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Where the Wild Things Go: Tourism and Ethnic Longing in the Theatre of Rodolfo Santana

Abstract

Tapping into the performative intricacies of tourist activity and showcasing the negotiations of performed ethnicity in the implicit contrasts between tourists and the people they travel to see, Latin American and U.S. Latino theatre artists use the tourist character or theme to investigate the cultural negotiations marking contemporary social life. This work parallels critical theory that investigates the tourist as an improvisatory player in trans-regional interactions and unpacks the tourist-“native” binary to revise conceptions of people and cultures that travel. As exemplified in two plays by Rodolfo Santana (Venezuela), artists deploy the tourist theme to critique culturalism, that is, to use the term coined by Arjun Appadurai, “identity politics at the level of the nation-state” (15). Santana’s plays *Mirando al tendido* (1992) and *Influencia turística en la inclinación de la Torre de Pisa* (1996) highlight the interaction of tourism with its designated other, the ethnic, to critique the concept of *abolengo*, or nation-based ancestry or blood-line, as the authenticating mechanism of a particular cultural practice or group. Santana’s work—along with that of his cohort—also proposes that staging tourism harbors insights into the everyday that might generate more salutary social arrangements.

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In June 2002 while wandering through the city of Tarazona in the Spanish province of Zaragoza, I stumbled into a large octagonal bullring, whose graveled performance space was surrounded not by stands for aficionados but by what appeared to be multi-storied apartments. As an unschooled tourist, I was struck by the apparent metamorphosis of a site for the public spectacle of Spain's proverbial *fiesta nacional* into a freshly painted structure with the aura of gentrified condos. While searching for markers of Spain's hybrid cultural history in the town's renowned Mudejar and Jewish sites, it was hard not to read this edifice as the sign of homogenizing forces of late twentieth century globalization. But I later learned that this 1792 structure had always housed apartments. It was financed by eight wealthy families whose dwellings faced into the ring, and the stands for those without access to the apartments leaned against the building's walls. According to Carrie Douglass, the conception of the Spanish bullring as a "separate and exclusively civic public building" came at the turn of the nineteenth century (219), which was precisely the era when the Tarazona bullring was built. Thus the curious space that I had come across marked one moment in the gradual separation of the Spanish bullring from its spectators, the professionalizing of the bullfighter, and the creation of class hierarchies among the Spanish *corrida de toros* 'bullfight' audience. My

brief stop in this ring pointed to complex histories of public spectacles, audiences, and nation building as well as to the de-centered spectatorship of tourists who impinge on sites of cultural performance, knowing or not what they see.

These meditations continued in Havana in June 2003, where University of Kansas colleagues and I alternated roles as scholars conducting research with those of ordinary tourists led by an official guide. One morning we witnessed the show-and-tell performance of a Yoruba dance at one of the multiple venues for cultural tourism that arose in post-Soviet Cuba. At the end of the show the costumed dancer-actors invited the Kansas visitors to dance with them, while on the other side of the open-windowed doorway to the street, a growing gathering of young *habaneros* watched with undisguised amusement. As a child of the Caribbean who grew up dancing in Puerto Rico, I resisted this invitation to perform as a *gringa* tourist and revel in staged spontaneity. But the momentary discomfort advanced my musings on communal cultural spectacles, tourist practices, and the nostalgia for ethnic rootedness where they appeared to intersect. Beyond providing essential revenue in post-Soviet Cuba, what did this spectacle mean in its new context? Who was performing, who was watching, and how did shifts in perspective between the designated spectators inside the building and the impromptu audience watching from outside alter the cultural significance of the show? What were the impact and role of the tourists in whatever ephemeral community this staged event convened? Tourist studies of the past two decades have unpacked the timeworn binaries that, as Kjell Olsen points out, contrast the tourist, the modern, the copy, and disengagement on the one hand with ethnic authenticity, tradition, and communal intimacy on the other (176). By contrast, new critical work on tourism and travel investigates the potential agency of the tourist, conceives of tourism as a performance that includes the adoption of tourist roles and “stages” or sites of tourist activity (Edensor 60, 63), discredits the binary opposition between superficial, unthinking tourists and allegedly more sophisticated and serious travelers (Culler 157-58), and investigates the role of tourists and tourism spectacles in the potentially salutary making and re-making of cultural arrangements (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 221-23).

Tapping into the performative intricacies of tourist activity

and showcasing the negotiations of performed ethnicity in the implicit contract—cultural, political, or economic—between tourists and the people and locales they travel to see, late twentieth-century Latin American and U.S. Latino playwrights and performance artists such as Eduardo Rovner (Argentina), Victor Hugo Rascón Banda (Mexico), Jorge Acame (Argentina), Guillermo Gómez Peña and Coco Fusco (U.S.), Marco Antonio de la Parra (Chile), Alina Troyano (a.k.a. Carmelita Tropicana, U.S.), and Rodolfo Santana (Venezuela)—two of whose plays I examine here—have used the tourist character, theme, or motif in their work to investigate the intricate cultural negotiations marking contemporary social life. This artistic work parallels critical theory that investigates the figure of the tourist as an improvisatory player in cross-cultural and trans-regional interactions by unpacking stereotypes of the modern tourist as the unthinking visitor who tramples on local customs with disrespect or consumes cultural events and objects in narcissistic pursuit of some self-redeeming authenticity. Contemporary tourism and tourists appear in Latin American fiction, poetry, and film as well. In one chapter of the novel *Las posibilidades del odio* (1978), for example, María Luisa Puga (Mexico) investigated the complex relationship between an upper class Mexican student-tourist and a struggling Abaluya-Kenyan university student that he hires as a guide for a road trip from Nairobi to Mombasa. Puga's narrative examines the impact of the evolving tourist-guide contract on the changing assumptions and behavior of its participants and imagines, if briefly, more liberating social arrangements between them. The 2000 short story "Santa Fe" by Alejandra Costamagna (Chile) brings a middle-class Chilean tourist to the United States for the first time, where, within hours of her arrival, her comfortable, class-based assumptions are shaken through an encounter in an Albuquerque bus station with a migrant family returning to Mexico. The supposed common heritage these characters share through language only marks the experiential chasms between them. Similarly, the globetrotting lyrical speaker in the poetry selection "Wekufe in NY," from the 1995 collection *Karra Maw'n y otros poemas*, by Clemente Riedemann (Chile) travels from his home in southern Chile to New York where he struggles to discern his place as a tourist within the class and cultural hierarchy of Latin American immigrants and U.S.

Latinos in the city.¹ The poems' mix of English, German, French, Mapuche, and chilenismo slang with standard Spanish underscores the uneven cultural, social, linguistic, and class identifications of this intellectual Chilean in New York. Whereas Puga, Costamagna, and Riedemann explore the potential for tourism to change the class, gender, or ethnic self-apprehension of the tourist, Fernando Pérez's acclaimed 1998 Cuban film, *La vida es silbar* 'Life is to Whistle', suggests through reappearing German and U.S. characters that international visitors can not only provide a material life-line (a common motif in post-Soviet Cuban literature) but also generate behavior-changing insight for the "locals" who choose to engage with them.

All of these works deploy the tourist figure or theme in pursuit of a larger critique of culturalism, that is, to use the term as coined by Arjun Appadurai, of "identity politics mobilized at the level of the nation-state" (15) or, I would add, at the level of any exclusionary performance of communal power rooted in a particular version of ethnicity. In unpacking the tourist-native person binary, and the accompanying oppositions of the modern and the derivative with the traditional and the authentic, these turn-of-the-millennium works revise conceptions of both tourism and culture, a change marked as well in the theoretical reassessments of travel, touring, and culture encompassed in such contemporaneous critical activity as James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997), Chris Rojek and John Urry's *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (1997), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (1998), or the academic journal *Tourist Studies*, launched in 2001. Although not focused specifically on the tourist figure, contemporaneous work by Nestor García Canclini and George Yúdice, among others, theorizes the changing dynamic between the global or the international and the local in Latin America's cultural production.² Although the tourist character offers a fruitful subject position in fiction, poetry, and film, theatre on the tourist theme is conceptually enlarged by the implicit connections between tourism and performance. Through meta-performative strategies, theatre about tourism can enact the process of cross-cultural interaction in the real-time of a staged play that highlights the performative qualities of the tourist experience and underscores its imbrications in the

performance of culture. The performative facets of tourism include 1) the idea of the tourist as an assumed, if variegated, role; 2) the conception of tourism as a staged activity that requires putting on a show, in which local citizens may self-consciously don the role of “native” people; 3) the view of tourism as an activity, like theatre, with a shifting relationship to the everyday; and 4) the complex audience-performer dynamic at play in both tourism and theatre. Both critical and artistic inquiries into tourism find it a rich arena for reflecting on the making and unmaking of culture in an interconnected world where cultures, like the tourists, migrants, or exiles that enact them, travel, and where inheritance-based, exclusionary concepts of ethnic community are open to revision.³

Two one-act plays by Venezuelan playwright Rodolfo Santana (b. 1944)—*Mirando al tendido* ‘Looking into the Stands’ (1992) and *Influencia turística en la inclinación de la Torre de Pisa* ‘Tourists Influence on the Inclination of the Tower of Pisa’ (1996)—mine these connections between tourism and theatre to highlight the interaction between tourism and its designated other, the ethnic. Santana, whose work has been recognized with national and international awards, is Venezuela’s most prolific, artistically experimental, and widely performed contemporary playwright.⁴ His work of the past two decades is characterized by farcical humor, irreverence toward cultural or ideological sacred cows, and attention to transformative moments in individual or community perceptions or behavior and the potential of these insights for more salutary social arrangements. Much of his theatre deploys the metaphor of the play-within-the-play to investigate the role of performance events in everyday life and their relationship to the quest for community, for example, in a television broadcast in *Santa Isabel del Video* ‘Saint Isabel of the Video,’ cabaret and cross-dressing in *Baño de damas* ‘The Ladies Room,’ or sports ritual in *Mirando al tendido*. Like the work of many contemporary Latin American playwrights, Santana’s recent theatre often eschews explicit regional or national markers in plays with an internationalist air whose action might unfold in any contemporary locale on the planet, such as a television studio, a hotel, an urban neighborhood, an amusement park, an asylum, or a public restroom. When he does address the culturally specific it is not to affirm a particular experience of ethnicity but rather to scrutinize

identity talk itself. In *Mirando al tendido* and *Influencia turística en la inclinación de la Torre de Pisa*, Santana uses the tourist character and theme to illuminate an intricate exchange between tourism and its othered object of desire, the ethnic. Tourists execute important functions in both plays, which also showcase and critique the concept of *abolengo*, that is, of (nation-based) ancestry or blood line, as the foundational and authenticating mechanism of a particular cultural practice or national “native” group.

Mirando al tendido mines the links between theatre and tourism in an impromptu dialogue between a bull and a bullfighter during a *corrida*, portrayed as an eroding public spectacle entrenched in debates about authenticity and nation. The play situates tourism in the ritual’s decline and its renewal.⁵ The simple dramatic action unfolds in a contentious, ironic, humorous, and poignant reflection on the bullfighting tradition between the injured *torero*, El Niño, and bull Florentino, even as they fight on to their deaths. The set represents a modest bullring, with the play audience occupying the stands, and the action opens with the bullfighter and his assistants engaged in the traditional preliminaries: El Niño kneels in prayer before an image of the Virgen de Macarena, then strides to the center of the ring and takes the cape and sword from his helper, before positioning himself behind the *burladero* ‘safety barrier’ to await the arrival of the bull, signaled by sounds of the *pasodoble*, that is, the two-metered music and dance form traditionally played during bullfights. Although the dialogue drives the action, throughout the play actors, including those playing the *torero*’s assistants, periodically execute the bullfight’s elaborate, stylized choreography. Recurrent sound effects include audience olés, snorts and grunts from the bull, and periodic passages from *pasodobles* or the *cante hondo*, that is, the deep-voiced singing style that often accompanies flamenco dance.⁶

The play’s ambiguous title signals the spectacle’s two-way dynamic, as it evokes either the fearless *torero* “looking into the stands”—a stance that ascribes courage and honor to the bullfighter—or, conversely, the audience watching the prone bullfighter or bull *tendido* ‘laid out’ by the encounter.⁷ The fact that the piece identifies many of these stands’ occupants as tourists, and thus casts its own audience as tourists as well, forges a tie between contem-

porary tourism and a culture's representation of itself. As a ritual entwined with the cultural history and identity stories of one nation (reverberating as well in its former colonies) and as a cultural spectacle that has long drawn tourists in search of adventure and the exotic, the bullfight showcases the interaction between tourism and culturalism in a contemporary world searching for evaporating authenticities. Stage directions in *Mirando al tendido* mark this bullring as the ruinous palimpsest of just such a dying tradition: "A bullring that presents its decadence in full bloom" (20). Stains and holes mar the ring's wooden structures, whose peeling paint reveals additional underlying layers of deteriorated colors. Paralleling the site's decline, the aging bullfighter, with the ironic moniker El Niño, displays "a certain thickness of the abdomen" (21). If the modern rendition of the bullfight is among the most stylized and scripted of national spectacles, *Mirando al tendido* edits that script through improvisation made possible by the ritual's palpable decay, its status as a cultural ruin that juxtaposes past and present in the imminence of its own disappearance, and its consequent aura of reflexive, critical nostalgia.⁸ Thus El Niño's conversation with Florentino, the bull, unfolds in the ruinous "detained time" produced when the bull gores El Niño in the femur and deposits him, gently, in the sand (21). This time-out for a debate that delays death underscores the link between the framed cultural ritual and the tourist-audience experience, both of which unfold in a time conceived as separate from the everyday life with which they in fact interact.

During this time out that frames the play's action, El Niño and Florentino exchange conflicting versions of the bullfighting tradition, a colloquy that humanizes the highly informed bull sharing his own cultural memory of the *tauromaquia*, that is, the archive of the art and technique of bullfighting: "the teachings transmitted from cow to cow, and they inculcate the calves" (24). Florentino's citation of this counter-tradition challenges the one subscribed to by El Niño, as the animal informs the human, for example, that it's widely known that La Virgen de Macarena actually hates bullfights and always shows up to comfort the bulls. Florentino reveals that bulls, too, have utopian communal dreams—retirement to the Prado Azul (Blue Meadow) with plenty of cows—and chides El Niño for killing his cousin Clavelino who left behind seven orphaned calves and two

widowed cows (31). He also opens El Niño's eyes to the brutal practices that disadvantage the bull, such as needles in the groin, Vaseline in the eyes designed to blur vision, or debilitating kicks in the kidneys prior to the meet. It may be tempting to contextualize this personification in international animal rights and anti-bullfighting movements, for example years of debate in Venezuela leading to the ban on the *corrida* in 2007. Others read the play as an equalizing meditation between aggressors and underdogs on the mysteries of life and destiny of death (Lovera de Sola 13-14) or credit the bull with instructing El Niño in the authentic tradition to restore the honor of a death with dignity ascribed to the bullfights of yesteryear (Sánchez). But the critical nostalgia that envelops this play's portrayal of bullfighting as a dying tradition to which tourists bear witness also challenges unexamined longings for nationalist discourses of ethnicity.

The conception of the play action as a debate among adversaries about the "true" tradition of bullfighting—above all about how *tore-ros* should carry themselves and interact with the audience and with the bull—points to the status of cultural performances as dynamic, changing spectacles, a repertoire of multiple performative conventions whose selection can vary widely with the time and place of their execution. As Douglass details in *Bulls, Bullfighting, and Spanish Identities*, bullfighting in Spain encompasses not only the stylized and standardized performance script known as the *corrida de toros* but also a wide range of local taurine festivals, spectacles, and games that vary in size and involve the competitive interaction of humans with bulls (3-13). The same can be said of the bullfight's manifestations in Latin America, for example in Venezuela where the most distinctive local contest involving bulls is the *coleo*, a contest in which men on horseback try to overcome a bull by pulling its tail. References in the play to El Niño's birth in America and to their shared old word roots—Spain is the "Mecca" for bullfighters, El Niño affirms (30) and Florentino traces his ancestors to a fierce line of Iberian bulls—highlight these variations. The play makes clear that this particular performance of the *corrida*, in fact, unfolds far from Spain in a small-time, regional patron saint *fiesta* in Latin America. But a debate between adversaries about the meaning and value of bullfighting also points to the role of the variegated spec-

tacle as a centerpiece for a two-century old contentious national conversation, not only in literature and the arts but also in political and social life, about the identity of a Spanish national community. As Douglass details (91-116), the performance festivals of the bulls in Spain “serve as a vehicle to talk about and define the *relationships* that are ‘Spain’” (11; italics in the original), for example debates between nationalist advocates of the *corrida* as the *fiesta nacional* and internationalist detractors of the spectacle concerned with Spain’s status as a modern European nation.⁹ In identifying the bullfight as a cultural performance whose enactment is of a piece with long-standing debates about the identity of a nation, I’m not suggesting that Santana’s play has something concrete to say about Spain. Rather I’m arguing that the play employs the bullfight as a metaphor for the dynamic among its participants and its audience embodied in any cultural spectacle with culturalist claims, that is, that purports to represent the “authentic” identity of a people.

In *Mirando al tendido* this dynamic is enacted in the relationship between the ethnically marked performers—those claiming the authenticity of their *abolengo* or blood line—and their hybrid audience of aficionados and tourists. Although both El Niño and Florentino sport their ethnic credentials, Florentino is the play’s designated “wild thing,” modernity’s 490 kilo other, “dark as jet, strong as a wall,” that the tourist audience in particular has come to see and who barrels into the ring “like a locomotive of fury” (20). Florentino’s imposing size and larger-than-life grunts underscore even more than do El Niño’s choreographed moves the physicality of the spectacle to which the audience responds with validation or disapproval. Some stagings of the play have showcased the corporeality of the bull and its otherness from its surroundings, for example in a 2001 Valencia production in which the actor portraying Florentino is covered with an oversized mask representing only the bull’s head and neck but that covers most of the human performer’s body or a 2000 Cantabria production in which Florentino’s body is represented by a large moveable structure on wheels, topped with a bull’s head on the front and propelled from behind by the actor playing the role.¹⁰ These productions follow the play script in portraying the bull’s exoticism as distinctively physical. As the spectacle’s embodied cultural other, the bull is also the play’s vociferous

advocate for bullfighting's racial and cultural purity who stakes his own authority as the guardian of authenticity. Even as El Niño traces his credentials to his father from Seville, "the cradle of the bullfight" (38), it is Florentino who bemoans the tradition's miscegenation in the New World, and boasts of his *abolengo* 'blood line' as a *miura*, a prestigious breed of Iberian bulls. He critiques the bullfighter's moves as devoid of a defined ethnic style, like paella that combines the "virtuosity of a Manolete with the paranoia of a cockroach in the middle of a highway full of traffic" (28), and above all lacking in manly courage.¹¹ Thus Florentino also gives voice to the gendered biases of the most nationalist interpretations of the *corrida*—for example those of the Civil War and Franco era—as he coaches Florentino in bodily *hombria* or manliness and critiques his performance style as both counter to tradition and unmanly. El Niño, Florentino asserts, runs with "feminoid steps" to hide behind the *burladero* after nailing the *banderillas* 'barbed spears' into the bull. All he lacks to be hired as a soap opera heroine, Florentino adds, is some "little shrieks" (50).¹² The Cantabria staging of the play, in which the role of the bull was played by the woman actor, María Vidal, teased out the play's critique of Florentino's gendered, nationalist nostalgia. In the Peninsular context of women bullfighters' rising star, casting a woman in the role of the bull offers an additional interpretive layer to the spectacle.¹³

The play portrays Florentino's gender prejudices as the given of his *abolengo* and casts him as an otherwise endearing bull whose intelligence, sensitivity, and underdog role incline a play audience to grant him a platform and even accept his version of the *torero*. But his essentialist insistence on the ties between national purity and *abolengo* caution against romanticizing the projected wild things of modernity's yearnings for authentic others and cast his culturalist version of national memory in a more critical light. Both characters embrace their scripted destinies as they fight to the death. But the play grants equal contemporary relevance to the aging bullfighter who chastises Florentino for blindness to change: "All of those old cow wives tales they've given you see the bullfight in the olden days and since you don't accept change, you suffer and see soccer fans in the stands" (52). El Niño defends the changing artistry of the *torero* over tradition, a cultural ritual open to the stylistic originality of

the bullfighter. His affirmation that the artistic quality of the fiesta remains “vibrant” (52) showcases the remaking of culture through performance, as does both characters’ dying recognition that the imagined community embodied in the spectacle—the Gran Plaza for El Niño, the Prado Azul for Florentino—is brought to life only through the ritual’s performance.

Although we perceive them only through their frequent “Olés,” the tourists comprising the lion’s share of the bullfight’s audience embody the shifting perspectives that, as I’ve noted, are implicit in the play’s title, *Mirando al tendido*, between the bullfighter looking into the stands and those in the stands watching somebody laid out in the ring. The fact that the play’s title references the audience at all underscores the spectators’ centrality to the ritual, which is reinforced by the characters’ multiple allusions to their presence. But by casting them as tourists, the play locates this audience in an ambiguous relationship to the ritual whose status it unpacks. The tourists are adventure-seeking spectators lacking the cultural knowledge to be full-fledged aficionados, but their presence and intermittent responses to the spectacle give body and bear witness to the social change that undercuts nationalist nostalgia and reconfigures a dying tradition in a new light. For the purist Florentino the fact that the spectators are tourists—trainloads, he notes, of inebriated Italians, Gringos, Japanese, and Swedes (26) bearing wineskins and flamenco hats—signals the ritual’s decline. He rejects their Olés because they’re pronounced with the wrong accents, and when some of the Olés sound like “Gool” he surmises that some tourists think they’re at a soccer match. These impostors, in the bull’s view, outnumber the true aficionados and erode the *corrida’s* ethnic power. This exchange parallels debates in actual bullfighting culture about who qualifies as a true aficionado and those between soccer fans and bullfighting fans about the preeminence of their respective sports.¹⁴ Florentino the bull, with his vast historical knowledge and prescriptive view of the performance, most resembles what Timothy Mitchell describes as the elite aficionados of Spanish bullfighting, those who possess “specialized knowledge . . . esoteric vocabulary, long years of experience” and “discriminating eye” necessary to appreciate “the complex technical aspects of the bullfighting craft” (3). But while recognizing communal conventions of judging the behavior between the *torero*

and the bull, both Douglass and Sarah Pink provide more heterogeneous accounts of the actual spectators for taurine games. Douglass underscores the social class mix in the typical bullfight audience, and Pink argues that, in practice, the term *aficionado* in fact describes “a variety of degrees of understanding, knowledge and interest in bullfighting” (86). In this spirit, El Niño in Santana’s play is more tolerant of the range of fans in his audience as long as they’re present to validate his performance.

Mirando al tendido blurs the boundaries between the tourist and the culturalist *aficionado*, between the audience shouting *Olé* in foreign accents and the cultural purist Florentino who dismisses their participation in the ritual of *abolengo*. In his by now classic study, Jonathan Culler defined the tourist as a literal reader of cultural signs, somebody interested in “everything as a sign of itself” and as “an instance of a typical cultural practice” who searches for “signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behavior, exemplary Oriental scenes” (155). In this vein, on the one hand Florentino, the defender of *abolengo*, critiques the tourist fans for appropriating such signs indiscriminately: wearing their flamenco hats and carrying their wine skins to a bullfight, shouting “*Olé*” and “*Go!*” interchangeably, and confusing the bullring the flamenco stage, the bolero nightclub, or the soccer field. But when El Niño is buoyed up by the scores of *Olés* as evidence of a superior performance, Florentino, much like the stereotypical tourist in Culler’s account, reads their incorrect accents, which he mimics for comic effect, as the transparent sign of their “typical touristness” and consequent ignorance of the show: “what do those jerks know about *corridos*?” (34). Denigrating tourists in order to distinguish oneself from them, Culler argues, is integral to tourism itself rather than outside of it (156), and in this light Florentino is behaving like a typical tourist. The presence in the play of tourist spectators who “go native” with spontaneous *Olés* or *Go!*s, moreover, undermines the notion of a tourist as a mere (mis)reader of signs and points to the connections between the tourist presence and the rethinking of a cultural practice. In conceiving of that practice as a variety of adopted roles (rather than as a particular kind of person), Tim Edensor (drawing on the work of Urry) notes the range of distinct ways in which tourists may view a particular place or event (73). Olsen, drawing on Bruner, calls this

phenomenon the “heteroglot character of sightseeing” and suggests that such differences among tourists may also characterize their participation in other activities (Olsen 171). Although some tourist attractions present staged dramas that “coerce visitors into performing with the paid actors” (much like the call for spectators to join the Yoruba dancers in the Havana performance I described in opening this piece), Edensor argues that more often tourist activity unfolds in scenarios where tourists mingle with locals (64). Such is the case of the tourists attending the bullfight in *Mirando al tendido*, a scripted performance to be sure, but one whose primary intended audience is not them. Edensor would likely characterize this as a “heterogeneous tourist space,” that is, one that provides a stage “where transitional identities may be performed alongside the everyday enactments of residents” (64). Olsen suggests that tourists who elect to join in to such local events—“present but not a part”—rather than simply watching, don’t fully retain the “social characteristics usually ascribed to tourists” but actually “become something else” (171).

As the site of a cultural ritual staged for a heterogeneous audience of tourists and locals in a transitional site that may soon morph from a bullring into a soccer field, *Mirando al tendido* opens up ways for imagining such a “something else,” for example, new social arrangements between the ritual participants: performers and audience, aficionados and visiting tourists. In a similar vein, the play questions the proverbial division between modern self-reflection and communal intimacy implicit in the opposition of the touristic with the ethnic. In their very role as unschooled participants, the tourists in the play generate the reexamination of the ritual embodied in the debate between El Niño and Florentino and in the consequent inversions that blur the roles of bull and *torero*. At the same time, the audience in the *tendido* physically frames the ring, thus enclosing it in an intimate space shared only by its participants of actors and responsive audience. Toward the play’s end as the bullfighter and the bull near death, the very vibration of the tourist-aficionado audience that El Niño feels envelop him and the bull in their life-into-death communion and give way to an intensified scenario of church bells and “angelical” Olés that mark their transition to the imagined idyllic Grand Plaza and Blue Meadow (61).

In the play text description of this scene, the characters' awareness of the audience intensifies the intimate solitude of the ritual's most direct participants and points to a revised role for tourists, such as the one suggested by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. "Visitors," she argues, "by their very presence, by sheer dint of their numbers, and their roles as witnesses, can serve to ratify what they see. ... there is a synergy between the production of the site and the role of tourists in giving it an even greater degree of reality than it might otherwise have" (223). Some stagings of Santana's play have teased out this synergistic intimacy between audience and performers, for example in a 1998 English language adaptation directed by Paul Verdier at the Stages Theatre in Hollywood. Verdier created a bullring in the small garden behind the theatre, with an arc-shaped arena containing tiered bleachers and a painted backdrop of the stands filled with Latino fans. Although at first glance the choice of Latinos as the piece's painted audience for a performance in Los Angeles appears to contradict the play text's insistence that many spectators of El Niño and Florentino's encounter are to be tourists, Polly Warfield's review implies that this staging captured the point, that is, the critique of culturalist *abolenço* implicit in the piece's hybrid cultural exchange: "The play itself is a mosaic, having undergone an alchemical process of blended styles and ethnicities brought into focus" (Warfield). Warfield's review also suggests that the performance staged its diverse audience as witnesses to a moment of the very kind of ritual communal intimacy often sought out by tourists. Thus the "dance of death" between the two adversaries, she notes, "begins with the badinage of mutual taunts and insults, progresses to intimate exchange of thoughts and emotions, then culminates in a moment of truth when man and beast embrace, complete and transcend one another" (Warfield).

As a play that meditates on the interaction between tourism and performances of cultural identity, a distinguishing feature of *Mirando al tendido* is that the tourists remain an ambiguous presence, brought into the play audience's view diegetically (rather than mimetically) through sound effects and dialogue reference. By contrast, Santana's 1996 play *Influencia turística en la inclinación de la Torre de Pisa* 'Tourists' Influence on the Incline of the Tower of Pisa' places tourists on center stage as the explicit predators of heritage

sites with claims to cultural authenticity. The piece presents a seductive encounter between Dante, the caretaker of a small, one-star Florence hotel, and its lone guest Nikita, a Venezuelan singer and self-appointed culture cop with two missions: to impose the bolero on Europe and, above all, to assassinate tourists and salvage the cultural heritage residing in the monuments that constitute tourist destinations and that they allegedly threaten. Nikita arrives seeking a room in Dante's hotel. But when she hears from a radio broadcast that Nikita is sought by authorities as the "Assassin of Tourists," he starts to turn her in, she threatens to kill him, and, just as she is about to stab him, he confesses that he, too, has disposed of a few tourists. In the lively repartee that follows, Dante and Nikita exchange hyperbolic accounts of vast damage wrought by predatory tourists on heritage sites and brag about their mutual efforts at tourist eradication. Nikita claims the killings of forty-five tourists in Italy alone, not counting those she exterminated in Brazil, Venezuela, Tobago, Spain, England, and France. Although Dante's eradication achievements are more modest, the two perform exorcisms in Dante's hotel lobby of tourists he once killed but who have returned from the dead in such forms as giant worms. When Nikita discovers that Dante himself once had a life-changing experience as a tourist in Paris, she tries to exorcise his tourist virus with a Mandala ceremony that actually transforms him into a satyr, the monstrous embodiment of his true identity as a tourist. Transformed into predatory tourists, Nikita and Dante are poised at play's end to destroy the Tower of Pisa and other heritage monuments.¹⁵

This play inverts the tourism-ethnicity binary more decisively than does *Mirando al tendido*. Here tourism itself is the grand cultural spectacle, in which the tourists morph into modernity's projected "wild things," now cast as the exotic others that tourists typically travel to see. If the tourists are in hot pursuit of cultural otherness and authenticity in world heritage sites, the play text, Nikita, and Dante all "read" the tourists in the same way that tourists—in Culler's terms—seek outward signs to typify their ethnic others. Thus the play portrays sightseeing tourists as the exoticized objects of the audience's own sightseeing gaze. The opening scene stages what Kirschenblatt-Gimblett would term the "agency of display," that is a "dynamic field involving the medium of display, what is

shown, who shows, who experiences the display, and who is affected by it" (226). The piece opens with hallucinatory images of tourists "from all the continents" advancing on the audience (that in turn watches them) with the escalating rhythm of flashing cameras and camcorders (53). In staging "the entire spectrum of that *species*, expatriate through recreation" (my emphasis), the piece stereotypes the tourists as an ensemble of supposed native peoples whose own touristic rituals of display reveal signifying traits, including the "easy demeanor" of the U.S. tourist, the "piercing rectitude of the Japanese, the occult desires of the Swede, the Finn, and the Dane" (53) and, worst of all, the "frightening" Canadians, disguised "like chameleons" with "ecological mantles" and in hot pursuit of a good soccer match (72-73).

Performing agents of their own display, these tourists sport signature costumes and accoutrements—Bermudas, sunglasses, cameras, and bags of pistachios—by which the locals, with a tourist's keen eye for the "typical" (in Culler's sense) can know them. If the tourists are cast here as "native peoples" who carry with them their defining ethnic traits—their own traveling cultures—Nikita, the self-appointed guardian of world heritage sites imbued with *abolengo* of the ilk defended by the bull Florentino in *Mirando al tendido*, also inverts the tourism/culturalism binary. The tourist-extremist herself performs an alternate version of the tourist species, with her worn jeans, flannel shirt, white tennis shoes and large backpack "as if she were going to an unknown land" (53). As a world traveler-who-would-not-be-a-tourist, Nikita further inverts the traditional direction of the tourist/native opposition by taking her own cultures of performance—"rumba, boleros, guaracha, guaguancó, merengue, salsa"—on the road for imposition on Europe, music embodying the ethnicity-of-the-moment with an "air of fashion" that might bring her fame and fortune (60). But the defining feature of heritage-seeking tourists as the play's exotic others is Nikita's attribution to them of the power of metamorphosis by night into predatory animals. Transformed into giant worms, mosquitoes, viruses, termites, parasites, jackals, or wolves, these tourists travel in search of what they lack: *abolengo* or cultural lineage and essential community of the same kind that the ethnically marked Florentino the bull extols in *Mirando al tendido*. Here the tourists are cast in

these predatory roles through the verbs that Nikita and Dante use to describe the “architectural gastronomy” whereby they consume the *abolengo* they desire in the monuments containing it: “eat away” “riddle with holes,” “chew,” “devour.” If Gustavo Pérez Firmat, drawing on Fernando Ortiz’s classic metaphor of the *ajiaco* stew to describe Cuban culture, has suggested that Cubans “eat” their “roots” (16), the omnivorous tourists in Santana’s play cannibalize the roots of others. Tourist commandos, Nikita explains, also sport t-shirts with images of the monument they visit by day and aim to devour by night, for example the Tower of Pisa.

Beyond this elision of boundaries between tourists and “voracious” natives, the play further resists hierarchies between tourists and heritage gatekeepers. Consistent with the work’s farcical mode that includes satiating hyperbole, scatological humor, and unremitting irreverence, the play’s reversals unhinge any audience identification with Nikita’s cultural policing. Here the tourists’ quest for transcendent ethnic substance does exhibit, in smaller doses, some of the same nostalgia as the bull’s evocation of the *corridos* of yesteryear in *Mirando al tendido*. But *Influencia turística* takes more assured aim at *abolengo*, the consistent object of its hyperbole. Here *abolengo* resides in the monuments that tourists visit and in the relics they appropriate, any item or locale “with a transcendent air,” as Dante explains (54). When Nikita admits to her tourist extermination project, Dante portrays himself as her equal in protecting *abolengo*, for example when he killed a pesky Canadian tourist who tried to buy his family’s religious relic for \$500: “This scapular of Saint Trino has been blessed by ten Popes! The legacy of Great Grandfather Francesco!” (73). As visitors who merely photograph themselves at a famous site and then corrode it by night, tourists, Dante asserts, are incapable of appreciating the “patina of the centuries” of his own down-and-out hotel (57). The play takes more potshots at such heritage peddling when Nikita discovers that the Michelangelo who Dante claims lived in his hotel and took tea with the Medici’s on the terrace was not the one with the surname Buonarroti who actually painted the Sistine Chapel, but rather Michelangelo Di Mauro who followed the artist around and who, Dante claims, actually gave him his best ideas. Beyond the parodic tone of such inflated claims, the play questions the authenticity ascribed to

cultural monuments when Nikita suggests that the world's heritage sites are actually all staged copies, the originals having been stashed by world leaders until the tourist plague subsides. Further undermining Nikita and Dante's campaign against the touristic erosion of local *abolengo* is their position against heritage restoration: once the *Duomo* is fully restored, they note, it will be "covered with shrouds like a huge cadaver" (54). This view of restoration as a process that sucks the life out of the past brings to mind Svetlana Boym's contrast (drawing on Walter Benjamin) of a restorative nostalgia, which "attempts a transhistorical construction of the lost home" and thinks of itself as "truth and tradition" through the "intentional monument," and a reflexive nostalgia that "dwells in the ambivalences of human longing" found in "porous ... ruins" that are "inimical to the idea of commemoration" (xviii, 78-79). In this vein, the tourist activity that dwells in the corrosion, decay, and voyeuristic consumption of heritage sites generates in Santana's play a nostalgia that serves a more critical purpose, such as eroding the opposition between tourism and ethnicity and unpacking the potential of tourist activity to spawn salutary changes in perspective that challenge official narratives of culturalist exclusion.

This view, to which the play appears to subscribe in its punch line, subverts Nikita's attack on the catastrophic impact of the tourist spectacle on its performers, scenarios in which aging gringo women end up "dancing flamenco on tables" and "devout nuns on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem end up practicing prostitution" (98-99). Dante's ultimate confession to having succumbed to the tourist virus in Paris where he and a Swede reveled in drug-enhanced, transcendent sex, their backpacks stashed with pieces of the Eiffel Tower and Napoleon's Tomb, marks a turning point in the play's shifting positions on tourism. When Nikita's attempt at exorcising his tourist virus fails and Dante is instead transformed into an irreverent Dionysian satyr, he likens her cultural policing to the Inquisition's attack on witches, dismisses heritage preservation as the work of a "civilization that believes in art but not in wonder," and celebrates tourism with its critical potential for productive new insight on the everyday: "Listen up, we tourists ... are humanity. The blessed forgetting of decorum and decency makes us real! ... in distancing ourselves from conventions, we become the light of misery. Our own and that

of others” (113). Ultimately the play locates the intimacy of community long contrasted with the modern tourist role in the tourist performance itself: “By chewing on the *Duomo* we are more sensitive ... We gain our substance from it. We internalize it. It is like a communion” (113, 115).

Santana’s two plays pose far more questions than they answer about tourism, the longing for community, and the status of tourists as witnesses to the performance of ethnic or cultural heritage claims. But his inquiry takes the clear position that, in the turn-of-the millennium world, tourists, however transitory, are paradoxically here to stay and their presence in contemporary cultural spectacles is potentially critical, in more than one sense of the word. Santana is not alone among Latin American or Latino playwrights or performance artists who communicate through their work that, whatever cultural, economic, or political power relationships it enacts and displays, tourism deserves serious examination as a revealing cultural phenomenon that can alter perspectives on exclusionary definitions of community. Parodying and unpacking the West’s quest for indigenous authenticity, the by now well known 1992 performance piece, *The Couple in the Cage*, by Guillermo Gómez Peña and Coco Fusco, staged a critique of the quincentennial celebrations of 1492 in the interactive faux ethnic exhibit of a pair from a lost tribe of the Americas for museum-visiting tourists in the U.S., Latin America, and Europe. In a comparable revisiting of the contentious indigenous-European encounter in the Americas, Rascón Banda’s 1998 play *La Malinche* recasts the Cortez/Malinche encounter, in which the Mexican soldiers are cast as American tourists in Cancún, as a critical metaphor of neoliberalism in post-NAFTA Mexico.¹⁶ Rovner’s 1989 play *Y el mundo vendrá* ‘And the World Will Come’ stages the ventures into cultural tourism of a struggling Argentine family during recurring economic crisis. An assistant on a catamaran serving tourists in the Tigre Delta of the Río de la Plata tries to improve his family’s economic lot by organizing them into the song-and-dance performance of an assumed ethnic identity—Greekness—designed to draw tourists in search of authentic cultural others. When the project fails and his wife saves the day by selling her family’s simple *puchero* ‘boiled stew’ to the tourists, the piece implies that such ventures in cultural tourism can help com-

munities come to terms with their own realities. In a comparable reality-checking quest for self-knowledge, but in a radically irreverent satirical mode, in the performance piece *Milk of Amnesia* the Cuban American performance artist Alina Troyano (a.k.a. Carmelita Tropicana) undertakes a tourist's pilgrimage to Cuba as a cure for the cultural amnesia created in her U.S. upbringing.

Even when they reiterate tourist stereotypes, these plays and performance pieces, like Santana's, propose that in seeking more equitable social arrangements than those enacted through culturalist stagings of ethnic power, something of value can be gleaned from contemporary tourism. Mexican playwright Sabina Berman, whose theatre exposes cross-cultural and trans-national power interactions, calls in her 2006 journalistic essay, "Una cultura diversa y libre" 'A Free and Diverse Culture,' for a twenty-first century overhaul of the term "Culture" in Mexico to replace state definitions harking back to the official nationalism of the post-revolutionary 1920s. Seeking an official cultural democratization that might parallel the recent openings in Mexico's electoral process, she argues that "contemporary Mexican Culture" (the capital "C" is hers) "should ally itself with tourism" as has happened in other international cities (Berman). In a similar internationalist vein, Santana's investigations of tourism's potential for opening up conceptions of community are consistent with his affirmations that he is "in no way a nationalist" and that his theatre enacts a "probable reality that I undoubtedly globalize" in a world where the hunger in Somalia is all too familiar to a Venezuelan playwright and where violence in Venezuela, Colombia, and New York are kin ("¿Por qué escribo?" 217). As a "vehicle of scandal and unimagined upheavals," theatre in such an epoch of radical change must play a critical role, he argues ("¿Por qué escribo? 219). Of a kind with such critical upheavals are the irreverent enactments by travelers and their "native" hosts alike in Santana's plays that mix it up between tourists and the imagined wild things for which they quest.

Notes

1 Jill Kuhnheim notes that Riedemann's lyrical speaker, a traveler from Valdivia to Santiago, portrays himself as an outsider even in his own country (96-99).

2 See, for example, García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures* and or Yúdice's *Expediency of Culture*.

3 On traveling cultures, see Clifford's *Routes* (17-45) and, in a Latin American context, Francine Masiello's "Maps" in her *Art of Transition*, focused on literary production in the post-dictatorship Southern Cone (105-173). Shorter cultural studies on tourism in Latin America address specific periods (see Cristóbal Pera on the image of tourists and travelers in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Latin American literature) or regions, including Barrios Figueroa on tourism and Guatemalan material culture and Regina Harrison on the cultural production of eco-tourism in Ecuador.

4 Born in 1944 in Venezuela, Santana has founded and directed numerous theatre groups, participated as juror, playwright, and director in theatre workshops and festivals in Latin America, the U.S., and Europe, and written scripts for film and television along with dozens of plays. His numerous awards and creative fellowships include a 1993 Guggenheim. For a detailed account of his life and work, see E.A. Moreno-Uribe. Academic criticism on Santana's work is sparse in comparison to its extensive staging and recognition in theatre circles. On his theatre of the 1960s, see Leonardo Azparren Giménez and for an analysis of his 1992 play *Santa Isabel del Video*, see Laurietz Seda.

5 Although Charles Thomas published a translation of *Mirando al tendido* in 2000 (in *Latin American Theatre in Translation: An Anthology of Works from Mexico, the Caribbean, and the Southern Cone*, edited by Marco Antonio de la Parra and Thomas), here all translations from Santana's plays are my own. First published in 1992, *Mirando al tendido* debuted in Venezuela in 1991, directed by Cosme Cortázar, and received the Dramaturgy Prize. Its European debut was in 1993 at the World Festival of Dramaturgy in Chianti, Italy. It has been staged multiple times in Venezuela, the United

States (including Puerto Rico), Spain, and Cuba.

6 The 1998 staging of Thomas's English translation of *Mirando al tendido* directed by Paul Verdier at the Stages Theatre Center in Los Angeles included a backdrop chorus of flamenco dancers and a flamenco guitar accompaniment. See T.H. McCulloh and Warfield.

7 The ambiguity of the phrase "mirando al tendido" created between "tendido" as a noun that designates the tier of rings in a bullring and as a participle of the verb "tender," to lay or to spread out, is lost in the English rendition "looking into the stands."

8 Boym links reflexive (or critical) nostalgia with the ruin and a more restorative, conservative nostalgia with the monument (78).

9 For a more detailed account of these debates see Douglass (21 and 47).

10 For a description and photos of the Valencia production, see "*Mirando al tendido*" at the Teatres de la Generalitat Valenciana website. For a description and photos of the Cantabria production, see "*Mirando al tendido*" at the Ábrego Producciones website.

11 The play's references to Manolete and *miura* bulls evoke the most renowned bullfight in modern Spanish history, where the *torero* Manuel Rodríguez Sánchez (Manolete) was mortally wounded by the *miura* bull Islero on August 28, 1947. Manolete was known for his innovative economy of style in the ring.

12 The gendering of bullfight discourse does not merely play out in nationalists accusing their opponents of effeminacy but reflects conflicting interpretations of the bullfight itself as essentially masculine or feminine. See Pink (9).

13 On the rise of women bullfighters in Spain, see Pink.

14 On the bullfighting vs. soccer debate, see Douglass (215, note 6).

15 Although it was published in 1996, as of this writing I have found no information, including through contact with the playwright, on staged performances of *Influencia turística en la Torre de Pisa*.

16 On the substitution in Rascón Banda's play of American tourists for Spaniards in the Malinche story in a neoliberal context, see Stuart Day (122-39).

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