

**FOR A THEATER OF IDEAS: FELIPE SANTANDER AND THE POLITICAL
PERFORMANCE IN MEXICO**

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This dissertation is the first critical study of the work of Mexican playwright and director, Felipe Santander. I argue that the six plays that Santander wrote and directed from 1978 to 1990 draw on historical instances of popular struggle in order to propose the continuing presence of Revolutionary concerns in the contemporary context of 1980s Mexico. Across three chapters I analyze how Santander's fictionalized representations of historical events contribute to the production of what I call his 'aesthetics of solidarity': a term which I use to refer to the set of strategies that are mobilized in order to produce an experience of equality in his audience. My first chapter focuses on *El extensionista* (1978), Santander's best known play, which I read as re-politicizing elements of the Revolutionary Nationalist imaginary as the foundation for a public conversation about the on-going issue of agrarian reform. The following chapter analyses the remaining three plays from Santander's *Teatro Campesino* cycle. I maintain that through these plays Santander theorizes an alternative historiography of Mexico which foregrounds the on-going revolutionary struggles of the people and opposes the established myth of the so-called *pax priísta*. In the context of the emerging scholarship on the Mexican 'Dirty War', my dissertation contributes to a reflection on theater's relationship to these broader historical processes. Finally, I examine *La ley no escrita* and *México-USA* as critical performances of the media archive that replace a capitalist logic of fragmentation with an aesthetics of solidarity.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Politics plays itself out in the theatrical paradigm as the relationship between the stage and the audience, as meaning produced by the actor's body, as games of proximity or distance.

Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (17)

This dissertation is the first critical study of Mexican playwright, Felipe Santander (1935-2001), and the plays he wrote and directed from 1978 to 1989. Rejecting the historical notion of the *pax prúista*, Santander's theater brings stories of popular struggle to the stage, and contextualizes them within a historical trajectory that is defined, not by consensus, but by the anti-authoritarian spirit and unrealized proposals of equality that are expressed by the Mexican Revolution. I argue that Santander's work in this period produces a vision of Mexican post-Revolutionary history in which the Revolution is always present, not just as that which gives Mexico its aggressive national identity, but as an on-going confrontation between the interests of the state and the interests of the people. Understanding Santander's radical theater project advances a more nuanced understanding of the legacy of the Mexican Revolution, particularly from the perspective of the left.

From the 1970s to the 1990s Santander's plays plotted the changes taking place in Mexico's political culture and their impact upon the lives of citizens far removed from the centers of national power. Santander's writing can be thought of as participating in *nuevo teatro popular*, a continent-wide movement that encompassed a broad range of theatrical innovations

and sought to make theater a unique vehicle for the enactment of left-wing political rebellion and social justice. While the New Popular Theater movement and Santander's role within it are well documented, there has been almost no critical analysis undertaken of his actual work. With the one-party rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)- neither socialist nor properly liberal-democratic- as its unique political context, the 1960s and 1970s were decades of political upheaval in Mexico. However, by the 1980s, political reform, economic crisis and the increasing power of drug-trafficking cartels were causing important shifts in the topography of Mexican politics. Through the critical lens and political ideals of *nuevo teatro popular*, Santander's work confronts Mexico's shifting political paradigms at the end of the Cold War.

1.1 FELIPE SANTANDER AND THE ARCHIVE

Felipe Santander was born on 15th April 1935, either in the north-eastern city of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, or in the town of La Paz in San Luis Potosí (“Santander, Felipe” *Diccionario...*; Valdés Medellín; Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 283). His stepfather was an attorney and he came from a privileged background (Silva “Ex-director...”). He spent his adolescence in schools for boys “casi militarizados” in Cuernavaca, Morelos (“Santander, Felipe” Garzón Cespedes 22; Navarro). In adulthood he studied Agricultural Engineering in the “Escuela de Agricultura Hermanos Escobar” in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, although another source reports that it was in Saltillo, Coahuila (“Santander, Felipe” *Diccionario...*; Aranda; Lopez). After graduating, he pursued post-graduate studies in Italy and the Soviet Union. However, he soon left his career as

an agronomist to study drama at the “Escuela Teatral de Bellas Artes” (Valdés Medellín 55; Lopez; “Santander, Felipe” *Latin American...*). These details of Santander’s early life, as sparse and inconclusive as they are, show that Santander had experience of the different realities and cultures within Mexico by the time he was in his twenties, a factor that may have acted as an important antidote to the prejudices of regionalism, and a key element in the formation of a playwright committed to the creation of a theater truly for and about Mexico’s multiple realities (Santander, *Estoy casado con...* 123, 125).

Santander found success as an actor in the Mexico City theater scene and in 1957 he began his theater career playing the title role in the Greek tragedy, *Hipólito*, in no lesser venue than the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Santander *El teatro campesino*). According to John Dillon he became “something of a matinee idol” (Santander, *Three Plays* x). He was directed by Salvador Novo in 1958 in *El canto de los grillos* (Moncada, *Así pasan* 222). This was the first of a series of performances alongside Emma Teresa Armendáriz, alongside whom he would form part of the troupe ‘El Teatro Club’; Santander worked with the troupe frequently from at least 1959 until 1967 (Moncada, *Así pasan* 224, 270; Reyes; de Maria y Campos; Solana)¹.

Simultaneously, Santander began writing and, later, directing theater. His first script was a comedy called *Luna de miel... para diez* which premiered on 28th December 1959; Santander starred and it was directed by Fernando Wagner (“Santander, Felipe” *Red Teatral*; Moncada, *Así Pasan* 227). The piece was also written as a film script, although this project was never realized; another film script focused on the theme of prostitution, *La casa del farol rojo*, followed quickly in 1963 (“Santander, Felipe” *Red Teatral*; Santander *El teatro campesino*). Santander never

¹ Santander participated in the following productions: *Arpas blancas... conejos dorados*, directed by Hector Mendoza; *El alquimista* (1963); *De repente en el verano* (1964); *Viet Rock* (1967), all directed by Rafael López Miarnay.

found success in film, but he would continue to experiment in the genre². In 1961, Santander's musical comedy *Las fascinadoras* premiered in Teatro Insurgentes. The show is remembered by the internationally famous singer and actress, Angélica María, who recalls that it was while performing in *Las fascinadoras* that she decided to record her first album, "En este musical yo interpreté dos canciones y puedo decir que ahí comenzó mi carrera de cantante. Nunca antes lo había hecho pero ahí es la primera vez y luego fui a una editorial a buscar canciones para un disco". Although it was an important first step in an unstoppable career which would see her become known as "La novia de México", win a Latin Grammy and earn a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame, she admits that the show was not a great success, "era una obra bastante malona y nunca se volvió a montar. Pero fue bonita porque éramos un montón de jóvenes que se suponía querían ser artistas" ("*Las fascinadoras*" *Red Teatral*; "Angélica María" *Red Teatral*).

Santander would have more success with his next piece *La orden* which in 1963 won the "Premio Nacional de Teatro de la UNAM" and premiered in 1967 ("*Santander, Felipe*" *Red Teatral*; Santander *El teatro campesino*). A tight futuristic allegory set in a society controlled by pitiless bureaucrats, it is with this play that Santander begins to demonstrate where his politics lie and find his voice as a playwright, Hugo Arguelles writes of *La orden*, "esta obra contiene una de la preocupaciones básicas del teatro de Felipe Santander: su crítica social siempre dirigida contra un sistema que se sustenta en la masacre del ser [...] creo que desde *La orden* (1963) Felipe Santander comienza a crear su propio estilo dramático" (Santander, *De los prejuicios* 12). *La orden* was followed by more political theater: *Las Nachas de nueve* criticized censorship and its impact on the theater; *Penteo* warned of the dangers of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress;

² He acted in four films and a number of telenovelas, all terrible by his own account ("*Santander, Felipe*" Garzón Céspedes). At some point, probably in the late 80s or early 90s, he directed a film version of *El hombre de hierro* starring Mario Almada (Pineda Muñoz).

and *Una noche toda la noche*, loosely based on Euripedes' *Electra*, centered on the activities of a group of young fascists in Mexico City (Santander, "Una noche..." 11). *Una noche, toda la noche* premiered in 1970 in Teatro Reforma and was published in 1997 as part of the collection "La Ciudad de México y sus estudiantes" (Moncada, *Así pasan* 285; Santander "Una noche...").

In 1971 Santander took the unusual decision to give up his theater career and return to his original profession as an agronomist. Santander has described his temporary retirement from the theater in 1971 as a product of his sense that up to that point his theater career had been, "hollow and limited by the unwritten cultural politics of the country" (Santander, *Three Plays* 2-4). In an interview in Toronto in 1986 Santander revealed that, in large part, his frustration was driven by the intense censorship of the theater during the 1960s:

It was just miserable [...] You used to have a man (in) just one day before the opening and he was going to decide if your play was going to be shown the next day or not. One of my plays, it was supposed to last two hours and a half. Then after the censorship came, it did not last more than an hour. So he cut half the show, like that, and this was one day before. Imagine. For the show next day, we had to build scenes that were not written. It was disastrous. It was impossible to do a play like that (Crew).

His problems with the censors were far from over, it was an obstacle that would reappear throughout his career. However, censorship was not the only problem which drove Santander out of theater in 1971, there were a number of other factors that compounded the difficulties facing Mexican theater producers. Writing in 2001, Santander lists these as archaic theatrical legislation, "among other things, that cats must be on every set (for the rats) [...] These laws were not enforced except in productions not pleasing to the state"; the union for technical

workers, “theaters were hamstrung by requirements that imposed standards which often resulted in actors being paid less than those in charge of raising and lowering the curtain- even in theaters where there was no curtain”; and rampant corruption in the actors union “which by the seventies had arrived at a tragicomic level”. As Santander describes it, corruption and censorship were often an entwined couple, nevertheless, for him, “censorship was the worst plague of this period. It hobbled the efforts of three generations of Mexican playwrights” (Santander, *Three Plays* 2). In spite of his frustrations, after his experiences in rural Mexico he returned to theater with a radical political vision, and an urgency to communicate what he had learned that convinced him to take up the struggle once more. However, Santander had changed and for the rest of his career, he would take every possible opportunity to expose the myriad ways in which political pressure was exerted upon theater producers.

Santander returned to theater in 1978 with *El extensionista* (1978), the partially-autobiographical story of a young agronomist who is personally and politically transformed by the time he spends working in a rural village. The play ends with the young agronomist murdered and the villagers on the point of violent insurrection, and the ending is a debate with the audience about what the villagers should do. In an interview, his wife of 18 years, Guadalupe Carranza, recalled, “*El extensionista* surgió de una necesidad personal de comunicación, pues Santander, ingeniero agrónomo egresado de la Escuela Superior de Agricultura Hermanos Escobar, vio cómo los resultados de una investigación realizada para la Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos fueron a parar al bote de basura” (Aranda). However, *El extensionista*, took on much broader dimensions than those of its initial concern, as it became a panorama of the economic and social complicities that ensured that rural people were kept poor (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 276). The play included issues such as the on-going battle to get their property

boundries legally protected; the legal and physical threats from a powerful local landowner; and the corruption that prevented them from getting a fair price for their corn. Originally the play was an educational project, as Donald Frischmann notes, “*El extensionista* fue concebida como una obra a presentarse a nivel escolar ante estudiantes de agronomía a fin de hacerles pensar sobre los serios desafíos que les esperaban en el medio rural mexicano”. However, it was never able to be performed in an agriculture school (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 120; Santander, *Three Plays* 3).

Instead Santander formed the company “Teatro Cooperativa de Denuncia” and, after considerable difficulty, managed to secure a stage (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 271-2). *El extensionista* premiered on 15th November 1978 (Moncada, *Así Pasan* 329), and became one of the most successful plays in Mexican theater history (Frischmann, “Desarrollo” 57). Its unprecedented popularity was both critical and commercial: it immediately won a clutch of national prizes and in 1980 Santander became one of only four Mexican playwrights to be awarded the Premio Casa de las Américas in Cuba³. Much more surprising for the theater community however was its popularity with audiences, the stage production of *El extensionista* performed to full houses in Mexico City for a staggering ten years from 1978 to 1988. Furthermore, it found the same success beyond the capital and the urban centers, and Santander repeatedly toured with the production to rural areas (Islas). Following Santander’s death in 2001, original cast members decided to take the production on tour once more, the success of the tour was such was that they repeated the event yearly for a further ten years up to 2012 (Islas). To

³ The other three were Emilio Carballido (*Un pequeño día de ira*, 1962), Jorge Ibagüengoitia (*El atentado*, 1963), and Otto Minero (*Siete pecados en la capital*, 1983)

date the play has been performed over four thousand times in Mexico alone (Escobar), in addition to successful productions in the Germany, the United States and Canada.

The play was turned into a television movie in 1991, although Santander notoriously hated the result and made very public his resentment at being excluded from the directing process, “[c]onvenimos en que yo tendría que estar de acuerdo con el guión para ser filmado; sin embargo, me enteré por los periódicos que ya había iniciado rodaje y sin siquiera consultarme” (Sanchez-Hernandez, “Pérez Gavilán no cumplió...”). Undoubtedly one of the aspects of the film that Santander most objected to was its macabre ending. The play ends with the townspeople in a dilemma as to whether or not to take up arms in vengeance for the murder of the young agricultural engineer and one of the village leaders; the action freezes and the debate is turned over to the audience to decide the ending. The film invents a violent ending in which the villagers rush the town carrying burning torches, set fire to the municipal buildings and lynch the local authorities and landowner (*El extensionista* dir. Juan Fernando Pérez Gavilán). Santander commented in a newspaper interview in 1992, “Al ver mi obra en forma comercial, como cine guiñol, me llevó una gran sorpresa, pues se hacía un melodrama barato [...] es una lucha de intereses agrarios, no una lucha entre buenos y malos” (Pineda Muñoz). It is probable that “cine guiñol” was an erratum, intended to be “cine Guignol” in reference to the film’s gruesome ending during which the shot remains for an uncomfortable amount of time watching the landowner as he dies of hanging, occasionally breaking away to show the townspeople as they stand around and watch, their expressions flat and inscrutable (*El extensionista* dir. Juan Fernando Pérez Gavilán).

El extensionista (1978) was followed by three more plays: *A propósito de Ramona* (1981), *El corrido de los dos hermanos* (1984) and *Y, el milagro* (1985). Together the four plays

constitute what is known as Santander's *Teatro Campesino*. Of the series, Santander said: "yo intento plantear las relaciones del campesinado mexicano con las instituciones que ideológicamente han influido más sobre su actitud actual; y para mí esas instituciones son evidentemente la Iglesia, el Estado y el militarismo" (Santander, "Estoy casado con..." 121). The clarity of Santander's vision is indicative of the change in Santander's work after his time in the countryside. Santander recognized the schism in his work, commenting, "mi teatro flojo, por mera diversión ya quedó muy atrás" (122). Post-*El extensionista*, Santander's plays are explicitly committed to an aesthetic of equality and the transmission of a political message of solidarity.

A propósito de Ramona premiered in August of 1981 in the Teatro el Galeón, and was a finalist in the "Premio Nacional INBA" that year (Santander, "Estoy casado con..." 121; Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 273). The piece examines the Mexican Revolution from the perspective of an imaginary mountain village, and idealistically hypothesizes what the outcome could have been like if the outcome of the Revolution had been faithful to its ideals. Presented as a historical counterpart to *El extensionista*, the play presents the politicians of the post-Revolution behaving in much the same way as the caciques of the Porfiriato that preceded them. The play received some negative reviews and it did not last long *en cartelera*, although Santander also reported disruption to the venue. Frischmann recounts that "[Santander] llegó a un ensayo en la tarde y descubrió que el techo del foro había desaparecido repentinamente, en la plena estación de lluvias. Por suerte logró que lo taparon antes de la función de esa noche; pero para el maestro se trataba de un caso de "sabotaje"" (273). Whether the play's rehearsals was deliberately targeted or not, *A propósito de Ramona* is a direct criticism of the post-Revolutionary government's failure to address the demands of the people who brought them to

power. Furthermore, the play takes the unusual step of privileging the female experience of Revolutionary struggle.

The third play in the *Teatro Campesino* cycle was *El corrido de los dos hermanos* which had been awarded the Premio Nacional INBA in 1982. The piece is complex and ambitious in its historical scope. A group of young, hippyish musicians arrive in the small town of El Mineral in San Luis Potosí. The townspeople become aggressive when they sing a traditional *corrido* which tells a tragic love story, and they are informed that the *corrido* is based on events that took place in the town. A local man agrees to tell the full story of *Los dos hermanos* and in doing so he narrates the social and economic history of the town, beginning with the conflicts caused by the town's dependence on a foreign-owned silver mine. When the mine closes, one brother stays in the now poverty-stricken town and participates in the community's struggle for political justice; the other brother decides to go to the city and find work, in order to send money to the family. He struggles in the city and is persuaded to join the army. Ashamed, he does not tell his family, until he is informed by his superior that he will lead an operation to suppress the "subversive" forces in his hometown, with tragic consequences. Santander wrote that that play, "is not intended as a criticism of the Mexican army, an army made up mostly of farmers and the poor, but only as a questioning of the model which the government has chosen for our economic development, and an indictment of militarism in general" (Crew).

The play was based on historical and personal events: the foreign owner of the local mine closed the town's only source of work when workers demanded a pay rise; in a separate incident, an uncle of Santander's who lived in the town was robbed of his land when it was occupied by the army. Santander said of the play, "Los dos hermanos—¡es la historia de mi pueblo! (Santander, "Estoy casado con..." 123). The first page of the play carries the note "Los

caracteres y acontecimientos en esta obra son reales en su mayoría, a pesar de que la cronología, ubicación y nombres han sido alterados” (Santander, *El teatro campesino...* 131). The note can be seen as a fitting epigraph to all of Santander’s work post-1978 through which he developed a method of fictional historiography destined for the contemporary audience. Santander commented on the play’s contemporary relevance, “I want to warn of the dangers of taking more and more people from the fields and bringing them to join the army. The situation is becoming worse and worse. Unemployment is bringing more and more people into the army. [...] I think that my government will have to look for primary sources of work, in mines and agriculture and fishing” (Crew). The play narrates a historical problematic constructed to be broadly applicable in regions where the Mexican army was successful in recruiting poor rural men to its ranks to murder other poor rural men struggling for justice.

El corrido de los dos hermanos premiered on 2nd March 1984 in Teatro Legaria, located in Unidad Habitacional Legaria IMSS on the outskirts of Mexico City. The production was sponsored by the UNAM, IMSS and CREA⁴ (Moncada, *Así Pasan* 364). For its second season, it was allocated Teatro Santa Fe, on another IMSS housing estate, “lugar peligroso de noche debido a la presencia de pandillas juveniles” (273). In August 1984 the play was taken to New York to participate in the “Festival Latino” where it received a wholly negative review from Adam Versenyí who described it as “full of heart but devoid of artistry” with a “melodramatic, predictable script”. The production made a more favorable impact when it was performed in English by the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre in October and November 1985, directed by John Dillon; Donald Frischmann reports that the play found “gran éxito de crítica y de público”

⁴ Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social (IMSS); Consejo Nacional de Recursos para la Atención de la Juventud (CREA)

(Frischmann “Felipe Santander...”). In June 1986, Santander travelled to Canada to direct the play for Theatre Plus. In an interview with the *Toronto Star*, he said, “[h]aving a play in Canada is very important for me. Mexico is always very careful about its international image, but it will be more and more hard to stop me saying the things I want to say when I have some other forums where I can say them” (Crew).

The last piece in the *Teatro Campesino* cycle was *Y, el milagro* which premiered on the 12th July 1985 in Teatro Jiménez Rueda (Moncada, *Así Pasan* 372), according to Frischmann, the work won “Obra del Año por la crítica mexicana⁵”, and Santander, “Director del Año por su labor correspondiente” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...”121). Focusing on the leader of a group of revolutionary peasants who is cornered by the army and must rely on the sympathy of a priest in order to hide in plain sight, the play opens a discussion, in dialogue with liberation theology, on the impossibility of a politically neutral Church. *Y, el Milagro* was presented in a staged reading as part of the 1989 Festival Latino in New York. Speaking to the *New York Times*, Santander commented on his *Teatro Campesino* as “examining the relationship between ‘the peasants who are the backbone of this country’ and power [...] I don't take sides, since I want the public to take its own position, but I am against militarism [...] History has shown the inability of the Latin American military to impose peace” (Rohter). *Y, el milagro* was also performed in English by Milwaukee Repertory Theatre in 1988 (Stephens; “Santander, Felipe” Milwaukee Repertory). It was reported in 1986 that Santander was in talks to make *Y, el milagro* into a film starring Edward James Olmos, however, it appears that the project did not come to fruition (Frischmann “Felipe Santander...”).

⁵ Asociación Mexicana de Críticos de Teatro

Despite international interest in his work, Santander would assert in 1987, “Nunca fue mi objeto buscar mercados extranjeros para mi teatro; yo defiendo el hecho de que un teatro, para que sea combativo, tiene que ser local, y creo que mis obras son muy locales. [...] O sea, ¿cómo iba yo a pensar que en Canadá les iba a interesar la historia de mi pueblo de San Luis Potosí?” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 123). Santander certainly did not object to international interest in his work but he was very clear that his work was written, in the first instance, to intervene in Mexican reality. In the same interview, he said:

Mi próxima obra probablemente será la más localista de todas, y lo hago deliberadamente a sabiendas [...] rompo con esas posibilidades de convertirme en un autor internacional y escribo algo que no va a tener mayor mérito que la crítica profunda, seria y honesta de esta problemática, de esta sociedad que hoy nos envuelve aquí en México (123).

However, Santander did make use of his opportunities to speak to the international press to protest the censorship his work was subject to in Mexico, as demonstrated by his comments, noted above, to Crew, Rohter and Frischmann. He was not shy in the national Mexican press either, often appearing to court controversy with his blunt comments (Pineda Muñoz; Navarro; Rosles y Zamora).

Santander knew the risks of producing this belligerent, critical theater; when asked in an interview if he felt at risk given the confrontational themes in his work, he responded, “yo creo que me estoy arriesgando desde que monté *El extensionista*, pero no me interesaría hacer teatro de otra manera” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 122). Nevertheless, the obstacles that he constantly encountered were many and tiring, Guadalupe Carranza remembers a tour in Spain that was cancelled a day before the company was due to leave, with no explanation:

Pese a la aceptación de sus obras, a Felipe le cerraron los espacios, pidió teatros en varios lugares, como en el Seguro Social, pero siempre había apoyos mínimos [...] Sin los premios difícilmente se hubiera apoyado la obra de Santander [...] Su obra no era para darle gusto a las autoridades, y entonces se cerraban las oportunidades para montar las obras y se cancelaron una serie de apoyos (Aranda).

By looking at the performance history of these plays, it can be observed that almost all the plays from Santander's *Teatro Campesino* encountered issues with their staging, whether it was the subterfuge required to get a stage for *El extensionista*, or accepting the precarious conditions experienced in staging *A propósito de Ramona* and *El corrido de los dos hermanos*. In 1987, Santander felt that his dream of a drama school was impossible to realize, since his theater company would never make the profit to set one up, and, as he put it, “[d]esgraciadamente las características de mi teatro me alejan de todas las posibilidades institucionales; aquí no se puede contar con los ‘sponsors’ para hacer teatro” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 126). Nevertheless, he was convinced that, for his vision of a truly Mexican theater to be realized, a school committed to that vision was also necessary, “[h]ace falta una escuela que permitiera realmente contar con actores cuyos cuerpos, cuya voz y cuya estructura intelectual, mental, estuvieran entrenados para hacer teatro mexicano; esto no existe. ... Esto no lo tenemos, y creo que es muy necesario, pero me parece que es casi como el sueño imposible” (125-6). Santander never explained in detail, at least on record, why he felt that existing theater schools were not training students to make Mexican theater, but I would speculate that Santander may have found these schools prone to a Eurocentric bias, in that they trained their students to value a European tradition over the representation of Mexican realities. Only two years after he made these

comments, Santander's wish would be granted and he would have the opportunity to form a theater school of his own, to train actors and present his own work and that of others.

After 1987, Santander had finished his *Teatro Campesino* and announced his work would move away from rural themes, "ya en la siguiente obra me salgo del teatro campesino, por lo menos por un tiempo; ahora voy a analizar un poco la burocracia" (123). Santander would go on to write four more plays, all of them taking different perspective on the theme of politicians, narcotraffickers and the relations of power between them. In 1996 these plays were published together in the volume, *De los perjuicios que ocasiona el narcotráfico*. Hugo Argüelles, in his introduction to that volume, describes the shift in Santander's work post-1987 as follows:

Considero que después de una primera etapa en su quehacer dramaturgico y en la que probó y experimentó con varios géneros (la comedia *Luna de miel... para diez*, el musical *Las fascinadoras* y las cuatro piezas de su teatro campesino *El extensionista*, *A propósito de Ramona*, *Y, el milagro* y *Los dos hermanos*), ahora Santander está iniciando una segunda etapa en la que, si bien no hay tanta diversidad en cuanto a experimentar con distintos géneros, sí la hay en tanto que desarrolla un estilo más personal y desde luego, una temática con la que forma y establece una indudable unidad. La temática viene desde *El extensionista* y obviamente es de carácter social (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 9).

Argüelles' comments are provocative because they establish a schism in Santander's work following his *Teatro Campesino*, which is contrary to Santander's own view of his work. As previously noted, Santander locates the schism in his absence from theater and the ensuing increased political commitment and focus of his work. Argüelles' argument is that the turn in his work is established by less experimentation with genre and an increased tendency to make use of

metaphor and social allegory. Most interesting in Argüelles' theory of Santander's work is his clarification that he finds this less realist presentation of reality to be more suggestive (and exciting presumably) for the theater producer, he writes, "abre un sin fin de posibilidades interpretativas (y desde luego de montaje)" (10). I disagree with Argüelles' perspective here, my experience of searching the archive to uncover when, where and how Santander's plays were staged leads me to believe that the plays of his *Teatro Campesino* contain a deceptively complex and layered presentation of reality, as well as multiple possibilities for staging. However, Argüelles was a hugely influential voice in Mexican theater, and his hypothesis may well reflect, or have found an echo in, that of others, thus potentially explaining some of the critical lack of interest in Santander despite his awards, international recognition and commercial success. Undoubtedly, the plays that were collected in *De los perjuicios...* were darker in tone with more fantastic, strange and ambiguous moments that evidently demand a series of important logistical decisions from their director.

In 1980 Santander had moved to Ocotepéc near Cuernavaca, about 50 miles south of Mexico City in the state of Morelos (Navarro). In 1989 he received a grant from the Cultural Decentralization Program to found the Centro de Arte Dramático y Estudios Escénicos (CADEE), also known as the Seki Sano Theatre School⁶, in Cuernavaca (Navarro; "Santander, Felipe" *Latin American*; Rosales y Zamora). According to Aranda, "El plan era que esta ciudad fuera como Xalapa, donde surgieron varias compañías apoyadas por algunos directores, productores y escuelas veracruzanas y del Distrito Federal". This plan did not come to fruition, since the project only lasted four years. However, with the support of the state governor, Antonio

⁶ Santander had been a student of Seki Sano, and felt that his contribution to Mexican theater had not been properly recognized (Pineda Muñoz; Rosales y Zamora).

Riva Palacio López, Santander was given the Teatro Ocampo, a disused cinema in the center of Cuernavaca to realize his dream of running a non-profit drama school (Navarro; Pineda Muñoz; Sanchez-Hernandez). Santander was cautiously hopeful that the school would find support and resonance within the local community, “Este proyecto es una experimentación práctica de una cuestión de la que hemos hablado mucho y realizado poco. Vamos a ver que resulta. Si tenemos una sociedad que nos apoya, funcionará” (Rosales y Zamora).

The school was successful and the first cohort of students staged the premiere of Santander’s play, *México-USA*, on 22nd February 1990 for which they unexpectedly won three national prizes (Santander *Three Plays*; Daniel). Titled *México-USA, Drama policiaco en dos actos*, the action takes place between 1984 and 1986 in the town of Mexico, Missouri, and travels through Colombia, Mexico and Panama to tell the story of murdered DEA agent, Helen Esparza. Santander said that the main concerns of the play were, “las drogas, el problema de los chicanos y la rígida actitud de Estados Unidos hacia América Latina” (Daniel). A critic who read the contemporary reviews of the production reported, “Según los críticos, la actuación fue de gran calidad y manifiesta la amplia preparación que el CADEE está impartiendo, ya que en su mayoría los actores son aficionados y muy jóvenes” (Daniel).

Students were paid for their work in productions, which were also an essential part of their training, and this wage often covered their tuition fees (Maya; Ríos; Navarro; Aranda). The pieces *La noche de enero 16*, *Panorama desde el puente*, *Un matrimonio liberado* and *Enemigo del Pueblo* were also performed by students of the school, as well as Santander’s own work, *La otra opción* and *El extensionista* (Aranda; Pineda Muñoz). Guadalupe Carranza, who was an actress herself, said that “[Santander] tenía una lógica maravillosa para dirigir, su teatro era muy cinematográfico. Tenía un don para sacarles el feeling a sus actores” (Aranda). Sterling Houston,

a colleague in San Antonio, also recalled that Santander could be a “tough” director, “he was a very old-school director. Very ‘my way or the highway’, very dramatic. Lots of yelling. That’s the way he was trained. I never held it against him” (Silva “Ex-director...”). During the four years that it remained open, the school brought ten professional productions to the stage and eleven free productions; it gave paid work to two hundred and forty-five students and ex-students who were employed in the production of plays; and the stage was lent for free to eighteen productions from external theater companies (Navarro).

In 1993, rumors circulated in Cuernavaca that Santander had been embezzling funds from the theater school, that Santander had been mounting only his own productions and pocketing the profit (Navarro; Santander, *Three Plays* 119). Guadalupe Carranza has spoken in defense of the school, “Nunca hubo una prueba en su contra. Mucha gente decía que él explotaba a los alumnos, pero eso no era cierto, lo único que hacía es que les insistía en que fueran personas creativas. Felipe hizo lo pocas veces visto: les pagaba a los actores para que ellos pudieran pagar sus estudios”. Santander dismissed the rumors as baseless in a local newspaper interview before the change of state governor led to the school’s closure, questioning whether any of the accusations actually came from people who had worked with him, and stating that, “Los ejidos fragmentados nunca dieron resultado. Por lo que hay que luchar es por la apertura de nuevos espacios y presupuestos. En esta lucha yo me apunto, jalarle las corvas al que va adelante es un mal sistema” (Navarro). In the face of maneuvers designed to take the Teatro Ocampo away from him, Santander modeled a gesture of solidarity towards his fellow theater producers that was consistent with the politics advocated through his theater.

Santander was bitterly disappointed when the school was closed by the authorities in 1994 following the election of a new governor in Morelos. With respect to the closure, he wrote,

“[t]he pretext for the closure was an eight-month audit during which we were not allowed to enter the school [...] Eight months later, a casual article in the newspaper stated that the audit had found no misuse of funds. By then the damage had been done. The school was lost” (Santander, *Three Plays* 119). Guadalupe Carranza recalls, “[e]n realidad, la obra que estaba haciendo Felipe le molestaba a muchos. La única forma de sacarlo del Ocampo fue inventando cosas. El teatro fue clausurado a pesar de tener tres obras en escena. ‘Lo cerraron como un burdel’, me acuerdo que dijo Felipe” (Aranda). Although no official explanation was forthcoming, Santander had little doubt that the closure was part of the new governor’s campaign to suppress voices of dissent: “I have my own version. During his short term in office (three out of a five-year term) Cuernavaca became one of the most violent cities in the country and a refuge for the most conspicuous, reputed drug traffickers ... Therefore, how could this Governor let the author of *México-USA* run an acting conservatory exactly across from the Governor’s Palace?” (Santander, *Three Plays* 119-120).

In 1996 the playwright was named a consul of Mexico and director of the “Instituto Cultural Mexicano” in San Antonio, Texas. While there he organized an international theatre festival in October 1999, “[a]gainst everyone's advice”, according to Sterling Houston, a local artistic director (Silva “Ex-director...”). The festival was a huge success, securing the participation of 36 theater and dance companies from 15 different countries (Silva “Ex-director...”; Goddard; Aranda). His wife, Guadalupe Carranza, says the experience in San Antonio was mostly positive:

Nos dieron un buen trato en San Antonio. Felipe hizo muchas cosas, desde conciertos, exposiciones y este festival que nunca se había hecho [...] Pero la vida, juzga, es paradójica porque hubo muchas frustraciones. Cuando empieza a

repuntar *El extensionista*, empiezan a destruir el área de Extensión Agrícola de la Escuela Superior de Agricultura [...] A Felipe lo corrieron del CREA, del Ocampo aquí en Cuernavaca, y en San Antonio lo jubilaron porque una computadora dice que como tenía 65 años ya no podía estar produciendo, que le debía dejar la plaza a alguien más joven. Eso le afectó mucho. Me acuerdo que me dijo que ya no le interesaba a nadie, a pesar del trabajo que hizo en San Antonio (Aranda).

Santander left San Antonio in 2000. According to Carranza, in spite of his disappointments, he was excited about the forthcoming book of his plays translated into English by Lynne Alvarez, *Three Plays*. He was writing and planning the staging of a new work to be called *Cucúrbita Foetidissima*, after a species of gourd that grows in the arid regions of Mexico and the United States. According to Silva, “The play tells of a plan by the Mexican government to grow the plant as a crop. As a result, Mexican workers in the United States return to their homeland to work in the pumpkin patches, upsetting the U.S. economy. Americans are then forced to change the way they think about migrant workers” (“Ex-director...”). Unfortunately, before the piece could be mounted, Santander died of cancer at his home in Ocotepc, Morelos, on 30th October 2001 at the age of sixty-eight (Aranda; Valdés Medellín 55). Speaking about his illness before his death, he said, “I am very strong, and I am not afraid of dying ... My life is very good, because I am not living in a panic. Many people die before they die. That is not happening to me” (Silva “Ex-director...”).

In an obituary published for Santander, colleagues paid tribute to his passion, intellect and honesty. Greta de Leon, who knew him as a family friend since her father had formed a

socialist organization with Santander⁷, said of him, “[Felipe] was a fireball. He was a shining star, and everywhere he went he created all these things around him; the most intense feelings he brought out of people, like the most passionate love or hatred”. Ed Conroy, a former San Antonio journalist said, “I think he was just a very keen observer of the human condition, and his own honesty with himself- which I think was one of his salient characteristics- did not allow him to live a lie” (Silva “Ex-director...”). I include these comments, not only because they offer rare insight into the personality of a virtually unstudied theater personality, but because they illuminate the way in which Santander worked, which was uncompromising, passionate and reflexive. His interest in truth is reflected in his theater, which was always in search of a fiction more adequate than the everyday facts of “reality” could provide.

1.2 SANTANDER AND THE NEW POPULAR THEATER MOVEMENT

Like artists working in other mediums such as music (New Song) and cinema (Brazilian Cinema Novo), new theater companies participating in the New Popular Theater Movement drew on the work of radical theorists in Europe and Latin America to produce performances that sought to empower audiences as creative and political agents. Driven by their revolutionary politics and a commitment to “collective processes and nonhierarchical organizations” (Weiss et al.), Latin American dramatists embarked on a series of experiments that put their politics into practice and

⁷ This is the only reference to this socialist organization that I have found, I have no other details about when it was formed or its activities, though I would be very interested to.

rethought modes of production in both dramaturgy and performance⁸. In Mexico, Felipe Santander emerged from within this dynamic movement to produce a socially-engaged theater that explored the human consequences of corruption within national political and economic institutions.

Santander formed part of a cohort of practitioners who imagined theater as a catalyst for critical reflection and the theatrical space as a forum for the enactment of liberation (Boal 1979; De Costa 1992). The movement was incredibly heterogeneous, encompassing groups with widely differing approaches and concerns; however, what those associated with New Popular Theater shared was an explicitly Marxist framework in which they developed their ideas about the role of theater in society:

The main objectives among virtually all groups and artists of this tendency are: to expose the mechanisms and dynamics determining general and specific social phenomena and the class character of economic relations, and to demystify the various strategies for manufacturing consensus among different classes (Weiss et al 137).

This description identifies some key words for making sense of Santander's project which, as we have seen in the brief descriptions of his plays, sought to "expose the mechanisms" of power, "demystify" the *prísita* state's grand narrative of post-Revolutionary consensus, and create the relations of solidarity necessary for a class consciousness to arise, where solidarity is understood to be the political consequence of an assumption of equality.

⁸ For the broad characteristics of this movement see De Costa (1992), Geirola (2000), Monleón (1978), Montiel (1995), Rizk (1987), Weiss et al. (1993).

As part of *nuevo teatro popular*, theater groups throughout Latin America exchanged experiences of political activism and theatrical experimentation, and it was on the basis of this common critical perspective that they established the dialogue which gave the *nuevo teatro popular* movement its cultural force. Nevertheless, one of the key debates was what kind of theater qualified for the label ‘popular’. Judith A. Weiss and the ATINT research collective⁹ in their authoritative study, *Latin American Popular Theater: The First Five Centuries*, define the popular in opposition to mass culture, its commercial competitor, and provide a methodology for distinguishing between the two. They suggest that the difference hinges on, “the examination of processes of gestation and control of cultural production (i.e., by whom and for whom culture is produced)”; that is, the production of mass culture will be centrally and/or privately controlled and its objectives may include reaching the largest audience possible, maximizing profit and/or dispersion of propaganda. Popular culture, on the other hand, is produced by or in dialogue with the organic cultural forms of a specific community, with the objectives including the merging, consolidation or validation of that community, an engagement with the interests of that community, and/or the promotion of those interests. As a related criterion, Weiss et al. suggest “analyzing the nature of the relationship established with the audience (as passive consumer vs. active participant)” (5). This methodology provides a useful clarification of the differences between the modes of culture, while accounting for the inevitable cross-contamination between mass culture and popular culture.

In Latin American *nuevo teatro popular*, two tendencies dominated different groups’ approaches to producing popular theater, although many projects had elements of both sets of practices. The grassroots approach was normally a form of community theater made up, at least

⁹ ATINT: Asociación de Trabajadores e Investigadores del Nuevo Teatro (1985-92).

in part, by non-professionals. Professional theater, on the other hand, aimed to create art that was influenced by popular forms, created collectively or that took up themes of social injustice (Weiss et al. 139). As seen in the brief descriptions of Santander's practice above, he fits neatly into the professional theater camp, although it should be added that the apprehension of communities was vitally important to his theater work; examples of this in his practice include the rendering of rural communities on the stage, the creation of a temporal community in the theater space, a pedagogical community at the Seki Sano Theatre School and the attempt to foster a theatrical community in Cuernavaca.

Donald Frischmann, who has studied *nuevo teatro popular* in Mexico extensively, writes, "para nosotros el 'teatro popular,' en su forma más pura, es un teatro creado *por y para* las clases populares". It is indicative of the way in which the Mexican left organized to mobilize broad sections of the population during the 1960s and 1970s that his definition of "las clases populares" includes not only the expected, "clase trabajadora y los campesinos, los grupos indígenas," but also, "sectores de la pequeña burguesía: o sea, aquellos grupos que se hallan relegados a las posiciones socio-económicas menos privilegiadas y que históricamente han sido marginados de los procesos políticos" (1985, 30). Santander's *Teatro Campesino* was about rural realities but was largely performed for an urban audience that would have identified as lower middle class. Frischmann's definition is useful in understanding the value of a popular theater aimed at deepening a relationship of solidarity between the rural and urban audiences.

Many of the leading practitioners and theorists of New Popular Theater in Latin America had studied the work of Brecht in some depth. The adjective 'Brechtian' was often applied in descriptions of Santander's work, particularly with reference to *El extensionista*. This description from critic, Malka Rabell, in 1979 is a paradigmatic example, "Con muchos elementos

brechtianos, tanto en la dirección como en la escritura, ese Alma buena de Tenochtitlán también recurre a las canciones, a un cancionero, quien con su guitarra es el narrador permanente de la acción. Y sobre todo acogiéndose a la teoría brechtiana que exige del espectador la toma de decisiones” (Valdés Medellín 55). When asked about the influence of Brecht in his work, however, Santander denied a direct influence, “Yo me he opuesto mucho a que a mi teatro le pongan etiqueta de teatro “brechtiano”; me parece que nada tiene que ver con Brecht ni cualquier cosa que pudiera achacársele como brechtiana. ... Para hacer teatro brechtiano necesitaría yo haber sido un estudioso mucho más profundo de Brecht” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 124). It would be futile and of little value to speculate as to whether these statements are plausible or true; the fact remains that Santander, quite understandably, did not want his entire body of work to become part of the legacy of someone who had created theater for another time and place. Later in the same interview, when asked about his frequent use of narrators, Santander replied, “el narrador me ayuda mucho, pero me ayudan mucho también la iluminación, los sueños, las sugerencias, y también ciertos elementos de tipo brechtiano” (125). Santander does not explain further what Brechtian elements he is referring to, but the comment seems to confirm that he was willing to admit an affinity with Brecht, only when it did not detract from the autonomy of his work.

Santander was very wary of citing influences, and even though he was considered part of the New Popular Theater movement, he claimed not to know it well; speaking in 1984, he was graceful and sincere about his contemporaries’ work, but maintained a careful distance:

[el movimiento teatral latinoamericano contemporáneo] no lo conozco bien (me refiero a sus puestas en escena) ... Algo sin embargo he podido apreciar en festivales y encuentros a los que he asistido. Grata memoria guardo del teatro

colombiano, con sus grandes carencias, pero con teatreros luchando como fieras por su teatro [...] Los trabajos del Teatro Escambray me parecen de la experiencias más interesantes del teatro contemporáneo (Santander, Garzón Céspedes 24, 26).

In a later interview, he comments that he does see parallels between his work and the work of Latin American practitioners of *nuevo teatro popular*, “con el teatro chicano, con el Teatro Escambray, algo con el teatro colombiano de Santiago García”. He is careful not to cite them as influences, however, saying “[c]uando yo conocí esos teatros, ya *El extensionista* se había estrenado; sin embargo, cuando me tocó ver sus producciones, me di cuenta de que realmente teníamos una determinada problemática que era necesario resolver de determinada manera” (124). Santander recognized and shared the broad political ideals of *nuevo teatro popular*, but he was defensive about protecting both his authorial legacy, and the particularity of Mexican cultural and political space into which his work was directed.

Recognizing the particularity of place and audience, and creating theater that responded to that particularity in a political way was a key problematic that motivated many of the formal innovations that drove *nuevo teatro popular*. In Colombia Santiago Garcia and Enrique Buenaventura both led extremely influential theater companies that produced some of the most successful examples of the methodology known as “creación colectiva”. While they developed unique methodologies under this common rubric, essentially this practice consisted of developing a methodology for creating work that engendered relations of equality, both within the theater group and with the audience. The process might involve researching specific social problems by conducting interviews with the potential audience in order to create work directly inspired by those realities; improvising scenes and plotlines together in order to collectively

build the performance; and requesting and incorporating audience feedback (Gutiérrez 124-128, 214-228).

Both companies used professional actors and technicians, but sought to avoid imposing a perspective on the audience that had no relationship to their experience. The Cuban company, Teatro Escambrary, mentioned by Santander above, forged a very similar process working with communities in isolated parts of rural Cuba (Gutiérrez 229-244). Buenaventura drew parallels between the new theater and the *comedia nueva* of Lope de Vega, noting the importance of the formation of a poetics created in conjunction with a particular historical-social context (Ariza; Versényi 163; De Costa 61-86). This goal of a collective production of space and a common poetics which could speak to the particular experiences of the audience, echoes Santander's own project to create a theater in dialogue with the Mexican audience and their immediate political context. However, Santander was conservative about the possibilities of "creación colectiva" saying "podría ser la mayor tendencia a la vista de nuestro teatro", but only if attempted by an experienced theater group "con varios años de trabajo (ejemplo poco frecuente y significativo en México) [...] los ejemplos de la creación colectiva literaria, en América Latina toda, me parecen aún escasos e insatisfactorios" (Santander, Felipe, Garzón Céspedes 24).

This interest in literary, as well as theatrical, production demonstrates that Santander placed a certain value on the recognition of his writing, something which was understandable given that much of the funding that he could access for his productions was granted based on awards received for his writing (Aranda). Guadalupe Carranza, his widow, has said that writing was his preferred activity, "Felipe nunca fue una persona social. Siempre eludía los compromisos y reuniones. Quería estar escribiendo en su casa" (Aranda). Santander himself suggested that writing was the refuge that remained when resources for making theater were inevitably taken

away; when the Seki Sano theater school was threatened with closure, he told a local newspaper, “yo no vine a Cuernavaca a incrustarme para ver qué saco, sino para hacer algo, si ya no puedo, queda mi oficio de escritor” (Navarro).

For others within the New Popular Theater movement, however, the idea of retreating to writing theater was at odds with their theatrical and political projects. One of the key theorists of the *nuevo teatro popular* movement was the Brazilian theater director, Augusto Boal, who distinguished between four different categories of popular theater, a) of the people for the people (do povo para o povo), b) theater from a popular perspective for another audience that is not the people (teatro de perspectiva popular para outro destinatário que não o povo), c) theater from a perspective that is not popular and whose audience unfortunately is the people (teatro de perspectiva antipovo e cujo destinatário infelizmente é o povo), and d) the new category (A nova categoria). This final category is different from the previous three because it is the only category in which the people become the producers of theater, rather than merely its consumer and it is here that Boal locates the work of his group, Teatro de Arena (*Técnicas Latino-Americanas...* 42). Later, while working in Peru, Boal created the popular literacy program, ALFIN, by encouraging participants to communicate in a variety of “idioms” including theatre, photography and puppetry. At the heart of Boal’s project was the creation of a theatrical language in which everyone would become an actor, ultimately abolishing the division between actor and spectator; equality would be achieved when everyone was acknowledged as both an actor and a spectator, “The spectator is less than a man and it is necessary to humanize him, to restore him to his capacity for action in all its fullness” (Boal, *Theater...* 155). Of course, this theatrical practice was intended to have political consequences. Boal wrote in *Theater of the Oppressed*: “The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates

power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator freed himself: he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action! Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!” (155). The idea of theater as a rehearsal of revolution is a particularly provocative one in relation to Santander’s work, in which revolution was always present. It is perhaps most obvious in the case of *El extensionista* and its open ending, but revolution, as historical event and as political principle is always present in his plays. Nevertheless, I propose here that Santander’s theater it is not exactly a rehearsal of revolution, but a re-staging of the conflict that the Mexican Revolution stood for, “tierra y libertad”, that demonstrates the unfinished nature of that historical project.

Santander never cited Boal as an influence, or indicated that he knew his work, yet there several parallels in their theatrical methods and objectives, despite the radical differences in their approachesto creating theater. For Boal, the work of Paulo Freire was influential in developing the methodology for his “Theater of the Oppressed” (1973), which clearly paralleled the title of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire’s radical pedagogy had been developed during his participation in rural literacy campaigns in Brazil and empowered students to direct the course of instruction and enter into dialogue with the instructor in order to develop a critical awareness of their reality. By looking to Freire, Boal sought to develop a method that enabled audiences to speak for themselves and, while working with the Peruvian ALFIN project, he made use of Freire’s teaching methods. One of the most significant things that Santander’s work shares with Boal’s is the idea of theater as a pedagogical experience which would produce critical thought in its audience. Repeatedly in Santander’s plays appears the ideal of an educative model which is not dogmatic, authoritarian or moralistic, but imparts, without selfish interest, the information that will help others to make greater sense of their reality. Sometimes this ideal is

presented through a character who is actually called “El Maestro” (as in *El corrido de los dos hermanos* and *La ley no escrita*); in *El extensionista* it is a process realized by the *extensionista* himself.

1.3 EL NUEVO TEATRO POPULAR IN MEXICO

New Popular Theater in Mexico was pioneered during the 1960s by the collective *Los Mascarones*; the group practiced experimental theater as well as, “teatro callejero tipo *agitprop* (de agitación y propaganda) y de guerrilla” (Galván *Dramaturgia mexicana*). Their work influenced young people who would go on to form part of one the most recognized collectives in Latin American New Popular Theater, the Centro Libre de Experimentación Teatral y Artística, more commonly known as CLETA. CLETA was founded in 1973 and was composed of different theater collectives linked to the UNAM who were committed to creating plays that spoke to working class experiences. One of CLETA’s founding members, José Antonio Herrero del Rello, explained in a personal interview that the collective came about due to students’ frustration with the university for failing to provide adequate spaces for student theater. Once unified as CLETA the movement occupied the UNAM’s “Foro Isabelino”, the central university theater, forcing the incumbent director, Hector Azar, to resign. Although the university theater became the center of their activities until 1982, the radical politics that permeated their activities often meant that performances were more likely to be in the streets or other locations that enabled them to reach beyond the university (Azar; Galván *Dramaturgia mexicana*; Herreo del

Rello). The formal theater space was still the bastion of the middle and upper classes, and radicalized theater workers in Mexico realized that if they wanted to make political theater they would have to find not only spaces but contexts in which they could engage new audiences, those normally excluded from the production and consumption of theater.

For the reasons set out above, the commitment to finding and creating alternative performance spaces was a recurrent theme of *nuevo teatro popular* throughout Latin America, however, the omnipresence of the state remained an issue for politically committed theater. Weiss et al. note that the silencing of radical theater through an official passive resistance was common in a number of Latin American countries, “although theater workers sometimes encountered violence from the local police or vigilantes in response to the subject matter of their plays or to their grass-roots activism, the state’s displeasure was usually shown only through a total lack of cooperation by the authorities” (Weiss et al 160). Of course, it should not be forgotten that violence against theater producers labelled as ‘subversive’ did happen and was particularly a feature of the Southern Cone dictatorships. To name but one high profile example, Augusto Boal was imprisoned in Brazil in 1971, tortured and forced into exile (Wardrip-Fruin 339). In Mexico, via official bodies and institutions such as the Consejo Nacional de Recursos para la Atención de la Juventud (CREA), Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS), or the UNAM, the Mexican state held a controlling stake in almost all of the resources and locations available to aspiring theater producers. Felipe Galván confirms:

[d]espués de 1968 ya nada sería igual y en el terreno dramático del país eso se puede visualizar con nítida claridad: autores premiados y aplaudidos a fines de los sesenta, encontrarán ante sí la represión generalizada de los gobiernos postlatelolco, los que en lo económico y programático tratarán a la dramaturgia

nacional como un artículo a arrinconar con falta de apoyos y desinterés casi generalizado (Galván *Dramaturgia mexicana*).

For Ronald D. Burgess, writing in 1985, the silencing of experimental and critical theater meant that the productions of New Popular Theater groups became invisible for the next generation of Mexicans, who had not been there to witness them: “[e]n la historia del teatro mexicano, pues, hay un vacío, el espacio que ocupa la generación actual, la generación ignorada. En efecto, se ha perdido un paso en el desarrollo teatral de México” (93). Part of what is at stake, then, in drawing attention to and studying the work produced by this generation of radical artists, such as Santander, is challenging this “disappearing”, in order to recognize that the influence of the concepts and values they brought forth is still present in Mexican culture.

The arrival of theater professionals from abroad to Mexico during the 1970s, when Luis Echeverría opened Mexico’s doors to exiles from around the world, had an invigorating impact on the New Popular Theater movement in Mexico (Azar; Galván *Dramaturgia mexicana*). Sol de Rio 32 arrived from El Salvador and, in 1976, members of the established company, El Galpón, came to Mexico from Uruguay. El Galpón came from a context in which the Uruguayan Federation of Independent Theaters and a well-organized Communist Party had pioneered, prior to the dictatorship, many of the principles of the *nuevo teatro popular* movement (Weiss et al. 154). El Galpón emphasized the importance of independent performance spaces and introduced Mexican theater groups to the idea of the “independent institution” (Galván 2013), a theatrical

space independently owned in order to promote longevity and integration into the community as well as creative freedom¹⁰.

Given the difficulty of securing a performance space, Guillermo Schmidhuber de la Mora notes that many playwrights were tempted by the benefits of a career in government, “[p]ara triunfar algunos escogieron el camino de la influencia política ... resultado de la seducción de puestos importantes y de apoyos para abundantes puestas, pero en perjuicio de la calidad de su creación” (Schmidhuber 153). Furthermore, Schmidhuber notes that even those authors who remained playwrights, rather than becoming bureaucrats, found that their works that set out to critique the state were diluted by the official context in which they were presented, “[e]n Latinoamérica, en los sesenta, el expresionismo de Bertolt Brecht se diría que fue mayor que el teatro épico en esos años. Bajo la influencia brechtiana, en México se escribieron piezas de oportunidad política que perdían su mensaje al ser montadas con el presupuesto oficial” (Schmidhuber 150).

While Schmidhuber may be right, it is worth adding that the Mexican state’s investment in promoting cultural activity was so broad and complex that it is almost impossible to draw general conclusions about the way in which ‘state money’ affected any given performance. An example of this is Teatro CONASUPO (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares), a state-subsidized community theater program whose activists negotiated an agreement that guaranteed noninterference by the government in their brigades. Concomitant with the rise of the New Popular Theater experiments was the expansion of government-sponsored community theater programs. Teatro CONASUPO ran from 1971 to 1976 and proposed to provide, through their

¹⁰ El Galpón would achieve this goal in Mexico; two of their members, Blas Braidot and Raquel Seoane, stayed in Mexico after El Galpón formally returned to Uruguay. Together they created Contigo América, which continues to be a central institution in independent theater in Mexico City.

theater, information on relevant government initiatives to people living in rural areas; plays would often aim to be didactic and entertaining, for example they developed a farce containing information about how to take advantage of guaranteed prices for certain produce. The group intended to end the exploitation of subsistence farmers who did not always have access to information about programs designed to benefit them, and at the same time vindicate rural and indigenous culture and traditions. While the group was disbanded at the end of Díaz Ordaz' *sexenio* and obviously did not fully achieve its aims, it did have some tangible successes empowering rural people and confronting corruption particularly within CONASUPO itself (Frischmann, 1990 53-67; Frischmann, "Desarrollo" 58).

While the New Popular Theater movement and Santander's role within it are well documented, there has been almost no critical analysis undertaken of his work, with his later plays being particularly neglected. This lack of critical recognition may be, in part, a question of timing, since his work gained recognition in the 1980s when *nuevo teatro popular* was much less new and, due to the waning of the Cold War, less fashionable. Donald Frischmann is the only scholar who has worked closely with Santander's work and career, dedicating an entire chapter of his important book, *El nuevo teatro popular en México* (1990), to Santander and his *teatro campesino*. In addition to providing invaluable information on the genesis and production of Santander's theater up to 1985, Frischmann argues that Santander succeeded in retaining a unique artistic independence from the state, something rarely achieved among theater producers who wanted to see their work performed. Speaking in 1987 about his dream to set up a theater school, Santander was clear-sighted about the fact that in order to remain independent, he had to accept the loss of whatever he won:

En este momento no rechazaría ninguna ayuda institucional porque no me van a decir sobre qué escriba, eso está claro, y en México se sabe eso. [...] sí sé yo que siempre estaría yo muy presionado para modificar mis puntos de vista respecto a lo que es y debe ser mi teatro. Entonces, yo lo aceptaría con la conciencia de que lo más probable es que fuera una cosa totalmente transitoria, y nada más. Y por otro lado, nadie me va a dar la posibilidad de que yo sea quien lo arme con medios propios (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 126).

As Santander indicates, it would have been virtually impossible to stage his works, or set up the Seki Sano Theater School, had he not used facilities that were in some way affiliated with the state. However, for Frischmann, Santander, and his work with the Cooperativa de Teatro Denuncia while producing his *teatro campesino*, constitutes “un caso excepcional” in Mexican theater: “Santander considera que su trabajo es, en el fondo, independiente ... logra montar las obras que quiere y en ellas se expresa de la forma que quiere, sin concesiones” (Frischmann *El nuevo teatro popular* 272).

Santander was independent in so far as he would not compromise the integrity of his work in order to get it staged; however, he was also resourceful, well-connected and handled the government channels with great skill. For example, an acquaintance in CREA programmed *El extensionista* for the Teatro de la Juventud in Mexico City without notifying the organization’s governing body (Frischmann 273); *El extensionista* then ran for ten years in the state-sponsored theater in Mexico City (from its premiere in 1978 until 1988). To spend so long on the stage was an incredible feat that established Santander’s reputation as a playwright; however, he would still encounter great difficulty in gaining access to space and funding. Frischmann describes the challenges that Santander faced in getting his work staged as a form of internal exile: “según el

dramaturgo, se cuentan las dificultades de encontrar un foro, de hallar quienes promuevan sus obras, y de lograr que éstas se publiquen” (Frischmann 272). What is evident, and yet also not much mentioned, is the enormous amount of time and effort that Santander, like almost all theater practitioners, must have put into searching out opportunities for prizes, recognition, funding, theater space etc. As Frischmann implies, not many could endure the frustration, disappointment and instability of this cycle for as long as Santander did. The exhausting labor of remaining an independent theater producer must also be considered part of Santander’s legacy.

Kirsten Nigro laments the lack of recognition received by many playwrights and collectives of the popular theater wave, including Felipe Santander. She has pointed out that, to a certain extent, it was radical theater groups’ focus on the potential of performance, rather than on literary texts, that led to their work being less documented and receiving less critical attention both in Mexico and other parts of Latin America (Nigro 233). Felipe Galván and Ronald Burgess (cited above), somewhat contradict Nigro by blaming political repression for a lack of recognition, nevertheless, it is true that while Santander’s texts have received little critical attention, their publication has at least aided the distribution of his work. Nigro cites Santander’s work as a paradigmatic example of “alternative, openly political, anticommercial, anti-literary theater” (Nigro 233). Clearly Santander’s work was not as radically anti-literary as that of many within the movement; given that he wrote plays and published them, he was clearly not opposed to the idea of theater as literature as well as performance. However, Nigro’s comments help to highlight the integration of popular, non-literary forms into his scripts (public debate and popular music are two examples that have been mentioned) and it is worth noting Santander’s familiarity

with Soviet agitprop¹¹. He spent time in the Soviet Union as a young man and was among a generation of playwrights influenced by the invigorating effect of Japanese exile, Seki Sano, on Mexican theater. Sano stayed in Mexico from 1939 until his death in 1966 and trained many actors and directors, inspiring them not only by his successes but also by the very real suffering which he bore for his political commitments. An expert in agitprop after his subversive theater activities in Japan, he was committed to producing popular theater that reflected local realities and aesthetics, and was particularly enthusiastic about sustaining the *carpa* tradition in Mexico. The use of popular cultural forms, in particular the *corrido*, was a technique integrated by Santander into a number of his plays. This study will explore further the relationship of script to performance in Santander's work, viewing his work, not as anti-literary as Nigro does, but rather as work which deliberately destabilizes the centrality of an elitist literary culture.

1.4 THE PERFORMANCE OF HISTORY

The rise of Performance Studies from the 1960s up to the establishment of the first university Department of Performance Studies in 1980 at New York University is to a great extent contemporaneous with the evolution of New Popular Theater¹². While some overlap in the key

¹¹ Agit-prop (agitation-propaganda) emerged in Russia after the revolution, around 1917. It was a form of theater animation designed as a political instrument that would raise the audience's consciousness of a political or social situation.

¹² See Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*; Kershaw, Baz. *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*; Turner, Victor. *Drama Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

ideas and impulses that motivate the two movements may seem obvious, it is not redundant to clarify some of the ideas they shared and, indeed, may serve to clarify the common ground on which the theoretical and literary corpora of this dissertation stand.

Central to both movements was the destabilization and investigation of what constituted theater or a performance; Performance Studies expanded what could be read as performance beyond the confines of the theater to include religious ritual, political rallies, sexual identity, civil (dis)obedience, any event, in short, in which an audience was present. Schechner defines a performance as, “the whole constellation of events ... that take place in/among performers and audience from the time the first spectator enters the field of the performance” (Schechner 1988). While Schechner’s definition is loose in terms of what events can be permitted as performance under this definition, the focus of analysis is very specific: it is the relation of performers to audience. Just as Boal, Buenaventura, Santander and others sought to abolish or re-articulate the division between actor and spectator in their theater practice, those working in Performance Studies were also examining the relationship of actor to audience from an academic post-performance perspective, posing questions about what was being transmitted and accounting for the methodology behind the performed content. As they were for the theater innovators of the 1960s and 1970s, in Performance Studies place, space and spectator are fundamental categories of analysis in understanding the relation of performance to politics.

Santander’s theater emerges from a theatrical movement and a political project that is committed to using theater to politically empower their audience, working from the understanding that in order to do this they need to take account of their audience as carriers of

Influences came largely from anthropology (Turner, Milton Singer, Erving Goffman and Clifford Geertz) as well as linguistics (J.L. Austin).

knowledge and experience, and recognize their embodied presence as they witness the theatrical performance. Thus, creating a relationship of equals between audience and performers is a political act: a realization of the movement's politics that is simultaneous with the representations of politics being performed on the stage.

There is a self-reflexive complexity, then, to the way in which my readings of Santander are constructed. Philip Auslander has written that, "Performance studies is a paradigm-driven field, by which I mean that it takes the concept of performance as both its object of inquiry and its primary analytical concept" (Auslander, *Theory for Performance Studies* 1). What Auslander articulates here is, for me, the double bind in writing about an artist with a political and theatrical project like Santander's. In studying Santander's work as both written text *and* a set of performances, I try to find information and sources that help me to account for the space, place and audience of these plays and to think through what Postlewait calls, the joined identity of the event/context (Postlewait 90). However, I am also trying to understand how Santander realized his works as text and performance so that they engaged the place, space and audience. There is a difference between my project, which is interpretive and guided by the insights of Performance Studies, and Santander's project, which creates theater with political as well as aesthetic objectives. I have tried to be as attentive as possible to this difference and distinguish between Santander's reflections on what he wanted his work to achieve and what it did achieve, and my interpretations of the potential meaning of what was written and what was staged.

Santander made explicit that he constructed his plays and their performances so that they would intervene in and provoke reflections upon their political context. Thus, my readings of Santander respond to what is known and what is not known, to what is experienced as potential in the incomplete data available to me. I take seriously the openness of the theater text and the

interpretive/signifying possibilities that I point to have been developed in dialogue with the evidence I have about what happened in performances of the plays. There is necessarily an imaginative component to my reading of the evidence; since I cannot experience performances of Santander's work, I have to re-build them as far as possible from the archive. This does not mean, however, neglecting the performatic and embodied aspects of his plays. As far as possible, I acknowledge and theorize the audience in order to properly account for the impact and intervention of Santander's work.

What is absent from the archive, is not only gaps in the data, but something which cannot be contained by it. In her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor identifies the political work of Performance Studies as its insistence upon recognizing the body as a site of knowledge production: “[b]y taking ‘performance’ seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by ‘knowledge’” (16). Taylor proposes the *archive* and the *repertoire* as two distinct paradigms for storing and reproducing knowledge; the former made up of “supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)” (19), it is assumed to remain unchanged across time and space and “succeeds in separating the source of “knowledge” from the knower” (19). Archive is recognizably the privileged system within academic discourse, and usually it is called by its other names: history, narrative or text. Repertoire, “enacts embodied memory: performance, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing” (20), like memory it is thought of as non-reproducible and relies on presence or witnessing, the transmission is via participation. Repertoire is live and cannot be “captured or transmitted” through the archive, just as it cannot transmit the archive either. Repertoire allows

me to think about embodied knowledge as a historical force; furthermore, Taylor's concepts help to describe the moves that Santander makes in turning archival sources into performance.

Taylor is interested in exploring the interaction of the archive and the repertoire, not in seeing them as binary opposites with archive taking the dominant role and repertoire, the dominated; however, she realizes that “[b]y shifting the focus from written to embodied culture, from the discursive to the performatic, we need to shift our methodologies” (16). In order to displace narrative as the dominant “meaning-making paradigm” she suggests *scenario* as an alternative that allows for investigation using both archive and repertoire: “[t]he scenario includes features well theorized in literary analysis, such as narrative and plot, but demands that we also pay attention to milieu and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language” (28). Like the practitioners and theorists of New Popular Theater, and as in my work, the scenario demands an attention to place and audience, “All scenarios have localized meaning” (28) and “places spectators within its frame, implicating us in its ethics and politics” (33). I find Taylor's description of the scenario extremely instructive for developing my own theories of embodiment in my analyses of historical performances.

My argument in this dissertation centers around the claim that Santander appropriates the Revolutionary scenario in order to propose that Mexican Revolution was an unfinished and on-going struggle. Taylor declares that a scenario, “structures our understanding,” “haunts our present” and “resuscitates and reactivates old dramas” (28); through the imaginary of revolutionary nationalism, the “old drama” of the Mexican Revolution became tied to the re-founding of the Mexican state. Mexican historian, Enrique Florescano has written that the revolution is “not just a series of historical acts ... it is also the collection of projections, symbols, evocations, images and myths that its participants, interpreters and heirs forged and

continue to construct around this event” (qtd. in Pick 2). The Mexican state, controlled by the PRI, is in large part responsible for the vastness of this collection, particularly in the area of visual culture. The nationalization of the National Bank of Cinematography in 1947 was part of the PRI’s strategy to create what Zuzana Pick calls “a mass media-based cultural nationalism” (Pick 125). The PRI undertook this project in an attempt to neutralize the revolutionary scenario, in full knowledge that the Mexican Revolution is both the historical fact and the on-going idea of the people coming together to challenge the state.

Santander’s use of the Revolutionary scenario has two interconnected goals, one is historiographical. Santander uses the scenario of the Mexican Revolution to link together different historical instances of popular struggle and present them as part of one, continuous struggle. Santander then seeks to project this struggle into the audience’s present, so that the problems and solutions to contemporary political problems become the object of a critical reflection. The other objective is political. The Revolutionary scenario brings disparate bodies together in a common critical endeavor. As such it requires solidarity, the recognition of the equality of another. I propose that Santander’s iterations of the Revolutionary scenario are constituted by an ‘aesthetics of solidarity’; a battery of devices designed to give the audience the experience of equality.

Jacques Rancière writes that “[a]esthetics’ is the name of a specific regime for the identification of art” (Rancière, *Aesthetics...* 8). The classification of beauty is an activity that is representative of a sensibility, specific in both time and place. Santander deliberately called his theater a “theater of ideas”, since its purpose was to generate discussion, analysis and to bring forth critical thought:

Mi obra es una obra de teatro que pretende enfrentar a un público con una realidad y sacar de allí las conclusiones, llevarlo a que discuta, a que analice, a que democráticamente la gente vaya usando el teatro para pensar. Yo estoy casado con el teatro de ideas; me interesa el teatro de ideas. Lo contrapongo precisamente contra el teatro esteticista, el teatro que busca formas bellas.

When Santander opposes his theater to the theater ‘esteticista’ he opposes it, not to aesthetics itself, but to the bourgeois aesthetic regime. Rancière writes that, “[p]olitics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (*The Politics...* 13). The Revolutionary scenario is not necessarily revolutionary; but when Santander puts it to work it becomes the disruption and reconfiguration of who can do what. Santander’s theater of ideas. In order to disrupt the bourgeois political order, had also to engage its aesthetic order; to generate the experience of solidarity, his theater also generated a new aesthetics, a new political sense of what is beautiful. The PRI and their allies invoked the Revolutionary scenario over and over as the justification for the repetition of the same (Vaughn; Legras). Through the strategies that I call his aesthetics of solidarity, Santander creates space for ideas, for the eruption of something different, for politics.

Santander’s theater gains political urgency in the context of the long history (at least 1964 to 1982) of the government’s deadly counter-insurgency campaign, a reality which it attempted to purge from the official record (Herrera and Cedillo 1-18). The ferocity and violence with which the Mexican state responded to dissent came to light with the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco. Yet, there is still a very persistent myth that Mexico under the PRI was largely peaceful, and it is possible to read assessments such as this from David Shirk in 2005,

“Government actors only rarely applied the use of threat or force. The regime tolerated and even openly encouraged political contestation [...] Mexico stood out as a “mild” and even questionable case of authoritarianism” (15). This dissertation rejects statements such as these based on the overwhelming evidence that the Mexican state systematically used deadly violence against its citizens. While we are accustomed to reading about the Dirty Wars in Argentina or Guatemala, it is only in the last ten years that an increasing number of historians have begun to insist that we speak about a Mexican Dirty War. These studies show that the rural communities who organized themselves suffered the most brutal suppression and their stories were also the most successfully silenced (Herrera and Cedillo; Palacios Hernández; Ocampo Arista; Watt; “Informe Histórico...”). The recognition of an institutional program of counterinsurgency and state terror in Mexico is commensurate with Santander’s project to produce, through his theater, an embodied affirmation of the equality of poor, rural and indigenous Mexicans.

It is from this context of silence that Santander’s theater works as historiographical revision and political envisioning. In his essay, “Politics as a Nonexpressive Dialectics”, Alain Badiou writes that, contrary to classical revolutionary politics, the political process is not the expression of objective reality, and it is necessary, “to find another disposition between masses, classes and parties; a great fiction is always something like the name of a recomposition of the political field itself” (78). Santander knew the Mexican context of struggle and repression first hand; he worked in the countryside in the early 1970s while government forces were hunting down rural leaders like Genaro Vázquez Rojas and Lucio Cabañas. Speaking in an interview in 1997, apropos of the publication of *De los perjuicios que ocasiona el narcotráfico*, Santander said, “Quizá ... la gente siente que mis obras están rodeadas de verdad a pesar de que todos parten de meras hipótesis pues no pretendo que sean históricas sino que aporten un pequeño

grano de arena para el mejoramiento de la sociedad” (García). It is Santander’s opinion, perhaps based on what he witnessed at his shows, or perhaps what he hoped he were witnessing; nevertheless, it expresses what Santander wanted to give his audience, the feeling of witnessing something true. To achieve this, he took moments from Mexico’s Revolutionary history and turned them into questions to be answered in the present.

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The three chapters in this dissertation cover six plays written and performed between 1978 and 1990 and consider the ways in which these very different works bring the history of leftist political activism to bear on the present, creating a popular theater that engages with the social consequences of political and economic change during the 1980s from a Revolutionary perspective. The first chapter analyzes the production and performance of *El extensionista* (1978). Since it was Santander’s most successful play, I was able to put together a large archive of performance materials, which I use to consider how Santander’s performance choices interacted with the cultural context of his audience in order to layer revolutionary symbols and produce an experience of entering into solidarity with the *campesinos* of the present. I pay particular attention to the student audience that the play attracted and ask why Santander did not end the play.

The second chapter focuses on the other three plays from Santander’s *Teatro Campesino* cycle *A propósito de Ramona* (1981), *El corrido de los dos hermanos* (1984) and *Y, el milagro* (1985). These three are primarily concerned with exposing the permanence of archaic socio-

economic structures in the Mexican countryside that fail to protect the land rights of rural workers and repeatedly result in state-sanctioned injustices. All four plays encounter peasant communities at different stages on the path towards armed struggle and are explicit in emphasizing that these are struggles of the present, not the past.

The final chapter examines two plays from the late 1980s, *La ley no escrita* (1987) and *Mexico-USA* (1990). In these plays Santander shifted from writing about the rural context to exploring the links between the bureaucratic labyrinth and the world of narco-trafficking. I propose that both model critical readings of the media archive as part of their pedagogical exercise in questioning the fragmented reality presented through mainstream media. The revolutionary horizon is no longer visible in these plays, yet I propose that in both plays the critique of neoliberal logic is presented via an aesthetic of solidarity.

2.0 CHAPTER 1: THE LONG REVOLUTION: *EL EXTENSIONISTA*'S POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY

Felipe Santander had already retired from theater when he wrote *El extensionista* in the mid-1970s. In the introduction to Lynne Alvarez' translation of *El extensionista (The Agronomist)*, he writes, "disillusioned by theater in 1971, I returned to my old profession as an agronomist. While fighting to resolve the agricultural problem, I began to write *El extensionista*" (Santander, *Three Plays* 3). Giving up a successful acting career, he began working for the government program, Servicio de Extensión Agrícola, which had been created with the purpose of helping local farmers raise production and improve the efficiency of their farming methods. As an *extensionista*, he witnessed the *campesinos*' daily struggle for survival against political injustice and the experience became the inspiration for this phenomenally successful play which also became the first work in his *Teatro Campesino* cycle.

El extensionista grew out of Santander's own frustrations and failures in attempting to apply the theory learned at university to the reality of the Mexican countryside. The play sketched what some of those political realities looked like on the ground. Santander writes of the play, "I hoped it would serve as a guide to students from the schools of Applied Agriculture ... I felt it was indispensable that the new generation of agronomists became aware of the situations they would be facing after leaving the classroom" (Santander, *Three Plays* 3). The play opens in *medias res* as the villagers argue about what course of action they need to take. The play is then

stopped by the Cancionero who says he will take the audience back to the beginning of the story so they can decide what action should be taken. The audience are introduced to protagonist, Cruz López, a recent graduate of agricultural engineering sent to the remote village of Tenochtlén de las flores. Cruz's initial optimism is dampened when he receives a hostile reception from the villagers that he intends to educate. He, in turn, is disdainful of what he perceives as stubborn ignorance on their part. In time, however, the young *extensionista* realizes that the rural people do not lack expertise in farming, rather their endeavors are dogged by the machinations of corrupt politicians who collude with the interests of large agribusiness to poach their land. When Cruz himself is tricked by the region's most powerful landowner, don Máximo, he sides with the local people in confronting the authorities. After Cruz marries Manuela, the daughter of local leader, Benito, both Cruz and Benito are arrested and murdered. The play returns to the opening scene where the members of the community are discussing what action they should take against the authorities following the murders. The debate is frozen and opened up to the audience, who propose solutions or endings to the play.

Santander was unequivocal about the social and political purpose of the play, saying in an interview, "Es una obra que busca un enfrentamiento del público con su realidad, ese enfrentamiento es bastante brutal y la gente de alguna manera toma consciencia, porque ese público es nuestro semillero, es nuestra esperanza de un mejor futuro" ("Cumplió *El extensionista* ...). Santander did not expect that his play would reach such a broad public, much less stay on the boards for an unprecedented 10 years, until 1988; he claimed not to understand it, calling it "un fenómeno bastante inexplicable" (Santander, Felipe, Garzón Céspedes 26). This chapter will explore some of the possible aesthetic and political explanations. I claim that, as Mexico convulsed with the boom/bust cycles of neoliberalism and the government offered

nominal “democratic” reform, *El extensionista*, created a truly participatory space in which its cast and audience could perform iterations of a desired participatory democracy night after night. *El extensionista* offered its audiences a “shock”, to use Walter Benjamin’s term for an opportunity to arrest the storm called progress and contemplate “su realidad”, as a “configuration pregnant with tensions” (262). It contained the hope that the audience could “take cognizance of the oppressed past” (263, paraphrased). In his own words, Santander intended that the play should produce in the spectator “una toma de consciencia sobre su papel en el proceso revolucionario en el país” (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 279). Santander does not specify where in Mexico’s historical-political landscape the country’s “revolutionary process” is located; nor does he define what he meant by “el proceso revolucionario”. Rather, he frames revolutionary process as a given in Mexico’s political and civil composition, as absolutely immanent to Mexican society and absolutely divorced from the state’s project of institutionalized revolution.

The first part of this chapter describes the challenge of bringing *El extensionista* to the stage, examining the performance context and the historical moment that it responded to and resonated with. I pay particular attention to the popularity of Santander’s play with a contemporary student audience, a generation still not resigned to the rational completion of their duties as productive citizens, and yet miserably alienated from their desire for true change. For this audience, I argue, the *El extensionista* offered a critical and honest account of the effect of neoliberal rationality on social relationships through which students were able to discover and debate their role in society.

The second part of this chapter will examine how Santander turned his pedagogical, realist play into an aesthetic experience that made rural realities legible to an urban audience. *El*

extensionista was staged in 1978 in the center of Mexico City, one of the world's biggest cities, yet the play's action takes place in a fictional rural village, Tenochtlén de las flores. The Nahuatl name, Tenochtlén, locates the community in Mexico's central belt in the area surrounding Mexico City and closely resembles the city's Aztec name, Tenochtitlan. From the outset of the play Santander is bringing this apparently distant reality closer to his audience by drawing on and subverting dominant cultural symbols of *mexicanidad*. I argue that the 1978 production of the play found success by forging an aesthetic language that brought together motifs from mainstream popular culture with the concerns of youth-oriented counterculture. This aesthetic layering of revolutionary symbols functions to "brush against the grain" of the aesthetics of Mexican history and create space for new truths and the possibility of an alternative Mexican future.

2.1.1 The Critical Perspective: Acclaimed and Ignored

El extensionista was a phenomenal success. It was performed continuously for ten years, becoming the most performed play in Mexican theater history with over four thousand performances to date (Azar; "La puesta en escena"). In addition, the play won a clutch of prizes. These included the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize both for best play and best theater company; the Juan Ruiz Alarcón Prize for best work by a national author, from the Mexican Association of Theater Critics; the Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize for the best work by a national author, from the Union of Theater Critics and Journalists; and in 1980 Santander was awarded the prestigious Casa de las Américas Prize in Havana, Cuba. Casa de las Américas would go on to publish two editions of the play, helping the play to circulate more widely. In addition to successful

productions in the United States and Canada, a film version was produced for Mexican television in 1990 starring popular actor, Eduardo Palomo (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro* 271).

In the contemporary press, the play was referred to as, “uno de los hitos del teatro mexicano- por la innovación teatral que representa ..., por el tratamiento a la temática del campo, fuera de los cánones costumbristas y profundamente renovadora políticamente” (Pineda Baltazar) and “de la política nacional que tiene mucho que ver con esta obra ... Esta obra se recordará y será sólo un documento histórico cuando las injusticias sean solo del pasado” (Quemain).

Its commercial and critical success ensured *El extensionista*'s place in Mexican theater history¹³, however, little critical analysis has been produced about the play¹⁴. Kirsten Nigro has suggested that *El extensionista* is a paradigmatic example of the kind of theater which by all measures should be considered part of the canon of Mexican theater, and yet is traditionally overlooked by academic approaches to Mexican theater. As previously noted, for Nigro, “[*El extensionista*] is representative par excellence of so much of recent alternative, openly political, anticommercial, antiliterary theater” (Nigro 224). She opposes George Woodyard's appraisal that the play's text, ““might not reach the status of a classic work””¹⁵, to that of the text's first English translator, Joe Rosenberg, “[t]he script is extremely well put together. ... I found the flavor of the campesino way of life practically falling out of the words ... this was a playscript in which the characters transcended their locality”. Nigro attributes Rosenberg's perspective to the fact that he translated the work for the purposes of staging it with the Milwaukee Theater, claiming

¹³ See Burgess, Ariza, Ramirez, Schmidhuber

¹⁴ A notable exception is the work of Donald Frischmann whose discussion of the play in his important book, *El nuevo teatro popular en México* (1990), is one of very few extended descriptions.

¹⁵ Nigro quotes Woodyard, 12, as quoted by Schmidhuber, *La dramaturgia mexicana*, 129.

that Rosenberg “read the text with an eye to the stage (and not the page)” (224), and was thus able to better appreciate the play on its own terms as a dramatic work.

By contrasting these two critical perspectives on *El extensionista*, Nigro strongly suggests the predominance of an academic tradition that has tended towards “text-bound” readings that judge plays as works of literature and ignore their resonance with performers and audiences. By describing *El extensionista* as “antiliterary”, Nigro proposes that the play was written to be performed (to seek that “enfrentamiento” that Santander described), rather than to be read or appreciated by a literary class. Nigro’s theory of why such a successful work has remained outside of the canon of Mexican theater, guides my approach to the play, and I prioritize the analysis of production choices, audience and historical context alongside the text itself.

2.2 PART 1: LA PROBLEMÁTICA DEL EXTENSIONISTA: FINDING THE STAGE, REACHING THE AUDIENCE

The “*misiones culturales rurales*”, initiated by José Vasconcelos in 1923 (37), were the predecessors of what became more broadly known as “la educación no formal rural”. In their review of this sector in Estado de México, Pieck and Aguado note that the beginning of the 1970s saw a sudden expansion in state-funded rural education and outreach programs, outstripping any previous investment in this sector in both the quantity and variety of programs initiated. Furthermore, the authors note that the introduction of the “Ley de la extensión agraria” marked a shift from government education programs that focused largely on public health campaigns and small scale farming, to a determined push towards the rapid modernization of farming practices (Pieck Gochicoa and Aguado López 35). A key element would be the

servicio de extensión agrícola which was established in Mexico in 1956 with only eight *extensionistas* and was based on the United States' Agricultural Extension Program (Pieck Gochicoa and Aguado López 40; Santander *Three Plays* 3).

In their analysis of public education programs, Enrique Pieck Gochicoa and Eduardo Aguado López note that the extension program was viewed as an important vehicle for “la transmisión de la modernización”, given the role its *extensionistas* were expected to play in introducing new technology in the countryside and raising agricultural production (Pieck Gochicoa and Aguado López 36). They explain that during the 1970s the work of the *extensionistas* suddenly found itself at the forefront of government efforts to increase productivity in the countryside:

Es durante los setentas que se presenta una irrupción de organismos y programas de capacitación rural que se suma a la actividad realizada por la SARH y CODAGEM. Justamente en 1971, se crea por parte del Gobierno Federal la Dirección General de Extensión Agrícola (DGEA) con un mayor apoyo económico y con más personal ... en 1979 llegó a contar con 6, 000 *extensionistas* distribuidos en el territorio nacional” (40).

It is in the context of this massive expansion of the *extensionista* program, and rural education projects generally, that *El extensionista* is written and staged as a discussion of the contradictions faced by the university students and graduates who would perform these tasks of modernization.

Extensión agraria became so significant that in 1975 renowned pedagogue, Paulo Freire, published a book on the subject titled *¿Extensión o comunicación? La concientización en el medio rural*. In it he critiqued specifically the practice of *extensión agraria* as an exercise by which the metropolis imposed its will on the periphery in the name of education:

Nos parece que la acción extensionista implica, cualquiera que sea el sector en que se realice, la necesidad que sienten aquellos que llegan hasta la “otra parte del mundo”, considerada inferior, para, a su manera, “normalizarla”, para hacerla más o menos semejante a su mundo. [...] De este análisis se desprende, claramente, que el concepto de extensión no corresponde a un quehacer educativo liberador (21).

Freire emphasizes in his argument that the agrarian reform enacted by the *extensionistas* was not merely a question of imparting useful technical information. Rather, it participated in propagating a set of ‘educational’ practices that silenced and oppressed those that it claimed to assist. Freire makes fun of the great distance felt by the ‘educators’ from the people they came to “normalize”, yet there is a serious point undergirding his ironic metaphor: the national territory had to be disciplined and made productive, this was the *extensionistas*’ true task. Freire’s analysis of *extensión agraria* reads as the theoretical complement to *El extensionista*, demonstrating to some extent the timeliness of the play’s central problematic.

Like Santander’s play, Freire explains that the way in which agricultural production is organized and practiced defines every aspect of the lives and culture of the people who live and work in the countryside; he calls this paradigm, “su participación en el sistema de relaciones campesino-naturaleza-cultura” (63). The interconnected nature of these fields is of absolute importance for the work of the *extensionista*, because: “es imposible el cambio del procedimiento técnico, sin repercusión en otras dimensiones de la existencia de los hombres” (62). It is not a coincidence that Cruz is unable to hear the cancionero as he sings his, “tres consejos” for the “amigo de la ciudad” (directed toward the audience): “cuando vayas por el campo / escucha con atención / observa la tradición / y respeta al que anda arando” (Santander

1980 18). Unlike the countryside people, the agronomist (*extensionista*) does not understand the system of relations, *campesino-naturaleza-cultura*, or the potential repercussions of a shift within it; furthermore, such knowledge has no place in the “striated mental space” of the government man, to borrow Deleuze and Guatteri’s image (Deleuze and Guatteri 379).

A key factor in understanding the appeal to the student community is found in excavating the roots of the concept and practice of *extensión*, which was a meaningful term to all those educated in public universities in Mexico, and not only students in the field of agriculture¹⁶. It referred to nothing less than the role of the university in society. The principle of *extensión universitaria* originates in the 1918 Reforma Universitaria de Córdoba whose democratizing program gave the modern Latin American university its unique characteristics. At the heart of the Reformistas’ critique of the traditional university was what they termed its “alejamiento olímpico” from wider society (“Manifiesto Liminar”). The young people of Córdoba insisted on the academic community’s obligation to “extend” its discoveries, knowledge and teaching apparatus beyond its walls in order that society as a whole might benefit from their activity and knowledge. Guided by the principles set out by the students of Córdoba, universities across Latin America were established as public institutions that adopted a social obligation as part of their mandate (Tünnermann Bernheim 3-14). In Mexico this was just as relevant as in other countries in Latin America, as noted by Juan Mot: “Vasconcelos al asumir la rectoría de la Universidad Nacional de México, en 1920, dice: ‘...yo no vengo a trabajar por la universidad sino a pedir a la universidad que trabaje por el pueblo’” (Mot 18). Outreach work in the community was embedded in the university structure and all students participated in it through the requirement known as *servicio social universitario*.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Natalia Gras for first bringing this to my attention.

Published in 1979 by the UNAM, Raúl Béjar Navarro's book *Cultura nacional, cultura popular y extensión universitaria* claims that the true objective of *extensión universitaria* was the affirmation of the national culture. This affirmation included an obligation to “contrarrestar las pautas culturales que resulten extralógicas dentro de la cultura nacional”. According to Béjar Navarro's interpretation, then, the social role of the university (or rather its representatives and participants) was to decide on what was to be included and what was to be excluded from ‘national culture’. The university ‘disciplines’ its constituents by training them in a field of knowledge; once they have understood the coordinates of the space in which they may move intellectually, they know their place. When Cruz arrives in Tenochtlén de los flores, he knows his place. As an *extensionista* he comes as both an agent of the state and a missionary of the university; he boasts to Manuela, “[m]e recibí hace ocho meses, con mención honorífica” (18). When Cruz holds a meeting with the village people to explain how he is going to help them, the meeting ends in violent confrontation because Cruz refuses to hear their problems. He objectifies himself as a tool to be used in the service of the fatherland, denying any possibility of engaging with the village people as anything other than an *extensionista*:

Cruz: (*Conteniéndose.*) ¡Vamos a hablar en serio! Yo soy ingeniero agrónomo, tuve muy buenas calificaciones en la escuela, ¿por qué no me aprovechan?

[...]

Boni: ¡Y yo quiero saber cómo le hago para que la gente de don Máximo no se siga quedando con mi agua!

Cruz: No, pues ahí no puedo hacer nada...

Cuquillo: ¡Se lo dije, don Benito, que nomás nos habían mandado al ingenierito este pa'que nos sirviera de chupete!

Cruz: ¡Ingenierito tu madre pendeja!... ¡y lo que quieras! (*Cuquillo, también se encrespa.*)

Cuquillo: Pos, ya va, ¡ingenierito monta perros! (*Conato de pleito. Los separan, Los demás campesinos empiezan a salir.*)

[...]

Cruz: ¿Por qué no quieren entender? ... (30-1)

In this scene, Cruz is acting as Béjar Navarro expected that an *extensionista* should, his mission to: “intentar zanjar el abismo entre los creadores de formas culturales superiores o refinados, y el pueblo”. Cruz is well-intentioned and earnest, but he does not respect the experiences of the agricultural workers.

The villagers of Tenochtlen have become accustomed to the arrival of university-educated ‘experts’ who patronize them, and then collaborate with the local caudillo to steal their land. Mario, a previous agronomist who was assigned to Tenochtlén before Cruz but now works in the bank, views them as “monos” (34), inferior beings to whom nothing can be taught. Cruz distinguishes himself from Tenochtlen’s previous *extensionistas* by his decision to continue trying to open up lines of communication and mutual understanding. In spite of the humiliation of his first assembly with the villagers, he tells Mario, “Estoy muy desconectado de esta gente. Quisiera hablar un poco más con ellos, conocerlos un poco más” (37). With this decision to persevere in talking with the local community, Cruz is taking the first step towards treating the villagers as subjects, rather than objects, of change. Freire sees dialogue as the main tool through which solidarity is founded and put to work, “[e]l diálogo es el encuentro amoroso de los hombres que, mediatizados por el mundo ‘lo pronuncian’, esto es, lo transforman y transformándolo, lo humanizan, para la humanización de todos” (46). For Freire the use of

dialogue is not only important from an egalitarian perspective, but because it is through the dialogic (or dialectical) process that critical thought emerges. His argument is that mutual respect and true dialogue are the basis of all human knowledge and discovery, and that no positive or life-affirmative social change can take place without it, “[e]n la dialoguicidad, en la problematización resulta la percepción de que todo este conjunto de saber se encuentra en interacción (61-2).

It is not, however, until Cruz has been fired from his position as *extensionista*, and following his subsequent “encuentro amoroso” with Manuela, that Cruz shifts from trying to persuade the villagers to think as he does, to entering into dialogue with them. It is deeply significant that, in Santander’s play, for all his good intentions, Cruz only finds his place in “el sistema de relaciones campesino-naturaleza-cultura” once his economic circumstances are transformed and he becomes one of the villagers. It is only then that he approaches Freire’s ideal agronomist, “un educador que se compromete y se inserta, con los campesinos en la transformación, como sujeto, con otros sujetos” (71). The play suggests then that the perception of rural space is intrinsically related to socio-economic location. That is to say, whether the countryside is perceived to be an empty space to be conquered and disciplined, or if it is known to be a “nomad space”, as Deleuze and Guattari name that space which is localized but not delimited, and whose relation to its inhabitants is constituted by deterritorialization (381-2). The countryside and its people are seen and understood by those who exist there and only there, on and because of that land. Like Freire’s work, *El extensionista* does not romanticize origins, but performs subjectivities in process.

Writing from the UNAM in 1978, the year in which *El extensionista* premiered in Mexico City, Carlos Tünnermann Bernheim declared Freire's ideas apposite in thinking through

the task of the university in society, he writes, “[el libro examina] concretamente la labor de los extensionistas agrícolas y el problema de la comunicación entre el técnico y el campesino, pero cuyas consideraciones son aplicables a toda la tarea de extensión universitaria” (21). Tünnermann questioned if and how the activities that had come to comprise *extensión universitaria* actually served the community, if indeed they were intended to. Commenting on the activities reported by the representatives at the 1957 Primera Conferencia Latinoamericana de Extensión Universitaria y Difusión Cultural, held in Santiago, Chile, Tünnermann observes:

Es obvio que predominó un criterio de ‘entrega’ y hasta podría decirse de ‘dádiva cultural’ o, en todo caso, un marcado acento ‘paternalista’ o ‘asistencial’ en las labores que se realizaban. ... La extensión y difusión se realizan así mediante un canal de una sola vía, que va de la Universidad, depositaria del saber y la cultura, al pueblo, simple destinatario de esa proyección (15).

Tünnermann critiques the universities’ outreach activities as a series of impositions that, rather than contributing to the democratization of knowledge, further reinforce the idea that culture and knowledge are centralized within the University. He analyses the shortcomings of endeavors that were included under the rubric of *extensión*, noting that many of these activities sprang up spontaneously, often at the whim of a member of the university community, and did not form part of any long-term program. Consequently, they left the communities they proposed to ‘help’ feeling used. The university did not consider the activities of *extensión* as serious academic projects, often terming them extra-curricular; they were not central activities in the way that teaching and research were considered to be. Finally, *extensión* often came to mean *difusión cultural*, and was limited to cultural activities which took place within the campus, barely reaching an audience beyond the university community (Tünnermann 16-17).

Bejar Navarro's more conservative perspective that the *extensionista* ought to enact a disciplinary project, provides an important counterpoint to Tünnermann and Freire's perspectives, and taken together these three texts illuminate some of the potential meanings that *El extensionista*, and the adjoined concept of *extensión*, had in Mexico at the time (and, potentially, in other parts of Latin America). The student population would not have need to have been students of agriculture in order to see themselves in the play's protagonist, Cruz. They would have been aware of, and involved in, different activities titled under the umbrella of 'extensión' and they would have experienced first-hand the hierarchical structure of those activities as it is described by Bejar Navarro, Tünnermann and Freire.

Santander wrote his play specifically for students of agriculture (those who would become *extensionistas*), but he was unable to find a school of agriculture that would allow him to stage his play, he wrote with respect to this, "despite all my efforts, lectures, promotions, appeals to the Secretary of Public Education- we were never allowed to visit one of the country's 1000 agricultural schools" (Santander *Three Plays*, 3). This is perhaps unsurprising given the play's sharp critique of *extensionistas'* work. Since at least the presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), the Mexican state had quietly nurtured large-scale agribusiness against the interests of small-hold farming (Walsh Sanderson 60-65). *El extensionista* mapped, in the most explicit way possible, the violent paths leading from government policies to private capital and back again.

It was not only the SEP and the agricultural schools who were unwelcoming in their attitude towards the play, however. Thanks to a lack of institutional support, *El extensionista* might never have found a stage (Frischmann 1990; "Cumplió El extensionista 2 mil 200 representaciones"). As previously noted, many Mexican theaters were state-owned and Jacqueline Bixler underlines the significance of bureaucratic control in her discussion of theater

following the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco: “[a]lthough censorship does not exist in any official form in Mexico, the unofficial censorship wielded by the cultural institutions that grant theatre spaces and staging permits made it difficult if not impossible to stage plays treating such a taboo topic” (Bixler 121). As oppressive as the institutional labyrinth of the Mexican state was, however, it was never a totalitarian structure, and many theater producers sought ways to exploit the ambivalence of its many faces.

In a personal interview with Donald Frischmann, Santander explained that a friend working in the *Consejo Nacional de Recursos para la Atención de la Juventud* (CREA¹⁷) “se arriesgó” in order to surreptitiously secure Santander a small but centrally located theater. Senior management in CREA did not find out that Santander was using “Teatro de la Juventud”, until the first reviews of the play appeared in the newspapers. The play was allowed to stay on the government’s boards, however, thanks to the positive reviews, which served to mitigate CREA’s image problem at that time: “la mala imagen que acosaba al CREA por alegatos de haber organizado a jóvenes en grupos de rompehuelgas, determinó que se les permitiera a Santander y su grupo quedarse en el teatro, ya que su presencia mejoraba esa imagen” (Frischmann 1990 272-3). It was an ironic twist of fate that the hostile response of the state to the collective action of the strikes provided the opening for *El extensionista* to be staged. The radical, youth-oriented nature of the production forced the company to obtain a stage by subterfuge, and yet also became the reason that they were able to keep the stage at “Teatro de la Juventud”.

¹⁷ Now Instituto Mexicano de la Juventud (IMJUVE)

Located close to the intersection of two of Mexico City's largest avenues¹⁸, Av. Insurgentes and Paseo de la Reforma in what is now the headquarters of IMJUVE (formerly CREA), the production was positioned to draw a wide audience. Benjamin Islas (who played the character of 'Cuquillo' when the play opened and on many occasions after) remembers that ticket sales were low for the first two weeks of performances and the production was on the point of closing when, suddenly, seats started to fill up in the third week (Islas). Islas remembers that all kinds of people attended the play but that the student population was crucial in sustaining audience figures over the next ten years. Mike Greenberg, who interviewed Santander in 1996 about the original production, confirms Isla's testimony:

The play met with thunderous indifference at first. Santander invited 800 people to the premiere, and only 37 or 38 showed up. The second night had about four people in the house, he said. But some university students spread the word, and the play ultimately became a hit, with predominantly young audiences supporting a run of 3,200 performances over 10 years" (Greenberg 1996).

Despite its commercial success, the production was far from commercial in that it had very little budget, was dependent on institutional subsidies and had few resources to promote itself (see Pineda Baltazar, Santander "Estoy casado con...", Frischmann *El nuevo teatro...*, 272). The extent to which the Cooperativa de Teatro Denuncia could have relied on personal contacts to promote the play to a youth audience would have been limited; they were professional actors and not part of the student community, Santander himself was in his forties when *El extensionista* opened. Felipe Galván (2013) confirms that Santander always showed solidarity with the

¹⁸ The theater's address is specified as Serapio Rendon 76, Col. San Rafael, 536-1605 in Bert "La otra cara de la revolución"

UNAM-based members of CLETA (one of the most high-profile university theater groups), but was never involved in their organization. Furthermore, sustaining audience figures for 10 years, a feat described as “un caso insólito en el teatro mexicano” (“Llegó ...”), demonstrates that the production brought in a broad student audience beyond the theater community and what their limited promotional budget could have reasonably hoped for.

In an interview, Santander attributed to the student population a central role in effecting political change:

[E]l teatrasta considera que México: “No tiene futuro si el estudiante no adquiere una conciencia de su posición frente al momento histórico que está viviendo; [...] cuál es su responsabilidad frente a la situación que vive el país. Un estudiante después de ver *El extensionista* debe definirse, ponerse al servicio o bien no ponerse al servicio de las luchas económicas y reivindicativas de los campesinos” (Frischmann *El nuevo teatro...*, 275).

For Santander, then, a performance of *El extensionista* would always confront students with a real choice, to enter into solidarity with the people of the countryside, or to choose not to. From its centrally located Mexico City theater, *El extensionista* brought a rural perspective on the historical moment to an urban student audience.

Santander's protagonist, Cruz, is idealistic and convinced of his own efficacy; he believes absolutely in the market as rational and fair, and economic productivity as a righteous path equally available to all. Cruz's counterpoint is Benito, a respected local man who takes responsibility for Cruz, introducing him to the villagers and attempting to orientate him. On his first day in the village, Cruz excitedly explains his mission to Benito, “Benito, con tu ayuda podemos cambiar muy pronto la mentalidad de estos campesinos ... a que adquieren una

mentalidad productiva empresarial ... hay que llegar a que cada campesino, además de estar capacitado para la producción, se convierta en un empresario” (21). Benito responds ironically but with sympathy, “¿Y usted nos va a enseñar todo eso? ... aquí eso de la técnica y el crédito no jalan parejo” (22). Cruz is uninterested in what Benito has to say. Unprepared to confront fundamental questions of class or systemic change, Cruz is convinced that the problem of the countryside is one of changing attitudes and spreading information. He has not yet experienced the injustice of the system that that Benito gestures towards. *El extensionista* works to undermine that belief in the fundamental order of the system and the superiority of the ‘expert’.

The ‘system’ in *El extensionista* is represented by three characters whose relationship to one another and the people is set out by the Cancionero at the beginning of the play:

don Quirino, lider campesino ... ha usado su cargo sólo para tener dinero y poder ... de nada sirve protestar porque a Quirino lo puso allí don Ismael, nuestro presidente municipal ... quien a su vez fue puesto allí por don Máximo (*Entra Máximo, tipo de extranjero*) que es aquí en Tenochtlén el que tiene el control de los centavos” (Santander, *El extensionista* 1979 12).

While Quirino and Ismael represent the authority of the state in Tenochtlén, Don Máximo is the *maximum* authority, though he is a landowner who holds no public position. The implication that he may be ‘foreign’ could be interpreted as a reference to the controlling interests of foreign capital in Mexico. Photographs from the production published in 1979 and 1987 (Santander 1979; Bert 1987) show that, while Santander was directing the production, this direction was interpreted by giving don Máximo blond or white hair. What the audience sees, then, is a representation of power that is not so much foreign, as fair; a visual message that is less specific, yet deeper in historical terms, insofar as it represents the continuity of a racist colonial legacy.

Don Máximo's appearance acknowledges that, in post-Revolutionary Mexico, power and wealth remain in the same hands as ever (Legras).

Part of the backdrop for *El extensionista's* critique was Mexico's turn, in 1976, towards a neoliberal economic policy. The shift from an economic policy based on state intervention to one that idealized the free market was led by President José López Portillo, and transformed not only the economic foundation of Mexico, but also its social and political landscape. In his review of the Lopez Portillo *sexenio*, Gerardo Peláez Ramos describes how abruptly Mexico shifted away from the interventionist statism of the institutionalized revolution, "la economía se petrolizó y alcanzó un auge fugaz y transitorio, deslizándose, al finalizar el sexenio, hacia una crisis aguda y sin precedentes desde la gran depresión, mientras en el plano de las relaciones entre el Estado y la sociedad el eje de las mismas estuvo constituido por la reforma política" (Peláez Ramos). The enormous financial crisis he mentions took place in 1982 during which year the value of the peso declined by 67% (Mabry) leaving Mexico with massive foreign debts that it could not pay. In an interview with Malka Rabell, Santander identified three objectives, or planes, that he kept in mind as he wrote *El extensionista*: "primero, el panorama de la situación del campesino mexicano; segundo, la dramatización de este panorama para el escenario, y tercero, el planteamiento de la siguiente tesis económica: que el problema agrícola de México no es de producción sino de distribución" (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 276). *El extensionista* presented Santander's disagreement with the fundamental premise of an economic policy that refused to address inequality.

El extensionista's mapping of a corrupt system means making visible the identification between the 'invisible hands' that control the flows of the market for their own interest, and those that use violence to control social relations. Yet if all roads lead back to don Máximo, the

play is careful to conserve the anonymity of the agents that enforce the unwritten laws that govern the distribution of capital and people. It is not Don Quirino who murders Cruz and Benito, but the anonymous ‘alguaciles’. When Cruz is fired from his position after directly confronting corrupt practices of the bank manager and the water authority, it is by a non-descript letter stating that his contract has come to an end. The audience knows that don Máximo controls Quirino, the bank manager and the water authority because they are privy to conversations that the villagers and Cruz are not. In the bewilderment, fear and frustration that Cruz and the villagers experience as their plans and hopes are thwarted, the audience may see something that resembles their own experience, and the play invites them to reflect that it is capital itself that has an interest in retaining traditional social distributions and the violence that enforces this unjust social order is enacted in exchange for money. Don Máximo’s relationship with the other elements of the ‘system’ is purely economic; he says in one scene, “Desgraciadamente, como usted sabe, don Ismael, yo no puedo tener amigos; tengo demasiados intereses” (61). In Tenochtlén, the state is a vehicle for the pursuit of capital’s interests and thus its institutions reflect its rationale.

Tenochtlén’s stifled atmosphere is consistent with Wendy Brown’s account of how neoliberal rationality transforms itself into a mode of governance, she explains that “[n]eoliberal governmentality undermines the relative autonomy of certain institutions—law, elections, the police, the public sphere—from one another and from the market, [...] neoliberalism entails the erosion of oppositional political, moral, or subjective claims located outside capitalist rationality” (45). In Mexico the erosion of those spaces took the form of a political reform to accompany the economic reform. The 1977 Federal Law of Political Organizations and Electoral Processes proposed to make Mexico more democratic, but would in fact do the opposite. The law

made it easier for political parties to register and participate in national elections and the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM) registered. It is a measure of how the ground would shift from 1977 onwards that by 1989 the PCM formed part of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (Carr 289), a center-left party founded largely by former PRI members. The PCM was just one victim of the ‘reform’ that, according to Emily Edmonds-Poli and David Shirk, was successful in further legitimizing the PRI’s regime by fracturing the opposition into many small parties (84).

The passive attitude of the PCM did not reflect, however, the attitude of the general public. Mass discontent was intensely manifested in spite of the state’s continuous use of violent repressive measures. Peláez Ramos records 378 strikes in 1979 alone, and more than a thousand strikes involving in excess of 1.2 million workers over the course of Lopez Portillo’s mandate. Repressive tactics were used by the government against strikers, including those participating in protests at universities (among them UNAM, la Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit y Baja California) and teachers (in Hidalgo, Valle de México, Morelos, Guerrero, among others). The UNAM was the setting of a particularly important solidarity struggle. In 1977 academics and administrative workers formed a single union, STUNAM, and demanded a unified collective contract (Odorika 244). Gerardo Peláez Ramos states that, “la paralización de actividades en la UNAM en junio-julio de 1977, tuvo una resonancia en la sociedad como ninguna otra acción sindical en las universidades desde 1972-1973.” Support for the strike in the UNAM came from all quarters, Imanol Odorika describes massive solidarity marches in Mexico City and elsewhere with participation from students’ organizations, industrial trade unions and opposition parties (244). López Portillo supported the university authorities in their efforts to end the strike, handing them the support of the press to wage a discursive war on the unionists. In 1979 López

Portillo altered Article 30 in order to make illegal the formation of a national union of academics and administrative staff. Odorika describes the contemporary university culture as a result of the long term effects of that loss: “la alteración del tejido social de estudiantes y académicos, burocratización de la vida universitaria y aislamiento entre las autoridades y la comunidad” (250). The struggle in the UNAM had been a struggle for the rule of solidarity and democracy within the university, and it was a battle lost. At a time when students and academics found themselves facing a new set of social relationships in which solidarity seemed to be receding into the past, *El extensionista* went on stage theorizing the possibility of solidarity in the most hostile of circumstances.

2.3 PART 2: THE AESTHETICS OF A REVOLUTION RECONFIGURED

Susan Bennett in her book *Theater Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* traces the theoretical coordinates that guide the analysis of spectatorship. In doing so she echoes, Una Chaudhuri’s call, in “The Spectator in Drama/ Drama in the Spectator”, for “a spectator-oriented criticism. The description of how a play works on a spectator- rather than of what it means- can supply the terms our criticism needs in order to erase the gap between theory and its object” (14). In undertaking a tentative analysis of *El extensionista*’s impact, it is useful to analyze how the play may have “worked on” (to use Chaudhuri’s phrase) the urban student audience. As noted above, this audience was of particular interest to Santander and it was this audience that sustained the play’s audience figures, suggesting that the play had a special impact within this sector.

Though there might be reasons to privilege the contemporary student perspective on the play, it is important to also underline that they were far from being the play's only audience. We should take seriously Bennett's warning regarding the assumptions made by critics whose work automatically directs "the dramatic transmission to those in the right stage of receptiveness (in other words to those with beliefs, levels of education, and literary 'sensitivity' which more or less match those of the writer and/or director)" (8-9). I want to briefly account for some of *El extensionista's* other audiences. Donald Frischmann gives some examples of different locations in which the play was performed beyond Mexico City, "[h]a llevado su obra en gira por gran parte de la República Mexicana, y entre sus foros de presentación populares se han contado ejidos, cascos de haciendas y también escuelas agrícolas como la de Chapingo, Estado de México. *El extensionista* se ha presentada también en las Tandas Culturales de Tlaltenango [en 1982]" (*El nuevo teatro...* 275). This list demonstrates an enormous commitment to performing *El extensionista* before as many different audiences as possible.

For Paco Ignacio Taibo I. this commitment to reaching audiences was one of the production's defining factors, "*El extensionista* ha luchado contra una absoluta falta de educación en el público para asistir a este tipo de espectáculos; ha tenido de ir creando su propio público y ha salido a buscarlo a los pueblos ... tarea fundamental y apasionante la de hacer teatro y hacer espectadores" (Santander, *El teatro...* 20). By seeking out new routes to the audience, and expanding access to the theater, *El extensionista* tried to perform in practice what it theorized on the stage. Margaret Werry analyzes theatrical productions of the American Pacific as productive of social imaginaries, she writes, "in imagining and materializing new connectivities between peoples and places, the here and the elsewhere, spectacle also forged a circuitry between the actual and the virtual. In materializing the imaginary, it imagined other materialities" (382).

El extensionista imagined that a student could go to the rural village and enter into a relationship of equality and solidarity with them; it invited its urban audience to imagine itself in solidarity with a rural community; it looked for rural audiences and invited them to reply to its representation of their lives and historical experiences. *El extensionista* created all of these strategies in order to materialize its imaginary of solidarity.

There is also something deeply performative about Santander's statements about the play. Frischmann writes that, "de los primeros 100 000 destinatarios de *El extensionista*, [Santander] calcula que unos 70 000 han sido estudiantes y el resto campesinos" (Frischmann 1990 275). If this student/*campesino* split seems a little too neat to be entirely accurate, it provides an indication of who attended the play, but it also speaks of, and with, the audience sectors that most interested the author-director. In conversation with Francisco Garzón Cespedes, Santander again prioritized the *campesino*/student relation when he summarized, in general terms, differences in the endings that urban and rural audiences proposed for the play:

En la ciudad de México es común que espectadores, en su mayoría estudiantes, conmovidos por la situación campesina expuesta en *El extensionista* propongan soluciones muy radicales. Los campesinos no, ellos son mucho más cautos en el debate, y por lo general plantean más bien reformas administrativas, de organización, convenios y demás (Santander, Garzón Céspedes 26).

To underline the performative element in such statements is not to question them, but to draw attention to the role they play in circulating and 'making real' the world of the play, as Werry puts it, of forging a circuitry between the actual and the virtual.

Santander also knew what *El extensionista* was not, and did not want *El extensionista* conflated with other kinds of politically-motivated theater, such as agitprop. In an interview he articulated how *El extensionista* was distinct from agitprop-style theater:

yo me resisto a pensar o a aceptar que mi obra tenga que ir a las fábricas—no es una obra de agitación en fábrica porque creo que no tendría mayor efectividad. ... para que *El extensionista* fuera una obra de agitación al campo tendría yo que encontrar en determinado campo los problemas específicos de ese campo que quizás en líneas generales tengan mucho que ver con *El extensionista*. (Santander, *Estoy casado...* 123).

Santander does not reject agitprop per se, but he emphasizes that *El extensionista* does not direct the conclusions of the audience; rather it is an exercise in theorizing *with* the audience the possibilities and consequences of political protest. Jacques Rancière theorizes democracy as the unscripted appearance of a people, as he puts it, “[p]olitical activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it ... It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes heard as discourse what was once only heard as noise” (*Disagreement* 30). The production of *El extensionista* worked to seek out the spectators who were not supposed to be in the theater and make them both visible and audible; the play climaxes in the unscripted appearance of that audience. Paco Ignacio Taibo I. writes of viewing the play: “[h]a sido una experiencia sorprendente y absolutamente nueva al presenciar cómo al final de *El extensionista* gentes de planos muy diversas de nuestra cultura y situación social se dejaban llevar por la pasión de encontrar un “final al drama” (Santander 1985 19). The sincere surprise in his testimony suggests that *El extensionista* was successful in

bringing together a diverse audience to theorize collectively. The attempt to ‘create’ spectators was an exercise in egalitarian politics.

However, *El extensionista*’s success was not a foregone conclusion. During the 1960s, the area of Mexico City where Teatro de la Juventud was located, the Zona Rosa, had hosted a vibrant and diverse cultural scene and was known as a haven for hippies and the gay community. By the time *El extensionista* arrived, the neighborhood had lost some of its bohemian aspect and become more closely associated with the slick tastes of the nearby financial district. For Santander and Cooperativo Teatro Denuncia this meant that, in spite of the theater’s promising name and central location, the production would still require help in order to bring in the young student audience that it had been written for. The rest of this chapter will consider the political activity performed by the aesthetic production of *El extensionista* and how it worked to make the rural realities audible to an urban audience.

For many audience members coming to see the play, the production’s first aesthetic framing was in the design of the play’s original posters, programs and promotional materials. Beneath the headline, “El Extensionista, De Felipe Santander” is a simple, cartoonish illustration of a well-dressed man in a cowboy hat and boots ploughing his field with the body of another darker-skinned man. The ‘landowner’ character grins at the viewer and his speech bubble reads, “Aliados producimos je je je” as he grasps the other man’s heels and ‘wheelbarrows’ him over the soil. The man’s arms are roped to his sides and his body is perfectly straight and rigid, maintaining the cartoon’s transformation of his body into object. If the obvious irony of the image leaves little doubt as to the critical political position of the play, the simple, flat-line drawing is also instantly recognizable as the work of Rius, one of Mexico’s most prolific and internationally recognized political cartoonists.

The illustration was commissioned by Santander from his friend, Eduardo del Río (Rius), a central figure of Mexican counter-culture. During the 1960s his work was consistently censored; his hit comic book, *Los supermachos*, was often altered before publication without his consent (Hinds 70). Furthermore, in 1969 Rius was kidnapped by police who threatened to execute him “for crimes against the government” (71). In spite of his experiences in Mexico’s dirty war, Rius never stopped publishing his comics, he never changed his political perspective nor wavered in his critique of Mexico’s government. His survival as a politically critical artist in hostile conditions was remarkable and he became a key cultural reference among those sympathetic to his ironic, anti-establishment worldview. Harold E. Hinds and Charles M. Tatum, in their study of Mexican comic books of the 1960s and 70s, note that a market study identified students as Rius’ primary group of readers, followed by “middle- and upper- class professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and teachers. ... In 1978, however, it was pointed out that used copies of both *Los supermachos* and *Los agachados* were being used by Mexican worker study groups to give focus to their discussions on communism, socialism and related topics” (73). The market study supports the opinion that Rius’ project is to present a critical, left-wing view of historical and political topics that is entertaining and popularly accessible; a project entirely correspondent with that of *El extensionista*. A Rius drawing functioned as a visual magnet for exactly the kind of audience Santander was looking for: a critical audience drawn to a sharp, ironic world view that remembered both the Mexican Revolution and the repression of the 1960s.

Rius’ poster presents the rural class system as a stark binary contrast. The *hacendado* character can be identified by his bolo tie, cowboy boots and large cowboy hat; the laborer is dressed in the simple white shirt and trousers used in Mexican visual culture to mark the rural indigenous classes who made up the Revolutionary armies of Pancho Villa and Emiliano

Zapata¹⁹. The legacy of the Mexican Revolution is writ large in the poster, and yet the cynicism of the words in the bubble, “Aliados producimos je je je” resonate more with the pseudo-solidarity of post-Revolutionary political slogans; what the poster lacks in subtlety it makes up for in wit. Rius was no stranger to writing about the countryside. From 1968 to 1977, the years preceding the premiere of *El extensionista*, Rius wrote and illustrated two hundred and ninety-one issues of his comic book *Los agachados* (Hinds 72), which like his earlier hit, *Los supermachos*, offered a searing critique of Mexico’s political and social landscape from a fictitious Mexican town called San Garabato. Like Santander, Rius utilized the rural settings in order to write about, “the myriad of problems [...] that afflicted Mexican society in the 1960s and the 1970s” (Hinds 74). For Rius fans then, the Rius-designed poster would have lent the production all the cultural caché of Rius’ political trajectory, his deep historical knowledge and his witty presentation, introducing *El extensionista* as a production in the same vein as Rius’ own work; for those less familiar with Rius, it framed the production as ironic, critical, historical and political.

Hinds and Tatum note that in Rius’ work there is a crucial interaction between various planes, the graphic, the narrative and the balloon planes; they write that “[h]is comic books are structured as dialogues between the narrative voice and those of the characters speaking in balloons”. Much of the irony and humor in Rius’ work arises from the way in which the ‘balloons’ provide a space for the characters to undermine and question Rius’ narrative voice; that is, Rius allows his characters to push back against the authority of his voice. Hinds and Tatum write that the effect of this interaction is that, “the reader feels he has an advocate within the fictional framework who will ask his questions and express his concerns to the narrator while

¹⁹ See the murals of Diego Rivera or Eisenstein’s *¡Que viva Mexico!*

at the same time providing comic relief” (74). This analysis of the balloon plane in Rius is analogous to the role that the Cancionero plays in *El extensionista*. The text describes the Cancionero as a “campesino” (9) and photos show him accompanying his singing on the guitar, lending him an aspect closer to that of a troubadour, than that of a singing narrator. When the opening corrido is over, the Cancionero begins to speak directly to the audience, “[e]n este sucedido que van ustedes a presenciar, y no soy uno de los personajes, ni siquiera tengo nombre, no soy nadie; sin embargo, me van a ver por todos lados ... soy parte de todos, pertenezco a todos. Soy la opinion popular de este pueblo” (14). The Cancionero intervenes throughout the play to explain aspects of rural life and behavior to the urban audience, acting as socio-cultural translator and advocate for the *campesinos*, and, thus, interrupting the audience’s identification with Cruz, the (urban) protagonist.

Cancionero opens the play singing a corrido that introduces the audience to the context of Tenochtlén. He sings, “Vengo a cantar el corrido / de ‘Tenochtlén de las flores’ / un pueblo lindo y querido / que se ha quedado dormido / por varias generaciones” (Santander *El extensionista* 1980, 9). The line “lindo y querido” self-consciously echoes the title of the famous patriotic corrido “México lindo y querido”, immediately recognizable to a Mexican audience as the country’s unofficial national anthem. “México lindo y querido” was written by Chucho Monje in 1921 and the lyrics romantically depict Mexico’s landscape as “volcanes”, “praderas y flores”, “la sierra” and “los magueyales”. The song is an ode to the Mexican countryside, its men (Mexico’s landscape is “cuna de hombres cabales”) and patriotism in death, as it is the singer’s only wish to be buried in Mexican soil (*Siempre tuya*). Written eleven years after the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, years during which so many men had died asserting their legal and moral right to the land, “México lindo y querido” vindicated their sacrifice and comforted the

survivors of the ongoing conflict. However, the song attained its iconic status much later, in 1952, when it featured in the Jorge Negrete vehicle, *Siempre tuya*. In the film Negrete plays a man driven by economic necessity from the countryside to the city where he suffers tremendous hardship but eventually finds success in the entertainment business singing traditional revolutionary corridos. Thus, in the course of its popularization, the patriotism of the original song was redirected away from the countryside, which was relegated to the past, and the corrido is re-packaged as a belief in the country's industrial and urbanized future.

The corrido was the musical genre of the Mexican revolution and no other cultural form evokes so completely the romantic idea of Mexico (Mendoza). The films of Mexico's Golden Age Cinema excelled at drawing on Revolutionary symbols in order to generate an understanding of the contemporary moment (1930s-1950s) as a continuation of the Revolutionary project. Consequently, when Jorge Negrete turns a revolutionary symbol of sacrifice and patriotism (the corrido) into his ticket to socio-economic success, he completes this cycle. *El extensionista* takes the displaced song back to its original rural setting to denounce the destruction of the countryside by large agribusiness and corrupt political interests. The citation of "México lindo y querido" is laden with irony as the play seeks to unravel the contradictions inherent to the neoliberal modernity with which Golden Age productions, such as *Siempre tuya*, sought to reconcile their audience.

In *El extensionista*, the Cancionero takes Negrete's place as the voice of the people. In the 1978 production of *El extensionista*, the Cancionero was played by Gabino Palomares, a Mexican singer and composer of "nueva canción"²⁰. Fostered by Cuban "nueva canción" as part of a new revolutionary imaginary of the sixties and seventies, this neo-folkloric style of music

²⁰ Palomares continues to perform in and around Mexico City

was the soundtrack to the revolutionary optimism of the 1960s and 70s and was defined by an anti-imperialist stance that foregrounded the interests of workers and the rural poor, and championed Latin American solidarity versus North American economic imperialism. For the 1978 audience of *El extensionista*, the music of the national revolution, the corrido, is being sung in the voice of the Cuban Revolution. The Revolutionary scenario so successfully institutionalized by Golden Age Mexican cinema is familiar, but it is infiltrated and reconfigured by a renewed revolutionary imaginary.

Photos published in the 2nd edition of *El extensionista* (and taken circa.1978-9) show Férida Medina's original set for the production (Santander *El extensionista* 1979). The set appears simple and sparse, and is dominated by a series of clouds floating upstage at mid-height. Legendary Golden Age cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa, made Mexican clouds famous in his iconic shots of vast expanses of sky, often shot from below shifting the balance of the composition skyward, as Charles Berg Ramirez puts it (16). Yet there is none of the drama of Figueroa's atmospheric, infinite skies in this set. The heavy lines and flat, textured appearance of the clouds are more grounded and closer in style to Dr Atl's painting. A participant in the Mexican Revolution and a peer of the giants of Mexican muralism, Dr Atl was a key influence in the development of Figueroa's famous clouds, inspiring him to adopt a curvilinear perspective. By contrast with Figueroa, however, Dr Atl's rendering of Mexico's scenery is far more intimate and less intimidating than Figueroa's, more an exploration of nature than of nation. *El extensionista*'s clouds hang just behind the actor's heads, barely above them; for the audience the clouds are viewed straight on as they are in Dr Atl's paintings where the horizon lines so often cut directly across the middle of the canvas. For the campesinos of *El extensionista*, the Mexican landscape is not an analogy, as it is for Figueroa, but an immediate materiality. The rest of the

stage is left open, the different houses and meeting places of the village all used the same bare wooden furniture. An abandoned cart wheel (which also featured in all subsequent productions up until 2012) lends a timelessness to this place where traditional agricultural life is only just giving way to the technology of modernity, mirroring the settings of the post-revolutionary films where Mexican modernity is always in process yet never complete.

Props and drop down panels were used to represent the different settings. CREA's 2nd edition of *El extensionista* includes 3 photographs of the local government meeting scene, suggesting it was one of the most visually interesting sets in the production (although there is no mention of it in the script). Don Ismael, the municipal president, is facing the audience giving a rousing speech as if to them (with lines lifted from López Portillo's speeches). He advocates in favor of raising production in order to confront the area's social problems. The council members are discussing Cruz' idea of subsidizing the production of cotton in Tenochtlén, don Máximo appears in a casual pose on a swing that hangs up stage, high above the meeting which he has organized but, of course, has no official role in. Three white panels hang in front of the clouds, blocking them from view.

In contrast to the iconic white campesino costume used in Rius' poster, the photographs show the male rural characters to be dressed in worn versions of the audience's own clothes: jeans and shirts. There are some cartoonish touches such as neckties and dungarees, this conjuring of the countryside combines a realist presentation of the countryside with the cultural clichés learned from the mass media, in order to signal a correlation between the suffering of the rural underclass in the 1970s and the suffering of the rural underclass of the Mexican Revolution. This correlation is particularly effective because it succeeds in forefronting class over race; thus seeking to sidestep an *indigenista* tradition which tended to represent the experience of those

marked as indigenous as fundamentally different and separate from the contemporary struggles of modern Mexicans. Likewise, don Máximo's dress combines elements of the traditional and the contemporary. In his first appearance, he is in the village ordering the villagers to obey Cruz; in this scene he is described as "*vistiendo ropa campirana*" (50), this was interpreted in 1978 by a satin shirt embroidered in the *vaquero* style, a riding crop and a cigar (Santander 1979 30). In this way the production visually renders his relationship to the villagers as that of *hacendado* to *peon*. However, when he is in his home, he is styled as urban and fashionable, in a very 1970s roll neck and blazer (35). *El extensionista* insists on a continuity between Mexico's feudal past and its neoliberal present, yet complicates the traditionally binary view of rural society. Don Máximo's different costumes, as well as characters such as the banker, the politician and the bureaucrat signal the economic interdependence of the rural and urban spheres. The most obviously urban character, the "extensionista", Cruz López, wears the collar of his denim jacket upturned in a nod to 1970s youth fashion (Santander, *El extensionista* 1979 15).

The few women in the play (they are three who are not prostitutes and appear in more than one scene) are dressed more traditionally, there is something anachronistic about the high-collared dresses in somber colors and the woolen *rebozos* pulled modestly around their shoulders (Santander, *El extensionista* 1980 52). Santander's Manuela in 1978 could be Eisenstien's Maria from his 1932 film *¡Qué viva México!*, and, unlike Maria, she will not left holding her dead lover's body. At th end of the play Cruz is dead, but Manuela is holding a rife. Manuela is the only character who speaks plainly to Cruz, orientating him as to the truth of his situation. When he meets her, he makes a disastrous attempt to charm her, "eres muy bonita ¿ya te lo han dicho? tienes buena figura (*Conquistador.*) te mereces algo mejor que andar cuidando animales... en la ciudad serías todo un éxito" (18). In fact, his rather sinister focus on her physical attributes as a

conduit to “success” is reminiscent of the plots of *cabaretera* movies in which beautiful women making their way in the city, inevitably “fall” into tragedy. The implication of sexual looseness enrages Manuela and she reminds him he is relying on her local knowledge to do his work, “si quiere ver a Benito le voy a dar un consejo: no hable tanto ... ni alma que vaya yo a interesarme en la historia de su vida, ni en su opinión que usted tiene de nuestro pueblo!” (18). Throughout the play, Cruz turns to Manuela for help and guidance (53, 96), but as long as he is an *extensionista* she remains distant. When Manuela decides to go to bed with Cruz, after he has been fired and beaten by don Máximo’s men, she does so from a position of power, she knows that he will soon become part of the community. The following morning when Cruz tells her that he must leave Tenochtlén because he has lost his job, Manuela informs him that the village people would like him to stay and give them technical support, “hasta se pusieron de acuerdo para cooperar y pagar tu sostén” (99). Finally, the play’s action will freeze upon the figure of Manuela dressed in holding the rifle over her head like an *adelita* screaming with rage against the never-ending cycle of injustice. Although it is almost impossible to know how forcefully this reading of Manuela was represented in the 1978 production, from the photos it can be observed that, at least in this final climactic image, Manuela becomes, visually, the guide that she has secretly been throughout the play. By removing Cruz and Benito from the play, Santander has removed the village’s ‘natural’ leaders: the father and the (male) scholar are crucified. The final tableaux casts Manuela as the new leader.

Cruz and Manuela’s love scene is the point at which the play turns from mapping what is, to mapping what could be. Cruz now shifts from an outsider to become part of the local community; he is longer on the government’s payroll and he has understood through experience the injustice against which the villagers struggle. Cruz immediately accepts the offer to stay and

together they pick the cotton harvest by night in order to sell it on the black market, thus escaping the oppressive conditions of their contract with the government and the bank. At this point the play picks up speed and the village becomes an egalitarian dream of consensus decision making and positive social action. A community school is established with Manuela as the teacher, she teaches: “A de algodón... de agua... [...] avorazada [...] B de burro... de banco... de bandido [...]”. She reaches ‘R’ and is interrupted by a communal shout, “TODOS: ¡De revolución!” (106).

This communal call for revolution, close to the play’s end is at odds, however, with the discussion that immediately precedes it. While the villagers pick the cotton they exchange opinions about how they will handle the inevitable repercussions, as Benito puts it, “Es la primera vez que les toca la de perder y no creo que les guste, ni que se vayan a quedar tranquilos” (104). Cruz believes they will lose if they attempt violent confrontation but is vague in his articulation of the alternative, “tenemos una Constitución... leyes que nos protegen... [...] Si nos mantenemos unidos, podemos presionar para que las apliquen correctamente” (104). Cuquillo is the only character who advocates confrontation, a revolutionary violence to match the state’s violence. The other villagers are apprehensive- experience has shown such a course to be deadly- and there is nothing approaching a consensus. Daniel Bensaïd writes that revolution is both “overthrow” and “dissolution”, but it is also “a protracted intellectual and ethical revolution, slowly undermining the foundation of empires” (Bensaïd 90). R is for revolution in the context of the school where ideas are circulated and discussed, this is the ideal foundation, *El extensionista* suggests, for the intellectual revolution Bensaïd mentions. Nevertheless, as with Cruz and his study (theoretical knowledge) of agronomy, the application of knowledge requires an iterative process of experience and reflection upon that experience. The call for revolution in

El extensionista recognizes the desire for a revolution of overthrow and dissolution, but also asks what kind of knowledge has been gained from experience, and what applications of experience can contribute to the long revolution against empires.

Although Cruz has entered into a relationship of equality with the *campesinos*, he now promotes the idea that his education provides him a special understanding of the Mexican state, both as it is and as it should be. What he initially claimed to be technical knowledge is now transformed into knowledge of the state, “Quizás mi única ventaja sea que, cuando llegue a presentarse un siniestro ... yo sí sé dónde preguntar, cómo consultar y a quién recurrir” (105). He refers to the Constitution, the Mexican Constitution written in 1917 during the Mexican Revolution, as that which will protect the people if realized correctly. In this new vision, it is the combination of his knowledge of the true form of the law (the Mexican Constitution) and the force represented by his relationship of solidarity with the villagers that will bring about the transformation of Mexico from an unjust society to a just one. Cruz, then, continues to view himself as a Messianic figure who can restore the law in its true form. The play does not entirely rob Cruz of this Messianic role, certainly his arrival in Tenochtlén led (through Manuela, crucially) to “the turning of a corner in which an altogether different present happens” as Fredric Jameson describes Benjamin’s view of messianic time. However, the murder of Benito and Cruz leaves the future of the present undetermined, it will not be Cruz who shapes the future but the villagers themselves, lead by Manuela. The play ultimately refuses the educated male’s vision of himself as a Messiah.

Owen Ware in his comparison of Derrida and Benjamin’s concepts of messianism states that Benjamin’s concept of messianic time lacks a future orientation (like the angel of history, it is always looking backwards), unlike that of Derrida who celebrates the possibility of a time

whose relationship to the past is uncertain. Ware analyses how Derrida's idea of the future-to-come relates to justice, stating that it hinges on the possibility of a time "without certain conjunction" either to the past or the future. Ware quotes Derrida:

To affirm the coming of the event, its future-to-come ... all of this can be thought ... only in a dislocated time of the present, at the joining of the radically disjointed time, without certain conjunction. Not a time whose joinings are negated, broken, mistreated, dysfunctional disadjusted, according to a dys- of negative opposition and dialectical disjunction, but a time without certain joining or determinable conjunction ... There would be neither injunction nor promise without this disjunction (106).

For Derrida (as read by Ware) the only possibility for justice exists in allowing for an undetermined event, outside of history. In Ware's words, "only if time is heterogeneous can we establish a heterogeneous relation to the other. Still, disjointed time does not necessarily lead to justice; it simply opens up the heterogeneity crucial for any respect and responsibility toward the other" (107). The time after the scripted section of the play has ended, when the audience are invited to debate the ending to the play, functions as an a-temporal event. The play opened in the middle of the final scene; in *El extensionista* time can be paused, rewound, played again; paused again. The present can come around more than once in this place, but the future is completely uncertain; it is only what the audience-community will make of it. When the final scene freezes upon Manuela holding her rifle over her head, the Cancionero, the voice of the people, turns to the audience and tells them once more, "Y es en este punto que se encuentra actualmente la historia de "El extensionista". Corresponde a ustedes concluir-la" (112). The actors move to the front of the stage, now out of character. The debate with the audience begins. The play has no

scripted ending, the text indicates that “se oírán diversas opiniones; se concretarán las más interesantes, se discutirán, se someterán a votación y finalmente se concluirá la obra, mediante su representación escénica, a criterio del público” (112). Santander stated in an interview that in this way the play avoided being paternalistic, “simplemente se le muestra una cadena de situaciones en la que puede caer, simplemente las retratamos, ellos toman las decisiones” (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 278). Interestingly, however, Benjamin Islas recalled that, frequently, audiences took the opportunity of the ‘debate’ to speak about their experiences of injustice; deciding an ending to the play was rarely the main issue, and he does not remember acting out alternative endings or taking votes. According to Isla’s account, the space tended to become more truly heterogeneous than Santander envisioned as audience members took the time to explain their perspectives and listen to one another. In the future they chose, injustice was recognized as such.

In 1978, for a Mexican audience, armed struggle is a historical fact not a theoretical proposition. In the city, leftists who were deemed to have drifted too far to the left were systematically murdered; Pelaéz Ramos confirms that “[e]l movimiento obrero y sindical recibió durante el lopezportillismo serios golpes y diversas formas de represión”. Anyone who has come from the Mexican countryside or has family there, knows what happens to those who challenge the system, they would have first-hand experience of what they were seeing on stage. When asked about the debates in an interview, Santander recounted the following anecdote:

un día, celebrabamos, actuando ante cuarenta y una comunidades indígenas independientes, el centenario del natalicio de Zapata, y mientras al final de la representación un líder campesino tomaba la palabra en el debate me pareció que se aclaraba mi inquietud: aquel campesino sí habló de injusticia y de revolución, y en tanto hablaba, su mano, inconsciente, se dirigía hacia el machete colgado de su

cintura como queriendo apoyar sus palabras ... Ahí estaba la clave ... cuando un hombre del campo habla de revolución lo hace con el machete en la mano, resuelto a iniciarla en ese mismo instante, cara a cara y sin concesiones (Garzón Céspedes 26-27).

The anecdote is a moving confirmation of why *El extensionista* shows the whole process of events and reasoning that would lead up to the decision to take revolutionary action but stops a moment short of actually arming the people. Santander *cannot* insist on armed struggle as a solution. But he can ask the audience where they stand in relation to justice. By asking them to end the play, the audience are indirectly asked what kind of future they want to construct.

El extensionista gives voice to the silenced history of post-revolutionary struggle in the countryside and demonstrates that the goals and social relations of the state capitalist structure are systemically opposed to the interests of rural people. *El extensionista* frames and acknowledges the un-official truth that, in spite of the passage of time, the struggle for land continues in the countryside by re-appropriating the scenario of the Mexican Revolution and using its tropes to bring this national story of re-founding into the present. The play refuses to draw that struggle to an end, instead drawing attention to the historical cycle of uprising and violent suppression. By providing a forum for audiences to share their experiences, theorize resistance and find the common ground of solidarity, it challenges the audience to take part in history and put an end to Mexico's institutionalized revolution.

3.0 CHAPTER 2: SANTANDER'S TEATRO CAMPESINO: A TIGER'S LEAP INTO THE PAST

The responsibility that you hold at present is so serious that if you do not correctly perceive with utmost clarity the political and economic reforms that the country demands, you will run the risk of having left alive the germs of future disturbances in the peace, [...] If you do not know how to fully satisfy the legitimate needs of the nation, you will leave planted the seeds of future revolutions, after having taught the people a dangerous form of rising in arms, putting our sovereignty in constant jeopardy

Luis Cabrera, "Open Letter to Madero Concerning the Treaties of Ciudad Juarez" (Gilly 57-58)

Luis Cabrera's prophetic message to Madero in 1911 warns Madero that the experience of popular insurrection will not be forgotten once it has served his ends. It will remain in the collective memory as the knowledge, learned through practice, that the people together wield the power to topple their leaders; Cabrera's imagery of germs and seeds is a metaphor for the birth of a revolutionary scenario²¹. Cabrera's phrase "placing our sovereignty in constant jeopardy" makes evident that sovereignty, for Cabrera, is not in the people. Although he recognizes "the legitimate needs of the nation", Cabrera is not a revolutionary, and the sovereignty he wishes to preserve is that of "a bourgeois juridical order based on the federal army" (Gilly 57).

²¹ Ironically, Cabrera would go on to build his political career around circumscribing land reform in order to protect the sovereignty of his class, thus playing a significant role in creating the conditions that would provoke future uprisings.

The three plays I analyze in this chapter are *A propósito de Ramona* (1981), *El corrido de los dos hermanos* (1984) and *Y, el milagro* (1985). In them, Santander looks back on the bloody history of the Mexican government's attempt to protect "our" sovereignty. Unlike Cabrera, Santander celebrates this revolutionary scenario because of its collective character, but he does not underestimate its cost. He said of it that, "[t]he campesinos are the main characters in my plays ... I am not very pleased with their behavior nowadays; they are very apathetic. But the trilogy explores the reasons for their conduct, the three different institutions that provoke it." (Crew). In the first place this statement clarifies that Santander is more troubled by apathy than insurrection. Secondly, that he observes no contradiction between disagreement with the "campesinos" and solidarity with them. Thirdly, that, for the playwright, a better future is one that accounts for the devastating human impact of the deadly militarism of the state. I propose that in these three plays Santander presents armed resistance as the logical response to violent oppression, a manifestation of equality to be understood rather than feared. Furthermore, by basing his fictions on historical instances of revolutionary struggle, Santander attempts to make plain the unreasonable nature of the violence that the state perpetrates against its Revolutionary subjects.

The three plays that follow *El extensionista* (1978) complete Felipe Santander's *teatro campesino* cycle. Along with *El extensionista*, the four compose what Santander called his "trilogía compuesta de cuatro obras" (Santander, "Estoy casado con..." 125). Although it is left somewhat unexplained, the logic behind this statement is probably that *El extensionista* and *A propósito de Ramona* are two halves of the same problem, both take up the question of the post-revolutionary state's historic failure to deliver land reform, prosperity or economic stability to the rural poor. On the other hand, *El corrido de los dos hermanos* (1984) and *Y, el milagro*

(1985) confront the ways in which the army and the church have intervened in the rural communities in the post-Revolutionary period. *El corrido de los dos hermanos* (1984) weaves a complex story of the different ways in which one village is torn apart by the activities of ruthless capitalists and the military over the course of a decade; and *Y, el milagro* (1985) integrates the story of a guerillero on the run from the army with an examination of the political role played by the Catholic Church.

Peter Watt writes, “In 1970s Mexico there existed a holy trinity – the President, the army and the Virgin of Guadalupe. Voicing criticism of, questioning and challenging publicly the two former could have serious consequences, potentially landing the unfortunate dissenter, unionist or peasant leader in jail, or worse” (Watt). This is exactly the trio of power that Santander’s trilogy of four sets out to critique, as noted in the introduction, Santander sees his trilogy as a thesis on “las relaciones del campesinado mexicano con las instituciones que ideológicamente han influido más sobre su actitud actual [...] en *El extensionista* es el Estado, en *Los dos hermanos* el militarismo y en *El milagro* la religión” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 121-2). Santander’s plays theorize that relation in solidarity with the campesino, framing the discussion about the future of Mexico and its countryside as one that must be rooted in a sympathetic understanding of its historical background.

As in *El extensionista*, these plays are all detailed accounts of the reasoning and experiences that lead rural people to take up arms, yet in all three instances the hope that is embodied in the act of insurrection is brought to an abrupt and frequently tragic end by a state which is directed by the interests of capital. In *El extensionista*, Santander left the people of Tenochtlén de los flores on the point of taking up arms and asked his audience what they thought the villagers should do. The three plays that follow *El extensionista* might be thought of as acting

out (indirectly) some of the consequences that might have followed a decision to enter into violent conflict with the merciless armed forces of the state. Santander never states it this way; to do so would have been to imply that *El extensionista* has an ending, and thus bring an end to the discussion that is its proper ending. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude from these three plays that follow *El extensionista*, that Santander did not favor armed struggle as a revolutionary solution.

I do not wish to suggest that Santander was opposed on principle to armed struggle; he does not express an opinion either way, always speaking about his plays as hypotheses rather than conclusions (Santander, “Estoy casado ...; Garcia). In an interview he states that he is opposed to militarism, but stresses that he is in no way critiquing the ordinary people who make up the army, “[*El corrido de los dos hermanos*] is not intended as a criticism of the Mexican army, an army made up mostly of farmers and the poor, but only as a questioning of the model which the government has chosen for our economic development, and an indictment of militarism in general” (Crew). Santander frames militarism then as the other face of the neoliberal economic model that the Mexican government embraced from the late 1970s onwards (Edmunds-Poli). Therefore, to suggest he wrote his plays to advocate against armed struggle, would be to misrepresent a theatrical project which vindicates, over and over again, the historical actors who have lost the most and been heard the least.

I interpret these three plays as a set of historical iterations of the same problem. Santander presents three historical examples in which taking up arms against the state ultimately fails to resolve the problems of the people. Again, though Santander emphasizes when he describes the trilogy, that he views it, not a historical account of the past, but as an explanation of the present:

un análisis sobre esas tres influencias y cómo han llevado ideológicamente al campesino, por qué el campesino hoy actúa de esta manera, cuáles son sus potencialidades como un pueblo revolucionario, como un pueblo que más bien busca la paz, que busca su mejoría económica, su mejoría social (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 122).

The relationship between the past and the future in these plays hinges on his conception of the rural people (and all those who are in solidarity with them) as “un pueblo revolucionario”. Santander’s description establishes a continuity between the “pueblo revolucionario” of the Mexican Revolution and the “pueblo” today; they are still exploring their possibilities and capacity, “potencialidades”, as a “pueblo revolucionario”: the revolution is not yet finished.

Unlike *El extensionista*, which refused to stage armed conflict, all three plays are about the experience of rural *guerilleros*; the plays make use of historical premises in order to enact the tragedies of violent repression and the failure to realize revolutionary proposals in different instances of Mexico’s history. I have already examined how this vision is staged in *El extensionista*. The success of *El extensionista* left an archival record which enabled me to analyze a number of aspects of its staging and impact on its audience. However, *El extensionista* stands apart from the rest of the *teatro campesino* cycle not only because it was by far the most successful, and most documented, play. *El extensionista*’s plot focused primarily on the contemporary crisis, but the narratives of the three plays examined in this chapter are more explicitly historiographical, each recuperating historical antecedents of the “pueblo revolucionario”. In *A propósito de Ramona*, this is the ‘pueblo revolucionario’ of the Mexican Revolution. The narrative of the Revolutionary play-within-a-play begins during the Porfirato, and invents a community that fights for the realization of the land reform promised in the “Plan

de San Luis”, tirelessly returning to battle every time the new Revolutionary government fails to deliver. In *El corrido de los dos hermanos* the public are presented with the story of a workers’ rebellion in San Luis Potosí that could be pre-revolutionary, given the large number of labor disputes and strikes in the mining industry at the turn of the century and in the lead-up to the Mexican Revolution. However, the play is deliberately ambiguous about the time period and confrontations between owners and workers have taken place periodically in the mining industry throughout the 20th century (Azamar Alonso). Finally, the “pueblo revolucionario” of *Y, el milagro* is that of notorious sixties “guerillero”, Genaro Rojas Vázquez.

The timing of these plays coincided with an important shift in the organization of the political left. Since the 1977 “Ley Federal de Organizaciones Políticas y Procedimientos Electorales” (LFOPPE), issue-led organizations called *coordinadoras* were attracting supporters from around the country; among them were the National ‘Plan de Ayala’ Coordinating Body (CNPA), as well as the National Coordinating Body of the Urban Popular Movement (CONAMUP) and the National Worker and Peasant Assembly (ANOCP), which organized two nationwide civic strikes in October 1983 and in June 1984. As previously mentioned, the Mexican Communist Party had spent decades at the center of radical politics in Mexico, and just two years after its long-awaited legalization in 1979, it dissolved in 1981. Out of its ashes the uninspired United Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM) was created and it became clear that the politicians of the left were invested in the struggle for ‘sufragio efectivo’, and had less time for the issues that drove popular political intervention. Furthermore, the support base of the new movements was hostile to what they saw as opportunism on the part of the traditional parties of the left who, post-1979, had swiftly become more interested in electoral gains than the realities driving the popular demand for change. As Guillermo Correa, one of leaders of CNPA, said at

the time, “the vanguard of the left is in the masses, not in the parties” (Carr 281). The *coordinadoras* attracted supporters because they were not arguing about the legacy of Trotsky or scientific socialism; rather, they understood and were sensitive to regional differences and cooperated with local movements.

At the heart of Santander’s project is the recognition of “un pueblo que más bien busca la paz” There is a revolutionary proposal within these plays, but it is not that of armed struggle. It is a proposal to the audience to imagine another version of history, a secret history, in which there are no “terrorists”, only exploited people with hope. This chapter will also examine some of the strategies that Santander used to implicate his audience in this version of history, an aspect that I view as a crucial part of his aesthetics of solidarity.

3.1 THE REVOLUTION AS RUPTURE AND CONTINUITY IN A *PROPÓSITO DE RAMONA*

A propósito de Ramona, premiered in 1981 at “Teatro el Galeón”, a theater which forms part of the prestigious “Centro Cultural del Bosque”, a modern and well-funded theater complex belonging to Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA). Nestled at the corner of Paseo de la Reforma and Bosque de Chapultepec, near to the “Museo Nacional de Antropología”, the CCB is a haven for performing arts students and theater professionals. At the center’s 50th anniversary celebrations, award-winning set designer and former director of the “Centro Universitario de Teatro” at the UNAM, Alejandro Luna said:

El Centro Cultural del Bosque tiene significado para muchísima gente que ha decidido dedicar su vida al teatro. Ha sido, primero, butacas desde las cuales

vimos las primeras obras, posteriormente escuela, porque muchos estudiaron en las escuelas de teatro y de danza que había aquí, y después, el haber vivido en sus escenarios. Es una casa para todos nosotros (Delgado 97).

The CCB is the ideal place to put on a performance and get it seen, and in 1981 it was fresh from a 1978 remodel (“Teatro el Galeón”). *Ramona...* had been a finalist in the “Premio Nacional INBA” that year, which may have helped Santander secure the space (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 121; Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 273). It is disappointing then that there is no archival material related to the play, although Carlos Martínez Moreno claims that the play only stayed in the theater for a couple of days and received some negative reviews (Santander, *El teatro...* 10). Furthermore, Santander reported that the ceiling was missing from the theater when he showed up to rehearsal one day, an event he interpreted as sabotage against the play which presents a very explicit criticism of the post-Revolutionary state (Frischmann *El nuevo...* 273).

3.1.1 Taking the Audience Behind the Scenes

A propósito de Ramona is a play within a play. The piece opens with a prologue in what is supposed to be a theatrical representation of a popular assembly in post-revolutionary Cuba, “Antes de iniciarse la función de la escena está vacía. A la segunda llamada se escucha la canción “*Ramona*” con ritmo tropical. Entran los actores meneándose al ritmo de la música y arman la escenografía” (Santander, *El teatro...* 81). At this point the audience do not know they are watching a play within a play, the actors are in character, and it seems as though they will watch a play about the Cuban Revolution, “Un actor coloca una gran foto (o pintura) del Che, con su leyenda: Hasta la victoria siempre. Otro, un gran letrado al frente que reza: “Saludamos asamblea de ejemplares” (Santander, *El teatro...* 81). Since the idea is to create the unmistakable

sense of being in Cuba at the height of the Revolution, we might assume that the photo of Che would have been *the* photo in which he is instantly recognizable as both Che Guevara and the archetypal revolutionary subject of the Cuban Revolution. This scene prepares the audience to watch a piece of art about the Cuban Revolution; that is an actually existing Communist culture.

The presentation of “Cuba” is meant to be deliberately clumsy and stereotyped. The stage direction reads, “*El acento de los actores será “muy cubano” y sus movimientos más amplios y expresivos que lo normal en México*” (81). Ramona Santos is presented in the assembly as a candidate for the position of “obrero ejemplar que nos representará ante el Comité Regional” (81). A neighbor interrupts to object to Ramona’s nomination, citing, “problemas de moral en la comunidad ... que estuvo engañando al marío con un brigadista del INRA” (82). In the debate that follows, the neighbors bicker about who started the rumor about Ramona in the first place and the group divides on whether a woman should be held to a different moral standard than a man:

JOSE: ... Le voy a hacer una pregunta a usted mismo: si de lo que se acusa a Ramona lo hubiera hecho usted, o cualquier otro hombre, ¿estaríamos discutiendo ahora si ese hombre podría o no ser ejemplar?

[...]

ÑICO: Qué sé yo. Será por eso mismo: porque uno es hombre y usted mujé: y toa la vida, desde tengo uso de razón, ha sido así.

INMACULADA: ¿Y no sabe usted que la revolución es precisamente pa eso, pa cambiar lo que anda torcido? (82-3)

The debate continues until Ramona is asked if she will clarify the situation, she assents but suddenly the scene is interrupted by the arrival of the “Director”: “¡Hasta aquí! ¡Hasta aquí! ...

se suspende el ensayo, no tiene caso continuar ¡Esto es un desastre!” (84). The action is interrupted here and no conclusion given to the debate. When the play takes up its narrative again, in the first act and with the action moved from the Cuban to the Mexican Revolution, the play shifts and the question of gender inequality seems to become secondary to class inequality and the collective goal of the Revolutionaries. I write “seems” because the story of the Revolution is in fact structured around Ramona’s romantic and sexual experiences. The debate at the beginning functions, as many a good prologue, to give the audience a framework from which to view the play: by setting the prologue in a version of the Cuban Revolution, the audience is persuaded to accept a vision of the Mexican Revolution that is wrought from a communist-feminist premise.

The actors refer to the director who has interrupted the play as “Felipe”, suggesting that Felipe Santander (the performance’s actual director) may have played the role of the director himself. Santander never mentioned this in interviews, although there is barely any interview material that refers to *Ramona*.... It is worth remembering that in 1981 *El extensionista* was two years into its run at “Teatro de la Juventud” and a massive hit, having just won the “Premio Casa de la Américas” in Cuba in 1980. Felipe Santander was a very well-known figure in the theater community in 1981, and given the location and context of the CCB, at the heart of Mexico City’s theater scene, it is extremely likely that many members of the audience would have been aware that they were attending a “Felipe Santander” play and that they would have seen, or been aware of, *El extensionista*²². Whether it is Felipe Santander playing the “Director” or someone imitating him, the energy created by the actors seeming to break character at this point would

²² We might recall Benjamin Islas comment that, during the 1980s, it seemed as though almost every actor in Mexico City had been in *El extensionista* at some point (Islas)

almost certainly have been intensified by the “cameo”. It also appears to have functioned as an opportunity for self-promotion since, in their staged discussion, the actors refer to *El extensionista* and “su [Felipe’s] concepción de teatro popular” (85).

“Felipe” tells the actors that the show cannot go ahead “se cometió un error desde la selección demasiado localista y exige una ambientación que, para nosotros, es casi imposible lograr”. One of the actors points out that there is not only art at stake in this decision, “¿y quién nos va a mantener mientras tanto? Porque usted sabe que vivimos de esto, y no estamos en Cuba para que nos mantenga el gobierno” (85). This recognition of the actor’s material needs was typical of Santander who, in *Cooperativa Teatro Denuncia* and his theater school, was keen to ensure as fair a remuneration as possible for actors. “Felipe” replies, “Tienes razón. ¡Toda la razón! Pero ¿qué hago? Ayudenme por favor” (85). This also serves as the excuse for the group to quickly come up with a contingency plan, so that the show can be staged. The actors and the director discuss if they can simply adapt the play to a Mexican context, but the Director objects, “Son otras cosas las que habría que cambiar para que la historia de Ramona pudiera suceder en México [...] los personajes son el resultado de una forma colectiva de ser y de pensar que surge de un sistema distinto del nuestro [...] Un pueblo sin caciques, sin desempleados, sin analfabetos” (87). The actors continue to discuss options, until an actor sighs “Bien, no se puede hacer nada ... ‘La Ramona’ pertenece ya a nuestro pasado” (87). Felipe considers this statement as the actors pack up around him, then interrupts them, “¡A nuestro pasado! ¡Muchachos esperen, ¿cómo no lo pensamos antes? [...] hay una época de nuestra historia en que sí se dieron las condiciones”. As a Revolutionary atmosphere erupts around him “*balazos, gritos y música de la época*” the Director shouts, “especulando un poco en lo que habría sido de un pueblo

cualquiera, si, allí sí, la revolución mexicana hubiese sido llevada hasta sus últimas consecuencias” (88).

The prologue’s framing of *A propósito de Ramona*, announces to its audience that what they are watching is intended to be understood as a thought experiment, a hypothesis. It solicits their complicity with the suspension of disbelief that is required to imagine what could have been. The staged conversation between the Director and the Actors includes the audience in a simulacrum of “creacion colectiva”, which, even though it is fake because Santander has authored the play, does give the audience privileged information about where the play comes from and what its objectives are. Furthermore, the audience have had the opportunity to meet the “real” Ramona, since she has pretended to break character. In fact, there is considerable continuity in her character, as an actress she still behaves like “Ramona”- friendly, calm and cooperative.

When the play opens the second time, this time in Act 1 and in Mexico, Ramona is still not in character. The Director orientates the audience “El pueblo que hemos inventado se llama Tenochtlén de las montañas [...] después de 1915 sus órganos de poder se sustrajeron a la influencia reaccionaria del exterior, y continuaron adentro con la revolución” (89). The actors are still unsure where to begin, Felipe sends them off stage and shouts at Ramona “Tú, colócate en el podio y sigue con tu historia”. Ramona replies, “¡Ay, Dios estoy tan nerviosa con tanto cambio! Sígueme cuidando, por favor. (*Se vuelve al público*) Aquí se ha empezado a hablar de mi vida privado y eso es delicado...” (89). The switch from “actress” to the character of “Mexican Ramona” is so seamless that the audience might not even notice it. The continuity between the three Ramonas allows Ramona to carry the empowered Cuban revolutionary version of herself into a story that begins with rape and oppression. Furthermore, the audience trust her, the

continuity enables them to feel that they already know the Mexican Revolution version of Ramona when Act 1 of the play opens. Since Ramona acts as a narrator for the rest of the play, speaking directly to the audience, this sense of intimacy and continuity is an important strategy in securing their solidarity with the Revolutionary and feminist causes²³.

3.1.2 “Hasta sus últimas consecuencias...”: The Mexican Revolution Reimagined

Ramona’s story starts at the end of the Porfiriato in 1910; she is a young girl in love with a revolutionary, Jacinto. Her parents disapprove of him, believing he has no future, her father tells her, “[l]os hombres pueden darse la libertad de escoger mujer. Ellas tienen que arrimarse al árbol que les dé mejor sombra” (93). Her parents’ fear of her love for Jacinto, leads them to send her to work in don Máximo’s hacienda (since this is an iteration of Tenochtlén from *El extensionista*, Santander re-introduces the landowner, don Máximo). At the hacienda she is sexually harassed by don Máximo until one day he knocks her unconscious and rapes her. Traumatized she runs home, to find her parents irritated that she has left the hacienda. Her mother realizes what has happened to her but is matter-of-fact, telling her, “Hicites [sic] bien en no decirle a [tu padre]. Hubieras causado una desgracia” (105). Ramona says she won’t go back to the hacienda but instead runs to the sierra to find Jacinto, convinced he will still love her. Her mother warns her, “No estés tan segura, hija, son muchos años de costumbre” (105). In the meantime, don Máximo murders her father believing that he will take revenge upon him for the rape. When Ramona

²³ It is interesting, if highly speculative, to wonder if *Ramona*... did not do well (as we have inferred that it did not), because the audience at “Teatro Galeón” in the CCB could well have been made up of what we might call “theater insiders”, that is to say, performing arts students, theater workers and people who worked or lived so close to the world of theater that they simply failed to be impressed by the prologue. If they already knew a lot about the process behind the production, because they knew the actors or Felipe personally, had seen rehearsals or were simply familiar with the technique and its objectives, they might have resisted playing along.

finds Jacinto, her mother is proved right. Jacinto loses interest in her, “a partir de aquel día, solo le moviera un deseo de venganza” (108). Jacinto decides, irrationally, that it is time to take the town. The attempt ends in a massacre; Jacinto is killed but an older man named Julian rescues Ramona.

Ramona marries Julian although it is strongly implied that they do not have a sexual relationship. Under the respectful protection of Julian, Ramona participates in the Mexican Revolution and the formation of the independent agricultural community that the region eventually becomes. Though the story is barely beginning, all of these tragic events have been caused by chauvinistic and patriarchal attitudes towards Ramona’s sexuality. Thus while the play sets out the reasons for the people’s decision to rise up in Revolution, it is also simultaneously presents a peasant-class feminist reading of the reasons behind the Revolution and women’s role in it.

In the first successful Revolutionary battle, the people rise up against the injustice of the Porfiriato, only to be disappointed when Madero’s government puts the old hacendado, don Máximo, back in the seat of power by making him the new governor:

Ramona: La explicación de que don Máximo se había pasado al lado de la revolución, y que luchando junto a Madero había logrado lavar las viejas culpas, la verdad no convenció a nadie [...] decidimos de dejarlo gobernar hasta que él mismo nos diera motivos concretos para ir a protestar con Madero. Así fue: el viejo empezó a dar color luego, luego (113).

Desperate to get rid of don Máximo, the people take up arms with each new wave of revolutionary activity, hoping that they will get the piece of land they were promised, but every time they gather to greet their new governor, don Máximo steps out the car crying, “¡Viva

Huerta!” or “¡Viva Carranza!”, as appropriate. The third time he comes, the people are ready, “*Los campesinos apuntan hacia él sus armas y avanzan lentamente*”. Máximo tells them, “rebelarse contra mí, esta vez, es rebelarse contra un gobierno legítimamente constituido, es ir contra la revolución, contra la patria, no tienen ninguna posibilidad. Serán exterminados” (117). The people are tired, they have been fighting for years and with each battle they seem to lose more than they gain, they murder don Máximo with “un golpe solo, seco, mortal” (117).

The people take the town, deciding to fight only for their independence. Tiring of the disappointments, the region takes advantage of its isolated position to cut itself off from the rest of Mexico and enact its own *reforma agrarian*, “RAMONA: Al tomar por la fuerza los poderes en Tenochtlén, nos colocábamos en una situación muy difícil. Ya no luchábamos al amparo de nadie. Estábamos solos, y en contra de la revolución” (117). However, the litany of threats that don Máximo pours upon the villagers marks the point at which the revolutionaries become terrorists; the audience witnesses that the people who were the Revolution became the enemy of the Revolution as soon as they tried to fulfil its promise. There is an obvious parallel here with the rural guerilla of the 1960s and 1970s, which is invoked by don Máximo’s “counter-insurgent” language: “contra la revolución, contra la patria”. The play provides the audience with several opportunities to experience solidarity with a marginalized ‘other’, be they the abused female peasant, the exploited peasant class of the Revolution, or the bullied peasant class of the more recent past.

Eventually the community is successful in cutting itself off from the rest of Mexico and is forgotten about, and the region begins to flourish. The play proves the campesino right by imagining that the peasants themselves are capable of enacting the “*reforma agraria*”. But the play comes to a disappointing end when the people hear the news of Cárdenas’ presidency,

“¡Cárdenas toma el poder! ¡Se reparten veinte millones de hectáreas! ¡Sesenta mil campesinos son armados para defender sus tierras!” (124). The community decide to reincorporate themselves into the state structure, only to have don Máximo arrive once more shouting “¡Viva Miguel Alemán!” (125).

In spite of the political comment made by this ending, the independent community has come to an unsatisfactory end. Just prior to don Máximo’s arrival, the local authorities had taken the decision to separate Ramona and her boyfriend, Raul. The play has come back full circle to where it began in the prologue, with patriarchal moralism reasserting itself in an otherwise utopic, egalitarian community. The play is, thus, on the verge of saying something about revolutions that do not stay revolutionary, but it quickly backs away and blames Miguel Alemán/don Máximo for the end of the utopia.

The final line of the play is an instruction written in capital letters, “DEBATE CON EL PÚBLICO” (125). This is not the same “debate” as in *El extensionista*, where the conceit of finding an ending for the play was used to get the public talking. In *Ramona...* Santander has presented a historical thesis, a vision of post-Revolutionary Mexican history as repetition without progress, and a vision of the Mexican Revolution as futile, as having achieved nothing; the don Máximo in power is the same one as before the Porfiriato. There is also, however, a view of Mexican history as persistently revolutionary, and as part of that a view of the Mexican people as brave and tireless in their struggle. Finally, the struggle is not something they have sought out; it is something that necessity has imposed upon them.

3.2 *EL CORRIDO DE LOS DOS HERMANOS*: A “CORRIDO” OF EPIC

PROPORTIONS

The third play in the *Teatro Campesino* cycle, *El corrido de los dos hermanos*, charts the descent into poverty of a mining village in San Luis Potosí, and the factors that eventually compel the people’s decision to challenge military abuses in the area. The play won the “Premio Nacional INBA” in 1982 and, with funding from UNAM, IMSS and CREA, it premiered on 2nd March 1984 in Teatro Legaria to the north-west of Mexico City (Moncada, *Así Pasan* 364). Its second season took place at Teatro Santa Fe, part of a large IMSS housing estate (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 273). Both theaters were very different from “El Galeón” at the CCB, where *A propósito de Ramona* was performed; although in some ways they might have been more appropriate locations for Santander’s brand of “popular theater” since both belonged to the social security infrastructure which is designed to benefit Mexico’s working classes above all. Both theaters form part of the legacy of Benito Coquet who directed IMSS from 1958 to 1964, leading a project to create a theater-going public which saw the construction of seventy theaters in different parts of Mexico (Rivera). Teatro Legaria is a large theater built in 1960 in the concrete-block style of many government buildings in Mexico. The theater benefits from being located on Calzada Legaria, a busy thoroughfare surrounded by IMSS infrastructure, large public hospitals and government buildings as well as densely populated local neighborhoods, and it could have attracted a wide audience (“Teatro Legaria”). A couple of photos are available from the season at the Legaria, although there is no information about what kind of audience attended the play. The play was successful enough to justify a second season, but this time in “Teatro Santa Fe”, a much

more complicated location. Designed by celebrated architect, Mario Pani²⁴, “Teatro Santa Fe” is a concrete community center set in the heart of a housing project, “Unidad Habitacional Santa Fe” (“Teatro Santa Fe, IMSS”). In order to access the theater, it would have been necessary for actors and audience alike to walk at least 300 meters from the main avenues through the center of the estate in order to access the theater. Frischmann describes the area as “peligroso de noche debido a la presencia de pandillas juveniles” (*El nuevo teatro...* 273), indicating that it was, in some ways, a challenging working environment, despite the possibility of attracting a local working class audience.

The story is partially based on two events that the author knew about from his personal experiences. In the town where he was born, La Paz, San Luis Potosí²⁵, Frischmann reports that, “un dueño extranjero prefirió cerrar su mina, fuente de trabajo de medio pueblo, a acceder a las demandas salariales de los obreros” (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 283). The second event that inspires the story was a quite separate incident: an uncle of Santander’s was robbed of his land when it was occupied by the army, “oficiales de éste le pidieron permiso para jugar fútbol en sus tierras, que lindaban con otras del ejército, pero con el tiempo empezó la construcción de edificios y la resultante pérdida de esas propiedades” (283). This is the play of which Santander exclaimed, “¡es la historia de mi pueblo!” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 123).

Following Santander’s presentation of the play as based on both personal and historical events, Frischmann says of *Los dos hermanos*, “[e]sto constituye otra prueba del valor documental y de denuncia de la producción de Santander, acercando el teatro a la realidad con el

²⁴ Pani was also the architect of Ciudad Satélite and the Torres de Satélite, see Ch. 3

²⁵ The reader will remember from the introduction that there is some disagreement between sources as to whether the playwright was born in San Luis Potosí or in Monterrey, Nuevo León. However, Frischmann refers to La Paz in San Luis Potosí as Santander’s “pueblo natal” (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...*, 283)

fin de incidir constructivamente en ella” (Frischmann, *El nuevo teatro...* 283). Furthermore, Santander prefaces the play with the following statement: “Los caracteres y acontecimientos en esta obra son reales en su mayoría, a pesar de que la cronología, ubicación y nombres han sido alterados” (Santander, *El teatro campesino...* 131). It is important to Santander that *El corrido de los dos hermanos* be recognized as a fictional version of historical events. In part this may be because the play is an epic in terms of its vast proportions, taking on a conflict between miners and agricultural workers, a labor dispute with the mine owners, migration to the city, the dehumanizing experience of a soldier, an urban massacre and finally a rural massacre. Furthermore, the play covers all of this without giving any indication of time period or dates. I propose, however, that the tension between historicity and ahistoricity in the play is delicately managed in order to achieve a sense the events of the play are part of the audience’s present. The claim to historicity functions to anchor the events with factual truth; ahistoricity allows the audience to forget that the story is being told in the past.

An example of how this balance between historicity and ahistoricity works can be seen in the story of the mine. The event which triggers the rest of the events in the story is the labor dispute that leads to the closure of the mine. With respect to the mine, it seems that Santander probably took details from different mining communities in San Luis Potosí, in spite of his claim that the play was story of his town, La Paz. For example, in the play, the owner of the mine in the play is an Englishman named Robert Stanley. There was an American capitalist operating in San Luis Potosí from the 1890s called Robert Safford Towne, but the mine in La Paz did not belong to him. One of the mines that was owned by Robert Safford, however, was “Cerro de San Pedro” (Azamar 55). Aleida Azamar has studied the history of this mine and presents the following, familiar sounding summary of its history:

La mina del Cerro de San Pedro sufrió un gran incendio en 1948 por lo que las actividades se detuvieron, después de esto se decidió terminar el contrato con los trabajadores de la zona por lo que éstos protestaron. El conflicto se detuvo cuando la compañía American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) se negó a pagar la indemnización correspondiente a los trabajadores señalando que iba a terminar con las operaciones extractivas al no encontrarse en capacidad económica para seguir operando. Durante la clausura de la mina la empresa provocó el derrumbe de las instalaciones (Azamar 56).

Robert Safford died in 1916, so he would not have been involved in the closure of the mine. Santander did not necessarily put his story together using the facts that I am describing, and there may be a hidden story about La Paz. However, what is interesting is that there were so many conflicts related to the mines in San Luis Potosí from the end of the 19th century and through the 20th century, that in telling the story of the mine, Santander is referencing and giving a place to a whole history, and present, of labor conflict (Cockcroft; Wasserman; Rubio; Gámez).

The “Cerro de San Pedro y la Minera San Xavier” continues to be a source of conflict today, “El Estado ha intervenido en los acuerdos entre la población del Cerro de San Pedro y la Minera San Xavier y ha manifestado interés en favorecer a los empresarios y no a la comunidad. La negociación entre la empresa minera y la población empezó en 1995” (Azamar 57).

3.2.1 “El corrido” as Theatrical Genre

From Santander’s comments to Frischmann and Crew regarding his concerns about contemporary militarism and the incorporation of increasing numbers of young men into the army, *Los dos hermanos...* is clearly intended to be a comment on the audience’s present. Like

Ramona... the historical narrative is prefaced by the presentation of a present-day situation that is resolved through the re-telling of history. In *Los dos hermanos*... the catalyst for events is a group of young musicians, described as “facha clase media” (133), who arrive in the small town of “El Mineral” and begin to sing a corrido for the public about “los hermanos Rodríguez”. The song describes two brothers in love with the same woman who end up shooting at each other in a cantina, driven by drunkenness and jealousy:

La culpa fue de Rosita
que empezaron los rencores
y es que, en cuestión de amores,
la cosa es bien conflictiva
cuando la hembra es de dos hombres (134).

As they sing, the public becomes increasingly angry, “*No pueden terminar. De la agresión verbal, el público intenta pasar a la agresión física*” (134). The crowd is dispersed and the young people ask an elderly man, Policarpo, for an explanation of the event. This prompts Policarpo to tell them that the corrido refers to real events that took place in the town, but that the song misrepresents what happened and the people involved, that is why the people are angry. They beg him to tell them the true story, and as the events of the story unfold, the narrative cuts back periodically to the young people and Policarpo who plan to re-write the corrido together so that it will reflect the true story more completely.

There is a productive nexus created, then, between the play as a historical narrative and the form of the corrido, as a traditional story-telling form. Santander actually describes the play as a corrido, “*Los dos hermanos*, pues siendo un “corrido” también no deja de ser un espectáculo político-musical [...] Todo el que escribe un teatro de estas características en cierta medida está

creando un género diferente” (124). Santander’s comment is provocative insofar as he leaves unexplained in what way he thinks of his play as *being* a corrido. The corrido famously acquired a historiographic function during the Mexican Revolution since it served at the time (and during the 19th century) as “el periódico de los analfabetos” (Reuter qtd in Lira-Hernández 36). In fact, Antonio Avitia Hernández defines the corrido as “composiciones poéticas narrativas históricas populares”, since corridos often narrativize real events, thus serving as a form of historical memory, as well as a source of information (Lira-Hernández 31). Not all corridos are historiographic, however, and Vicente Mendoza prefers to define them as “un género épico-lírico-narrativo, [...] que relata aquellos sucesos que hieren poderosamente la sensibilidad de las multitudes” (Mendoza 9). Santander’s play is a corrido insofar as it can be thought of as a poetic, popular, epic, historical narrative that tells the story of events that deeply offended the multitude.

However, Santander is not only staging a corrido, he is also interrogating it. The play accuses the corrido of misrepresenting the people. Through Policarpo’s correction of the corrido, the play stages a discussion of a popular cultural form, implicating the audience (inevitably consumers of the genre, in one form or another) in its consideration of what the corrido means to who. Policarpo asks the young musicians, “¿a quién se le ocurre venir a contarnos de una manera tan insultativa la historia de nuestras gentes?” (136). The young people did not know that the place referred to in the song as “Tierra Brava”, was the local name for the region:

LOLA: Y nosotros pensamos que como menciona Matehuala que está junto, les haría ilusión.

POLICARPO: ¿Cómo ilusión? Si además de falsear la imagen de nuestro pueblo, insultan la memoria de los dos hermanos, y hasta la de Rosaura, a la que pintan como una casquivana. Ya ni la amuelan, aquí se les quería mucho” (136)

Policarpo's defense of Rosaura's reputation revises the moralizing character of the corrido, since Policarpo does not defend her chastity, but her person. By declaring that she was loved by all, he humanizes her without conditions. Policarpo's revision is also an intervention in the audience's reality. "El corrido de los dos hermanos" was written by Juan Mendoza, probably around 1950²⁶, which has an identical narrative of two brothers who fight over a woman and end up facing each other in a shootout. In the original corrido, the characterization is much less subtle, the problem is between "dos hermanos muy buenos" and "una mala mujer", who is the first to be shot and killed in that version. If they have heard the song²⁷, there is a clear parallel between Rosaura and the nameless "mala mujer" of the original, and the audience are invited to mistrust the simplistic and binary representation of the original corrido. It would not have mattered if the audience were not familiar with Mendoza's song; John Holmes McDowell has pointed out that there is an entire sub-genre of "corridos" structured around the theme of 'Los dos hermanos' (20). Furthermore, as Maria Herrera-Sobek notes in her feminist study of the corrido, it is common that in the corrido form, "[t]he patriarchal order shines through the violence directed at recalcitrant women who challenge male authority at a dance or in the privacy of the home. Women who are different from the 'good' daughter, wife, or mother pay with their lives for their audacity in deviating from established patterns of feminine behavior" (Herrera-Sobek 117). Whether, the audience have heard the original or not, Policarpo models a feminist approach to the corrido form.

The young group of musicians had not considered that the corrido could have an emotional or historical meaning, with the power to hurt or anger. If they thought the people

²⁶ The song is included in the section "Corridos (1880-1950)" of *Omnibus de poesía mexicana* (Zaid 222-223). Mendoza died in 1978, thus the song definitely pre-dates the play.

²⁷ It is likely that they would have been, Juan Mendoza was a member of the Trio Tariácuri who performed in films, and on TV and radio from the 40s to the 70s. *El corrido de los dos hermanos* was also covered by Vicente Fernandez.

would be happy to hear Matehuala mentioned, they did not consider how the people might feel about the image that the song presents of the region; much less how they would react to hearing that representation sung from the mouths of outsiders. They did not consider these things because they could not imagine the song having an embodied meaning. They question Policarpo further:

JULIO: Bueno, usted habla de insultos: pero fuera de Rosaura con la que sí podrían tener algo de razón, yo pienso que el corrido, en realidad, no insulta a nadie.

POLICARPO: ¿Qué no? Según ese corrido, en este pueblo somos una punta de borrachos pendencieros que arreglamos todo a balazos

JUAN: Hay muchos corridos que dicen lo mismo

POLICARPO: Sí, pero no de nosotros. [...] No espero que me entiendan, pero, el sucedido de los dos hermanos, que no es tan simple como ustedes lo cantan, cubrió de dolor a este pueblo, un dolor que nos marchitó a todos (136).

The indifference of the young people to the corrido, then, is not only a question of them being outsiders who could not have been expected to know the local history. There is a more important question of their lack of embodied knowledge with respect to the corrido form. They have heard similar representations of small-town life over and over in corridos, but they have no embodied connection to those stories. Where the villagers hear iterations on a theme, the middle-class youths hear repetition: A shooting is another shooting, a drunk is another drunk, and a whore is

another whore. Policarpo offers the young people concrete referents for all of these archetypes²⁸, so that they might better understand the town and its people.

With respect to the deeply violent, “macho” image that the song presents, Policarpo intervenes that violence is not the only definition that the people have of masculinity, “Lo que en general yo siento mal, es que se dé una idea equivocada de lo que para nosotros es la hombría ... yo creo que es más hombre andar excavando en galerías de más de diez kilómetros de profundidad” (137). When the Julio repeats the line, “Y con dos que se encuentren basta”. Policarpo laughs and says “según ustedes, aquí....

(Aparecen dos borrachos. Se miran provocadoramente.)

BORRACHO 1 ¿Qué me ves, hijos de la chingada?

BORRACHO 2: ¡Lo feo que estás, y lo más pior que te voy a dejar!

Se matan a balazos

POLICARPO: No, en este pueblo se dio la violencia, y mucho, pero por razones muy distintas (137).

Policarpo goes on to explain how the mine workers were incited by the administration of the mine to protect their jobs by entering into a violent confrontation with the agricultural laborers whose lands were being filled with run-off from the mine, resulting in sixty-two deaths. Another important correction to the corrido that the play makes, then, is the role of capital in rural violence which goes unreported.

In his review of research carried out by numerous academics on the corrido genre, Alberto Lira-Hernández has pointed out that, in studying corridos, it is fundamental to appreciate the huge complexity and diversity of the genre, citing, “la imposibilidad para establecer un

²⁸ I draw here on Maria Herrera-Sobek’s use of archetypes in her feminist study of the corrido (Herrera-Sobek)

concepto que lo abarque en su totalidad [...] el corrido no es un fenómeno uniforme y tampoco generalizado en todo el territorio nacional, ya que hubo zonas como en los estados de Yucatán o Chiapas, donde su producción fue escasa o nula” (32). However, the only category that he agrees is truly indispensable for the study of the corrido is that of place. He refers to the work of Catherine Heau whose defines the genre as, “el conjunto de cantos considerados como originarios de la tradición oral local o regional, o producidos por cantadores y letristas reconocidos local o regionalmente, por oposición a los cantos procedentes de otros países” (Lira-Hernández 31). Lira-Hernández notes that her definition is particularly important because “enfatisa la zona en la que se producen los corridos, aspecto fundamental y constitutivo de éstos, además resalta, de igual forma, la contraposición con lo ajeno o extranjero como una manera de delimitar al fenómeno en sí” (31). What Heau points to in the corrido then is its power to create a sense of belonging and identity that is intimately related to place, as well as history, and is about the exchange of local stories and characters. The young musicians are outsiders because they do not understand or respect the social function of the corrido.

Throughout the play, the encounter of Policarpo with the young, middle class musicians has appeared to be a reflexive encounter in which stereotypes and misconceptions have been torn up and the new song has been devised as an expression of their solidarity with the townspeople. However, the play ends with a tremendous betrayal of that performance:

JULIO: Pues, le quedamos muy agradecidos, don Policarpo.

POLICARPO: Quedan con bien, y que dios les bendiga. *(Sale). (Julio abre la grabadora, saca las cintas y las tire a la basura)*

TOÑO: *(Asombrado)* ¿Qué siempre no la vas a usar?

JULIO: No pinche historia, tendríamos que hacer una ópera... además, yo no creo que esas cosas aún sucedan en México... (*Recoge su guitarra*) Tenemos que encontrar algo más auténtico, recatar nuestro folclore (177).

Because it would be impossible to write one corrido that took account of everything that Policarpo has told him, Julio rejects the material as useless. He has failed to understand that Policarpo's story was not a corrido in itself, but a critical introduction to the embodied meanings contained by the corrido genre from an expert. Julio does not believe Policarpo, he rejects his experience, and in doing so he also rejects the experience that he has had with Policarpo and everything he could have learned from him. The young people have served as an on-stage extension of the audience, and the end seems to function as an uncomfortable accusation directed at audience. If they do not agree with Julio, then they must ask themselves, how they interpret the play's reflection upon the corrido genre.

3.3 THE CROSS AND THE SWORD IN *Y, EL MILAGRO*

The final piece in Santander's Teatro Campesino genre, *Y, el milagro* (1985), opens on an embattled group of rural "guerrilleros" who are decimated by an army ambush. Their leader Genaro Rojas is shot but makes it to the local parish where he is cared for and hidden from the army who continue to comb the area looking for him. The priest incorporates Genaro into the parish, telling the General that he is his nephew who is also a priest, thus the "guerrillero" becomes a religious leader in the town, upsetting the balance of power as he inevitably practices his radical politics from the pulpit. As Frischmann describes it,

[La obra] indaga en los mecanismos brutales de control político practicados por el ejército en México, y apoya el concepto de un cristianismo progresista a través del cual los curas asumirían de nuevo el rol social y políticamente combativo de Cristo al luchar, junto a sus feligreses, contra las injusticias perpetuadas contra el pueblo” (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 121)

The work becomes a discussion of the political potential of the Church. The play makes no claims to historicity as such but references the revolutionary struggles of Mexican *campesinos* by naming the central character and community leader, Genaro Rojas, after the historical figure, Genaro Rojas Vázquez, a prominent leader of the rural guerilla in Guerrero during the 1960s. He said of the play:

El milagro, sin ser una experiencia real, tiene puntos de vista que me han tocado vivir de cerca en mi contacto con el campesinado, en mi contacto con la Iglesia de los pueblos, en mi contacto con los sacerdotes que van a hacer trabajos al campo, o que les toca una parroquia provincial. Quizás menos es el contacto, mucho menos que en *Los dos hermanos*, que es mucho más una visión más cercana a lo histórico que *El milagro* (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 124).

Unlike, *El corrido de los dos hermonos* which makes an explicit claim to historicity, despite being heavily fictionalized, *Y, el milagro* has a well-known historical figure as its protagonist yet carries a disclaimer below the list of characters, “Los caracteres y acontecimientos en esta obra son ficticios. Cualquier semejanza con hechos reales o personas, es mera coincidencia” (183). While this may have been simply a legal issue, to protect Santander from the accusation of misrepresenting the historical Genaro Vázquez Rojas. Under the circumstances, it feels like an ironic statement, and there is a curious symmetry in the fact that *Los dos hermanos...* carried the

opposite epigraph and was about the vindication of historical experience, whereas this work embeds a well-known historical figure in a purely fictional narrative. Again Santander's work deliberately uses the idea of history as a strategy in his "games of proximity or distance" with the audience (Rancière, *The Politics...* 90).

The play premiered on the 12th July 1985 in Teatro Jiménez Rueda (Moncada, *Así Pasan* 372), winning "Obra del Año por la crítica mexicana²⁹", and for Santander, "Director del Año por su labor correspondiente" (Santander, "Estoy casado con..."121). The play, along with *El corrido de los dos hermanos* and *El extensionista* was also performed by the Milwaukee Repertory Theater in April of 1988 (Stephens). The Teatro Jiménez Rueda is located in the very center of Mexico City, close to Bella Artes on Paseo de la Reforma and surrounded by other theaters and museums. It would have been hard to have a better location for the play, and the play's highly controversial material.

With respect to the Church, Santander said in an interview:

cuando escribí *El extensionista* me preguntaban: "¿Y la Iglesia?". Y yo decía que no es cuestión de sólo hacer un comentario con respecto a la Iglesia, sino de estructurar toda una obra de teatro sobre la Iglesia. Su actitud y sus actividades en estos momentos son muy importantes pero muy complejas también. No se puede hablar de la Iglesia como un bloque solo, sino como una fragmentación ideológica que con mayor o menor intensidad se ha ido formando y trabajando en todo lo que sería el mosaico latinoamericano. Lo que yo tomé para *El milagro* es la discusión actualizada de lo que sería la teología de la liberación, y hago un enfrentamiento

²⁹ Asociación Mexicana de Críticos de Teatro

con los puntos de vista de una Iglesia y de la otra (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 122).

The interview was in 1987, and Santander’s sense of the complexity of the role of the Church “en estos momentos” may well have been influenced by the Mexican Church’s increasing support for the ‘sufragio efectivo’ movement. In 1986, the PRI committed their most blatant act of fraud in the Chihuahua state elections. The PAN, who had been poised to win, fought back with a hunger strike, and high profile protests that brought together the parties of the left and right (Aguayo Quezada 258-261, 272-277). Starting in Chihuahua, bishops from around the country released public statements condemning the corruption and lack of transparency surrounding the election and demanding that the government defend the “human right” to properly administrated elections. In 1986 a document titled “Declaraciones de los Obispos Mexicanos” was published in a national newspaper stating, “Nuestro país, para actuar coherentemente, debe responder al compromiso contraído varias veces en foros internacionales, de salvaguardar los derechos humanos” (271). The Church’s sudden interest in politics, however, should be understood in light of the fact that Chihuahua was, above all, a defeat for the PAN and the wealthy entrepreneurs with whom the party associated. Since the PAN’s inception, the party’s key figures had been closely associated with the leadership of the Catholic Church (Tirado). Santander’s comments about the Church in 1987 likely reflect an awareness of this nexus of interests, as well as an understanding of how important the Church’s stance could be in influencing public opinion.

Chihuahua had still not happened in 1985, when Santander wrote and directed *Y, el milagro*. However, elements of the Church had been invoking human rights discourse since the 1960s. In 1983 a booklet titled ‘Votar con responsabilidad’ was printed in Chihuahua and was

distributed throughout the country, informing priests that, “un voto consciente, libre, respetado y mayoritario, puede llegar a cambiar radicalmente la fisonomía de nuestro país” and clarifying how priests were allowed to engage with politics. I include an extended quote from the text because it sets out so plainly what the Church’s political position was in 1983, that it provides invaluable understanding of the context into which Santander wrote *Y, el milagro*. The booklet included a series of questions and answers in order to guide priests, and their parishioners, as to what the Church would consider an appropriate political intervention:

1. ¿Puede la iglesia participar en la política? La Iglesia ... siente como deber y derecho estar presente en este campo de la realidad (la actividad política): porque el cristiano debe evangelizar la totalidad de la existencia humana, incluida la dimensión política. [...]

11. ¿Pueden los Pastores de la Iglesia ordenarles o indicarles a los laicos por cuál partido deben votar? No. Porque la Iglesia reconoce la debida autonomía de lo temporal [...]

14. ¿Es un deber de todo ciudadano católico votar en las elecciones? Sí, es un deber [...]

17. ¿Se agota la participación de los electores con la acción de votar? No. La misma acción de votar requiere una previa formación crítica de la consciencia para analizar las situaciones, los partidos y los programas. [...]

20. ¿Cuáles ideologías actuales son incompatibles con la fe cristiana? Actualmente en México tratan de influir, a través de diversos partidos, dos ideologías que son incompatibles para el cristiano, a saber:

-El liberalismo capitalista

-El colectivismo marxista.

También trata de influir una ideología que se ha desarrollado en varios países de América del Sur, que es

-La ideología de la Seguridad Nacional

(Aguayo Quezada 262).

The church, then, has declared itself for political activity but against the preference for any political party; and for the critical formation of citizens, but against Marxism. In addition, the Church must labor under the idea that liberal capitalism and discourses of national security are foreign to the Mexican experience (which is essentially to deny the experience of the “campesino”). In fact, to deny a Mexican discourse of national security was quite an audacious act of forgetting³⁰, Peter Watt describes the Cold War terminology used in the media throughout the 1960s and 1970s, “‘National security’ validated all manner of horrors, and the crimes committed against ‘subversivos’, ‘anitmexicanos’, ‘terroristas’, ‘comunistas’ were duly relegated to the memory hole of the national press” (Watt). I do not know whether Santander read this document, but he was certainly intimately familiar with the position of the Catholic Church in the 1980s and, as stated above, the play was based on his experience with the church in rural areas. Thus, this declaration serves to illuminate to contemporary readers why Santander chose to bring the Church into direct contact with the “guerilla” in his play. Santander’s play presents the hypothesis that the political doctrine of the Catholic Church, that declared itself in favor of

³⁰ One is tempted to wonder if the reference to the Southern Cone is a red herring so that the Church can say they disapprove of the government’s counter-insurgency activities without falling foul of the security services themselves. If so, this would be entirely coherent with the principled but cowardly characterization of the priest Padre A. Mena that Santander gives us in the play.

universal political rights but against Marxism, is not viable when brought into direct contact with reality.

The play takes place in “la parroquia de Santa Catarina” in “Tierra Caliente”, the lowlands of Guerrero, Michoacan and Estado de Mexico. The priest, Padre Armando Mena’s main objective is that his sermons, like his name, should be “amenas”, but to his frustration and incomprehension, church attendance in the parish continues to decrease. The church is faithfully attended, however, by the families of General Maurilio García, Ataúlfo Ramos (Municipal President) and Alonso Villaluengo (owner of a local textiles factory). Padre Mena is at the beck and call of their wives, known as “Las damas de Perpetuo Socorro”, and is accustomed to accept large donations from the unholy trio. The first scenes in which he appears present him as meek, bullied and bought by them:

ELENA: ¿Lo ves? Valió la pena insistirle al padre para que tocara el tema del respeto en su homilía. Nos dedicó casi medio sermón”

[...]

GENERAL: [Al padre] Nuestros trabajos pueden complementarse: yo imponiendo el orden social y usted haciendo que la gente entienda el por qué de mi trabajo. (*Levanta la voz*) Y aquí tiene nuestra colaboración para su iglesia, son cincuenta mil pesos (189).

Before Genaro Rojas arrives at the parish, the Church serves the rich; not because Padre Mena is cynical or self-interested, butw because he ignores the political implications of his work, attempting to please everyone and only pleasing the rich and powerful.

Donald Frischmann has noted that in all the plays of his *teatro campesino*, Santander makes use of some kind of narrator. In *El extensionista* it was the “Cancionero”, in *A propósito*

de Ramona it was Ramona herself, in *El corrido de los dos hermanos* both Policarpo and the “Maestro” serve the function. Santander explained his frequent use of this strategy as follows:

En realidad lo que busca mi teatro es una economía de todo lo supérfluo. [...] el hecho de concretar toda una acción—voltearse hacia un público y regresar otra vez a la acción—me permite en muchos casos ese ahorro que estoy buscando todo el tiempo en el texto. (Santander, “Estoy casado con...” 124-5).

However, what Santander describes as explanation is also an act of interpretation, with his narrators serving to draw the audience’s attention to what the author and director wants them to see. The narrator is someone the audience can trust and an important element in Santander’s aesthetics of solidarity is the complicity of the narrator with the audience. This changes in *Y, el milagro*, because the narrator figure is the General. The play opens with the direction “*El general se enfrenta a un jurado popular*”. The General stands before a “jurado campesino” accused of being responsible for a massacre on 28th January, although the audience does not find this out until the end. The first thing the audience sees on the stage is the General saying “No, señores, no estoy de acuerdo con el procedimiento para juzgar mi actuación como comandante en jefe de la novena zona militar” (185). The General is not present for the entire play, but his role as narrator only serves to condemn him further, since he must account for his inconsistencies and explain the horrific acts of violence committed by the army, such as the torture, murder and disappearance of Padre Mena’s nephew, Toño. As Toño is tortured on stage, the General declares to the audience/jurado, unconvincingly, “Yo estoy en desacuerdo con las prácticas de tortura; pero ahí sí, en cierta medida, todos somos culpables: a nosotros nos presiona la opinión pública” (208-9).

As Herrera Calderón and Cedillo, among others, have noted, the Mexican “Dirty War” is still only beginning to be talked about; it is remarkable then that, in 1985, Santander was staging a trial of a military General and talking about the disappeared. Yet 1985 was not the 1970s, as Watt writes, “Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, whose son Jesús, along with hundreds of other young men and women, was disappeared during Echeverría’s presidency, found it practically impossible to get the media to address the subject of the Dirty War in the 1970s” (Watt); in 1982, however, the remarkable Ibarra was the presidential candidate of the “Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores”. Santander may have taken a decision that the audience were ready to see some harder truths about Mexico’s revolutionary past. The following statistics provide some context for what Santander is referring to in his play:

Around 3000 people were disappeared or murdered by the state in Mexico between 1969 and the mid-1980s. According to the *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (CNDH), perhaps as many as 1000 people went missing, around 800 of them now confirmed as disappeared (CNDH 1998: 752). In the state of Guerrero alone, 600 people are reported as having disappeared. Disappearance involved getting rid of every shred of evidence that the victim ever existed; one of the camps for political prisoners, the *Campo Militar Número 1*, according to the *Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana* even had its own crematorium (2006: 635) (Watt).

It is very important to note, that the 1985 audience would probably not have had such a clear sense of the numeric extent of the government’s counter-insurgency campaign. Much of the information that has enabled estimates such as these only became available in the 21st Century

(“Informe...”). For some audience members, the discovery of Toño’s body in a mass grave might have even seemed far-fetched:

GENARO: Cada zona militar cuenta con un cementerio clandestino, para enterrar a los detenidos... con los que se les pasa la mano.

El general se enoja

GENERAL: ¡Y claro que tenemos cementerios clandestinos! ¡Estamos en guerra!

(214)

Y, el milagro, then, while claiming to be telling a completely fictitious story, is in fact presenting its audience with the still secret, forbidden and entirely true history of the Mexican Dirty War.

3.3.1 Church/Theater/Politics

Y, el milagro exposes the horrors of the Mexican Dirty War, but it also gives Genaro Rojas a chance to speak directly to an audience that may have had very little information about the dirty war. There is very little doubt that the audience would have been familiar with the figure of Genaro Vázquez Rojas (1933-1972). Even though he died in 1972, a newspaper report from 1985 indicates that the public still remembered the man whose “guerilla” kidnapped Jaime Castrejón Díez, rector of the Autonomous University of Guerrero and owner of bottling companies Coca-Cola and Yoli for eleven days, and famously succeeded in forcing the Mexican government to release nine political prisoners from Mexican jails to Havana, Cuba, and pay a large ransom (“Lo que empezó...”; Holmes McDowell 59). Beyond such high profile escapades, however, it is unclear how much the audience would have known about the political project of the “guerrillero”.

One of the ways in which Santander brings the reality on stage closer to that of his audience is by comparing and overlapping the space of the church, with that of a theater. As noted above, Padre Mena is extremely frustrated about low attendance at mass. In the following extended quote, he expresses to his housekeeper and confidant, Margarita, that he has tried everything:

PADRE: Tú has visto lo que hago por ganarme a la gente [...] tomé clases de actuación para manejar bien mi cuerpo y enfatizar correctamente. De voz, para corregir mis defectos de dicción. [...] hace algún tiempo leí que a los presidentes americanos los maquillan para causar una mejor impresión en sus presentaciones para causar una mejor impresión en sus presentaciones públicas. [...] Es importante la imagen que uno proyecta. Ahora mismo estoy estudiando un libro de semiótica. [...] es una ciencia que está muy de moda en el teatro.

MARGARITA: ¿Y qué tiene que ver el teatro con que no venga gente a la iglesia?

PADRE: La misa es, de cierto modo, una representación teatral; por lo que entre mejor se realice escénicamente, se cuiden los detalles y sea más amena, es posible que más público acuda”

Margarita is doubtful, she does not think much of imitating American presidents to talk to the people of the village and tells him that wearing make up in the pulpit will not help his case. The scene gently makes fun of the theater, but draws its audience closer with its reflexivity. The audience may remember the priest’s theory about polished theater attracting the best audience, and wonder if they agree. The church, now, has become a stage.

Santander does not agree with Padre Mena. The priest is hospitalized and away from the church for several months following the discovery of his nephew's body. Upon his return he finds the church full, "¿Por qué hay tanta gente en la iglesia? ... Cuando pasé por allí, Genaro les hablaba con gran energía... ¿tienen algún mítin político?" Margarita replies, "No, están en misa" (219). The priest is shocked and dismayed, "lo que yo no pude lograr" (221), he comments. Genaro has filled the church, not by wearing make-up or worrying about his presentation, but because he has an authentic vision.

It is in the unfinished theater that Genaro is building behind the church where Padre Mena and Genaro finally confront their differences. Genaro explains how he had thought to make the space malleable by mounting benches on to mobile platforms that could be arranged according to the needs of the performance,

GENARO: ... De esta manera, el mismo espacio podría ser utilizado para teatro, cine, fiestas.

PADRE: Mítines políticos.

[...]

PADRE: Te señalé claramente los peligros de mezclar religión con política.

GENARO: La religión y la política siempre han estado mezclados; la religión siempre ha sido política, y la política, religiosa. [...] En tu iglesia no se ha oído nunca el discurso de algún político, salvo de Cristo, ni encontrarás un libro de Marx, o de Lenin... Lo único que hemos hecho es analizar y discutir nuestra realidad, ¿está prohibido?

Genaro proposes that what he does in the church is exactly what Santander has said that he does in the theater, "Mi obra es una obra de teatro que pretende enfrentar a un público con una

realidad y sacar de allí las conclusiones, llevarlo a que discuta, a que analice, a que democráticamente la gente vaya usando el teatro para pensar” (Santander, “Estoy casado ...” 123). For Genaro, as for Santander, the church and the theater are both the correct places for political meetings, because there is no place where politics is not.

Herbert Blau writes in “The Impossible Theater”:

[Politics tries] to prevail against stalemate ... [theater]takes us through the formal experience of stalemate ... Yet the theater, because it is an art, has the potentiality of collective power without limit; it can imagine into being such stuff as dreams are made on, good dreams and bad dreams, what politics may someday come to and what politics must try to avoid (Blau 6).

There is a stalemate in the history of Mexico. Armed struggle has tried to prevail, over and over. In these plays, Santander tries to find ways through the stalemate, taking a tiger’s leap into the past. There are good dreams and bad dreams, but in Santander’s dreams, the “campesino” is never to blame for violence because armed struggle is always the last option; they are not responsible for the stalemate, but neither are they victims, they are “un pueblo que más bien busca la paz”.

4.0 CHAPTER 3: PERFORMING ARCHIVES IN *LA LEY NO ESCRITA* AND *MEXICO-USA*

In 1996, ten years after the publication of his *Teatro Campesino*, a further five plays were published together in the volume *De los perjuicios que ocasiona el narcotráfico*. These plays marked a shift away from the analysis of rural problems, and towards a documentation of corruption within Mexico's political class. The shift seems to reflect an interest in exploring, and casting some doubt on, the conditions for democratic reform in Mexico. The previously mentioned 1977 "Ley Federal de Organizaciones Políticas y Procedimientos Electorales" (LFOPPE) allowed for the registration of political parties, and, as limited and problematic as it was, the movement for 'sufragio efectivo' began in earnest, gaining momentum throughout the 1980s. Furthermore, by 1982 the government was withdrawing from the dirty war in the countryside; in 1983 Miguel de la Madrid dissolved the "División de Investigaciones para la Prevención de la Delincuencia" (DIPD), the secretive organization responsible for disappearances and violence throughout Mexico during the 1970s (Herrera Calderón and Cedillo 8; Castillo García). These developments in Mexico's political panorama may have influenced Santander in withdrawing from visions of an armed and empowered *pueblo*. His work during the second half of the 1980s, seems to counter the hopeful idea that Mexico was on the path to democracy in order to present a darker image of a Mexico in thrall to the forces of transnational capital and unremittingly corrupted by greed.

Curiously, the volume's title proposes that it is narco-traffickers that will be the target of the plays' opprobrium. This is misleading; more accurately, it can be said that the plays are explorations of the conditions that gave the cartels' such prodigious power in the mid-1980s. What the title does capture, however, is the tone of the volume; these are tenebrous, violent accounts of life under neoliberal dictatorship. I propose, however, that they are also pedagogical exercises in the critical reading of the narratives constructed by the media and the state.

In this chapter I will consider *La ley no escrita* (1987) and *México-USA* (1989); two plays that make use of media documentation, real and invented, in order to undergird their claims about the complicity of the state apparatus *and* narco-traffickers in the production of general anomie and violence and laundered profits, on both sides of the border. Both plays invite the reader into the media's archive, interacting self-consciously with the mediatic production of Mexico and its crass cast of stereotypes, to construct alternative readings of stories about Mexico. I interpret the ways in which the archive and the repertoire are put to use in these plays as an invitation to the audience (and the readers- who include theater practitioners participating in performances of these plays) to view the archive as a performance of one kind of truth, and the performance as an archive for other truths less spoken.

4.1 LA LEY NO ESCRITA: A PLAY ABOUT AUTHORITARIANISM, CONSENSUS AND DEMOCRACY

Felipe Santander's 1987 play, *La ley no escrita: Pesadilla en dos actos* follows a Príista civil servant known as H who is taken from his home in the middle of the night and imprisoned without charge. Thus, begins an odyssey through Mexico City's underworld at the end of which

it is acknowledged that his arrest was in error and he is returned to his office and assured, “aquí no ha pasado nada” (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 132). At the end of the play, in his office surrounded by his memories, H climbs into a cardboard box and shoots himself. I have no information about performances of this play, and Santander stated in 2001 that the play had never been produced thanks to soft censorship from the Writer’s Union (SOGEM) who assured him they would produce the play but never did (*Three Plays* 67). However, Guadalupe Carranza claimed in an interview given shortly after Santander’s death, that he did direct a production of the play, probably in Mexico City since she associates only *Mexico-USA* with their years in Cuernavaca (“Los sueños inconclusos...”). My analysis will consider how aspects of the play might have been understood by Mexican audiences of the late-1980s, since his prologue to the play references the political developments taking place during that period and his own comments on the play make evident that it was very much written for a contemporary audience. He writes that, “the first scene of the play, the suffering in prison, and the wandering through the streets in the second act can be taken as pure Mexican folklore of the 80’s. The central characters are well-known in Mexican society- so that to try and separate what is real and what is fiction would be quite difficult” (Santander, *Three Plays* 66). With respect to the back and forth that Santander provokes between what is real and what is not, I propose that it functions to engage the audience in a critical analysis of society, its ills and its objectives. Taking my cue from Santander’s reference to *la corriente democrática* in the prologue, I analyze how the play positions itself in relation to the politics performed by the movement for *sufragio efectivo*.

4.1.1 Authoritarianism and “La corriente democrática”

Santander chose to make apparent, at least to the reader, that *La ley no escrita* was written in dialogue with a very specific political moment. The following preface, from the 1996 publication, is both enigmatic and explicit in its description of the event that the play is a comment upon:

El 4 de marzo de 1987 frente a la opinión pública y medios masivos se dio a conocer, oficialmente, por el presidente del Partido Revolucionario Institucional, la existencia de una legislación no escrita que rige los destinos de nuestro país. Sabíamos de su existencia, la palpábamos en el hecho diario pero, su promulgación pública aún causó sorpresa en este país de sorpresas. La historia de H es un homenaje del autor a esa ley no escrita (Santander *El perjuicio...*, 49).

The preface’s deliberate obscurity is tantalizing. Santander provides no more details as to the content of the unwritten law; only a date, March 4th 1987, and a title, the president of the PRI. There is enough factual information that the reader senses they *could* track down the cited speech-event, that the record must be somewhere in the media archive. The reader is deprived, however, of immediate access to the specifics of the event; they are left wondering what they missed, what is the content of this unwritten law. Thus, the prologue serves only as an opening riddle, nagging the reader to decipher the relationship of the play to real events. I write ‘the reader’, because there is no instruction to include the preface in the performance of the play. This itself raises the question of whether this ambiguous preface was only meant for readers, directors, actors, or if it is also meant for the audience. Without access to the prologue, a theater audience would still have had the opportunity to consider the question implicit in the title, *La ley*

no escrita, with respect to the existence of the unwritten law. The prologue serves to emphasize the mystery already present in the play's title.

Since it is unwritten, the law must exist only through practice, through its unending repetition. The play presents its audience with a catalogue of institutionalized injustices (unlawful imprisonment; torture and rape by justice officials; corruption; a cartel boss running his business from an opulent prison cell) and asks what these diverse practices have in common. Which singular practice is responsible for the destiny of the nation, since as Santander claims, it is “una legislación no escrita que rige los destinos de nuestro país”? It is up to the audience to decide which is *the* unwritten law, to distinguish the archetypal transgression upon which the rest are modelled. The ambiguity of the preface is the source of its power, as it invites the reader into a critical, questioning relationship with both the play-text itself (they must try to distinguish fiction from reality) and the practices they recognize as forming part of the Mexican experience of the law (what is the unspeakable truth that must be articulated in order to make sense of all these abuses?). Thus, the play proposes that the truth will appear in the back and forth between what is recorded and what is witnessed.

The dialectic that the prologue provokes between fiction and reality, is intimately intertwined with the dialectic that it fosters between archive and repertoire. Through his reference to the 4th March 1987, Santander invokes the archival record to provoke a reflection on the embodied practices that constitute the repertoire of power. Diana Taylor has pointed out that the archive has long been the privileged term in the creation of knowledge because it is assumed to remain unchanged across time and space and “succeeds in separating the source of “knowledge” from the knower” (19-20). As Taylor theorizes it, the archive is built from, “supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)” (19), and is usually

called by other names: history, narrative or text. Taylor opposes archive to repertoire, which she states, “enacts embodied memory: performance, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing” (20); like memory it is thought of as non-reproducible and relies on presence or witnessing, the transmission is via participation. Repertoire is live and cannot be “captured or transmitted” through the archive, just as it cannot transmit the archive either. Santander makes efficient use of the privilege of archive, but he does so in order to turn the reader’s attention to the embodied knowledge transmitted by the performance on stage.

The cited event was an embodied performance of political power that has been incorporated into the archive as text, the record of a date and a title serves as testament to the truth of the event, “El 4 de marzo de 1987 frente a la opinión pública y medios masivos se dio a conocer, oficialmente, por el presidente del Partido Revolucionario Institucional ...”. The line tells the reader that the event was recorded first in the mass media and, now here as the date and title repeat and record anew the event. Santander frames the event as a provocative performance, one that revealed too much and has brought some dark secret to light; as he presents it, the PRI have made public the fact that the written law is not the supreme authority in Mexico: “la existencia de una legislación no escrita que rige los destinos de nuestro país”. By citing the event and then immediately eclipsing its content with his own interpretation, Santander sets forth an example of how the archive can be appropriated and set to work for different purposes than those for which it seems to have been intended. Nevertheless, the prologue is perhaps more an exercise in emotional pedagogy, than critical thinking. Although Santander models how the archive can be curated, he is opaque about the specifics of what he is citing. Once the record has been cited, the prologue becomes increasingly dramatic: “Sabíamos de su existencia, la palpábamos en el hecho diario pero, su promulgación pública aún causó sorpresa en este país de sorpresas”. By

performing collective surprise, Santander seems to make believe with his reader; he pretends that everyone (or whoever is included in his 'nosotros') has interpreted the event of 4th March 1987 in the same way. The 'we' is deliberately indefinite, it could include all Mexicans, or it could be a more exclusive 'we', designating only 'those of us who know such things'. The reader is included in the experience of surprise, they are part of the 'we' that knows about and experiences this unwritten legislation, "la palpábamos en el hecho diario". Santander's 'we' obliges the reader-citizen to position themselves in relation to the "news" that the rule of law in Mexico has been undermined; they either know exactly which event he is referring to and can choose whether they truly agree with his interpretation of it, or they do not know what he is referring to and have to take his word for it. In short, Santander's lack of transparency and his confident claim to truth imitate the techniques of the mass media which, in thrall to power, teach their audiences how to think about current events. The mass media edits and frames the archive in order to enact its conservative political pedagogy. Santander performs the same methodology of truth production but for the purpose of securing the reader's critical engagement with *practice*. While Santander's practice is not transparent, nevertheless, I would claim that its objectives are opposite to those of the mass media. By pressuring his reader to locate themselves in relation to that 'we', Santander is implicating the reader personally in the politics of the play, thus securing their participation in the fiction-reality dialectic through which they will draw their own conclusions about what practices best define Mexican civil society.

March 4th 1987, the date Santander records in his teasing prologue, was the last day of the 13th National Assembly of the PRI; during the Assembly Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas gave a speech that echoed the calls of others from within the PRI, starting with Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (Aguayo Quezada 298), to implement a transparent, democratic process in which party members would

vote to select the PRI's presidential candidate. Cárdenas' criticism of the PRI's centralized (and elitist) grip on power was unyielding. Making the argument for a renewed and participatory culture within the PRI, he reasoned:

La participación democrática de los militantes en la selección de los candidatos del Partido a los cargos de elección popular en todos los niveles, favorecería el desarrollo de vínculos efectivos entre los dirigentes políticos y las bases, y establecería entre ambas partes además, un claro compromiso ideológico, esencial en una representación verdaderamente democrática (Aguayo Quezada 299).

Cárdenas proposal struck right at the heart of the PRI's power structure. Open elections within the PRI meant bringing an end to the tradition of *tapadismo*, whereby the incumbent president named his successor, a decision that was made according to no criteria other than personal taste.

This was how Mexico had chosen its presidents since the Revolutionary era; Lorenzo Meyer dates the practice back to 1929 and the presidency of Elías Calles (Meyer 15). At that time, he claims, the candidates campaigned openly for the presidency, although the ultimate decision lay in the hands of the President. He attributes the special secrecy surrounding *el destape* to President Ruiz Cortines and his surprising announcement of Adolfo López Mateos as his successor in 1957. Meyer contends:

de ahí en adelante, lo mejor que podían hacer los miembros del partido en el poder que aspiraban a recibir el apoyo del primer príista- el del Presidente- era negar en público su aspiración a la presidencia e insistir que su única ambición- y máximo honor- era continuar sirviendo “al Señor Presidente” hasta el último minuto de su mandato. La hipocresía fue elevada entonces a la categoría de gran político... y ahí sigue (Meyer 15).

El tapadismo, as Meyer points out, was seen by critical observers as the provenance of the lack of transparency and culture of hypocrisy in the Mexican political structure; its inherent authoritarianism prohibited precisely the “clear ideological commitment” that Cárdenas advocated for.

Cárdenas’ words elicited a violently authoritarian backlash from the PRI leadership. The president of the PRI’s Nacional Executive Committee (CEN), Jorge de la Vega Domínguez, responded to Cárdenas that same day (4th March 1987) in a vitriolic closing speech:

[e]n la institución presidencial convergen las tendencias más responsables y progresistas que dan sentido a la dinámica de la Nación. [...] éste es una institución producto de nuestra experiencia histórica y un instrumento poderoso de nuestra voluntad colectiva ... Nuestro presidencialismo, enmarcado en el principio de la No Reección, ha demostrado su eficacia y su capacidad de perfeccionamiento como pieza central de nuestra organización política” (Aguayo Quezada 299).

Vega Dominguez attempted to simultaneously defend the concentration of power in the President and the PRI’s democratic credentials; thus allowing the “integrantes” of *la corriente democrática* to define the territory on which the battle would be fought: “No toleraremos que se invoque la democracia que practicamos para trastocar nuestra actividad partidista. Desde esta gran Asamblea decimos a todos los que de aquí en adelante no quieren respetar la voluntad de la inmensa mayoría de priístas, que renuncien a nuestro Partido” (Aguayo Quezada 300). In his attempt to justify the autocratic practice of *tapadismo* and the centralization of power in the figure of the President, de la Vega Domínguez publically acknowledged a practice that had been built on silence.

La ley no escrita describes an authoritarianism that stretches from the top of Mexican politics down into everyday practices. The example in the play that most obviously exemplifies the prejudicial effects of political authoritarianism is at the end of the play when the audience finally meets “La Señora”, H’s boss and the person responsible for his imprisonment. “La Señora” is busy issuing threats to the staff who are preparing her nephew’s party, and is irritated by the constant phone calls from her office, “Doctor, ¡le dije que no me pasara ninguna llamada! No ve que tengo que preparar la fiesta de Quique” (126). Finally, “La Señora” tells the “Doctor” to send Enríquez to represent her in a Ministry meeting, this is when she finds out that she has sent H (who is Enríquez) to prison, “¿En la cárcel? [...] No, yo sería incapaz, es un hombre muy serio y decente; ¡además es escorpión! [...] (*le gana la risa*) pobre Enriquez, qué pena; no, seguro que me entendieron mal. ¡Que lo reinstalen de nuevo! ¿Como que cómo? Pues quitan de allí al licenciado y ya” (128). Everything that happens to H, from being arrested to being tortured, to losing his family and becoming indebted to a cartel boss, has been the consequence of a mistake, made either by his despotic and incompetent boss, or by one of her unquestioning subordinates. The attribute which defines the President of Mexico is his absolute power over the lives, “los destinos”, of others. De la Vega Domínguez tells us that his decisions are not to be questioned. In *La ley no escrita*, this law permeates the political power structure and is entrenched as the definition of power; to have power is to decide the fate of another, to imprison them or to promote them, but all in silence and with no questions asked.

H is abused by the caprices of “La Señora”, but he is not himself innocent of the abuse of power. Tellingly, when he is arrested, H tells the agents, “[e]sto le probaré que mi arresto es un error [...] mi nombramiento oficial en el cargo que actualmente desempeño” (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 62). When this is ignored, H articulates more clearly that he is threatening the officers,

“[c]uando menos cien personas trabajan conmigo, y tengo relaciones a muy alto nivel ... en unas cuantas horas esta casa se llenará de periodistas [...] ¡ya verán, desgraciados, les van a echar hasta el ejército!” (63). Santander deliberately provokes the pathetic comedy of this confrontation by allowing H’s arrogance to get the better of him in the face of the arresting soldiers’ indifference to his privilege. H’s assumption that his position in the PRI offers him a special immunity from the law is matched by the impunity of the soldiers who enter his home in the middle of the night to arrest him. They are the law because whoever they represent is higher up than H; when H asks what he is being arrested for, they reply, “No lo sabemos” (61). It is then, by the fact they do not need to answer his questions, that H understands that he must submit to the agents; it is they, not he, who represent the state.

In his analysis of sovereignty in Mexico, Gareth Williams writes that the power of the Mexican state to silence the other is foundational to the postrevolutionary state which has relied since its inception on “the permanent application of state power in the construction of the social order, rather than on the self-limitation of state power via a legal system guaranteeing individual rights and limiting public power” (11). In fact, as Arnaldo Córdova puts it, in Mexico, “the law not only legitimizes the state, it breaks down all the barriers that obstruct the state’s practice ... In Mexico democracy means conciliation of, and by no means disagreement with, power” (11). By taking us back to the original consensus that “ended” the Mexican Revolution, Williams’ analysis clarifies that the law in Mexico is the tool that forges the necessary level of consensus so that the state (occupied by the PRI) can continue to exist. Williams is circumspect about the usefulness of biopolitics for dealing with the exercise of power in Mexico, He sees biopolitics as too closely tied to liberalism, and its core principle of self-limitation of government, to properly

describe a history determined by the authoritarianism of the state, rather than its limitation. He writes:

In biopolitics, sovereignty has become so profoundly socialized that it orientates everyday life, via the exercise of reason, toward the bourgeois pursuit of good order, well-being and prosperity [...] sovereignty has become increasingly dispersed and de-centered yet at the same time increasingly entrenched in everyday life (8).

The society that *La ley no escrita* presents us with is one in which the arbitrary application of the law has become a generalized social custom, to such an extent that anyone with any possibility of appropriating the authority of the state can and will do so. The authoritarianism of the state reproduces itself at every level, with surreal and tragic consequences. I would propose, not necessarily in disagreement with Williams, that, based on *La ley no escrita*, biopolitics is applicable to a Mexican context if the terminology is re-drawn. In a Mexican context, sovereignty is defined as the authoritarian exercise of legal power, and “the bourgeois pursuit of good order, well-being and prosperity” becomes “the national pursuit of good order and prosperity”. Thus, using these terms the authoritarian exercise of legal power can be dispersed throughout society and its use by *any* individual coincides perfectly with the interest of the sovereign and therefore the nation.

The following example from the play illustrates what I mean by the “socialization” of authoritarianism, and how the pursuit of the always-coincident individual and national interest functions at the everyday level. After his release from prison thanks to “El Capo”, H walks the streets of Mexico City dressed in the orange overalls of a Mexico City maintenance worker. As he loiters, awaiting the mysterious ‘instructions’ from El Capo’s associates, he observes the

street life that happens around him. A traffic cop stops a driver for passing a stop sign, then accuses him of speeding, and finally of driving drunk. When the driver replies in frustration to the litany of accusations “Usted sabe que eso no es verdad”, the traffic cop smiles and replies “es su palabra contra la mía” (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 100). The policeman has made explicit his impunity and yet when the driver questions the request for his documentation, the cop takes out a thick file, “Me voy a permitir leerle el reglamento de tránsito” (101). The reading of the rulebook is a performance that underlines that he is an agent of the state and his power rests on the law. The policeman is acting in bad faith and in his own interest, but he is also reinforcing the authority of the state, its prerogative to interpret the law and its right to apply the law arbitrarily. Eventually the driver is cowed by the litany of accusations being heaped upon his head: “Resistencia a la autoridad [...] empleo de lenguaje soez” (102). He offers a bribe which is negotiated and accepted. Through the traffic cop’s arbitrary imposition of the law, the sovereignty of the state is expanded, not diminished.

As the traffic cop moves to leave, the driver suddenly stands, dons a military cap and demands to see the traffic cop’s military service record. The astonished traffic cop does not have it with him. The previously submissive driver is now the higher authority and he can behave in as arbitrary a way as the policeman has done, “Es su palabra contra la mía! *Lo jalonea y empuja con brusquedad al interior del auto. ¡Andale, cabrón, métete ya, que vas a ver el trato que les damos a los remisos rebeldes*” (104). Like H, the policeman has been transformed from representative of the law into “remiso rebelde” in only a few moments. This final line offers a nod of recognition to the state’s persecution of political progressives, and simultaneously demonstrates how the interest of the individual (revenge, in this case) coincides with the defense of the national interest (one less subversive on the streets). It does not matter that the policeman

is not a subversive, it matters that the authority of the state to decide who the subversives are has been reinforced. This is the socialization of authoritarian sovereignty in Mexico. Power in this authoritarian regime translates into power over meaning, hence the emphasis given to the law and its interpretation. Here, when the policeman is marked as a political subversive, the term “rebelde” is emptied of meaning. The enforced consensus of the Mexican state raises the problem of how to oppose it: when anyone can become an enemy of the state, how do citizens demonstrate their opposition or acquiescence to the state?

4.1.2 Authoritarianism and Justice: The Problem of the Victim

In his introduction to the play, Hugo Argüelles suggests an affinity between *La ley no escrita* and *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, going so far as to call the play a Mexican version of that novel (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 12-13). Despite the many divergences in tone and plot between the two works, the comparison, nevertheless, is a fruitful one. Kafka’s novel leads the reader into a symbolic labyrinth in which the language of the law’s representatives is impenetrable nonsense, and yet the authority to judge, that the law imbues them with, is made abundantly clear. This loss of control over meaning and interpretation causes Josef K to become paranoid and he increasingly believes that his every action is being judged by those around him as evidence of his guilt,

He sometimes thought he saw the deputy director, who was always watching, come into K’s office, sit at his desk, look through his papers, receive clients who had almost become old friends of K., and lure them away from him, perhaps he even discovered mistakes, mistakes that seemed to threaten K from a thousand directions when he was at work now (Kafka 143).

In this example, we see K's inner thoughts begin to mirror the performance of the law: prosecution, defense, judgement.

The fact that Josef K is being harassed by an authoritarian entity is not disputed, but the novel also subtly examines how Josef K is complicit in his subjugation via the construction of his own victimhood. Ultimately, Kafka's K seeks the approval of his attacker, the court, and the court functions as a metonym for the political power structure. Near the end of the novel, the court chaplain tells him a fable which he says appears in the opening paragraphs of the law; following the fable, Josef K and the priest debate the possible interpretations of the fable. They disagree, and the priest scolds him, "[y]ou shouldn't pay too much attention to people's opinions. The text cannot be altered, and the various opinions are often no more than an expression of despair over it" (157). Josef K feels oppressed by the priest's knowledge of different commentators' theories about the story, despite hearing that there is no definitive agreement of what this story means. As he is leaving the priest, again, reprimands him, "the court doesn't want anything from you. It accepts you when you come and it lets you go when you leave" (159). His words here disavow the violent threat the law poses to its subjects. The priest is no impartial authority and he does not pretend to be; he tells Josef K that he belongs to the court, and. Nevertheless, the indifference that he claims for the court is a significant counter to Josef K's egocentric performance of victimhood. In the context of the novel, his words reveal how effectively Josef K has built his own prison (holing himself up in his office as much as possible); with very little persuasion from the forces of the law, he has destroyed his own integrity, both social and psychological.

According to the priest, the fable is the opening paragraphs to the law, but, by extension, the law is revealed to be a fable. Before this ambiguous fable and its infinite interpretations,

Josef K has prostrated himself, he stands for nothing and for no-one. The so-called justice system is unjust, yet K participates in its charade, perhaps (as the priest suggests) lending it even more power by refusing to imagine that it is unjust, or that justice could come from outside of it. The priest tells Josef K that he has more freedom than he imagines, “it lets you go when you leave”, he says, but Josef K cannot leave. To make the point, he becomes upset that the priest will not lead him to the exit. What happens to Josef K cannot be called just, much less justice: he is murdered in the final chapter of the novel. Nevertheless, even he seems to understand this end in terms of his decision, perhaps even desire, to be a victim of the state, “K. now knew that it would be his duty to take the knife as it passed from hand to hand above him and thrust it into himself. But he did not do it [...] this final shortcoming was the fault of whoever had denied it to him” (Kafka 164).

In his reflection “La idea de justicia”, Alain Badiou clarifies the problem of a definition of justice that is conditioned by the existence of a victim. Not only, he claims, does this lead to a negative conception of justice, but what he calls an “ética de la víctima” requires that somebody is judged to *be* a victim. Badiou explains, “la idea de víctima supone una visión política de la situación; en otras palabras, es desde el interior de una política que se decide quién es verdaderamente la víctima ... Por lo tanto, no podemos partir únicamente de la idea de víctima, porque víctima es un término variable” (Badiou). As Badiou points out, the subjective nature of *who* is the true victim does not resolve itself when that duty is delegated to the victim themselves:

sabemos que hay diversos tipos de quejas -esto es algo que el psicoanálisis ha estudiado: la queja neurótica, la queja que justamente no plantea la cuestión de la injusticia (lo que Nietzsche llama "resentimiento") y que no crea ninguna justicia.

Con frecuencia esta queja es una demanda al otro, y no es realmente un testimonio de injusticia.

In untangling the problem that the victim poses as a foundation for the definition of justice, Badiou signals the equally nebulous nature of injustice; it is not only justice which is hard to define, the problem of the one is the problem of the other. A subject who designates themselves as a victim is making a claim about whose experiences deserve to be recognized. If their claim is accepted by the judiciary as an example of injustice, it contributes little to the definition of justice, it tells us only which victims, which experiences and which bodies, are sanctioned by that political system. For Badiou, for the idea of justice to be present, “se hace necesaria una definición de la humanidad más amplia que la propia víctima. En otras palabras, es necesario que la víctima sea testimonio de algo más que sí misma”. Justice is not practiced by a series of individual judgements via which victims passively allow themselves to be approved of or not, and incorporated into the political order dictated by power. Justice appears when the victim makes a claim that is not only individual, but is linked to the experiences and rights of other subjects, when that claim announces itself as a reconfiguration of the political order.

Josef K is responsible for constructing his own victimhood, not only because he designates himself as a victim, but also because of the political allegiance that he performs by making his only objective that of being recognized as a victim by the court. What makes its appearance in the novel as a psychological alignment with the logic of law, K’s paranoia, demonstrates a political alignment with the ideology of a violent and arbitrary state; that is, a desire to be recognized “desde el interior de una política”, as an innocent. K examines himself and finds that he is what the state wants him to be; it is on this basis that he demands “justice”.

It is important to point out at this juncture that Kafka and Santander are writing from, and into, radically different contexts. Furthermore, the prologue of *La ley no escrita* announces Santander's commitment to using his writing as a way to speak back to state's assertion of power-above-the-law, and his interest in proposing practices that undermine the enforced consensus of the state. However, analysis of *The Trial* provides a theoretical foundation for approaching *La ley no escrita*, because it is a searing satire of the law itself, what it claims to be, and what it is. Kafka maps the collaborative effort that generates injustice; on the one hand the jealous power that claims for itself the right to interpret the law, on the other, the self-proclaimed victim who cedes their interpretive claim.

Unlike in Kafka's novel, H is physically and forcibly imprisoned without charge and tortured. However, H's discourse of victimization precedes his arrest. The opening scene presents him in his house, before he is arrested, lamenting to his wife that his superior, "La Señora", treats him unfairly; she is capricious, unpredictable and unjust:

es muy difícil cumplirle bien a alguien que improvisa y se contradice todo el tiempo [...] Cuando en tu misma cara te dice: "desde la semana pasada te supliqué atender este asunto" ... y tú te deshaces en disculpas por tu negligencia respecto a un asunto del que tienes conocimiento por vez primera (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 54-55).

In his description of the terrible treatment he receives from "La Señora", H speaks of the deeply authoritarian and arbitrary political culture of the PRI, but also reveals his own obsequious behaviour within it.

H complains of the stress his high position causes him (52-55); but, as a civil servant in the PRI, his high position is almost a synonym of corruption. As Ilán Semo, political historian at

Universidad Iberoamericana, bluntly put it a recent statement, “[b]eing a politician in Mexico is the equivalent of winning the lottery in the public imagination” (Agren). The props that Santander places in H’s home (cognac, a television in the bedroom, “sexy” underwear) indicate that statement was as true in crisis-ridden, 1980s Mexico as it is today. The suggestion of a consumerist lifestyle, beyond the means of most, is further implied by the setting of H’s house in Ciudad Satélite. The location is specific and deeply significant to inhabitants of Mexico City. Ciudad Satélite is an upper-middle class suburb of Mexico City originally built in the mid-1950s in imitation of the modern, car-friendly suburbs of the USA with large plots, wide streets, sweeping curved blocks and a shopping mall at its center. It is instantly recognizable by the “Torres de Satélite”, five enormous concrete towers that mark the entrance to the city-suburb. Luis Carlos Sánchez describes some of the features of the “*american way of life*” with which Ciudad Satélite came to be associated, “La cultura del mall, el culto al automóvil y cierto consumismo exacerbado forman parte de los rasgos que unen a los habitantes de esta zona al norte de la Ciudad de México” (Sanchez). This perception of the *satelucos* is coherent with Ciudad Satelite’s origins; Carlos Monsiváis claims that the suburb was built for, “esta clase media en crecimiento, como deseosa de crear formas insulares de vida, o pequeñas aldeas medievales de la modernidad” (Monsiváis). The surging aspirational middle class that Monsiváis describes with such disdain, were the standard bearers of the so-called “milagro mexicano”, the name applied to the period during which Mexican politicians turned their backs on the revolutionary promise of land reform and the pro-labor policies of Lazaro Cárdenas’ presidency. Miguel Alemán Valdés, president from 1946 to 1952, was responsible for a period of intense industrialization throughout the Republic, yet, as Alejandro Quintana points out, such ‘miraculous’ growth was accompanied by the consolidation of the practices that have come to

define Mexican politics: “corruption, violence, patronage and cronyism” (121). Yet, Ciudad Satélite was doubly significant; it was not only the urban landscape that represented the pro-capital politics of the 1940s onwards, the whole development stood on land originally owned by barely ex-President Miguel Alemán. As Monsiváis’ recounts, Ciudad Satélite was practically a case study in corruption:

Miguel Alemán era el dueño de los terrenos, como era el dueño de muchísimas otras cosas. Y uno, entonces, atribuía a Ciudad Satélite a uno de esos proyectos de expansión urbana de crecimiento, marcados por un proyecto de acumulación capitalista muy voraz, y con los tintes de corrupción que implicaba la cercanía incestuosa entre el funcionario y el empresario. Pero en ese momento no había tanto registro crítico de lo que significaba que un político acumulara fortunas.

(Monsiváis)

Alemán felt comfortable enough with the lack of “registro crítico” to inhabit one of the largest houses in the new neighborhood (his family continue to occupy the residence to this day (Chávez González); and as Liliana Vásquez notes, there was no attempt by the politician to conceal his private fortune, “[t]odos los que tengan relación con Ciudad Satélite sabrán lo que se cuenta, que al lado de la Comercial Mexicana está la casa de Miguel Alemán, contarán la historia de que alguna vez vieron doblar la calle a una fila de meseros mientras se preparaba alguna fiesta.” (Monsiváis). Ciudad Satélite is chosen by Santander because, for the inhabitants of Mexico City, it simultaneously signifies presidential impunity, acquisitiveness and the exchange of the Mexican dream for the American one.

The emphasis on H as a consumer can be thought of as the counterpart to his willingness to become a victim. Returning once more to Badiou’s theorization of justice, Badiou refers to

Aristotle's definition of a slave as one whose ideas belong to his master, therefore, the slave is a body separated from thought. For Badiou, when the recognition of an injustice requires the spectacle of the victim's suffering body, the human being is reduced to nothing more than a body; a human being separated from an idea, principles, his creative potential. With respect to the forms this separation takes today, he proposes:

Yo me pregunto, por lo tanto, si a través de la definición del cuerpo del sufrimiento, a través de la figura de la víctima como único soporte de la idea de justicia, no estamos en camino de crear una nueva esclavitud, que yo llamaré la esclavitud moderna. La esclavitud moderna es el volverse un cuerpo de consumo o un cuerpo víctima. De un lado el cuerpo rico que consume, y, del otro, el cuerpo pobre que sufre, un cuerpo separado de sus ideas, separado de todo proyecto universal, separado de todo principio (Badiou).

A definition of justice that is based upon what Badiou names an ethics of the victim, then, is one that de-humanizes everyone as our projects become reduced to either consumption or suffering. For Badiou, justice is when the body is not merely a body, it is a body connected to ideas, a body that participates and creates; this connection, participation and creation are social, not individual. We are made human, more than bodies, by our relation with the human community. There can be no justice then, if we look at the spectacle of the body, and see only the objects that the body is connected too. Following Badiou, the fashioning of our identity and our exterior connections through consumption is not a practice which leads us, collectively, towards justice.

Badiou's definition of justice is important because it shows the consequences, and also impossibility, of depoliticizing the body. As H continues to worry about his job, his wife is more interested in serving them drinks and putting on a porn film (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 56).

The audience watch the couple watching the porn film, and the playwright's directions make evident that the experience should be graphic; they read, "*H suda y la lengua se le retuerce entre los labios. Su mujer lanza gritos y gemidos*" (56). For a Mexican audience in central Mexico in the late 1980s, accustomed to censorship of sexual content on TV and in the cinema, as well as a tradition of highhanded moralizing from their political leaders, the scene can be seen as a commentary on the hypocrisy of the PRI and the decadence of the political class in general. If H's position and privilege were not already cause for ambivalence (not to mention disdain) towards the couple, this scene seems designed to interrupt any possible sympathy between H and the audience. The same ambivalence that interrupts identification with the couple also interrupts the potential for the pleasurable contemplation of their bodies. The success of that interruption would be a question of performance (of course the scene could be staged to be pornographic), but the script suggests a presentation of their bodies that is deliberately vulgar, bordering on the grotesque and (after the banality of their conversation) perhaps even bizarre. While even sexual intimacy has become an act of consumption for H and his wife, the audience's possibilities for pleasurable consumption are being foreclosed. Later, when soldiers enter H's home in the middle of the night to arrest him, they rape H's wife in the course of his arrest (58-63). H is taken to prison, tortured horrifically, then thrown into a cell without finding out what he has been arrested for. He is raped himself while in prison (77). If the performance rejects the logic of pornography in this initial sex scene, it can use this as a foundation to reject an aesthetics of the victim and portray political violence without reducing H and his wife to spectacles of suffering.

In considering what is at stake in the unappealing presentation of H and his wife, I turn to Rancière's description of "the ethical turn". For Rancière, the political feature that defines the ethical turn suppresses the division between right and fact, between that which is politically

defined (right), and that which exists without being politically defined (fact)³¹. For Rancière, the suppression of this difference is called consensus. Consensus reduces the people to the population and “incessantly works to fill in all these intervals between right and fact through which the right and the people are divided” (115). In the ethical community, forged by consensus, it is an imperative that everyone must be included; thus, the excluded threatens the community, by “the mere fact of being alien to it, of not sharing in the identity that binds us all” (116). The political community, by contrast, has a place for division and conflict, the subject who disagrees is, “an actor who includes himself as a supplementary political subject, carrying a right not yet recognized or witnessing an injustice in the existing state of right” (117). The ethical community is terrible in its “absolute rejection of the other” (117).

H readily designates himself as a victim even when he is clearly in a position of considerable power; thus, his claims of mistreatment and injustice do not seem entirely trustworthy. This is reinforced later in the play when it is reported in the newspapers that he has been accused of embezzlement (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 75), and his mother writes him a letter in which she reveals that he has been entrusting her with considerable sums of money in the form of “centenarios” (87). Yet everything about his arrest and imprisonment is arbitrary and unjust. As in Kafka’s novel, the penal system is neither fair nor righteous, on the contrary, it is characterized by extreme violence. In *La ley no escrita*, the audience can recognize H’s right to not be tortured or imprisoned without charge, but if they do so it will not be because of personal sympathy with him, or the pleasurable sympathy generated by the consumption of his victimized body. The audience will view the horror of H’s story, if they choose to recognize it, in terms of

³¹ Returning to the question of biopolitics, these categories are arguably quite similar to Agamben’s formulations of bios and zoe (Agamben 1995), although Rancière does not describe them in quite the way that I have.

the facts it presents. By not allowing the audience to wholly identify with H, nor wholly reject him, the play gives the audience the experience of forming part of a political community.

Nevertheless, H views himself as part of an ethical community; he is outraged at the suggestion that he does not belong. When the *príista* is asked what he is accused of, he replies “No sé de qué... ¡pero, soy inocente!” (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 71); the content of the accusation is absolutely irrelevant because he cannot be other to the community. H’s sense of injustice stems from his belief that his loyalty to the party has earned him protection from the horror to which others are submitted. His response to finding out that he is a political prisoner accused of embezzlement is petulant frustration, “Es que no es justo! ¡No es justo!... ¿cómo han podido hacerme esto?... ¡están destruyendo mi vida! [...] ¡Diez años de entrega total al partido! [...] Diez años con la sola idea de servicio...” (75-6). There is nothing in his response that exceeds himself, his life, his choices. H is not indignant on behalf of the political prisoners; he is not indignant that his political rights have been violated, he is indignant that this horrific wrong has been committed against *him*. Like Josef K, his journey is a desperate search for approval from society’s institutions. K and H do not behave as men accused of a crime, they behave as men wronged by the very accusation that they, as individuals, could have displeased the authorities. For them, it is a case of mistaken identity, they have been incorrectly categorized as *other*; thus, they invoke their obedience as proof of their belonging, and the source of their supposed immunity from prosecution.

H’s understanding of his situation, however, is shown to be part of a broader culture of confusing the legal with the ethical. H’s cell mate, a political prisoner known as El Maestro, reveals to H that he is accused of embezzlement. El Maestro shows him the front page of a newspaper which carries the headline, “¡Continúa la campaña de moralización; alto funcionario

detenido ayer, al parecer, por el delito de peculado!” (75). Via the newspaper (not his legal representatives) H receives the only substantial information about his case. Yet the newspaper is also being parodied as an excessively enthusiastic mouthpiece for the state as the headline brings into existence the “campaña de moralización” and files H within the category of those judged immoral. The newspaper replaces the court in judging H, and ‘morality’ replaces ‘legality’ in the state’s mediatised discourse of self-presentation.

This is the context in which H chooses to present himself as a victim. Understanding that he has become ‘other’ to the ethical community, H submits himself to the justice system, awaiting the judgement from above that will restore him to the community. He does not ask if the man sharing his cell deserves to be tortured, attacked, imprisoned; it is enough for him to know that *he*, H, does not deserve to be here. Just as H constructs his experience of injustice as entirely personalized and divorced from any legal or political understanding of rights, so does he seek to demonstrate the apolitical nature of his victimhood. When El Maestro talks about the formation of a political party to represent the workers (apropos of the 1977 LFOPPE reform, we may suppose), he exclaims, “Un partido politico, ¿aquí?” (77). He does not recognize the PRI as a political party, and apparently does not understand his work within it as political. The issue is not whether H is sincere or not in this understanding; it is evidence of how successfully the state has de-politicized its activity and forged consensus. Wrongful imprisonment and torture do not change H’s political perspective, and after experiencing both he still introduces himself to his cellmate, El Maestro, as “un institucionalista convencido” (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 74).

For H, his victimhood implies that any and all means are justified in the course of minimizing the wrong (this is not the case with K whose paranoia turns him into his own policeman). H reasons that his choices and his behavior have been ideologically obedient to the

sovereign state. On this basis, he decides he deserves to have his privileges reinstated, by whatever means necessary. Thus, when he is tortured, he confesses to everything. Later, when he enthusiastically accepts the help of shady characters such as “Big Shot” and “Capo”, he performs an incongruous naivety, as in the following exchange:

CAPO: Estás metido en un lio grueso, pero te voy a sacar. Ya lo verás.

H: Algún día podré pagarle todo lo que está haciendo por mí.

CAPO: Sí, mis hombres te van a decir cómo. (97)

The exchange is followed by the following stage direction: “*H queda pensativo, tratando de captar el sentido en la última frase del Capo que le sonrío enigmático. Al fin se retira de ahí. Tras él sale un hombre enfundado en una gabardina negra*” (97). It is difficult to take seriously this gesture of unworldliness in someone who has spent years working in the Mexican government, but perhaps coherence is not the point. This incongruity can be seen as part of the push and pull of the performance that works against facile designations of H as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. H is neither an innocent nor a cynic, he is a depoliticized subject who has been taught that his only imperative is to pursue his own interest. It is not a question of excusing H, but of presenting him as an example of how authoritarianism dissolves the concept of “right” by purging words of meaning (“subversive”, “rebelde”) and reducing subjects to bodies that consume in order not to be consumed.

4.1.3 Democracy or Consensus? The Problem of the Victim

As Badiou recognized, the selection of the victim (the one whose human rights must be defended) is always a political decision, but this reality becomes distorted by an ‘ethical’ approach to the victim, that is the logic that the victim is the one who signals injustice, and thus

justice is a world without victims (Badiou). Rancière makes a complimentary argument with respect to the de-politicizing gesture present in human rights discourse. For Rancière, the problem with the humanitarian demand made by the invocation of human rights is that it confuses a political conversation (who has what rights) with an ethical conversation in which any action is justified if it undertakes to “protect the security of the factual community” (117). Since the “factual community” is everybody, the assumption is that it does not matter who is being defended because everyone is entitled to their human rights. Thus, human rights become a tool for enforcing consensus as right and fact become indistinct from one another. Furthermore, via human rights discourse the designation of the victim is disguised as an apolitical decision. In practice, this translates into impunity for those who claim to be “protecting human rights”, and human rights becomes the ethical cloak for political decisions about who is a victim and what justice looks like. None of this should suggest that there are not very valid causes that have made use of human rights to achieve positive changes; the point is that they are not politically neutral ideas, yet the discourse around them has sought consensus at every turn, and thus allowed them to be used in ways that violate and diminish them. Rancière claims that human rights were “rejuvenated in the 1980s by the dissident movements of Eastern Europe” (117). However, human rights discourse surfaces simultaneously in 1980s Mexico as part of the movement for ‘sufragio efectivo’ and becomes the term around which opposition to the PRI coalesces.

The movement for ‘el sufragio efectivo’ saw both ends of the political spectrum unite in the struggle to end the PRI’s dictatorship (Aguayo Quezada 258). Sergio Aguayo writes, “[e]n los sexenios de Echeverría y López Portillo el sistema sí se abrió y crecieron las organizaciones civiles que defendían causas de lo más variado. Aunque tenían una gran diversidad ideológica, el concepto unificador fue el de los derechos humanos (Aguayo Quezada 229). Religious groups, in

particular el Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social (Cencos), formed in 1964 with close ties to the Catholic Church, were the first to bring the phrase ‘human rights’ into their condemnation of state violence (229). On the left, groups demanding amnesty for political prisoners and the recognition and location of “los desaparecidos” also began to use human rights in their claims. One of these organizations was “El Comité Nacional Pro-Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos” who closed their 1978 open letter in *Proceso* with the cry, “¡Por el pleno respeto a los derechos humanos y políticos del pueblo de México!” (233), demonstrating that, in 1978 at least, the left did distinguish between human rights and political rights. The invocation of human rights was, at least in part, a strategy that aimed to expose the hypocrisy of a regime that during the 1970s denounced human rights abuses in Spain and supported popular, democratic governments in Central and South America, while repressing in the most violent way possible any political dissent at home (238-245).

In 1984 the Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos was founded by Rodolfo Stavenhagen, returning to Mexico after three years working for UNESCO, and Mariclaire Acosta, of Amnesty International. Stavenhagen contextualizes the need for human rights, and in particular an organization to promote human rights in Mexico, as follows, “Habían pasado los heroicos años de las luchas anticoloniales por la liberación nacional, se había desgastado el discurso sobre los cambios revolucionarios de regímenes totalitarios o burgueses; en todas partes surgían movimientos sociales democráticos” (282). For Stavenhagen, then, human rights discourse is understood as an evolution that succeeded and surpassed the logic of anti-colonial, revolutionary struggle. Mariclaire Acosta remembers the work of the Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos was very much influenced by her experience in Amnesty International and followed a similar pattern of reviewing individual cases of human rights abuses and working to

put them in the public eye. For Acosta, human rights work represented not only an evolution but a radical break with the collective projects of the left, in an interview recorded in 2012 in Colegio de México, Acosta explains:

[Con la Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos] abrimos un espacio para los derechos humanos, los legitimamos. Hasta ese momento los derechos humanos eran algo subversivo, marginal, despreciado [...] [e]n un siglo como el siglo XX que era el siglo de números, de las estadísticas, de las abstracciones ... esa despersonalización de las ideologías que se manejó en el siglo XX se rompió de tajo con la perspectiva de los derechos humanos cuando se centra en las personas (“Mariclaire Acosta” 00.10.54-00.11.30; 00.12.20-00.25.21).

Acosta and Stavenhagen’s comments demonstrate that, in the Mexican context, human rights discourse aimed to retain the humanitarian concerns of the left while divesting social movements of their threatening collective aspect. Aesthetically, their work seemed to reference the photos carried by the relatives of the disappeared, brought together in political organizations such as “El Comité Nacional Pro-Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos”³², but where these movements had derived their impact from placing the photos alongside one another and emphasizing their commonality, the human rights movement chose a politics of dispersed victims (the radical left wing was literally neutralized in death) as the platform for their building an alternative forum for consensus.

³² It is worth reiterating that human rights themselves are not what is objected to here, and not all campaigners who have disputed human rights abuses are guilty of de-politicizing discourse. Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, one of the founders of “El Comité Nacional Pro-Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos” as well as two-time presidential candidate, is an example of a campaigner who has invoked human rights while never abandoning the ‘ideological’ organizations and parties of the left that advocate class solidarity and economic reform.

The issue of 'sufragio efectivo' was brought to crisis-point in the 1986 state governor elections in Chihuahua. Sergio Aguayo Quezada calls 1986 "una primavera democrática" (258) due to the fact that parties of the left and the right were able to win local elections around Mexico. The PAN in particular looked likely to win the election for state governor in Chihuahua, where they had won significant municipal victories since 1983 (Aziz Nassif 9). When the PRI announced their victory in the Chihuahua election, the PAN, who were quickly becoming the protagonists of political opposition in Mexico, accused the government of perpetrating a fraud. After a meeting between Heberto Castillo, leader of the Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores and one of the most influential figures on the left, and members of the PAN leadership in Chihuahua, the "Foro por el Sufragio Efectivo" was formed on 7th September 1986 (Aguayo Quezada 273-4). The declaration announcing its formation was signed by twenty-one parties and organizations from across the political spectrum, including the PAN, the "Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores", and "El Comité Nacional Pro-Defensa de Presos, Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos". The letter emphasized the necessity "en primer término el respeto de los derechos humanos" (274). This was the context in which the PRI's left wing, with full knowledge of the consequences, began to publicly insist on the reform of the party's internal practices.

The concern of the 'sufragio efectivo' movement was not the internal democracy of the PRI, yet in his speech to the 13th National Assembly of the PRI, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was highly strategic in framing the progress towards democracy as an on-going project of the PRI, thus capitalizing on the wave of general discontent. The discursive territory of Mexican politics had been defined, from outside the PRI and in opposition to it, as authoritarianism versus democracy. Cardenas' speech re-located that dispute safely within the PRI. Cárdenas' speech

was not only performed for the PRI members present in the Assembly room; by acknowledging the groundswell that was occurring beyond the walls of the assembly, Cárdenas directed himself to that external, invisible audience and their demands. The confrontation was also indicative of the deep divisions within the party caused by the country's turn towards neoliberalism. Sergio Aguayo confirms that the changes from the late seventies into the early eighties had taken their toll on the party's cohesion, "[l]as crisis, las reformas económicas y la llegada de los tecnócratas a la cúspide del poder habían provocado grietas" (298).

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to feel cynical about the changes that took place in Mexican political discourse during the 1980s, but in 1987 the shifting panorama of alliances and the emergence of political alternatives with genuine traction seemed, however briefly, like an opportunity to break the PRI's suffocating monopoly on power. For the audience of *La ley no escrita*, H represents one, familiar, mode of citizenship. However, in the character of El Maestro the play proposes the existence of another possibility, one that claims to be the true inheritor of Mexico's conflictive and radical history.

El Maestro is H's cellmate but, unlike H, he has no interest in being a victim. When H meets him in prison, El Maestro is described as, "*descomunamente alto, de pelo blanco, que calcula las características físicas de los muros, al tiempo que apunta fórmulas matemáticas en la pared, con un gis*" (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 73). For El Maestro everything is political, even an earthquake; he announces ironically, "Pinche edificio, lo han de haber calculado en la Secretaría de Agricultura ... ¡otro temblor, para que se nos caiga esta mierda encima y pueden culpar a la naturaleza de la desaparición de todos los presos políticos!" (74). As H whines "Es que no es justo! ¡No es justo!... [...] ¡Diez años de entrega total al partido!" (75-76), El Maestro begins his lesson: "La violencia en la Universidad es sólo un reflejo de las inquietudes generales

del país, de la crisis en el campo, de la inconformidad en las fábricas...”. The stage directions read “*Las palabras del Maestro se grafican mediante el uso de película o diapositivas de los sucesos de 1968*” (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 76). The tension between the images of 1968 and El Maestro’s use of the present tense draws attention to the fact that, in the 20 years since 1968, the universities have not stopped resisting the government’s attempts to control them, the strikes in the factories keep happening and the countryside has gone from bad to worse (Flores Lúa; Peláez Ramos; Watt; Herrera Calderón; Ordorika).

El Maestro’s use of the present tense brings everything that 1968 stands for into the present of the play; 20 years of resistance is pressed into the now. He continues, “Sólo con tantos préstamos han logrado mantenerse en el poder; pero en estos momentos ya no pueden pagar ni los intereses de la deuda externa; [...] Por otro lado está nuestro proceso histórico que es inexorable”. Again his words are accompanied by a series of projected images, the script reads, “*Película o diapositivas de la Revolución mexicana*” (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 76). In El Maestro’s historiography of Mexico, the Revolutionary scenario is inescapable. It is presented simultaneously as both the foundational conflict and, through its necessary reiteration, the future of “nuestro proceso histórico”. El Maestro continues, messianic and galvanizing, “Las condiciones están dadas. Sólo falta un detonador, y nosotros lo tenemos: ¡un partido político! Que de verdad represente a los trabajadores [...] Tenemos experiencia en las luchas campesinas, en la organización obrera, con el estudiantado, y no nos hemos cruzado de brazos mientras afuera se agudizaban las contradicciones” (76-7). There is something deeply ambivalent in the conclusion that the formation of a political party to represent the workers should represent the culmination of the decades of popular and left-wing resistance.

The combination of El Maestro's communist lexicon and this somewhat conservative proposal (seemingly delivered as if it were an extremely novel idea) feels anticlimactic and flat. Given the number of left-wing political parties in Mexico, it is unclear if this would have been understood as an ironic comment on the limitations of the reform. Debate and criticism defined the Mexican left's reaction to the 1977 electoral reform (LFOPPE) with many in the guerrilla firmly denouncing the reform (Aguayo Quezada 221; 227), and the Partido Mexicana de los Trabajadores, the Partido Socialista Revolucionario, el movimiento de Unidad y Acción Socialista, and the Partido Comunista Mexicano eventually attempting to merge in order to qualify for registration (223-4).

On the other hand, there is a possibility that an optimistic audience might hear genuine expression of hope in the changes taking place in 1987 (though that optimism would certainly have been dampened by 1988). The ambiguity is further compounded in a later scene when El Maestro reappears to invite H to escape from prison. H refuses, saying, "He dedicado toda mi vida, toda mi capacidad a mi partido. Con ustedes no sabría qué hacer. [...] En este tiempo que convivimos juntos, he llegado a entender tus ideas, a valorarlas, y a usted le tengo un gran respeto [...] Estoy con ustedes pero desde el único trinchera que conozco" (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 86). Although El Maestro responds vigorously, "¡Esa no es una trinchera, es un pantano, una cloaca!", the scene ends with them wishing each other luck and embracing through the bars of H's cell:

Maestro: Pues, que tengas suerte... (*Sonríe.*) ¡enajenado!

H: Que tenga suerte... ¡buscabullas! (86).

The jolly scene represents the new political panorama in which interpersonal relationships and an unquestioning faith in democracy miraculously overcome irreconcilable ideological differences

between a teacher-terrorist escaping into that most rebellious of scenarios, “la sierra”, and an insipid, bourgeois politician in a masochistic victim-collaborator relationship with the state that has imprisoned him.

At the end of his essay, “La idea de justicia”, Badiou concludes, “una política justa es la consecuencia de dos afirmaciones: todo cuerpo soporta un pensamiento, todo el mundo es igual a todo el mundo” (Badiou). There is much that is ambivalent in the character of El Maestro, although what is unambiguous is how sharply the mode of citizenship that El Maestro represents contrasts with that of H. Whatever concessions he makes, El Maestro can confront his horror of what he calls “esta sociedad podrida” (86) and remain committed to a politics of solidarity and the consequences of entering into conflict with the state. At the end of the play, H is unable to reconcile what he has experienced of Mexican society with returning to his government office. When he crawls into the box and shoots himself, he performs the state’s work for it: if he does not share in the identity of the community, he cannot continue to exist. Ultimately, El Maestro is not the same as H, the play insists on making a distinction between them. El Maestro escapes prison³³ and H chooses not to.

4.2 MIGRANT BODIES AND ALTERNATIVES TO THE ARCHIVE IN FELIPE

SANTANDER’S *MÉXICO-USA* (1989)

México-USA: Drama policiaco en dos actos (1990), a murder-mystery-cum-political-thriller, was developed from 1986-1989 (based on the in-text citations and Huerta 1989). Santander’s

³³ El Maestro escapes prison in a laundry basket, thirteen years before El Chapo Guzmán made that exit route legendary.

most formally complex play, *México-USA* offers a critique of national politics and regional dynamics through the geopolitical labyrinth of the US-sponsored ‘war on drugs’. A police investigation into the mysterious death of a young woman known as Ruth Gordon unravels to the backdrop of “breaking news” reports of the progress of the Iran-Contra Affair (1986-7). The two narratives intersect in the second half of the play when the murdered woman, “Ruth Gordon”, reveals herself as Helen Esparza, a Chicana DEA agent who has discovered the collusion of U.S. law enforcement agencies in trafficking drugs to the US from Colombia via Noriega’s Panama. Her work has taken her into the heart of the Colombian drug-trafficking cartel, *Cártel de Medellín*, and she has discovered that a major drug shipment coming from Panama will be smuggled into the United States by plane, touching down in Missouri in a town called Mexico. On the eve of the delivery Helen is murdered by her own agency in Mexico, Missouri.

I argue that the two narratives deploy different modes of truth production in order to undermine the Reagan administration’s rhetoric in which immigrants and drug dealers figured as a single predatory invader. On the one hand, media documentation of the Iran-Contra Affair and the U.S. war on drugs (largely from 1986-7) is curated and satirized in order to frame the United States in the role of Latin America’s aggressor, rather than vice versa.

I pay particular attention to the historical events that the play references, in order to better analyze how the play might have been understood by a Mexican audience within the historical context in which it was performed. As in *La ley no escrita*, I claim that there is evidence to suggest that Santander is being pedagogical with his audience and modeling his deconstruction of media narratives in order to focus critical attention on the construction of ‘truth performances’ by the mass media, thus empowering the audience vis-à-vis these “documented” narratives by exposing the ways in which they mobilize *both* the archive and the repertoire.

México-USA premiered in 1990 in the Teatro Ocampo in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It was the first production staged by the students at Santander's newly-established theater school, Center for Dramatic Art and Specialized Studies for the Stage (CADEE), and, against all expectations, the play won three national prizes that year: Mexican Association of Theater Critics: Best Play of the Year, Best Production of the Year, and Best Regional Company (*De los perjuicios, Three plays*). The majority of the cast were students, although well-known actors, Socorro Bonilla, Hugo Larrañaga, and Miguel Ángel Zevada, were brought in from Mexico City to play the main parts and boost audience figures (Sanchez-Hernandez). The set was designed by Guillermo 'Billy' Barclay, an artist and sculptor, revered within the Mexican theater scene for his set design ("Guillermo Barclay. Semblanzas"). Given the sudden wealth of resources at Santander's disposal (conditions could hardly have been more different from the tight budget and stress of his days producing his *Teatro Campesino* in Mexico City), it is perhaps not surprising that the play made greater use of technology and high-concept set design than his previous work.

To my knowledge, this was the only occasion on which the play was produced. I have been able to uncover very little about the details of its staging, however, it should be noted that while writing the play Santander corresponded with eminent academic and director of Chicano theater, Jorge Huerta, while developing the play. Documents retrieved from the Huerta's archived papers (housed in Mandeville Special Collections Library, San Diego) show that Huerta and Santander exchanged at least a couple of drafts of the script with Huerta offering advice on staging the complex and ambitious play, in particular he advises Santander to lessen the amount of screen time (Huerta and Santander "*México-USA-Includes Notes*"). There are also documents about a reading that Huerta organized with Spanish-speaking actors from Los Angeles and San Diego which he planned to record and send to Santander. In one of his letters to the actors, titled

“What we are trying to accomplish” (dated 7th Jan 1989), Huerta tells the actors that one of the reasons for the reading in San Diego is “to react to it and to give Felipe that reaction [...] he is quite interested in what we, as *Chicanos y Mexicanos* living in the US of A think of it. He does not feel that Mexican audiences would be interested in this particular play” (Huerta 1989). There is no explanation of why Santander felt this way in Huerta’s missive, but in a newspaper article published a year later on 7th February 1990, he told a press conference that the play was a convergence of three concerns, the Iran-Contra Affair, the international drug trade, and, “los chicanos y hasta cierto punto su abandono cultural ... O sea, una cultura que les hace mucha falta y que no encuentran en los puntos donde radican. Los chicanos tratan de aferrarse a su cultura, pero lo que encuentran es algo de televisión y poco teatro” (Rosales y Zamora). I interpret his phrase, “algo de televisión y poco teatro” as a way of expressing the concern that once resident in the United States, in a small town in Missouri for example, the Mexican culture that Chicanos would have access too would be one of ever-impoverished reproduction, rather than one of live creation. Santander’s blunt concern might offend some Chicano or Mexican-American sensibilities since it does not give much credit to the possibility that those communities would generate their own iterations of Mexican culture. However, the point may be exactly that, to explore the idea that Mexicans living in the United States are part of another culture and another political future that is not Mexico’s. His concern about the cultural and political futures of Mexicans living in the United States was deeply relevant at the time due to changes taking place in immigration law that would make millions of Mexicans into permanent U.S. citizens.

The proliferation of references within the text, demonstrates how attentive Santander was to the changing political discourse in the United States, and the language surrounding Mexican immigration, which culminated in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), and

was deeply hostile towards Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Casting around for a scapegoat as economic insecurity increased in the United States, Reagan cynically turned immigration into a question of national security; in 1985, Reagan claimed that “the United States had “lost control” of its borders to an “invasion” of illegal immigrants” (Durand et al 521). According to Jorge Durand et al., Reagan legitimized an aggressive discursive representation of Mexicans in the United States: “[h]enceforth, immigrants were connected symbolically with invaders, criminals, and drug smugglers, who were pictured as poised menacingly along a lightly defended two-thousand-mile frontier dividing the United States from Mexico and the poor masses of the Third World” (Durand et al 521). However, the marking of Mexican bodies as alien invaders in the U.S. political imaginary was somewhat contradictory, since the content of IRCA provided two different routes for migrants from Mexico to acquire legalization. Thus, as Durand et al. point out, the actual implementation of IRCA served to limit the mobility of migrating Mexicans, causing far more migrants to remain permanently in the United States than had done previously:

IRCA thus dramatically altered the rhythms of seasonal migration back and forth across the border. Prior to 1986, most migrants sought to work abroad temporarily in order to manage risks and acquire capital for a specific goal or purchase. [...] IRCA ruptured this dream in several ways. First, legalization offered migrants the prospect of a secure existence north of the border during a period of exceptional economic and political turmoil at home. The LAW program, in particular, virtually required undocumented migrants who had formerly circulated back and forth to remain in the United States until their petitions for legalization were resolved. (Durand et al. 523)

The initiative that expanded the Mexican-American community, giving many permanent residence in the U.S., came directly out a racist political discourse that portrayed their arrival and presence as unwelcome and undesirable. The conflation of immigrants and drug traffickers was further cemented in the public eye because IRCA was introduced almost simultaneously with the 1986 Anti Drug Abuse Act which expanded the powers and budgets of both the DEA and Customs to fight traffickers (Grillo ch.4). The context for Santander's apprehension about Mexican-American culture, or Chicano culture as he calls it, is a legitimate concern about large numbers of Mexicans being stranded in a country that appears to be becoming increasingly prejudiced against them.

In order to understand what is at stake in the Reagan administration's public targeting of Mexicans/drug traffickers in 1986, it is necessary to revise briefly the history of the Iran-Contra Affair. Between 1984 and 1987, the kidnapping of around fourteen American citizens in the Middle East by Iranian extremists led the Reagan administration into clandestine negotiations to sell US arms to Iran via Israel in exchange for the release of the hostages. Concurrently, in October 1984 the US Congress agreed, against Reagan's wishes, to prohibit direct and indirect government finance aid to the Nicaraguan Contras and their effort to overthrow the revolutionary Sandinista state. As a result, President Reagan's national security advisors conspired to divert the profits from the illicit Iranian arms sales to the Nicaraguan Contras. The scandal was revealed in 1986 by Attorney General Edwin Meese 3rd, prompting an investigation by the Senate. During the ensuing investigation, Reagan's advisors, in particular Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North and Admiral Poindexter, denied the president had any knowledge of the diversion of funds. In 1987, the investigation into the Iran-Contra Affair concluded that it was impossible to prove that President Reagan had known about or authorized the illegal sale of arms to Iran, or the

subsequent diversion of profits from these arms sales to the Nicaraguan Contras. The investigators noted that much of the documentation that would have clarified how much the President and his security council knew was withheld from investigators, or destroyed (“Iran-Contra Report” (1987); “The Iran-Contra Report” (1994)). Furthermore, of the many members of the Reagan administration who *were* indicted and convicted on different counts, not one was ever imprisoned thanks to the numerous pardons granted by George Bush Senior on his arrival in office in 1989.

This is the official version of the Iran-Contra affair as of 1989. However, there was another strand in this already tangled web, that did not come up in reporting on the official Iran-Contra investigation: this was the fact that the CIA were facilitating the trafficking of drugs into the United States by Mexican drug traffickers, in order to cover the costs of the cartel’s assistance in trafficking the arms to Central America, among other services that the cartel members lent to the CIA (Esquivel ch. 4). The involvement of the CIA with the cartels became apparent (although it could not be proven) following the murder of American DEA agent, Enrique ‘Kiki’ Camarena, who was killed in 1985, ostensibly after ordering the destruction of a huge marijuana plantation in Mexico belonging to one of the leaders of the Guadalajara Cartel, Rafael Caro Quintero (Esquivel ch. 4). One year before the Iran-Contra Affair broke, the abduction, torture and murder of Camarena became an international scandal that created huge diplomatic tension between Mexico and the US, while shining a light on the power of the Mexican cartel and its close relationships with top-ranking Mexican politicians. In the furor following Camarena’s murder, the DEA launched Operation Leyenda, the largest homicide investigation ever undertaken by the DEA (“History of the DEA”). The agency accused Mexican police officers of working for the drug cartels and of kidnapping Camarena; the DEA then

kidnapped a physician, Humberto Álvarez Machaín, and Javier Vásquez Velasco in order to bring them to trial in the United States (Lowenfeld 713; Quesada). US pressure on Mexico became so intense that the central Mexican intelligence agency, the Federal Security Directorate (DFS), was dissolved amongst accusations that the organization was involved in drug trafficking (Velázquez 38). Yet, despite DEA efforts to demonize the cartels, persistent rumors circulated that the CIA was cooperating with the drug traffickers and that it was their agents who were behind Camarena's murder.

Official confirmation did not come until October 2013. Following Rafael Caro Quintero's sudden and controversial release from prison in Mexico, two former DEA agents and an ex-CIA contractor revealed to the press that Camarena's murder had indeed taken place at the behest of the CIA which, they confirmed, had been assisting the traffic of drugs and weapons through Central America to the United States in return for a share of profits which were used to finance the Contra rebels in Nicaragua (Chaparro, Luis and J. Jesús Esquivel; Quesada). Of the three, Héctor Berrellez, the principal DEA agent in charge of the investigating the Camarena case, gave a series of extensive interviews to journalists from the Mexican newspaper *Proceso* and the U.S. news agency Fox News³⁴ (Esquivel Intro.).

The story that Esquivel reveals through his interviews with Bellerrez and three other anonymous informants, is that a CIA operative named Ismael Félix Rodríguez ran a military training camp for Guatemalan paramilitaries, and the ranch where the training camp was located belonged to Rafael Caro Quintero. A German arms dealer name Gerhard Mertins was contracted by the CIA to traffic arms into Mexico and from there send them to Central America using the

³⁴ Esquivel notes in his book that Fox News did not report the connection between the CIA, Camarena and the Contras Scandal; he notes that one possible reason for this is that retired colonel Oliver North was in 2013 still one of Fox News key political analysts (Esquivel ch. 4).

airplanes of the Honduran trafficker, Juan Ramon Matta Ballesteros. To cover the cost of flying the arms to Central American, on their way back, the planes were loaded with Colombian cocaine which was sold to the Guadalajara cartel and delivered on to Mexican airstrips protected and maintained by the CIA. The CIA then assisted the cartel in trafficking the drugs into the United States (Esquivel ch.16).

The book claims that the CIA were responsible for Camarena's death, albeit somewhat indirectly. According to information Belerrez that attributes to Guillermo Gonzalez Calderoni (ex-commander of now extinct *Policia Judicial Federal* (PJF)), Ismael Félix Rodríguez (the CIA operative) gave the order that the DFS should kidnap, not kill, Camarena. The order was given to Juan Ramon Matta Ballesteros. Ballesteros passed the message to Fonseca Carillo and Caro Quintero who would give the order to the DFS, which they controlled (Esquivel, ch. 4).

Rumors regarding the links between the cartels and the CIA had circulated at least since Camarena's death (Grillo ch. 4). Juan Diego Quesada, in his reporting on the 2013 revelations, claims one contemporary source of such rumours was the legendary composer, Paulino Vargas. Quesada notes that "popular Mexican *norteño* folk band Los Broncos de Reynosa had alluded to this allegation [of the CIA's involvement in Camarena's death] 25 years ago in one of their well-known *narcocorridos*" (Quesada). The Broncos' founder, Paulino Vargas, is referred to as "el padre del narcocorrido" and was one of the most venerated composers of the genre. After Camarena's death, Vargas composed "El corrido del R-Uno", the song that Quesada claims alludes to CIA involvement in Camarena's death; the song was officially released in 1989 on the album from Los Tigres del Norte "Corridos Prohibidos" which was produced by Vargas; the album was quickly censored (Emmanuel CG). Vargas' songs were popular throughout the north and center of Mexico and his proximity to the politicians and cartel bosses was well-known as he

was often invited to play for them. He even claimed to have been present at a meeting between Camarena, Rafael Caro Quintero and Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, the then heads of Mexico's all-powerful Cartel de Guadalajara (Emmanuel CG). Santander provides no clues as to whether or not he knew of Vargas' song, nevertheless, Vargas' song demonstrates that, in Mexico at least, the dealings of the CIA were more of an open secret than they would have liked to imagine.

Santander certainly did have knowledge of another contemporary source, Elaine Shannon's 1988 book *Desperados: Latin Druglords, U.S. Lawmen, and the War America Can't Win* is cited several times in his footnotes in *México-USA* (Santander, *De los prejuicios* 181, 197, 200). Written by a former journalist at *Time*, Shannon's book was probably the most important contemporary source of information on the Camarena case after it was published. Shannon certainly does not accuse the CIA of anything, but she carefully documents the CIA's activity and how deeply embedded they were in the DEA's work, in particular, she documents in apparently unnecessary detail how close the CIA were to General Noriega as he made Panama a haven for money-laundering drug money (ch. 7). So many details from *México-USA* are in Shannon's book that it seems reasonable to assume that Santander understood what Shannon could only hint at regarding the strands that linked the Iran-Contra Affair and the Camarena case, and he was able to put Shannon's information together with rumors circulating in Mexico³⁵. Furthermore, *Desperados* was important because of its cultural impact in the U.S., a New York

³⁵ National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No 2 titled, "The Contras, Cocaine and Covert Operations" provides documentation confirming Contra links with the drug trade, U.S. law enforcement agencies' knowledge of this and their close ties to Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega whose collaboration with Colombian drug traffickers was also known to them³⁵. The notebooks confirm almost all of *México-USA*'s hypotheses with respect to illegal U.S. interventions in Latin America and the responsibility they bear for drug-related violence throughout the continent. However, the content of these notebooks was only declassified in 1989, once Santander had finished writing the play and was preparing it for performance.

Times bestseller, it would go on to be made into an award-winning mini-series (“Elaine Shannon”), Spanish speakers would have to wait until 1990 before it was translated into Spanish; in 1988 Santander may have felt it was important to bring Shannon’s carefully documented investigation to a broader Mexican audience. Santander’s footnotes demonstrate that he was following the case through publications on both sides of the border. Perhaps it was his knowledge of the U.S. press that made him wonder if Mexican-American audiences were not in greater need of a work of solidarity capable of unpacking the hypocrisy of the Reagan administration? It is productive to have in mind this alternative, hypothetical Mexican-American audience, even as we turn to our focus to the Mexican context for the play’s performance.

4.2.1 A Three-Ring Circus: Circuits of People, Capital and Goods

In the world of the play, the ‘Mexico’ of *México-USA* refers to the small town of Mexico, Missouri in which the play is set. Mexico³⁶, Missouri is a real town located about 100 miles west of St Louis. In the play, it is referred to as San Luis, causing deliberate confusion with the state of San Luis Potosí which, as of 1986, was among the top six Mexican states with the highest levels migration to the U.S. (Sprouse 9). This adds to the slipperiness of the signifier “Mexico”, which is made to stand simultaneously for a homeland and for a diaspora, inspiring as much nationalist pride as it does deep ambivalence. Placing Mexico inside the United States disputes the clean separation of the two nations into discreet entities and ironically opposes itself to the Reagan administration’s imaginary of Mexicans as invading foreigners. The metaphor represents

³⁶ I gave a presentation on this play at a conference at Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 2014. Following the presentation, I was informed by an audience member that Mexico, MO, is notorious in the area for illegal drug-related activity, including trafficking, and rumors circulated about drugs brought directly from Mexico by plane. Unfortunately, to date, I have been unable to find any documentation to support this claim.

the millions of Mexicans living in the United States in different conditions of legality, and the fact that many Mexican-Americans are descendants of Mexicans native to the Southwestern states. Furthermore, it represents the ‘special relationship’ between the USA and Mexico as a ‘spatial relationship’ that implies there are neo-colonial consequences to being part of the United States’ “backyard”.

The play opens in Mexico, MO; four Mexicans have been detained for questioning over the murder of the woman known as Ruth Gordon. Each of them has a unique story to tell of how they arrived in the United States. The four Mexican suspects are interrogated by an on-stage “pizarra”. The board is described as “como suspendida en la oscuridad, una pizarra con letras rojizas se ilumina y una inquisitoria electrónica se inicia” (139). The board communicates by displaying questions and uses beeps, flashing lights and a computerized voice to contradict and berate the interviewees when their answers do not mirror the information it already has about them. The board seeks only to confirm what it already “knows”. Although they are being interviewed about a woman’s murder, first the board asks them if they have ever visited Cuba or Nicaragua, and if they have ever taken any drugs, thus reflecting the true concerns of the state’s law enforcement agenda.

The first to be interrogated is “Nick” (this is how he introduces himself, his name is Nicanor Gómez). He is 42 years old and married with five children, “[t]odos ellos nacidos aquí, salvo María, la mayor, que nació en Morelia” (139). Nick has been an American citizen for 20 years; he came to the U.S. to work picking fruit and cotton (it is implied, but not clarified, that he did not enter illegally but rather through one of the guest worker programs). Since Nick’s mother died he has not returned to Michoacan, Mexico, and he has been able to save to set up a coffee shop: “ya no tuve que mandar los pesos pa’al otro lado [...] Antes trabajé en el campo, en la

pizca de la uva” (140). When the board asks Nick if he has ever been involved in any political activities, Nick replies that he has not. The board flashes, “Delano, California, 1968”. Nick was involved in the Delano Grape Strike, which took place in California from 1965-1970 and turned Cesar Chavez into an icon of the civil rights and labor movements (Ganz; Dunne & Stavans). Curiously, Nick’s version of the story is less than triumphant, “aquello no fue un political movement, y menos comunista [...] Sólo ganamos que nos corrieran. Desde entonces no he vuelto a protestar nada” (141). It seems obvious that Nick is under some pressure to deny any left-wing political affiliations, yet the stage directions indicate that Nick is almost talking to himself at this point, they read “*Sigue con lo suyo*” (141); Nick is ignoring the board for a moment as he speaks. Furthermore, Nick’s trajectory from farm worker to small business owner epitomizes the American dream. By dismissing the defining historical event in the construction of a resistant Chicano identity, Santander seems to foreclose the possibility of an authentic and transcendental left-wing Chicano movement emerging from within the United States. In his interview, Santander referred to the “abandono cultural” of the Chicano population; more precisely, the play seems concerned with the conservatizing effects of cultural assimilation upon Mexicans living in the U.S..

A second example follows immediately with “Al”, the next ‘suspect’ to be interviewed. Al is a chemical engineer who came to the U.S. for postgraduate studies, he has been a citizen for 15 years, and “accidentally” became involved with the Klu Klux Klan in 1973. Al is vehemently anti-communist and proudly reveals he voted for Reagan, an act which he does qualify as political since he immediately denies ever having been involved in any political activities (145). Again he introduces himself as “Al Galigous, American citizen and very proud of it”. He is immediately instructed to speak Spanish and pronounce his name as it is pronounced

in Spanish, Alvaro Gallegos (144-6). The board projects its questions in English, only switching to Spanish for Tiro who speaks in Nahuatl. Independent of how well the audience read English, the effect is clear, English is the language of power, Spanish is the language of the suspect.

Through the despotic board, the play suggests that, for the law enforcing institutions of the United States, the “Mexicans” (both are American citizens) will never be accepted as Americans, and they will always be borderline illegal bodies regardless of how they entered the U.S., what language they speak, who they vote for, or their legal status. Santander’s perspective is a radical antidote to the “American dream” insofar as he does not deny that a Mexican can have a materially-comfortable life (both Al and Nick seem to have that), but he presents the Mexican-American subjectivity as that of a patsy: politically disempowered and delusional about their status in a society in which they are always “other” (not white) and an easy scapegoat.

The interrogation of the four Mexicans parodies the self-confirming nature of the bureaucratic state archive and, consequently, the state’s methodology of truth production. The following exchange demonstrates how the board interacts with the interviewees, asking questions it believes it already knows the answers to:

Pizarra: Have you ever tried drugs?

Al: ¡Jamás!

Pizarra: Any members of your family?

Al: Definitely not!

Chirrido y luz roja. El hombre se desconcierta.

Al: ¡No entiendo la luz!

Pizarra; Wrong answer! (146)

Given the preference for English, it seems that the board principally represents the U.S. state-archive. In a comment on the power that the DEA and the CIA were known to exercise in Mexico at the time, the “Mexican” police force is now a local authority that is subordinate to the national jurisdiction of the U.S. intelligence services. The local authorities in Mexico, Missouri, collude with the shadowy security services by systematically discriminating against the Mexican migrants who live in the community, all of whom are accused at some point of being involved in either drug-trafficking or the murder of Ruth Gordon. The board functions as the faceless “embodiment” of a dehumanized state-complex whose only truth is its archive, which it constantly edits and organizes according to its needs.

The final two Mexicans to be interviewed, Tiro and Carlos, represent the extremes of poverty and wealth, illustrating the inequality engendered by neoliberal reforms that abandoned the rural economy (Kurtz), and were compounded by corruption as politicians pocketed their cut of the narco-traffickers’ profits (Esquivel). Carlos is an “alto funcionario del Gobierno mexicano” and he is in Mexico, MO., to buy horses for a ranch he owns in Chicago (147). By contrast, Tiro Labrador de Yecapixtla is a Nahuatl-speaker from the state of Morelos who works as a cleaner in the motel where Ruth is found murdered. Tiro explains, “Me fui del pueblo por falta de comida. Dos chilpayates se me murieron de hambre el año pasado [...] me vine hasta Laredo de mojado” (151-2). Despite his fantastic personal wealth, Carlos confronts the board-interrogator with quasi-socialist rhetoric, “Soy amigo de Castro [...] defensor tenaz de la libre autodeterminación de los pueblos, y finalmente me parece deplorable la política de su Presidente Reagan con Nicaragua ¿Esa clara mi posición internacional?” (148); yet Tiro’s story gives the lie to Carlos’ attitude of proud resistance. Ten years before NAFTA came into effect in 1994, the Mexican government had already begun scaling back its support for small farmers and

agricultural growth was negative. Consequently, from 1984 to 1989 real wages in the agricultural sector in Mexico dropped by 25% (Kurtz 181), this shock came in addition to the suffering brought on by a wave of droughts in 1987 (Liverman 101). As a consequence of the disproportionately harsh effects of neoliberalism in the countryside, undocumented migration to the U.S. accelerated to 3.8 million entries per year by 1986 (Durand et al. 519). While much of the play is dedicated to revealing the hypocrisy of the US war on drugs, through Carlos Mexico's political class is also implicated in the criminalization of Mexicans as economic migrants and drug-traffickers. Santander's critique of U.S. political culture is not an endorsement of Mexico's.

Ultimately, all four Mexicans share the same fate. They are detained without charge and handed over to the U.S. Army for further questioning. The helicopter in which they are transferred to the military facility explodes en route. The television news reports, "Aparentemente, la nave realizaba una misión antidrogas" (222). In the war on drugs, then, the enemy to be annihilated is not drug traffickers, but Mexicans.

4.2.2 Editing Reagan's Performance Archive

The interviews with the four "Mexicans" are interspersed with the enactment of "Ruth Gordan's"/Helen's murder. Throughout the play the action flips back and forth ignoring time and geography; like a fast-moving thriller the audience simply has to keep up. There are no scene breaks, but the script indicates that lighting should be used to fade characters in and out and shift the audience's attention. An ex-student of Santander's school, Deborah Rios, who participated in the production of *México-USA*, explained that the set had four levels which were divided vertically using transparent fabric instead of walls to create a grid-like structure. This divided the stage into eight or more sections. When the action shifted, the lights would move to a new corner

of the grid, this helped provide continuity so that the audience could keep track of the different settings.

Deborah Rios also described the set as being upstage from a television screen which she said rested down stage and was placed on top of an elongated, American-style car (Rios 2013). The car functions to locate the television broadcasts so that they are understood to be broadcasting from and to the United States. At one point a smiling ‘animadora’ appears on the screen offering Mexican-Americans the latest in Mexican culture:

Presentamos ahora nuestra cartelera cultural para los mexicanos de acá de este lado: en cine tenemos varios estrenos muy excitantes: “El Santo contra las mujeres vampiro”. La India María en “Pelados Estos”, y “Lola la Trailera contra la CIA”. De teatro tenemos el show del “Chapulín colorado”, ¡y los caballos amaestrados de Tony Aguilar! Y para los amantes de la buena música mexicana, este sábado, ¡Raúl Vale en concierto!” (*De los perjuicios* 166).

The sampling includes some of the best known film and television characters in popular Mexican culture, and this scene could be interpreted as a derisive lampooning of popular culture. My understanding of Santander’s work, however, is that he was deeply invested in borrowing from and contributing to popular culture. Rather, I understand this scene as an illustration of Santander’s assessment of access to Mexican culture in the United States as “algo de television y poco teatro”; the scene is an example of what we are left with when reproduction replaces reiteration in the production of cultural representations. The entertainment franchises cited are among the most repeated in Mexican television and cinema history: there are more than 50 films featuring silver-masked wrestler, El Santo (Glenday 37); la India Maria starred in 15 films (Rohrer 54); “Lola la Trailera” was the most popular film franchise of the 1980s (Maciel 47); “El

Chapulín Colorado” ran for 8 years from 1971 to 1979 (Rojas). The characters in these programs, and the stories they tell, are icons in Mexico, and they continue to be re-run on Mexican television today. The scene asks its audience to imagine what it would be like to only have access to re-runs; or to leave the metaphor behind, to have no access to Mexico except through nostalgia. In his 1936 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Walter Benjamin wrote, “[e]ven the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (219); I am suggesting, through Santander’s analogy, that these “works of culture” lose their aura when they are reproduced in a context where they are not shared experiences. Their “historical testimony” (220) is perceived dimly without a social context where they generate exchange and discussion with a present community. For Santander, I surmise, culture is like theater because it can only exist though “presence in time and space ... at the place where it happens to be”.

From the descriptions in the script, the TV and the board that interrogates the four Mexicans appear to be different technologies. The TV screen shows the play’s local news anchor Jack Colby who presents both the news reports of Helen’s murder and narrates the development of the Iran-Contra Affair as if in real time. The news report incorporates excerpts from press conferences with Reagan and Col. Oliver North. From the script it is not clear if Santander used actual recordings of Reagan speaking or if Reagan’s speeches were re-enacted and then projected, however it seems most likely that they were re-enacted since Reagan is listed as a character. Huerta, for his part, seemed to be concerned about how the screen would affect the pace of the action and may have persuaded Santander to reduce the amount of action on the screen; the first note he writes is “logística de Reagan en TV?”, unfortunately this question is not resolved in the script. Although the script indicates that Reagan first appears on the screen, in his

exchange with Jorge Huerta, Santander writes, “decidí dejarla así (sin los filmes) o sea, que todo será teatral y con los actores haciendo los personajes de Reagan, etc. Pero con fotos fijos de Reagan, North, cuando los actores los están interpretando” (Huerta, Jorge and Felipe Santander). For Santander, it was crucial that the audience immediately recognize the characters the actors were portraying. By this determination to be speak transparently of the present historical moment with its audience, *México-USA* is produced to be the polar opposite of the TV series that runs and re-runs.

In 1987 the authorities refused to recognize Reagan’s guilt in the Iran-Contra Affair because the archive was incomplete, the evidence had been destroyed. Thus, *México-USA* (1990) attempts to turn the tables on this incomplete archive and put Reagan’s administration on trial through the curation and performance of the archive. The electronic board’s interrogation of the four suspects is interrupted by a broadcast from the on-stage TV. Reagan appears, invoking the ideal of democracy in order to publically challenge Congress’ decision to prohibit funds being sent to the Nicaraguan Contras:

REAGAN: ... jamás permitiré que los sandinistas se salgan con la suya, en desafío directo a nuestros intereses. Nuestros valores morales y nuestras propiedades, estarán más seguros en una vecindad democrática ...⁷ (Footnote displayed as in original text; Santander *De los perjuicios*, 154-5).

Reagan’s lines are accompanied by a footnote that gives the source of the lines as “7. NY Times, AFP, Reuter, DPA 7/24/87” (155). Meticulous footnotes such as these are distributed throughout the play-script from beginning to end; there are forty-seven in total. Every piece of information given on the Iran-Contra Affair and every quote attributed to Reagan is cited by Santander. He

gives the source of the information, the title of the document and the date published (often a newspaper, but other materials such as research papers and state archives are also cited).

Historical accuracy aside, there is an intriguing performative impact to the footnotes. I propose that by displaying the documentary truth behind *México-USA*, Santander is creating an “alternative archive” that he embeds in the play’s script. The intervention of Santander’s alternative archive is in its framing of Reagan and the Iran-Contra Affair, in which the moral integrity of the U.S. president is satirized using only his own words and those of his allies. He focuses not on what is missing from the record, but on what is present, and uses Reagan’s own words to perform his guilt as the head of a predatory and disingenuous state.

In Santander’s re-organization of the archive, however, Latin America answers back to the Reagan administration and its war on drugs/Communism. After Al “Galigous”’s son, Alvy, is found dead, Jack Colby, the play’s news anchor, reads news from the Reagan administration’s war on drugs and is interpolated by different Latin American counties criticizing the violence and arrogance with which the U.S. has pursued its agenda in their national territories:

Jack: Reagan envió al Senado una enmienda de ley que le permite suspender la ayuda económica a todo país que, a su juicio, fomente la producción de drogas, o que no esté haciendo un esfuerzo notable para atacar el problema.

Reagan: [...] sólo espero la aprobación del Senado para suspender créditos a Perú, Colombia, Bolivia, México, Brasil y Argentina...

(Santander, *De los perjuicios* 179-180).

Staged to appear as if they were in a meeting of the United Nations, Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, Brasil, Peru and Nicaragua together protest the measures. Most of the contributions

come accompanied with footnotes citing a newspaper or other textual source for the views that each country presents; some do not, however, and the effect is a clamor of statistical facts, counter-arguments (Colombia's response notes the U.S. provides the market for drugs; Mexico asks what it is doing to combat its own internal mafias), and the surreptitious association of the war on drugs with aggressive anti-Communist operations. The scene utopically reimagines the United Nations as a site for solidarity between Latin American nations that are able and willing to speak frankly about the United States' coercive diplomatic tactics.

The scene also brings into view the longer history of U.S. intervention in Latin America. Brasil's contribution has no cited source, "Si como atacan al comunismo combatieron el narcotráfico, en poco tiempo ya no tendrían el menor problema con las drogas" (181). The implied question is why the United States would not be applying themselves with as much vigor or vehemence in this conflict as they have done in previous crusades. It is the the CIA's contribution that cements the link between the criminal and the subversive, "Sugiero a los Gobiernos Latinoamericanos un endurecimineto en el combate contra las guerillas, apoyados por nuestros agentes; pues siendo ellas quienes más consumen las drogas, al combatirlas se estará combatiendo a la droga misma" (182). As paranoid and untenable as this theory seems, the quote is attributed to a source ("The Great Heroin Coup", Henrik Kruger's 1980 investigation into the links between the Nixon administration, the heroin trade and counterinsurgency organizations around the world). Unlike the exchanges presented in media coverage of government press conferences or international conferences, such as the United Nations, in Santander's scenario, Nicaragua can reply directly to the CIA: "¿Eso va para nosotros también? [...] no hay un país que prefiera el liderazgo soviético al norteamericano; ¿son ustedes los que nos obligan a este cambio para endilgarnos la estafeta de comunistas, prolongar nuestras guerras y vender más armas!".

The headline that follows, “¡La Casa Blanca anuncia el recorte de la cuota azucarera de Nicaragua en un 90%!”, reiterates that Latin American nations who do not bend to U.S. foreign policy are punished.

Much like the prologue to *La ley no escrita*, however, it is unclear how, or if, an audience would have access to the footnotes that compose the archive. Deborah Rios does not remember the footnotes forming part of the 1990 production (Rios 2013). However, if they are intended only for the reader, there are still performance implications; Santander may have wanted to remind or inform those interpreting the play that, although Reagan is being set up by the play (he is *México-USA*'s patsy), this is not entirely satire. The knowledge of the play's painstaking historical accuracy gives it the feel of a montage and adds texture to the way *México-USA* splices the Reagan excerpts with excerpts from the television news and the fictional story, flipping back and forth between these parallel narratives. Reagan's performances are located as one performance in a stream of staged truths that make up the television news; thus, the written archive is performed as part of a comment on the superficial and fragmented representation of the world that televisual culture offers its viewers. *México-USA* professes to fill in those gaps by hypothesizing as to the veiled connections between events and people that are made to appear to have nothing to do with one another. By mimicking Reagan and his cronies in carefully selected moments of their public performances, the enacted citations in *México-USA* frame Reagan's political performances and make sure that the audience understands them *as* performances, as opposed to *as* truth.

Ultimately, the performed archive aims to establish the truth of Santander's version of history, as well as the guilt of the Reagan administration. However, the selective curating of the documentary archive in the performance of truth mirrors the interrogation of the four Mexicans

that is performed by the board at the beginning of the play. The construction of an alternative archive is Santander's own manipulation of the archive. The stubborn board that interrogates the Mexican migrants, poses its questions in bad faith in order to implicate and imprison its preferred suspects. Santander also organizes his archive to tell the truth that he would like to hear: that of Reagan's guilt. Thus, the positing of Reagan's contradictions as lies does not invoke a different methodology for the production of truth.

4.2.3 The Unbounded Body and the Production of Space

The truth of the alternative archive is performed alongside the truth of the murdered woman known as Ruth Gordon, whose mysterious death the police are intent on pinning on the four Mexicans. Throughout the first half of the play, the woman "Ruth Gordon"/Helen Esparza is presented by police, journalists and interviewees as a femme fatale whose hedonistic lifestyle included drugs and the pursuit of numerous men; Jack, the news anchor tells the camera/audience: "En la bolsa de la víctima se encontraron varos carrujos de marijuana y una agenda con el nombre y dirección de tres individuos con nombres hispánicos" (157). Through the testimonies of Nick and Al, she is depicted as having flirted with Nick to get information about local drug dealers and having seduced Al's son, a recovering drug addict who is found dead at the end of the first act.

The second act of the play transforms this image as Helen reveals her true identity through a letter written immediately before her death. The letter is discovered and read by the local police commissioner, but Helen herself narrates and performs the events that lead up to her murder. The stage directions read, "*El Comisario llega a su oficina, saca el paquete de sobres y con gran excitación empieza a leerlos. En luz fantasmal aparece la imagen de la mujer asesinada*

que narra la carta” (195). Through this letter the audience learns for the first time that the name Ruth Gordon was a pseudonym, and that the murdered woman was actually DEA agent, Helen Esparza. Helen begins her story and the second act of the play by travelling to Colombia in the guise of a journalist named Diana Rand. In Colombia she infiltrates the Medellín cartel posing as “Rosa de Guadalajara” and learns of frequent trips back and forth to Panama. She travels to Panama and discovers that a major drug shipment is being sent to Mexico, Missouri. Finally, Helen travels to Mexico, Missouri, as Ruth Gordon to intercept the delivery and expose the links between the Mexican government, the Latin American drug cartels and the CIA. Although the CIA murder Helen before she can publish her findings, this letter, which structures the second half of the play, reveals Helen’s investigation and functions as her defense, the apologia to the image presented of her during the first half of the play.

Stood on stage bathed “[*e*]n luz fantasmal” (195), she begins the narration of her letter, “[m]i nombre es Helen Esparza, soy chicana, hija y nieta de chicanos” (195). The odd and slightly archaic introduction takes its cue from the ancient Greek playwright, Euripides, and his play *Helen*. Helen Esparza references the historical figure, Helen of Sparta, better known as Helen of Troy, or “the face that launched a thousand ships” (Marlowe). When Euripides wrote his play about the Spartan queen, she had long been cast by Homer as a beautiful *casus belli*, as well as an adulterer who had deserted her husband, Menelaus, for Paris of Troy (Hughes 58-59). However, in Euripides’ *Helen* a new story emerges in which Helen never went to Troy, but was imprisoned in Egypt while a phantom Helen replaced her in Troy. The play essentially exonerates Helen and re-casts her as a noble heroine. Euripides’ play begins with a monologue in which the ancient Helen explains that what the world has long believed about her is false. Like Helen Esparza, she begins her story by stating her divine lineage and affirming: “My name is

Helen, and I will now recount the sorrows I have suffered” (*Euripedes*). Through his play, Euripedes gives Helen of Sparta a voice to answer her critics. Similarly, through the letter, the second half of *México-USA* serves as an opportunity for Helen Esparza to reject the aspersions cast on her character by the agents of misinformation and vindicate herself as a courageous person of ideals who sacrifices herself in order to expose the hypocrisy of the powerful.

There is reason to believe that, to a Mexican audience in 1990, the parallel between the Camarena story and Helen’s fate may have been fairly apparent. The case was covered extensively in the Mexican and U.S. media, making the front page of *Time Magazine* in the U.S. (Esquivel 9; Hirsch). J. Jesus Esquivel, in his 2014 book, *La CIA, Camarena y Caro Quintero* claims the case was a watershed moment in Mexican society’s understanding of itself, and the first incident related to drug trafficking in Mexico to be covered internationally (11), he writes that as of Enrique Camarena’s murder:

las palabras *narcotráfico* y *narcotráficante* se integraron al argot de las actividades criminales en México [...] El caso de *Kiki* Camarena abrió la caja de Pandora y, con ello, la pobredumbre de la corrupción por narcotráfico que corroía a una sociedad que a mediados de los años ochenta del siglo pasado consideraba el consumo de drogas como un problema exclusivo de los estadounidenses (9).

In Esquivel’s re-telling, then, the Camarena case is the archetypal conspiracy in the *narco-policiaco* genre. This does not mean that it was necessarily the first in Mexico’s history (drugs had been produced and trafficked for decades (Grillo; Astorga), but the Camarena case signaled to the public that a profound change had taken place in Mexican society. The case brought to light the deep alliance between politicians and drug traffickers. The battle lines that defined the political conflict for so many years were fast disappearing (Herrera Calderón and Cedillo), and in

its place was not a conflict, but a much more terrifying consensus between power and capital. From this perspective, as thoroughly fictitious as *México-USA* is, it seems likely that many audience members would have understood the story as a reference to Camarena's murder.

However, Helen is not Enrique and Santander chooses not to present a documented version of Enrique's story, eschewing in the construction of Helen (in place of Kike) the parodic archive that he created for Reagan. Through Helen, Santander draws a map, one that the historical figure of Enrique Camarena could not; the media spectacle of the diplomatic haggling between Mexico and the US ensured that Enrique's story became limited to the Mexico-US border. Through Helen, Santander can present the regional dimensions of drug trafficking and its political, rather than criminal nature, and connect the characters and scenarios of drug trafficking in a way that refuses the ellipses and disconnects of the television news.

There are no borders or boundaries that apply to Helen. She can apparently slip over the frontiers of national, racial and linguistic difference. While she tells the story of her investigation, the DEA agent adopts different disguises depending on the part that she must play. Each change of character takes place on stage, with the actress making only minimal changes to her appearance: a new wig, a pair of heels. To extract information from a Colombian government minister she turns from Helen into blond journalist, Diana Rand; the stage direction reads, "*Mientras habla se pone una peluca rubia, lentes y zapatos de tacón bajo*" (Santander, *De los perjuicios* 196). Although she is in disguise, Helen/Diana tells the minister the most personal information, speaking in earnest as herself, "mi padre fue asesinado por la mafia [...] si mi vida tiene algún sentido, es en cuanto a este problema que me ha golpeado desde niña" (201). The minister does not believe she is a journalist but agrees to help her and puts her in contact with the local cartels. The disguise is amateurish and her goal too easily achieved, yet what is performed

as Helen's story in the second half of the play is not a realist portrayal of how to expose a drug trafficking ring, but a mapping. Helen's costume changes are part of the mapping that her body performs; they make manifest the shifts of location and how these condition the body that agent-Helen must become.

Writing on the ways in which bodies and places are made in relation to one another, Adrienne Rich writes, “[t]o locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go” (Nast 2). Rich is writing about identity politics, but she is also writing about what is most visible about her body to others. From an American perspective, Rich is female and white, or white and female (Rich deliberately plays with the order; which comes first depends on who is looking). Similarly, Helen's costume changes draw attention to what others see; they are “common sense” at the same time as they are complex and slippery. For example, while still on stage, Diana becomes the black haired, sultry Rosa de Guadalajara³⁷, her objective is to seduce a cartel boss and infiltrate the Medellin cartel: “*Mientras continúa hablando cambia su ropa por un provocativo vestido rojo fuego, remueve su peluca liberando un frondoso y espectacular pelo negro, remarca en colores vivos sus facciones y adoptando una actitud jacarandosa se dirige a ‘la cumbancha’*” (202). The audience can reason that perhaps a blond woman with an American name would be able to exert some racial-cultural power and win over a government minister; likewise, the glamour of Rosa's appearance suits the role of a narco's girlfriend. Yet, the transformations also point to the instability of what we believe we see with respect to race and nationality (although less so with respect to gender) since Helen can shift from “American” to “Latina” with a change of a wig and a name.

³⁷ Possibly another reference to Enrique Camarena who was based in the DEA's Guadalajara office

Commenting on Rich's reflection cited above, Heidi Nast writes, "[t]his cartography of places through her body reveals the ways in which she is positioned through her body, but also how her [Rich's] body becomes capable of imagining these connections and territories differently" (Nast 2). Likewise, Helen does not represent the places she travels through, she interacts with them and becomes herself a site of confluence for different sets of geopolitical relations. Rather than a truth based on documentation and the re-writing of history, Helen's truth lies in the audience's experience of watching Helen draw a line from Colombia to Panama to Mexico and to the USA. I propose that Helen can be understood as a performance of hemispheric solidarity, insofar as her presence comes to stand in for the actual witnesses in Mexico, in Colombia, in Panama, in the USA, whose testimonies do not appear on the television news, and whose stories are silenced.

What I am calling Santander's alternative archive acts as the lens through which the audience view the narrative drama surrounding Helen/Ruth's death. Through Helen's witnessing, the play theorizes the following interrelated ideas: that the problems facing South, Central and North America are not separate phenomena, but intimately connected; that the U.S. security services (and in particular the CIA) are at least implicated in, if not responsible for, many of the problems facing the continent (again the war on drugs and the Central American wars loom large); and finally that the most murderous enemy facing the continent is the imperative to silence. Helen's body is used to perform the truths which cannot (yet) be proved.

Through Helen's performance of presence, the theater audience experiences the possibility of a reconfigured regional (Latin American) solidarity. Helen is collateral damage in this war on drugs which has effectively been a war on certain classes of people. The path she takes allows an audience in Mexico to see how they might think of themselves as connected to

other Latin Americans, from Colombia to Mexico to the United States, whose violent deaths have been splashed across the front page one day only to disappear the next. As she travels from Colombia to Panama to Mexico, Missouri, her presence plots the transnational flow of people, goods and capital that the international drug-trafficking trade pulls along in its tide.

At the end of the play Helen's letter is burnt. Her careful documentation of her investigation no longer exists. The gesture marks the limitations of the archive and its fragility. It also distances Helen's story from that of Reagan's, indicating a truth of a radically different quality that can only be apprehended in its performance. By understanding "Helen" as creating the space for solidarity, the play maps the illicit flows of capital, people and goods that traversed and transformed Mexican national space during this period.

4.2.4 Conclusion

Although revolution is no longer a central proposal of *La ley no escrita* and *México-USA*, the Revolutionary scenario continues to haunt these plays in unexpected ways. In *La ley no escrita* it is embodied by El Maestro who brings the revolutionary past into the present as an emancipated mode of citizenship that is unafraid of conflict and defined by its posture of solidarity. In *México-USA*, the media spectacle of the war on drugs is revealed to be little more than a consequence of the true political conflict, which is against communism. The performance of regional solidarity is its pedagogical and political intervention. Neither play is optimistic about the future, both plays end in the death of the protagonist. Nevertheless, these plays demonstrate a commitment to the production of critical drama that contests the commonplaces of its audiences' cultural reality, and an aesthetic of solidarity that continues to insist upon using the elliptical archive to perform what is true.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This dissertation answers the question of how and to what end Felipe Santander's theater work from 1978-1990 reflects on and interacts with the immediate political context into which it was performed. It finds that Santander's work employed a series of strategies in order to produce experiences of political solidarity in its audience, and that these experiences of solidarity formed the basis for imagining a renewed political future for the Mexican left wing in the context of 1980s Mexico, the receding Cold War and the occupation of political spaces by neoliberal logic.

The study of Felipe Santander's theater project is an important contribution to the field of Mexican theater history because his work represents a unique vision of what Mexican theater should be and who it is for. For Santander, Mexican theater was a theater rooted in the historical experiences of the Mexican people, and one that rendered those experiences in an aesthetic language that could be recognized and understood by anyone. It was inclusive and made use of popular forms, such as the corrido, and everyday language. Furthermore, it stole from the commercially successful products of Revolutionary Nationalism, repurposing its gestures for a subversive revolutionary project.

Santander realized his commitment to solidarity through the creation of a theater capable of entertaining the masses, and engaging them in critical reflection upon their contemporary political reality. His experiment in creating a theater for the Mexican public, and in creating a public for Mexican theater, adds a new definition to our understanding of what it means to talk

about “Mexican” theater. His most successful play, *El extensionista*, was performed continuously to full houses for ten years. It is the most performed play in Mexican theater history, and yet his work has been left completely unstudied. *El extensionista* changed the history of Mexican theater history, but, without this study, the radical nature of what *El extensionista* did and what it meant, will be lost.

Santander’s theater offers a different historiographical understanding of political reality in post-Revolutionary Mexico because it was based in the experiences of the people. His understanding of Mexican history challenges the Priísta notion of consensus and post-Revolutionary harmony and highlights a silenced history of on-going political conflicts. In the last ten years and increasing body of scholarship has appeared that draws attention to this history of conflict and its violent repression, what we can now call Mexico’s Dirty War. However, Santander’s theatrical realization of this history represents an unusual contemporary attempt to represent this understanding of history, this unspoken truth, and hold a public conversation about it. I view this dissertation as an important addition to the on-going scholarship surrounding the Mexican Dirty War and its impact.

In terms of its methodology, my dissertation takes account of the specific contexts in which the plays were performed and I have accumulated as much information as I have been able to regarding the logistical and aesthetic realization of the plays. From the evidence base that I gathered, I was able to base my analyses of the ways in which these plays work on their audiences, and how their contemporary audiences might have understood these plays as a comment on contemporary political reality. In the case of *El extensionista*, the knowledge, gleaned from various interviews, that the student audience was crucial to sustaining audience figures, led me to think through the meaning and practice of *extensión* in universities and the

way in which the play explores the tragic consequences of an all too common gap between the ideal of disseminating and democratizing knowledge, and the affirmation of hierarchies of knowledge which is so often a feature of practices in this field. I show how *El extensionista* proposed that knowledge is not a qualification gained through education but the result of experience. The value of experience, *El extensionista* suggests, is realized in its analysis. On the other hand, in *México-USA*, I make use of the record of a conversation between Jorge Huerta and Felipe Santander, and comments from Santander in interviews, about the way in which the play is speaking both to and about Mexican-Americans and their experiences. I make use of this to develop my analysis of the play as modelling regional solidarity; as the recognition of the validity of Latin American revolutionary projects; and as a rejection of the conflation of revolutionary violence and organized crime.

Santander's aesthetics is about the creation of a gaze in which outcast revolutionary subjects become equal. And their struggle can be seen clearly as a continuation of the Revolutionary struggle for justice. In my analyses, I refer to what I call the Revolutionary scenario which I view as a privileged scenario in Mexican aesthetics thanks to the cultural impact of the Revolution, largely exerted through the project of Revolutionary nationalism. I claim that Santander is able to make use of this Revolutionary scenario in order to present the Revolution as an unfinished, ongoing Mexican national project. I view Santander's theater project from the late-1970s onwards developing a theater which vindicates their experience but from within the paradigm of solidarity with ongoing revindicative struggles. I name the series of strategies that he employs in order to transform the sensibility of his audience, Santander's "aesthetics of solidarity".

I understand solidarity to be the political consequence of an assumption of equality, and show that Santander's aesthetics is the theorization and experimentation with the idea that a truly Mexican theater is only possible when an audience enters into solidarity with those who are cast out by the state and turned into its enemies. The assumption by the audience that the outcast people, those who are labelled 'terrorists' and 'criminals', are equal is, in Santander's theater, the recognition of the justice of the revolutionary people. It is the recognition that the people are not violent, but in search of peace.

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