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An Archeology of Cuban Ballet:

reading state discourse in Alicia Alonso's

Ballet Nacional de Cuba

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Culture and Performance

by

Andrew Michael Martinez

2017

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2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Archeology of Cuban Ballet:

reading state discourse in Alicia Alonso's

Ballet Nacional de Cuba

by

Andrew Michael Martinez

Doctor of Philosophy in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Allen Fraleigh Roberts, Chair

This dissertation endeavors to produce an archeological history of the *Ballet Nacional de Cuba* (BNC). Founded a decade before the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and nationalized as a state institution at the start of the Revolution, the phenomenon of Cuba's ballet goes beyond the anomaly of an elite practice thriving in a socialist state. Its provocative story lies in the first two decades of the Revolution when cultural production was sutured to the moral and economic development of the new state. This state-funded company has supported the socialist ethos of the state through boycotts, producing ballets featuring themes of the Cuban Revolution, and initiating a Cuban style of ballet choreography and pedagogy taught throughout the island. This historical project mobilizes Michel Foucault's concept of the archeology as a theoretical framework for thinking about Cuba's 1959 revolutionary state as producing systems knowledge

(or epistemes) via state apparatuses that would then sanction and mold cultural production such as a national ballet. Like the grammar by which rules and language take form, these systems of knowledge for Foucault produce what he terms as discursive traces, which in this project become state ideology and legislation as well as choreography and dance movement. This archeology of the BNC analyzes the company as a cultural institution, its classical and contemporary repertoire, and its founder and prima ballerina Alicia Alonso as articulations, or traces of official state language and are contextualized within contemporaneous representations of socialist ideology drawing from the spheres of the revolution's economic, gender, race, and class projects.

The dissertation of Andrew Michael Martinez is approved.

Lauren Derby

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2017

To my parents:

Sylvia Basurto Martinez and Darrell Michael Martinez

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There is not enough time to fully acknowledge the following people, but do know that they are my life's blood: Mom, Dad, Sam, and Matt. Eliza and Theo. Becky Novotny Bullard and Ward Bullard. Lucia Skinner. Jenny Basurto.

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Introduction: An Archeology of Cuban Ballet: Reading State Discourse in Alicia Alonso's *Ballet Nacional de Cuba*

In the two years following U.S. President Barack Obama's 2014 announcement to normalize relations between the U.S. and Cuba, there have been several articles about Cuban ballet in mainstream U.S. newspapers. In May 2016, *New York Times* writer Brian Seibert penned two features on the future of ballet and modern dance in Cuba. Cuba's "future" has been a strident theme in mainstream U.S. media since President Obama's announcement, and while Seibert's write-ups offer both historical accounts and projections for dance on the island, it is the tenor of the language used to describe the State and the dance that this dissertation will center on. For example, take "In Search of Balance in Havana," the title of Seibert's May 7, 2014. The title alone epitomizes a point of view for how Cuba is conceptualized in a Western imagination. While the author makes a creative and literary gesture to the phenomenon of dance as a constant negotiation of gravity, intention—and, yes—balance; "In Search of Balance in Havana," also obliquely suggests there is a *lack* of "balance" in Cuba's capital city. While it is not the purview of this project to expose, identify, and locate imperialist malice in U.S. representations of Cuba, it *is* the focus to examine discourses and systems of knowledge production that may perceive, shape, and qualify an alleged deficit of "balance," quality, and accomplishments deemed "essential" to "democracy" as some would define the term.

Seibert's articles invoke what Cuban scholar Lou Perez terms the "Time Warp Trope" by conflating both Cuban ballet and *técnica Cubana*—the latter a dance form invented in the Revolution—with "the 1950s Chevys famously still cruising Cuba's streets: gorgeous,

miraculously maintained, way behind the times."[1] Seibert details that while Cuban ballet has a more pronounced international reputation than *técnica Cubana*, it is "even more trapped in amber."[2] Although Seibert admits that Cuban movement practices include traces of American modern dance from the last 40 or 50 years as well as influences from European dance-theater and the work of choreographers like Pina Bausch, he specifically characterizes lack of U.S. influence on Cuban ballet as a "scarcity" that dismisses Cuba's modern dance as antiquated. For whatever lack of Western (read: North American, U.S.) influence Seibert reports upon, he does concede that there is something of value to be found in the Cuban ballet school: Discipline. One ballet instructor from Sarasota, Florida, relays to Seibert that when they travel to the island for workshops, his students benefit tremendously from the discipline and work ethic instilled in the teaching of Cuban ballet technique, further noting that American culture, and therefore the students' attitude toward training, is "much more relaxed."[3]

Seibert's tertiary reference to the discipline in Cuban ballet technique touches upon a notion that there is more to the discussion of ballet in Cuba than qualitative comparisons of its aesthetic development, or in Seibert's view, *non*-development. In light of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, a certain discourse reduces Cuba to a passive and isolated country. A blank slate for any influence. From this perspective, if there is discipline on the island, it must be because the USSR "imposed" it. This was not the case when Marian Horosko visited Cuba in the 1970s with the assumption that ballet in Cuba was a Soviet export. She found her speculations to be

[1] Louis Perez, "Visit Cuba, Before It Changes!" *NACLA*, August 17, 2016, https://nacla.org/news/2016/08/17/visit-cuba-it-changes

[2] Brian Seibert, "What Comes Next for Cuban Modern Dance?" *The New York Times*, May 6, 2016.

[3] ibid.

off-base and reported that the ballet was indelibly "Cuban" and not a facsimile of the Soviet tradition of ballet. Lisa Garcia Bedolla, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, shares that such a discourse of change being brought to the island is misleading because Cuba has had access to other foreign exchanges and investments for many decades.[4]

Louis Perez suggests in his article, "Visit Cuba, Before It Changes!" that we are at a moment when the media is anticipating a great shift due to U.S. presence on the island and an assumption that Cuba is a vacant vessel, thirsty for American goods.[5] However, outside of a capitalist and Western logic, Cubans have been developing and repurposing their own cultural forms since before the 1959 Revolution. For example, Alicia Alonso and her husband Fernando Alonso were making "Cuban" themed ballets before the Revolution as part of the music society *Pro Arte Musical* and the art collective *La Silva*, respectively.[6] It is from the purview of Cuba to create and manifest its own culture that this project focuses on the Ballet Nacional de Cuba—its technique, its repertoire, and its premiere ballerina Alicia Alonso—as discursive objects constituted to some measure by State discourse. This archeology of knowledge is not an illustration of how Cubans approximate ballet as defined in and by the Soviet Union or any other country; rather it is an examination of how Cuban values and traditions might have been assimilated into the dance as introduced, to transform it into a distinct idiom all its own.

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[4] Dave Iverson, "Cuba, One Year After Diplomatic Détente," *KQED*, Jan 7, 2016. http://www.kqed.org/a/forum/R201601070900

[5] At the time of research and writing of this dissertation, relations between the U.S. and Cuba have fluctuated. Reuters has reported that president-elect Donald Trump has threatened to end the recent détente that U.S. President Obama and Cuban president Raul Castro have achieved. See Patricia Zengerle and Matt Spetalnick, "U.S. lawmakers, Cuban business owners urge Trump to preserve détente," Reuters, Dec. 7, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-cuba-idUSKBN13W1ZW

[6] Ahmed Piñeiro, "La Silva, una experiencia escénica," *Cuba en el Ballet*, no. 99 (2002): 34.

I propose an historical accounting outside of the "Time Warp Trope" Lou Perez suggests as emanating from a Western Capitalist discourse. Instead, this project is an archeology of the efforts, the passions, and the labor of a political and social movement. In an alternate discourse, Cuban ballet and *técnica Cubana* were developed to serve a socio-political utility. Their service was to the State and their purpose was to affect a Cuban-specific efficacy and promote a Revolutionary culture. Isidro Rolando, a veteran dancer, teacher, and choreographer for *Danza Contemporánea*, laments the potentiality for changes to the Revolutionary dance form of *técnica Cubana* in the wake of normalizing the relationship between the U.S.-Cuba : "We created things of value," he said ruefully, "but they will probably disappear."[7] Rolando's projection is rooted in the reality of the Cuban dance form adjusting in order to accommodate American imaginaries of Cuba, U.S. models of dance programming, and of course, U.S. dollars.[8]

Seibert and Rolando's perspectives on dance in Cuba present an opportunity to examine the logic of ballet's adaptation in Cuba. The thrust of my project is to consider the epistemological positions from which ballet in Cuba may be considered, and I present two epistemes that operate as templates, rather than as a dyad, for how ballet in Cuba is described. One episteme produces a Western-centered discourse and imagines how the U.S. may influence Cuba in the future. This discourse generates a presumed, ostensibly universal language will be referred to—how Alicia describes ballet critics' response to Cuban ballet—as a discourse of *astonishment*.[9] Through a positionality of *development*, contributions that Cuba and socialism

[7] Brian Seibert, "What Comes Next for Cuban Modern Dance?" *The New York Times*, May 6, 2016.

[8] ibid.

[9] I will be referring to Alicia Alonso as "Alicia." Just as the scope of this dissertation is to understand the formation of language broadly, and the identity formation of Cuban ballet

make to the U.S. and the world can be considered. My reference to "the West" is influenced by Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents,* which considers how liberal thought as it emerged in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century defined human subjectivity based on a generalizing amalgam of European attributes that "simultaneously differentiated populations in the colonies as less than human."[10] As Lowe explores how the development of "universal" attributes such as liberty, reason, civilization, and freedom are dependent upon the subjugation of "non-human," colonized people, I find such insights applicable to the histories of colonization in Latin America and specifically to the temporal experience of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. I utilize the terms "West" and "Western" as being derived from epistemes and practices of

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specifically, so too should it be my intention to select an appropriate moniker for the woman largely responsible for the Cuban ballet. To refer to her as "Alicia" is not to deny Alicia Alonso a deserved honorific due to her age and accomplishments, nor is the seeming familiar first-name usage meant to subjugate her personhood as a woman of color descended from a former colony. No. My decision has been influenced by my fieldwork in Havana, at the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, and my observations of how pervasive Alicia's name and image is throughout Havana. In his biography of Alicia, Dance critic Walter Terry asserts that there are "two superstars in Cuba, both known by their *first* names: FIDEL! ALICIA!" (emphasis added in italics, Terry, 1981, 2).

Additionally, Martin Guevara's article "How Should One Refer to Fidel Castro?" (2016) illustrates a complex classification based on a Cuban's geographical and ideological proximity to the island and therefore the Revolution. For example, Guevara details that on the island first name usage might connote solidarity with the Revolution and its leader, but it could also express frustration with the man. Those Cubans who left the island may have switched to referring to Fidel as "Castro" as a way of deflecting any "suspicious sign of familiarity. Guevara notes that artists in favor of the Revolution would most likely refer to Castro as "Fidel." In honor of Alicia who had a personal friendship of Fidel, is herself a public figure and outspoken supporter of the Revolution, it is from here that the ballerina will be referred to as Alicia. It is in tribute to Alicia's choices as a woman, dancer and revolutionary, that I call her Alicia. By her own agency, Alicia has aligned her company with, and verbally supported, the Revolution. Alicia by any other name would be just as appropriate, but it would not necessarily capture or convey her emic contributions to the Revolution and ballet.

[10] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press (2015), 6.

colonization.[11] In other words, Western discourses about Cuba are often predicated upon, and operate from, a logic of superiority.

If a discourse of astonishment and a logic of superiority do not acknowledge full human capacity, a discourse of development operates within an episteme of knowledge-production which has resulted not only in a Cuban ballet known the world over, but the Revolution's contributions to the fields of education and medicine. Despite Cuba's discursive, political, and economic isolation from the U.S., the country has made formidable strides, from finding a solution for mother-to-infant transmission of HIV, to creating CimaVax, a vaccine for lung cancer.[12] Cuba has collaborated with countries around the world through foreign investment which dismisses the stereotype that the island is derelict. Moreover, in 2011 *Los Angeles Times* reporter Reed Johnson asked Alicia what she thought of the easing of travel restrictions by the United States government so that artists from both countries may travel to and from Cuba for creative exchanges. Alicia put the onus on the U.S.: "I think it's the question the people in the United States have to answer themselves…. We always like to share. We have proved it all over the world. And art is the best way to improve relations between one country and another one, because through the art we are becoming more human."[13] Alicia may be speaking generally about how "art produces humanity," but her statement can also be perceived to mean that through artistic production and circulation around the world, Cuba and its culture move from an abstract idea of an isolated country to a concrete example of its cultures and values.

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[11] cf. Glissant *Faulkner, Mississippi,* 1996; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* 2000.

[12] "WHO validates elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis in Cuba," press release, http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/mtct-hiv-cuba/en/

[13] Reed Johnson, "Alicia Alonso, Cuba's living legend of ballet," Los Angeles Times June 12, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jun/12/entertainment/la-ca-ballet-nacional-de-cuba-20110612

This latter consideration of Cuba's humanity epitomizes my effort in this dissertation to demonstrate how the BNC forwards a revolutionary movement to distinguish itself alongside the Revolution's standards and values. A revolutionary discourse will be privileged to suggest that from perspectives shared with me by Cuban interlocutors, it is the West that has isolated *itself* from the island. From this vantage point, Cuban ballet is not fixed in amber as Seibert seems to suggest, but instead it is the West that has fixed *itself* within the "amber" of conservative discourse. The following section will provide a brief historical context of cultural and historical landscapes from which the *Ballet Nacional* emerged.

HISTORY

In many ways, the economic goals of the 1959 Cuban Revolution necessitated a particular kind of citizenry. Cuban citizens would prioritize a collective identity over an individual identity, and being of service to the State would be understood as a great honor. The exodus of Cubans in those early days of the Revolution left a void in the workforce that sustained the infrastructure of daily life on the island. One strategy to mitigate losses of skills was to galvanize the remaining citizens into the nation-building process, and therefore much attention was paid to education. This took shape in deliberate ways: the details of every-day life were restructured for many citizens, including from what people ate, to what kind of work they did. Many Cubans benefitted from the services and resources the new state redistributed such as literacy campaigns, labor unions, and medical care. These educational efforts also took a more abstract form by focusing on building a specific cultural experience that would craft the revolutionary Cuban to the ideologies of the State.

In his famous essay about the ideal revolutionary, "Man and Socialism in Cuba," Ernesto "Che" Guevara described *el hombre nuevo* (the new man) as embodying Karl Marx's concept

that "man truly achieves his full human condition when he produces without being compelled by the physical necessity of selling himself as a commodity."[14] Guevara's essay called for the new man and woman to sacrifice their personal happiness for the greater Cuban people, for upon achieving this, they would know great happiness. Following Marx's writings, Guevara also envisioned a socialist approach to a distribution of material goods that would inspire an idyllic society where people could live in harmony with one another and live responsibly independent of government interventions to make it so.[15] According to George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi in *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class and Power: A Sociological Study of the Role of the Intelligentsia in Socialism*, a socialist system often advocates education and the advancement of artists and intellectuals. They note that artists were and are not merely creating their various works on the periphery of politics, but instead, that they can be participants and oftentimes leaders in their respective countries.[16] While Marx never specifically commented on performance practices, he articulated his concerns toward oppressive working conditions that may hinder the laborer from being fulfilled by cultural pastimes.[17] The first few years of the Revolution were spent vigilantly resisting prior models of historicity that denied Cubans autonomy over their own natural and economic resources as well as cultural traditions.[18] How the State reclaimed agency

[14] Che Guevara, "Man and Socialism in Cuba," in *Venceremos! The speeches and writings of Che Guevara*, ed. John Gerassi (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 391.

[15] Che and Fidel considered the arts as an absolute component in building this society. Robin D. Moore, *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba*, 5.

[16] George Konrád and Ivan Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class and Power: a Sociological Study of the Role of the Intelligentsia in Socialism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 179-180.

[17] Moore, *Music and Revolution*, 10-11.

[18] Lisandro Otero, *Cultural Policy in Cuba* (Paris: Unesco 1972), 13.

in Cuba's cultural revolution will be further addressed later in my dissertation, but for now let us turn to historicizing the Ballet Nacional de Cuba (BNC).

Although Western styles of dance were presented on the island in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, ballet was not taught on the island until 1931.[19] *The Sociedad Pro Arte Musical*, a "privately endowed cultural center" that served middle and upper classes of Havana, began offering classes in the arts as a way to alleviate financial strains caused by the Great Depression.[20] It should be noted that these classes were only offered as recreation and entertainment and not for the development or encouragement of practitioners to pursue careers in the arts. Alicia Martínez (later Alonso) began her ballet training under the tutelage of Nikolai Yavorsky, whose own training was based upon that of Michel Fokine. Yavorksy, a native of Russia, fled the Bolshevik Revolution to exile in Paris, where he performed with Ida Rubinstein who had been a student of Michel Fokine's in Russia. Biographies of Alicia note her quick adaptation to and artistic proclivity for ballet. They note her natural facility, affinity, and sacrifice of a conventional young girl's social life in exchange for a devoted practice.

In 1934, Laura Reynari de Alonso, Alicia Martínez's future mother-in-law, became the president of *Pro Arte*. Her fourteen-year tenure initiated great change to the mission of the institution. Tickets were sold to non-members, student tickets were sold as well, and ballet was made a greater priority in the season's programming.[21] Most notable was Laura Alonso's encouragement that her sons Alberto and Fernando Alonso take ballet classes. The increase in

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[19] Dancers Anna Pavlova, Ted Shawn and his Men Dancers, and Fanny Elssler graced the stages of Havana theaters well before the founding of the BNC (Terry, 6).

[20] The price of Cuba's main commodity, sugar, had fallen and so too did many of the "financial empires" of Pro Arte's patrons. Beatrice Siegel, *Alicia Alonso: The Story of a Ballerina* (New York: Warner, 1979), 13.

[21] Beatrice Siegel, *Alicia Alonso: The Story of a Ballerina* (New York: Warner, 1979), 17.

male presence at *Pro Arte* afforded Yavorsky opportunities to choreograph full-length ballets, and allowed Alicia Martínez's abilities in ballet to shine. In 1935 and to much acclaim, the thirteen-year-old prodigy performed the role of Swanilda in *Coppélia* as her first full-length role.[22]

At fifteen years old, Alicia Martinez "reached the top at Pro Arte," and the extent that Yavorsky could teach her, according to Beatrice Siegel.[23] Alicia began to think about her future, and she and Fernando Alonso, now romantically linked, decided to "break tradition [with] their class" and left Cuba to train in New York City where they were married and welcomed their daughter, Laura.[24] There they also began touring with Lincoln Kirstein's Ballet Caravan, today known as the New York City Ballet. The Alonsos acquired a formidable education both in balletic movement—NYCB has a wonderful history with choreographer George Balanchine—and more modern American music.[25] Following this venture, in 1941 Alicia began her now-legendary association with American Ballet Theatre, then under the helm of co-founder Lucia Chase. It was here that Walter Terry credits Alicia with being influenced by all members of the troupe—personally, artistically, and professionally.[26] It is important to note that both Ballet Caravan and Ballet Theatre had visions of being "American" companies producing "American" themed ballets. In Siegel's biography of Alicia, she attributes a desire to promote American ideals as a way to combat the defeat and despair experienced by the Great Depression. Dance

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[22] ibid., 17-18.

[23] ibid., 21.

[24] Siegel, *Alicia Alonso: The Story of a Ballerina*, 21-23.

[25] ibid., 40-41.

[26] Walter Terry, *Alicia and her Ballet Nacional de Cuba: An Illustrated Biography of Alicia Alonso* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1981), 15.

critic Walter Terry's biography of Alicia corroborates this idea by quoting director Richard Pleasant as describing Ballet Theatre as a company that would be "international in scope and American in spirit."[27] Alicia's talent being honed in "American" institutions bears a certain irony when one considers where Cuban ballet derives its own influences.

In New York, Alicia worked with "American" choreographers George Balanchine and Anthony Tudor, and she studied the Cecchetti ballet technique with Alexandra Fedorova, sister-in-law to Michel Fokine and another legendary Russian choreographer. At Ballet Theatre, Alicia's principal and soloist roles began receiving notices in the papers. Her years spent training in the U.S., Alicia and her husband Fernando regularly returned to Cuba to see their daughter, whom they had sent to be raised by both sets of grandparents, and they used the same visits to foster the next generation of Cuban ballet dancers at *Pro Arte*.

The years 1940 to 1950 proved to be such a banner decade in regard to Alicia's budding American reputation that in 1948, when Ballet Theatre stopped production for an entire year, the Alonsos decided that it was the right time to head back to Cuba to found the Ballet Alicia Alonso. With Alberto and Fernando Alonso as directors and Alicia as prima ballerina and instructor, they established a company independent of the *Pro Arte* institution.[28] Their dancer colleagues from Ballet Theatre travelled to Cuba and throughout Latin America to dance with the Alonsos during the 1949 season, when Ballet Theatre was on hiatus. In the early years of the Ballet Alicia Alonso company of Cuba, Alicia continued dancing with Ballet Theatre in New York and touring with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo as a way support her burgeoning company in Cuba financially.

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[27] Terry, *Alicia and her Ballet Nacional de Cuba,* 15.

[28] ibid., 32-24.

With a U.S. embargo against Cuba imposed in the early-1960s, Alicia was not permitted to enter the United States—to dance, or to visit—for the next 15 years.[29] She was no longer able to hire her American colleagues to dance with her company, so she focused her efforts on ballet education in Cuba and on building future talent from Cuba's own stock of dancers. She and the company toured the island, working in the fields and also performing to recruit young boys to her company, even as "they enlisted in work brigades, they harvested sugar crops, they did everything that ordinary patriotic Cubans were doing in support of their leader."[30] Alicia also saw orphanages as a resource for talent.[31] One such child, Jorge Esquivel, later became one of her best-known partners.

At the same time that President Fidel Castro passionately advocated for literacy campaigns across the island, the Revolutionary government also set up arts vocational schools. Fidel's support of the Ballet Nacional resulted in Law 812, "codifying the government's obligation to support and defend ballet, mandating ballet education for all children, and giving the Ministry of Education oversight."[32] Education in Revolutionary culture provided general and arts education to both rural and city children. At age nine, children who tested with a high aptitude for dance advanced to dance vocational schools. Then at twelve, the children were tested again and possibly advanced to the provincial vocational school, *Escuela Nacional de Arte in*

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[29] Terry, *Alicia and her Ballet Nacional de Cuba,* 54.

[30] ibid., 50.

[31] Walter Terry details the model for recruiting dancers from orphanages comes from the Bolshoi Ballet's example when the Moscow orphanages introduced ballet classes to children in orphanages. Within a year of being presented sixty-two students in 1773, Ballet master Filippo Beccari produced twenty-four soloists. The Bolshoi Ballet was born" (*Alicia and her Ballet Nacional de Cuba*, 51).

[32] Toba Singer, *Fernando Alonso: The Father of Cuban Ballet* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2013), 218-221.

Cubanacán, a suburb of Havana. From there, the Alonsos and their staff chose students to take company classes and perhaps join the company.[33] In addition to ballet training being made available to children throughout the island and not just in large cities, the stages where ballets were danced were filled with revolutionary-themed repertoire performed by Cubans whose style of dancing is now recognized as distinct from any other ballet company in the world.

THEORIZING CONCEPTS

Revolution

This dissertation project is about many revolutions: It is about the 1959 Cuban Revolution, whose purposes were as cultural as they were social and political; it is about the justification of ballet in a socialist/communist regime; and it is about the aesthetic transformation of ballet in Cuba from its European predecessors. As Reynaldo C. Ileto suggests in "The 'Unfinished Revolution' in Philippine Political Discourse," the "business" of naming an event a "revolution" should not be understood solely by its political references.[34] Accordingly, as my dissertation is an archeology of knowledge and praxis that will focus on the discursive formation of Cuban ballet, revolution can best be defined as a process, and a methodology of and for continual reflexivity. Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (1969),

[33] Terry, *Alicia and her Ballet Nacional de Cuba,* 53.

[34] Richard Ileto, "The 'Unfinished Revolution' in Philippine Political Discourse," *Southeast Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (1993).

and Clifford Geertz's essay "Religion as a Cultural System" (1973) enlighten my interest in emphasizing both the Revolution and the development of Cuban ballet technique as a process.[35]

An approach of revolution-as-method is not to elide the tragedies, heartbreak, and human rights violations instigated by the Cuban political movement initiated and long led by Fidel Castro. Rather, my emphasis on social process exposes a "for the greater good" ethos in the ideology of the Cuban revolution, not only regardless of the outcome, but in the hope of achieving an ideal. This perspective is what Giorgio Agamben might refer to as a state of exception that "marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference."[36] The state of exception is epitomized in Fidel Castro's famous statement at his 1953 trial for leading an attack on the Moncada barracks: "History will absolve me." Fidel could not project how future histories would contextualize his actions, but he was operating from a logic, a discourse, that would later proliferate and serve as the foundation for the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* organization to overthrow the Batista regime and usher in the Cuban Revolution. This dissertation seeks to seize upon the ballet's incorporation of this logic into its participation in the Revolution.

The discipline of ballet serves as an excellent example of a process of projecting an ideal outcome, and influences the way I define "Revolution." A process of improving one's conscience through rigorous and constant training of the body involves a state of exception whereby comfort is sacrificed for the moment in order to reach for a potentiality of mind and body operating in an ideal fashion. In other words, I understand revolution as a process toward a

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[35] See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969); and Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a cultural system," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[36] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005), 40.

future outcome, similar to the way that Hirokazu Miyazaki theorizes "hope," not as an emotion or an object, but as a "method of knowledge formation."[37] For Miyazaki, hope "fails to capture the temporality" of process. In other words, a revolution can never arrive at an ultimate endpoint but must inexorably move onward. Mary Nooter Roberts captures this dynamic in writing about choreographer Gregory Maqoma's *Beautiful Me*,revealing how this piece is one of "perpetual becoming" and operates as a prolepsis, or an "evocation of a future-perfect," a "will have been," that transcends any sense of linear time.[38] This dissertation examines Cuban ballet technique and its subsequent practice as a prolepsis of discursive anticipation, representing "something in the future as if it already existed or had occurred."[39]

Theorizing Cuban ballet as a revolutionary process is influenced by Susan Foster's essay "Dancing and Theorizing and Theorizing Dancing" in which she conceptualizes the historical trajectory of "theory" as practice, tracing how the act of theorizing was an embodied practice in the 5th and 6th centuries. Foster's genealogy of the dynamic interchange between theory and practice influences the way I examine the formation of Cuban ballet technique in the Revolution as a theory-based practice of the 20th century. Theory, then, continues to be developed from the physical re-presentation of events to a "system of ideas" as Foster proposes a prolepsis of "what the body is, what it has been historically, and what it might become in the future."[40] From such a perspective, choreography is understood as the "tradition of codes and conventions through

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[37] Hirokazu Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), vii.

[38] Mary Nooter Roberts, "Memory and Identity at The Threshold in Gregory Maqoma's Beautiful Me," *African Arts*. 78, 81.

[39] ibid., 81.

[40] Susan Foster, "Dancing and Theorizing and Theorizing Dancing," in *Dance [and] Theory* (Bielefeld, Germany: Bielefeld, 2013), 22, 27.

which meaning is constructed in dance," and through which personal and community identities are represented and manifested.[41] Not unlike Foucault's concept of the episteme, choreography is a knowledge system for fathoming what it is possible to articulate through corporeality and embodied practice.

Archeology and Discourse

This dissertation also focuses on the discursive emergence of the *Ballet Nacional de Cuba* in a Revolutionary milieu. Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) provides a method for visualizing how the 1959 Revolutionary State produced epistemes that would support the State project and make such policies legible through the discursive formations and embodied practices of the BNC. For Foucault, an archeology of knowledge finds value in discontinuities that positivist "History" would sidestep in "favor of stable structures."[42] Following such reasoning, systems of thought are constituted by discourse, or "a group of statements for which conditions of existence are definable." Foucault further notes that a "statement is any series of signs which may appear in an enunciative field," and as Stuart Hall would affirm, "a national culture is a *discourse*—a way of constructing meanings which

[41] Susan Foster, "Choreographies of Gender," *Signs* 24, no. 1 (1998): 1-33.

[42] Michel Foucault, *Archeology of knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972), 13-15. (cf. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History, 1978; Susan Foster, *Choreographing History*, 1995; Mark Franko, *Dance as Text,* 1993; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1993; Stuart Hall, "Thinking the Diaspora," 1999; Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1996; Joseph Roach, Cities of the Dead, 1996; Allen Roberts, *A Dance of Assassins*, 2013; and Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, 2003).

influences and organizes both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves."[43] This view is further developed and synthesized in the dance studies of Susan Foster, who has long advocated for the capacity of the body to write and produce its own meanings.[44] Following such guidance, I understand discourse to be a *sentient* force, then, allowing movement and choreography to produce and convey meanings.[45] I propose that the 1959 Cuban Revolution is the episteme from which the discourse of its state-sanctioned ballet company materializes.[46] I refer to the enunciations of this episteme as a discourse of development.

Foucault conceptualizes discourses as both what gets expressed *and* the "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."[47] My archeology of knowledge examines the BNC's ballet technique, repertoire, and, indeed, founder/ballerina Alicia Alonso herself as discursively formed objects and archives of the Revolution's discourse. For Foucault, an archive is defined as "the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events."[48] The archive designates the collection of all material traces left behind by a particular historical period and culture. Not only does my project examine Cuban ballet technique, the BNC's repertoire, and Alicia Alonso as discursive objects of Revolutionary discourse, but it considers the Revolution's legislation and socio-political initiatives as archives

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[43] Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity." in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 613.

[44] Susan Foster, *Choreographing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1995), 15.

[45] Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge* (Pantheon Books 1972), 86.

[46] ibid., 86.

[47] ibid., 84.

[48] ibid., 217-218.

that shape the development of a Revolutionary discourse. With this theoretical framework, the analyses in the chapters that follow incorporate facets of life during the Revolution that may have followed, negotiated, and/or resisted the acute and capricious character of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The inclusion of gendered, social, economic, and cultural experiences of the Revolution supports my dissertation's intention to counter colonial models of History and offer polyvocal understanding of social dynamism as demonstrated through the BNC.

Classification

The semantics of classifying Cuban ballet as a Western derivative or Cuban invention is a recurring theme of this dissertation, and significant to any discourse through which Cuba is understood as an independent and self-identifying nation. Foucault's thought helps to understand that a definitive classification of Cuban ballet is ineffectual. I propose that Cuban ballet is a confluence of attributes and ideologies and that a Foucauldian examination of discourse would not only convey the epistemic processes of thought and knowledge formation, but also how language and thought then are leveraged for hegemonic advantage. For example, Jon Cruz's *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* explains how White elites in the 19th century refused to call the music of enslaved people "music." Instead, they were denied their own subjectivities, and their music was referred to as "noise." "To perceive only noise is to be removed from how slave soundings probed their circumstances."[49] In similar ways, the arts of Black South Africans were understood—and

[49] Jon Cruz, *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1999), 48.

dismissed—as "crafts" during apartheid.[50] The purpose of the discourse of development is to position the Cuban Revolution as being realized by progressive people capable of recognizing their own project, whereas what I term the discourse of astonishment, only concedes to its own imaginaries of Cuba.

Suki John (2012), Yvonne Daniel (1995), and Lester Tome (2013) have written about contemporary modern dance, rumba, and ballet in Cuba during the Revolution. All three describe the shift in expressive forms as the result of hybridization or transculturation, but without analysis of these concepts as processes. Through my own archeology of knowledge, I seek to highlight the epistemic influences that shape Cuban ballet. The "intercontextual" works of Janet O'Shea (2011), Rustom Bharucha (2000), and Nikos Papastergiadas (2002) provide conceptions of hybridity and the transcultural as inclusive interdisciplinary discourses. Additionally, I consult the work of Cuban Studies scholars Gustavo Perez-Firmat (1989) and Lou Perez (1999) to place the BNC in dialogue with processes of Cuban identity-formation.

The phenomenological process of assimilating ballet draws from the work of Sara Ahmed (2006) and Susan Foster (2011). In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects and Others*, Ahmed's concept of "orientation" offers a way to understand how ballet technique and a Cuban Revolution might accommodate shared proximity. Ahmed proposes that "if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as "who" or "what" we inhabit spaces with."[51] I am posing the question of orientation as a phenomenological inquiry into the ways that Cuban ballet technique,

[50] Allen Roberts, "'Break the Silence': Art and AIDS Awareness in KwaZulu Natal," *African Arts* 34, no. 1 (2001).

[51] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

its repertoire, and the body of Alicia Alonso inhabit the spaces and discourses of the Revolution as well as those of ballet. I align phenomenological experience of "orientation" with the experience of Foster's conceptions of kinesthetic empathy to understand processes of assimilation as empathizing through movement practices with another person, object, or ideology. Foster contends that "any notion of choreography contains, embodied within it, a kinesthesis, a designated way of experiencing physicality and movement that, in turn, summons other bodies into a specific way of feeling towards it."[52] For Foster and for my own project, the choreographing, or orienting, of ballet to a Cuban dynamic and vice versa necessitates a specific process of constructing meaning which I will call "revolution, assimilation, and empathy."

METHODS

Framing

As an archeology of knowledge concerning the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, I depart from any linear history isolated from events outside of the ballet and cultural spheres. A Foucauldian approach allows for analyses of state and socialist discourse within the context of ballet in Cuba, such as how such political positions influence development of ballet technique, as Chapter One presents. Theories of flows and scapes, such as those provided in the work of Arjun Appadurai, influence the way I aspire to engage the dynamism and multiplicities of this archeology.[53] I am also interested in re-framing the concept of ballet as a solely European genre from a Western geographical location and political and colonial history, and draw inspiration from Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) proposal to re-imagine the monolithical influences of Europe by

[52] Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*: *Kinesthesia in Performance* (London: Routledge 2011), 2.

[53] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1996). (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

“provincializing” the continent, and from Joann Kealiinohomoku’s anthropological suggestion that ballet is an “ethnic dance” with reference to its European origins and Russian elaborations.[54] Somewhat similarly, not only does Joseph Roach’s concept of surrogation aid the analysis of assimilation of a ballet technique into Cuban culture and experience, but his broader conception of the circum-Atlantic in *Cities of the Dead* (1996) encourages a more transactional understanding of the Caribbean resonant with the evocative writings of Antonio Benitiez-Rojo (1997) and Édouard Glissant (2000), among many others. Such reconceptions of relationships between North America and the Caribbean help me demonstrate the different, shared, and similar utility of ballet as part of their respective national projects.

Choreographic Analyses

The method of reading and analyzing discursive and corporeal traces of a national ballet in Cuba is influenced by Susan Foster’s anthology *Choreographing History* (1995). There writers explore the many ways that historical writings can be rendered through bodily, or corporeal articulations and traces, and how these articulations necessitate a style of writing that also “moves.” Choreographic analyses prioritize the body’s capacity to produce knowledge as well as influence the very structure of writing through which scholars seek to convey knowledge.

In their article “Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art,” Polly Roberts and Christine Kreamer detail how in African art the body may be the “most politically charged template for imparting meaning” surrounding issues of “gender, identity, ethnicity and

[54] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe,* 2000 and Joann Kealiinohomoku, “An Anthropologist looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance.” *Moving History, Dancing Cultures: a Dance History Reader*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

class through inscribed forms of adornment."[55] The body-as-template may serve literally as a corporeal "canvas" through tattoo and scarification, as a surface to display jewelry or clothing, and is often used as a medium of writing the "discrepancies and ironies of colonial narratives of conquest and to explore how writing has dictated the telling of Africa's histories."[56] A goal of my dissertation is to consider the treatment of colonial, post-colonial, and Revolutionary narratives of both dancing and non-dancing bodies following Roberts', Kreamer's, and Susan Foster's understandings that physical articulations are not "natural," universal expressions, rather they emerge from cultural practices that construct corporeal meaning. Such articulations are a form of writing—a bodily writing.[57]

The "bodily writing" I have studied is constituted by and produces Revolutionary discourse, and will derive from the BNC's repertoires, techniques, and labors of production, as well as the State's proscribed behaviors that epitomize the purported moral character of the Cuban revolutionary. Such an approach is resonant with Jens Giersdorf's *The Body of The People* (2013) through which he analyzes literal choreography, floor patterns, gender relationships between dancers, and how choreographies uphold socialist themes. In order to describe the quality of movement, I turn to Foster's "The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe" (1996) and Cynthia Novack's *Sharing the Dance* (1990) for ways of interpreting labor, gender, and sexual articulations. Moreover, Foster's analysis of the ballet *Giselle* in *Choreography and Narrative* (1996) serves my second chapter when I read the narratives of gender, labor, and purpose of specific BNC repertoire.

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[55] Polly Roberts and Christine Kreamer, "Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art," *African Arts* 40, no. 3 (2007): 84.

[56] ibid., 88.

[57] Foster, *Choreographing History*, 3-4.

Archive

I follow Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor (2003) as she proposes a consideration of the role performance can play as a means of storing and producing knowledge. Taylor defines the archive as a material collection of "documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs" that are presumably resistant to change, although this is by no means the case entirely, given how all such materials are subject to interpretation by those consulting and deploying them.[58] Taylor explains that the archive is indeed a mediated concept, that a case must be made for anything to be included in the archive. An object must qualify as having a particular meaning or value to the dominant forces that constitute the archive—which, in turn, are socially and culturally determined. Taylor notes, however, that a change in circumstances, say after a shift in political power, can result in a change of contents in the archive.[59]

Such suggestions could not be more true than in the archives I was able to consult in Cuba and the US: those at the small library at the *Museo de la danza*, the Cuban national archives, and the national library; and then at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts where video footage of Cuban ballets and performances by Alicia Alonso are conserved. The *Museo de la danza*, Cuba's national museum of dance in Havana, is not so much a historical museum as a trophy room devoted to Alicia's legacy. It occupies the second floor of a converted colonial home and boasts photographs, posters, and portraits of Alicia, as well as her performance costumes and letters of recognition from around the world. The Afro-Cuban

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[58] Diana Taylor, *The archive and the Repertoire*: *performing cultural memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

[59] ibid., 19.

influences that Yvonne Daniel (1995) and Suki John (2012) include in their national dance histories are not evident in this museum. Instead, I turn to Marion Kant's "German Dance and Modernity: Don't Mention the Nazis" (2004) where she grapples with the historian's burden of encountering elements of historical material that contradict dominant narratives of an historical moment. Such perspectives serve me well in the case of the national dance museum in Cuba. There I encountered an absence of the other forms of national dance thus introducing a tension between the State's platform of forefronting indigenous heritages to suit certain political purposes, and the blatant and singular representation of dance in Cuba as being about and only about ballet.

Downstairs from the *Museo de la danza* in a small room behind a red curtain, a private *biblioteca* is to be found as a library for researchers and company ballet dancers alike as a resource for their various sorts of work. With permission from Pedro Simón, Alicia's second husband who directs the museum, and in the presence of a museum employee, I was able to gain access to an archive of performance programs and *argumentos*, or synopses of ballets; many Cuban magazines with features and photos of ballet in them; and books on ballet published in Europe that are not in circulation in the U.S. An approach to such materials is suggested by Susan Manning's use of a variety of archival sources in *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* (2004), as she accounts for choreography, performances, and representation. In addition to learning which ballets were produced in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, and how much ticket prices were, programs from the Revolutionary years reveal statements of support for the Revolution, dedications to Revolutionary figures and labor associations, as well as statements of unity to countries such as North Vietnam and Cambodia regarding atrocities perpetrated in those nations during the war pursued by the United States and its allies from 1955 to 1975. I was permitted to

touch decaying programs from the 1940s and 50s, and this not only told me of the great privilege it is to have permission to work in this library, but it also represents the precarity of such an archive (cf. Giersdorf 2013). For example, I was told that the ballet company's budgets from the 1960s do not exist anymore, as it was such a politically tumultuous time that they have been "lost" (read *destroyed*).

Following Diana Taylor's concept of "repertoire," another system of stored knowledge for the Cuban ballet project is in the repertoires of the BNC and other ballet schools in Cuba. For Taylor, repertoire consists of "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, [and] singing" defined as enactments that function as embodied memory.[60] I extend Taylor's definition to include the dynamics of the *ensayos*, or rehearsals, of ballet at the BNC. My ethnographic observations of rehearsals include repertoire exhibited by ballet maîtres to the dancers by way of musical phrasing (often singing along and emphasizing rhythmic patterns), demonstrations of nuance within choreography, as well as spoken notes. An important dynamic for Taylor is that "repertoire" requires the "presence" of people participating in the transmission of knowledge.[61] Furthermore, whereas an archive is composed of seemingly stable objects that serve a present use, through repertoire people grapple with present contexts and produce new meanings. In my ethnographic observations I consider both formal dance performances, rehearsal processes, and everyday work of the ballet as repertoires of a national institution. While Taylor advocates that repertoire be given greater priority in analyses, she maintains that both archive and repertoire are important sources of information that oftentimes work in tandem.[62] This is certainly true when

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[60] Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, 20.

[61] ibid., 20.

[62] ibid., 21.

dancers learn choreography from an archived VHS/DVD video recording of a past performances or rehearsals, and I have amassed professionally edited videos as well as rehearsal footage of Alicia rehearsing a model work ballet, *La Avanzada*, that I consult in my second chapter's analyses.

Ethnography, Critical Reflexivity, and Oral History

As an archeology of knowledge, my dissertation requires a method of ethnography that is reflexive and dialogic to complement and realize its elements of archive, repertoire, oral histories, biographies, and observation. As Theresa Buckland suggests in *Dancing From Past to Present* (2006), a polyvocal project is simply not sufficient without interpretations and critiques of methods and substantive contents used to arrive at an historical representation. I have spent one year of fieldwork as a student, interpreter, observer, and friend at the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. I have been privileged to enjoy relationships with my instructors at the BNC and with dancers in the company while living on the island and eating and dancing with company members of the BNC while observing them.[63] As an observer, I am influenced by the work of Janet O'Shea, who had 17 years of auto-ethnographic experience at publication of her monograph *At Home in The World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage* (2007). I am equally indebted to Robin Derby's *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo*, and what she terms "vernacular politics" as a way to examine how Trujillo's regime "extended the state into civil society [via] popular idioms of masculinity, personhood,

[63] My ethnographic approach is influenced by the work of Allen Roberts (2013) and his dissertation work in Lubanda, the DRC (then Zaire), Belgium, and the Vatican. I strive toward the ethics of his ethnographic practice, which is one of transparency in his interaction with his subjects/collaborators, as well as in his written accounts. See Allen Roberts, *A Dance of Assassins: Performing Early Colonial Hegemony in the Congo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

and fantasies of race and class mobility." Derby's text offers an example of looking at the Cuban State's management of daily conventions.[64]

My project strives to accomplish a style of ethnography of the sort that Theresa Buckland advocates for and that Cynthia Novack accomplishes in *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American culture* (1990). As a participant observer, Buckland discusses the conflicts that arise in maintaining a sense of objectivity in her position as a researcher that I find relevant to the multiple roles in which my presence at the BNC has resulted. Novack writes of her vigilance as she shifted roles as a researcher and as a dancer, a skill that resonates with Clifford Geertz' concept of the hermeneutic circle (1971), which calls for a reflexivity in both describing what subjects are doing, as well as questioning the cultural idioms through which those actions are taking form. As a participant observer, I must also demonstrate a critical reflexivity of the circumstances of even being at the BNC: I am always a U.S. citizen in Cuba. I may be perceived as someone with exceptional financial resources, which may be a reason for some people to comply with my requests. But I am also a dancer who shares a passion and facility for this art form, and my own practice also proven a legitimizing factor in my presence at particular rehearsals and meetings.

Jorge Esquivel, Alicia's *pas de deux* partner late in her life, graciously offered me the opportunity to record his oral history, and I did so in an effort to procure alternate discourses of the BNC and understand how he adapted the practice of ballet to perform with an elderly and blind dancer. What priorities were maintained in order for Alicia to maintain visibility on Cuban and world stages? Additionally, Esquivel's oral history exposes agency as a response to official

[64] Robin Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction*: *Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 7.

language. I am reminded of the manner in which Jacqueline Shea Murphy has mobilized the stories of Native Americans who performed in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Shows in her compelling volume *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing* (2007). I am interested in how subjugated voices and histories operated during Revolutionary years in Cuba.

As a dance historian, I approach writing from my respective corporeal techniques, following Susan Foster's lead that a scholar's own body should be implicated in any such process, as well as from what I know of the repetitive, and equally physical processes of research, reading, and writing. As an historian writing the body, I seek to clarify the kinesthetic relationship between the living body of the historian and the past body as Foster introduces, for the dance historian imagines, listens for, and is aware that the body s/he seeks to write about articulates a bodily discourse and not only or even primarily a verbal one.[65] As a result, the kinesthetic connection I have as a *live* body with a *past* body—through ethnography, participant observation, writing and archive—will be in dialogue with just such bodily discourse.[66] Interpretations, translations, and rewritings will result, that in turn produce an account that moves as the past body might have been influenced to do.

READING OBJECTS

Each chapter in my dissertation analyzes three of what Michel Foucault might have termed discursive objects, and the circumstances and formation of knowledge that constitute each one of them. The objects explored in my dissertation are the Cuban ballet technique, the repertoire of the BNC, and the oeuvre of Cuba's most celebrated ballerina, Alicia Alonso. These

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[65] Susan Foster, *Choreographing History,* 7.

[66] ibid., 9.

three examples do not exhaust this methodology used to explore the BNC and cultural production in the 1959 Cuban Revolution; however, the specific subject matter of each object and the order in which each is examined efficiently progresses my project's structural and theoretical underpinnings.

Chapter One, "A School of Cuban Ballet," continues analysis of state discourses surrounding the nationalization of the BNC as an institution, as well as the company's ballet technique. As a subheading, "Constructing a School" describes the process through which the national school of ballet and national ballet technique were formed. "Assimilating Ballet" explores the process by which the BNC as a national institution adapted the form of ballet technique to a national character of "the Cuban" as defined for Revolutionary purposes. "Processes of Classification" further situates ballet vis-à-vis the Revolution, with further reference to broader dialogue of constructing a new Cuban identity. "Moving Theory into Practice" suggests that Cuban ballet technique is an embodied Revolutionary practice forged in the discourse of Revolutionary values.

Chapter Two, "Reading Repertoire: Classical, Neo-classical and Model Works," analyses BNC performances of the ballets *Giselle, La Avanzada*, and *Carmen,* in relation to state and ballet ideologies and how these particular repertories advanced, supported, or were ambivalent to state discourse. In my choreographic analysis, all three ballets will be examined through video, photos, costumes, live observation of rehearsals, program notes in support of those fighting wars of resistance in Vietnam and Cambodia, reviews, and magazine editorials. The section on "Giselle," a classical work and popular ballet on the island, considers the narrative structure and content of this tragic ballet about a peasant who falls in love with a person of nobility, and how the production empathizes with state discourse about eradicating elitism while demonstrating the

“inherent goodness” of a “peasant” class. “La Avanzada,” as close to a model work as BNC repertoire gets, is an overtly Soviet-style military piece usually featured six men—a *comandante* and five *soldados*—until Alicia inserted herself into the role of *el comandante* in later performances of the piece. Consideration will be given to the roles of women and official state language regarding their labor-participation in the Revolution, in addition to themes of collectivity and sacrifice for the state. The section entitled “Carmen” will look at the eponymous ballet, original choreography created for it by Alberto Alonso, Alicia’s brother-in-law, and the tensions of choreographing an ideally sensual, and hyper-feminine protagonist against the ideal revolutionary woman that the state was looking to fashion. For example, the Cuban women’s union was adamant to maintain the right to be feminine, not feminists, while also being treated equally with their male counterparts. Future analysis of BNC repertoire would include a ballet with an indigenous narratives such as *Dioné,* as well as a more politically acute ballet such as *A Santiago*.

Chapter Three, “The Passion of Alicia” considers the material and symbolic discourses of the figure/dancer/woman at the helm of the BNC. A section entitled “The Reality of Magic in Cuba” looks at the literary genre of magical realism in Cuba via the work of Alejo Carpentier as part of the discourse of development in Cuba, and as a method of understanding and mitigating a legacy of Spanish colonialism and U.S. neo-colonialism. “The Method of Magic” explains how the genre of magical realism developed and then prospered within the Revolution’s cultural project which in many ways replaced the centrality and utility of the church to teach every day values. Alicia is described in magical realist terms This section also demonstrates how the genre countered the West’s discourse of astonishment. “Ballet as a Devotional Practice” advances the idea that through magical realism, ballet—in its daily and persistent exertions—has become

tantamount to a religious practice all its own. Finally, to conclude the dissertation, "Developing Empathy" considers that Alicia's extended career has been sustained through her devotional practice of ballet and through a process of consistent empathy for others expressed through her mind and body.

Chapter One: A School of Cuban Ballet

Every morning I walked to the studios of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba *from my rented room in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana. I lived across the street from an* agro*, or organic market where I bought a bag of contraband potatoes for Thanksgiving in addition to my weekly provisions of fruits and vegetables. I rented a room in a top floor apartment at* Calle *B and 19th*. *Most mornings I left the apartment with my ballet shoes, a large bottle of water and a protein bar, and began my downhill trek toward the* Ballet Nacional de Cuba (BNC). *Walking down a patchwork road of broken concrete and cobblestone, I dodged stray dogs, their excrement, and stood patiently at the major thoroughfare referred to as* Línea *until traffic subsided enough for me to bound across it and arrive at the BNC.*

Entering the compound of the BNC *was always exhilarating. I'd wave good morning to the old security guard positioned at the front driveway, drop a chocolate treat I'd brought from the U.S. to my friend Gladys at the small reception desk and make my way over to the company's rehearsal schedule for the day. I'd make my way through a labyrinth of hallways to the opposite side of the compound where I would take my classes in ballet technique and methodology. The room I danced in was named after Anton Dolin, the English ballet dancer who was Alicia's first partner in* Giselle *at American Ballet Theatre in New York. Once class was finished, I would towel off in the men's bathroom and head to lunch in the cafeteria to a daily menu of chicken breast, rice with black beans called* congris*, and a starch (Sometimes pumpkin, other times a root vegetable of some kind).*

The afternoon was spent watching rehearsals. Over the years I had graduated from observing from the doorways where I would stand alongside other company members and administrative employees who stopped by to watch, to later sitting in a chair in the back of the room, and occasionally sitting with the rehearsal mistress in the front. This latter vantage point was always reciprocated with chocolate bars from the U.S. as gratitude for allowing me to sit up front. Feed back in rehearsals were often given with whoops and shouts of "eso" *("this") to affirm that the dancers were achieving the desired outcome. During the summer months, rehearsal mistresses might wave their fans at the dancers during these affirmations. These moments of* "eso" *were not only affirmations for the dancers, but they became moments of heightened interest for me as a researcher and student of Cuban ballet. Those moments of recognition signified the values of Cuban ballet.* "Eso*" was invoked to commend a technical feat that a dancer may have demonstrated—such as balancing* en pointe *for an extended period of time—and also to celebrate the style and spirit with which movement was practiced. As an observer, I became attuned to understanding that what defines Cuban ballet technique is not how close it gets to approximating a standard of excellence its Western contemporaries has set. It is the Cuban style and spirit in its execution that makes Cuban ballet distinct and outstanding.*

In 1964, just three years after the *Escuela nacional de ballet* was formed as a national institution, the BNC traveled to Bulgaria with several of their dancers to compete in the first

international ballet competition at Varna.[67] It was the debut of Cuban dancers who had been trained in the national school of ballet. The response of those in attendance was overwhelming.[68] Critics from all over the world praised the Cuban ballet, however there was a particular tone in which the praise coming from Western ballet critics was deployed. English critic Arnold Haskell characterized Cuba's display and performance at the competition as a "Cuban miracle," remarking, "You have achieved in a few years what others have achieved after the work of several generations."[69] Other comments from the West follow a similar tenor as describing Cuban ballet as a "miracle," and often invoke the political and economic realities of Cuba. Clive Barnes, another English critic, who later wrote for the American publication *Dance Magazine* remarked: "Here we see a small country, underdeveloped and poor, providing one of the great schools of ballet in the world..."[70] While Barnes' commentary is true—that Cuba is poor—his comment does not acknowledge the initiative of cultural production that the Revolution enforced as part of their revolutionary project. Alicia characterized these reactions as "astonishment."[71]

Eventually the disbelief evolved into focused curiosity. *Why* is Cuban ballet impressive? *How* it was formed? Barnes describes Cuban ballet as a composite of various schools of ballet, and training pedagogies, around the world. He has a didactic fascination for desiring to distinguish ballet movements part-for-part:

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[67] The competition at Varna has since become one of the most prestigious ballet competitions in the world.

[68] Pedro Simón, "De lo Cubano en el ballet," *El Ballet: una devocion* (Barcelona: Ediciones Cumbres, 2014), 290-291.

[69] ibid., 291.

[70] ibid., 299-300.

[71] Alicia Alonso, "Sobre la escuela Cubana de ballet," *Cuba en el ballet* 7, no. 1 (1976): 7.

> Russian heritage is obvious, in view - the eloquent port de bras, strong backs, violent and delicate jumps, and that very obvious, almost dogmatic classic preparation for each paso--. But there is also a strong American influence in them: such flexibility, potential flow, the sense of space and outgoing charm. And besides, there is something British - particularly the British school of Ceccheti - with his swift footwork and crisp. Be that as it may, the Cuban ballet is certainly very eclectic, which is magnificent ... Here we see a small country, underdeveloped and poor, providing one of the great schools of ballet in the world ...[72]

While Alicia confirmed that Cuban ballet shares similar attributes that Barnes observed, to focus on identifying each derivation is a pedantic endeavor and not well poised to neither understand nor define Cuban ballet. Barnes' bottom line is to identify the way that Cuban ballet is constructed from parts of Western schools of ballet, and Alicia's bottom line is that it does not matter. It is Cuban.

It has been observed that among other attributes associated with Cuban ballet are the abilities to sustain a balance, do many pirouettes—or rotations, turns on one leg—to have an accent of being "up" or very high and off the ground, and to be dynamic in *pas de deux* work as well as an awareness with the audience.[73] This last attribute is something that Haskell echoed in his attempt to illustrate the general character of the Cuban dancer as one that is flexible and rhythmic, has a "natural" turn-out (or rotation of the legs from the hips), and is "sensual." That the dancer's ability to "caress the music," and be a "generous" artist is then emblematic of Cuba. He added that Cuban dancers work harder than any other dancer in ballet and that they work with "joy" and "revolutionary ardor." Haskell also described the Cuban ballet dancer as having "a warm and sensual Latin quality, the quality of people [who] stretch in the sun." Haskell also

[72] Simón, *El Ballet, una devocion*, 299-300.

[73] ibid., 298.

noted the talent of the Cuban dancer's ability to balance which allows Cuban dancers time to enjoy the movement in all its fullness.[74]

For Alicia, what makes Cuban ballet distinct from other ballet schools are the constructions of gender in the choreography of Cuban ballet technique. She stated that the *pas de deux* between a man and a woman is what distinguishes Cuban ballet from the rest. She asserted that there is a degree of equality between male and female roles that does not occur in other schools of ballet. For example, in many scenarios outside of Cuba, the male dancer plays a secondary role to the female. He will partner her in a way that exploits his labor by showcasing her body. He will lift her, pull her, turn her, all the while being as quiet and ornamental as possible, so as not to distract the audience's attention from her form. This particular gender dynamic of the ballerina-as-proxy for the male partner and a male gaze is explored by dance historian Susan Foster in her essay "The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe."[75]

For Alonso, the male-female dynamic in social dances in Cuba influences how men and women interact in ballet.[76] She adds that the Cuban *pas de deux* is more intimate, because dancers dance for each other rather than solely for the audience.[77] Such assertive equality of masculinity and femininity on stage can be read as sympathetic to the State's desire to address inequality between men and women, but as a demonstration of intimacy on stage and in public, it

[74] Simón, *El Ballet, una devocion*, 298.

[75] Susan Foster, "The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe," in Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power, ed. Susan Foster (London: Routledge, 1996).

[76] This is corroborated in a short article about Cuban ballet dancer Rolando Sarabia who adds "We [male dancers] are very well trained in the way we handle the girl" See Enrique Fernandez, "Ballet: Split with Cuba Still Brings Pain," *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 359.

[77] Simón, "Defender nuestra identidad," 362.

also counters European sexual norms. This particular expressive engagement between Cuban dancers contrasts with the tradition or legacy of Western ballet practice of exercising an unaffected face so that the efficacy of the narrative is conveyed through the dancer's gesture and choreography, rather than suggestive facial exhibitions.[78] Alonso's description of the pas de deux is the closest we get to a tangible idea of how the Cuban ballet style is different from another that does not rely on reductions of a general "Cubanness." By providing references such as the performance aesthetics of non-Cuban *pas de deux* as well as a reference to Cuban popular social dance, Alonso contextualizes rather than generalizes a Cuban sensibility in ballet. But it is this particular sensibility of the male and female dancer in dialogue that contrasts from other ballet schools.

This chapter proposes an epistemological difference between Western descriptions of Cuban ballet and how Alicia and the BNC talk about it. Alicia does not deny that there are similarities between the Cuban ballet technique and other ballet schools, but she also has a perspective that is not exclusive to Western logic, a logic that solely sees and interprets Cuban ballet as a composite of other schools of ballet. Instead she focuses on the process of creating this technique and style. These contrasting logics, and their discourses, are what this chapter is about. The comments and curiosities generated from Western circumstances are seemingly innocuous and complimentary in nature, however they are devoid of a Cuban and Revolutionary specificity and concern. Haskell's comments can be viewed as patronizing in his attributing Cubans' proximity to the sun as the source for their joy, but is not necessarily the purview of this chapter to assign blame to a single person. Rather, I am interested in understanding the parameters and limits of the discourse from which Haskell and others are able conceive of ballet in Cuba. And

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[78] Susan Foster, *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 67.

likewise I am interested in the limits of Alonso's discourse as I propose that they are informed by and complicit with the Revolution. How is she able to perceive Cuban ballet as *sui generis* and not a derivative of Western ballet traditions? These two positions present what Foucault would refer to as a discontinuity. One discourse is concerned with how Cuban ballet approximates the established tradition of ballet, and the other is concerned with adapting ballet into a new form for the Revolution.

Discontinuity occurs at the point when what the West is saying about Cuban ballet and what Alonso is saying about Cuban ballet do not follow the same episteme, or system of knowledge or logic, that the West subscribes to in order to conceive of ballet or the Revolution might to imagine their socialist project.[79] Therefore in thinking about Cuban ballet as a discursive object—as it emerges at the intersection of ballet as monolith and ballet as a Cuban Revolutionary form—there is an opportunity to explore just how the ballet was a product of a very specific revolutionary process and project. In juxtaposing these two discourses, it is my goal to de-center the West and to show how their respective positions reflect systems of thought and knowledge production that are geared toward achieving particular goals. One is to produce the Revolutionary state, and the other is to maintain a subjectivity of Western Sovereignty. The discourse of the West "systematically ignores the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history."[80] The two operate differently. One attempts to maintain sovereignty over ballet, and the other seeks self-definition through their assimilation of ballet.

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[79] Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 168.

[80] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66.

This chapter examines the discursive formation of Cuban ballet technique to see where a critical understanding of ballet might make a contribution to conceptualizations of Cuba. This approach is influenced in Michael Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* and therefore I am defining the term discourse as a collection of statements for which conditions of existence are definable. In an archeology, the study of discourse is less concerned with interpretation of particular statements as it is with the rules that define its specificity. Thusly, I am treating the Cuban ballet technique as an object of discourse in an effort to satisfy my archeological interests in understanding the formation of thought and knowledge. The aim of this chapter is threefold. First, it will establish that the Cuban ballet pedagogy emerges contemporaneously to the Revolution's educational initiative. Second, it will establish the process through which the technique is developed. This will, third, lead toward a new conceptualization of cultural production during the Cuban Revolution.

As I proceed to explain how the ballet school developed within a discourse of the Revolution's educational movement, it would be helpful to clarify some terminology. When I refer to the school of Cuban ballet, I am referring not only referring to the literal campus where Cuban ballet is taught, but the specific pedagogical and artistic approach that it imparts to its students, and is evident in a style which distinguishes it from other schools around the world. To be trained with a ballet school is to assume that dancers have been trained along a particular "technical and artistic criteria."[81] Pedro Simon, director of the *museo de la danza* in Havana, proposes that in an ideal sense, the school can be one way of identifying, or reading, the training a dancer received just by watching them dance.[82]

[81] Alonso, "Sobre la escuela cubana de ballet," 5.

[82] Simón, "Defender nuestra identidad," *El Ballet una devocion*, 354.

Constructing a school

The Alicia Alonso Dance and Drama, National Academy—more succinctly known as the Alicia Alonso Ballet Academy—opened in September of 1950 two years after the company Ballet Alicia Alonso was established. The purpose of initiating a ballet school that was connected to the company was to develop a "permanent source of Cuban dancers" by providing a complete education that would lead to a career in ballet, as ballet instruction on the island prior to this academy before was only for recreation at Pro-Arte. The academy aspired to become a major center for ballet training for Latin America.[83] Part of their mission even before the Revolution was to become an international hub for ballet training as well as to develop a ballet school with a distinct style. These efforts to create the unique style of ballet began prior to the Revolution.

In her 1951 manifesto, Alicia Alonso articulated the intent of establishing a ballet company and school in Cuba. The mission of the academy was focused on four main tenets: To establish a ballet school where all Cubans could study ballet without having to travel abroad for their ballet education; to maintain a professional ballet company that fosters the talent of its dancers; to collaborate and employ a variety of artists and technicians; and to develop a Cuban audience through free performances, television appearances, and publications. Alonso was proposing "to demonstrate to the world that our country is able to create and maintain a high carat artistic company that allows us to be on the scale of universal values."[84]

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[83] Miguel Cabrera, "A lesson from half a century," *Cuba en el ballet* 95 (2000): 43.

[84] "Propósitos que dieron origen y dan vida al Ballet Alicia Alonso/Goals that gave origin and continue to give life to the Ballet Alicia Alonso," in *Orbita del Ballet Nacional de Cuba/1948-1978*, ed. Miguel Cabrera (Ciudad de La Habana: Editorial ORBE, 1978), 122-123.

The Alonsos' plan to create a Cuban style of ballet exceeded the expectations and education they practiced at the Pro-Arte Musical society, whose offerings of ballet classes had begun in 1931.[85] The ballet school at Pro-Arte was not geared toward developing professional dancers. It was treated mostly as a recreational activity.[86] The Alonso's ballet academy not only provided ballet instruction for professional development, but it also began to teach ballet with a particular "idiosyncrasy" and "style," that was developed via the culmination of their experiences training and performing abroad.[87] This developing pedagogy was not only taught in the Havana academy, but was shared with young dancers in other Cuban provinces prior to the school becoming nationalized.[88]

Alicia's investment in Cuba can be summed up by a great quote in her manifesto: "The Ballet Alicia Alonso has faith in the destiny of our country and the natural talent and eagerness of the Cuban people, and therefore firmly believes that, like France, Russia and England - where the ballet was grafted and within years as their own roots - Cuba can become one of the most brilliant ballet centers worldwide."[89] As early as 1951, we see that Alicia is characterizing the success of the company and school as a success for the nation. The academy aimed to train dancers in "technical, ethical and aesthetic principles" in a "national style" of ballet.[90] The methodology, as stated in the manifesto, for creating the national style was articulates as one of

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[85] Cabrera, "A lesson from half a century," 34.

[86] Simón, *El Ballet una devocion*, 352-353.

[87] ibid., 357.

[88] Cabrera, "A lesson from half a century," 44.

[89] "*Propósitos que dieron origen y dan vida al Ballet Alicia Alonso*."

[90] Cabrera, "A lesson from half a century," 43.

assemblage and assimilation, a methodology this chapter seeks to further understand. This process of this assimilation of ballet would be inclusive of Cuba's African and indigenous influences as well as collaborating with contemporary Cuban artists, musicians, and set designers. What would manifest from such a process would be a company and style that conveyed a "particular seal" that would invariably reflect the nation.[91]

The Revolution brought greater infrastructure and visibility both to the ballet company as well as the school, and ballet begins find itself within a discourse of development, specifically the education initiative of the Revolutionary state, as a way to begin the processes of leveling previous disparities and this included education in the arts as well. Articles 39 and 51 of Cuba's Constitution articulates the right to free education. "The State, in order to raise the level of the culture of the people's, endeavors to promote and develop arts education, the vocation for creation and the cultivation of art and art appreciation."[92] This legislation supports the opportunity for Cubans to develop themselves according their aptitudes and guarantees them access to education in a variety of areas including the arts, regardless of their ability to pay. This push for both general education and arts education provided support for the Cuban school of ballet to develop, and thus was an avenue for this institution to align itself with the cultural development of Cubans via the education initiatives.

Education was a top priority for the new government as it was seen as a direct action to raising the Revolutionary consciousness needed in order to replace the capitalist social structure with one that was egalitarian and not based on socio-economic class, to eradicate racism and sexism, and to end the divide between those who lived in the well-resourced urban centers and

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[91] "*Propósitos que dieron origen y dan vida al Ballet Alicia Alonso*."

[92] *Cuban Constitution*, arts. 39 and 51, http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/cuba.htm

those who lived in rural areas.[93] Fidel Castro stated, "Only a revolution is capable of totally changing the educational scene, and the social scene,"[94] and as a result, the government allocated a significant amount of resources that went into building schools, training teachers, and developing and mobilizing an education plan.[95] One plan in particular was the 1961 Literacy Campaign, in which around 200,000 Cuban citizens achieved reducing the illiteracy rate from 23.6 percent to 3.9 percent in the first year.[96] Within the first decade and a half of the Revolution, more than half a million adults reached a sixth-grade reading level.[97]

From the beginning of the Literacy Campaign, there was an emphasis on the collective, or shared, responsibility in developing a more literate society. Slogans such as "Let those who know more teach those who know less,"[98] and banners that read "The school plan is your responsibility," are examples of the way that this goal was materialized into everyday life.[99] These efforts were as much geared toward achieving greater literacy as it was a way of integrating formerly marginalized populations in the "new society."[100] For example, for the national women's organization the *Federacion de Mujeres Cubanas* which was assembled in

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[93] Samuel Bowles, "Cuban Education and the Revolutionary Ideology," *Harvard Educational Review* 41 (November 1971): 474.

[94] Richard R. Fagen, *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 35.

[95] Marvin Leiner, "Cuba's Schools: 25 Years Later," *The Cuba Reader: the making of a revolutionary society* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 446.

[96] Claes Brundenius, "Development Strategies and Basic Human Needs," *The Cuba Reader*, 114.

[97] Leiner, "Cuba's Schools: 25 Years Later," 447.

[98] Lee Chadwick, *Cuba Today* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1975), 91.

[99] Leiner, "Cuba's Schools: 25 Years Later," 445.

[100] Brundenius, "Development Strategies and Basic Human Needs," 114.

August of 1960, and the literacy campaign was the first nationwide movement they championed. As participants in the Literacy Campaign, they were both beneficiaries of the literacy education as well as then being able to join work brigades that would then go out and teach Cubans to read and to write.[101] Ballet being a part of a cultural literacy movement, it was not only limited to offering classes for vocational pursuits, but ballet education also included demonstrations and lectures held in factories and fields. "Hundreds of thousands have seen huge choreography in which dancers, students, athletes and workers come together in a beautiful spectacle of massive and truly popular art."[102] One spectator, a 60-year-old factory worker, commented: "I never thought that ballet is so, we always said it was very difficult to understand, it was for people of great culture."[103] Early ballet education curricula was also made available for rural children in the Ana Betancourt Schools and education centers as a way to prepare children between 1 and 6 years old in physical and artistic training.[104]

After 1959, the now Ballet de Cuba was in stride with the Revolution as it was in alignment with the state's educational movement. While the state was administering its pedagogy for education, the ballet was busy further developing a pedagogy of its own. The *Escuela Nacional de Cuba* was established in 1961 two years after the Revolution.[105] This endeavor to create a Cuban method of ballet was ambitious.

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[101] Max Azicri, "Women's Development Through Revolutionary Mobilization." *The Cuba Reader*, 462.

[102] Graciela Alamar, "Ballet para todos," *Cuba en el ballet* 4, no 3. (1973): 43.

[103] ibid., 43.

[104] Alamar, "Ballet para todos," 43.

[105] Cabrera, "A lesson from half a century," 44.

> We should note that there are not many ballet schools. Some countries have good dancers, many ballet companies, but do not have a school. The formation of a school is not an easy process, and we know of countries that for years try to create [their] own school, and have not succeeded. So many dancers are dancing with a school that does not suit [their] temperament, [their] national culture, its expressive possibilities. These dancers have a great disadvantage compared to those who dance according to their own school, they have to express themselves in ways that do not correspond to their characteristics, they can do better, apart from the little originality which is to the contrary.[106]

The development of the Cuban school of ballet, style, and technique, as a national dance language that would be projected out into the world, was the result of the work between Alicia, Fernando, and her brother-in-law Alberto, who comprised the core of the ballet company and school.[107] Ballet critic Arnold Haskell credited the success of the Cuban ballet school as the result of a particular and unrepeatable science. In Haskell's opinion, Alicia was the embodiment of the school. She served as an "inspiration" for dancers to model themselves after, and indeed was the model that Fernando and she would later codify the technique by. Fernando filled the role of teacher in his capacity to not only know and have an interest in the craft of ballet technique, but who understood the "psychology of the students." Alberto, as a choreographer would be able to create ballets that aligned with the culture of the Cuban people. Adding to the Alonso family *trifecta*, Haskell attributed the government's support of ballet to the success of the company, characterizing the government as a "government that understands the value of this and encourages them to the limit. The rest is easy": like wine it is only a matter of time…"[108] Haskell's comment of "the rest is easy" is an inadequate description. With state support, the Alonsos' now had the task of creating a ballet school and company that would be unique and for

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[106] Alonso, "Sobre la escuela cubana de ballet," 5.

[107] Simón, "De lo cubano en el ballet," 296.

[108] ibid., 297.

Cuba, building from specific stereotypical characteristics of Cubans as well as existing Afro-Cuban, indigenous, and popular and folk dance lexicons.[109] Haskell's elision of the labor behind the formation of the technique underestimates the Revolutionary process which this company and school were tied to.

At the beginning of the Revolution, concerted efforts were made to construct and perpetuate a national heritage that would encourage Cubans to unite and build a new nation. In order to achieve the larger goals of the Revolution, such as building an economic base independent of an U.S. form of capitalism, nurturing the Cuban citizen with a Revolutionary ethos would depend on compulsory and collective participation. Such social management resulted in social and cultural heritage projects that were thought to help orient the citizen to the new state like the establishing of cultural ministries, unions, and literacy campaigns. In order to achieve this the State found it necessary to redefine the notion of "mass culture" and "consumer" away from their ties to capitalism and exploitation. The Cuban citizen then took on a dual role as both consumer and producer of culture who had previously been excluded from an understanding of how cultural production worked. "From that point on, Cuban mass media changes into handmaids of education. The press, the radio and television had to devote a proportion of their resources to literacy work, to the assertion of the nation's values and to the placement, orientation and unification of the entire people."[110] The BNC also played a role in this mission. Revolutionary ballets and costumes and narratives became legible manifestations of Revolutionary ideologies, but it was the opening of ballet schools and education across the island that offered a more nuanced way of disseminating the new Revolutionary identity packaged

[109] Simón, "De lo cubano en el ballet," 296.

[110] Otero, *Cultural policy in Cuba*, 13.

within a Ballet technique. One aspect of the ballet's compliance with the new state was its racial integration at the beginning of the Revolution.

The racial integration of the company was another result of the Revolution's influence that distinguished the BNC from U.S. ballet companies, as well as pre-Revolutionary Cuba, but the BNC downplayed this significance as a tertiary achievement.[111] As a state institution, it was assumed that the national ballet would be integrated to reflect the racial equality that the Revolution sought, and so racial integration was not emphasized. Racial integration was an opportunity to unite all Cubans under one Cuban and Revolutionary identity. Alicia is quoted as saying: "[Cuban ballet was] integrated with a naturalness…our dancers were not divided."[112] Regardless of the "naturalness" or ease that Alicia characterizes the racial integration of the BNC, her comment complements the discourse of development which prioritizes a collective identity.[113] The emphasis of the Revolutionary identity was not to be placed on the integration, but rather that integration brought the Revolution closer to attaining uniformity as one Cuban race.[114]

In addition to the standard of racial inclusion in the ballet, there was a proposal to assemble a working group that would maintain the pedagogical standards and methods of Cuban

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[111] "Entrevista a dos bailarines cubanos—Lázaro Carreño y María Elena Llorente del Ballet Nacional de Cuba," *Areito* 4, 1-2 (1978): 56.

[112] Simón, *Alicia Alonso: Diálogos con la Danza* (first edition, La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986), 40.

[113] ibid., 40. As relaxed as Alonso's comment is regarding the integration of the company, it should be noted that the social and cultural adjustment to integration was not simple. Cuba has a legacy as a slave colony, and slaves were not emancipated until 1886. Another example of the convoluted process by which racial and gender equality would be reached is that unlike the U.S. where social organizations advocate for legal representation, the Cuban state's "legal changes came from above, while independent organizations aimed at pushing for social change were frowned upon." Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 6.

[114] Simón, *Alicia Alonso: Diálogos con la Danza*, (sixth edition, 2010) 40.

ballet technique. This standard would protect all the elements that comprise the Cuban heritage—a history of being a former colony, Latin and African heritages, etc.—and be invoked in the ethos and practice of Cuban ballet. Attempts to align the school of ballet alongside principles of Cuban nationalism could not be articulated more clearly than what this quote conveys: "…that which is referred to as the Cuban school, is you, is us."[115] To dance Cuban ballet is to dance to Cuba, to see Cuban ballet is to see oneself. The institutionalizing of national values into the technique engenders a perspective that when one watches Cuban ballet, they are in fact also viewing a Revolutionary discourse.

The Cuban "idiosyncrasy" that the working group would endeavor to sustain was alluded to in a 2008 *Dance Magazine* feature on Cuban technique. Former principle ballerina Loipa Araújo described the physical mechanics needed to complete the Cuban form that she honed during her prestigious tenure at the BNC.[116] Jumping and turning distinguish the Cuban style of ballet from others, and Araújo offered tips on how to execute certain movements. When asked what makes the Cuban style of dancing so distinct, she responded:

> "It's a little bit of everything. First, being born in a sunny place in a country whose people's characteristic is being gay and happy, we even make jokes out of our problems. We suffer, but we're very positive for life, and we always think that things can be solved. We don't let things push us down. That's the natural characteristic of the country. And then the school. Noverre explained the technique long ago, tendus and everything. But the school has been very well put together, picking up what kind of arabesque would be better for us, the position of the hips, the high passés, the high relevés, that would suit our personality and the way our bodies are made.[117]

[115] "La Escuela Cubana de Ballet' … Ponencia," *Cuba en el Ballet* 8, no. 3 (1977): 10.

[116] Araújo is one of the "four jewels" of the Cuban ballet. The four jewels are comprised of Josefina Méndez, Mirta Pla, Aurora Bosch, and Loipa Araújo. Bosch and Araújo are the two surviving "jewels" and are considered among greatest ballet instructors of Cuban ballet technique.

Araújo suggested that the geographical location, its weather conditions, and a shared experience of suffering may be sources that inform the particular inflection brought to Cuban ballet. What these superficial reasons do not offer is historical texture. For example, Araújo might have considered referencing the geographical convenience of the island in the processes of colonialism, and then the subsequent exploitation of labors and resources that would coincide with a creolization of Cuban peoples. Or *would* that she conveyed how then the Revolution would initiate economic and social strife that would lead to a shared experience of suffering, *then* these historical events might begin to warrant the circumstances Araújo hazarded to cite. Although she, and others, suggest that "temperaments," or "idiosyncrasies" simply exist rather than being politically, socially, and culturally constructed, I posit that within these superficial claims can be read a history, or a heritage, that informs the ballet's construction as a national institution and technique.

It is not only the technical acuity that defines the Cuban school of ballet, but it is also the performance of the technique and choreography that distinguishes the Cuban school. Another element of Cuban ballet technique which Alonso says makes it distinct is not only the performance of the technique, but that coupled with their artistic projection, or dramatic prowess. An emphasis is placed on the theatrical, or dramaturgical, presentation of the Cuban technique and choreography. This affect is achieved via an additional educational process which is in step with the educational movement of the Revolution. Dancers are asked to be aware of the narrative and to project the choreography from contextual understanding of the role they are portraying. I propose that this emphasis on independent study and taking an initiative in learning about the narrative of the ballet echoes the education movement in that Alonso is standardizing the

[117] Barbara Newman, "Teacher's Wisdom: Loipa Araújo," *Dance Magazine,* March 2011.

intellectual investment into the pedagogy of the national ballet school. For Alonso, this is what distinguishes the Cuban ballet school from others.[118]

Alicia has said that the technique and school were forged for the Revolution. Therefore my dissertation proposes that the BNC technique, its school pedagogy, and performance qualities are state property and are as much Revolutionary as they are Cuban. In her 2001 speech to young ballet students, Alicia situated ballet as intellectual work in order to uphold the sacrifices of the Revolutionary fight: "We have a great ladder of history that never ends because you will be the continuity of this ladder, this ladder will always be growing. You can never stop building for he who does not builds does not live, does not exist, and does not leave anything."[119] Alicia's call for students to implicate themselves in the process of continuing the ballet legacy, and from a point of remembering the struggle to create the ballet company and also within the context of the fight of Cuban culture, also echoes the theme of the Revolution. It evokes the concept of a Revolution as the process of continual evolution and renewal, that continual growth is necessary for success, and that to reach a point of stasis is to cease living. Alicia words epitomize a discourse of development in encouraging her students to continue to develop their craft and that this itself was a Revolutionary act.

For Alonso, continued development included taking on a dramaturgical approach to the study of ballet. In addition to dancers training in the technical and performance aspects of ballet, they would also be intellectualizing the work they were doing. For example, Alonso stressed the importance of the dancers to be curious about the culture in which their ballet takes place in order to visualize and realize a truth in their performance. "You have to learn, have to study

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[118] Simón, "Defender nuestro identidad," 357.

[119] Alonso, "El que no construye" in *Diálogos* (sixth edition, 2010), 65.

literature, have to read everything you find… That does not mean that you memorize. It means that they see or read something and say, "Oh how strange this!" To have a curious culture.[120]

Alicia articulates that this "conscious art" is one of the defining features of the Cuban ballet, in addition to the technical and choreographic execution.[121]

The introspection Alicia encouraged for her students complements this project's definition of Revolution as a reflexive process and it exemplifies the methodology of empathy as a mechanism of assimilation of ballet. It is about not simply dancing, and enjoying the visceral experiencing of the movement, but also having a critical consciousness about the narrative they are dancing.[122] Alonso has employed this very practice of reflexivity in her own work. "Already in the beginning of my long career I understood that I could not defend and explain my art only from the stage […] In many instances it was necessary to use words as the weapons in my fight […] I became conscious of how essential it was to explain, defend and promote certain values and discuss important issues in dance. I started to write texts, first timidly and then with more ease, and, at the same time, I allowed the publication of transcripts of my interviews, talks, lectures and other public speeches."[123] In addition to Alonso's publications working to justify or defend dance as a form in general, they also evidence the implementation of Revolutionary values of critical consciousness into the ballet school and company.

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[120] Alonso, "El que no construye," 69-70.

[121] ibid., 67.

[122] Alicia Alonso, "Vindicación de la danza/In defense of dance," (speech, Valencia, Spain, May 6, 1998), in *Diálogos* (sixth edition 2010), 62-64.

[123] Alonso, ""Defender nuestra identidad," *Diálogos con la danza* (fourth edition, Mexico City: Océano.), 53.

Assimilating Ballet

Alonso's support for ballet's relevance to the Cuban Revolution has never faltered. In her acceptance speech for an honorary doctorate from the University of Guadalajara, Mexico, she said: "Our countr[y has] the right to develop their own culture, to express themselves through art forms with local roots, but also to assimilate, enjoy and make their own the cultural legacy accumulated throughout the history of humanity. Classical ballet is part of that heritage."[124] Moreover, Alicia added that a ballet company in the Revolution was an act of resistance. "In principle, I don't believe that we should reject something beautiful and useful just because it 'comes' from an elite. In that case, the thing to do is to take it away from the elite and give it to the people."[125] This co-optation of ballet is not a phenomenon exclusive to Cuba. This was the process of how ballet as a form evolved its gestural and pantomime features from the court culture to the street fairs in France. The result of which led to ballet's that followed a narrative structure.[126] Later, the inverse occurs when choreographer George Balanchine appropriates Africanist aesthetics in a broader re-definition of ballet as an "American" dance form.[127]

Alicia's use of the word "assimilate" echoes with the broader ethos of the Revolutionary state to adapt foreign culture to the needs and goals of the Revolution. In a speech at the inauguration of a school in Pinar del Rio, Fidel encouraged Cuba to "be able to assimilate other

[124] Alonso, "La danza: triunfo ilimitado de nuestras culturas," *Cuba en el Ballet,* no. 100 (2002): 69-71.

[125] Alonso, "Verdades sin fronteras," in *Diálogos* (2004), 266-76.

[126] Foster, *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 43.

[127] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Stripping the Emperor: The Africanist Presence in American Concert Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader*, ed. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2001), 337-38.

countries' artistic expressions without succumbing to cultural colonialism."[128] Alicia saw her ballet company and school as doing this very kind of Revolutionary work.

> We work for the mass dissemination of ballet. Not because we believe that everyone should dance ballet, but because we believe that this event takes place in revolutionary culture. That ballet is an art where tradition is projected into the present, not as a curious reminiscent of the past, as museum object, but as a living force upon which we must build the new art. We believe that the old ways must be overcome in a dialectical way, not mechanical abolition of art of the past but with their conscious assimilation.[129]

And this is what the Alonsos did. Assimilate. In addition to contextualizing this as revolutionary work, Alicia saw this as a contribution to the world by bringing forth a Latin American contribution to ballet:

> […] enriching current ballet technique choreographically with our own artistic development, rhythms, folklore, dances or popular forms, and, above all, with our culture. Every Latin American country has its cultural history and it is our turn to make this contribution to the old world of ballet. Latin America has not yet contributed its culture completely, only partly, but we have many more riches that we should and must give to the world of art and dance […] This is our duty.[130]

In step with the overall structure and method of this dissertation as an archeological history, it is important to stress that the Alonsos' ballet education in New York had already been assimilated for a U.S. cultural context. Their formative training the U.S. came at a time when there were concerted efforts being made to develop the form of ballet to a U.S. cultural

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[128] Fidel Castro, "Speech on occasion of the inauguration of the School "Comandante Pinares," (speech, Guane, Pinar del Río, September 20, 1971), http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f200971e.html

[129] Fernando Alonso, "Servir a la revolucion y al artes," *Cuba en el Ballet*, 5, no. 1 (1974): 14.

[130] Alicia Alonso, "Alicia Alonso's Passion and Exuberance," interview by S. B. Cherson. *Performing Arts Reviews* 8, no. 3 (1978): 282-83.

landscape. Ballet impresario Lincoln Kirstein, had brought George Balanchine to the U.S. in 1933 and began a lineage of ballet style and choreography that persists and is produced to the present day. Ballet critic, John Martin, tackled this conundrum of how to make ballet American by encouraging the play of ballet aesthetics as a way to incorporate an American identity on both the narratives of ballet as well as the style in which they are danced.[131] While the Alonsos never directly attribute their model for creating a Cuban pedagogy of ballet, they were still immersed in an "American" assimilation process in New York City, being taught by Russian and Italian émigrés, and dancing in productions that were "American" in spirit. Just as the choreography of ballet in the French courts quite literally represented the standard for "requisite social behavior," so too was imagined an efficacy for ballet narratives and choreography to function as, appeal to, and identify and resonate with American audiences.[132]

It is then not a leap to consider that the Alonso's training in "American" companies, coupled with the encouragement of the State to assimilate, formed the basis of their approach to building a national ballet pedagogy. The director of the *museo de la danza*, who published many interviews with Alonso about Cuban ballet, also describes the process of the Cuban ballet technique and style as one of assimilation. Pedro Simon characterized the process of amalgamating Cuban "idiosyncrasies" and technical approaches from existing schools as rather eclectic. He described the process as sometimes deliberate and other times involuntary, but that whatever became part of the national pedagogy had to resonate with a general Cuban character. In the case of Cuban ballet, the criteria of assimilation included incorporating existing folk and

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[131] John Martin, "Creating an American Ballet" *The New York Times*, May 4, 1930.

[132] Susan Foster, *Choreography and Narrative*, 28-31.

popular dance and musical forms on the island.[133] The effort to include folk culture does not manifest as literal choreography from folk dances, rather it works to gesture toward "an essential *Cubanía*, everything is done according to the conceptual and artistic line art developed from Alicia Alonso."[134] Ballet, *técnica cubana*, Rumba—and even Santeria ceremonies—were re-invented not necessarily as accurate representations of their origin, but were streamlined and re-fashioned into official representations of the Revolution as a way of emphasizing formerly subjugated Cuban histories and influences.

Simon says that the Cuban style and pedagogy did not develop suddenly, but was a process.[135] In addition to the pedagogy of Cuban ballet deriving from "the best" of the Alonso's training regardless of country, ideology, or origin, Fernando and Alicia also created the technique by referring to how the critics distinguished her style of dancing. Thusly Alicia's body served as the model for how the Cuban school would approach teaching ballet. "It began with comments from critics, and Fernando seeing me dance and both analyzing by saying that I danced different…because the basic technique is the same everywhere in the world, the art of ballet is universal. But it is the accentuation we give up come things and the importance we give to other."[136] The decision to then assimilate their technical training from other schools of ballet, as well as Alicia's style of dancing, was then integrated with Cuban-specific inflections: "the conditions we had, our climate, character, physical constitution and taste, particularly artistic

[133] Simón, "De lo cubano en el ballet," 292.

[134] ibid., 294.

[135] Simón, "Defender nuestra identidad", 352.

[136] ibid., 354-355.

taste."[137] In fact, this choice to assimilate foreign forms with a general Cuban character was not solely relevant to ballet.

In 1968, Ambrosio Fornet, a Cuban literary critic and essayist, stressed the importance of scrutinizing the "formulae" of any form that arrives here as "avant-garde." Fornet advocated for a highly critical approach in incorporating a non-Cuban form, and to discard "what cannot be assimilated naturally" to a Cuban cultural lexicon.[138] In 1972 this "selective assimilation" approach was submitted as a report on cultural policy in Cuba to the United Nations. The report articulated that Cuban traditions and origins should remain a priority, but that Cuba sees the adaption of the "cultural heritage of mankind" to their needs as a way to ensure the "retention of our dynamism."[139]

Alicia agreed that dancers should dance relative to their own cultural style. "Dancers from other schools move in their own way […] that fits their character and their culture. We should dance in our differentiated style."[140] This did not mean that the Alonsos foreclosed on the idea of incorporating foreign ballet techniques, but that the implementation of such an assimilation would be facilitated by knowledgeable ballet teachers or a working group designated specifically to maintain and hold accountable the characteristics of the Cuban school of ballet technique, and also determine that any assimilations of new technical aspects be taken in a way that would always prioritize the original mission of creating a specific Cuban stamp, or

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[137] Simón, "Defender nuestra identidad", 354-355.

[138] Ambrosio Fornet, "El intelectual en la Revolución/The intellectual in the Revolution," in *Revolución, Letras, Artes*, (Havana Cultural Congress, 1968), 318.

[139] Otero, *Cultural Policy in Cuba,* 14.

[140] Alonso, *Alicia Alonso: Diálogos con la danza*, (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986), 55.

aesthetic.[141]

Process, not classification

Revolution, assimilation and empathy are concepts I engage with as methods more to distinguish the *process* by which Cuban ballet emerges than to define its form definitively. However, it is helpful to evaluate the approaches that other scholars have taken in order to illustrate the trajectory of Cuban ballet and other Cuban dance forms. In contrast to Cuban ballet's development via assimilation, another dance form called *técnica cubana* was invented during the Revolution and is comprised of for and Cuban movements. In *Contemporary Dance in Cuba: técnica cubana as Revolutionary Movement*, Suki John qualifies *técnica cubana* as a "hybrid" of ballet, American modern dance, Afro-Cuban tradition, flamenco and Cuban nightclub cabaret.[142] She proposes that *técnica cubana* was an invention intended to represent the "cross-pollinating"[143] that was happening throughout the island in the pursuit of incorporating African traditions into state cultural institutions as an effort of the new state to eradicate the racial stratifications that existed from before the Revolution. *Técnica Cubana's* eclectic array of artistic influences is designed to reflect the racial and cultural makeup of Cubans.[144]

Alternatively, Rumba, a dance form that was not invented for the Revolution, was

[141] "La Escuela Cubana de Ballet' … Ponencia," 9-13.

[142] Suki John, *Contemporary Dance in Cuba: Técnica Cubana as Revolutionary Movement* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2012), 8.

[143] ibid., 87.

[144] ibid., 27.

refabulated into a national dance form to reflect rural values and to project national goals.[145] Rumba's choreography had shifted from a spontaneous and improvisatory structure to being finitely choreographed and incorporated into government sponsored cultural programs across the island that are equally about celebrating a national symbol as they are to show tourists that Rumba warrants being a national image of Cuba.[146] The popularity of Rumba as a social dance has prompted national folkloric companies, and even the national ballet, to appropriate Rumba choreography into their repertoire.

In the one published scholarship on Cuban ballet, Lester Tome compares the formation of Cuban ballet aesthetics to Alicia's own personal interpretation of music and her explanation that Cubans self-identify as having an inherent, shared, and thusly "national" sense of musicality. Tome consults a discourse of Alicia's musicality which are sourced both from Alicia herself as well as critics and other dancers as a way to understand "Alonso's formulation of musicality as a marker of Cuban aesthetics."[147] Tome presents Alonso's musicality as a "hybrid product" constituted by her training abroad and a "Cuban disposition to dance in a certain manner, probably determined by *the* national habitus" (emphasis added).[148] Tome, like Suki John, does not define nor demonstrate the dynamic of "hybrid" as a process, nor does he define what the Cuban "habitus" is other than there is one singular and shared "national" musical experience that Alicia would be influenced by. The issue being that without defining hybridity, Tome and John

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[145] Yvonne Daniel, *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1, 16.

[146] ibid., 13, 16.

[147] Lester Tome, "Music in the Blood": Performance and Discourse of Musicality in Cuban Ballet Aesthetics" *Dance Chronicle* (London: Routledge 2013): 220.

[148] ibid., 236.

might assume that their respective forms are measurably "one part this, and one part that," which is an antithetical logic in a Revolutionary context which seeks to challenge Western deduction.[149]

Tome and John both rely on fixed descriptions of theoretical concepts such as hybridity and habitus. What is not emphasized in their projects is the complexity and specificity in the method of forming a creative practice in a socio-political movement. Nikos Papastergiadas considers the term "hybrid" as accommodating (not dominating, not shaping) the eclectic memory with all the terms rough, smooth, and fragmented surfaces, and this inclusive conception of hybridity validates my interest in the epistemic and discursive emergence of Cuban ballet. Whereas Tome does not consider the racial, class-based, and rural musical experiences on the island that might not have reached Alicia's middle class experience and "national" musical lexicon, the central thesis of Papastergiadas' article "Restless Hybrids" is concerned with the process of mapping a culture "whose coordinates refer to multiple locations."[150] Cuba's particular coordinates chart a history of colonization, occupation by the United States after the Spanish-American War, and now a post-Cold-War Cuba. Papastergiadas' study suggests the departure of hybridity from its origin as a biologically based, scientific tool adopted in the social sciences, and encourages an approach proposed by Homi Bhabha: "Hybridity is … both the process by which the discourse of colonial authority attempts to translate the identity of the other within a singular category, but then it fails and produces something else."[151] For Papastergiadas, there is value to recognizing that there may be a "third space" where hybridity exists outside of a binary understanding, and Alicia's understanding of assimilation as a reflexive process allows

[149] John, *Contemporary Dance in Cuba,* 28.

[150] Papastergiadas, "Restless Hybrids." *Third Text* 9 (32).

[151] Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 18.

Cuban ballet to develop alongside its past, present, and future circumstances.[152] In this understanding, I can consider the "third," fourth, and umpteenth spaces, as Papastergiadas suggests, in which ballet in Cuba as a hybrid form exists.

The methodology of hybridity that Papastergiadas forwards reflects the "intercontextual" analysis that dance studies scholar Janet O'Shea refers to in her analysis of Rustom Bharucha's (2000) critique of "intercultural" exchange. In addition to considering the hybrid and transcultural processes within the development of Cuba's ballet, a discursive-oriented methodology allows me to read these processes with an intercontextual lens. In her article "Intercultural Collaboration? Thinking Culture Beyond the Nation in the Work of Shobana Jeyasingh and Zhang Yunfeng" Janet O'Shea interrogates the use of the term "intercultural" and the assumptions and affiliations with nation that this term has in a "traditional" sense. She finds the term "intercultural" inadequate for her project which examines the roles that choreographic processes, language, and aesthetics, play in so-called intercultural exchanges. This is because the term intercultural relies on the notion of 'culture' being rooted as more a stable referent or tradition, rather than in "economic circumstances and in historical ruptures" that O'Shea finds in her observations of the choreographic exchanges. In the case of this chapter, the development of Cuban ballet becomes inseparable from the development of the Revolutionary project.

O'Shea agrees with Bharucha's mobilization of the term "intercontextual" in an effort to salvage the labor and contributions of marginalised communities from appropriations by the West.[153] I advocate for the term intercontextual in similar ways to O'Shea and Bharucha within the circumstances and histories of Cuba and Cuban ballet. An intercontexual approach for the

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[152] See Robert Young for a more detailed trajectory of the term hybridity.

[153] Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice: thinking through theatre in an age of globalization* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

Cuban ballet project considers "economic structures, institutional systems, training practices, and working processes" as part of the creation of work labelled 'cultural' and designated as 'intercultural,' or movement that is assumed to be a hybrid form. These specific conditions, or "coordinates" for Papastergiadas, contribute to aesthetic production and to expectations around ways of working as much as "culture" does. The importance of dance forms that embody complex histories is that they complicate the idea of "culture" as a monolith, as developing outside the world of politics and economics. Moreover, what these dance forms and choreographic processes expose is a challenge to the idea of the nation as fixed. Not only can intercontextual reading resist fixity, but as a methodology it can demonstrate a capacity that transcends being collapsed into the category of a "national," uncontested practice.

Another indeterminate term used to describe the revolutionary processes of cultural assimilation, and specifically *técnica cubana*, is transculturation. Mary Louise Pratt's definition of transculturation is the ex-propriation of colonial materials, language, dispositions, and then refashioned for the circumstances or purposes of the colonized.[154] With this theoretical lens we understand how Suki John is possibly using the term transculturation to describe *técnica cubana* and also how the BNC, and thusly the Revolution, conceptualized the assimilation process. It is the "ex-propriation" that captures the specificity this project aims for here with regard to Cuba. "Transculturation" suggests an agency for the colonized to negotiate the terms of its adaption.

Within a similar, but broader discourse of Cuban assimilation, Louis Perez uses the term "appropriation" to characterize the process of adaptation of North American forms into the Cuban zeitgeist. In this history, he retroactively places the agency in the hands of Cubans in order to demonstrate their complicity in the making of their own lives and arrive to a place of

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[154] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 6.

"self-definition."[155] However Perez' use of the term does not situate "appropriation" within in the purview of understanding how language and discourse operates as a colonial strategy to further subjugate people. Appropriation is the acquisition of property without consent of its owner. While Perez' desire to write a history that is powerful for Cuba is admirable, there is a caveat. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that total autonomy on the part of the colonized was not guaranteed, so it is with a caveat that the term appropriation be used. In the spirit of Gayatri Spivak and her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I'm wondering if it is possible for the marginalized people to "appropriate," because by Spivak's logic, if the subaltern could speak, they would not be subaltern. The scenario in which Cubans were in a position to acquire something without consent from the U.S. is termed by Spivak as strategic essentialism, or "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."[156] However, the use of strategic essentialism, and its subsequent acquisitions, must always be exercised as a deliberate approach and therefore should be consistently contextualized in the Revolutionary project.

The significance of this seemingly semantic analysis is to convey that the intent of the Revolution is to self-define. *If* Suki John considers Técnica Cubana an indigenous form of dance because it represents the "cross-pollinating" of indigenous Afro-Cuban aesthetics to produce a nationalized form, and *if* Cuban ballet is proposed by Alicia as its own distinct school of ballet and not a satellite of her American ballet education, cultural and political specificity, and

155 Louis Perez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 7.

156 Gayatri Spivak, *In other worlds: essays in cultural politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 250.

attention to the revolution's discourse of development, is key.[157] For example, ballet is not indigenous to the pre-1959 culture of the island. Indeed it was taught as recreation in the 1930s and Cuba's first ballet company was founded in 1948, however its incorporation into a national landscape, as an assimilated and standardized Cuban dance form which imbues the European practice with Cuban aesthetics, is indigenous only to the Revolution. It is not this chapter's goal to arrive at one certain category of process, rather it is to emphasize that each terminology should be aware of the discursive epistemes, or systems of thought, that a practice and process developed. To think about how other scholars conceive of revolutionary processes in their respective projects, further clarifies how the Alonsos develop this technique and style, and then how it positions this 1959 Revolutionary labor in a focused Revolutionary discourse and not one that is trying to maintain fidelity to an "original" discourse in which ballet was formed.

We have seen this practice of marrying the indigenous with the Cuban prior to the 1959 Revolution through the work of the Cuban writers in the early-20th century. Described as "critical" criollists, these writers, poets, essayists took on a process that would "inflect, rather than efface, European culture."[158] The goal was not to return to "aboriginality," but was to create something entirely new. In his book *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* Gustavo Perez-Firmat directly aligns this process in the spirit of the ajíaco, Cuban stew, as well. Where the discourse of astonishment may rely on stereotypes and generalizations to illustrate the depth of surprise in seeing a Cuban dance ballet, the generalizations within the discourse of development is goal-oriented, state-oriented, and has a mission that the discourse of astonishment cannot fathom. Fernando Alonso's quote below

[157] John, *Contemporary Dance in Cuba,* 87.

[158] Gustavo Perez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12.

disabuses us from any notion that the Cuban ballet was unaware of their generalizations of a Cuban character, and rather conveys their perspective on art-making:

> We try to express nationalism in our art in profound ways, trying to avoid superficial, nativist expressions of "local color." We believe that the Cuban does not reject universalism, and that the assimilation of technical and expressive elements has no boundaries, provided they are an artistic truth. So negative is the foreigner's fashion, to penetrate himself ideologically and follow the dictates of the capitalist art system censoring, surrounding oneself with prejudice, and with closed eyes to the development of art in the world. We need to have high standards and not easy or mediocre standards. So we fight, those are our goals towards these principles we conduct our work. So we have served and serve the Revolution and the Arts.[159]

There is precedent for this process of assimilation that Alonso and the Revolution are making official. Through metaphor, Cuban writer Fernando Ortiz characterizes this process which develops the Cuban culture and character—or "cubanness"—to a Cuban stew called ajíaco. This stew descends from the Cuban indigenous Taino tradition. The stew is made through a continual adding of water, meat, root, and vegetable ingredients. Only what is needed is taken, but the rest remains to steep and develop flavor. Simply put, ajíaco is never finished. Ortiz' metaphor illustrates a Cuban character that is both constituted of indigenous, colonial, and post-colonial pasts, as well as influences, or ingredients, that have not yet come to pass.[160] This process of continual remaking and repurposing aligns with how the Alonsos built the ballet technique and style. Because the technique will always evolve with the care and knowledge of ballet masters, the ballet technique is unfinished, and likewise the discourse of development is unfinished, whereas the discourse of astonishment is only seeing and interpreting what it perceives as

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[159] Fernando Alonso, "Servir a la revolucion y al arte/To serve the revolution and art," *Cuba en el Ballet* 5, no. 1 (1974): 14.

[160] Fernando Ortiz, "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* XLV, no. 2 (Havana, 1940): 161-186.

"finished."

In contrast to Perez-Firmat's "inflective" process of adapting foreign practices to create something new, Louis Perez in his book *On Becoming Cuban*, addresses the processes of Cubans "appropriating" U.S. practices as a means of softening the blow of encroaching American imperialism, neo-colonial presence on the island in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. In addition to more privileged Cubans having access to U.S. educations in many ways to help transform Cuba from a "postcolony to a more successful nation," transformation also happened domestically on the island in the refashioning of U.S. forms to meet their own needs.[161] Perez points out that after the 1898 revolution, it was quickly understood that the U.S. presence, and thusly its culture, was on the ascendance.[162] And while the North American influence brought advancements to the island, there was still a desire to protect a Cuban identity. A former officer who has been educated in U.S. schools suggested that "Americanization" become "a strategy to defend *Cubanidad*," or Cubanness. He saw this as a way to leverage the playing field between Cuba and the U.S. "The more we know… the more we will be in a condition to sustain our rights and liberty."[163] And "Americanize" they did. "So thoroughly had North American forms penetrated the structural order of daily life that it was often almost impossible to make a sharp distinction between what was properly Cuban and what was North American. In the end, to challenge "North American," as after the Cuban revolution of 1959, was to challenge what it meant to be Cuban."[164] And this is point. What the Cubans assimilated, became their own.

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[161] Louis Perez, *On Becoming Cuban,* 32-35.

[162] ibid., 158.

[163] ibid., 162.

[164] ibid., 12.

Moving Theory in Practice

In a 1971 article of *Dance Magazine*, Marian Horosko wrote of her visit to Cuba and her search for Russian influences in Cuban ballet. This is but one example of general assumptions about Cuba during the Revolution, as many conflate the Soviet Union's influence with an elision of US presence on the island.[165]. Horosko discovered that there were indeed classes being taught by Russian or Russian-trained teachers, but she concluded that "the technique is Fernando's; the artistry, Alicia's. The result, uniquely Cuban."[166]

This chapter begins to look at the way the State appropriates ballet into its cultural project. I have demonstrated how cultural expression was linked to developing a moral character that might then procure an investment from the citizenry in order to develop an economic base of the new nation. Certain dance forms, such as Rumba and *técnica cubana* were merged into the Revolutionary cultural landscapes in ways that affected their aesthetic and durational formats, and ballet is no exception. In addition to themed ballets, the ballet also adapted a Cuban style of ballet, one that folded in "sensibilities" and "temperaments" associated with Cuban people. These movement genres have been described as "hybrid" or "transcultural" products of the revolution, but without critically evidencing the specific and multiple causal forces that influence the forms. This absence of criticism is but one example of the multiple themes of ambivalence, and dual modes of identification, that this dissertation seeks to address. Ballet serves as an

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[165] Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2.

[166] Terry, *Alicia Alonso and Her Ballet Nacional de Cuba,* 58.

example of a particular ambivalence because of its strong tradition as an already codified and prescriptive form.

One of the more obvious oddities of Cuban ballet is that it would not only be nationalized, but celebrated to the extent that it has. The form is strongly associated with court dance and nobility and the Revolution was against bourgeois aesthetics and practices. On the other hand as Janelle Reinelt points out in "The Role of National Theatres in an Age of Globalization," sometimes national theatres can be a "means of fighting back against what nations have lost in economic power."[167] This is similar to how Marta Savigliano writes about tango and Argentina's desire to become a cultural capital of the world if not an economic super power in *Tango and the political economy of passion*.[168] In the case of Cuba, and although it has not been explicitly stated, their practice of assimilation might have been motivated by the idea of succeeding alongside Western entities, but also in a way that was unique and new to Cuba and met the socio-cultural and political needs of the state.

Another aspect of this ambivalence is the idea of a national institution itself as a European construct as Marvin Carlson highlights in "National Theatres: Then and Now." Carlson also finds it important to understand the existence of this institutional framework in post-colonial situations. The ethos of colonists in African countries, for example, carries over and produces an ambiguity in the work presented even after independence.[169] In Cuba, the BNC was

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[167] Janelle Reinelt, "The Role of National Theatres in an Age of Globalization," *National theatres in a changing Europe*, ed. S.E. Wilmer (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan 2008), 232.

[168] Marta Savigliano, *Tango and the political economy of passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

[169] Marvin Carlson, "National Theatres: Then and Now," *National theatres in a changing Europe*, ed. S.E. Wilmer (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan 2008), 21, 25.

allowed permitted to continue performing classic repertoire, but sometimes the narrative changed in order to accommodate a Revolutionary outcome. For example, Odette the swan in *Swan Lake* does not die at the end of the ballet. Rather, she lives, turns into a human along with all her other swan friends, and marries the prince. Another example is the BNC's version of Giselle. It is not entirely different from the version that made Alicia famous in the 1940s, but the original narrative might have a particular traction with Cuban audiences because the nobility in the story end up looking deplorable.

Partha Chatterjee offers an insight to this tension between European presence and the Cuban adaptation. He might describe the Cuban Revolution as embodying an "eastern" type of nationalism through their efforts to 're-equip' the nation culturally in order to transform it. Chatterjee goes on to describe how this cultural process would not be solely "imitating the alien culture, for then the nation would lose its distinctive identity. The search therefore was for a regeneration of the national culture, adapted to the requirements for progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness."[170] Understanding the seeming "contradictions" of Cuban ballet in the terms of a post-colonial project helps to resist the collapsing of tension into uncritical uses of terms such as "hybridity" and "intercultural."

Lastly, this chapter considers the pedagogical efforts of the state and the performative interpretations and/or manifestations of a national ballet company and also acknowledges the political context of this national institution. If I follow the intercontextual lead that O'Shea advocates for, I can consider how the very concept of revolution itself resonates with a purposeful ambivalence. Cuban historian Aviva Chomsky suggests that there is no definite start

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[170] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 2.

or finish to a revolution; that ideally a revolution never arrives at an end.[171] This complements my hesitation to uncritically classify ballet as a "hybrid" or "transcultural" product as its history in Cuba is steeped in Alicia's childhood training at *Pro Arte*, her formative training in "American" companies with Russian (pre-Soviet) instructors, and her working with Cuban choreographers. Perhaps this notion of ambivalence together with Ashis Sengupta's reconceptualization of the term "contemporary," as a way of charting the "conjoined, yet incommensurate elements," provides a topos upon which to display the many incommensurate elements that constitutes Cuban ballet.[172] In other words, it is precisely the point for revolutionary ballet to never quite be definitively qualified because that would be to reify a standard that has little relevance to the specific project of Revolutionary strategy.

In the broader structure of this dissertation, we endeavor to understand the limits of discourse. The discourse of astonishment and the discourse of development serve as methodological tools to understand how Cuban ballet came to be. Alonso has characterized the process of developing the Cuban technique and style as one of assimilation, and this chapter has evidenced how this process was already part of the Cuban experience and then became an "official" process in the Revolution. With this understanding of how North American forms get adapted for Cuban sensibilities, Cuban ballet need not only exist as a derivative of ballet schools as the discourse of astonishment might suggest, but rather that Cuban ballet was the result of deliberate efforts to achieve a self-created cultural identification. Cuban ballet is not only a discursive object, but it is a discursive practice. It is the embodiment of assimilation and what

[171] Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 15.

[172] Ashis Sengupta, Mapping South Asia through Contemporary Theatre: Essays on the Theatres of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5-6.

Bhabha calls ambivalence. It is the duality of being an art form as well as a Revolutionary process.

We can view the process of assimilating ballet as an official choreography, an act of agency-making, as it empathizes a Cuban identity with the practice of ballet. Susan Foster defines agency in the act of making choreography. In her introduction to *Choreographing History*, Foster argues that the body's physical articulations must not be assumed as "natural" expressions.[173] Rather, the body's iterations are in fact manifesting out of cultural practices that construct corporeal meaning, hence her thesis that the body that is written upon by history is also capable of writing.[174] She suggests that the body be viewed as having potential agency "to participate in or resist whatever forms of cultural production are underway."[175] Cuban ballet technique and style presents a theory of a process of assimilation which is born out of the ethos of the Revolution to create a form that becomes entirely new. This chapter has been about exploring Cuban ballet beyond a definitive classification, and instead understanding the formation of Cuban ballet through a revolutionary discourse of development.

[173] Foster, *Choreographing History*, 3.

[174] ibid., 15.

[175] ibid., 15.

<u>Chapter Two: Reading Repertoire: classical, neo-classical and model works</u>

Six years of doctoral studies in Los Angeles including four years of fieldwork in Havana, have brought me to the very theater where I began my professional dancing career in my hometown of San Jose, California. I am here to watch the first American company dance the Ballet Nacional de Cuba's *version of* Giselle*. I know the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts like the back of my hand. Not only was I familiar with its circular Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired design since childhood when my mother would bring me and my siblings to see* The Nutcracker *ballet or a musical, but later when I returned to this theater as a dancer, I came to learn the backstage dressing rooms, the private side-patio where dancers smoke cigarettes before the show and again at intermission, and the loading dock where all the tech men and women dressed in black would park their motorcycles. Watching this version of* Giselle *was a literal and intellectual homecoming.*

Alicia's own experience with *Giselle* has a similarly fortuitous trajectory. She unexpectedly debuted as "Giselle" in dancer and choreographer Anton Dolin's 1943 re-staging of *Giselle* for Ballet Theatre in New York City, when she replaced the dancer Alicia Markova in the title role. *Giselle* had its world premier in Paris in 1841 and was originally choreographed by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot. Toba Singer, a biographer of the BNC and Fernando Alonso, has noted that what made Alicia's interpretation legendary in the ballet world was her "mad scene," or the scene when Giselle's world falls apart.[176] Alicia later staged her own version in 1948 and made adjustments to the choreography that would emphasize the importance of the *corps de*

[176] Chloe Veltman, "Silicon Valley Ballet Makes History with Cuban 'Giselle,'" *KQED*, October 14, 2015, http://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2015/10/14/silicon-valley-ballet-makes-history-with-cuban-giselle/

ballet as well as "restore" its romantic ballet heritage with a focus on the *port au bras*, or placement of the arms. For example, Alicia's version of *Giselle* replaces the more common peasant *pas de deux* in the first act with a *pas de dix* comprised of six women and four men. In the second act, the choreography for the "Wilis" danced by the female *corps de ballet* is more involved and results in more stage time. Her version of *Giselle* has received international acclaim. Alicia considered the opportunities to stage her version of *Giselle* throughout Western Europe as "not a personal success, but rather a triumph for Latin American culture."[177] A triumph that she clarifies is due to debuting her own version of *Giselle*—"revitalized and enriched"—in France and Italy, the birthplace and cradle of ballet.

From all the late nights sitting in the "house" of the theater and receiving our director's and choreographer's notes following a technical rehearsal, I knew the best seat for me to watch Giselle *would be front-row-center. The ticket had cost me $25 dollars. I suppose the box office managers consider the view from the front row to be partially obstructed as a result of the pitch in the proscenium stage's apron, but for me it was one of the best seats in the house for the observations I was keen to make. I would be able to see and hear the dancers' feet from this seat. From here I could both wince and delight at the sounds of ballerinas' fortified pointe shoes brush, stab, and punctuate the wooden floor with rhythms and choreographies that Alicia Alonso became so well known for in her interpretation. I would be able to see the moment when their perspiration would breach the pancake and powder of their face makeup. I knew this staging of* Giselle *well. I had spent the last four summers at the BNC taking ballet and history classes and watching rehearsals. In the summer and fall of 2014, I had watched the BNC rehearse and*

[177] Octavio Roca, "Love Affair With `Giselle' / Legendary Cuban ballerina Alicia Alonso has made it her own," *SF Gate*, February 7, 1999. http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Love-Affair-With-Giselle-Legendary-Cuban-2948441.php

perform this ballet for several months in preparation for the 28th International Ballet Festival held in Havana. I knew the costumes. I knew the dancers and I knew how they were the rehearsed.

It was not by chance that the recently renamed Silicon Valley Ballet—formerly Ballet San Jose, and then San Jose Cleveland Ballet before that—would acquire the rights to present the Cuban version of *Giselle*. Jose Manuel Carreño, the nephew of Lazaro Carreño, brother of Yoel and cousin of Alihaydée—all celebrated dancers of the BNC—retired in 2011 from an 18-year tenure at American Ballet Theatre in New York City, having also danced with the Royal Ballet and English National Ballet. He came to Ballet San Jose as the artistic director in September 2013 following the dismissal of founding artistic director Dennis Nahat. According to *Dance Magazine* writer Claudia Bauer, Ballet San Jose's finances faltered with the dot-com bust in the early-2000s and this precipitated a cavalcade of attempts to find a new direction for the company that was in existence since 1986.[178] Ballet San Jose was renamed Silicon Valley Ballet (SVB) as a way to align itself with the tech industry. According to its June 2015 press release, SVB "reflects the bold inventiveness of its high-tech home base – presenting groundbreaking programs that explore the digital-physical blur while enriching the community with brilliant artistry."[179] The press release also communicated that the first season as SVB will open with Alonso's *Giselle* as a way of "celebrating the opening of relations between the US and Cuba."[180]

Carreño is intimately familiar with Alonso's *Giselle* after watching it danced by his uncle, cousins, and he himself dancing it in Cuba. In addition to producing Alonso's *Giselle*, SVB

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[178] Claudia Bauer, "ABT of the West?" Dance Magazine, January 1, 2014.

[179] Silicon Valley Ballet, "2015-16 Season Announcement," press release, June 19, 2015, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55bf9ff8e4b09102a9efad46/t/55e62a5ce4b0fbe9ea0fce44/1441147484923/2015-16seasonannouncement.pdf

[180] ibid.

also established "The Giselle Project", a "multi-faceted initiative to include community outreach, special events, and performances of Giselle."[181] This included a Cuban-themed gala at the Fairmont Hotel called "Spellbound," master classes where the public could observe Cuban artists staging *Giselle* on the SVB company, a "Beer & Ballet" reception where "beer lovers and curious fans can watch a Giselle rehearsal, and a "Cuban Food Celebration" featuring music and art at the Los Cubanos restaurant in San Jose.[182] SVB found purchase in the political significance of this event as well as culturally. SVB was the first ballet company in the U.S. to dance this version of *Giselle*, and according to the press release "represents the first major collaboration between an American performing arts company and Cuba since the 1950's."[183]

Germane to the history of Cuban ballet's formative relationship with American Ballet Theatre (ABT) discussed in Chapter One, Carreño's appointment as Artistic Director at SVB once more associates Cuban ballet with ABT. Claudia Bauer details to the parameters of this "strategic relationship" in her *Dance Magazine* article "ABT of the West?" This partnership allows SVB to access ABT repertoire, costumes and sets, and will facilitate the introduction of SVB to directors and choreographers with whom the company would like to work. In addition to this company support, SVB became an American Ballet Theatre Certified Institution, whereby the SVB ballet school becomes the only institution on the West coast certified to teach ABT's

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[181] Silicon Valley Ballet, "Silicon Valley Ballet Announces The Giselle Project…," press release, August 10, 2015, http://www.marketwired.com/press-release/silicon-valley-ballet-announces-the-giselle-project-first-performances-american-company-2046394.htm

[182] Silicon Valley Ballet, "Silicon Valley Ballet Announces The Giselle Project: Community Outreach and Special Events Celebrating the Production of Cuban Dance Legend Alicia Alonso's Giselle," press release, September 22, 2015, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55bf9ff8e4b09102a9efad46/t/5601ce66e4b04aa9439adc8b/1442958950272/Giselle-Project-Special-Events-FINAL-2.pdf

[183] Silicon Valley Ballet, "Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley Announces 2015/16 Season And its New Company Name Silicon Valley Ballet," press release, June 19, 2015.

ballet curriculum.[184] Bauer mentions that in addition to the new curriculum making SVB a destination for pre-professional students which will then feed into the company, SVB participated in ABT's "Project Plie" initiative which seeks to increase "racial and ethnic representation" in ballet companies throughout the U.S.[185] What is compelling about the SVB/ABT partnership and the changeover in ballet school curriculum is that ABT technique developed similarly to Cuban ballet technique. ABT once had its own mission to be an "American" institution, presenting "American" repertoire, and making ballet an "American" form, and Alicia was a part of that history when she danced there in the 1940s. More than 6 decades later, we see the result of ABT's work and interestingly interfacing with a company with a Cuban at the helm. While this partnership was an opportunity for SVB to expand its school, which for many companies becomes a financial resource, even this collaboration could not save the foundering company. In March 2016, SVB closed its doors due to its inability to surmount its legacy of financial strife. How gripping that their final season, albeit unwittingly, would premiere with Alicia's *Giselle*.

The case study of *Giselle* in San Jose, California, is meant not only to describe the coincidence of Cuban ballet arriving in my hometown, but it is an opportunity to understand *how* ballet navigates, materializes, and even dissolves in the case of SVB. Through Randy Martin's method of "overreading," this chapter—and dissertation more broadly—situates the dance in relation to its circumstances for being presented. Martin employs "overreading" as a way to

[184] Silicon Valley Ballet, "Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley Announces 2015/16 Season and its New Company Name," press release, June 19, 2015.

[185] Bauer, "ABT of the West?"

mobilize and implicate dance into other “horizons” of political and social understanding.[186] For example, “overreading” allows us to see how an American ballet company attempts to keep its doors open by capitalizing upon the current U.S./Cuba political relations. Throughout this chapter, “overreading” serves as a central method of choreographic analysis to understand how particular BNC repertoire makes intelligible a discourse of development.

Chapter Two continues the theoretical thread of a Foucauldian archeology in considering the repertoire of the BNC as discursive object. The BNC’s repertoire is comprised of ballets ranging from classical and neo-classical choreographies and narratives, to ballets with folkloric as well as political themes. The variety of the BNC’s repertoire is due in part to the state’s ambivalent position on cultural production to any set criteria so long as it was “for the revolution.” As the BNC is a state institution, this analysis considers its repertoire as authorized enunciations of its political circumstances and therefore capable of representating of the State. This chapter will focus on three ballets: *Giselle, La Avanzada*, and *Carmen*; a romantic ballet, a “model work” ballet and a neo-classical ballet respectively.

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[186] Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 55.

chapter will focus on three ballets: *Giselle, La Avanzada*, and *Carmen*; a romantic ballet, a "model work" ballet and a neo-classical ballet respectively.

The analysis of the repertoire continues its methodological influence from Michel Foucault's concept of the archeology as a process for chronicling the production of knowledge, and it is also inspired by the work of dance scholars Lena Hammergren and Ann Daly whose respective work allows me to consider how these three ballets can be used to make specific and historical inquiries into state "choreographies" as representative of a particular moment in the Cuban Revolutionary process. Both Hammergren and Daly have theorized strategies for writing historical accounts which are helpful in this particular analysis of situating a specific ballet in a Revolutionary milieu. For example, Hammergren develops "the persona"—a narrative strategy that takes on a specific vantage point—as a transparent approach in the ways that historical accounts are negotiated, formed, and presented. She proposes that accepting the ambiguities that different personas procure in their juxtaposition can lead to "new understandings of what coherency means, the different shapes it can and should be allowed to take."[187] Hammergren's strategy provides a model for each ballet in this analysis to have a socio-political efficacy in its present-day performances. Rather than characterizing the ballets as relics, the fact that they are still being produced qualifies them for a present-day analysis. FIX.

In a similar vein, Ann Daly identifies and utilizes seeming discontinuities in linear historical accounts and through an historiographic approach develops them into "bodies" as "sites of discursive intercourse." This strategy is similar to the work Hammergren is doing with the "personas," because the intention is less about valorizing and producing a singular narrative and more about reaching an understanding in how these bodies and personas come to constitute a

[187] Lena Hammergren, "Different Personas: A History of One's Own?" *Choreographing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 189.

larger historical moment.[188] As a discursive object, the BNC repertoire becomes a material as well as symbolic point of contact between the State and the public, and the analysis of this chapter will consult the plight of women in the Revolution as a sites of choreography that both complement and chafe against the choreography of state-sanctioned repertoire. This theoretical approach will not solely rely on choreographic interpretations of specific ballets, rather it will position the narrative of the ballet in relation to the State's narrative as a way to articulate a theory of representation with regard to the BNC and their contribution to the Revolution as a state institution.

Giselle—The Collective Body

Cuba's version of *Giselle* takes place in Finland. It is the story of the eponymous peasant girl who falls in love with Albrecht, a noble man disguised as a peasant. Upon learning that Albrecht is not only nobility, but also engaged to another, Giselle loses her mind and dies of a broken heart. She is buried in the forest where the Wilis, ghosts of maidens who died before their weddings, come out at midnight and dance men to their death. Giselle is ordered to dance Albrecht to his death, but she refuses and protects him from the Wilis' deathly grasp.[189] While Cuba did not enforce a socialist-realist mandate on the subject matter of cultural production, the narrative of *Giselle* might still satisfy the intention to support the values of the Revolution. In this context, *Giselle* can serve as a cautionary tale of the excesses and aloofness of the nobility. But rather than simply inventory the ways the narrative of *Giselle* aligns itself with socialist-realism, part-for-part, this analysis focuses on the utility of the *corps de ballet* in *Giselle* in

[188] Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 17.

[189] Program notes from 1954 Ballet Nacional performance of *Giselle*.

relation to its contemporaneous socio-political milieu. How Alicia develops and features the *corps de ballet* in *Giselle* contrasts with the specific ways women were asked to participate in producing the State.

Act II is set in the forest under the light of moon. Nearby, Giselle's gravestone rests mid-stage right. A ballerina shrouded under a veil, bourrées on the tops of her toes across the stage as though she were floating. The Wilis are crowned with white wreathes and are adorned with little wings on their lower backs. Their baleful expressions, and powdery-white complexions, encapsulate the *foideur* that might become an assemblage of half-dead, dispassionate creatures. The choreography in Act II is a mixture of solo, *pas de deux*, and *corps de ballet* work. Myrtha, the queen of the Wilis, picks two stems of white flowers from the base of a tree and dances with them, one in each hand. The *corps de ballet* is comprised of 26 women. They assemble in rows and columns, as well as in tableaus, or groupings, that intermittently frame the soloists. They move with precision. They move as one. Hilarion the peasant, and unrequited love of Giselle, is met by the Wilis and is danced to his death, coming to his end via a dramatic diagonal formation where in rapid, ripple-like succession they point him to his doom. The audience may respond with applause to these moments of exactitude when the *corps de ballet* moves in perfect synchronization.

The Wilis are constituted by what is referred to as the *corps de ballet*, usually comprised of dancers who hold the lowest rank in the company and dance as a group. A technical manual and dictionary of ballet terminology defines the *corps de ballet* as "the dancers in a ballet who do not appear as soloists," but this definition does not convey the work and labor that many dancers

and certainly Alicia would advocate for.[190] *The corps de ballet* serves an important role in ballet, as Betsy Erickson, the ballet mistress for the San Francisco Ballet explained: "the corps de ballet can either make or break a classical work."[191] Louise Lester, a ballet mistress at Houston Ballet, echoed Erickson in that companies today can be judged by the strength of their *corps de ballet*.[192] A successful *corps* is predicated on how well they work in precision with one another and how well they *not* stand out, but rather blend in. Sarah Wroth, a dancer with Boston Ballet in 2003, noted: "If you forget your mark, your step, which leg you're on, which arm you're lifting, it can completely distort the bigger picture. It's like dominoes; you can affect so many people."[193] Alonso subscribed to a similar perspective of the *corps de ballet* as critical to a ballet company.

The efficacy of the BNC's *corps de ballet* is not lost on Alicia. She recalled how one critic in particular was skeptical of the *corps'* ability to present a uniform and homogenous affect due to the racial and phenotypical diversity of the *corps* dancers. "One critic who was watching the company class, and had not seen the company in performance, was alarmed because he saw that there were dancers of all colors, all sizes, and features, and he said: "Fine, but how they will dance Giselle? And yet, when he saw the company perform Giselle, he had to say he had not seen a more homogenous corps de ballet. Which means that when a ballet is well performed, when the dancer is well prepared, what matters is the interpretation, and not race or body

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[190] Gail Grant, *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet* (New York : Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), 33.

[191] Sarah Halzack, "Surviving in the corps," *Dance Spirit Magazine,* March 2009. http://www.dancespirit.com/uncategorized/Surviving_in_the_Corps/

[192] Joseph Carman, "The Silent Majority," *Dance Magazine*, July 25, 2007.

[193] ibid.

type."[194] For Alicia, the *corps*' ability to surmount the perceived handicap of racial integration is a testament to how well Cuban dancers are trained. While it is subjective for the critic, and at least for Alonso, to think that discipline and accuracy can supersede phenotypical difference, it is telling of the pride and investment that the BNC was making in its *corps de ballet* considering the history of how the corps de ballet had operated.

The role of the corps de ballet has evolved over time. *Corps* work in the 19th century often involved being staged almost like a backdrop, or decoration. Their bodies grouped as a "harmoniously arranged and regimented still picture." Robert Greskovic notes that choreographer George Balanchine began to incorporate more movement patterns into the choreography of the *corps* and they began to move more, and perhaps this is yet another influence that can be attributed to Alonso's tenure with Balanchine.[195] Today, the *corps de ballet* has evolved to a place of greater utility. As Joseph Carman explained, "the corps de ballet is to a dance troupe as the spine is to the body: It provides framework, support, context, and aesthetic form."[196] The culture of the *corps de ballet* is based on working as a collective. For Frances Perez-Ball, a dancer with the Houston ballet, dancing in the *corps* requires a particular conscientiousness and a "group focus."[197] Dancer Caitlin Peabody would agreed that working in the *corps* is about working collectively. "It's a truism in the corps that you're only as good as the person next to you. Understanding that one-upsmanship or competitiveness is out of place makes

[194] Alonso, "Fuentes y antecedentes de la Escuela Cubana de Ballet," *Diálogos con la danza* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986), 42.

[195] Robert Greskovic, *Ballet 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving the Ballet* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 178.

[196] Carman, "The Silent Majority."

[197] ibid.

the corps more powerful in the ballet."[198] And the Cuban revolution was certainly fertile ground for thinking about and promoting the collective work and labor and production.

This idea of executing a choreographic intention as one collective body, is a concept that Joe Roach considers in his essay "Theatre History and the Ideology of the Aesthetic." Roach talks about the aesthetic and utilitarian function of the *corps de ballet* developing as a "kind of military simulacra" representative of the disciplining of bodies that imperial expansion hinged on for achieving success.[199] In this context, what Alicia does with the *corps de ballet* in the first act with the *pas de dix* and the more rigorous choreography in Act II, can be interpreted as an idealization and reification of the collective.[200] Roach conveys that in 1798 Napolean Bonaparte travelled with a *corps de ballet* on his Egyptian campaign as a means of demonstrating the "technical and organizational achievements of the Enlightened West."[201] In fact, Roach credits the history of *corps de ballet*, and specifically the history of dance notation, to the development of the "arts of war" and the way bodies are directed.[202] It is in this vein that I consider the *corps de ballet* of a national ballet company as a model of precision and discipline, as a material and symbolic connection of the ballet with the ideology of the State and the revolutionary project. The result of this state sanctioned image of collective work becomes a pedagogical tool for collective conscience and the embodiment of political order.

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[198] Mark Kanny, "Power of the corps: Important dancers form foundation of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre," Trib Live, Sept. 21, 2013, http://triblive.com/aande/moreaande/4621373-74/corps-ballet-says

[199] Joseph Roach, "Theatre History and the Ideology of the Aesthetic," *Theatre Journal*, 41 (1989): 168.

[200] ibid., 158.

[201] ibid., 155.

[202] ibid., 164.

This image of women working together on stage to achieve a singular goal is one that manifests off stage in the example of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). In August of 1960, the FMC was established in an effort to attenuate the disparities women faced in a variety of areas prior to the Revolution, and according to Jean Stubbs, the organization also developed out of the real necessity for the state to galvanize the support of Cuban women.[203] According to Inger Holt-Seeland, it was formed as a consolidation of existing women's organizations.[204] Within its first two decades, the FMC can be credited in making advances in incorporating women into production, creating daycare centers, literacy, and eliminating prostitution. As the only official non-governmental organization permitted to represent women, the FMC is compelled by design to emblematize a corps of women working together toward the same authorized goal, epitomizing what Judith Butler would call, a regulatory ideal, where the FMC not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs.[205] The next section will discuss what it looks like when an alternative corps acts out against the government.

Damas de blanco

In contrast to the state sanctioned FMC and the utilitarian and aesthetic function of the Wilis in *Giselle*, there exists another corps of women who assemble in white. These women assemble in the daylight. They organize in the streets of Havana, pleading for the release of their

[203] Jean Stubbs, "Revolutionizing Women, Family, and Power," in *Women and Politics Worldwide*, eds. Barbara Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 194.

[204] Inger Holt-Seeland, *Women of Cuba* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1982), 91.

[205] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 235.

loved ones and for whom the threat of violence is supremely real. The *damas de blanco*, or Ladies in White, are a collective of women protestors founded by Laura Pollán in 2003 after the "Black Spring" incarceration of political dissidents. Charged as "prisoners of conscience," according to a 2010 article for *La Voz Bilingüe*, about half of those imprisoned are known to be journalists who were accused of what would later be decreed as activities that undermine the national security of Cuba.[206] Arch Ritter, who has written several reports for the Human Rights Watch, described that the Ladies in White are comprised of wives, mothers, and daughters of the "prisoners of conscience."[207] They dress in all white, and arm themselves with photos of their imprisoned loved ones (sometimes the photos are screened on white shirts), and a single stem of gladiolas. This assembly of women in Cuba share a striking resemblance to the Madres de plaza de Mayo group in Argentina, a collection of women who since 1977 have organized to seek information regarding their disappeared family during the "dirty war" of 1976-1983.[208] Unlike the Wilis of *Giselle* who are met with applause, the Ladies in White are often met with such violence that Amnesty International has advocated for their protection.[209]

My analysis of the Ladies in white is influenced by Susan Foster's essay, "Choreographies of Protest," which is interested in looking at the body's participation in protest

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[206] Editor's note, "Cuba's 'Ladies in White' at risk of beatings and intimidation," *La Voz Bilingüe,* May 5, 2010, 5.

[207] Arch Ritter, "World Report 2015: Cuba Events of 2014," Human Rights Watch, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/cuba

[208] Rachel Koepsel defines the dirty war as the undisclosed civil war taking place between the left wing supporters of reform and the Argentine Army backed by the right wing. Rachel Koepsel, "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: First Responders for Human Rights," Case-Specific Briefing Paper. *Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies* (University of Denver, 2011), p.2.

[209] Editor's note, "Cuba's 'Ladies in White' at risk of beatings and intimidation," 5.

and its ability to construct "individual agency and sociality." For Foster, the body is a "vast reservoir of signs and symbols… capable of both persuasion and obstinate recalcitrance."[210] I endeavor to further understand the visual constructions and the physical articulations of this *corps* of women and the subsequent analyses of repertoire not only of protest as a means to a specific end, but also how bodies are used to protest colonial and gender norms. How have the Ladies in White chosen to dress themselves? How do they assemble? And how do they react when the state imposes their own repertoire of choreographies and protocols in order to break up the *corps* of women? Within this analysis of the Ladies in White, I am looking at two kinds of choreographies: those which are deployed by the Ladies in White, and those that are used by the State in response to them.

Foster's interest in how a dance studies inquiry into protest includes an interest in how the body of the researcher could be implicated in the investigative process.[211] This concern is particularly significant to my methodological approach in writing about the Ladies in White, as it is affected by the current political relations between the U.S. and in Cuba. I have not been able to observe or follow the Ladies in White when I lived and researched in Cuba. My citizenship was sponsored by the BNC and as such I could compromise that relationship if my presence were to be noticed and inquired upon. In this particular regime, I would specifically not be allowed to bear witness to this act of political dissidence and therefore I must be open to alternate mediums of witnessing. Additionally, there is a paucity in scholarship about the Ladies in White and the Google search engine and Twitter has been an invaluable resource in locating images and reportings on the Ladies in White. YouTube has also provided moving images produced through

[210] Susan Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395.

[211] ibid., 397.

professional video journalism as well as on cell phones by bystanders. The following analyses are made through these methodological efforts.

The choreographies of the Ladies in White are straightforward. They often begin their protest by attending church, dressed in white and sitting in silence, not participating in the traditional exercises of a Catholic mass.[212] After mass they assemble in two, single-file lines. Google Images shows them marching along the streets of the capitol carrying signs and gladiolas. Sometimes they sit in the middle of street, sometimes they stand or sit in clusters. Videos on YouTube show them chanting with their signs and gladiolas. Sometimes the video footage is professional and steady, and other times it is shaky and low-quality because it is filmed on someone's phone. When the women experience verbal and physical harassment they sometimes hold hands or link arms. One article in the Miami Herald reported that the ladies were punched, scratched, pinched, and that they hair was pulled by civilians and security agents, and thrown onto buses to be taken away in.[213] Frances Martel reported that the women are subject to men urinating in front of them and in February 2015 it was reported that one lady in white was tarred in a wrangling of women in white before they attended mass.[214] There have also been reports of miscarriages as the result of the brutality from Cuban police.[215] One lady in white

[212] Frances Martel, "Cuba Arrests 50 Catholic Dissidents as Pope Francis' Visit Nears," Breitbart, September 14, 2015, http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2015/09/14/cuba-arrests-50-catholic-dissidents-as-pope-visit-nears/

[213] Juan Tamayo, "Cuban protesters punched, dragged," Miami Herald, March 18, 2010.

[214] Frances Martel, "Cuban Dissident Tarred As Government Arrests 200 for Attending Catholic Mass," Breitbart, February 15, 2015, http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2015/02/23/cuban-dissident-tarred-as-government-arrests-200-for-attending-catholic-mass/

[215] Arch Ritter, "WORLD REPORT 2015: CUBA, EVENTS OF 2014." Human Rights Watch, July 2015.

posted a video testimony on YouTube detailing a June 2014 confrontation where she was viciously kicked in stomach in her third month of pregnancy and she includes photos of her miscarriage.[216]

Such abuses are justified by the State because their protests infringe upon the laws of association and assembly in Cuba. They are not an official state group, like the FMC. According to Amnesty International's 2013 report to the UN, Article 208 of the Criminal Code states: "members of unofficial organizations may be sentenced to one to three months' imprisonment and directors of such organizations may be sentenced to three to nine months' imprisonment."[217] The Ladies in White are deemed unofficial and illegal because a woman's organization already exists, and groups are not allowed to exist in duplication. The sole women's organization that has been sanctioned by the government to exist in the role of conversing with the government is the FMC. Formed in a Cuban stew fashion of simply combining all the existing women's organizations prior to the Revolution into one, Julie Shayne notes that the FMC became the "center of women's power" within the revolution, as it was the only women's organization that could represent itself to the government.[218] Although the state made it compulsory that there only be one organization per "cause," the FMC often advocates for the women's movement to maintain a singular and united front.[219] The logic being that there is greater strength as one large

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[216] UNPACO, Golpiza de Policia Politica provoca aborto a activista de UNPACU en Gibara/Police Strike Abuses UNPACU Activist in Gibara, August 11, 2014, https://youtu.be/mhW3IFgsq5k

[217] Amnesty International, "Cuba: Submission to the UN Universal Period Review 16th Session of the UPR Working Group, April-May 2013.

[218] Julie Shayne, *The Revolution Question: Feminism in Chile, El Salvador, and Cuba*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996): 139.

[219] Ilja Luciak, *Gender and Democracy in Cuba*, 27.

group than in several smaller groups. "The more the women's movement divides itself, the weaker it is, since so many little groups remain without national structures [and] have little strength in the community."[220]

In order for the Ladies in White to become a nationally recognized organization, they would have to obtain a "negative certificate" from the Ministry of Justice that differentiates its goals from another NGO's, acquire sponsorship of a state institution to provide oversight for the NGO, and must work on behalf of a state goal.[221] As Marisela Fleites Lear summarizes, "there is no forum for diversity or individual dissent. Without authorization, any meeting of more than three persons with political goals can be considered illegal and its participants subject to punishment."[222] Because the Ladies in White are not fighting a "women's" cause, they are deemed "duplicative" as a group comprised of women.[223]

State Strategy

To analyze the brutality of the state's strategies against the Ladies in White in relation to the choreography of the *corps de ballet* is neither to diminish nor wholly represent the violence experienced by the women. However, there are efforts that the State takes which in a way "stages" their interface with this particular ensemble of dissenting women. This can be perceived

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[220] Ilja Luciak, *Gender and Democracy in Cuba*, 27.

[221] ibid., 29.

[222] Marisela Fleites-Lear, "Women, Family, and the Cuban Revolution," *Cuban Communism 1959- 2003,* ed. Irving Louis Horwitz and Jaime Suchlicki (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 289.

[223] Shayne, *The Revolution Question*, 146.

in their anticipation of women after mass. One lady in white was quoted as saying that she believes the state compels government workers to participate in counter-protests outside of the church, where the police and wardens from the prisons wait for the women. "When we leave the church, police vehicles, cars and even a bus from the Agüica prison…are deployed … and when we get as far as one block away from the church, a police officer comes to tell us that we can't walk because the people won't allow it." If and when the Ladies proceed to march after they have been warned, "the abuse, insults and beatings begin."[224]

The State's approach in dealing with the Ladies in White is articulated through a variety of discourses. In addition to the legislative discourse rendering the Ladies' assembly as illegal, the state also positions itself within an anti-capitalist rhetoric suggesting that the Ladies in White are funded by the U.S. in a "decades-old effort to undermine Cuba's socialist revolution."[225] The state has also utilized media to disqualify the Ladies in White. In 2008, the Cuban government recorded a phone call between the Ladies in White and U.S. Congresswomen Ileana Ros-Lehtinen who wanted to express her solidarity with their cause. The recording was then broadcast on the news to evidence that the Ladies in White are a counter-revolutionary group "in disguise."[226] Consequently, the State has regularly disappeared this *corps* of women in order to preempt their protests from appearing on a broader, international stage. Archie Ritter's 2015 Human Rights Watch report relayed that just days before U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry

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[224] Anddy Sierra Alvarez, Cuba's "Women in White" Harassed on Sunday Marches," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, November 1, 2013, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/cubas-women-white-harassed-sunday-marches

[225] "'Ladies in White' protesters held in Cuba crackdown," BBC, July, 14 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-28290793

[226] "The Ladies in White: Marching for Change in Cuba," Tavaana: E-Learning Institute for Iranian Civil Society, April 8, 2016, https://tavaana.org/en/content/ladies-white-marching-change-cuba-0#_edn17.

came to open the U.S. embassy, an estimated 50 Ladies in White were arrested and detained. The following month when the Pope was set to visit and meet with Miriam Leiva, a founder of the Ladies in White and a freelance journalist, she was detained and prevented from meeting him.[227] The bodies of dissidents are hidden from view and denied their existence so much so that President Raul Castro vehemently denied that human rights violations were occurring in Cuba when U.S. President Obama shared a press conference with him in Cuba in March 2016. Castro's response to CNN journalist Jim Acosta: "Dáme la lista! Give me the list of political prisoners, right now!"[228]

Travel to, around, and off the island for dissidents is also a strategy haphazardly employed by the state. In 2013 Blanca Reyes, a Lady in White living in Spain, was denied access to return to Cuba to see her dying father. According to 1997 Decree 217, Cubans must get permission to move to Havana. This is a way to suppress dissidents from migrating to the capital and resuming their practices of protest and dissent. Jose Daniel Ferrer who is a leader of the human rights organization UNPACU, was denied permission to exit the island. And earlier in 2010, the Cuban government agreed to release many political prisoners on the condition that they move to Spain.[229] The state justifies such actions for reasons of "defense and national security" or "other reasons of public interest."[230] These arbitrary maneuverings and sequestering of bodies

[227] Arch Ritter, "WORLD REPORT 2015: CUBA," Human Rights Watch, January 28, 2016.

[228] Olivier Knox, "At presser with Obama, Castro erupts over human rights criticisms," Yahoo News, March 21, 2016, https://www.yahoo.com/news/at-presser-with-obama-castro-erupts-over-human-231148794.html

[229] The Editorial Board, "Shifting Dynamics for Cuba's Dissidents," *The New York Times*, December, 27, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/28/opinion/sunday/shifting-dynamics-for-cubas-dissidents.html?_r=0

[230] Arch Ritter, "WORLD REPORT 2015: CUBA."

for reasons of national security and public interests also appear in issues of national diplomacy. As signs of goodwill, the State releases political prisoners, as was the case when in December of 2014 when President Obama commenced the "normalization" of relations between the U.S. and Cuba and 53 political dissidents were released from prison.[231]

The Wilis in Giselle and the Ladies in White engender a compelling parallel. Aside from the visual similarities of wearing white and carrying flowers, this image of the corps de ballet as a disciplinary tool contrasts with the supremely real experiences of the Ladies in White who fail to comply with the "authorized" example of appropriate assembly. Both *corps* of women hold space and witness a narrative taking place. The corps de ballet in *Giselle* hold vigil, standing in controlled ways, as if saying to the audience, "I'm here too. I am seeing what you are seeing and it's going to be okay." The inexplicable magic that compels the Wilis, those supernatural creatures, to disappear with the dawn, operates like the inexplicable whim of the State which decides when and how the Ladies in White are disappeared from public view. And like the Wilis and Giselle who cannot be laid to rest, who are detained from death by the occult forces of their own world, it is part of the every day experience of the women in white to anticipate and endure State detentions. Finally, there is one tragic comparison that can be made between the suspicious deaths of both Giselle and the founder of the Ladies in White, Laura Pollán. There is confusion surrounding Pollán's 2011 death. Hospital officials said she died of cardiac arrest, and then the death certificate said it was a bacterial infection. No autopsy was performed. Pollán's daughter was allowed to visit her mother twice, both times in the compulsory presence of state officials.

[231] Arch Ritter, "WORLD REPORT 2015: CUBA."

Within two hours of her death, her body was cremated.[232] Despite the fact that these women emerge on different stages, one based in fiction and the other in real life, taken together they illuminate one way in which women's presence and life stories have been simultaneously heralded, repellent, and for the sake of this analysis, symbolically expedient. Giselle's death-by-broken heart and Pollán's suspect heart attack epitomize the Revolutionary motto that conclude speeches and adorn walls around Cuba: "Patria o muerte." Homeland or death.

La Avanzada: the Laboring Body

Steadily working in the museo de la danza's *library and archive for four months, I was able to observe the marketing and promotional workings of the BNC. Through casual conversations with one of the staff members at the museo, I mentioned that I was interested in viewing archival footage of a ballet called* La Avanzada *as I had seen production photos from the 1960s and 1970s depicting dancers dressed as soldiers. I was told this footage did not exist. A couple of days later the same staff member relayed to me that the BNC would be restaging this repertoire for an upcoming performance, so I walked to the ballet and found out Clotilde, the ballet mistress, would be running the rehearsals. I had often seen Clotilde in the BNC cafeteria, but aside from the kisses she would blow to me, I had not had an extensive exchange with her. I asked to observe her rehearsals and she granted me permission. As was my modus operandi for ingratiating myself to new friends in Cuba, I brought Clotilde chocolate on days that I watched rehearsals. Just as quick as the Snickers and Kitkat bars were offered, did they find themselves placed in her purse. At the second rehearsal I asked if I could assist Clotilde the day of the*

[232] Mary Anastasia O'Grady, "A Dissident's Mysterious Death in Havana," *Wall Street Journal*, October 24, 2011, http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204618704576645362368682524.

performance and she said she would try to fix it so I could be there. Turns our the performance was going to be at military base and because I was an American, I was not allowed to go. A day after the performance, Clotilde was kind to tell me how the performance went as well as correct my Spanish. She told me I was too intelligent to be making small mistakes in my Spanish. The following choreographic analysis is the result of my observations as videos I took with my iPhone.

La Avanzada was choreographed in 1962 by Azari Plisetsky, a former dancer with the Bolshoi Ballet and brother of legendary ballerina Maya Plisetskaya. Azari also had a significant tenure dancing with the BNC as a guest artist and as Alicia's partner through a cultural agreement between Cuba and the USSR. The original cast of *La Avanzada* was comprised of 6 men: the leader ("el comandante"), and 5 soldiers ("soldados"). The running time of the piece is a little under five minutes, and is a musical orchestration of the "La Guerre Sacrée," or The Sacred War composed by Alexander Vasilyevich Alexandrov. According to the *argumentos*, or program notes from a 1965 presentation dedicated to the workers of education and science, *La Avanzada* is the story of a group of "brave patriots" at the Battle of Stalingrad in the early-1940s, and depicts their unyielding frontline position against the Nazis.[233] The dancers are costumed in soldiers' uniforms and even though it is a ballet they are wearing military boots creating heavy, and constricted movements. They pantomime holding rifles and el comandante wields a large red flag.

The choreography and movement qualities are comprised of intricate marching patterns and holding a tight formation as they march on a diagonal from upstage to downstage. *La Avanzada* begins upstage right in a tableau of men surrounding el comandante. Holding their

[233] Program notes from 1965 indicates that this performance was in tribute "to the workers of education and science."

imaginary rifles, they march downstage left along the diagonal path. At another moment in the ballet, the soldiers disappear their pantomimed rifles and fall to the ground as through they are dodging explosions. In rehearsals Clotilde, gives the dancers notes about how these moments need to be executed as though they were explosions. "Like a grenade!" she shouts. All the while, the commander is waving the flag and pointing their flag onward to the front. Eventually one soldier dies and the resolution of the ballet is the reformation of the line in a way to say that they will persist.

The imagery of *La Avanzada*—especially the gesturing of the rifles and the military costumes—resembles the 1964 ballet adaptation of *The Red Detachment of Women,* what can referred to as model-work ballet from the Chinese cultural revolution which is also based on the true story about an all-female platoon in the Chinese army in the early-1930s. My findings in the BNC archives include a photo of Alonso dancing in the "el comandante" role and then an all-female cast of *La Avanzada* which was performed in 1973 in celebration of Women's Day. What is interesting about this choice to swap Alicia for the commander and then have a cast of all women, is that it departs from the historical specificity of the battle of Leningrad. Whereas *The Red Detachment of Women* was a ballet about women fighting in war, *La Avanzada* was not. However, this substitution of women in the men's roles at a performance dedicated to women evokes the Revolution's agenda for seeing women in the workforce, regardless of the ballet's initial context.

As early as Fidel's July 26, 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks, women were participating in the Revolution's crusade. Vilma Espín, the late wife of Cuban President Raul Castro and president of the FMC, Celia Sanchez, and Tamara "Tania" Bunke are all credited for

fighting alongside Fidel and Che and later served the Revolution in positions of leadership.[234] Bringing women in to the fold was one goal of the Revolution.

Feminine Labor

At the same time the BNC was cultivating its international reputation in the first two decades of the Revolution, the State continued to address areas of inequality. These areas were comprised of dismantling pre-revolutionary Cuba's class structure, addressing issues of racism against Blacks, closing the education and economic gap between urban and rural populations, and male-female inequality.[235] Che's concept of an ideal revolutionary, or a "New Man," was inclusive of the Cuban woman and although its title is devoid of the female pronoun, this was not meant to alienate women from the project of redefining the Cuban citizen. From a semantic point of view however, one could interpret the omission as prescient foreshadowing of the challenges the Revolutionary woman would face as she was incorporated into the work force.

Up until the 1959 Revolution, women had made significant gains in terms of legal equality, however in her article "Revolution and Conciencia: women in Cuba," Lourdes Casal explains how the legal gains in the sixty years prior to the Revolution did not necessarily exist in the practicalities of daily Cuban life.[236] Prior to the Revolution, women went from subordinated

[234] Tania was later killed along with Che in Bolivia in 1967.

[235] Lourdes Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*: women in Cuba," *Women, War, and Revolution* (NY: London, Holme and Meier, 1980), 184.

[236] In 1917 women were granted rights to her children, and in 1918 women had rights in divorce proceedings. The first Cuban Women's Congress in 1925 helped women attain rights in the work place, followed by the Maternity law in 1934 that covered child delivery costs. The 1940 Constitution prohibited discrimination based on sex, advocated for equal pay in the work place, gave women the right to property and salary. See Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*: women in Cuba*,* 186-187.

positions to their parents or husbands to obtaining their rights to divorce, to vote, to maternity leave and expenses in the workplace.[237] Casal notes that "complementary legislation and enforcement" were slow to materialize until a law in December of 1950 was created in order for the government to be more accountable of women's rights.

The advent of Castro brought renewed momentum to incorporating women into the building of a communist nation. In his "Speech to the Women," Castro spoke of the importance for women to be liberated from "domestic slavery" for the betterment of themselves and the revolution. In her article "The Woman Question in Cuba," Muriel Nazzari analyzes the nature of women's precarious dependency on previous systems of distribution. Nazzari posits that the "system of distribution based on material incentives and the requirement that enterprises show a profit perpetuates women's inequality in the home and the work force."[238] Marxist-feminist theory has made the claim that reproduction and child-rearing justifies a labor that should be honored in socialist society, and Nazzari places this concept in the developing nation of Cuba and the challenges they face within conventional Latin American systems of power.

Women were called to work in an effort to be liberated from domesticity, but also to fill the practical void of those Cubans who left Cuba at the start of the Revolution. The initial distribution of resources in the 1960s included land and housing redistributions as well as food rationing in order to promote a greater access to food and nutrition.[239] Women all over Cuba were provided with sewing machines and taught how to sew. In the housing redistributed in both rural and urban centers, people were receiving running water and electricity for the first time.

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[237] According to the 1902 Constitution and Civil Code.

[238] Muriel Nazzari, "The 'Woman Question' in Cuba: An Analysis of Material Constraints on Its Solution," *Signs* 9, no. 2 (1983): 247.

[239] ibid., 250.

Nazzari credits the most successful accomplishment of the Revolution as the campaign to end illiteracy and the institution of education and free health care.[240] However, these infusions of social services were not necessarily serving the greater goal of building a better economy in a direct, economic way.

At the beginning of the Revolution, the priority was to first employ all able-bodied men. Upon achieving this by 1964, women began to be incorporated into the work force. Childcare and night schools were opened in order for woman to become "typists, secretaries, bank tellers, and bus drivers," and all in the name of economic, social, and efficient production.[241] There weren't as many employment opportunities once all the men were employed, so women were mobilized via volunteer positions. These efforts were steered by the FMC woman's organization which was aware that men had more opportunities to develop as revolutionaries than women and was therefore a resource to help integrate women into the revolutionary process.

In 1966, Castro called for one million women to join the labor force, but found it difficult to fund the facilities and social services needed in order for women to be able to work. Employers complained that it was more costly to employ women because they would need to provide paid maternity leave and that it costs twice as much to pay for one women because of this. Castro insisted that once they built a larger material base to develop economically then more women would be able to work wage-earning jobs. The majority of women continued to volunteer with the motivation from the FMC. In fact, women were responsible for about 41 million hours of volunteer hours in the sugarcane harvest in 1970.[242] Despite the rousing calls to women from

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[240] Nazzari, "The 'Woman Question' in Cuba, 251.

[241] ibid., 254.

[242] ibid., 255.

Castro, the efforts to revolutionize women, motivate productivity and build the economy were futile as the lack of a material base and institutionalized discrimination limited women's potential. Let us now take a look at the role of women in the home.

Mona Rosendahl's ethnographic fieldwork in rural Palmera, a city in Cuba, examines the ways Revolutionary values manifested in the daily lives of Cuban citizens. Her chapter "Men and Women in Palmera," elucidates the roles men and women play both in the Revolution and within conventional Latin American gender structures. First and foremost aligning with Che's essay, the ideal man and woman is one that sacrifices for society and the Revolution.[243] According to Rosendahl's population, a real man is one who provides and protects his family, and is strong and autonomous. They are also expected to "protect the honor of their women and children by controlling their behavior outside the home."[244] Rosendahl defines the "good woman" in near opposition to her male counterpart. They are mostly defined by their roles of mother and wife. Motherhood, or *maternidad*, is considered sacred. She states that becoming a mother assures a higher status, and that few women would choose not to have children. Wives should also not be overly attractive for fear of representing their family dishonorably.[245] There is an explanation for how these gender ideals exist within the Revolution.

Rosendahl found these gender divisions to be rooted culturally in the concepts of *la calle*

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[243] Mona Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution: everyday life in socialist Cuba* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 61.

[244] ibid., 62. "Most Palmeran men do not account for their whereabouts when they leave the house, and they consider it irritating if they are asked where they have been when they return home … A real man is a very social person who likes to drink, to go to parties, to converse, and to be generous with himself and his time and money … He should be able to tell jokes and dance well. Most men like to dress well and are well groomed."

[245] ibid., 65-66.

and *la casa*—the street and the home. The male sphere en *la calle*, or out in public.[246] They work outside the home, primarily in agriculture where their labor is seen as manly. Alternatively, the women's sphere is *en la casa*, although in the context of women working or volunteering, it is a more symbolic representation suggesting that the center of her world is in the home, fulfilling the role of wife and mother. These spheres merge, or rather collide, when in 1975 The Family Code articulates that there is to be an equal distribution of domestic duties and child-rearing. This law was another attempt to bring women into the work force, by forcing men to share in domestic responsibilities. Rosendahl found that while men were on board with women joining the work force, it was challenging to put forth the new agenda of bringing women out of the home and into the streets, and have men share in domestic labor. Margaret Randall characterizes this struggle of instituting a new practice as resulting in women "carrying a double yoke," because they were straddling the domestic and public spheres in unequal ways.[247] The challenges women faced in joining the revolutionary workforce both complements and contrasts with the representation of Alicia dancing as the commander as well as the later casting with all woman. The decision to mobilize women as volunteers, en lieu of paying them for their labor is consistent with the ambivalence of simply casting women in roles traditionally for men. On the one hand, it can be perceived as a novelty to see Alicia dancing the role of the commander, but on *another* hand, when situated in the reality of women trying to establish the new norm for labor practices, this casting can be interpreted similarly to what Frederic Jameson might call

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[246] Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution,* 58.

[247] Margaret Randall, *Cuban women now: interviews with Cuban women* (Toronto: Women's Press: Dumont Press, 1974), 1.

pastiche, or "blank parody, parody that has lost its humor."[248] This is not to say that *La Avanzada* is a comedy, nor that casting women in the role was to be more than novelty, but when humor can be defined as a state of mind or disposition, the choice to substitute women for men at a time when women are struggling to attain an equal status to men epitomizes a loss of humor as well as irony.

Carmen: the Feminine Body

During the ballet festival, the museo de la danza hosted several events. There was a press conference for a new postage stamp issued commemorating Anton Dolin, Alicia's partner in her first performance in Giselle *at Ballet Theatre in New York, and there was also a photo and portrait exhibit about Alicia Alonso in the ballet* Carmen*. As I walked through the exhibit, I chatted with a staff member at the museo and we talked about Alicia in Carmen. We were standing in front of a caricature of Alicia conveyed by a Cuban artist named Fausto. She told me she did not like it because it exaggerated Alicia's nose. I liked it for that very reason. The museo de la danza is an impressive collection that is part ballet memorabilia, and part celebration of Alicia. It is more a museum of ballet and less a comprehensive representation of dance, as the name "museo de la danza" might suggest. There is one room in particular that is filled from floor to ceiling with portraits of Alicia. Some are abstract, some are surrealist, but most are portraits. The caricature of Alicia in* Carmen *with the large nose represents a relief from the magnitude that the great room of Alicia portraits imposes on those graduate students from Los Angeles.*

[248] Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *Modernism/Postmodernism*, ed. Peter Brooker (New York: Longman, 1992): 167.

The BNC's Carmen is classified as a neoclassical ballet. It was originally choreographed by Alberto Alonso for the legendary ballerina Maya Plisetskaya in 1967. The music is an adaptation of the famous Bizet score by Plisetkaya's husband, Rodion Shchedrin. Soviet authorities, who considered Shchedrin's score an insult to Bizet's celebrated work, banned the orchestration until Dmitri Shostakovich championed for it be back on the approved list.[249] The set is minimal. The ballet takes place in a bullpen. On risers in the shape of a semi-circle depicting where the spectators at a bullfight would be, are men sitting in Spanish ladder-back chairs from which they view Alicia dancing for her freedom. According to program notes, "Choreographer Alberto Alonso puts his Carmen in a bullring where the symbols of the game are reversed; Here the bull is the bullfighter of death and life. Victims are love and human aspiration, and the culprit is the despotic authority of the military in the service of empire."

The curtain rises and the lights come up, revealing Carmen positioned in a lunge with one hand on her hip and the other on her knee. The audience applauds. With arms extended out like a bulls horns she charges downstage and begins the first dance. The choreography utilizes the sixth position, or parallel position, whereas much of ballet is distinguished for its legs and feet operating from a position of the legs and feet rotating out from the hips. When Carmen pirouettes, or turns on one foot, she may do so on her heel as opposed to her toes. These choreographic choices made by Alberto Alonso are one strategy used to articulate Carmen's subversion from traditional ballet choreographies. Carmen's hair is styled in a long ponytail. She wears a red leotard that is designed to look like a bikini with strips of red fabric sewn onto it, perhaps to suggest the red fabric that the *muleta*, or stick, that will be tied to a bull in a bullfight's final round.

[249] Andrew McGregor, "Rodion Shchedrin Carmen Suite Review," *BBC*, album review, 2001.

The image and movement of Carmen evokes many connotations. In this adaptation ballet she is identified with a bull in a bullring—an animal to be tamed—but Carmen seeks liberation. Within the context of *Carmen* as a ballet in the Cuban Revolution, it could be interpreted that the protagonist Carmen is seeking liberation from an oppressive Spanish patriarchy since the ballet is set in Spain. In this light Carmen the character could be interpreted as Cuba, an exoticized island under an imperial gaze. An interview with Alberto Alonso, Carmen's choreographer, would support this. Alberto Alonso talks about how Carmen, like a bull, fights and resists in a blind fashion. Pedro Simon who was the interviewer added that individual rebellions do not resolve injustices, but that collective rebellions do.[250] This theme of collectivity, and strength in numbers, goes back to the second section of this chapter and the development of the FMC as the only conduit for women to gather because smaller, individual efforts would be thwarted by the State.

The image of Carmen-as-bull trying to liberate itself has real life connotations in the Revolutionary project, particularly for women participating in the Revolution and how this affects the dynamics in the home. As previously discussed in section two, we learned that it was acceptable knowledge that a woman's place was in the home, and that the man's sphere was outside of the home. While the narrative of Carmen is a specific tale of tragedy, and love, it is also about a woman who defies traditional norms of behavior. Her choreography is sensual, independent and it is an aberration from classical ballet technique. Carmen's choreography as emanating from a state institution inspires an inquiry into the way men and women were asked to perform their sexuality and gender in service of the State. This section will contrast the narrative

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[250] Mayda Bustamante, *Alicia Alonso en Carmen: Mito y Leyenda*, (Barcelona: Ediciones Cumbre, 2014), 123.

of the BNC's Carmen with the popular Cuban film *Fresa y Chocolate* in order to highlight the ways the State was looking to develop its new revolutionary citizen.

As discussed in the previous section, Mona Rosendahl attributes the struggle of incorporating women into the work place to patriarchal holdovers from prior to the Revolution. Not only was the infrastructure not able to support the total incorporation of women since many women were working without pay, but there were also dynamics in the social and familial infrastructures that impeded women's progress. One dynamic that explains the resistance to women working outside of the home was *machismo*. Rosendahl defines *machismo* as "an exaggerated display of manliness but also the idea that men should have supremacy and control over women in every aspect of life." *Machismo* also generally operates under the assumption that men and women are in different spheres both physically and psychologically.[251] In Cuba, Rosendahl sees *machismo* as inherited from Mediterranean and Caribbean concepts of gender. A woman's virginity and a man's ability to provide and protect are key virtues to machismo, and honor and shame are the inherent barometers by which social/gender performance is judged in the context of machismo. Rosendahl's research took place in the 1970s/1980s and while many men she interviewed gave the perfect revolutionary answer of wanting total equality in the political context, implementing the practice of equality in the home proved to be a challenge. The Revolution called women out of the house to participate in the public revolution, only for them to be called back *into* the privacy of their home by their husbands and cultural mores.

At the same time women were negotiating their positions in the home as well as outside of the home, the FMC was asserting its own image as "feminine, not feminist." Vilma Espín argued that "feminism" and "feminist" was a bourgeois and capitalist construct and therefore had

[251] Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 53.

no relevance in the Cuban Revolution:

> We hate the feminist movement in the United States. We consider what we are doing part of the struggle. And for that reason we feel we are more developed. We see these movements in the United States which have conceived struggles for equality of women against men! … That is absurd! It doesn't make any sense! … Our work is to make everybody advanced. Then we everyone has a high level of consciousness nobody will have to think in terms of equality.[252]

For the FMC, feminism is limited in its conception in that it perceives its oppression as coming from men and not a larger structural force. This ambivalence in addressing patriarchy in Cuba allows *machismo* to then pose additional challenges when women enter the work force. Women working alongside men at the same jobs can be a challenge to the assumptions of *machismo*. In his essay "Gender Relations in the Caribbean," Hilbourne Watson attempts to describe the how lesbianism and homosexuality can be assumed to be a rejection of *machismo* and therefore a source of tension between the reality of women and men sharing work and domestic responsibilities and the ideals of the State.[253] Susan Thomas' 2002 research on female singer-songwriters found that their male colleagues often dismissed, and attempted to invalidate them, as "lesbians."[254] The context of this slur is rooted in the Revolution's sustaining of the 1930's Public Ostentation Law which according to Margaux Joffe "allowed for, and even encouraged,

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[252] Max Azicri, "Women's Development Through Revolutionary Mobilization: A Study of the Federation of Cuban Women," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 2, no. 1 (1979): 31.

[253] Watson, Hilbourne, "Gender Relations in the Caribbean," in *The culture of gender and sexuality in the caribbean,* ed. Linden Lewis (Gainsville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003), 81.

[254] Susan Thomas, "Did nobody pass the girls the guitar? Queer appropriations in contemporary Cuban popular song," *Journal of Popular music studies* 8, no. 2 (August 2006): 124-143.

harassment of gay Cubans who refused to stay closeted."[255] This legislation was considered necessary for developing the moral character of the Cuban Revolutionary that in turn would support the Revolution's economic goals of production.

Making El Hombre Nuevo—The New Man

At the same time as Carmen practiced her gender-bending choreographies, the economic goals of the Revolution was shaping the kind of men and women Cuba needed. As a result, a reformulation of gender took place within the purview of developing the moral character of Cuban citizens. Because many Cubans who were responsible for the infrastructure of daily life in Cuba had left the island when Castro took power it was important to galvanize the remaining citizens into participating in the nation building process. Therefore details of every-day-life were restructured for many citizens. From what people ate, to what kind of work they did. The moral conditioning of men and women was initially treated as key to achieving economic security, and the conditioning of genders was certainly one theme in building moral character.

The social revolution was strongly linked to economic development. There were two ideological thoughts presented at the time of the Revolution. Guevara's "idealist" approach wanted to skip the socialist stage of eradicating capitalism, and transition directly to communism, whereas another approach identified more with the Soviet model and saw that it was necessary to implement some "market mechanisms" into the transitioning economy from socialism to communism.[256] Under Marx's communist system of distribution, people would be

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[255] Margaux Joffe, "As Free as the Words of a Poem": Las Krudas and the Cuban Hip-Hop Movement, *MRZine Online,* February 13, 2006, http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2006/joffe130206.html.

[256] Brenner, *The Cuba Reader*, 61.

expected to work to contribute to society, and not for wages, because "goods and services would not be bought or sold, and needs would be met as they arose." Marx was aware of that this system would be challenging in the transition from capitalism to socialism and articulated a contingent plan that offered a wage. Castro and Guevara were convinced that the Cuban people could commit to a communist way of life, a collective consciousness, and share labor and production responsibilities.[257]

Guevara firmly believed that "subjective conditions" could change the "objective reality" or the material base.[258] This economic model, which emphasized morality, was implemented from 1966 to 1970, and failed. Guevara's belief that achieving the immediate goals of the Revolution—such as increasing housing, improving health care and malnutrition, improving rural standards of living, and education and literacy for all— could be done through moral persuasion, however Wassily Leontief suggests that the moral inventive model cannot trump the self-interest carried over from the profit system prior to the revolution.[259]

In his famous essay about the ideal Revolutionary, "Man and Socialism in Cuba" Che describes the new man, *el hombre nuevo*, as embodying Marx' concept that "man truly achieves his full human condition when he produces without being compelled by the physical necessity of selling himself as a commodity."[260] Che's essay calls for the new man and woman to sacrifice their personal happiness for the greater Cuban people, and upon achieving this will know great happiness. Following Marx' writings, Che also believed that a socialist approach to a

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[257] Nazzari, The "Woman Question" in Cuba, 249.

[258] Brenner, *The Cuba Reader,* 61.

[259] ibid., 61.

[260] ibid., 86.

distribution of material goods would perpetuate a society where people could live in harmony with one another and live responsibly without the guidance of a government, and he and Fidel considered the arts as an absolute component in building this society.[261]

Achieving Masculinity through Labor

Regardless of one's vocation, compulsory labor participation was mandated for all able bodies. The idea of coming to understand the values of the working population through labor, was thought to forge a community across class divisions. Photos of Fernando Alonso teaching ballet in his military fatigues with a gun at his side, and Alicia and her dancers cutting sugar cane in the fields, are just two examples of how serious the Revolution was at procuring participation.[262] As much as these photos were an opportunity to build a fan base for the ballet, they also conveyed the ballet's relationship to the nation as one that is compliant.

At the same time the government was integrating and training Cuban men and women into the labor industries, the institutionalization of homophobia on the island was introducing violent techniques on the male body. In his book, *Gay Cuban Nation*, Emilio Bejel notes that the 1960s was the decade in which homophobic legislation snowballed. Castro and Guevara were promoting the new man, an archetype that would be an example for citizens of the Revolution to comport themselves by, and an archetype that I propose was instrumental in the construction of a masculine male dancer. The "new man" was not a term Castro or Guevara invented, rather, it was based— however loosely—on the concept Cuban political activist and Latin American

[261] Robin D. Moore, *Music and Revolution: cultural change in socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 5.

[262] Octavio Roca, *Cuban Ballet* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2010) 81.

literary figure, José Martí coined in his 1885 novel *Amistad Funesta/*Fatal Friendship. Bejel articulates that Martí was insistent on the need for Cubans to adhere to prescribed rules of conduct in order to avoid suspicious acts that threaten the "new and future nation of Cuba."[263] Martí was writing on the cusp of Cuba's independence from Spain, and wrote *Amistad Funesta* as an allegory about emerging Latin American nationalism and how he would encourage Cuban society to behave.[264]

Bejel asserts that Martí's novel strategically illustrates how men should dress, style their hair and even what quality of life they should pursue. "Martí's symbolism is extremely rigid, since the characters are defined from beginning to end as good or evil based on an enormous accumulation" of cut-and-dry descriptions of the new man.[265]

Martí's archetype is ambiguous, calling for the Cuban man to be "strong but spiritual and refined, masculine yet also poetic."[266] Concepts like "masculine yet also poetic" seem contradictory, and yet however ambiguous Martí's prose is, his symbolism established a rubric from which Guevara and Castro loosely followed and which manifested in the most odious of ways. For example, Martí's illustration that Cuban man should be well groomed was literally applied to the heads of bohemian men, gay men, and any men whose hair was assumed to be an expression of anti-revolutionary aesthetics. Their heads were forcefully shorn in an effort to rehabilitate them from homosexuality. Further resistance resulted in more forceful techniques against the body: labor and/or prison.

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[263] Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 18.

[264] ibid.,18.

[265] ibid., 22.

[266] ibid., 27.

The *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Preducción* (UMAPs), forced labor camps, existed from 1965-1968 and were designed to "rehabilitate those persons thought to be 'antisocial.'"[267] Following the closures of the labor camps, less obvious forms of homophobia were initiated. In 1971, the Congress for Education and Culture officially designated homosexuality as "antisocial" and "socio-pathological" behavior, equal to prostitution and drug addiction. Furthermore, the congress decided "all signs of homosexual deviation should be strictly rebuffed and prevented in order to contain any spreading of homosexual practices."[268] As such, random raids around the island, as well as at the ballet, ensued and men deemed "anti-social" were sent to the camps and/or imprisoned.[269]

In the opening scene of the 1984 documentary film *Improper Conduct* ten leading male dancers of the BNC are interviewed by the French media regarding their decision to seek political asylum in France on the closing night of their 1966 Paris debut. "The dancers spoke of the terrors of persecution of the Cuban revolution."[270] They talked about not having the freedom of artistic expression, but also about the legalized homophobia of Castro's government which resulted in frequent raids on the BNC's rehearsal studios and invariable imprisonment of presumed homosexuals.[271] This defection, known as "The Paris Incident," was a watershed moment for Cuban dancers using ballet as a medium of political and physical mobility. They joined the list of baseball players, musicians, and artists defecting from the island since the beginning of the Revolution. News of dancers' exile is often published in today's newspapers

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[267] Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 96-100.

[268] ibid., 105.

[270] Roca, *Cuban Ballet,* 120.

[271] ibid., 122.

and is ever-present in the circulations of Cuban ballet related publications.[272] News of the Cuban Ballet and dancer defections are often presented together, so much so that they become inseparable.

Improper Conduct, by directors Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez Leal, is not about ballet in Cuba or dance, but it highlights the male ballet dancers' defections as a salient image with which to begin its narrative of homophobia and homosexual persecution on the island, and the processes through which homosexuals in Cuba were targeted as deliberately resistant and thusly compromising the values of the Revolution. The plight of the defecting male ballet dancers, whose ordinary practice is to convey unyielding grace and perfect comportment, becomes emblematic of the film's theme about improper conduct, while leaving the open-ended question of whose conduct *is* "improper."

The "Paris Incident" serves as an eerily compelling example and entrée into an inquiry about the company and ultimately the country from which these ten gentlemen exiled themselves. The 1966 defections of the leading male Cuban dancers had been what Octavio Roca calls, "an international embarrassment for Castro's government, as socialist and moderate intellectuals began to see that Cuba was not the worker's paradise they had envisioned."[273] As was stated before, these dancers were choosing not to return to the island because of the artistic and homophobic restrictions of Cuba.[274] That the seemingly innocuous practice—and, indeed,

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[272] Daniel J. Wakin, "Citing Art and Money, 7 Cuban Dancers Defect to U.S.," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/05/arts/dance/citing-art-andmoney-7-cuban-dancers-defect-to-us.html?_r=0. This is an article about seven dancers defecting to the U.S. while on tour in Mexico.

[273] Roca, *Cuban Ballet*, 121.

[274] Today, and since 1966, many dancers have defected, and although conditions for women and the queer communities in Cuba have improved, dancers still strive for greater artistic possibilities

the very presence—of ballet in Cuba should be the source of the first and most public defection of the Cuban revolution is one example of how the BNC has become enfranchised in both local and international understandings of Cuban culture.

The theme of juxtaposing the new man with the gay Cuban male is not unique to the film *Improper Conduct*. In fact, the oeuvre of gay Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas as well as the Cuban film *Fresa y Chocolate,* have become synonymous with the plight of the gay male in Cuba. In the following section, I will engage in a dialogue between Arenas' work and *Fresa y Chocolate* in order to chart the trajectory and climate of the gay male body in Cuba and how it engages with this regime. This dialogue between these two genres of representation, *testimonio* and film, provides a greater context to the process of developing a Cuban revolutionary citizenship alongside the BNC's *Carmen*. The difference between the *testimonio*, the film and *Carmen*, is that the ballet was not banned.

Fresa y Chocolate and Before Night Falls

In the 1993 film *Fresa y Chocolate,* audiences were introduced to the character Diego, a middle-aged homosexual male who advocates for artistic freedom and the preservation of forgotten, or prohibited, culture in 1979 Cuba. While the film introduces Diego's passions for freedom and culture as the vehicles for challenging the Cuban revolution, it is Diego alone who becomes the target of prohibition. In the same year and in a noncelluloid world, the literary

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and better economies. Cuban exile and contributing writer to the *New York Times*, Mirta Ojito often writes about Cuban defectors. In a 2003 article she stated that between 2002 and 2003, 20 dancers defected. The dancers Ojito interviewed said they left for professional reasons, but that Cuba's economic and political climate was another significant factor. See Mirta Ojito, "Fleeing Cuba, Hoping to Soar On New Stage," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2003, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/05/us/fleeing-cuba-hoping-to-soar-on-new-stage.html.

landscape was introduced to *Before Night Falls/Antes que anochezca*. The 1992-1993 autobiography of Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas describes his life in Cuba, his time in prison, and his ultimate escape to the United States as a gay Cuban male. *Before Night Falls* focuses on the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, when homophobia was institutionalized in Cuba.

1965 is the "key year" to study institutionalized homophobia as a "truly systematic homophobic repression of gays."[275] Focusing on how homosexuality was viewed in Cuba's socio-political discourse and legislation will clarify the context of the contemporaneous representations of gay Cuban men in film and publication. Examining these quasi-contemporaneous representations that thrive well past their inceptions provoke conversations that solicit both sympathy and judgment in popular discourse, but also reinforce a larger narrative about gay Cuban men who are destroyed by their sexuality and masculinity and the failure to perform the "right kind" of masculinity and sexuality. While both Arenas and the character Diego had themes of homosexuality and personhood at their core, they demonstrated different representations of homosexuality and homophobia that complemented and contradicted each other. It is within these consonances and dissonances of gay male representations in Cuba that one can begin to understand the landscape in which the new Cuban man was forged and that Carmen traipsed through.

Fresa y Chocolate, a film directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío, is based on the short story *The Wolf, The Forest and the New Man* (*El Lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo*) written by Senel Paz in 1990, who also wrote the screenplay for the film. Set in 1979 Havana, the story revolves around David, a revolutionary and university student, and Diego, a "non-conformist, bourgeois Catholic homosexual" who is challenged by

[275] Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 99.

the Revolution's policies against homosexuality, and the censorship of bourgeois culture.[276] Diego is portrayed as a "stereotypical, effeminate gay man with aristocratic tastes, who comes to embody forbidden or neglected bourgeois culture," and his references to homosexual writers is used to "immediately place his sexuality in a cultural context, and take the emphasis away from sex."[277] David's homophobic classmate, Miguel, encourages David to spy on Diego, in an attempt to expose him and his robust culture as a threat to the communist cause. The story captures the transcendence from what began as a Machiavellian-like effort to expose Diego, to a progressive friendship between Diego and David.

Before Nights Falls is a memoir that describes Reinaldo Arenas' personal and political journey from poverty to his oppression as a dissident writer and homosexual.
Arenas' autobiography provides a first-hand, detailed account and trajectory of the idiosyncrasies of Cuba's authoritarian regime, including his time spent in the UMAP labor camps, and prisons, before eventually defecting during the 1980 Mariel boatlifts.[278]
Contrary to the de-sexualized character of Diego in *Fresa y Chocolate*, Arenas freely writes about his sexual encounters in Cuba. Cuban scholar Emilio Bejel has noted that the 1960s was the decade in which homophobic legislation emerged and this was corroborated by Arenas in *Before Night Falls*:

> I think that in Cuba there was never more fucking going on than in those years, the decade of the sixties, which was precisely when all the new laws

[276] Deborah Shaw, *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America: Ten Key Films* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), 21.

[277] ibid., 24.

[278] Nearly 125,000 Cubans emigrated from Cuba within a brief window of months in 1980. This mass migration was initiated by a small group of Cubans who drove through the gates of the Peruvian Embassy in Havana to seek political asylum.
Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Malden, MA Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 95.

> against homosexuals came into being, when the persecutions started and concentration camps were opened, when the sexual act became taboo while the "new man" was being proclaimed and masculinity exalted.[279]

Here, Arenas establishes the time and place with this quote, and he also invokes Che and Fidel's "new man" archetype.

In addition to the themes of molding the perfect Revolutionary and "new man," *Fresa y Chocolate* also explores the dynamic of cultural censorship. The Revolution took umbrage with the bourgeois aesthetic, which at that point was identified as a medium of stratification. Beauty became an enemy. "Under a dictatorship, beauty is always a dissident force, because dictatorship is itself unaesthetic, grotesque; to a dictator and his agents, the attempt to create beauty is an escapist or reactionary act."[280] This bias against beauty was echoed in the short story *El Lobo, El Bosque, y el Hombre Nuevo* when Diego, whose apartment is a beautiful ode to bourgeois culture, implores David to understand his desire to enjoy high culture and remain a revolutionary to Cuba: "They don't want me here, why not turn my cheek any longer; besides, I like being the way I am, to put on a little plumage now and then. Tell me, who do I harm, if they're my feathers?"[281]

The annihilation of beauty was hardly as violent a form of persecution when compared to the legislation and labor camps for homosexuals in Cuba at that time. In *Fresa y Chocolate*, the threat of culture and aesthetics gets emphasized more than the threat of Diego's homosexuality. The film addressed the reality of surveillance in Cuba in regard to homosexuality, but to a

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[279] Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 105.

[280] ibid., 87.

[281] Thomas Christensen, *New world, new words: recent writing from the Americas: a bilingual anthology* (San Francisco: Center for the Art of Translation, 2007), 195. This quote is an excerpt from the short story by Senel Paz. In the film *Fresa y Chocolate*, the collage that adorns David's wall include a photo of Alicia Alonso.

moderate extent. The stakes in the film were not as high as they were regarded in the real world at that time. In Deborah Shaw's article about *Fresa y Chocolate* she addresses the one scene that shortly references the repercussions of an officially confirmed homosexual in Cuba. "It should be noted that … state and individual homophobia is underplayed, with only the dogmatic, young communist student Miguel seen to be genuinely homophobic."[282] Shaw adds that the film includes also includes a brief reference to the infamous UMAP camps, but it offers no explanation.

In his autobiography, Arenas describes the government's discovery of one's homosexuality as a "sinister expulsion because it also included a dossier that would follow each person for the rest of his life and would bar him from admission to any other state school."[283] In addition to an official record, Arenas says the accused would receive a telegram reprimanding him of his amoral behavior and notify him of his termination from work and/or notification of work in the forced-labor camps where the individual would also be rehabilitated.[284] The result would be humiliating, degrading, and could lead to death or suicide, yet the film portrayed Diego's case as an unfortunate but surmountable situation.

Despite any discrepancies between representations of the homosexual male in both the film and Arenas' memoir, *Fresa y Chocolate* was a commercial success.75 Bejel contends "Alea's film *Fresa y Chocolate* attempts a sort of "rectification" of the homophobic policies of the Cuban government. Through an alliance between a gay man and an open-minded socialist, the film's logic tries to convince its audience of the possibility of integrating gays (and, by

[282] Shaw, *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America: Ten Key Films*, 21.

[283] Arenas, *Before Night Falls*, 48.

[284] ibid., 138.

implication, lesbians) into the very concept of the nation."[285] The "logic" Bejel refers to is the use of a homosexual character that is stripped
of human behavior and used to educate a young revolutionary in an effort to bring culture back into Cuba.

Shaw writes that Alea in his later years as a director exercised his influence as a respected director to be critical of the government through his work, and that *Fresa y Chocolate* provided an opportunity to show the value of alternative voices.[286] Alea later also claimed that *Fresa y Chocolate* was an attempt to call for "an end to discrimination against gays," which contradicts what Paz, the writer of the original short story and screenwriter for the film says about *Fresa y Chocolate*'s intentions.[287] Shaw asserts that at one point, Paz defensively stated that the film was never intended to advocate or "campaign on behalf of homosexuality," rather the theme of general "tolerance" is what should be most salient; and that homosexuality is but a metaphorical-vehicle in which to deliver this theme.[288] "By the end of the 1970s, the Cuban Communist Party no longer considered homosexual behavior to be in fundamental contradiction with the revolutionary process" and homosexuality went from an unlawful act to purely a psychological and medical problem.[289]

Although "homosexuality" in Cuba was no longer a crime, it was not an invitation to be equal with the heteronormative Revolution either. "It is worth mentioning that although Diego is

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[285] Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, xxi.

[286] Shaw, *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America: Ten Key Films*, 13

[287] ibid., 21.

[288] ibid., 23.

[289] Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 106.

helping to forge the *new*, new man, it is never suggested that he, as a homosexual, could be that new revolutionary man."[290] What keeps Diego from assimilating into Revolutionary culture, and *Fresa y Chocolate* from truly breaking the mold as a film, is Diego's contained sexuality: "Audiences are encouraged to like Diego, partly because he has been discriminated against, and partly because he is a safe (nonsexual) gay man … Diego's sexuality is subsumed in culture and is thus made more palatable for David and straight audiences."[291] *Fresa*'s success as an enjoyable film about friendship must be viewed as independent of its limited contribution to the improvement of the gay narrative because Diego's story, like Arenas' real life, ends in exile. There is a disconnect, or lack of continuity in the way Diego's censured file was powerful enough to send Diego away from Cuba, because there was content missing in the film that was in the book that delivers Diego's cold reality into exile, that may have otherwise compromised the film's warm reception in Cuba and Latin America.

The original short story, which the film is based on, defines the stakes for Cubans who leave the island: "For us Cubans, *I'm leaving*, in the tone Diego had spoken it, had a terrible connotation. It meant leaving the country forever, erasing yourself from its memory and it from yours, and – like it or not – it meant treason. That is something one knows from the start."[292] This quote not only defines "exile" for Cubans as synonymous with treason, but it is one that also reflects Arenas' real-life journey away from Cuba.[293]

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[290] Shaw, *Contemporary Cinema of Latin America: Ten Key Films,* 28.

[291] ibid., 22.

[292] Christensen. *New world, new words: recent writing from the Americas: a bilingual anthology,* 193.

[293] In 1990, Arenas committed suicide in New York City, where he had been suffering from AIDS.

The audience knows that Diego will be leaving the country, but the trauma of what Diego might have to face, what Arenas faced, is never realized because the priority of the film is show David's progress as a young, and now cultured, revolutionary. What this *pas de deux* between the narratives of Carmen and the film *Fresa y Chocolate* achieves is the conveying of a narrative in which the State wins. Although the ten male ballet dancers defected in the 60's proves that they could not find sanctuary even within their practice of beauty, because even beauty was a stratifying force.

Conclusion

Leaving is no longer the only option for men and women who do not conform to the political culture. In 2013, Victoria Burnett reported for the *New York Times* on Cuba's first transgender city councilwoman. According to the article, gender-reassignment surgery has been available Cuba's public health system at no cost since 2008. Mariela Castro, daughter of Raul Castro and director of the National Center for Sex Education, says that this election "proves that Cubans can overcome their prejudices when it comes to voting for someone." Even Fidel Castro has summarized the treatment of homosexuals as a "great injustice."[294] In light of this development, Burnett asserted that Cubans continue to behave with *machismo*, including the use of homophobic slurs, but that the L.G.B.T. Cubans hold positions in the government. While the election of a transgender person to a governmental position can be interpreted as progress, it is also important to recognize that the story is also predicated their service to Revolution, and perhaps the State supersedes gender.

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[294] Victoria Burnett, "A Transgender Elected Official Reflects an Evolving Cuba," *The New York Times*. March 15, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/world/americas/a-transgender-elected-official-reflects-an-evolving-cuba.html

This chapter has explored the process of creating the Revolutionary milieu through the analysis of three unique ballets. In considering the plight of the female Revolutionary in the midst of these authorized ballets, this chapter sought to shed light on the subjugated choreographies of both the women off stage and the government that endeavored to direct them. This approach of consulting three ballet in the BNC repertoire is not exhaustive an ultimate representation of how the BNC's repertoire can be read along the other social issues. The fact that these ballets are still in circulation make this methodology relevant in the historical development of both the ballet and the revolutionary project that developed alongside it.

Chapter Three: The Passion of Alicia

The reality of magic in Cuba

In his second attempt on February 2, 2004, Luis Grass set out to drive his 1959 Buick Electra—with a hard top—the 90-mile stretch from Havana to Miami. That is correct. Grass fitted the Buick four-door with homemade propellers, packed all the compartments with Styrofoam, and sailed across the Atlantic Ocean with ten other family members and friends. His first attempt the summer prior in a two-ton, 1951 Chevrolet truck. Grass and his party were intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard some 40 miles off the coast of Florida and the car violently sunk by gunfire. The Cubans were returned to the island with a new moniker *camionautas*, which in English translates to "truckonauts." Grass' second voyage in the Buick got him within 10 miles of the Florida coast where he had every intention to "drive directly to a gas station, buy some gas" and continue on to Miami, but the Coast Guard intercepted them yet again. After a ten-month detention at the U.S.-Guantanamo, Costa Rica's government granted the Grass family refugee status, and from there they eventually made their way to the U.S. and Miami where Grass now works as a line mechanic at a Chevrolet dealership. Together with other mechanics, including his general manager, Grass built a replica of the "ancient green" Chevrolet truck that now rests at the bottom of the ocean.[295]

While Grass' voyage is a sensational account of immigration to the U.S., the novelty quickly pales in the reality of how dangerous the journey from Cuba to the U.S. is. In the 1990s, nearly 46,000 Cubans—men, women, and children—attempted this same crossing, and on vessels less seaworthy than Grass' invention. I refer to the *balseros*, or rafters, that Holly Ackerman indicates fled Cuba in two significant waves of migration: between the years 1959-

[295] John Pearly Huffman, "Sail to the U.S.A. in a Chevrolet," *Car and Driver*, August 2006, http://www.caranddriver.com/features/sail-to-the-usa-in-a-chevrolet-feature

1974 and 1989-1994. According to Ackerman there are three "classes," and modes, of voyage. There exists the more safe—and costly—water-taxi mode; then what Ackerman calls the "betting mode" made by Cubans who have access to boats and perhaps some knowledge of the sea; and finally the "do-or-die mode" comprised of Cubans taking to the sea in inner tubes, rafts, and determination.[296] Ackerman estimates that between 1959 and late August 1994, a total of 16,000 to 100,000 *balseros* may have died in crossing.[297] This exodus resulted in the 1995 revision of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 when President Clinton agreed to no longer admit Cubans into the U.S. who were intercepted *in* the water, which led to the "wet foot/dry foot" policy. If a Cuban made it to *dry* land, they would have the opportunity to pursue citizenship. This clarification in policy perhaps only heightened the desperation and thus the creativity to make it to dry land. On April 22, 2016 the Cuban government lifted its restrictions on Cubans entering and leaving the island aboard cruise ships or commercial vessels, and has hinted at soon allowing Cuban-born people to travel to the island aboard recreational vessels, although "that authorization … would come gradually and when circumstances are right."[298]

Luis Grass' "amphibious" car joins a popular discourse of "American" cars in Cuba. In addition to the water car that Grass made, the classic cars have been referred to as "Frankenstein" and "monsters" because they still run and are sustained through repurposed parts, some of which derive from other cars, engines, and even appliances.[299] Soon after U.S. President

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[296] Holly Ackerman, "The Balsero Phenomenon, 1991–1994." *Cuban Studies, Vol. 26* (1996): 170-172.

[297] ibid., 173.

[298] Lizette Alvarez, "Cuba Reverses Longtime Ban on Sea Travel," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2016, A10.

Obama announced the normalizing of relations with Cuba, U.S. car collectors began to salivate over the prospective access they may once again have to these cars. "There's just this fascination with this idea that there's this treasure trove of collector cars sitting there waiting to be discovered or found, when in fact it's more of a time capsule."[300] To refer to these cars as "collector cars" reveal another example of how the discourse of astonishment operates, because these cars materialize not only as objects to be collected and "discovered," but rather hold a utility in Cuba.

In addition to being described as collectors' items and "monster" cars, these vehicles routinely describe Cuba as a "time capsule." A 2002 documentary film, *Yank Tanks*, described the cars as "exotic, endangered species, these colorful cars roam around this island paradise trapped in a 1950's time warp."[301] Similarly, in his photo book *American Dream Car in Cuba*, Martino Fagiuoli curated a Cuba dependent on a discourse of astonishment in order to illustrate a "Cuba" where these cars still operate. "In a country where life seems to have stopped some decades ago, there exists a museum which shows its treasures in streets and roads."[302] In other words, in order for these cars to still function time must have stopped. Fagiuoli expressed gratitude to the Cuban people "who have succeeded in keeping alive the products of a consumer's society which is not their own, turning them into tourist attractions and creating a

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[299] Tom Miller, "Old Cars in Cuba: Nurtured but Not Loved," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2004.

[300] Tom DiChristopher, "They're alive! Cuba's Frankenstein classic cars," *CNBC*, December 21, 2014.

[301] Film Synopsis. Yank Tanks. David Schendel, dir. Blue Collar Films. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0312048/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl

[302] Martino Fagiuoli, *American Dream Car in Cuba,* (Rimini: Idea libri; Bologna: CV export, 2001), 9.

huge and unique “driving museum.”[303] Not only does Fagiuoli equate the island of Cuba to a museum where life has stopped and elides the labor and necessity that Cubans require for these cars to run, but he denied ownership of these cars to Cubans and instead thanked them for being custodians of cars that are not their own.

At first glance these seemingly innocuous descriptions of the cars and of Cuba, while insensitive, register as nostalgia. According to Svetlana Boym, author of *The Future of Nostalgia*, nostalgia has a function. Boym defines nostalgia as a “sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy.”[304] She identifies two kinds of nostalgia. Boym suggests a “reflective nostalgia” which “bathes” in the longing for what was lost, as well as a “restorative nostalgia” which seeks a rigorous reconstruction of what has been lost.[305] “This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the anti-modern mythmaking of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths.” The nostalgia in these *etic*, or outside, descriptions of the cars fall within the parameters of the discourse of astonishment, as the descriptions of the cars as belonging to another time and place reveal the anxieties of Western imperialism.

To be clear, melancholia does not presuppose nostalgia: “Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and

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[303] Fagiuoli, *American Dream Car in Cuba,* 20.

[304] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.

[305] This makes me wonder about the process of restoring parts of Miami to resemble Havana. “Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth or tradition” (Boym, xviii).

collective memory."[306] This analysis of nostalgia and astonishment exemplifies one limit of Western discourse's ability to comprehend a post-colony's way of life and patterns of sustainability, and resonates with what Trinh Minh-ha says in her project about the limited ways women have been defined. Just as for Minh-ha it is a futile endeavor to simply define a woman as "not man," so too can it be ineffectual to simply figure Cuba as "not the U.S." For Minh-ha, "Woman can never be defined [...] She wallows in night, disorder, immanence, and is at the same time the 'disturbing factor' and the key to the beyond."[307] With a similar conception for how Cuba can operate outside of a Western, capitalist logic, how can the efforts of Revolutionary Cuba render unto us an alternate theory of development?

Within a discourse of development, these cars exist in capacities beyond their links to U.S. presence on the island. In Cuba, the cars are also known as *maquinas*, or "machines," and they serve as a ride-share taxi service not unlike UBER. However, instead of using an "app" on one's smart phone, an exchange of hand choreographies between driver and prospective passenger communicates which way the *maquina* is headed and how many passengers the driver can allow. These cars are merely one example in a plethora of re-inventions that Cubans have made. For example, washing machine motors now power fans, lawnmowers, and even key copier machines. The 1960 embargo and later the collapse of the Soviet Union made it difficult to acquire imported goods. In 1992, the Cuban military published a book called *Con Nuestros Propios Esfuerzos*/With Our Own Efforts that featured a variety of ways to fix and repurpose objects. Also included was a recipe for marinating grapefruit rind and frying it in a pan as a

[306] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.

[307] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, native, other: writing postcoloniality and feminism, (*Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 97.

"steak." Ernesto Oroza, a collector and writer of these objects, characterized the do-it-yourself movement as "technical disobedience" whereby Cubans learned to disrespect the "authority," purpose, and life cycle of the original object. "These are people that live with objects that are always disemboweled, the electronic guts exposed, while others keep things as if they were palimpsests, scraped clean of their prior functions," Oroza said. "And both of these practices essentially lead to a dismantling of the object's identity."[308] The "dismantling" or re-envisioning an object's identity remains a key theme of my dissertation which analyzes the limits of discourse and how particular objects of discourse are constituted through efforts to form a specific identity.

The Cuban's ability to wrest an object from its original state and function reflects a similar concern explored by Donna Haraway in "*A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,"* an essay in which she invokes the metaphor of the cyborg creature as a call for feminists to engage politically, beyond concepts of naturalism and essentialisms. "The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the Oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust."[309] Within this purview, the cyborg Cuban car would not recognize the American soil from which it sprung. Haraway's objection to general notions of naturalism and essentialism propels this project to resist becoming subsumed in only hierarchical ways of experiencing and participating in the world. What the cyborg did for Haraway's feminist project, and what the cyborg does for Cuban

[308] Jenny Marder, "How communism turned Cuba into an island of hackers and DIY engineers." *PBS Newshour*, January 7, 2015.
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/isolation-generation-master-inventors-cuba/

[309] Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Unfinished Business: 20 years of Socialist Review* (1991): 32.

re-creations, summons specific communities to come out from their anachronistic spaces and realize that all along they have been apart of, exploited by, and complicit within the structure of hegemony as part of time and not separate from it.

The discourses of science fiction and utility warrant the cars as discursive objects and provide an entrée for how this chapter explores the body of Alicia Alonso, in all her manifestations as a dancer and ambassador for the State, as a discursive object as well. The purpose of which is to once more further understand the limits of discourse and the variety of vessels upon which they are deployed. Haraway's "cyborg" presents a useful concept for contextualizing the output of these Cuban inventions and the concept of magical realism, indigenous to Latin America and has roots in Cuba, allows us to further ponder a Cuban imaginary which conceives these inventions and re-inventions—such as cars and ballet technique—and gestures toward alternative methods of knowledge productions.

The method of magic

At the time of the Spanish conquest in Latin America, the literary genre of romance thrived, and "the writings of early Spanish explorers and conquistadors [were] filled with the exotic expressed in a language of awe."[310] In 1982 Latin American writer Gabriel García Márquez received the Nobel Peace Prize for literature and presented a lecture describing the ways Europe envisioned Latin America as early as Magellan's first voyage to the "new world:"

> Antonio Pigafetta, a Florentine navigator who went with Magellan on the first voyage around the world, wrote, upon his passage through our southern lands of America, a strictly accurate account that nonetheless resembles a venture into fantasy. In it he recorded that he had seen hogs with navels on their haunches, clawless birds whose hens laid eggs on the

[310] Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence,* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 36-37.

> backs of their mates, and others still, resembling tongueless pelicans, with beaks like spoons. He wrote of having seen a misbegotten creature with the head and ears of a mule, a camel's body, the legs of a deer and the whinny of a horse. He described how the first native encountered in Patagonia was confronted with a mirror, whereupon that impassioned giant lost his senses to the terror of his own image.[311]

Garcia Marquez considers Pigafetta's report to contain "the seeds" of contemporary magical realism, seeds that would later be re-conceptualized by 20th century Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier into a postcolonial genre of writing known as *lo maravilloso real*, or the marvelous real. Magical Realism is the acceptance of magic in a real, or rational, world. Matthew Strecher defines magical realism as "what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe."[312] Strecher recognizes magical realism as a Latin American concept, and Carpentier's strain of magical realism characterizes the supernatural as "an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence."[313] For Carpentier, the marvelous real endeavored to mitigate the myriad histories and influences that comprise Latin America: "the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography, and politics."[314] Within this explanation, it can be simply understood that the seemingly incongruous practice of ballet can thrive in Cuba because "marvelous" outcomes routinely occur. Magical

[311] Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nobel Lecture, December 8, 1982, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture.html

[312] Matthew Stretcher, "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki," *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1999): 267.

[313] Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism: theory, history, community*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 3.

[314] ibid., 75.

realism developed out of a need to assert a post-colonial identity, and the practice of magic realism as a writing genre materializes across a-political and political registers.

Angel Flores, also credited as a pioneer in magical realism, advocates for the writing form as taking on a post-colonial discourse that "rejects traditional Euro-American emphasis on realism and positivism in favor of a worldview that permits the 'magical' to coexist with the 'real.'"[315] For Flores, magical realism presents a conundrum for critics who seek to define magical realism—much like the way critics sought to define Cuban style of ballet—within the already "vetted," and existing writing genres. Like the discourse of astonishment operates within a limited purview that privileges Western constructions of knowledge production, Flores saw that within the categorical expectations of Western criticism, magical realism could only ever be perceived as "ineptitude, uncertainty, imitativeness, sentimental histrionics, and [tedium]."[316] Carpentier's desired affect of magical realism counters Flores' characterization of the West's potential interpretation and sees the form as "defamiliarizing" in which the author, poet, or dramatist is encouraged to make the ordinary *extraordinary*, different, and unfamiliar to the reader or audience member. Carpentier, similarly using terms reminiscent of avant-gardism, describes the marvelous as something "amazing because it is strange. Everything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous."[317] In this light, the cars of Cuba need not be relegated to a language of science fiction, like their descriptions of "Frankenstein" and "monster" might suggest. Rather, magical realism—forged from the

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[315] Stretcher, "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki," 268.

[316] Angel Flores, "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction," *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community,* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995): 111.

[317] Stretcher, "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki," 268.

merging, colliding, and repressing of many cultures and religions—allows these marvelous cars and seemingly out-of-place practice of ballet to be imagined and manifested in an everyday life of Cuba.

Interestingly enough, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, one the world's most revered authors of magical realism, was a close friend of Fidel Castro and a fervent supporter of socialism. The two met in 1959, when Garcia visited Cuba and was "fascinated by the triumph of the people, [and] the charisma of their leader."[318] According to Ángel Esteban and Stéphanie Panichelli's *Fidel and Gabo: A Portrait of the Legendary Friendship Between Fidel Castro and Gabriel García Márquez*, the friendship grew so close that Garcia would not publish a book without first showing his manuscript to Castro. Reciprocally, Castro has referred to García as his one "true friend."[319] Vivek Kumar Srivastava suggests that García's magical realism was supported by his own ideas of socialism, having travelled extensively through the Soviet bloc during the cold war. García resisted his work being categorized as a kind of "fantastic fiction" and believed that he was producing a "true socialist realism."[320]

Seeing the Cuban Revolution first hand, García found the U.S.-imposed embargo to represent a "clash between an anti-consumer society and the most consumption-oriented society in the world."[321] This "clash" between the U.S. and Cuba was yet another instance in a larger

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[318] 'Ángel Esteban and Stéphanie Panichelli, *Fidel and Gabo: A Portrait of the Legendary Friendship Between Fidel Castro and Gabriel García Márquez* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2009), 14.

[319] "Fidel Castro and Gabriel García Márquez: Buddy, buddies." *The Economist*. February 12, 2004.

[320] Gabriel Garcia Marquez, 'The Art of Fiction No. 69', The Paris Review, interview by Peter H. Stone, Winter1981, http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3196/gabriel-garcia-marquez-the-art-of-fiction-no-69-gabriel-garcia-marquez

conversation of Imperialism in Latin America. In his review of García's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Mike Gonzalez wrote, "Latin America was born out of the destruction of an original world. And on its leveled rubble the Spanish colonialists built a new world, a utopia that existed only in their imperial imagination."[322] While Gonzalez emphasized the literal destruction and genocides of Latin America, my dissertation also focuses on the discursive violence leveraged upon the post-colony by the West and the way magical realism operates both as a product of that history, but also as a methodology for the production of knowledge that mitigates its colonial pasts and independent futures.

If the discourse of astonishment utilizes a language of science fiction as a means of describing a Cuba that confounds the West, as my reference to the Cuban cars suggests, how might magical realism become a method for the discourse of development to describe the marvelous real in the Revolution? Magical realism as a method offers a logic for the Cuban cars that the discourse of astonishment cannot conceive. For example, perhaps only on an island where the *extra*ordinary occurs alongside reality, can the concept of a car driving across the ocean, be forged. Ultimately, the analysis of the hard bodies of Cuba's chrome machines provides a model for examining the hard body of Alicia Alonso as a discursive object, a body constituted through discourses that contest and conflate her human subjectivity. From her extensive dancing career and artistic prowess, to her political participation in the Revolution, Alicia's body persists at the center. With magical-realism-as-method, how might the state-sanctioned body of Alicia Alonso symbolize something *extra* ordinary within the extraordinary circumstances of the Revolution?

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[321] Marquez, 'The Art of Fiction No. 69.'

[322] Mike Gonzalez, review of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Socialist Review*, December 2012, http://socialistreview.org.uk/375/one-hundred-years-solitude

I was never apathetic to being around Alicia Alonso. Over five years of field work, I watched her come and go from the compound of the BNC in a modern European car. She would emerge not from a classic American car, or a Soviet Lada, but from an Audi sedan wearing beautiful clothes, oversized sunglasses, and be ushered into her office that journalist Stephen Gibbs refers to as her "inner sanction" where she is protected by an "army of efficient secretaries protect her from the uninvited."[323] *One artist at the BNC told me that new cars, and sometimes apartments, are often given as perks to people at the ballet. This goes hand-in-hand with an anecdote written by a dancer who taught at a dance school outside of Havana in the 1970s relaying that if Alicia wanted a marble toilet, she would get one.*

Occasionally Alicia would stop to take photos with tourists and fans. In my first trip, whenever I saw her car parked under the portico—which was only ever accessible to her car—I would make myself available to stand and wait, and to watch for the woman at the center of my dissertation project. As the years of fieldwork at the BNC continued, my initial excitement of being in proximity to her settled into proud ambivalence, one that recognized that we both *had work to get done at the BNC. It was a privilege to observe Alicia as both the active director of the ballet company and national icon. From her box seats at the former* Grand Teatro Garcia Lorca*, now named after Alicia Alonso, the icon greets BNC audiences before every performance and receives standing ovations and flowers. Often, she opens her arms wide and executes a bit of choreography reminiscent of Odette, the swan's arm movements. She is marvelous.*

Just as chapters one and two treat the technique and the repertoire as authorized by—and thusly representative of—the State, so too will this third chapter consider the body of Alicia Alonso as a discursive object. This is not to elide her subjectivity and agency as a person and woman in the Revolution, rather this is a discursive analysis of her body in its official and professional capacity as a State figure. Alicia is visible across artistic and political registers in the Revolution. Gia Kourlas for *The New York Times* described the dancer as both "reviled and adored" depending on which side of the communist/anti-communist aisle you are on.[324] On March 22, 2016 Alicia received U.S. President Barack Obama in the newly renovated and renamed Alicia Alonso Grand Theatre of Havana, where in his keynote address to the Cuban people President Obama announced, "I have come here to bury the last remnant of the Cold War

[323] Stephen Gibbs, "Alicia Alonso: The grand dame of Cuba, " *LaHabana.com*, April 2015.

[324] Gia Kourlas, "Still Dancing, Her Way, From the Soul," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2010.

in the Americas."[325] Pedro Simon, director of the *museo de la danza*, noted that the President Obama "expressed his admiration for her work and satisfaction to finally be meeting her in person."[326] This recent appearance with President Obama is far from the first instance of Alicia's political visibility, although she was made an ambassador for the Republic of Cuba by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2002.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the BNC politically aligned with Castro's regime even before its 1959 victory. Alicia and the ballet company toured the island protesting the Batista administration culminating in a final performance in the University of Havana's stadium. This final appearance marked the company's boycott from dancing on the island from 1956 until the Revolution.[327] In addition to being photographed with heads of state such as Hồ Chí Minh and Mao Tse-tung, Alicia's image has been captured volunteering in the fields alongside other Cubans and giving speeches to Cuban militia during The October Crisis, or what the U.S. refers to as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

In addition to Alicia's vocal support for the Revolution her visibility as a Cuban ballerina with an international reputation invariably becomes a success for the State. For both of these contributions, Alicia has been heralded both on and off the island. She has been awarded honorary doctorates in Cuba, Spain, and Mexico, and has received countless medals of honor from European and Latin American countries. In Cuba, Alicia has not only been recognized by cultural organizations, but also by social and political organizations. She has received a

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[325] Frances Robles, "President Obama Delivers Keynote Speech of His Cuba Visit," *The New York Times,* March 22, 2016.

[326] Amelia Duarte de la Rosa, "Obama meets Alicia Alonso," *Granma*, March 23, 2016, http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2016-03-23/obama-meets-alicia-alonso

[327] *Distinciones y condecoraciones de la primerisima bailarina Alicia Alonso,* (Museo Numismatico de BNC, 1978), 8-9.

distinction from the worker's union (1973, 1976), the Federation of Cuban Women (1971), the Ministry of Industrial Construction (1873), the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (1975); and in 1998 she was awarded the title of "Heroine of Labor of the Republic of Cuba," the highest civilian distinction. Alonso deferred the praise of her 2002 appointment as ambassador to the Republic of Cuba back to her country saying, "This magical island, despite its small size has made and continues to make great history as an example of culture, valor, and heroism."[328]

Along a cultural register, Alicia has been celebrated and conflated with her work. Cuban novelist of magical realism Alejo Carpentier has written about Alicia on several occasions. His descriptions of her dramatic prowess characterize Alicia as one of the most "complete dancers of our time."[329] He notes that Alicia exhausts herself in service of her craft and that "nothing in dance is alien to her."[330] In addition to being illustrated as a "complete" artist, she has been described as being inexplicable by any human language. Barbara Rowes writes: "Who could describe Alonso's technique? No one. She is so absolutely unique and impossible to write." Miguel Barnet, a Cuban novelist, poet, ethnographer, and writer of the 1966 breakthrough ethnography *Biografía de un cimarrón/*Biography of a Runaway Slave reiterates the challenge to render Alicia into words. In his poem titled "Alicia," each stanza begins with "*En unas brevas lineas*"/"In a few lines." The poem explains the difficultly in capturing, even briefly, the mystery of Alicia. While even the most vague attempts to describe Alicia are meant as high praise, as a discourse it is generative to this project to think about what happens to a discursive object when it is relegated to a realm of inexplicability.

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[328] Andrea Kapsaski, "Alicia Alonso. I am dance," *Scene4 Magazine*, May 2010, http://www.scene4.com/archivesqv6/may-2010/0510/andreakapsaski0510.html

[329] Alejo Carpentier, "Hommage a Alicia Alonso," program notes, UNESCO Paris 1980.

[330] Alejo Carpentier, "Nada en la danza le es ajeno," *Cuba en el ballet*, enero-abril 1972.

In addition to Barnet's less-is-more approach to encapsulate Alicia's awesomeness, metaphor has also been employed. Afro-Cuban poet Cos Causse, initially trained in Agronomy and later shifted to poetry that primarily focused on themes of family life, Afro-Cuban culture, and Caribbean histories, penned "*Cancion de elogio para Alicia Alonso*"/"Song of Praise for Alicia Alonso").[331] Causse described Alicia as the reeds that bend in the wind, as other earthly elements, and as a "simple princess" without a crown of gold nor throne of crystal.[332] Cuban journalist, Eduardo Heras Leon in his article "Alicia, a living legend," conflated the artist with the role of "Carmen" in the eponymous ballet: "Perhaps the best compliment that can be made to Alicia in *Carmen* is that, despite everything, this ballet was created for her. She is Carmen."[333] While it may not be Leon's priority to decipher the subjectivity of Alicia from her dramatic capacities, the notion that Alicia is capable of disappearing herself is one that fuels this discourse of Alicia as a myth, a theme recently culminated in Mayda Bustamante's aptly titled 2014 book *Alicia Alonso en Carmen: myth and legend*.

One component of the "legend" discourse is Alicia's extended career. Octavio Roca, author of *Cuban Ballet*, qualifies Alicia's career longevity as "super human," as she danced up into her 70s and denied a generation of female dancers the opportunity to dance in lead roles.[334] Similar themes of Alicia's impressive tenure are echoed in Juan Marinello's praise of the ballerina. Marinello, a celebrated Cuban essayist and philosopher, likens the dancer to a force of

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[331] Cos Causse, "Cancion de elogio para Alicia Alonso," *Distinciones y condecoraciones de la primerisima bailarina Alicia Alonso,* 52-53.

[332] Paulette Ramsay, "Jesús Cos Causse—Afro-Cuban Poet," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 20, No. 2 (FALL 2001): 57-59.

[333] Eduardo Heras Leon, "Alicia, una leyenda viva," *Juventud Rebelde*, December 27, 1981.

[334] Octavio Roca, *Cuban Ballet*, 165-167.

nature, one that “resists disease and time, toward tireless perfection.” He not only references the phenomenon of Alicia’s long stage career, but his reference to her resisting disease might also be a gesture to her dancing despite the issues with her debilitating eyesight. In a 1986 unpublished manuscript found at the *museo de la danza* of Raul Ruiz’ 1988 book *Alicia: la maravilla de la danza,* he writes that like the cyclops, Alicia summoned her willpower and “set out to do battle” with the resources she had left, and that this matured her dancing talents.[335]

Alicia’s ability to persist in the face of adversity is a dynamic that Mexican writer Juan Vicente Melo captures in his article “Alicia Alonso perfecciona el mito de la bailarina y vuelve al cuerpo, sinonimo de milagro” (“Alicia Alonso perfects the myth of the dancer and returns to the body a synonymous miracle”). “Alicia Alonso meets in the highest degree of perfection, the state of grace that defines and mystifies the dancer: she is at the same time, the instrument and the interpreter.”[336] In his figuring of Alicia as “perfection,” as a “myth,” and as an “instrument,” Melo also credits the dancer for making ballet a relevant cultural form for Latin America. For Melo, through her dancing, Alicia explores new worlds and introduces new vistas for Cuba. “Alicia, instrument and interpreter, is dedicated to forging an essential tradition and forces us to look at ballet in a more luminous way.” He wrote that Alicia’s dancing opens up the world to Cubans, “to guess another light… Then Alicia Alonso writes something on the doors: we are not mortals.[337] This description that Alicia is not only a dancer, but a conduit for new ideas and as

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[335] Raul R. Ruiz, *Alicia: la maravilla de la danza* (Ciudad de La Habana, Cuba: Gente Nueva, 1986).

[336] Mayda Bustamante, *Alicia Alonso en Carmen: mito y leyenda* (Barcelona: Ediciones Cumbre, 2014), 77-79.

[337] ibid.„ 79.

Melo has suggested, immortality (or at least a mortal life as they know it to be), epitomizes this discourse of Alicia as exceptional, as divine, and as extra-ordinary.

The characterization of Alicia as a divine and immortal creature by sanctioned Cuban writers as well as other Latin American cultural producers resonates with the general spirit of Cuba and Latin America generating their own cultural forms and artists, and is particularly pertinent in the context of how Revolutionary cultural forms evolved to surrogate and de-center the church as a source of knowledge and value production. How, then, might magical realism serve as a methodology for understanding how the practice of ballet as a cultural form of the state become its own devotional practice of producing Revolutionary knowledge. En lieu of holy narratives of saints and disciples, how might the insider, emic narratives of magical realism by Cuban and Latin American writers approximate its own process of canonization? In examining the "marvelous real," or magical realist discourse about Alicia and her body, this next section theorizes the dancer and her body Alicia and her body as a surrogate and vessel for Revolutionary faith, or faith in the Revolutionary project.

Ballet as a devotional practice

Magical realism as a method, beyond its utility as a literary genre, offers a specific lexicon for interpreting how Alicia's laboring body can be re-conceived from an aging body to a body that theorizes. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, magical realism evolved as an attempt to create a new national identity after Cuba gained independence from Spain at the end of the 19th century, and this is an intention that the Revolution more broadly adopts with regard to cultural production. As Edwin Williamson has noted, "Under the empire, society had been

dominated by the Church far more than in Spain itself."[338] This emancipation from the church allowed for writers, and other cultural producers, to present new ideologies and identities. According to Williamson, "they could become the high priests of the modern culture of the enlightenment, bearers of the values of rationalist humanism."[339] Magical realism then developed as a way for the post-colony to mitigate the need for a new identity that incorporated their own cultural elements and "which would positively articulate their sense of being native-born Americans rather than transplanted Europeans."[340] For Alejo Carpentier, magical realism was formed as a way of redeeming the mind from the "dead hand of [colonial] rationality by unblocking once more the sources of the marvelous."[341] For Carpentier in Cuba, and later for the Revolution, this would mean consulting Afro-Cuban and indigenous cultures whose religious practices often incorporated elements of the marvelous. This focus would go beyond what Carpentier characterizes as the Surrealists' empty "literary trick," and instead write about how other subjugated faiths and their marvelous elements can be a force.[342] For Carpentier, "the experience of the marvelous presupposes a faith."[343] Belief in the extraordinary is compulsory. "Those who do not believe in saints cannot heal themselves by the miracles of the saints, nor can those who are not Quixotes enter, body and soul, into the world of Amadis of Gaul or Tirant lo

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[338] Edwin Williamson, "Coming to terms with modernity: magical realism and the historical process in the novels of Alejo Carpentier," *On Modern Latin American Fiction*, 79.

[339] ibid., 79.

[340] ibid., 79.

[341] Richard Pine, *The Disappointed Bridge: Ireland and the Post-Colonial World* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 350.

[342] Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 31.

[343] Williamson, "Coming to terms with modernity," 84.

Blanc."[344] It is in this milieu that Carpentier and other celebrated writers and poets describe Alicia as supernatural and marvelous. But what happens to faith in the purview of the Revolution's position on religious practice? In the context of the State surrogating official faith for official culture, how might the magical discourse of Alicia Alonso deify her to a point where her body, and her devotional practice of ballet, becomes the conduit through which a certain faith is levied as faith?

Considering culture-as-faith requires an understanding of the Revolution's position on religion as it was influenced by the values of Marxist-Leninism. The Cuban constitution of 1976 articulated that the "socialist state…bases its activity on, and educated the people in, the scientific materialist concept of the universe," an Atheistic position.[345] Scientific materialism was instituted within the educational system ranging from primary school to the most advanced university degrees.[346] One of the principles of this platform included "The gradual overcoming of religious beliefs by materialist scientific propaganda and the cultural advancement of the workers." A cultural advancement that included ballet. This principle identifies "cultural advancement" as one of the methods through which the Revolution would promulgate its values.

Similar to its position on cultural production, the State also took a for-or-against the Revolution approach to managing religious practices in Revolutionary Cuba. Both religion and the State were suspicious of each other. For example, the catholic church understood socialism and communism as "inherently aetheistic and antithetical to faith, a position curiously reflected

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[344] Williamson, "Coming to terms with modernity," 84-85.

[345] Jeroen Temperman, *State-Religion Relationships and Human Rights Law: Towards a Right to Religiously Neutral Governance* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2010), 142-143.

[346] Emma Gobin and Géraldine Morel, "Ethnography and Religious Anthropology of Cuba: Historical and Bibliographical Landmarks," *Ateliers d'anthropologie* 38 (2013): 16.

by that of orthodox Marxist-Leninism and its strict adherence among the Cuban revolutionaries who regarded religions as inherently counter-revolutionary."[347] Openly religious persons were banned from joining the Communist party, demonstrations of religiosity repressed, and individuals who "openly proclaimed a religious faith" suffered discrimination in their education and professional careers.[348] Prior to 1992, it was illegal and punishable by law for Cubans to use religious affiliation as an exemption from their Revolutionary duties. In 1992, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the constitution was amended to more softly reiterate the Revolution's freedom of religion, however within respect to the law.[349]

At the same time the State situated itself as a non-religious government, it worked to appropriate Afro-Cuban religious practices into sites of a non-religious cultural project, a few of which (Santería, Ifa, and Palo Monte), possess a "magico-religious" grammar.[350] According to Emma Gobin and Geraldine Morel, "the State appropriated many of the choreographic and musical aspects of Afro-Cuban practices (especially those of *Santería* and *Abakuá*)," after emptying them of their "semantic and symbolic significance" in an attempt at "heritage creation" which Yvonne Daniel also notes happening with the rumba dance form which previously discussed in the first chapter.[351] While it may be expedient to qualify this process of repurposing the religious practices of marginalized Cubans into non-religious ways as "appropriation," it is important to remember that this is a post-colonial communist state attempting to forward a new

[347] Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report*. (London: Routledge, 1997), 126.

[348] Gobin and Morel, "Ethnography and Religious Anthropology of Cuba," 16.

[349] ibid., 16.

[350] ibid., 14.

[351] Gobin and Morel, "Ethnography and Religious Anthropology of Cuba," 16.

identity away from its imperialist past. Instead, Joseph Roach's concept of "surrogation" provides a way to imagine the process by which the State appropriates, and to better understand the dynamics of substituting culture for official religion as this chapter theorizes the practice of ballet as a devotional, theoretical and kinesthetic praxis.

In his article, "Part of the blood and dream': surrogation, memory and the National Hero in the postcolonial Caribbean," David Lambert mobilizes Roach's concept of surrogation as a "mechanism for the reproduction of collective social memory within the 'circum-Atlantic world'… [and] it can also be applied to postcolonial contexts, such as the processes of nation-building in the formally decolonized Caribbean that rest on the articulation of history and memory."[352] Surrogation is a process through which attempts are made to fill those voids created by death or departure with alternatives. Certainly the process of surrogation is utilized in the formation of the Santeria religious practices in the repurposing of Catholic saints into *orishas*, or Yoruba deities but it also operates as a process of post-colonial, Revolutionary Cuba assimilating its colonial circumstances into a new revolutionary culture that would disseminate revolutionary values through cultural production. For example, scholars have seized upon the state iconography of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as a kind of religious surrogation. Despite the State's position on religion, David Kunzle's article titled "Chesucristo: Fusions, Myths, and Realities" points out that state iconography of Castro and Guevara figures Castro as the omniscient father, and Guevara as the martyred son, likening the two to a Judeo-Christian example of God and his son Jesus.[353] While the West German playwright Peter Weiss likens Che

[352] David Lambert, 'Part of the blood and dream': surrogation, memory and the National Hero in the postcolonial Caribbean," *Patterns of Prejudice* 41, no. 3 -4, (2007): 345.

[353] David Kunzle, "Chesucristo: Fusions, Myths, and Realities," *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 2, (2008): 98.

to Jesus, Kunzle interprets the Che affect more as an "accretion, a tributary, or a renewal of Christ, a secular Jesus or saint of which there have been many in history."[354] In the Revolution's cultural project where cultural production takes on the former purview of religion, how might this repurposing, or surrogation-like dynamic, apply to Alicia's fiefdom of ballet? And in the context of magical realism as a methodology, how might ballet be seen as a devotional practice?

When considering magical realism as a methodology for conceiving of the marvelous among the real and in the context of State discourse resisting religious affiliation, ballet class presents its own kind of faith. For the professional dancer, ballet is often a daily practice. The dancer begins their practice standing at the ballet barre, then following a progression of repetitive exercises to warm up the body similar to the way a Catholic congregant might progress through each rosary bead. Depending on which school—or denomination—of ballet one is training in, the succession of standing and genuflections at the ballet barre are reminiscent of what Joann Kealiinohomoku describes as a "variety of motor activities such as rising, sitting, folding hands" in the ways Catholics or Muslims might demonstrate.[355] In the devotional practice of ballet, the dancer is not seeking salvation in an afterlife, so much as it is directly seeking a higher physical and artistic capacity in their bodies in the present moment. This repeated devotion can result in both muscle building as well as injury. Both cases of muscle injury and muscle building affirm the consideration as mortifications of the flesh. However the physical labor of practicing ballet, while a strenuous flagellation indeed, is not geared toward atonement. Rather, the devotion of ballet is about honing an allegiance to a practice, or in the case of ballet in Cuba, discursively developing the state.

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[354] Kunzle, "Chesucristo: Fusions, Myths, and Realities," 98.

[355] Joann Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance," *Impulse: annual of contemporary dance* (San Francisco: Impulse Publications, 1969-70), 36.

The same intensity with which Cuban ballet technique became standardized alongside Revolutionary discourse, as established in the first chapter, is also enacted through the articulation of that discursive technique when danced. The corporeal dynamic of dance and devotional practice has been investigated and theorized by Diedre Sklar, who theorizes the body's participation in religious practice is as much a part of value and knowledge production as the verbal and written components to religious formation. She categorizes this study of the body as subject and source of knowing as bodylore.[356] As a devotional practice, Sklar's project suggests that the patterns of movement are capable of producing the discourse of the religious practice, and draws influence from Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the habitus, that "One knows oneself and is known by others as much through the accumulated habits of the body as through the verbalizations that people exchange."[357] For Sklar, "while other forms of expression can be examined, heard, tasted, and so on apart from the body that produced them, movement as expression is never *not* also movement as immediate experience. More than for any other, the medium of movement is the message."[358] Chapter one explores this very theme of Cuban ballet technique as a discursive object constituted by the ethos of the Revolution's efforts to incorporate Cuban elements. This chapter explores the physical practice of this discursive technique and the body's intent to manifest its specific discourse of development.

Examining ballet as a devotional practice is also an opportunity to examine ballet as a practice of intention. Sklar employs what she terms kinesthetic empathy as a method of analysis to understand the dynamic of cultural specificities within both dance and the corporeal

[356] Diedre Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" *The Journal of American Folklore* 107, (1994): 13.

[357] Sklar is referring to Bourdieu's 1977 text, "Outline of a Theory of Practice."

[358] ibid., 14.

expressions of every day life. Kinesthetic empathy allows the researcher to theorize the way "movement embodies socially constructed cultural knowledge in which corporeality, emotion, and abstraction are intertwined."[359] Kinesthetic knowledge is a sensory-cognition process of encoding knowledge(s) whereby the experience of an event is sensed and then conceptualized. Kinesthetic empathy is then the ability to see past the "visual presentation and concentrating instead on projecting oneself "as if" into the other's engaged and moving body,,,, [kinesthetic empathy] gives a sampling of the proprioceptive, or "felt" dimension of events.[360] Ballet is an inherently empathetic practice as it not only calls for dancers to embody characters in ballets that have a narrative, but the practice of ballet requires the dancer to utilize an "as-if" projection in their intent to train in an art that has an affect of European physicality, and a movement terminology that literally has dancers moving "as-if" they were cats (*pas de chat*), horses (*pas de cheval*), or "as-if" they were of Basque heritage (*pas de Basque*). Once more, magical realism as a method for facilitating marvelous processes such as kinesthetic empathy is simpatico with an empathetic process that allows a dancer to identify with their intended subject as well as for how the observer may then receive their visual display. How else might belief be suspended in order to watch a Prince fall in love with a swan?

Alicia has not only suspended her body across discourses of politics and performance, but the discourse of her dancing body is suspended—exceptionally—above traditional stereotypes of a dancer's tenure and physical capacity. As a practice, ballet training is rigorous work and can have traumatic affects on the body. One doesn't need to watch Darren Aronofsky's 2010 film *Black Swan* to see violence among ballet dancers (although the 2013 acid attack of a dancer upon

[359] Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" 12.

[360] ibid., 15.

a director at the Bolshoi ballet company might suggest otherwise) to understand that ballet dancers inflict much of their own pain. Fashion icon Karl Lagerfeld, a man who has devoted a lifetime in understanding and conveying the female form through his own respective theatre—fashion—summarized ballet as an "extraordinary art" and the result of torturing the body into something graceful.[361] In addition to the ballet exercises, some dancers employ a battery of stretching and massage exercises that incorporate tools such as elastic stretch bans, foam rollers, and a variety of apparatuses—some of which can leave superficial bruises and broken capillaries—all to achieve a greater range of motion and flexibility in their limbs and feet.[362] Simultaneously to the constant improvement of one's own body, the dancer is working. Irina Kolesnikova, dancer for the Saint Petersburg Ballet dances at least 10 hours a day. "10 hours of non-stop physically demanding performance. I'm not the only one who thinks this is counterproductive. At some point the body just switches off."[363] Merill Ashley, former principal dancer with New York City Ballet, and who had her hips replaced as her 40th birthday present explained, "A dancer always has pain. You learn to live with it. What's weird is that when you're on stage you sometimes don't feel it. You're anaesthetized by the adrenaline and thrill."[364] This

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[361] Jess Cartner-Morley, "A dress to die for," *The Guardian*, May 29, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/may/30/chanel-tutu-glurdjidze-ballet.

[362] Jen Rini, "First State dancers use 'torture devices' to aid moves." *Delaware Online,* February 27, 2015, http://www.delawareonline.com/story/life/2015/02/26/first-state-dancers-use-torture-devices-aid-moves/24050463/.

[363] Dalya Alberge, "Ballet companies must stop wrecking our bodies, warns Russian star," *The Guardian*, April 30, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/apr/30/irina-kolesnikova-ballet-companies-wrecking-dancers-bodies-physical-limits?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Facebook

[364] Jonathan Romney, "Blood, sweat and murder at the ballet: The endless torture of Darren Aronofsky," *Independent*, January 8, 2011, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/blood-sweat-and-murder-at-the-ballet-the-endless-torture-of-darren-aronofsky-2176828.html

threshold where one does not feel the physical labor and pains of the practice, or at least when it is superseded by another sensation, can be likened to achieving salvation, nirvana, or perhaps the right kind of revolutionary devotion, where the labor and suffering becomes tertiary to the overall feeling or output of service.

Developing empathy

Although it is out of profound respect for Alicia that Raul Ruiz likens the dancer to the cyclops, in this magical realist examination of ballet as a devotional practice within the context of state surrogation of religion, Alicia's damaged eyes exacerbated by her practice lend themselves to be interpreted as a corporeal mortification of the body reflected in many religions, and certainly Catholicism which was the religion of the colonial project. Early in her career Alicia suffered detached retinas, those light-sensitive tissues that convert the light entering the eye via the cornea, pupil, and lens into impulses which are then sent through the optic nerve to the brain where they are interpreted into the images that one sees.[365] Detached retinas can be hereditary, but most likely they become detached via a process called Valsalva or concerted pressure being exerted. Athletes who experience head trauma can certainly instigate the valsalva process, but "retina detachments have occurred from roller coaster rides, swing-sets or exercise equipment and other motion related events."[366] The jumping, turning, lifting, and spinning dynamics of ballet certainly simulate such an effect.

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[365] Kierstan Boyd, "Retinal Detachment: What Is a Torn or Detached Retina?" *American Academy of ophthalmology*, March 1, 2016, http://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/detached-torn-retina

[366] Alan Glazier, "Retinal Detachment." *Shady Grove Eye and Vision Care*, https://www.youreyesite.com/common-eye-problems/retinal-detachment/

There is speculation regarding whether ballet caused Alicia's impaired vision.[367] In an interview with journalist Turnley Walker where he referred to Alicia's vision as "peculiar" and "perfect," Alicia denied that ballet could be the reason her retinas detached.[368] However, in my interview with Alicia's former partner, Jorge Esquivel, he speculated that the centrifugal force experienced in pirouettes—the rotation of the body on one leg paired with the head rapidly returning its gaze to a concentrated location—exacerbated her retinas and perhaps caused them to detach. Regardless of the *dis*-positioning of her eyes, Alicia regards her "strange eyes" as an asset to her: "Now I have to use more thought, more soul, to feel precisely where I am in space and time."[369]

In 2010, American Ballet Theatre commemorated Alicia's 90th birthday with a film retrospective of her career and performance of Don Quixote featuring three professional casts. In her article for the *New York Times,* Gia Kourlas reported that at a press conference Alicia said that she now dances with her hands.[370] While Kourlas referred to Alonso as no longer able to dance with her feet, dancing with her hands already proved a dependable methodology for the dancer. After a series of eye-surgeries both in New York and Havana when she was 19 years old, a bedridden Alicia had her head secured to the pillow by weights in order to deter any movement during her sleep. A Cuban doctor warned her that if she danced again her retinas would certainly

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[367] Reed Johnson, "Alicia Alonso, Cuba's living legend of ballet, " *LA Times*, June 12, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jun/12/entertainment/la-ca-ballet-nacional-de-cuba-20110612

[368] Alonso, *Dialogos con la danza*, 216.

[369] ibid., 218.

[370] Kourlas, "Still Dancing, Her Way, From the Soul."

become detached and she would be blind.[371] From her bed Alicia recalled the repertory of *Giselle*, and with her husband Fernando's help, she learned the eponymous role she would become famous for two years later.[372]

Modern dancer and choreographer Martha Graham has said: "A dancer dies twice—once when they stop dancing, and this first death is the more painful."[373] Whether or not Graham specifically considers the professional retirement from dancing as the "first death," or if she meant being physically incapable of dancing, it is a provocative quote considering that Alonso retired from the stage in 1995 at the age of 74.[374] When, according to Graham, did Alicia first "die?" This application of magical realism and ballet as a devotional practice allows us to consider Alicia's aging body and how her continued practice of state sanctioned ballet can be seen as a continued and embodied practice of a revolutionary commitment.

French philosopher and religious thinker Simone Weil's concept of decreation captures the sentiment and physical function of ballet practice as a mostly daily devotion of sacrificing the body that day for the purpose of a more perfect future performance but also in service to the Revolution. For Weil, decreation is an atonement process to God, who in his creation of mankind, has made himself less divine. In other words, creation of humanity is God's own

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[371] Walter Terry, *Alicia Alonso and Her Ballet Nacional de Cuba* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1981), 23.

[372] Terry, *Alicia Alonso and Her Ballet Nacional de Cuba*, 22.

[373] Maroosha Muzzaffar, "A Dancer Dies Twice': The Unique, Sad Challenge of Retiring From Ballet," *The Atlantic*, March 7, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/03/a-dancer-dies-twice-the-unique-sad-challenge-of-retiring-from-ballet/284187/

[374] Mireya Castaneda, "And Giselle inhabited us," *Granma*, Aug 29, 2013.

crucifixion.[375] Weil's God bears a resemblance to the way the Cuban Revolution of 1959 has operated in that she does not conceive of a wholly benevolent God:

> "God can love only himself. His love for us is love for himself through us. So, he who gives us being loves in us our consent not to be… Our being is nothing other than the will that we should consent not to be. He is forever begging from us the being which he gives. And he gives it so as to beg it from us.[376]

This is to say that decreation is the giving up of one's subjectivity and ego. John Caruana summarizes this concept plainly that "We are at our holiest when we imitate God's own denial of power for the sake of something else…To "decreate" is to cultivate within ourselves the capacity to refuse self-expansion. The death of the self qua ego gives birth to a more attentive and compassionate way of being in the world."[377] Similarly the Revolution seeks to consolidate the proletariat's subjectivity and instead emphasize the collective. This metaphor of the State functioning similarly to Weil's conception of a non-benevolent God—while generative in theorizing the dynamic of government power—it does not intend to account for the real violence the state issued as a means to decreate dissident Cubans, such as the *damas de blanco*, into cooperation with a Revolutionary process.

Ballet practice takes on its own attitude of decreation that is both physical and mental. Physically, ballet is an empathetic process that requires a daily acceptance of what the body can do that day. Ballet as a training regime requires physical and mental focus on behalf of the practitioner, often influencing how one rests and feeds their body in preparation for their next

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[375] Simone Weil and George A Panichas, *The Simone Weil Reader* (New York: McKay, 1977).

[376] Thomas Nevin, *Simone Weil: Portrait for an Exiled Jew* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 287.

[377] John Caruana, "The Return of the Repressed," review of *Simone Weil and Theology* by Lucian Stone and A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone, Los Angeles Review of Books, April 28, 2014, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/return-repressed/

practice. The body literally decreates. Building and tearing down muscle is cellular process called muscle hypertrophy where the body "repairs or replaces damaged muscle fibers where it fuses muscle fibers together to form new muscle protein strands or myofibrils."[378] Muscle hypertrophy as decreation, as a corporeal chastisement of sorts, is a process of reincarnation. Additionally, dancers can sport thin, sometimes skeletal, frames that result from their devotional practice. This aesthetic of decreation, of consolidating one's physical vessel to its most small and compact form, can be seen as a metaphor for divinity. There is also the mental and emotional work of decreation and the self-emptying of the mind and ego. There is very little room for ego in ballet class because it is an opportunity to go back to basic technical training. While ballet performance can be enhanced by costuming, lighting, and dramatic interpretation, these dynamics are not present in ballet class when you are surrounded by other dancers simultaneously watching you and working on their own devotional practice.

Indeed, Weil proposes a stripping away of the old self in order to become something new. "Once we have understood we are nothing, the object of all our efforts is to become nothing."[379] And this is what Christ does when he decreates and is crucified on the cross. He becomes nothing so that he may be divine and in alignment with God. The work of ballet practice as a devotion is similar in that when one abdicates their ego and masters the technique, they then open themselves to achieving greater capacities in their body and subsequently even greater dramatic demonstrations and performances. Their resurrection is more immanent after decreating their egos. For Weil, this attention to decreation is where grace comes in. "Grace fills empty

[378] BJ Schoenfeld, "The mechanisms of muscle hypertrophy and their application to resistance training," *Journal of Strength Conditioning Research* 24, no. 10 (2010): 2857-72.

[379] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (New York: Putnam, 1952), 80.

spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void."[380] The intention to decrease, to empty the self, makes a space for grace.

I met Jorge Esquivel in Belmont, California, in the San Francisco Bay Area. He teaches at his daughter's ballet school alongside his ex-wife who is also a former principle dancer with the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. Jorge is one of Alicia's most celebrated dance partners. He was 18 years old when first paired with the 48-year-old ballerina and national treasure. They danced together from 1969-1986. In our conversation I learn that Jorge is extremely grateful for the ballet education he received from the national school.

Jorge shared two stories with me about his experiences with Alicia, a valuable story to this chapter as they shared a close proximity onstage for 17 years. He recalls that Alicia was unlike any other ballerina he had danced with. She was very patient and generous with her knowledge of ballet. Her experience as a partner was unparalleled. Jorge describes her body as compact and muscular—surprisingly light—and demonstrates how he would lift her. When they toured together, Jorge recalls how Alicia always searched for a ballet class as soon as their plane landed in another country. Once Jorge's legs had reacted poorly to a long flight to France and didn't want to take ballet class upon arrival. Alicia searched the city for an immediate class and could not find one. She called Jorge from the lobby of their hotel, and along a railing they both took their own class in the lobby of the hotel.

Jorge remembers the looks and whispers dancers would make when they would see Alonso in ballet class. She was getting older, but no less fervent in her work in ballet class. Wrapped in layers of clothing that would slowly come off of her body, Alicia stood at the ballet barre with the intensity of a young student, that this vision elicited laughter from people who thought she was past her prime. Jorge didn't opine about Alicia's decision to keep dancing, rather he was moved by her conviction to her practice. Jorge weeps through both of these stories. He weeps at her devotion.

It is understandable how Alicia's extended stage career can be perceived as hubris, as ridiculous, and certainly lacking in grace. However, this project is interested in placing the body of Alicia within a Revolutionary discourse whose ideological premise is based on constant process. Gia Kourlas for the *New York Times* describes Alicia in 2010 as illusive to questions about retirement from her role as artistic director (today Alicia is 95 years old and is still the artistic director). Kourlas reports that it took three attempts, and some skepticism in accepting Alicia's sudden lapse in her otherwise fluent English, to answer that she has not even considered

[380] Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* 55.

developing her successor and that she is sure that whomever comes after her will be a capable person. While it would easy to characterize Alicia—and Fidel for that matter—as stubborn and indignant, in the context of revolutionary discourse, and particularly that popular revolutionary phrase "*Patria o muerte*!" ("Homeland or death!") there is a logic to the idea that Alicia and Fidel will literally continue to persist in their roles for Cuba and the Revolution until their respective deaths. Magical realism affords us the opportunity in the final section of this chapter to explore how ballet for Alicia has been a discursive antidote for this seemingly everlasting life.

Alicia has quipped on several occasions that she will live another one hundred years.[381] "I don't fear death, I don't deny death, and I don't like to think about death—why should I? It is a negation of life."[382] Alicia has also said that one should not focus on their age, rather to continue to pursue the things you want to do.[383] Her attitude toward death parallels Weil's concept of decreation as nothing more than a necessary process in order to achieve the ideal. This is also the essence of the 1959 Cuban Revolution's ideology and methodology. To keep moving and developing, what Alicia literally has done and continues to do with her body even if it is dancing with only her hands. As Cubans repurpose automobiles, so Alicia continues to repurpose her body. Her daily practice, met with giggles and whispers, is also a dynamic process of empathizing her body's waning capacities with the devotional practice of ballet. In other words, it is the *lack* of empathy that has the discourse of astonishment defaulting to limiting characterizations of Alicia as solely an obdurate entity. Rather, in this exploration of a discourse of development, and magical realism as a methodology for Latin America to shape its own

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[381] Both Gia Kourlas and Octavio Roca have respectively chronicled Alicia's quip about living for an additional one hundred years.

[382] Roca, *Cuban Ballet*, 236.

[383] Kourlas, "Still Dancing, Her Way, From the Soul."

narratives in embracing the strange amidst the real, Alicia is reincarnating herself. The discourse of development encapsulates the Revolutionary fortitude of "making-do." As chapter one cites empathy as the methodology for assimilating Cuban culture to the form of ballet technique, this chapter will examine kinesthetic empathy as a process of assimilating Revolutionary culture to the body.

At the same time Alicia is both an authorized body and an *authorizing* body. As a Revolutionary woman she is an ambassador as well as a dancer. However, Alicia's devotional practice of a discursive technique is an *authorizing* body. That is, her very body—in its dancing and post-dancing persistence—authorizes the state. This concept of the body's capability to inscribe, to articulate, is influenced by Susan Foster's text *Choreographing History*. In her introduction, Foster lays the groundwork for understanding the body's physical articulations not as "natural," universal expressions, but rather these articulations as emerging out of cultural practices that construct corporeal meaning.[384] She proposes that these articulations are a form of writing, a bodily writing.[385] Records of these habits and gestures do not only take a readily visual form such as film or photography (certainly they can), but these records of bodily traces exist in letters, manuals, clothing patterns, or hospital charts, et cetera.[386] As Chapter One suggests, these traces can also exist in the Cuban ballet technique. Foster emphasizes the importance of understanding that these fragments of a body, or "partial records," are constitutive of a larger historical moment. "They document the encounter between bodies and some of the discursive and institutional frameworks that touched them, operated on and through them, in different

[384] Susan Foster, *Choreographing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3.

[385] ibid., 4.

[386] ibid., 5.

ways," and as such, the historian intervenes in order to situate the fragments of the body they are interested in examining, tracing, reconstructing, or conveying.[387] In addition to this archeology examining Cuban ballet's technique and repertoire as constituted by Revolutionary discourse, this third chapter is interested in how Alicia's body is articulating a larger Revolutionary faith.

The process of the purposing and re-purposing of Alicia's body is best explained through the concept of kinesthetic empathy. Diedre Sklar defines it as a method of interpretation through which a viewer can proprioceptively "feel" or identify with another body using their own body's knowledge.[388] While this methodology is useful in perceiving my own dance practice and then conveying my ethnographic and participant observations of Cuban ballet technique and performance, it is Susan Foster's conception of kinesthetic empathy which serves as a model to understand the larger, structural dynamics of how Alicia adapts her aging and debilitating body to the practice of ballet. Julia Handschuh synthesizes Foster's conception of kinesthetic empathy as the "sensory experience felt in the body invoked by encountering another, be that "other" inert, active, human, or otherwise; and kinesthesia as the awareness of bodily orientation in space."[389] In this case, the "other" that Alicia is encountering throughout her years of devotional practice is the ever-changing circumstances of her body due to age and visual impairment.

For Foster, kinesthetic empathy begins in one's own body and the experience of that body. It is a sensate experience, a process of simulation, termed kinesthesia.[390] In its practice of

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387 Foster, *Choreographing History*, 5.

388 Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" 15.

389 Julia Handschuh, "'On finding ways of being:' Kinesthetic empathy in dance and ecology," in Performance on behalf of the environment, ed. Richard D. Besel and Jnan A. Blau (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 152.

390 Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 124.

ballet, Alicia's aging body is simulating ballet technique as she recalls it when fully-abled, while at the same time simulating a technique formed with the discourse of the Revolution. As Sklar has suggested, "movement is a corporeal way of knowing."[391] Alicia's simulation of the practice of ballet, and her recall, is informed by her decades of experience dancing ballet, *qua* her ways of knowing. Through kinesthetic empathy, Alicia is able to empathize with *herself* and empathize her mind to her devotional practice. As mentioned earlier, no two ballet classes and training experiences in technique are the same for a dancer. The dancer brings whatever their physical capabilities are *that* day and negotiate their body's capabilities with the technical training. Each day is an opportunity to "check in" the body. This is the same dynamic for Alicia's blind, aging body. She says, "Dance works on the total being. By that I mean the mind and the spirit as well as the purely physical parts, and I think of dance as the total antibiotic for healing."[392]

Following Foster's genealogy of the term kinesthesia, Alicia's process of kinesthetic empathy becomes also physiological. Kinesthesia, for Foster, both includes the sensation of the feeling of moving and also the sensations experienced perception of movement.[393] Kinesthesia then is the physiological dimension of the process of kinesthetic empathy, a dimension that Foster cites has become the recent subject of neuroscience with regard to the examination of mirror neurons."[394] "[These] neurons fire when the subject performs an action, and they also fire when the subject sees the action being performed."[395] In fact, in a 2009 issue of the *Journal of*

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[391] Diedre Sklar, "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" 11.

[392] Diane Telgen, *Notable Hispanic American Women* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1993), 8.

[393] Susan Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, 123.

[394] ibid., 10-11.

[395] ibid., 123.

Neuroscience, Italian researchers found that visual experience is not compulsory for the mirror system to develop and function.[396] Both "healthy sighted" subjects and congenitally blind subjects undertook MRI scans while listening to sounds of "hand-executed actions (such as cutting paper with scissors and hammering a nail) and environmental sounds (such as a rainstorm) as a control."[397] Results showed that when the blind subjects heard the hand-executed actions, their cortical brain networks responded in the same way that sighted people did. In other words, "neither visual experience nor visual imagery is required to form an abstract representation of objects."[398] For Alicia, this dynamic perhaps sustained her decision to keep dancing, because the physiological sensations remain the same.

This constant "tuning" of Alicia's body to the practice of the ballet is similar to Sara Ahmed's use of "orientation" as a phenomenological experience of the "spatiality of sexuality, gender, and race."[399] Within the framework of Foster's kinesthetic empathy, Alicia is contemporaneously orienting, and self-empathizing her body to new ways of knowing the practice of ballet as well as metaphorically empathizing with a State ideology that privileges physical labor (read decreation) in order to reach a Revolutionary enlightenment. Additionally, her work also forwards a Revolutionary discourse of making-do with what one has, *alias dictus* the discourse of development. In this understanding of kinesthetic empathy as a process of

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[396] Emiliano Ricciardi and Pietro Pietrini, "Do We Really Need Vision? How Blind People "See" the Actions of Others," *Journal of Neuroscience* 29, no. 31 (2009) 9719-9724, http://dx.doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0274-09.2009

[397] Mary Bates. "The Mind Is a Mirror: how blind people see the actions of others." *Scientific American,* November 10, 2009, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-mind-is-a-mirror/

[398] Bates. "The Mind Is a Mirror."

[399] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.

simulating the body's knowledge with its present circumstances, this dual—corporeal and ideological—empathy is simulating Revolutionary values of via her body. In other words, Alicia's dancing and continued exploration of ballet—not despite, but *because* of her "debilitating," and non-traditional body (displaced body)—becomes a rhetorical animation of Revolutionary values allowing her to suspend herself in perpetual state of creation as well as an abstract representation of decreation on behalf of the State. Alicia's neurons are not solely "firing" in the kinesthetic empathy of a devotional practice. In this practice and methodology of magical realism, each recalled tendu, or brush of the floor; is like a match striking against her cerebral cortex, firing neurons in a process of decreation. She is not a silly old woman. Like Prometheus, Alonso is using the light, the knowledge, of revolutionary processes and discursively sharing it with her fellow Cubans. She is a focused, and devoted practitioner, constantly attempting to set herself on fire. Immolation serving as the final act of decreation and homage to the Revolution.

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[400] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 4.

ideological—empathy is simulating Revolutionary values of via her body. Alicia's dancing and continued exploration of ballet—not despite, but *because* of her "debilitating," and non-traditional body (displaced body)—becomes a rhetorical animation of Revolutionary values allowing her to suspend herself in perpetual state of creation as well as an abstract representation of decreation on behalf of the State. In her practice and demonstration of Cuban ballet technique, Alicia is also a practicing prolepsis, "the evocation of a future-perfect."[401] Ballet and her body become devices for anticipation of a future-perfect, metabolizing the realities of old-age and vision problems, and instead presents "something in the future as if it already existed or occurred."[402]

[401] Mary Nooter Roberts, "Memory and Identity at the Threshold in Gregory Maqoma's *Beautiful Me*," *African Arts Winter* 44, no. 4 (2011), 81.

[402] ibid., 81.

Envoi

This archeology of knowledge does not conclude. The logic of such an approach, as introduced by Michel Foucault, develops from the necessity to avoid a singular, monovocal, positivist History. To suggest a conclusion would contradict the purpose of my project to analyze systems of thought rather than to arrive at some singular outcome or location of "Truth." Instead, I seek to present a series of practices in order to understand how discourses are formed. I propose that Cuban ballet technique, the repertoire of the *Ballet Nacional de Cuba*, and the dancing body of Alicia Alonso operate as objects of discourse and are therefore constituted by, reflect, and generate multiple systems of knowledge. Each chapter becomes an excavation of varying discursive formations that shape thought about ballet in Cuba.

My dissertation presents the histories and accomplishments of Cuban ballet in new ways. First, I highlight the concurrence of Cuban ballet technique's codification with its association and endowment from the State, and I re-frame Cuban ballet as a Revolutionary invention. Second, I juxtapose a sample of the BNC's repertoire with a context of collective labor, protest, and women's societal roles, and contrast the ballets' narratives with official state discourse and narratives of Revolutionary values. And third, I reinterpret Alicia Alonso's deferred retirement from the stage and propose that her devotion to the practice of ballet is a surrogation of culture to religion. My Foucauldian approach to each chapter not only traces a Revolutionary discourse in Cuban ballet, but it proposes a framework with which to imagine a potentiality for Revolutionary discourse that may prevail today.

Through the framework of my dissertation, I reinterpret the BNC and its methods to identify discursive formations that may influence future examinations of Cuban culture more broadly. Fidel Castro's recent death has instigated debates regarding the former president's

legacy and that serve as potential subjects of continued examination. Castro died on November 25, 2016, in Havana. The discourses of his death vary depending on the socio-political and economic spheres from which they derive.[403] For example, the headline in Fidel's *New York Times* obituary read, "Fidel Castro, Cuban Revolutionary Who Defied U.S., Dies at 90."[404] It is understandable that a major U.S. newspaper would choose to foreground Castro's political opposition to the U.S., but Fidel's reputation in Latin America and among other developing nations begets a different summation.[405] While *The New York Times* reported that in Miami, hundreds of Cuban Americans took to the streets of Little Havana to celebrate the night of Fidel's death, in South Africa a former secretary of the committee to end apartheid characterized Fidel as "a beacon of freedom."[406] Following such stories of grief, the BNC often referred to Fidel's fervent support of Cuban ballet, and in December 2016, Alicia Alonso refused to talk about Fidel's death because it would make her cry.[407]

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[403] Tracey Eaton, "Cuban leader Fidel Castro's mixed legacy," *Al Jazeera*, November, 26, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2016/11/cuba-leader-fidel-castro-dead-90-161126053354637.html

[404] Anthony DePalma, "Fidel Castro, Cuban Revolutionary Who Defied U.S., Dies at 90," *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/26/world/americas/fidel-castro-dies.html

[405] Al Jazeera reported that the U.S. spent over one billion dollars in assassination attempts and coups, trying but failing to remove Fidel from power. See Tracey Eaton, "Cuban leader Fidel Castro's mixed legacy," Al Jazeera, November, 26, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2016/11/cuba-leader-fidel-castro-dead-90-161126053354637.html

[406] Lizette Alvarez, "Miami's Cuban Exiles Celebrate Castro's Death," *The New York Times*, November 26, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/26/us/miami-cubans-fidel-castro.html and Mac Maharaj, "Fidel Castro, a South African Hero," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/30/opinion/fidel-castro-a-south-african-hero.html?_r=0

[407] Amelia Duarte de la Rosa, "El dolor de Alicia Alonso/The Pain of Alicia Alonso," *Granma*, December 4, 2016,

On the island, approaches to Fidel's legacy have taken practical and legislative directions. In December 2016, Cuba's National Assembly decreed as per Fidel's wishes that no monument or public place would be named in honor of the Cuban leader.[408] Instead, as articulated poignantly by Fidel's brother and current Cuban president Raul Castro, it is Fidel's "fighting spirit" that will persist in the conscience of all revolutionaries. "The best way to pay homage to El Comandante - the commander - is to follow his concept of revolution."[409] While new Cuban law prohibits state monuments and statues dedicated to Fidel, the law does not keep artists from using Fidel's "figure" in artistic and cultural production, as well as retaining and revering portraits and photos of him already hanging in offices, places of study, and public institutions.[410] The posthumous caveat that Fidel's image only be available for cultural production and education reflects an overall point raised in my dissertation concerning assimilation as a Revolutionary process, as such uses of Fidel's image will resist the purported fixity of a monument in favor of always-changing cultural discourse.

Nearly one month after these decisions, U.S. President Barack Obama sanctioned repeal of the 22-year-old "wet foot/dry foot" policy that permitted Cuban immigrants without visas to remain in the U.S. if they made it to American soil. The reason for terminating this policy was to avoid Cubans risking their lives across the 90-mile stretch of ocean between Cuba and Florida, as

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[408] Sarah Marsh and Marc Frank, "Cuba passes law that bans naming sites after Fidel Castro," Reuters, December 27, 2016, http://www.granma.cu/hasta-la-victoria-siempre-fidel/2016-12-04/el-dolor-de-alicia-alonso-04-12-2016-01-12-56
http://mobile.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSKBN14G1N9

[409] ibid.

[410] ibid.

well as to equalize the citizenship process for all Cubans hoping to immigrate to the U.S.[411] Ballet dancers, athletes, and medical professionals have steadily defected from Cuba since the 1960s. While Cuban dancers' modes of defection are mostly less treacherous than taking to the sea, the new U.S. policy will undoubtedly make it more difficult for dancers to remain in the U.S. Clearly, here is a topic for ongoing study.

An ethnography of dancers who have defected would contribute to a growing literature of the Cuban diaspora in the U.S., and would be a logical next step for me, in terms of tracing the artistic, personal, and political circumstances of their exile. Such a study would theorize Cuban ballet technique in the context of exile and how dancers and ballet companies alike may leverage their political asylum for audience interest and economic gain. This prospective study would also survey the technical and performative assimilations Cuban-trained dancers might make to their practice as they encounter and collaborate with dancers and techniques from around the world.

Additionally, I would like to develop understanding of processes of assimilation as a tool to theorize and explore the way discourses of the Revolution interface with artistic creation, and the resulting plurality of cultural identities that an individual may choose to articulate depending upon the safety and stakes of their surroundings.[412] For example, in the wake of Fidel's 1961 speech promoting unflagging support of cultural activities like dance so long as they were "for the Revolution," I posit that the success of the BNC has as much to do with its dancers' ability to adapt and respond to the capricious nature of the 1959 state regime, as it does with the ballet

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[411] Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Frances Robles, "Obama Ends Exemption for Cubans Who Arrive Without Visas," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/12/world/americas/cuba-obama-wet-foot-dry-foot-policy.html?action=click&contentCollection=Opinion&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article

[412] Cf. Homi Bhabha's thoughts on exile in *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

school's growing international acclaim.[413] This query proposes that the flexibility of artists to shift their focus in response to a dominant power's pressure epitomizes Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, or the ability to see a culture as consisting of opposing perceptions and dimensions. His concept of ambivalence captures a duality with which Cuban artists could identify and reiterate official state culture, while also being able to identify with a national culture in which there is potential for creative agency.

Both projects—the dancers who have defected and the further development of assimilation as a Revolutionary process—will continue to utilize the discursive methods of the archeology of knowledge presented here. My next studies will reach beyond quantitative or "Historical" summations of the impact of art-making in Cuba, and instead will account for the labor and practice of Cubans as negotiating an ever-shifting landscape of Revolutionary culture and politics.[414] These proposed studies will make way for alternative interpretations of cultural expression as well as the realities of everyday life, and theorize how artist-citizens as practitioners and state institutions experience creative processes as a continual remaking of self and nation against the hazards and constraints that may limit or regulate them.

The months of writing this dissertation in 2016 have been an auspicious time for U.S./Cuba relations, and my project's significance delves into the invariable curiosity that will burgeon as these two nations are reacquainted. When U.S. media discourse regarding Cuba perpetually leans into a nostalgia for those halcyon days when the U.S. monopolized Cuba's economy, how can political and cultural collaboration be achieved? What can socialism teach

[413] Fidel Castro, *Palabras a los intelectuales*, speech at the National Library, Havana, June 30, 1961, in *Revolución, artes y letras*, 14.

[414] Pérez, Louis A. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

capitalism? How might those classic American cars be more than a vestige of U.S. presence in Cuba, and rather be the result of Cuban labor and innovation? And finally, how will the radically different U.S. presidency of 2017-2020 affect any and all such dreams and expectations?

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