The Equivocal Politics of Carnival: The Forms and Discourses of Carnavalesque Theater in Contemporary Uruguay

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the political, social, and cultural institutionality of carnival in Uruguay and on its growing centrality as a means of expression and space of popular enunciation since the return to democracy in the 1980s. It also argues that the “field” of carnival is a site of constant negotiation with both the state and nongovernmental sources of power (economic groups, the media, churches, etc.) and can thus accommodate various political proposals, leading to constant symbolic-discursive reconfiguration. A detailed analysis of three carnavalesque performances belonging to the *murga* genre—*La caldera de los diablos* by Diablos Verdes (2003), *Los Sueños* by Agarrate Catalina (2005), and *Creer o reventar* by Don Timoteo (2014)—highlights how carnival has responded to, and has been reconfigured by, three recent circumstances: the apogee of neoliberalism and “the crisis of 2002,” the election of a “broad front” leftist government in 2005, and the end of this government’s second term in 2014.

1. See Mijaíl Bajtín, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993); Mijaíl Bajtín, *La cultura popular en la Edad Media y el Renacimiento* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1987); Roberto Da Matta, *Carnavais, malandros e heróis* (Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara, 1990); and Roberto Da Matta, *Universo do carnaval* (Rio de Janeiro: Pinakothèque, 1981). On the romantic populist view, see Néstor García Canclini, *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Imagen, 1981); and Néstor García Canclini, *¿De qué estamos hablando cuando hablamos de lo popular?* Materiales para el debate contemporáneo 7 (Montevideo: Cuadernos del CLAEH, 1986). All translations in the article are by the author unless otherwise noted.

2. See, for example, María I. Pereira de Queiroz, *Carnaval brasileiro: O vívido e o mito* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1992); Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (New York: Verso, 2009); and James C. Scott, *Los dominados y el arte de la resistencia* (Mexico City: Era, 2000).

3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialéctica de la ilustración* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1998).

4. On the idea of the artistic field, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). On the popular sphere, see Gustavo Remedi, "Esfera pública popular y transculturadores populares: Propuesta de interpretación y crítica de la cultura nacional desde las

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Preliminary Theoretical Musings: Carnival as a Popular Public Sphere

By focusing on three *murgas*—one of the various genres of carnivalesque theater in Uruguay—produced in three distinct historical and political periods, this article investigates the ideological maneuverings and shifting political positionings of carnivalesque discourse and troupes in recent decades. In doing so, it argues that carnival should be conceptualized as a medium that can be used to convey a variety of ideological and political messages, against those who view carnival as inherently confrontational and revolutionary or conservative and reactionary.

Indeed, discourses referring to the carnivalesque as poetics, as a worldview, and as a form of theater—that is, as a kind of popular theater that takes place during carnival time—tend to fall within two traditions. Some, following Mijaíl Bajtín, Roberto Da Matta, or a romantic populist view, stress its intrinsically defiant orientation (highlighting, for example, its dialogical and parodic mode, its utopian edge, the destabilizing powers of humor and laughter, and its popular origins and working-class pedigree).¹ Others, following María I. Pereira de Queiroz, Terry Eagleton, and James C. Scott, ascribe it an essentially conservative vocation and social function, emphasizing its subaltern character, and the ways, by merely echoing common sense or providing a safety valve, it ultimately reproduces and reaffirms the existing order and hegemony; that is, offering a temporary inversion and interruption of the social and symbolic order, carnival makes such order possible.² This is further reinforced by its increasing professionalization, commodification, and cooptation by the institutions of the market, the mass media, or the state.³

Contrary to these two views, I find it more productive to think of carnival theater—and, in fact, of all carnivalesque production—as a heterogeneous, conflictual, and undetermined artistic field, and as a "popular" or "plebeian" public sphere.⁴ That is, I think of it as a public sphere existing in opposition to the lettered, legitimate public sphere that Jürgen Habermas had in mind.⁵ Above all, I see it as a medium, a form of art, a type of discourse, and a social and cultural space that is truly accessible (in Uruguay at least) to the popular classes, which effectively use it extensively to express their views and to intervene in public life. Carnavalesque theater is thus both a language and a social space wherein popular "transculturators" operate, translating the political into cultural terms, into the masked and ambivalent languages and games of carnival.⁶ The "carnivalization of the political scene" is thus the obverse side of the politicization of carnival.⁷

If we think of the public sphere as a combination of media (the press, the printed word, literary reviews) and locales of sociability (London coffeehouses, men's clubs, literary societies, French salons, German dinners [*Tischgesellschaften*]), we can then think of carnival as constituting quite a different kind of public sphere, resulting from the combination of another set of media (carnavalesque theater and song, radio and TV programs devoted to it, etc.) and a second set of locales: for example, carnival stages, the clubs where actors gather and rehearse, and the pubs where folks drink and meet afterward. It is through these popular practices and these other set of social and cultural experiences that popular forms of discourse and consciousness—a carnivalesque view of life and the world, a popular concept of life and world—are not only

prácticas culturales de las clases subalternas," in *Hermenéuticas de los populares*, ed. Hernán Vidal (Minneapolis, MN: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1992), 127–202; Gustavo Remedi, *Murga: El teatro de los tablados: Crítica de la cultura nacional desde las prácticas culturales de las clases populares* (Montevideo: Trilce, 1996); and Gustavo Remedi, "The Production of Local Public Spheres: Community Radio Stations," in *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Ana del Sarto, Abril Trigo, and Alicia Ríos (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 513–33. On the plebian sphere, see Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Spheres* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

5. See Jürgen Habermas, *Historia y crítica de la opinión pública: La transformación estructural de la vida pública* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1981); John B. Thompson, "La teoría de la esfera pública," *Voces y cultura*, no. 10 (1996), 1–10; and Angel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte, 1984).

6. On transculturation, see Remedi, "Esfera pública popular." On translating the political into cultural terms, see Stuart Hall, "Notas sobre la deconstrucción de lo popular," in *Historia popular y teoría socialista*, ed. Raphael Samuel (Barcelona: Crítica, 1984), 1–10.

7. Milita Alfaro, *Carnaval: Una historia social de Montevideo desde la perspectiva de la fiesta*, vol. 1, *El carnaval "heroico" (1800–1872)* (Montevideo: Trilce, 1991), 79.

expressed but also actually formed differentially.⁸ However, such "popular" worldview and practices are often heterogeneous and contradictory.⁹ They often express multiple, conflicting ideologies and politics.

I borrow the term "transculturation" from Angel Rama, who himself adapted it from Fernando Ortiz, in order to highlight a new kind of narrative structure, language, and worldview he saw emerging in Latin America.¹⁰ Similar to Rama's "literary transculturators," popular transculturators—carnavalesque theater practitioners—also perform the work of transculturation, that is, the task of selecting and combining elements taken from different archives and repertoires (high culture, low culture, mass culture, folklore, everyday life, art, politics, etc.). As opposed to their lettered/literary counterparts, they work within the popular public sphere—in our case, the field of carnival—and they need to translate and re-elaborate everything into carnivalesque terms and codes. Transculturation does not simply refer to the process of selecting and rearticulating elements of one's own culture with the culture of others. It also implies overcoming and diluting distinctions, such as high and low culture, literary and oral, mass and folk, local and global, and art's autonomy and heteronomy. Performing the task of transculturation, actors keep alive and bring back repressed and excluded cultural traditions and forms, giving form to and merging in the project of cultural decolonization and transmodernity.¹¹

Popular acts of transculturation achieve something that was of concern for both Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci. Influenced by Bertolt Brecht, Benjamin criticized the elitism of the intellectual Left and highlighted the need for critical and progressive ideas to be discussed, appropriated by, and incarnated in the popular masses in order to be able to transform society.¹² As for Gramsci, he understood folklore to be both an expression of hegemony—past and present—and a creative and "deviant" production by means of which the popular classes manage to smuggle in, even if in subordinated form, elements of their own alternative experience and worldview, which consequently survived, permeated, and shaped society and culture.¹³

As occurs in any social and cultural space in which the popular classes participate almost exclusively, both as producers and spectators, another experience of life, social reality, and nation takes place, and a differentiated sensibility, aesthetics, and worldview are brewed.¹⁴ This is, perhaps, the most significant political substance and content of Uruguayan carnival theater, whose main political challenge nowadays comes from excessive regulation, professionalization, and industrialization. Carnival practitioners have so far been able to meet this challenge creatively, by either resorting to existing modes of production (such as the murga, albeit in renovated forms, such as the *murga joven*¹⁵) or using forms not entirely in compliance with the conventions of the genre or the rules of official carnival contests.

Thus, thinking about carnival as a field prevents us from slipping into essentialisms and ahistorical generalizations of various kinds. Firstly, it allows us to account for changes that have occurred over the years, in tandem with the historical and political process. Secondly, it enables us to capture its heterogeneous, contradictory, and indeterminate character, something that is in the nature of popular culture.¹⁶ More to the point, it serves to visualize the tensions, conflicts, and disputes that take place within the field of carnival and to identify competing poetic and ideological forms.

8. On a carnivalesque view of life and the world, see Bajtin, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski*.

On a popular view, see Antonio Gramsci, "Canciones populares" (vol. 2, notebook 5, 361), "Observaciones sobre el folclore" (vol. 6, notebook 27 [XI], 203–6), and "Concepto de nacional-popular" (vol. 6, notebook 21 [XVII], 40–43), all in *Cuadernos de la cárcel* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1986). On the different formation, see Edward P. Thompson, *La formación de la clase obrera en Inglaterra* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1989); and Thompson, "La teoría de la esfera pública."

9. Gramsci, "Observaciones sobre el folclore"; and Gramsci, "Canciones populares."

10. Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1982).

11. See, for example, Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina," in *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000), 201–45; Enrique Dussel, "Europa, modernidad, eurocentrismo," in Lander, *La colonialidad del saber*, 41–53; and Enrique Dussel, "Sistema mundo y transmodernidad," in *Modernidades coloniales*, ed. Ishita Banerjee, Saurabh Dube, and Walter Mignolo (Mexico City: Editorial El Colegio de México, 2004), 201–26.

12. Walter Benjamin, "El autor como productor," in *Brecht, ensayos y conversaciones* (Montevideo: Arca, 1966), 77–98.

13. Gramsci, "Observaciones sobre el folclore."

I also intend to establish the study of carnival—and of carnivalesque theater—as a subfield of theater studies in Uruguay, highlighting the fact that, according to José Pedro Barrán, carnival in Uruguay has been historically “disciplined” and, as was pointed out by Paulo Carvalho Neto and Milita Alfaro, altogether “theatricalized.”¹⁷ Hence, the various genres of carnivalesque theater—murgas among them—are the kind of “*teatro tosco*” Peter Brook had in mind and praised, or a type of “third theater,” a theater outside and “off” the official or legitimate theater stages in the tradition of the ancient satires, parodies, and farces, the Italian *commedia dell’arte*, Lope de Rueda’s *pasos*, the comic *sainete*, Valdes’s *actos*—all examples of *género chico* and *teatro breve*—as well as many forms of musical theater, such as the *zarzuela*, or the *revista de variedades* (or *varieté*).¹⁸

Yet, with only rare exceptions, Uruguayan carnival has not been thought of and studied as theater, or as a type of popular theater, not even as a kind of musical theater.¹⁹ Rather, it has been approached and studied from disciplines other than theatrical studies, such as anthropology, ethno-musicology, history (especially social history), sociology, and political science, focusing on its role in the context of the authoritarian crisis of the early 1970s, the following military dictatorship, and censorship.²⁰

With these premises and goals in mind, I then pose a series of questions: What can we say about the ways carnival has adapted to, has responded to, and has been involved in the changing political scenarios of the past two decades? How has carnivalesque theater translated politics into its own language, terms, and space? To what extent has carnivalesque discourse provided a language and a worldview critical of both the (neo)liberal regime (up to 2005) and the governing Left (after 2005)?

Carnival Formation in Uruguay: A Personal/Historical Narrative

When I was a child, in the middle of summer—that is, February—the children on my block would sometime gather on the sidewalk to throw “water bombs” (*bombitas de agua*) at passersby. We also aimed our water streams (*pomos*) at them, as well as into the open windows of buses and trolleys, where folks were surprised, and quite upset, to find their office clothes suddenly soaked.

On any given evening during those days in February, my family would attend a highly crowded carnival inaugural parade on the capital’s main artery, 18 de Julio Avenue. Most of us were standing amid—and somewhat smashed by—the attending multitude. The luckier ones among us were comfortably seated in chairs rented by City Hall, which organized this official parade. Running up and down, sitting on the street, and teasing the paraders, kids were the protagonists in the *proscenium*. More than just the thrill of seeing the carnival queens waving at the crowd, preceded and followed by hundreds of carnival troupes of all kinds, the parade offered the occasion to buy and wear our favorite masks and become, for a short while, “somebody else.” In the 1960s and 1970s this meant buying and wearing masks based on characters from comic books, cartoons, and TV series: Batman, Wonder Woman, mummies, princesses, vampires, and so on. Protected by such anonymity, we could perform mischievous tricks, which basically consisted of watering people and throwing confetti (*serpentina*) and foam.

The parade, which was long and to a certain extent boring for kids, offered a second pleasure.

14. Thompson, *La formación de la clase obrera en Inglaterra*.

15. See Julio Brum, *Comparando la alegría de cantar: La experiencia de la murga joven en Montevideo* (Montevideo: IM/TUMP, 2001); and Guzmán Ramos and Alejandro Scherzer, *Destino: Murga joven. Espacio, tiempo, circunstancias* (Montevideo: Medio & Medio, 2010).

16. Gramsci, "Canciones populares"; and Gramsci, "Observaciones sobre el folclore."

17. José Pedro Barrán, *Historia de la sensibilidad en el Uruguay*, vol. 1, *La cultura bárbara* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1989); José Pedro Barrán, *Historia de la sensibilidad en el Uruguay*, vol. 2, *El disciplinamiento* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1990); Paulo Carvalho Neto, *El carnaval de Montevideo: Folklore, historia, sociología* (Seville: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1967); Alfaro, *Carnaval... (1800–1872)*; Milita Alfaro, *Carnaval: Una historia social de Montevideo desde la perspectiva de la fiesta*, vol. 2, *Carnaval y modernización: Impulso y freno del disciplinamiento (1873–1904)* (Montevideo: Trilce, 1998); and Milita Alfaro and Antonio Di Candia, *Carnaval y otras fiestas* (Montevideo: Comisión del Bicentenario, 2013).

18. On third theater, see Peter Brook, "El teatro tosco," in *El espacio vacío: Arte y técnica del teatro* (Barcelona: Península, 1994), 93–135; and Eugenio Barba, "Tercer teatro," in *Teatro: Soledad, oficio y revuelta* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 1997); 203–5. On theater outside the legitimate

This included teasing and running away from the "*cabezudos*": big-headed creatures with no arms that went up and down the street in sudden fits of running, and whose only reason for existence was to make children laugh and cry by approaching them with their scary big heads and mouths and making threatening gestures.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the neighborhood dance parties of yesterday were pretty much gone, though they would reemerge as New Year's Eve block parties. Gone as well were the "assaults" (*asaltos*), which consisted of neighbors crashing other people's homes. I know of this only through older folks' memories and accounts. We, for our part, attended a neighborhood show called "*tablado*," organized and run by ad hoc committees of neighbors and merchants, who built a stage where carnival theater troupes would perform (figs. 1–4).

Figure 1. *Tablado del Museo del Carnaval*. Photo by Juan Samuelle, from *El Observador*. Courtesy of the photographer.

Figure 2. *Tablado barrial*. Source: Intendencia de Paysandú, <https://www.paysandu.gub.uy/destacadas/3635-intendencia-y-comision-de-carnaval-destacan-exitoso-comienzo-de-tablados-barriales>.

stage, see Gustavo Remedi, ed., *El teatro fuera de los teatros: Apuntes desde el archipiélago teatral* (Montevideo: CSIC-Udelar, 2014); and Gustavo Remedi, "Teatro de frontera/espacios contaminados: Argumentos desde la transmodernidad," in *Teatro, memoria, identidad*, ed. Roger Mirza (Montevideo: FHCE/CSIC, 2009), 83–99.

19. See Gustavo Diverso, *Murgas: La representación del Carnaval* (Montevideo: Imprenta Coopren, 1989); Gustavo Diverso, "Lo murguístico es el cuplé," *la diaria* (January 31, 2014), <https://ladiaria.com.uy/articulo/2014/1/lo-murguistico-es-el-cuple/>. Remedi, *Murga*; Isabel Sans, *Identidad y globalización en el carnaval* (Montevideo: Fin de siglo, 2008); and Cecilia Carriquiry, "Poéticas de la murga uruguaya: Tradición, profesionalismo y rupturas. Estudio comparado temático-formal de cuatro casos entre 2005 y 2010" (master's thesis, Universidad de la República, 2018).

20. On ethno-musicology, see Lauro Ayestarán, *El folklore musical uruguayo* (Montevideo: Arca, 1997); Couriún Aharonián, "La murga, lo murguístico," in *Músicas populares del Uruguay* (Montevideo: Tacuabé, 2007), 165–82; Marita Fornaro, "Los cantos inmigrantes se mezclaron: La murga uruguaya: Encuentro de orígenes y lenguajes," in *Trans Revista transcultural de música*, no. 6 (2002), <http://www.sibe-trans.com/trans/articulo/230/los-cantos-inmigrantes-se-mezclaron-la-murga-uruguaya-en-cuentro-de-origenes-y-lenguajes>; Gustavo Goldman, *Salve Baltasar: La fiesta de reyes en el barrio sur de Montevideo* (Montevideo:

Figure 3. Tablado. Photo Municipio "A" de Montevideo.

Source: <https://municipioa.montevideo.gub.uy/comunicacion/noticias/que-lindo-el-tablado-de-mi-barrio>.

Figure 4. Tablado de Verano del Parque Rodó. El Pais Archive.

Source: <https://www.tvshow.com.uy/novedades-carnaval-tablados-nuevo-reglamento-bus-gratuito.html>.

The acts were of different kinds or genres: there were murgas, *parodistas*, *humoristas*, *escolas do samba*, *comparsas de negros* (groups of black drummers and *candombe* dancers), folk singers, stand-up comedians, and *payadores* (singers who improvised musical dialogues). At that time, I enjoyed the parodists, humorists, and stand-up comedians the most, because of their

CSIC-EUM-FONAM, 1997); Brum, *Compartiendo la alegría de cantar*; and Clara Biermann, "Faut-il avoir des *bolas* pour faire une 'vraie' *murga*? Comique de genre et transgression dans le Carnaval de Montevideo (Uruguay)," in *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie*, no. 26 (2013): 111–28. On social history, see Barrán, *Historia de la sensibilidad en el Uruguay*, vols. 1 and 2; Alfaro, *Carnaval*, parts 1 and 2; and Alfaro and Di Candia, *Carnaval y otras fiestas*. On censorship, see Dorothée Chouitem, *Carnaval, dictadura y después: Decir y no decir bajo censura* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2018); and Gabriela Rivera, *Carnaval y dictadura: Los mecanismos de elusión de la censura* (Vigo: Escola Internacional de Doutorado-Universidade de Vigo, 2019).

21. "Baile de más caras" is by the group Los que iban cantando (Jorge Lazaroff, Luis Trochón, Jorge Bonaldi, and Carlos da Silveira). "Para abrir la noche" and "A redoblar" were written by Ruben Olivera and Mauricio Ubal and were performed by a band named Rumbo. "Brindis por Pierrot" and "Aquello" were written by Jaime Roos, and "Brindis por Pierrot" was performed by Washington "Canario" Luna.

22. Eduardo Restrepo, *Antropología y estudios culturales: Disputas y confluencias desde la periferia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2012); 205–6.

silly double entendre jokes, usually of a sexual nature, some offensive, and most rather childish and naive. Besides the spectacle itself, we enjoyed being with our peers, the social intermingling and the romancing, and eventually, catching the eye of somebody from outside our inner circle. Girls, for their part, had their eyes and hearts out for the (rather few) good-looking actors and stars on stage.

In the early 1980s, I turned eighteen and went to college. Like many, I became increasingly politically conscious and active. In 1980 I voted in the plebiscite against the dictatorship, and carnival provided secondary, yet crucial, avenues of activism. For instance, in Sur and Palermo, two neighborhoods historically inhabited by Afro-Uruguayans, the end of the *Desfile de Llamadas* (the parade of the black *comparsas*) turned into a demonstration against the military, and moments later, into a clash with the police. The 1980s *murgas* and other carnival theatrical performances reflected a similar political consciousness, managing to convey hidden—and sometimes not-so-hidden—political messages, or so we believed. Radio stations started to broadcast songs (of the rather vague genre we called *canto popular*) built around carnivalesque rhythms, sounds, and poetics, with mild, implicit, or imagined social and political messages.

Increasingly, social and political mobilizations started to be preceded, accompanied, or crowned by carnival songs and carnival theatrical representations. Some of these, such as "Baile de más caras," "Para abrir la noche," "A redoblar," "Brindis por Pierrot," and "Aquello," became anthems of the mobilization against the military and offered ways of imagining other realities: a future different from and better than the present.²¹ Neighbors, housing co-ops, and students formed their own improvised carnivalesque groups to appear in public to express their views, critiques, and hopes.

A few years later, as I was completing my undergraduate studies in Latin American literature, I rediscovered Uruguayan carnival, this time from a literary and theater studies angle, and I got interested in the relationship between culture, ideology, aesthetics, history, and society and politics, in other words, what Eduardo Restrepo later called "the cultural dimension of politics and the political dimension of culture."²² As I was researching forms of popular literature and theater, I argued that carnival theater and carnivalesque theatricalities constituted a legitimate object of literary/cultural study (something that, to this day, is rejected in Uruguay). I thus made the Uruguayan carnival of the mid-1980s the focus of my dissertation.

By then Uruguayan carnival had become, as Uruguayans like to think, one of the longest if not *the* longest carnival in the world, extending from February until well into March. Actually, some early parades and public appearances even take place in January, rehearsals begin several months before, and plays continue to be performed well past March. Some say it is a year-round affair.

In February and March, when carnival festivities are most intense, there are regular parades and spectacles of various kinds and in different places. Many thousands of people partake in the production of carnival, either as actors, directors, playwrights, designers, singers, dancers, and more. Most, however, attend these parades mainly as spectators. Indeed, as it has been "theatricalized," contemporary carnival has become less "lived" and more watched and listened to.

23. The eight private stages are:

Velódromo Municipal (Parque Batlle), 1° de Mayo (across from Palacio Legislativo), Club Malvín, Rural del Prado, Monumental de la Costa (Parque Roosevelt), Buceo (across from Buceo Cemetery), Parque Rodó (in front of Defensor's Stadium), and Club Rentistas (Cerrito de la Victoria).

The sixteen public stages are:

Anfiteatro Washington "Canario" Luna (next to Antel Arena), Jardines de Manga, Las Acacias, Club Arbolito (La Teja), Lucho "El Tío" Suárez (Cerro), Museo del Carnaval (Ciudad Vieja), Las Torres - Juan Taranto (Francisco de Quevedo y Granados), Jardín de Nuevo París/Club Salus, Escenario Popular Daniel Viglietti, Teatro Barrio Lavalleja, Escenario Pablo Estramín, Monte de la Francesa, Almacén Cultural Macanudos, Molino del Galgo, Flor de Maroñas, and Punta de Rieles.

24. *Lubolos* are whites who, historically, painted their faces black (like minstrels) in order to participate in this Afro-Uruguayan theatrical form. See George Reid Andrews, *Blackness in the White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 50–84.

As spectacles, carnival performances take place on two kinds of stages: the street, where several kinds of parades take place, and the *tablados* (built stages). Nowadays, in Montevideo alone, there are eight such privately run stages, attended by thousands of folks every night; sixteen public stages (*tablados populares*) set up by the city; and four itinerant ones (*Rondamomo*), to which residents need to bring their chairs.²³ The symbolic center of it all, however, is the open amphitheater at Parque Rodó (Teatro de Verano) where the official contest takes place.

Adding up all the genres (*categorías*) of carnivalesque theater, including murgas, parodists, humorists, *revistas*, and *sociedades de negros y lubolos*, more than fifty companies perform several acts, and in different places, every day.²⁴ This is without counting the many groups participating in the murga joven circuit and other amateur circles. Each group performs on various stages each night, going from one stage to another. Each presentation lasts somewhere between forty and fifty minutes. Each stage offers as many as six or seven groups per night. Spectacles begin in the evening and do not end until well past midnight (at 1:00 a.m. or 2:00 a.m.). Just as many groups of *comparsas* participate in the two-night-long *Desfile de Llamadas*.

In the past decades, carnival has also been turned into a media event, broadcast through radio and television networks. This growing exposure has transformed the concept, nature, and experience of public space and of carnival, as some attend the *tablados*, others watch them on television or on the internet, and yet others do both. Some stages, such as the Teatro de Verano or Isla de Flores Street (where the *Llamadas* parade takes place), have become virtual open-air TV studios.

The murga, the genre of carnivalesque theater I am focusing on, is the most popular of them all. Structurally, the murga genre is made up of the following sections: the entrance (*saludo*) and the exit (*retirada* or *despedida*) at both ends, and in between a number of short segments of various kinds (*canción*, *popurrí*, *cuplés*, etc.), either developing a single and overarching theme, or presenting a number of different ones (the *popurrí* taking this to its extreme). These are performed by the chorus (*coro de murga*), led by a director (*corifeo*), and a body of three musicians on stage (*la batería de murga*). In addition, there are a small number of individualized characters, more or less developed depending on the situation and theme of the short act in question, which engage in a dialogue with the chorus and other characters (as in the case of the *cupleteros*—main characters). These traditional parts and forms have been played with, altered, and mixed in recent years, sometimes as a result of the genre's own reflexivity and self-critique in the spirit of the carnivalesque poetics, and sometimes as a result of formal experimentation and the pursuit of innovation.

If in the first half of the twentieth century carnival performed an essentially comic, cathartic function, contributing to the ultimate restoration of the social, political, and cultural order, by the late 1960s, some interventions within the field began challenging the existing social, political, cultural, or symbolic order. This was reinforced during the military dictatorship, particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the years of the harsher repression (1974–77) had passed, as more and more troupes dared to question the regime in veiled terms (though, importantly, not all of them did so). In any case, carnival was then perceived to be somehow situated

25. Gustavo Remedi, "Del carnaval como 'metáfora' al teatro de carnaval," in *Latin American Theatre Review* 34, no. 2 (2001): 127–52; and Remedi, *Murga*.

26. During 1986–94 inequality in Uruguay remained almost unchanged, whereas it grew in 1994–2007 and started to fall in 2007–9. See Guillermo Alves, Verónica Amarante, Gonzalo Salas, and Andrea Vigorito, "La desigualdad del ingreso en Uruguay entre 1986 y 2009" (working paper, School of Economics, Universidad de la República, Montevideo, Uruguay, 2012). <http://www.iecon.ccee.edu.uy/dt-03-12-la-desigualdad-del-ingreso-en-uruguay-entre-1986-y-2009-publicacion/286/es/>.

27. The banking crisis of 2002 in Uruguay was a socioeconomic cataclysm similar to the crisis of 1929 in the United States or the crisis of 2001 in Argentina. See Carlos Staneri, *Al borde del abismo: Uruguay y la gran crisis de 2002–2003* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2011). For a quicker look, see Raúl Zibechi, "The Crisis in Uruguay: The Long View," *NACLA* (September 25, 2007): <https://nacla.org/article/crisis-uruguay-long-view>.

outside the ordinary time and space—a site where one could distance and estrange oneself from the official discourse, where one could rethink national culture from below. Ironically, in a country that likes to think of itself as secular, carnival was re-functionalized as a pagan ritual and restored a sense of the sacred against the background of the profane order of the dictatorship. Yet carnival as a religious mask could not but be a tricky space, as it celebrated a variety of gods, beliefs, and sects—not just one—which competed for the hearts and minds of the national popular body.²⁵

Building on the preceding ways of thinking of carnival in Uruguay, as well as having in mind its current configuration and character, I now turn to a discussion of three spectacles, performed under different circumstances, with the purpose of exploring how carnivalesque theater has reacted to the changing historical and political process over the last fifteen years. I will pursue mostly a discursive analysis, yet I will also dwell and reflect on significant devices of this carnivalesque theatrical form and *mise-en-scène*.

A (Neoliberal) Hell with a View: Diablos Verdes's *The Devils' Cauldron* (2003)

With the end of the civic-military dictatorship and the restoration of democracy in 1985, the popular classes faced a new challenge, that of a new wave of capitalist modernization. The so-called neoliberal reforms of the 1990s implemented by a number of Latin American governments aimed to open the economy to global market forces while reducing the welfare state, freeing the "invisible hand" of the market and, in the process, the power and reach of imperial international political and economic agents (and their local partners). The neoliberal governments that came to power in the 1990s (including those of Carlos Menem in Argentina, Collor de Melo in Brazil, Carlos Salinas de Gortari in Mexico, Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada in Bolivia, and Luis Lacalle in Uruguay) sought to privatize the profitable public companies, weaken labor organizations to lower the costs of labor, and strengthen the hand of capital (its power, its rule, its profits), mostly associated with agribusiness, the export of raw materials, and the financial sector.

Gravitating around the notion of consumption—participating in the market as "equal free sellers and buyers"—neoliberalism sought to meet social needs and achieve individual satisfaction by increasing economic activity and hoping for a trickle-down effect in lieu of wealth redistribution policies. It meant importing consumer goods from the global market and, above all, adopting a culture of unrestrained and compulsive consumption. In the context of struggling underdeveloped economies, price asymmetries, trade imbalances of all sorts, and increased indebtedness, this only increased economic and social inequalities.²⁶ A brief period of apparent bonanza proved to be a mirage with fatal consequences.

The beginning of the millennium could not have started worse: the neoliberal model imploded in 2002. While the dictatorship had proved to be a political and moral catastrophe, the neoliberal experiment caused the Uruguayan economy to fall into a general crisis that destroyed the productive apparatus, set historic unemployment and emigration records, and impoverished most of its middle-class and working-class population.²⁷

In the subsequent carnival, Diablos Verdes (Green Devils), a murga troupe formed in the late 1930s in the working-class neighborhood of La Teja, presented a spectacle called *La caldera*

28. My analysis is based on the recording of *La caldera de los diablos* edited and published by Ayuí/Tacuabé in 2003 (Serie de la Brillantina A/E 265 CD) and on the complete audiovisual record available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNpw-85cJTL8>.

29. Analía Camargo, "Diablos Verdes, Pare de sufrir: Entrevista a Leo Preziosi y Charly Álvarez," *SieteNotas* (February 17, 2003): <http://sietenotas.com/Inicio/contenido.aspx?i=6B6ADB35-8CCB-4090-8150-9A335BA05C4D>.

de los diablos (The Devils' Cauldron) and referred to "the hell" created by the neoliberal crisis.²⁸ Written by actor, playwright, and director Leonardo Preziosi, *Diablos* won the 2003 official contest. According to Preziosi, the idea was to represent the hell that the popular classes were experiencing ("what is taking place in reality") through the distorting and distancing lenses of carnival's deformation and laughter. Quoting Brecht, Preziosi believed that "once the people in the audience see themselves on stage and manage to laugh at their situation, they can start overcoming it."²⁹

The spectacle was made up of the usual segments (*saludo, canción, cuplés, retirada*), this time organized around a single theme: the severe economic and social crisis. Presided over by a devil on an elevated platform on one side and amid a heavy screen of smoke, in the opening scene, song, and choreography, a chorus of devils—dressed in robes and horns—introduced themselves as "devils of the twenty-first century that condemn injustice and sadness," and inaugurated "in this hell crowned by a starry night" a time of celebration, wherein people regained their power to speak out, to sing, to dream, to laugh. They also brought the good news of a day when reason and justice would be reestablished, when poverty would be defeated, and human dignity restored.

The second act introduced the main character (*cupletero*) of the sinner, interpreted by comic actor Charly Álvarez. Dressed in grey suit, white shirt, and tie, he entered the stage singing and describing himself as someone who had voted for President Jorge Batlle's neoliberal government in 1999, had deposited his savings in local banks as well as in fishy off-shore bank accounts, and, as a result, had become a victim of the financial collapse. The chorus of devils stood still in the now unlit background. The sinner was an ambiguous character, though; at the same time as he appeared as a victim—representing the suffering of the common folks—he also symbolized the kind of subjectivity and behavior promoted by neoliberalism, thus eliciting both empathy and condemnation from the audience.

In the third scene, "The Sinner Has Arrived," the sinner was greeted by the chorus of devils, now dancing around him. Different members of the chorus moved forward and alternated to sing the different verses and stanzas (as is characteristic of this genre), and they finished by opening the gate to him. Forming a compact mass that moved back and forth from left to right, the chorus enumerated to the sinner the various "floors of the Inferno": first floor, the Bank of Hell; second floor, the Prison of Hell; third floor, the Hospital of Hell, and so on. It also referred to "the world above" as a world in ruins, as a world of total scarcity: no electricity, no gas, no water, no food—words reminiscent of "I'm Black/Ain't Got No," one of the songs from the rock musical *Hair*. As the chorus engaged in a counterpoint with the sinner, it embodied the polyphonic voice of the people's perspective.

The fourth part recreated the "Bank of Hell" (or "International Infernal Bank"), "straight as the Tower of Pisa" and "as solid as the towers of the World Trade Center." It was a satire of the speculation craze that had led to the 2002 financial collapse and of the corrupt maneuvers that had caused it. It poked fun at those who enriched themselves as well as at those who had lost their savings, their jobs, and homes and had seen their lives ruined. Gathered together like a football team posing for a picture, the chorus narrated what had happened to the sinner by resorting to the usual device of substituting new, made-up lyrics to those of popular songs (*contrafactum*). Piece by piece, the sinner lost nearly all his clothes, and at the end, reappeared

almost naked on an elevated side platform, miming various situations: such as crucifixion, prostitution, and dispossession. In the end, the police arrived, and the sinner was detained for stealing and walking around naked, and the judge sent him to jail.

In the following scene, titled “The Prison of Hell” and modeled after Elvis Presley’s musical *Jailhouse Rock*, the chorus described and criticized both the judicial system and the penitentiary system. While white-collar thieves were placed in “a summer residence” where prisoners “live[d] like kings and g[o]t fat” (“justice for the rich”), the poor were sent to quite a different prison—inhuman and cruel. Dressed in stereotypical prison clothes (black and white horizontal stripes), the chorus alternated between common prison cap and crowns as they commented sarcastically on these two opposite places and treatments.

When the sinner got sick he was sent to “Hell’s Hospital” and appeared center stage, seated on an emergency bed. Now wearing the usual white nurse uniforms and caps, the chorus focused on the critical situation of Uruguay’s public health system, affected by a scarcity of resources, strikes, and lack of staff discipline. The sinner needed surgery but all he got was a giant Band-Aid. Employees were depicted playing card games of various kinds while a number of antics typical of a madhouse took place. “Better start praying” when entering an emergency room, the chorus advised the audience.

Figure 5. Diablos Verdes murga (2003). Still from video recording broadcasted by TV Ciudad, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNpw85cJTL8>.

The last segment, “Hell’s Soup Kitchen” (*El Merendero del Infierno*), was the apotheosis of the representation. The image and mise-en-scène directly alluded to *The Last Supper* by Leonardo Da Vinci, or better still, to Luis Buñuel’s grotesque version of it in *Viridiana*, when the poor took over the scene, or to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s rendition of it in the eponymous film, in which the apostles were replaced by slaves. A table stretching all along the stage was surrounded by a

30. General Pinochet was arrested in London in October 1998, where he remained under house arrest until March 2000. After being authorized to return to Chile, Pinochet was indicted there by Judge Juan Guzmán Tapia and charged with several crimes, before dying in December 2006 without having been convicted.

31. On the notion of “structure of feeling,” see Raymond Williams, *La larga revolución* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 2003).

number of “hungry monstrous beings” of impoverished folks. The factory scene from Georges Bizet’s opera *Carmen* and a variety of other folkloric songs and carnival classics provided the musical background to the “counterfeit” lyrics.

Part dinner, part mass and prayer (“in the name of [President] Batlle, [Minister of Economy Alejandro] Achugarry, and the IMF [International Monetary Fund]”), this scene served to congregate the group and to deploy, albeit in comic and grotesque format, a sequence of grievances and demands directed at government officials and international financial institutions. Yet, as dinner was served, they discovered and exhibited their empty plates for all to see (“empty as [Augusto] Pinochet’s memory,” who was testifying in London at the time³⁰). With gargantuan melancholy, they remembered “the food of the good old times” and complained that there were not even bones to gnaw on since “grandma ate them all.” As dessert time approached, the negative stance turned into a biblical call to come and share the table of the poor as well as their dreams, a call to sensibility and solidarity with the dispossessed, to stand up “against the empire” and in favor of hope, to resist in spite of the flames of this inferno, etc. The true “miserable,” the chorus explained, were not those lacking wealth but those causing the poverty and hunger of the people.

In the end, the sinner pleaded to leave this hell and, in a parody of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, “to get back home.” The devils granted him “a second opportunity on earth,” this time referencing the ending of Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The *retirada* began with a Brazilian samba rhythm and a happier mood, followed by a more nostalgic second part based on the popular Uruguayan rock band NTVG’s song “Clara” and the classic, exuberant farewell song and dance promising to return the following year.

Historically, religions have created fabulous places, such as heaven or paradise, where, in contrast with the real world, life is as should be and desires come true. Diablos Verdes’s farewell inverted the metaphor, as heaven was displaced by hell. The distorted “view from hell” stands as a carnivalesque view of life and the world. Because of the monstrous and crooked character of the social and cultural order, it was in this imaginary hell of carnival, ruled by the Green Devils, that human values were spoken of, celebrated, and taken as principles to guide action and the dream and struggle for a different social world.

If carnival is a field of dispute, that year *Diablos* managed to symbolically conquer the field, setting the tone and semantic value of carnival. The previous concern with dictatorship and democracy was now displaced by a parody and critique of consumer society and capitalist globalization and their fatal social and economic consequences in Uruguay and the region, pointing to an alternative social and cultural project vaguely imagined as a carnivalesque utopia.

The proposal, reception, and success (it won first prize after all) of *Diablos* mirrored the configuration of yet another “structure of feeling” and sensibility, critical of, and contrary to, the neoliberal discourse and reality.³¹ This fed a tension and confrontation at two levels, first, between the two political models and forces (Batlle’s government, on the one hand, and the Center-Left coalition headed by Tabaré Vázquez, governing the capital city, on the other), and second, between the here and now of the utopian moment come true in carnival and the more abstract and alien premises of global capitalism responsible for the miseries of real life due to the

32. Bertolt Brecht, *El compromiso en literatura y arte*, Historia, ciencia y sociedad 102, ed. Werner Hecht (Barcelona: Península, 1973), 234–43.

33. Remedi, *Murga*, esp. part 3.

34. Bajtín, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski*, 149–200.

35. See Brum, *Compartiendo la alegría de cantar*; and Ramos and Scherzer, *Destino*.

36. Joaquín de León, Ariel Cancio, and Helen Mondada, "El Encuentro de Murga Joven como fiesta popular," Monografía del Curso Carnaval y fiestas populares, Cátedra UNESCO Carnaval, December 2014, in my personal possession.

collapse of the neoliberal regime. By making use of a formally fanciful mode of representation and discourse such as the carnivalesque, *Diablos* managed to produce the kind of realism that Brecht advocated.³²

Agarrate Catalina's *Los Sueños* (2005): Challenging the Rules of Both Carnival and Political Orthodoxy

By the 1980s, the carnival field saw greater competition between various kinds of carnivalesque discourses, religiosities, and deities. Some were less willing than others to accept the confined space and time of carnival, and less willing to conform to the rules of the official contest, or the forms traditionally governing carnivalesque genres or categories.³³ The most overtly confrontational types of murgas were called *murga-pueblo* and *anti-murga*, as opposed to the more traditional *murga-murga* (with such troupes as Patos Cabrereros, Curtidores de Hongos, Saltimbanquis, and La Gran Muñeca). Questioning and confronting the culture of dictatorship and seeking to establish an alternative cultural order, the *murga-pueblo* (represented by such troupes as Reina de la Teja, Araca la Cana, Falta y Resto, and Diablos Verdes) was an especially rebellious carnivalesque form. It was sometimes characterized as "epic" in the sense that it displaced the dialogical, polyphonic, and irreverent qualities of carnival in favor of a more stable notion of truth, or more evident ethical and political standings, all of which eroded ambivalence and relativism, sometimes at the expense of humor as well.³⁴ In addition to its defiant discourse, it did not restrict itself to the time and place of carnival, performing throughout the year and venturing well beyond the carnival stage, as it accompanied a wide range of social and political events. The *anti-murga* also challenged the restrictive conventions, rules, and commonplaces of the carnival form as codified and imposed by tradition—and militantly embraced by the *murga-murga*—and the contest itself. Its practitioners were younger, and many came from the theater world or from the amateur university murgas. Predictably, the *anti-murga* was often penalized and disqualified by official carnival organizers, yet it opened a venue for a new conception and mode of practicing carnival that eventually led to the *murga joven* movement.

Against the background of a perceived regression of carnivalesque discourse into traditional and official forms and conventions as it sought to conform to the jury's expectations and thus do well in the official contest, the *murga joven* movement emerged in the 1990s. More than a type, it emerged as yet another carnivalesque field existing around but outside the professional, commercial circuit and the official contest. This peripheral subsystem was formed by a number of student-run carnivalesque troupes that gathered at an annual encounter.³⁵ In the *murga joven* movement there were fewer rules, and emphasis was placed on the experience and the process. As it was more playful and experimental, the *murga joven* introduced new forms, poetics, and themes.³⁶ To the traditional political criticism—national or international—and social satire, it added a different and wider range of social topics: gender concerns, issues of discrimination, a broader human rights agenda, and even a critique of weakened traditional political parties and language, which were more in tune with the new generation's mindset and sensibilities. It also questioned the increasing commercialization, formulaic nature, and conformism of the more well-funded and professionalized troupes, be they of the *murga-murga* or the *murga-pueblo* types.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw an increase in the influence of the *murga joven* circuit and forms, and some of the most prominent and influential troupes, as well as some of

37. Founded in 1971, the Broad Front was an electoral coalition created to challenge the hegemony of the traditional two-party system formed by the Colorado Party and the Blanco Party (one more urban and reformist, the other more rural and conservative). It was joined by the Center-Left wings of the two traditional parties, plus the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, the Communists, and other smaller groups. The Front was severely persecuted and repressed during the dictatorship (1973–84), and thousands of its members were jailed, tortured, exiled, and murdered, when they did not simply disappear. In 1989 the Broad Front won a local election in Montevideo and in 2005 they won the national elections.

38. My analysis is based on the recording of Agarrate Catalina's *Los Sueños* released by Montevideo Music Group in 2005.

the most memorable plays came from it. La Mojigata, Agarrate Catalina, Queso Magro, and Demimurga are some examples of troupes that originated from this movement. Yet the decade was artistically and symbolically ruled by Agarrate Catalina, which began participating in murga joven in 2001 and moved to "the big stage" in 2003 (fig. 6).

Figure 6. Agarrate Catalina murga: A "murga joven" that triumphed in the major league. Source: <https://www.emol.com/fotos/27895/#1248374/La-murga-uruguay-m%C3%A1s-exitosa-de-los-%C3%BAltimos-tiempos-en-Nescaf%C3%A9-de-las-Artes>.

Following the 2002 neoliberal debacle, the Center-Left Broad Front coalition won the 2004 national election for the first time in Uruguayan history.³⁷ Capitalizing on the crisis of neoliberalism, this political triumph of the electoral Left made a century-old dream come true and opened new political horizons. It also set the stage for one of the best-accomplished spectacles in decades, Agarrate Catalina's play *Los Sueños* (Dreams), written by Yamandú Cardozo, Tabaré Cardozo, and Carlos Tanco. Agarrate Catalina's memorable performance won the prize in 2005, only two years after this formerly murga joven arrived to the grown-ups' carnival stage.³⁸ Catalina also won first prize the following year for "The End of the World" (2006), two years later for "The Journey" (2008), and in 2011 for "The Community." Due to their affinity with then senator José "Pepe" Mujica's political style, their participation in his political campaign, and their frequent and grotesque, yet tender, characterizations of this political figure, they became known as "Pepe's troupe."

Los Sueños consisted of seven parts. The introduction or *saludo* ("Dreams have returned") combined the notion of carnivalesque space and time as the brief materialization and embodiment of a world of dreams and imagination—"a theater of the poor"—and the arrival of the murga as the embodiment of the people and the *barrio*, with the possibility of dreaming or

daydreaming once again—in the aftermath of the 2002 crisis. The transition to the second part invited the audience to enter “the mysterious world of dreams,” a world that “escape[d] reason,” yet wherein any similarity with reality was, however, real. It also set a premise: that we get to know people...by their dreams.

The introduction was followed by a brief counterpoint between the chorus and a character with exaggeratedly hairy eyebrows named Julio Ma[g]ía, a clear reference to the historical leader of the Colorado Party and two-time president, Julio María Sanguinetti. By means of a play on pronunciation—he had difficulties rolling the “r” and replaced it with a “g”—this character was meant to parody Sanguinetti. Julio Ma[g]ía mentioned that “he had a dream,” indeed, a nightmare. He had dreamt of “a horrendous monstrous being” (referring to then senator Mujica), surrounded by “a horde of dirty and bearded creatures” coming to power, speaking of “revolution” and seeking to distribute wealth: “My wealth!” Julio Ma[g]ía added. The following *cuplé*, “The Nightmare” (Sanguinetti’s nightmare), paved the way for the appearance of a second character, “Pepe” Mujica, the object of a superb and hilarious imitation by Martín Cardozo.

Figure 7. Caricatures of president José Mujica and Hugo Chávez by Agarrate Catalina, *Los sueños* (2005).
Source: <https://murgaagarratecatalina.wordpress.com/2008/05/28/la-pesadilla-de-los-guerrilleros-pepe-mujica/>.

This folkloric figure symbolized the changing profile of the leftist coalition, traditionally urban and middle class, as the Broad Front grew by incorporating larger sectors of the popular classes (including the impoverished working class, rural residents, and the unemployed squatters). The power of the segment resided in the successful caricature of Mujica’s look, gestures, voice, mode of speaking, and figurative language (closer to that of the working classes and rural folks), all of which resulted in self-recognition and laughter. What was said amounted to a play on words that articulated a mild political-economic critique while using double entendre as a second source of laughter. (Mujica himself attended these performances and was caught laughing at his caricature.)

39. The name Ronald Guevara Vázquez combines the names of three political figures: Ronald Arismendi, a historical leader of the Uruguayan Communist Party, who died in 1989; Ernesto Che Guevara, the Argentinian leader and symbol of the Cuban Revolution; and Tabaré Vázquez, the Broad Front coalition candidate who was elected mayor of Montevideo in 1989 and president of Uruguay in 2004.

In the third part, "The Lost Dreams of the Blanco Party Youth," the object of parody this time was the Nationalist (or Blanco) Party. The actors made fun of President Lacalle's sympathizers, his wife, Senator Julia Pou ("Julita Puuuuu"), and Senator Jorge Larrañaga and his followers, as they were all traveling to a party meeting in the legendary and faraway site of Masoller.

The fourth and most climactic part was a parody of McDonald's as a symbol of corporate culture and of "the American dream," that is the dream of "climbing up the capitalist ladder by stepping on and crushing other people's heads," as the chorus stated. The chorus now wore the typical McDonald's uniform, and the emblematic clown Ronald McDonald—the main character in this segment—was replaced with "*compañero* Ronald Guevara Vázquez," played by theater actor Iván Solarich.³⁹ Acknowledging the change in Uruguayan politics, the multinational developed a strategy to adapt to the new climate by apparently turning to the Left and adopting a series of leftist slogans and actions, existing ambiguously as a sign of "cultural revolution" but mostly of opportunistic accommodation. For example, McDonald's was renamed Marx Donald and the employee of the month became "comrade" of the month. Its employers demanded "the end of the bourgeois hamburger" ("*la hamburguesa...burguesa*"), and advocated becoming a workers' cooperative; forming a union; and offering "a proletarian menu," the collectivization of cups and straws, and other disparate ideas that made people roar with laughter.

At one point, however, a character reacted to these new values and changes, rejecting them as "messing with *my* stuff," and expressed that he did not like this "game" any longer and wanted *his own* individual hamburger and his Happy Meal box (*cajita feliz*), thus establishing a conflict or tension. Yet another voice, calm and cynical, reassured him that, in reality, nothing had changed that much, that *he* still called the shots, that "by serving you, *you* serve their purposes," and by selling you, they actually buy you, hence casting a dark cloud of irony above it all. In the end, the chorus reminded the audience that "if *you* don't change, *nothing* changes,...not even with Fidel [Castro] as your president."

The fifth act was an emotive segment in which the members of the murga, all children and grandchildren of 1960s and 1970s activists, paid homage to "their parents' dreams," the dreams they had fought for and suffered so much for in the preceding decades, hopes and goals that had collapsed and had to be picked back up many times finally come true in this brief window—or eschatological "lightening flash," as Benjamin would put it—of triumph at last and hope. The kids reflected on the times ahead and the illusion and joy of now having the chance to live in a society their parents dreamt for them: a society "that w[ould] have to be built," the chorus warned. A brief sixth segment further delineated this utopian moment as one member of the chorus sang a song. In it, a poetic voice wandered through the corridors of a surreal mansion and walked into the room of "forgotten dreams" to remember and pay homage to "impossible dreams," which, overcoming a number of barriers and tricking a myriad of sentinels, managed nonetheless to return and "come looking for me." This voice figuratively opened an imaginary window that led to such a domain and invited the audience to venture through. In the final farewell, Agarrate Catalina referred to the greatest and most important dream of all, "the dream that makes all the other dreams possible": the dream of coming back next February, for the subsequent carnival.

Los Sueños gave near-perfect expression to some of the most critical functions of carnival. It offered a transcendental and satirical critique of the established order and mode of thought. It

was a time where a “world upside down” came true, only this time, the dream, the unthinkable—and the nightmare for others—became reality, and was not simply a brief interruption of the established order. The performance was a celebration of the triumph and crowning of the people, as had been once suggested by playwright and comedian Jorge Esmóris, director of the anti-murga BCG: “Murga, the peoples’ queen, if the people reign” (*murga, del pueblo reina, si reina el pueblo*), as Araca la Cana’s classic verse went.

Don Timoteo’s *Creer o reventar* (2014): Pointing Out the Contradictions of the Uruguayan Left

Having been in the opposition for so long, once in government the leftist coalition had to learn how to continue to be critical and avoid the trappings of conservatism, orthodoxy, and officialdom. Suddenly, it found itself in the position of not only having to defend and run the state but also administering the (capitalist) economy and making compromises with the dominant classes. Socially and culturally speaking, leftist culture also proved to be quite traditionalist and conservative as a result of decades of middle-class hegemony, fairly conservative subcultures (in guilds and unions, the press, churches, traditional parties, and so on), and an invasive global culture, both high and low. This set the background for a growing critical stance toward the governmental Left from within the social Left, which found its expression in the field of carnival. Yet, with some exceptions, carnivalesque theater had a difficult time combining a critical perspective on power, on capitalism, and on the capitalist state, with a critique (or self-critique) of a government led by popular forces, without crossing a line and being interpreted as siding with the conservative and reactionary forces that sought to regain control of the nation. Ten years into leftist dominance, criticism of the Broad Front government became more biting, highlighting the bureaucratic, technocratic, and sometimes corrupt practices of some government officials; the numerous errors caused by deficient, inept, management; the inability to think outside the capitalist box and the contradictions of official ideology as it promoted a sort of “friendly capitalism”; and, last but not least, the lack of attention paid to a new agenda of social and cultural rights (for example, gender issues, minority rights, and environmental concerns).

In 2014, while Cayó la Cabra, Queso Magro, and other representatives of the murga joven movement tended to promote this new social and cultural agenda, the first prize went to Don Timoteo, a murga troupe of an older, traditional kind (*murga-murga*), which originated in the historically more conservative Unión neighborhood (when compared with the more militantly working-class neighborhood of La Teja). Bought and managed by soccer stars and buddies Álvaro Recoba and Rafael Perrone, Don Timoteo privileged a critique of a number of social issues and a critique of the “contradictions of the state,” while still reaffirming the overall moderate and reformist political course (that is, advocating neither a radical leftist turn nor a return to neoliberalism).

Don Timoteo’s performance also consisted of the traditional seven parts.⁴⁰ After hesitantly establishing the beginning of carnival time and logic (“it seems that carnival is on”) the introduction made room for a character, “Pablo” (interpreted by comic actor Pablo Aguirrezábal) who represented both “the average citizen” and common sense, and who playfully established a philosophical and political tension or dilemma between being and seeming (“either it *is* or it *is not*”). From a dramatic point of view, the whole representation rested on the dialogue between Pablo (*cupletero*), the chorus, and occasionally other individual voices and interlocutors—such as Diego Bello—stepping forward from the chorus.

40. Here I use the recording of Don Timoteo’s 2014 murga released by Montevideo Music Group in 2014. Script writers: Carlos Tanco, Pablo “Pinocho” Routin, and Pablo Aguirrezábal. Both the text and the video recording of the entire spectacle are also available at <https://carnavaldeluruguay.com/>.

Figure 8. Don Timoteo murga, *Creer o reventar* (2014). Photo by Juan Samuelle, from *El Observador*, March 8, 2014, <https://www.elobservador.com.uy/nota/don-timoteo-logro-el-primer-premio-en-murgas-20143816350>.

41. Here, Bajtín's concept of dialogism and the carnivalesque concept of truth meets Jacques Derrida's critique of Western *logos* and its accompanying anxiety about presences, binary oppositions, clearly delimited identities and terms, stable and unquestioned truths, and so on. See: See Culler, Jonathan. "La crítica postestructuralista," *Criterios*, nos. 21–24 (January 1987–December 1988), 33–43.

42. Coined by Max Horkheimer, the term "instrumental reason" refers to the thinking and the actions of those in power that turn anybody or anything into "things" and instruments of their own objectives. Things and people have value only in terms of its "instrumentality" or use by others, and do not have value or meaning in themselves. Max Horkheimer, *Crítica de la razón instrumental* (Buenos Aires: Sur, 1973).

Pablo requested a positive and unambiguous resolution to all matters that contradicted then president Mujica's ambivalent logic ("while I tell you one thing, I also tell you the opposite"), adhering to a traditional Western "notion of truth" and *logos*, where there is no place for ambivalence or dialectics and "two opposing things *can't* both be true." In his longing for "presence" and certainty—"I need something to *be*" (*necesito algo que sea*)—Pablo seemed to forget that identity was more often than not "a relation," an opposition to and a negation of something else: an absence, a desire, a project.⁴¹ The same went for bringing together and forging "the people," but negatively, that is, based on an opposition to something or someone else (be it the upper classes, bourgeois culture, or instrumental reasoning⁴²). This led to the four motifs—and object of parody—that organized the representation: the search for and, ultimately, the fabrication of an enemy; the dangerous transformation of oneself into the other, that is, into the very enemy one used to fight and that defined oneself; the contradictions between state and society; and the emergence of negative forces from within "the people."

Likewise, the anxiety and feeling of loss caused by the perception—or confirmation—that "the people" are not as united and monolithic as they used to be (or as we liked to imagine) led, by means of satire, to a renewed awareness of the relational and negative notion of being, and thus of "the necessity of an enemy" ("Batman needs the Penguin," as the chorus put it). Or of the function of negative feelings, such as hate, in order to unite the people once again: "Hate lasts longer than love...and is more participative," the chorus noted ironically.

This need for an enemy, in turn, led to the search for and "the invention of the enemy," which was the theme of the song of the following segment. Yet this enemy was an entity brewing in everyday life: "The taxi driver, the hospital clerk, the person who calls you on the phone just

when you are watching the game. There are real as well as imaginary enemies, like the person who steals your socks. The owner of the academy who teaches your daughter how to dance reggaeton is an enemy too." In sum, "enemies are everywhere."

The "Delinquents of Yesterday" *cuplé*—a development of this "search for an enemy"—addressed the topic of crime and insecurity by creating a racialized enemy of recent Caribbean immigrants. It longed for "the thieves of yesterday" and their civilized codes and morals, as opposed to the ruthless robbers of today who "talk[ed] with a Caribbean accent"—here mocking racist and xenophobic discourses—and "under the influence of crack cocaine, do not hesitate to steal from a neighbor or a public school, aggressively rob an old lady's pension, and are willing to kill you just for your cell phone." A dialogical exchange between Pablo, two other delinquent characters (Diego Bello and Gonzalo Imbert), and the chorus sarcastically proposed to "get closer and to *understand* the thief" and requested that he use his manners and be gentle so that you could have a nice memory of the crime. Lastly, the chorus offered "a new robber etiquette," or "stealing with values." Yet, as the chorus lamented, these values were taught when it was already too late. Their treatment of the problem of delinquency then became a self-critique of the way society raises and educates children and youth.

The next segment, "Our Neighbors," moved from the thief to the neighbor—and returned to the level of everyday life—in order to identify a number of likely and usual petty conflicts among neighbors, such as the taste and volume of their music; the way their car is parked; their dog; and various kinds of noises caused by home repairs, the washing machine, or frenetic sex. The act then shifted scale and referred to conflicts with neighboring Brazil and Argentina, while reviewing a number of episodes when Uruguayan presidents Batlle, Vázquez, and Mujica made gross—and hilarious—diplomatic mistakes.

At this point, one got the idea that society—"the people"—was or had become merely a messy mass of egocentric and antisocial individuals, and that "individualism" was perhaps the worst enemy of all. "When left alone and on their own, people behave like bastards"—a Hobbesian view indeed.

The sixth part was the climax of the performance and focused on the state (and "statism") as yet another enemy, while navigating a number of facets of this problem: the necessity of the state, the contradictions of the state, the deformations and deviations of the state, and above all, "the parasites of the state." It explored what the state represented, offered, and solved, while highlighting its abuses, its lack of piety, and the pain it caused. It was a many-layered text that walked a thin line between a call "to start all over again" (entertaining the idea of stateless primitive communism) and to embrace and accept the state as "the social contract that organizes society and the imaginary" and "makes us productive and good," despite all its problems and contradictions. Interestingly enough, when Pablo demanded "the dissolution of the state," he encountered silence and disapproval from the chorus, implying that in spite of everything, people may still need, desire, and rely on the state (an idea that can be interpreted in many contradictory ways, ranging from republicanism and socialism to fascism).

In this segment, the state was represented by a rope held by the entire troupe—as a sort of umbilical cord "that keeps us together"—while the chorus sang: "The state organizes us,

establishes an order, provides a meaning. It is the people at its best, the God of the atheists.... It gives as much as it takes.” (fig. 9) Yet this notion of a “powerful” state fell rather short of understanding contemporary society and culture inasmuch as the political and symbolic order were established by actors and forces that transcend the national state (especially in small nations like Uruguay), such as transnational corporations, globalized media and networks, and geopolitical games. Something like this was indeed inscribed in the segment where the state failed to confront Tenfield boss “Paco” Casal, a powerful entrepreneur, owner of soccer players, a TV channel (VTV), and the rights to soccer, basketball, and carnival broadcasting itself.

Figure 9. The rope as symbol of the state that binds society. Don Timoteo murga (2014).

Photo by Juan Samuelle, from *El Observador*, January 22, 2015,

<https://www.elobservador.com.uy/nota/arranca-la-venta-de-entradas-para-el-teatro-de-verano-20151221890>.

The murga also pinpointed a number of contradictions. The media criticize the state but they make use of and profit from the airwaves that are public property. Likewise, agribusiness demands lower taxes while at the same time requiring subsidies and logistical infrastructure and demanding that the state find new markets for them. A small number of bad investments and decisions sit alongside successful public companies that enrich the state’s coffers and finance social programs and public investments. The murga did not fail to criticize carnival itself, which is not only organized and regulated by the state but also heavily sponsored and promoted by public companies, such as the State Electricity Company, the State Oil Refinery, and the State Insurance Company, and city government funds as well. The chorus warned: how much can we criticize the state if, in the end, we all depend on it, and in one way or another, we seek its aid and protection? “Among firefighters we do not step on each other’s water hoses—as the proverb goes—...and among urologists, we don’t shake hands,” the chorus jokingly reminded the audience. In sum, Don Timoteo succeeded in touching many sensitive nerves both in favor of and against the state and statism, thus creating a humorous and satirical play full of tension, sarcasm, and irony.

43. Bajtín, *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski; and Bajtín, La cultura popular en la Edad Media.*

44. Gustavo Espinosa, "De la obscenidad a la retórica (poética del Carnaval)," in *Revista Crac*, no. 1 (July 2001), <https://carnavaldefuturo.uy/2006/10/12/de-la-obscenidad-a-la-retorica-poetica-de-carnaval/>. See also Hernán Vidal, "La noción de otredad en el marco de las culturas nacionales," in *Hermenéuticas de lo popular*, ed. Hernán Vidal (Minneapolis, MN: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1992), 43–71.

45. Here it is important to stress, once again, that Habermas's notion of the public sphere is a relational one. The rising bourgeoisie developed a number of social and cultural institutions and practices (publishing houses, newspapers and magazines, places to meet, elaborate ideas, discussion of these writings, etc.) in order to organize themselves socially and symbolically as a class and to contest and challenge *both* the ancien régime and the popular classes. Likewise, the popular public sphere is also organized outside and directed against a number of social, political, and cultural actors and formations: the dominant classes, as well as, for example, the intellectual Left, the middle classes, civil servants, the "alienated" or corporatist working class, and the lumpenproletariat.

A first-person and highly philosophical "Farewell Song" summed up all these facets and contradictions. It stressed the many uses and benefits obtained from having and constructing an enemy, including hiding our own miseries, shortcomings, and wrongdoings from ourselves. It demonstrated how, little by little, we become much like the enemy we criticize and want to confront, resorting to the same arguments and excuses used by our enemies. The song showed that once the imaginary monster-enemy evaporates, we find ourselves alone and naked in front of the mirror, free at last. Lastly, it demonstrated the pain that we, too, cause to others. The final lyrics warned the audience against seeking the false and harmful protection of lies and blind faith in whatever we believed in order to sustain and reproduce the order of things and our sense of reality.

Conclusions

While the intention of this article was to explore the changing politics of carnival in relation to a series of contextual shifts, the relationship between carnival and politics cannot be reduced to the explicit positioning and verbal expressions and discourses of carnivalesque troupes. Carnival is a complex, multilayered social phenomenon and possesses a number of structural traits, all of which have political meaning and value.

To begin with, as pointed out by Bajtín, carnival time and its festivities create an interruption in everyday life and norms, a suspension, a critique, and an inversion of present reality, opening up other horizons and possibilities that transcend, call into question, and diverge from existing reality.⁴³ Also, it temporarily offers "a second life," a less alienated one: an inverted yet "straightened" reality where humanity, reason, human values, and human personhood are restored. Indeed, it is a place where a more sensual, joyful, down-to-earth, and better-balanced "carnavalesque concept of life and the world" reigns. During this time, popular sectors take over the public sphere, become cultural actors and producers, and make use of it, albeit in a non-determined form, since carnival is merely "a field."

If obscenity has taken over the real world and the entire social scene, as Gustavo Espinosa points out, and that which is excluded and repressed is always context-dependent, carnival would not perform its "work" by replicating *that* which is already present everywhere.⁴⁴ Instead, carnival offers a place and an opportunity for the popular sectors to stage and voice their concerns, views, and critiques *in opposition to* the dominant sectors and forces as well as to the state, the government of the Left, the formal political organizations and authorities, the media, and "common sense" and "normal" behaviors and customs, making use of carnivalesque polyphonic and dialogic structure (even if sometimes this may be more apparent than real).⁴⁵

Indeed, Uruguayan carnival, carnival theater, and the murga genre in particular, have acquired certain structural features and different political meanings and values over time. Until the 1960s, it performed a mildly critical, yet cathartic, function. By the early 1970s, *some* groups within the field became increasingly hostile to the power structure and to hegemonic culture. Carnival provided the occasion for the crafting of an alternative cultural formation in tandem with the opposition movement (for example, the leftist political coalition, the Central Workers Union, the student movement). Between 1973 and 1985, the military dictatorship repressed and restricted the cultural field in general, and the field of carnival in particular. Yet the military could not shut

46 . Espinosa, "De la obscenidad a la retórica."

down carnival—or any other cultural space or manifestation—altogether. Hence, by the end of the 1970s, the field of carnival saw the reemergence of more defiant carnivalesque troupes (Falta y Resto, Reina de la Teja, Araca la Cana, Diablos Verdes, La Soberana) that played their part in the struggle against the authoritarian state. As that state suffered a couple of political defeats in 1980 and 1982, carnival also became a cultural space for popular celebration (something better performed by the more playful and festive anti-murga BCG), for continued political criticism and action, for the imagination and proposition of alternative scenarios, or for thoughts beyond dictatorship. Lastly, in the two decades that followed, carnival found itself amid, and taking part in, a number of processes and struggles yet to be fought: the struggle "for truth and justice" and against impunity for crimes committed during the dictatorship; the need to consolidate democracy and contain the possibility of a military comeback; the need to confront the neoliberal offensive of the 1990s; and the need to articulate an alternative imaginary and project—that is, post-capitalist political language, values, desires, goals, attitudes, and practices. The first decade of the new millennium, however, presented a set of new and complex circumstances for carnival. While the Left governed the capital city and carnival became a cultural apparatus of some force—what Espinosa called an "ideological reproduction apparatus of the City-State"⁴⁶—the Right still controlled the finances, the military, most of the media apparatus, the government, and the state apparatus. Left-leaning carnivalesque troupes and discourses imposed their presence—and at times, their prevalence—in the field of carnival and, without ceasing to be critical of everything (as the genre mandates), they targeted, mocked, and challenged the forces perceived to be responsible for the status quo (the national government, the global capitalist system, the media) and aligned themselves with the leftist forces, and the local and the popular sectors within the nation.

Such was the situation until the crisis of 2002 signaled both the failure of neoliberal capitalism and the exhaustion of the traditional two-party system. In this context, backed up and sustained by the social, political, and cultural capital accumulated in decades of social struggle, Diablos Verdes seized the moment and put forward a critical depiction of reality, launching a symbolic assault on the already breached neoliberal fortress. This was accentuated by the disaster of Batlle's government, which caused the triumph of the leftist coalition in 2004 for the first time ever. Once again, carnival could perform one of its most ancient functions, that of the "coronation ceremony" of the people and the corresponding celebration. However, it was a different kind of festivity, for this time it was not merely a foolish act, or a comic parenthesis after which things returned to normal, but was one of epic dimensions for it meant a turning point and the beginning of a different era—albeit uncertain and, needless to say, never as imagined or desired.

In addition to making fun of the defeated, as expected, and laughing at the new and monstrous face of the Left—the invigorating custom of laughing at oneself—*Los Sueños* by Agarrate Catalina invited spectators to celebrate this triumph. But it also resorted to a romantic call to dream—yet another facet of carnival, that of daydreaming or *rêverie*—and to commit to the building of this dream. It also warned of some of the perils ahead: the corporate structures that remained intact and tended to adapt opportunistically.

After ten years in government and having had to run the economy within a capitalist framework—even if in a more redistributive and social democratic fashion—the Left found itself in many

47. Espinosa, "De la obscenidad a la retórica"; and Emiliano Tuala, "Adiós carnaval," *La diaria* (March 17, 2014).

contradictory situations and blind alleys. By the end of the second term, it showed signs of deviation and disorientation of various sorts, within the government, its political organizations, and their social base. As was to be expected, this was the source of a number of disillusionments with, and critiques of, leftist discourse and practice, both from within the Left and from the popular sectors themselves. Don Timoteo's 2014 performance testified to the changing climate, translating the signs of the times into the language of carnival. Thus, while in 2001 Espinosa had complained that carnival had become an official propaganda machine of the Left, in 2014, Emiliano Tuala, for his part, noticed—and admired—a "*desfrenteamplización*": that is, the emergence of a critical distance between carnival and the government of the leftist coalition.⁴⁷

Don Timoteo's spectacle began by playing with the need for questioning absolutes, presences, stable identities, and certainties, all of which could be taken as a warning against demagogic positions and solutions. It was also a lamentation for having slowly become the other ("when the monster is gone, I have to face myself in the mirror") and also a cause of suffering ("the broken flowers in my garden"). It did not hesitate to parody a number of emerging social and ideological phenomena, such as the need to find an enemy to blame, a widespread moral and social crisis, and a number of conflicts at the level of everyday life. It was also critical of the contradictory discourse that called "to get rid of the state" (in favor of "the rule of the market"), while at the same time demanding and expecting the state to provide justice, jobs, better salaries, services, protections, securities, markets, investments, and much more. Don Timoteo's vindication of the need and value of the state, symbolized by the rope "that ties everybody together," may sound like pro-government rhetoric. Yet it also ventured and invited a never-ending critique of the state and its related political pathologies (authoritarianism, bureaucracy, parasitism, corruption, lack of soul and piety), stressing the contradictions of a government of the popular sectors forced to operate within circumstances neither of their own choice nor under their control. From below, and using popular language, Don Timoteo thus posed a number of unresolvable questions, something inherent to the dialogical, carnivalesque form.

In sum, in Uruguay, carnival is a form of popular theater, and therefore it should be a subject for theater studies, independent of and in addition to other disciplinary perspectives. The political sign and value of carnivalesque theater is neither substantive nor predictable. It needs to be thought of as a field, characterized by poetic and ideological diversity, opposition and conflict, inasmuch as each group responds creatively and distinctively to changing contexts and circumstances, with one eye on reality and official discourse and the other on the aesthetic and ideological reconfigurations of the field. The form and ideology of carnival cannot be established other than by studying particular representations. Even then, given the polyphonic, dialogical, masked, and contradictory traits of this kind of theatrical discourse, one needs to surmount a number of trappings and mirages in order to establish its true face, ideology, and ultimate political value. While I chose a diachronic approach, a synchronic study would reveal a wider range of positions at any given time.

The three murgas analyzed here, all of which were awarded first prize in the official contest (in 2003, 2005, and 2014 respectively), are examples of how particular troupes have responded to specific conjunctures: Diablos Verdes to the neoliberal economic and social collapse of 2002, Agarrate Catalina to the perspective of the Left coming to power in 2005, and Don Timoteo in

48. Murga costumes can be thematic and referential (connected to the theme of the part or the theme of the overall spectacle) or non-referential (non-figurative). A single spectacle can alternate between these two kinds of costumes.

49. Carriquiry, *Poéticas de la murga uruguaya*.

2014 to the shortcomings and contradictions of the Left after two terms in government, and more particularly to questions of being in power and running the country. Formally speaking, all three cases opted to develop a single theme (structuring the spectacle from beginning to end, including the *popurrí*) and privileged the *cuplé* as the main theatrical medium, opting for expert *cupleteros* and comic actors (such as Charly Álvarez, Pablo Aguirrezábal, Diego Bello, and Iván Solarich). Diablos and Catalina made extensive use of special effects, accessories, costumes, and masks (other than the usual fantasy murga costume, mask, and makeup⁴⁸). However, while Don Timoteo was more metaphorical (making use of the rope as symbol of the state), Diablos and Catalina were more literal in their representation of situations and characters, as noted by Cecilia Carriquiry.⁴⁹

While carnival is constantly under threat of being captured or coopted by economic or political agents and logics (cultural entrepreneurs, state officials, the mass media), it nevertheless remains popular in form and content: subaltern but not entirely controlled. If some troupes express a certain alignment with the Left, others remain distant to, critical of, and even in opposition to it. To the perceived risk of institutionalization or professionalization (as in Don Timoteo's costly production), carnival has responded by creating less formal circuits, such as *murga joven*, forms not entirely in compliance with the official rules, and more artisanal modes of production and representation, in an attempt to remain a cultural form that is accessible to common people. As a result, carnival remains both a highly popular and political theatrical field, playing an important part in Uruguayan culture and society.

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