

E-MISFÉRICA 8.2 #NARCOMACHINE ALL ISSUES PARTICIPATE MASTHEAD



JULIO DE LA NUEZ

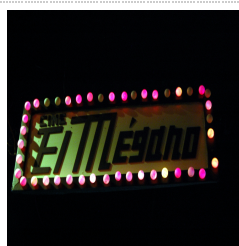
Ground Down to Nothing but Still Fighting: A Review of Talco

LILLIAN MANZOR AND AUSTIN WEBBERT | UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Talco: un drama de tocador. Written by Abel González Melo. Directed by Alberto Sarraín. La Má Teodora, ARCA Images, and [Cuban Theater Digital Archive](#). Abanico Theater, Coconut Grove, Florida. 16 April 2010.

Talco: un drama de tocador (Talco: A Powder Room Drama) is the final play in Abel González Melo's trilogy, *Fugas de Invierno* (Winter Scapes). One of Cuba's most important contemporary playwrights, González Melo is known for a hybrid poetics in which he employs contemporary formal features, such as non-linear storytelling and flashbacks (à la Michel Azama, Bernard-Marie Koltès, and Juan Mayorga), interwoven with elements from the classical tradition in order to stage the ignoble realities of postmodern life. The trilogy addresses concerns that are dear to its author and his generation, namely: the complex and contradictory ways in which homosexuality, sex, and migration from the countryside to the capital become means of survival in a society that has lost all sense of value.

Talco interweaves the stories of four characters trying to make their living on the margins of Cuban society. Javi, El Ruso (the Russky; Ariel Teixidó), a drug dealer, and pimp, is the manager of El Mégano, a movie theater. Mashenka, La Dura (the Rough Lady; Juan David Ferrer), is an aging transvestite who works in the theater and also for Javi's side business in drugs [videoclip 1]. Zuleidy, La Guanti (the Glove; Oneisís Valido), is an architect who migrated to Havana from Guantánamo and works as a prostitute in order to take care of her daughter. Álvaro, El Cherna (the Flamer; Norberto Correa), is a homosexual dying of throat cancer. As the paths of these four characters crisscross throughout the play, we discover that Zuleidy happens to be Mashenka's daughter and that Alvaro needs cocaine to help him through his final days. In this desperate and precarious nocturnal setting, the characters struggle to survive, suffering and celebrating life while they obsessively pursue the illusions of ephemeral pleasures: sex, drugs, and money. The story follows their vicious power struggles, which are marked by extreme verbal and physical violence.



JULIO DE LA NUEZ

Much of the action in *Talco* unfolds in the filthy and decrepit bathroom of El Mégano. The action descends into a dank underworld where the old convictions of grand historical progress have crumbled into a disenchanting present reality. The play stages the confrontation between the promised eternal spring of Cuba's *hombre nuevo* (new man)—those old values that were once socially significant but never mentioned in the play—and the present-day reality of drugs, violence, and corruption. Something has gone terribly wrong, but we only see the end result. It is the numb winter of humanity for sale: our trafficked and trafficking bodies, condemned to a tropical winter.

The Spanish title, *Talco*, plays on a series of meanings. “*Talco*,” talcum powder, recalls the ubiquitous presence of cocaine dust, the various white powders used to cut-in false purity, as well as the Cuban condition of being “*hecho talco pero dando guerra*,” ground down to nothing, but still fighting. The play's setting also reveals the subtitle's dark irony: “*tocador*” is a term for “*powder room*,” which carries similar class associations in both Spanish and English. However, the characters live amidst filthy urinals without running water in a cinema with floors

covered with grime and condoms.

González Melo's play script won the First Cuban-German Theater Prize in 2009, which is sponsored by the Goethe Institute, the International Theatre Institute, and Havana's Casa Editorial Tablas-Alarcos. *Talco* had its world premiere in Miami, under the direction of the Cuban-born and Miami-based director Alberto Sarraín, one of the protagonist's Miami-Havana theatrical exchanges. Sarraín has put together a talented team to create a staging that uses the aesthetics of “dirty realism” to interrogate this insistence on



GUANTI CHERNA DIES

JULIO DE LA NUEZ

struggling to survive (“dando guerra”). [video clip 2] With the excellent set-design of Havana-based Eduardo Arrocha, Sarraín create a minimalist scenery: in the background stands a series of urinals, a toilet, and a stall with a dilapidated and filthy door. Occasionally the curtain encloses and cuts-off characters, emphasizing their solitude and imprisonment. Sarraín and Arrocha also place the audience in the position of voyeur—the audience encircles the stage on three sides, nearly enclosing it. The setting connects the cinematically represented reality of the characters to the lived reality of the audience, implicating the audience in the drama of the play, as well as in its crime. At a gut level, we feel a palpable violation and anguish, sharing the violence with our “family” of migrants, traffickers, and trafficked.

In *Talco*, the audience becomes part of the dysfunctional family portrayed. In a masterful directorial reversal, the marginalized pimp, prostitute, and transvestite, before living in the shadows and silence of the underground, now inherit the center-stage, while the privileged audience is

exiled to the periphery.



JULIO DE LA NUEZ

Throughout *Talco*, Juan David Ferrer admirably brings Mashenka to life on stage avoiding the stereotypical performance of transvestites. Especially in the moments where s/he does not speak, the movement of her arms, playing with her hair, a batting of her eye lashes, a sad and lost gaze when *Javi* leaves, all of her non-verbal gestures help convey a Mashenka that, in addition to being tough, as her nickname implies, is also vulnerable, loving, motherly, protective, and funny. Ferrer is able to communicate Mashenka’s complex psychology and rounds a character that is not as multifaceted in the play script. González Melo and Sarraín, along with the actors and the rest of the creative team, have opened a compelling space of theater well worth the pain and pleasure of the experience.

Lillian Manzor is Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures and Director of the Cuban/Latino Theater Digital Archive at the University of Miami. She is widely published in the field of Latin American and Latino/a cultural studies and theater and performance studies. In addition to numerous scholarly articles, she co-edited the first book on Latina performance artists (*Latinas on Stage*, 2000). She also co-edited the first book on Cuban American theater in Spanish published in Havana (*Teatro cubano actual: dramaturgia escrita en los Estados Unidos*, 2005). She is currently finishing a book manuscript on Cuban theater in the US, *Marginality Beyond Return: US-Cuban Performances and Politics*. She has also directed the video-editing of over 100 filmed theater productions, in Cuba and the United States, both equity and on-equity. She is actively involved in developing US-Cuba cultural dialogues through theater and performance.

Austin Webbert is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of the University of Miami’s undergraduate program in Latin American Studies.

References

González Melo, Abel. 2011. *Talco: un drama de tocador*. Havana: Ediciones Alarcos.

González Melo, Abel. 2011. *Talco: A Powder Room Drama*. Trans. Yael Prizant. Unpublished translation.



DETAIL: TUS PASOS SE PERDIERON CON EL PAISAJE (2006-ONGOING), FERNANDO BRITO.

#narcomachine

DONATE

— Editorial Remarks —

Jill Lane and Marcial Godoy-Anativia

ESSAYS

THE NARCO-MACHINE AND THE WORK OF VIOLENCE: NOTES TOWARD ITS DECODIFICATION
Rossana Reguillo

YUPPIES, JUNKIES, AND MULES: NARCOTIC SUBJECTIVITIES, DIALECTICAL IMAGES, AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN CÓRDOBA (ARGENTINA)
Gustavo Blázquez

ALL ROADS LEAD NORTH: A READING OF NEWS ON MIGRATION THROUGH THE FIGURE OF THE COYOTE
Amparo Marroquín Parducci

NOCIÓN DE GASTO Y ESTÉTICA DE PRECARIEDAD EN LAS REPRESENTACIONES LITERARIAS DEL NARCOTRÁFICO
Jungwon Park and Gerardo Gómez-Michel

THE CRÓNICA OF THE NARCO AND THE TRANSA ACCORDING TO CRISTIAN ALARCÓN
Gabriela Polit Dueñas

CAPITALISMO GORE: NARCOMÁQUINA Y PERFORMANCE DE GÉNERO
Sayak Valencia Triana

AN ABORIGINAL YOUTH GANG NARCONOMY
Kathleen Buddle

MULTIMEDIO TEXTS

BODY AND SPACE AS SITES OF TRANSFER: VIOLETA LUNA'S REQUIEM FOR A LOST LAND
Roberto Gutiérrez Varea

LOST IN PLACE: REFLECTIONS ON TRAGEDY AND PHOTOGRAPHY WITH FERNANDO BRITO'S LANDSCAPES
Jill Lane

DOSSIER

AN OPEN LETTER FROM A POST-NATIONAL ARTIST TO A MEXICAN CRIME CARTEL
Guillermo Gomez-Peña

THE NARCOPOLITICAL IMAGINARY
William Garriott

ANTES
Lolita Bosch

MARTYRS
Santiago Rueda

PALAS POR PISTOLAS
Pedro Reyes

LOS NARCOCORRIDOS, EXPRESIONES CULTURALES DE LA VIOLENCIA
Anajilda Mondaca Cota

DAILY LIFE
Magali Tercero

ÉTICA PARA ARÓN
Rosa Ester Juárez

NARCO AND CINEMA: THE WAR OVER THE PUBLIC DEBATE IN MEXICO
Carlos A. Gutiérrez

SHOUTING IN THE PLAZA
Isabel Vericat

THE WRITING LESSON
Juan de Dios Vázquez

THE NARCO IN THE LA-LA-LAND OF JABAZ
Jabaz

THE SON OF A SINALOA DRUG LORD IN SEARCH OF A NORMAL LIFE
Diego Osorno

MULTIMEDIOS



VIOLETA LUNA: REQUIEM FOR A LOST LAND



CRISTIAN ALARCÓN: VISITATIONS TO THE MACHINE



FERNANDO BRITO: TUS PASOS SE PERDIERON CON EL PAISAJE

REVIEW ESSAYS

TWO NOTES ON RECENT FILMS BY GIANFRANCO ROSI AND NATALIA ALMADA
Christopher Fraga

CONTAMINATING CRIME AND IMMUNIZING POLICE GANGS: THE REEMERGENCE OF SOVEREIGN STATE VIOLENCE IN ELITE SQUAD
Micaela Kramer

LA SECRETA OBSCENIDAD DE CADA DÍA; TELEMACO / SUB-EUROPA, O EL PADRE AUSENTE; EL DESEO DE TODA CIUDADANA; QUERIDO COYOTE; TRISTAN E ISOLDA BY MARCO ANTONIO DE LA PARRA Y TERESINA BUENO
Camila González Ortiz

MAKING A KILLING: FEMICIDE, FREE TRADE, AND LA FRONTERA BY ALICIA GASPAR DE ALBA AND GEORGINA GUZMAN
Nathalie Bragadir

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

LA CASA DE LA FUERZA BY ANGÉLICA LIDDELL
Jorge Loureiro Figueira

GROUND DOWN TO NOTHING BUT STILL FIGHTING: A REVIEW OF TALCO
Lilian Manzor and Austin Webbert

BOOK REVIEWS

BRAZILIAN POPULAR MUSIC AND CITIZENSHIP
BY IDELBER AVELAR Y CHRISTOPHER DUNN
Cristel Jusino Díaz

BUENA VISTA IN THE CLUB: RAP, REGGAETÓN, AND
REVOLUTION IN HAVANA BY GEOFFREY BAKER
Ana Paulina Lee

CONSTRUCTING GLOBAL ENEMIES: HEGEMONY AND
IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSES ON
TERRORISM AND DRUG PROHIBITION BY EVA
HERSCHINGER
Sharada Balachandran Orihuela

EL CARTEL DE SINALOA: UNA HISTORIA DEL USO
POLITICO DEL NARCO BY DIEGO OSORNO
Arturo Laris

EL HOMBRE SIN CABEZA BY SERGIO GONZÁLEZ
RODRÍGUEZ
Silvia Spitta

ME LLAMAN DESDE ALLA: TEATRO Y PERFORMANCE
DE LA DIASPORA PUERTORRIQUEÑA BY ROSALINA
PERALES

Isel Rodríguez Concepción

NO SOY YO: AUTOBIOGRAFIA, PERFORMANCE Y LOS
NUEVOS ESPECTADORES BY ESTRELLA DE DIEGO
Claudia Salazar

PERFORMING PIETY: MAKING SPACE SACRED WITH
THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE BY ELAINE A. PEÑA
Jennifer Reynolds-Kaye

POLICING METHAMPHETAMINE: NARCOPOLITICS IN
RURAL AMERICA BY WILLIAM GARRIOTT
Harel Shapira

PRETTY MODERN: BEAUTY, SEX, AND PLASTIC
SURGERY IN BRAZIL BY ALEXANDER EDMONDS
Ashley Mears

QUEERING THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN MEXICO AND
BRAZIL BY RAFAEL DE LA DEHESA
Marta Cabrera

ADELANTE SIN MIEDO BY GUSTAVO ALVARO
Magda Rivera

THE CROSS BORDER PROJECT'S FUENTE OVEJUNA
Leticia Robles-Moreno

FILM REVIEWS

¿QUIÉN MATÓ A LLAMITA BLANCA? BY RODRIGO
BELLOT
Suzanna Reiss

DONATE

Why can't I read articles in my selected language?

¿Por qué no puedo leer los artículos en el idioma seleccionado?

Por que não posso ler os artigos em meu idioma selecionado?