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*Marielitos, Balseros and Other*

*the Miami Herald* 2009. 6 Nov

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## Cuban Theater Digital Archive: A Learning and Preservation Resource for Theater History in the Cuban Diaspora\*

**Lillian Manzor**  
*University of Miami*

“With practically a whole generation of artists lost to AIDS, the refusal of theaters to produce work that is representative and reflective of our time ... has made accurate documentation ... a needlessly difficult time. In fifty or a hundred years from now, what record will there be of the work that was relegated to the margins, the work that was shoved aside in favor of subscriber-friendly drama of often too-little artistic consequence?”

Caridad Svich



ive theater and performance are probably two of the most evanescent forms of cultural heritage. They are always provisional, ephemeral, and non-repeatable. This non-repeatability points to two salient characteristics of theater as live-art performance: 1) It is a transient and fleeting art form. The ontology of each performance is, of course, the present. It exists insofar as it knows itself to be a representation without reproduction (Phelan 2). It is collaborative rather than individualistic in nature. Live-theater involves collaboration from a wide range of participants such as playwrights, designers, directors, actors and performers, musicians, technicians, administrators, etc. It also includes the collaboration of critics, analysts, theorists and reviewers. As intangible cultural manifestations, they transmit an embodied memory that is extremely fragile and risks disappearing. This non-repeatability presents challenges to any theater researcher and theater artist in relation to documentation, challenges

that are exponentially increased in the case of Cuban and Latino/a theater.

In this essay, I present one attempt to address these challenges: the Cuban Theater Digital Archive Archive (CTDA, <[www.cuban-theater.org](http://www.cuban-theater.org)> and <[www.teatrocubano.org](http://www.teatrocubano.org)>). CTDA was developed at the University of Miami in collaboration with Cuba's National Council for the Performing Arts, and launched in January 2006.

The CTDA is an interactive, bilingual cultural heritage research and digital publication site for Cuban and U.S.-Cuban theater and performing arts.<sup>1</sup> It focuses on the works, both written texts and live-art performance, of theater practitioners in Greater Cuba, that is, on the island and in the diaspora. I use Greater Cuba to suggest that "border zone" in which citizenship is reformulated as a result of the encounter between competing national jurisdictions and the global economy.<sup>2</sup> In these pages, I will discuss the range of materials it encompasses focusing on U.S.-Cuban theater, the ways in which it combines database with digital documentation, and the space it offers for innovative hypermedia publication.<sup>3</sup>

Researchers know that the fleeting nature of performance transforms research for historians and scholars of theater as live-art performance into a search. As Patrice Pavis has suggested, theater research is, indeed, a search for a lost object: a non-locatable and inaccessible representation. Any writing/research on theater is partly a search for documentation that serves as a trace of that non-repeatable performance. Documents for theater re/search are comprised of the researchers own notes of the spectacular text (representation) and published or unpublished verbal texts. Other important elements are photographs, video recordings, sketches for costumes and stage design, program notes, directors' notebooks, and newspaper clippings. These documents are nothing but a trace of the live representation, the missing object of the re/search. Nevertheless, they are the only elements accessible to the theater researcher.

U.S.-Cuban (and Latino/a) theater artists, cultural institutions and theater companies also recognize the need to create archives of their work in order to address the very documentation challenges that Caridad Svich poses in the epigraph. Documentation on U.S.-Cuban theater exists but it is scattered in different personal collections. Resources may be available at different institutions. However, the drive for many institutions

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traditionally has been to collect. With limited budgets, theatre collections may not have finding aids and other organizational elements that accompany full processing, serve research, and provide the infrastructure necessary for digitization projects and broader access. Only in rare circumstances is there collaboration between librarians and archivists and theater faculty and artists in the processing of theater collections.

The Cuban Theater Digital Archive was developed precisely to facilitate the search for that missing object, to document and preserve part of this intangible cultural heritage, and to be able to write a theater history that takes into account live performance. Thus, it is conceived as a research, teaching and learning program that integrates classroom education in Cuban and U.S.-Cuban theater, new media, and archival primary research with an online scholarly publishing effort that provides a unique view of contemporary Cuban culture.

### Archives and U.S.-Cuban Theater History: New York

Other than literary studies, there is very little material written on U.S.-Cuban theater and performance in spite of the number of companies and directors working in the U.S. even before 1959. CTDA and the physical archives with which it works allow us to sketch out this critical history which began in New York with the founding of four theater companies: INTAR, Repertorio Español, Dúo Theater, and Dumé Spanish Theater.<sup>4</sup> INTAR Theater is the oldest Latino theatre company in the U.S.A. producing in English. It was founded as ADAL in 1966 in New York by Max Ferrá and other Cuban and Puerto Rican artists. In 1971, Ferrá joined forces with Magaly Alabau and Manuel Martín Jr. of DUO Theater, and ADAL was renamed INTAR (International Arts Relations). Originally, the company's mission was to produce work by Latin American, Spanish and Hispanic [sic] playwrights in English. Two of the four plays of that season were Abelardo Estorino's banned *Los mangos de Caín*, and Raúl de Cárdenas's *La palangana*. The 1971-72 season opened at their new INTAR Studio on West 53rd Street. The next major step in the company's development was the collaboration of nine-times Obie-award winner María Irene Fornés starting in 1975 when she directed the world premiere of her musical *Cap-a-pié (From Head to Toe)*, one of the earliest professional bilingual productions in the U.S. She developed a close relationship with Max Ferrá, and INTAR became

her privileged venue to direct several of her subsequent world premieres, including *Lolita in the Garden* (1976), *Eyes on the Harem* (1979), *Lovers and Keepers* (1985), and *Terra Incognita: An Opera for Theatre* (1997), as well as productions of her English translations of canonical Spanish and Latin American Theater including the U.S. premiere of Virgilio Piñera's *Cold Air*.

In the early 80s, INTAR's vision changed and it began to focus on the development and production of new works in English by US Latino playwrights. The project that has had the most impact on the development of U.S.-Cuban and U.S.-Latino playwriting is undoubtedly its Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Laboratory, created and run by María Irene Fornés from 1981 until 1992. One of the first playwriting projects of its kind in the U.S., participants were selected from a nationwide applicant pool, and judged on the plays they submitted for evaluation. Each artist was paid a humble stipend and was required to attend regular meetings, where their writing was constantly given feedback from peers and Fornés herself. The participants were required to complete one play, which received a staged reading at the end of the Lab. The participants themselves also chose which play(s) would receive a full production on INTAR's main stage. This Lab, under Fornés's direction, trained the most prominent Latino playwrights in American theatre, including the U.S.-Cubans Ela Troyano, René Alomá, Nilo Cruz, Eduardo Machado, Manuel Martín Jr., Rogelio Martínez, Manuel Pereiras, Ana María Simo, Carmelita Tropicana, and Caridad Svich. Since its founding, INTAR has presented over 65 world premieres of new plays by U.S. Cuban and Latino authors. Eduardo Machado became its artistic director in 2004 and Lou Moreno in 2010.

Another important New York theater company is Repertorio Español, founded in 1968 by producer Gilberto Zaldívar (1934-2009) and Artistic Director René Buch with the goal of introducing classical Spanish theatre to New York Spanish-speaking audiences. Its original name was Greenwich Mews Spanish Theater and it staged its productions in a space that also housed a Presbyterian church and a synagogue. This multicultural setting was an early sign for the company's development. As Repertorio grew, its mission changed so that it now stages the best of Latin American, Spanish and Hispanic-American theatre to a broad audience in New York City and across the country, including senior citizens, students and Latinos of all national

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backgrounds. 1972 was a landmark year: they changed their name to Spanish Theater Repertory Company, moved to the Gramercy Arts Theatre where the company has since remained, and Robert Weber Federico, stage, costume and lighting designer, joined the company full time. Their first play in their "Casa Nueva," *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, was an unprecedented critical success for the company bringing in English and Spanish newspaper critics.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1970s, they used the name Spanish Theater Repertory in most of their English advertising although their Spanish-speaking audience knew them as Repertorio Español. It is in 1980 with their Spanish production of *The Glass Menagerie* that they advertised themselves as Repertorio Español. That same year, Repertorio toured Latin America as the "first Spanish-language theater group ever to represent the United States in Latin America" (Shepard 1980, C10). In 1984, the company began to commission new plays by Hispanic-American playwrights and in 1991 inaugurated an infrared simultaneous translation system, which allows non-Spanish speaking audiences to enjoy the company's productions.

Although Repertorio has staged numerous Spanish, Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S.-Latino playwrights, their history with Cuban theater in particular is unprecedented, especially given the complex context of U.S.—Cuba cultural relations. They were the first company to stage in the United States a Cuban playwright residing on the island. In 1969, René Buch directed Nicolás Dorr's *Las Pericas*, eight years after its premiere in Havana, with Gilberto Zaldívar as lighting designer. The play, written when Dorr was only fourteen years old, is a farce about human relationships that borrows elements of the theatre of the absurd and breaks with the 1950s realist tradition in Cuban theater. The next staging of a Cuban playwright was Virgilio Piñera's *Electra Garrigó* in 1973, directed by Silvia Brito. *Electra's* world premiere in Havana in 1948, directed by Francisco Morín, signals the transition to Modernity of Cuba's theater. In 1979, Repertorio hosted Pepe Camejo in one of the very few *guiñol* productions of his *La cucarachita Martina* to be staged in the U.S. With the exception of the musical *Habana: Antología Musical*, Repertorio did not stage another Cuban play until 1984 when René Buch directed the popular comedy *Café con leche*, by Gloria González. This play was part of the company's repertoire until 1997 because, as a *New York Times* theater critic noted, "[a]lthough thin in substance, it is somehow solid enough in its lighthearted family portrait of three generations, from grandma to grandsons" (Shepard, 1984,

64). Other U.S.-Cuban playwrights staged throughout the years include Nilo Cruz, María Irene Fornés, Carlos Lacámara, Eduardo Machado, Dolores Prida, and Caridad Svich (including her adaptations).

In 1996, Repertorio Español dared to present on stage the famous Cuban singer Rosita Fornés. The audience response was excellent, in spite of the fact that they were insulted by protesters on the other side of the street. This presentation led to Repertorio's Cuba Teatro Project. Working with the UNEAC (Cuban Union of Writers and Artists) and the CNAE (National Council for the Performing Arts), they brought several productions by Abelardo Estorino with the actors from Havana's Compañía Teatral Hubert de Blanck between 1996 and 2000. In September-October 1998, they took to Cuba Eduardo Machado's play *Revoltillo*, the first play by a U.S.-Cuban playwright and company to be performed on the island in more than 30 years. The play and the project received negative criticism because, among several reasons, members of the exile generation believed that

the works of Machado are known as caricature representations of the Cuban family in exile (such as his *Floating Island*), and not as solid examinations of Cuban reality like the works of true playwrights of the Cuban diaspora such as Eduardo Manet, José Triana, María Irene Fornés, Iván Acosta, Pedro Monge Rafuls, Héctor Santiago, and others. (See Hernández Cuellar)

The majority, however, saw the play and the initiative as what they really were—truly groundbreaking with regards to U.S.-Cuba cultural exchanges.

The success of Repertorio Español has been due to the artistic vision of René Buch, the fundraising and sustainability strategies designed since very early on by Gilberto Zaldívar, and the excellent blend of arts, education and outreach brought by Robert Weber Federico, who has relentlessly worked building bridges to the Hispanic-American community for over four decades. It is this rare combination of artistic sensibility and business and organization acumen that have enabled the company to become a national treasure, probably unmatched by any other Spanish language theatre company in the United States.

throughout the years include Macámara, Eduardo Machado, (including her adaptations). They were presented on stage the first time. The audience response was so negative that they were insulted by protesters on the street. They returned to Repertorio's Cuba Teatro (the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists) and the National Union of Performing Arts), they brought back the actors from Havana's theater between 1996 and 2000. In 1996, Eduardo Machado's play *Macámara* brought playwright and company to be performed for several years. The play and the project were, for several reasons, members of

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has been due to the artistic and sustainability strategies of Eduardo Machado, Zaldívar, and the excellent work of Robert Weber Federico, and the Hispanic-American theater's rare combination of artistic and sustainability. It is probably unmatched by any theater in the United States.

Herberto Dumé Papers are also unique to theater history because they allow us to understand not only the beginning of U.S.-Cuban theater in the United States but also Havana's theatrical production in the early years of the Revolution. Most importantly, the physical collection includes a wide selection of negatives, photographs, and stage and costume designs spanning over 40 years. In addition to his well-known work as theater director, he was also an actor and a stage, costume, and light designer. After several years in Europe and in Latin America, he returned to Havana in 1959 to accept the position of Artistic Director of the Grupo Guernica at the then recently created National Theater. In 1965 he immigrated to the United States in the middle of what is known as "parametración," the persecution of homosexuals and other "undesirables." In 1968, he founded what would be known as Dumé Spanish Theatre with José Corrales and Edy Sánchez. Although he staged a number of excellent European avant-garde theatrical productions rare for the nascent Spanish theater in New York at the time, he quickly included important classics of Cuban theater.<sup>6</sup> Among the most significant, one finds the award-winning production of Carlos Felipe's *Requiem por Yarini* (1970) in a tiny basement apartment with a living room transformed into a stage, Abelardo Estorino's *La casa vieja* (1973) and *El robo del cochino* (1975) staged in another basement space, as well as José Brene's *Santa Camila de la Habana Vieja* (1975), and José Triana's *La noche de los asesinos* (1976), done in a space measuring 6 by 3 meters with 21-27 seats.

In 1980, he moved to Miami, taught at Miami-Dade College's Prometeo, and founded Gran Teatro Cubano. He staged several world premieres of exiled playwrights such as Matías Montes Huidobro's *Exilio* and Héctor Santiago's *Balada de un verano en La Habana* (1996) and *En busca del paraíso* (1997). Dumé believed in and always worked towards forming professional theater groups who, according to him, dedicated themselves to *doing* theater, as opposed to forming a Hispanic group that wanted to do theater: "Hacemos teatro en español porque es nuestro idioma. El idioma, desde mi punto de vista artístico, está situado en un segundo plano. El idioma en el teatro ocupa una posición de forma. De color, de estilo y no de contenido" ("Research notes"). Severo Sarduy poetically suggested Dumé's style thus: "Como los actores del Kabuki, la voz distante, distanciada, ajena, sin contaminación emotiva o visceral, como emitida por otro cuerpo, por la figura lateral del Otro sudoroso,

detrás de una máscara blanca" ("Excerpt"). Indeed, Dumé's directorial signature was based on the ways in which he focused on theatrical language as opposed to verbal texts: careful body expression and movements, and the language of gestures and actions.

#### **Archives and U.S.-Cuban Theater History: Miami**

Miami is the other important city for Cuban theatrical production. Through Teresa María Rojas Papers we are able to reconstruct not only the professional history of this outstanding actress and director but also the history of Prometeo Theater. In 1978, two of her students, Mario Ernesto Sánchez and Alina Interián, joined forces with her and founded RAS Community Theater, precursor to the internationally known Teatro Avante.<sup>7</sup> Teatro Avante's primary goal is the preservation of Hispanic cultural heritage through theater. The evolution in their programs reflects the changes in the Miami's Latino/Hispanic community to which they have close ties. Since *Electra Garrigó*, their first production in 1978, they have been the most important player in Miami's and in the United States's Spanish theater scene. Sánchez, as artistic director, has been able to bring to Teatro Avante Miami's most important and innovative theater directors and actors, profiting from the privileged role the city has had for the Cuban diasporic artistic community. Thus, some of Avante's best productions, in addition to Sánchez's, have been those directed by Alberto Sarraín (1983-1990), Rolando Moreno (1991-1994), and Lilliam Vega (2000-2009). One of the earliest invitations to participate in a theater festival came in 1986 when Sánchez' production of René R. Alomá's *Alguna cosita que alivie el sufrir* was invited by Joseph Papp to New York's Festival Latino, then "one of the world's most important arenas for Hispanic performing arts" (Shepard, 1986b, C1). It was the first time a Miami company playing to Cuban audiences participated in the festival. The play was staged at the Public Theater along with the most important theater groups from Spain, Latin America, and Latino U.S.A. It then continued a very successful season in New York's Puerto Rican Travel Theater in 1987, in both Spanish and English.

Alberto Sarraín's award winning world premiere of Virgilio Piñera's *Una caja de zapatos vacía* won them their first international invitation to Puebla, México in 1988. Although the Spanish press was



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#### City: Miami

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lukewarm because of the supposed changes the director had added (Niurka, 1987), the press in English and in Mexico considered the performance to be brilliant and praised the powerful production because of its acting, direction and design. Since then, the company has represented the United States in international festivals all over Latin America, Western and Eastern Europe, and Japan.

In 1986, as part of Acting Together, Teatro Avante started its annual Festival of Hispanic Theatre. By 1990 the festival changed its scope and name to International Hispanic Theater Festival (IHTF). Currently, it is the only one of its kind in the U.S. bringing the most established theater companies from Latin America and Europe and, occasionally inviting U.S.-Latinos; for this reason *American Theatre* recently described it as "[t]he most distinguished U.S. portal to the Americas" (Gener 79). The IHTF has a multifaceted educational component directed by Dr. Beatriz J. Rizk since 1994. The relevance and artistic quality of this festival has been acknowledged internationally by a number of important awards including the "Regional Award for the Arts" (1994) by the Cultural Olympiad of Atlanta's Olympic Committee, and the prestigious "Federico García Lorca Award" (1995) in Fuentevaqueros, Granada, Spain, for its contribution to the development of Hispanic theatre in the United States. Undoubtedly, it is the IHTF and Teatro Avante's innovative directorial techniques that have given this theater company its well-deserved international prominence.

Alberto Sarraín Personal Papers, including the records of La Má Teodora, permits us to recreate not only Cuban theater in Miami during the 80s but also the history of bridge-building between Miami and Havana through theater. Sarraín is a theater director, playwright and researcher who has directed more than 50 productions. In addition, he is one of the protagonists of the theatrical exchanges between Miami and Havana. He studied psychology at the University of Havana after serving a prison sentence for trying to leave the island illegally. He then worked as Assistant Director for Teatro Estudio in Havana until 1979, when he left for the United States. In Miami, Sarraín served as artistic director for Teatro Avante where he directed several award winning productions. He worked in Venezuela between 1991 and 1994, and then returned to Miami and created La Má Teodora Cuban Cultural Group in 1995. The project was meant to introduce new Cuban theater from the Special Period to Miami stages, which he had already started with his production

of Abilio Estevez's *La verdadera culpa de Juan Clemente Zenea* (1991). Sarraín was particularly attracted to the theater of this period because, for him, it spoke of the pain and hardship of these years as well as of the need for solidarity (Mirabal and Velazco).

In 2001, he received the Pen/Newman's Own Award for safeguarding the First Amendment's right to freedom of expression for his struggle against Miami-Dade County's ban on public funding to arts organizations performing work by artists currently living in Cuba. That same year, Sarraín and I co-organized the first *Festival Internacional del Monólogo* through which we brought to Miami close to 30 theater artists from Havana. The festival was described as "the ten days that changed the landscape of the city." Due to the festival's success, we were able to continue theatrical exchanges with Cuba, and in 2002, he directed Abelardo Estorino's *Parece Blanca*, the first co-production of Miami theater artists with Cubans residing in the island. Although *La Má Teodora* as a project ended in 2005, Sarraín has continued to direct both in Havana and in Miami. In 2009, he directed in Miami Abel González Melo's *Chamaco* and the world premiere of *Talco*, both examples of the newest dramaturgy written in Cuba. Sarraín lived in Madrid between 2010 and 2011 where he directed María Irene Fornés's *Fango* in January 2011.

Sarraín's experience as psychologist has influenced his directorial process. The first stages of his work include an analysis of each unit of action studying the motives and conflicts behind each character, thus helping the actors find potentialities in their character. His productions are characterized by a display of visuality where each stage element has an expressionistic function. Always respecting the playtext, his spectacular texts usually include a stage design that allow for a postmodern reading of his works. Some memorable moments include the chorus of *Electra Garrigó* that demythified Cuban exile bourgeoisie, and the inclusion of contemporary clothing, rap, and Cuban rocking chairs where he sat Etéocles and Polinices, thus cubanizing the heroes of Antón Arrufat's *Los siete contra Tebas*. In defense of his choice of plays to direct, he has said: "Busco en una obra que se mueva dentro de cierta constelación humanista, liberal; que represente una nueva óptica de la vida; que cualquiera de los aspectos que roce se resuelvan en una mirada de amor al conflicto que plantea, incluso desde el desamor" (Sarraín). When we see his productions we know that we will be encountering a

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carefully designed and choreographed acting, supported by beautifully suggestive stage and costume designs. Regardless of whether we like or dislike the production, the audience will be struck and forced to think about ourselves and the society in which we live (Manzor, 2010, 45).

Since a key component of live theater is the work of stage and costume designers, the archive gives special importance to these creators. Thus, the physical archive also holds the personal papers of different designers. Highlights include the Leandro Soto Papers documenting his early performance work in Havana as well as his stage and costumes designs in Havana and in the U.S. The Randy Barceló Papers contain visual and photographic documentation of his career as a Broadway musical costume and set designer during the mid 1960's and 1970's as well as his work with Duo Theater and INTAR. These include the costume designs for the award-winning Broadway production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* as well as costume and poster designs for the world premieres of Manuel Martín Jr.'s *Swallows, Rita and Bessie*, and *Union City Thanksgiving*. Through a number of different class projects, students have selected materials from both collections, now available digitally in the CTDA. The digital archive has worked with Jesús Ruiz's Cuban Stage Design Documentation Project in Havana since its inception. Ruiz is a famous stage and costume designer and CTDA's director in Cuba. Highlights of this image archive are numerous stage and costume design images lent to CTDA. In addition, the image archive also holds 3000 images of about 1000 different assets from the personal collection of Abelardo Estorino, including personal photographs from the mid-1950s to the present which document Cuba's theatre scene and are important to scholars outside of theatre history. The series of photographs shot by acclaimed Cuban artist Raúl Martínez, including 1950s commercial advertising, is of particular relevance.<sup>8</sup>

### Archiving Controversies

In 1986, as part of Acting Together, Teatro Avante started its annual Festival of Hispanic Theatre, and found itself in the midst of an unwanted (and unwarranted) political controversy: the cancellation of Teatro Nuevo's production of Dolores Prida's *Coser y cantar*. The CHC theater collections contain several unfortunate jewels from the Prida affair, including a printed program of that first festival with the cancellations noted by hand by the program's donor, as well as a copy of the

letter that sparked the controversy, which lies buried in the middle of Herberto Dumé's correspondence. These theater ephemera, which I uncannily discovered a week after seeing Carlos Garaicoa's "The Crown Jewels" in Tampa,<sup>9</sup> allow us to reconstruct that inopportune moment in what could have been an auspicious beginning for the first festival of its kind in Miami.

Dolores Prida's *Coser y cantar* is the quintessential U.S.-Cuban/Latina play about the internal struggles of a bi-cultural woman trying to negotiate between her U.S. self, portrayed by the character "She," and her Latina self, portrayed by "Ella." The play should be staged bilingually, according to the playwright—Ella speaks in Spanish and She speaks in English; it thus performs the dualities of Latinas who live between two cultures, two languages, and two world visions. Like the rest of Prida's plays, there is no mention of (macro) political issues, but her works do open up the space for the audience to think about gender politics and the different plights of Latinos/as in the U.S.

The 1986 controversy started when painter and writer Juan Abreu and his wife, Marcia Morgado, who worked for Metro Commissioner Sherman Winn, wrote an open letter dated April 29, 1986, which had the names of 34 writers, artists, and members of the Miami Cuban community. Abreu and Morgado (claiming to speak on behalf of the commissioner and other county officials) read their letter in the Spanish-language radio station WQBA. The letter sparked passionate criticism against Prida from a sector of the Cuban exile community demonizing her as "communist" and "enemy of the exile community." Vilification elevated to threats against the Museum of Science where the play was going to be staged, and to death threats against members of Nuevo Teatro and its artistic director, Rafael de Acha. As a result, Acting Together voted unanimously to cancel the play. In the end, the play was indeed cancelled, and the county removed the funding to Teatro Nuevo "so as not to expose the county to the possibility of civil rights litigation" (Fleischman 1B). Prida still came to Miami to participate in the educational component, and the play received a staged reading under close police surveillance. Finally, the American Civil Liberties Union passed a resolution condemning the county for failing to protect freedom of expression.<sup>10</sup>

The protest letter in question stated:

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Es particularmente detestable incluir en un mismo programa obras de víctimas de la llamada "revolución" cubana como René Ariza, condenado a ocho años de prisión por ser sencillamente un escritor en la Cuba de Castro, y defensores activos de tan monstruoso sistema. El apoyo de la señora Prida al gobierno de Cuba está más que probado en su largo quehacer de respaldo a la revista *Areíto* y como patrocinadora del Cuban American Committee, grupo de cabildeo radicado en Washington que trabaja a favor de los intereses del gobierno de Cuba, y naturalmente, para el descrédito del exilio cubano. (Abreu y Morgado)

In a complete ironic move, the letter continued: "Es lamentable que a un evento que podría convertirse en algo importante para el teatro de Miami, le haya sido otorgado un carácter político con la inclusión de la señora Prida" (Abreu y Morgado). Clearly, the added "political character" was not a result of the play's inclusion in the festival, but rather a result of the way in which the letter, blind to theatrical and aesthetic concerns, decided to highlight the playwright's (alleged) connection to Cuba's government. The letter itself, however, was not calling for violence.

These series of actions generated a massive public discussion resulting in 31 articles in *The Miami Herald* and 32 articles in *El Nuevo Herald* during the month of May, as well as in the *New York Times*. In addition to reporting the news, the editorials and viewpoints of the press, both in English and Spanish, underscored the need to alert the community that this was really a case of freedom of speech and of expression: "You don't need a Bill of Rights to guarantee your neighbor's freedom to agree with you. It's the speech we hate that requires the protection" (Cosford 1K). However, in doing so, the press in English often characterized the Cuban community in ways that were taken as an insult by some:

South Florida cannot—must not—continue to be a community where a small group of inquisitors terrorizes opponents and dictates what can be seen or heard.... The notion that art must serve the established party line was established in Cuba by

Fidel Castro. It must not be transplanted to Florida. (Herald Staff 22A).

The press in Spanish, on the other hand, always underscored the fact that it was a small and unrepresentative number within the community that favored censorship, like Norma Niurka's editorial suggests:

Este es el perfecto ejemplo de como unos cuantos dominan a menudo la opinión pública, y suprimen la libertad de expresión artística. Este es el resultado del terrorismo verbal, mental, que es hasta más temible, por sutil, que el de los explosivos. (Niurka, 1986b, Galería 17).

The controversy's plot is simple and, as Peter Brook has taught us, masterplots can repeat themselves with a vengeance. Since the Prida affair, there has been a small number of Cubans who continues to believe that certain art works or artists should not be seen/staged in Miami. The groups have changed throughout the years but the press continues to capitalize on controversies that prove to be attractive newspaper headlines. However, the majority now refuses to operate under the regime of fear that tended to prevail during the 1990s—fear of physical retaliation. Although some of the old tactics/antics are still employed, promoters along with academics and theater artists acknowledge that freedom of artistic expression has been at risk in Miami and refuse to fall into the "fear trap."<sup>11</sup>

### **Moving Towards Community Archives**

Since the Cuban Theatre Digital Archive tends to approach culture not only as something that we inherit, but also as something that we create and experience, it invites community participation. Thus, we work with individual artists and theater companies acknowledging that

by collecting, preserving and making accessible documents, photographs, oral histories and many other materials which document the histories of particular groups and localities, community archives and heritage initiatives make an invaluable contribution to the preservation of a more inclusive

transplanted to Florida. (Herald

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We expect contributions of other unique collections of either previously digitized or "born-digital" images that may not meet technical archiving standards.<sup>12</sup> We recognize that research needs, community interest, cultural heritage and preservation considerations may occasionally take precedence over best practices in determining if an object will be added to the project.<sup>13</sup> These concerns demonstrate our shared "postcustodial mindset for archives":

This new paradigm for archives replaces the profession's traditional intellectual focus on the physical record—that thing which is under our actual physical custody in archives—with a renewed focus on the context, purpose, intent, inter-relationships, functionality, and accountability of the record, its creator, and its creation processes, wherever these occur. (Cook)<sup>14</sup>

This mindset will inform appraisal and selection of born-digital of other images as we address the following questions of context: 1) we have to take into consideration what these images mean in the context of why and how they were created—addressing this issue alone for the images digitized in Cuba would require another essay) we are cognizant of the fact that one of the most important aspects of this project—beside preservation—is to enable access to information.

### Paradoxes of Archive Fever

It could seem paradoxical to attempt to "stabilize" a fleeting, collaborative art form such as Cuban and Cuban American theater in an archive—primarily a repository of written documents. Live theater and performance transmit knowledge in non-written fashion. Since the knowledge privileged by traditional archives is that of the permanence of the written text, we lose the knowledge that "embodied" performance transmits, "the memory passed down through bodies and mnemonic practices" (Taylor 35). Acknowledging the constructed nature of a digital archive as well as the stimulatory impulse inherent in digital images, we

propose digital documentation as a possible way to expand our notion of the archive, as a way to give space to the gestural and mnemonic practices transmitted by live performance. We are interested in the use of multimedia technology not only to document and preserve theatrical productions, but also to present critical analyses of performance processes. The creation of audiovisual hypermedia promises to provide tools that will help both scholars and artists in documenting, preserving and researching intangible cultural forms. In addition, audiovisual hypermedia helps us prepare our students for the critical analysis of visual art forms. This interactive digital theater archive is unique, then, because of the range of materials it encompasses, the ways in which it combines the database with digital documentation, and the space it offers for innovative audio-visual hypermedia publication.

Although the focus of phase 1 of this archive is one particular community (Greater Cuba) and one particular art form (theater/performance as intangible culture), the digital platforms are being created as open-source so they will be available to other communities of scholars, historians, and artists interested in the preservation of live performances as intangible cultural heritage. Following the etymology of the word archive, our aim is to make this digital archive be the “beginning,” “the source” of any research on theater in Greater Cuba first, and then on Latino/a theater, as well as the source for multimedia theater documentation and research. This archive, like theater, aims to be collaborative, always in progress. Digital Scholarship and Programs at the University of Miami supports the development of an ever-expanding digital collection of visual materials, primarily videos and photos, as well as performance texts—both published and unpublished. The design is developing based in input and feedback from theater artists, librarians, and independent collaborators in the U.S. and in Cuba. Theater artists, scholars, professors, and students interested in collaborating, can help build it as part of their class projects.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Show Must Go On**

In spite of financial limitations, we carry on building this “monument” of Cuban and U.S.-Cuban theatre history.<sup>16</sup> As a community cultural heritage initiative, the archive is part of a virtual culture that lives beyond cyberspace and allows communication and exchange between



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two communities that are politically separated. Like other virtual communities, "our constructed communities live within and around the relationships we form by moving within an electronic space that connects us with others. Virtual cultures extend, rather than exclude, our physical contact with each other" (Goldman-Segall 32). As a research site, it already offers scholars a possible, tentative access to an artistic practice that will otherwise disappear. By capturing the non-verbal memory of a fleeting event, this archive reflects changes in the practice of theatre as it serves as a witness for thousands of productions via programs, photographs, video clips, video-streaming, newspaper reviews, cards, etc. It also serves as an unwritten theatre history, insofar as researchers are able to know what plays were written and/or produced during a specific period. In addition, it is a re/research and pedagogical tool. As an interactive pedagogical tool, it offers professors and students the opportunity to use these materials in the classroom, and it allows students to be involved in research as they can add information to the database as well as "build" specific pages or Web/Scenes. Theatre researchers have access to materials that they can then annotate, rearrange in order to create other interpretative histories and "stories." Researchers in other fields—African American Studies, Anthropology, History, Latin American Studies, Political Sciences, Women and Gender Studies—will have access to cultural materials otherwise unavailable to them. Most importantly, it facilitates a space for innovative hypermedia publications in theatre research. Finally, it provides a useful link to the artistic community that can use the archive as a showcase of its work and as a reference point for potential publishers, directors, casting agents, and grant agencies.

Despite the challenge of U.S.-Cuba relations (and Miami in particular), we continue to develop ties and collaboration on intellectual, artistic as well as technical levels, with partners in Cuba. The Cuban Theater Digital Archive and its goal of preserving and providing access to evanescent performance materials, while fostering scholarly communication between different communities, will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible at this time of potentially changing attitudes in U.S.-Cuban relations. The CTDA is creating virtual communities in which cooperation, mutual understanding and common artistic and intellectual goals bring us together outside of the cold war rhetoric that continues to guide U.S.-Cuba relations on both sides of the

Florida straits. Through this process, the CTDA may even find itself in a position to serve as a model to other digital initiatives exploring U.S.-Cuba collaboration.

### NOTES

\* This essay and the development of the Cuban Theater Digital Archive were made possible thanks to Cuba's Consejo Nacional de las Artes Escénicas, and the University of Miami Libraries Digital Fellowship Program, the Small Grant program from the College of Arts and Sciences (2004-05), and the Center for Latin American Studies. I would also like to thank the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, especially James Early, director of Cultural Heritage Policy; I was fortunate to have received a Rockefeller fellowship that allowed me to be in residence at the Smithsonian Spring 2005. Finally, I would like to offer a special note of appreciation to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation who has recognized CTDA as a model of digital scholarly publication and is funding this project generously.

<sup>1</sup> The legacy site can be found at <<http://scholar.library.miami.edu/archivoteatral>>. In addition to Cuba, the University of Miami Libraries was an ideal place to develop this digital archive for two reasons. It houses the Cuban Heritage Collection (<http://www.library.miami.edu/chc>), which preserves, provides access to, and promotes the use of an outstanding array of primary and secondary sources in various forms that document Cuba and its diaspora. CHC is a major supporter of the CTDA, contributing content to the digital archive from its 31 collections of the papers of theater companies, playwrights, directors, and actresses (<http://library.miami.edu/chc/collections/theater/>). The UM Libraries, with generous funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, explored strategic options for the future of the Cuban Theater Digital Archive (CTDA), from February to July 2009. Through research into the current landscape of digital theater projects, consultation with experts in Cuban theater (both in Cuba and internationally), teaching and learning, digital library technology, and intellectual property, we discovered that no other project in the world was documenting theater in Cuba and the Cuban Diaspora to the extent of the CTDA. We are currently in the process of redesigning the database and the legacy site (with another generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 2010) in order to transform CTDA into a new media portal that can integrate classroom education in Cuban and U.S.-Cuban theater and cultural studies, new media, and archival primary research with an online scholarly publishing effort to provide a unique unbiased view of contemporary global Cuban culture. For a discussion of this archive in relation to cultural heritage debates, see Manzor, 2005.

CTDA may even find itself in a digital initiatives exploring U.S.-

the Cuban Theater Digital Archive to Nacional de las Artes Escénicas, a Fulbright Fellowship Program, the Small Business Administration (2004-05), and the Center for Latin American Studies. I would like to thank the Smithsonian Institution, especially James Early, for his generous assistance. It is fortunate to have received a Rockefeller Foundation grant for residence at the Smithsonian Spring House. I would like to express a note of appreciation to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and CTDA as a model of digital archiving project generously.

The Cuban Theater Digital Archive (<http://scholar.library.miami.edu/ctda/>) at the University of Miami Libraries was an important project for two reasons. It houses the Cuban Theater Digital Archive (<http://scholar.library.miami.edu/chc/>), which preserves, promotes, and provides an outstanding array of primary and secondary materials on Cuba and its diaspora. CHC provides access to digitized content to the digital archive of Cuban theater companies, playwrights, directors, and actors (<http://scholar.library.miami.edu/chc/collections/theater/>). The UM Libraries are supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has supported the Cuban Theater Digital Archive through research into the current state of Cuban theater and collaboration with experts in Cuban theater history and learning, digital library development, and research. I discovered that no other project in the United States focused on the Cuban Diaspora to the extent of this project. I am currently redesigning the database and the interface with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I am turning CTDA into a new media portal that can provide access to U.S.-Cuban theater and cultural heritage research with an online scholarly view of contemporary global theater in relation to cultural heritage

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of "Greater Cuba" see López, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> I use U.S.-Cuban instead of Cuban American for the reasons elaborated on Manzor, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> For information on these companies as well as others mentioned throughout this essay, please visit <[www.cubantheater.org](http://www.cubantheater.org)>. For information on theater related materials at the CHC please visit the web sites indicated on note 2 of this essay.

<sup>5</sup> See Shepard 1972, Simone, and Roche, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> See Pereiras for an excellent unpublished history of Dumé's work in New York, and Parra.

<sup>7</sup> RAS was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1979. Although a name change was not filed until 1986, by mid 1984 the press was already calling them RAS/Teatro Avante and they were filing for grants as RAS/Teatro Avante. See Niurka, 1984, and Teatro Avante's incorporation papers available through Florida Department of State Division of Corporations.

<sup>8</sup> Alberto Sarrain was the main contact with our colleagues in Havana during the developmental stages of CTDA. His initial work on the archive was funded minimally by a Small Research Grant from the University of Miami College of Arts and Sciences. The digitization of materials housed in Cuba was done in Havana by Odalys Moreno under the direction of Jesús Ruiz. Cost of digitization materials was funded by the same Small Research grant. Ruiz's equipment was funded in part by Cuban Artist Fund.

<sup>9</sup> Carlos Garaicoa, "La enmienda que hay en mí." Art Exhibit at the University of South Florida's Contemporary Art Museum, August–November 2010. Press release can be found at <[http://ira.usf.edu/PDFS/USFCAM\\_Garaicoa\\_Press\\_Release.pdf](http://ira.usf.edu/PDFS/USFCAM_Garaicoa_Press_Release.pdf)>. "The Crown Jewels" are a series of miniature cast silver models in which he reproduces his vision of different sites of state-sponsored repression and censorship worldwide, from Havana's Villa Marista to the United States's Pentagon.

<sup>10</sup> See Santiago, 1986a and b, for the best press summary of the events in Spanish and English.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Cancio Isla, 2002a, b, c, and d, and Niurka, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> We follow the Digital Preservation Coalition's definition of "Born Digital: Digital materials which are not intended to have an analogue equivalent, either as the originating source or as a result of conversion to analogue form" (Digital Preservation Coalition).

<sup>13</sup> This project involves digitizing for preservation, digitizing for access, and preserving born-digital information. We are aware of the ARL warning of the unfortunate confusion between these three (see 7 xx).

<sup>14</sup> Some of these concluding ideas are influenced by "Understanding Born Digital Records: Journalists and Archivists with Parallel Challenges," see Cook and Ham.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the pages in CTDA on María Irene Fornés's Signature Season developed as part of Gwendolyn Alker's advanced seminar on María Irene Fornés held in the Department of Drama, New York University, Spring 2008, as well as Alker, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> See Lazinger, "How Much Will it Cost?," 111-135.

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