to rule by consent. Consent

implies winning others' approval through ideological means. The construction of social relations in this case involves roles, characters, props, supporting casts, scenes, and audiences. Like in the conventions of the theatre, the purpose of such "theatricality of power" is to activate audiences' actions to benefit the status quo. Theatricality as a paradigm for social analysis allows us to explore the immediate action of what is performed in its overall context (actors, settings, scripts) and in terms of its preparation rehearsal (before), and the aftermath. What happens now? What changed? What stays the same and why?

Inextricably linked and entwined, performances as theatricalized displays of power and revolt can reveal, as through the rhetorical and manipulation of space and bodies in Nicaragua, significances, and contradictions pertinent to the understandings of social relations of colonialism, race, and class in the history of the country. Performances of power and revolution can be defined through intentions and effects that yield more readily to linguistic description, but the affective forms of theatricality are much less stable. By looking at effects in such historical and contemporary Nicaraguan spectacles of power and revolution, I propose to ground a new approach to the articulation of global systems of power and their local social forms. This theoretical and methodological framework seeks to understand and contribute to the discussions of how bodies and spaces change local and global social relations. As a methodological strategy, theatricality makes visible the otherwise hidden structures of social violence, arbitrary power, and social marginalization in Nicaragua.

On Writing and Presenting: *Presentational Remnants*

Extremely important to the theoretical and methodological approach I engage with here, and what I call "*presentational remnants*," is the theory of phenomenology. Phenomenological scholarship is pertinent to my work because it grants the study a rapprochement between subjective and objective knowledge grounded in experience, considered to be crucial for understanding the fleshy but otherwise disembodied scholarly representations. Phenomenological methodology, for example, moves away from the distancing between what we know as objective and given, and our own personal experiences, by converging these types of learnings on the subject's familiarity or closeness with a cultural sphere through intersubjectivity. Thus, in any type of presentation of history, through performance there is a need to suspend or bracket certain moments and instances of bodily knowledge as significant in representational practices: as scenes of memory and

witnessing, starting points for dialogue, and sites for reflection and action. The analysis of the many streams of acquired knowledge in this work, therefore, moves beyond verbal reductions of power and revolt to present the theatricalized embodiments of wounded, discriminated, marginalized, victorious, hopeful, and transformative bodies in the ongoing drama of social relations in Nicaragua during the centuries through to my own performance in this rendering.

I take inspiration on Della Pollock's notion of "performative writing" whose emphasis rests on action and performance. For Pollock, performative writing is not a matter of formal style. It is both a means and an effect of conflict. It is particularly (paradoxically) 'effective.'

> "It forms itself in the act of speaking/writing. It reflects in its own forms, in its own fulfillment of forms, in what amounts to its performance of itself, a historical relation (agonistic, dialogic, erotic) between author-subjects, readers, subjects, and subjects written/read" (Pollock, 1998: 79).

The way I see it, for Pollock, performative writing could be a break with structures of true and false, reality and fiction, real or imagined. For Pollock, to write performatively "is an inquiry into the limits and possibilities of the intersections between speech and writing" (Phelan, 1998: 13). It is the evocation of a territory not yet seen. "The ability to realize that that is not otherwise manifested. Performative writing seeks to extend the oxymoronic possibilities of animating the unlived that lies at the heart of performance as a making" (ibid.). It is a flexible space that takes shape as interaction, action and performance occur. Performative writing can be characterized for its postmodernist and anti-mimetic stance since it does not follow canonical circumscriptions and its form of writing is free. As a method of presenting in writing, the "*presentational remnants"* narrative I am proposing here is very similar to Pollock's idea of performative writing. Nonetheless, *"presentational remnants,"* unlike performative writing, pays attention to agency, the author's intentions as well as those of other subjects in history and ethnography. By highlighting the performer's social, cultural, political motives this method attempts to make visible the politics behind performance and its evocation. Tapping into the spirit of self-consciousness which is reflexivity, and the disruption to circumscribed writing presentational structures, "presentational remnants" uses the conventions of theatre such as audience and actor relations to make available to audiences and readers the intimacy of subjects' and agents' communication. Theatre can contingently and temporally frame the social and cultural processes that once heightened, are revealing of social relations.

Most theatre expressions modern, post-modern, phenomenological, presentational, representational, epic and others mirror performative writing and "presentational remnants" in their anti-structural and anti-mimetic stand. As performative space, theatrical or theatricalized social spaces can be,

> "a rejection of narrative structure in favour of simultaneity and montage; an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain, open-ended nature of reality; and the rejection of the notion of an integrated personality in favour of an emphasis upon the Freudian 'split' subject" (Sarup, 1993: 131).

More than a hundred years previously, Richard Wagner (1813-1883), rejected the "contemporary" trend toward realism. He argued, "that the dramatist should be a myth-maker rather than a recorder of domestic affairs" (Brockett, 1987: 543). The boundaries between the real and the imagined were thus broken in theatre. At the end of the 18th century, any departure from realism was labelled "expressionism". "An anthropomorphic view of existence led expressionists to project human emotions and attitudes into inanimate objects, and to seek truth in humanity's spiritual qualities rather than external appearances" (Brockett, 1987: 598). They opposed realism and naturalism because these were centered on locating a fixed "truth" of society (ibid.). The first expressionist play was The Beggar by Sorge published in 1912. Other playwrights, like Walden (1878-1941), Kaiser (1978-1945), and Toller (1893-1939) followed Sorge's lead (Brockett, 1987: 600-601). As expressionism declined, "Epic Theatre" arose, of which Piscator (1893-1966) and Brecht (1891-1956) were the most significant practitioners (ibid: 600). A theatrical form (in acting and playwriting) that draws closer to this anti-mimetic desire in expressionism and epic theatre, and more recently, in the post-modern theatre is the notion of the *presentational theatre.*

Presentational theatre[4] aims to tell a story through posing a question or devising a plot, by a plurality (sometimes fantastically) of means. Presentational plays "*present* (my emphasis) a dramatic action or theatrical performance; they are primarily audience-centered" (Albright, Halstead, and Mitchell, 1955: 136). In a presentational scene or play it is obvious that an actor is an actor, and the stage is a stage. Thus, there is not an intention of pretending in an illusionary "real" universe. Moliere and more recently Brecht represent this type of idea of theatre. In a presentational theatrical action "performers recognize the presence of the audience and address it directly and move towards and among the spectators" (ibid: 252). Thus, performance action does not concern itself with a realistic portrayal of life.

Parody, comedy, mime, exaggeration, or even animal personae and the anthropomorphism of objects are exploited to present expression, form, and content. This theatre style can be fantastical and thus poetical and multivocal. While observing and studying Vermont's "Bread Puppet Theatre," Stefan Brecht noted that, "Presentational theatre-acting, for example, is presenting a character in movement or speech without attempt at psychological indications or at creating an illusion of identification..." (1988: 280). However, I believe that the real power of "presentational theatre" resides in its pluralistic and eclectic way in which it presents. Presentational theatre can thus be an appropriate social space to mediate "real life" through a plurality of narratives, be it non-realistic, even fantastic. This type of theatre lends itself to metaphorizing "real life" characters and in some cases making them more accessible for audiences as they become closer to people's imaginations. This has been my experience while creating theatre in Nicaragua. People were more interested in participating with us when we used fantastic characterizations as in theatre of extraordinary reality.[5] It seems that any identification with characters rested on a subjective idea of reality.

The antagonist of presentational theatre is representational theatre. It was borne as an attempt to recreate reality as found in the "real world" and aims to portray it as closely as possible without deviation and contamination. Although its origins can be traced further back, this European movement for a greater "truth" on the stage stemmed from Victor Hugo's famous 1827 manifesto. He proclaimed that life, and life alone was the only model for the stage:

> "Let us take the hammer to theories and poetic systems. Let us throw down the old plastering that conceals the façade of art. There are neither rules nor models; or, rather, there are no other rules than the general rules of nature which soar above the whole field of art, and the special rules which result from the conditions appropriate to the subject of each composition" (Roose-Evans, 1973: 17).

In the 19th century, the ideal was a theatre larger than life (ibid: 155), which could capture reality as it was, producing a type of theatrical empiricism. This ideal was not only represented through the costumes, setting and stage, but also through acting. Subsequently, this need for realism has taken theatrical experimentation from "external, or photographic realism to a search for inner realism" (ibid: 18). Stanislavsky, for instance, was instrumental in implementing this transition at the beginning of this century (Brockett, 1987). Representational theatre symbolizes "an image of life that may seem to exist at times independent of the theatre." It is primarily "stage-centered"

(Albright, Halstead, Mitchell, 1955: 135-36). The representational theatre is the type of action where performers "maintain an actual separation between themselves and the audience and pretend to be unaware of the presence of the spectators" (ibid: 252). This is the so-called "fourth wall." They literally tried to recreate "real life" characters, environments, and circumstances, and their inner motivations. Through a representational realistic theatre technique and philosophy, the actor and director attempt to recreate what is observed, lived, and experienced with attention to details such as feelings, motivations, senses, hunger, fear, etc. This type of theatre is a mimicry of sorts.

I believe that just like presentational theatre, my "*presentational remnants*," as evocation and presentation of history, research, and its subjective understandings, can thus present a plurality of experiences (its current priorities, strategies and intentions, vicissitudes, and contingencies of writing and re-presenting), in a somewhat unified narrative, theatres of rebellion in Nicaragua. Nonetheless, I cannot and will not claim that a "*presentational remnants"* framework gets necessarily closer to reality. Such a claim would contradict the spirit of my undertaking as the main idea is to create narrational spaces populated with a partial yet imaged actual lives, a plurality of understandings, experiences, and evocations. This theoretical and methodological approach aims to be a locus, a temporal discussion, the intersubjective nerve system of research, and its presentation.

This book is thus the exploration behind the masks of public personas engaged in the performances of power: political and rebellion. It is also about my own performance of interpretation, understanding, and analysis of such exploration. The performance of theatre and the theatrics of political life is evident to see in a country that has experienced volatile social and political entanglements with dictatorships and revolutions since the Spanish arrived in the 1500s. The book moreover recalls the unsettled and contested intentions of those involved in the social productions of power and dissent that to a larger extent have shaped and reshaped the social fabric of the country.

Organization of the rest of the book

Two: "*The Theatrics of Colonial Power and the Theatre of Revolt*" will expound political power that developed in the country during the colonial encounter and was made visible through public performances in the intersection between theatre, theatricality, and revolution. Concentrating on

issues of political power and social relations and highlighting identity negotiations through theatre and other public social and political performances, the chapter will be comprised of two sections. First, it introduces a chronologically succinct presentation of Nicaraguan historicity from the 1500 hundreds to the present. The format of this first part of the chapter will be in the form of a free hand chronicle about colonial power and its impact on social life in Nicaragua during those centuries. Moreover, the second section of the chapter will detail and analyse Nicaraguan theatre tradition and cultural marker *El Güegüense*. This analysis is an academic treatise that pays attention to existing studies on Nicaraguan nation-building schemes through some narratives of *El Güegüense.* It also re-states the position of this work project that casts the performance of *El Güegüense* as the principal site for identity negotiation in Nicaragua.

Three: "*Rituals and Masks: A Presentational Remnant of a Performance of El Güegüense"* endeavours to present the social/cultural and political issues surrounding the annual staging of El *Güegüense* play. Based on ethnographic research I conducted in 2000, the chapter introduces the traditional performers of the play in the town of Diriamba, and their relationship with the town's annual religious festivities of San Sebastian, its patron saint. The section, loosely structured as a heteronomous theatre[6] play aims to re-articulate a process of identity negotiation already underway in distinct spaces of Nicaraguan society into everyday discourse. This method is intended to involve the reader in the process of the ethnographic experience.

Four: "*War and Theatre de Guerrillas: Somoza and Sandino*" retakes the discussion of theatres of revolution in Nicaragua from the early 1900s to the middle of the century. It pays close attention to the period of social convolutions that was marked by three socio-political forces in the country: the United States' political and military interventions in the country, the establishment of the Somozas' dictatorship, and the emergence of Nicaraguan anti-imperialist and nationalist hero Sandino. While exploring some anti-imperialist and anti-dictatorship theatrical manifestations such as folkloric and popular theatre, this chapter aims to give form to the history of theatricality and political theatrics of that time that contributed to political power and resistance.

Five: "*Insurrectionary Theater: Dictatorship, Theatrics and Revolution*" sets to look at the intermediate years of social and nationalist revolts that were marked by most Nicaraguans' struggles against the more than forty years of Somoza dictatorship, leading to the Sandinista Revolution triumph on July 19th, 1979. Theatre and theatricality are crucial in this period as it