

**Ana Elena Puga**

## **THESE ARE A FEW OF MY LEAST FAVORITE THINGS**

I'm still interested in theatre's potential for protest, resistance, emancipation, subversion, critique, howl, hope, lament, whimper. . . . This often leads me to focus on my least favorite things, drawn like a moth to performances that normal people (those who aren't theatre scholars) find depressing. In this spirit, I offer a few such topics, most of which are already being mined but that I think merit further research and exchange of ideas:

*Passports.* "I am so over the nation-state!" a graduate student in my performance-studies theory seminar said the other day. But the nation-state is not over us and won't be in ten years' time, when perhaps Donald Trump's second term in office will have recently concluded. Besides, many people think that we need nation-states, or something like them, whether to provide a measure of protection from globalized capitalism gone wild or to shield us from hordes of migrants and refugees. Methodologically, are theatre scholars entirely "over" the nation-state in the ways we structure our research? What new ways to carve up the slices of the world we study make sense and why?

*Violence/War/Terrorism.* Along with the nation-state come nation-state violence, antistate violence, wars, genocides, massacres, narcokidnappings, and many other acts of terror, including shootings in churches, offices, and classrooms. Or, to put it another way, using Slavoj Žižek's taxonomy: systemic, objective, and symbolic violence plague our world. How does theatre continue to bear witness, develop the documentary drama, find new ways of witnessing that transcend the documentary, and testify to its own inability to witness fully? How is the role of performance in shaping communal memory changing? How does devised, site-specific, immersive, and postdramatic performance figure in witnessing and memory making? What ethical issues are raised by theatre that attempts to bear witness and shape memory of atrocities that take place in cultures other than the playwright's own?

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*Ana Elena Puga is an associate professor in the Departments of Theatre and Spanish & Portuguese at The Ohio State University. Her current book project, with Víctor M. Espinosa, is titled Heroes, Martyrs, and Saints in Latin American Migration.*

## These Are a Few of My Least Favorite Things

*Inequality/Precarity/Debt.* Theatre scholars, in my view, besides analyzing social movements in order to understand better how performance can foster social change, should also highlight and support the struggles of people who mobilize and put their bodies in the streets against this triple threat. What will be the next Occupy? How will Black Lives Matter evolve? The Dreamers? The UndocuQueer? To what movements along these lines should we pay attention, even though they are not in the United States or in Europe? On a separate but related issue, perhaps we should pay more attention to the performances surrounding student loan debt protests. Come to think of it, in ten years I will still have student loan debt. A wild fantasy I once had: Bernie Sanders was elected president and made undergraduate public education free for future generations.

*Dismissal of the Significance of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Social Class, Sexuality, Disability, and So Forth.* No, I'm not over this identity stuff yet. And neither are many of our most talented contemporary playwrights and performers, such as David Henry Hwang, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Young Jean Lee, and Lin-Manuel Miranda, to name just four prominent examples. Hybrid identities, intersectional identities, subordinated identities, shifting identities, and strategically adopted identities should continue to command our attention.

*Neglect of Theatre/Performance outside the US and European Traditions.* Let's continue to explore the world of theatre and performance beyond the United States, England, and a few other European countries. Let's study theatre and performance from Canada, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Every time we are tempted to stage another Shakespeare play, let's think about what else we could stage instead. Let's even go further and learn other languages well enough to translate plays into English, encourage our graduate students to do the same, promote the staging of plays from other languages in our university theatres, and discuss why, even after many years of lip service to such diversity, many of our institutions continue to return to the same old same old, both in our season selections and in our hiring practices.

*Suffering.* How do we or should we represent the suffering wrought by all of the above, on stages and in social performance? In what ways, shapes, and forms does performance respond to suffering? A lot of great work has already been done on this topic, especially in studies of the sentimental/melodrama, empathic identification, the circulation of affect, and the creation of spectacles of suffering. Yet there is more than enough anguish in the world, and performances intended to address it, to keep us busy for the next decade.

*Treatment of Children in Theatre.* I am concerned about how children tend to be stereotyped and politicized, in theatre and in life, as apolitical vulnerable vessels of hope for the future (or, at the other extreme, as "bad seeds.") Whether we oppose reproductive futurism along with Lee Edelman or cruise utopia along with José Esteban Muñoz, let's take childhood, child characters, and children's theatre seriously. How about a special issue on children and youth in performance?