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 Association for Hispanic Classical Theater
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What Can I Say?: Perspectives on *Comedia* Staging Reconstruction

“When I get out of here, if I’m ever able to set this down, in any form, even in the form of one voice to another, it will be a reconstruction then too, at yet another remove. It’s impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavors, in the air or on the tongue, half-colors, too many.” (134)

--Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*

“When students ask about the problems of reconstructing historic performance—tasks I have shared in producing such works as Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate’s Dido and Aeneas with period instruments and dance styles—I now ask them: What evidence do we have that they ever died out?”

—Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*

Frustratingly, the rebirth of a contemporary Spanish *comedia* performance tradition has sprung up with an intensity inversely proportional to the scholarly study of its 17th-century staging practices. The past several decades has brought us the Teatro Clásico Español in Madrid, the Festival de Teatro Clásico in Almagro, the "Siglo" Festival in El Paso, TX among others, and yet post-Modernist criticism, especially the positions of Derrida and Foucault, has insisted upon the slippery significance of any staging "codes" or "conventions," and the impossibility of any fixing of associations.

What can we say, then, about actual staging practices in seventeenth-century Spain? This paper analyzes and problematizes the various approaches taken over the past few decades to staging reconstruction, including historical, semiotic, anthropological, cultural, structural, and phenomenological. Shevtsova, Schechner, Grubbs, Ferrer-Vals, Bass, Fischer and Friedman have all contributed to where Varey and Shergold, Allen, and Ruano de la Haza left off. While it seems that literary theory may also be used to dismiss these approaches out of hand, I argue each of these critics has worked to develop elements of a sustainable methodology that can effect some valid conclusions.

Picadillo—Laura Vidler

Picadillo is a traditional Cuban dish I grew up on. This is my version, which is a bit more generous with the seasoning than my dad's, I think.

Ingredients:

1 onion, chopped

1 green pepper, chopped

3 tablespoons olive oil

4-5 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 cup tomato sauce (or ketchup)

1 pound ground beef (80% lean works best—too little fat makes this dish too dry)

2 tablespoons cumin (or to taste—I like a LOT)

Salt and pepper to taste

1 tsp dried oregano

1 bay leaf

10-15 green olives

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

2/3 cup water

In a skillet, sauté onion and green pepper in olive oil with a pinch of salt until translucent. Add garlic, sauté for one minute. Add tomato sauce. This mixture is called the “sofrito,” and forms the basis of many Hispanic dishes. Yes! It’s a Hispanic mire-poix! Now, add the ground beef and seasonings and brown completely. Add water, vinegar, bay leaves and olives. Simmer partially covered until liquid cooks down, about 30 minutes. Serve over a bed of fluffy rice.

Cran-gría—Emily Vidler

1 64 oz bottle of cranberry juice

1 cup orange juice

1 1/3 cup turbinado sugar

2/3 cup water

Sliced fruit/berries (oranges, strawberries, peaches, blueberries)

1 cup club soda

My daughter Emily devised this delicious, non-alcoholic alternative to the traditional Spanish sangría. My son Elias, however, gets the credit for naming it. In a saucepan, dissolve turbinado sugar in water and simmer over low heat for 5 minutes. Allow this simple syrup to cool. In a serving pitcher, combine cranberry juice, orange juice, simple syrup and chill for several hours. Immediately before serving, add fruit and club soda. Serve over ice.

Figure 1.1 The hourglass of cultures

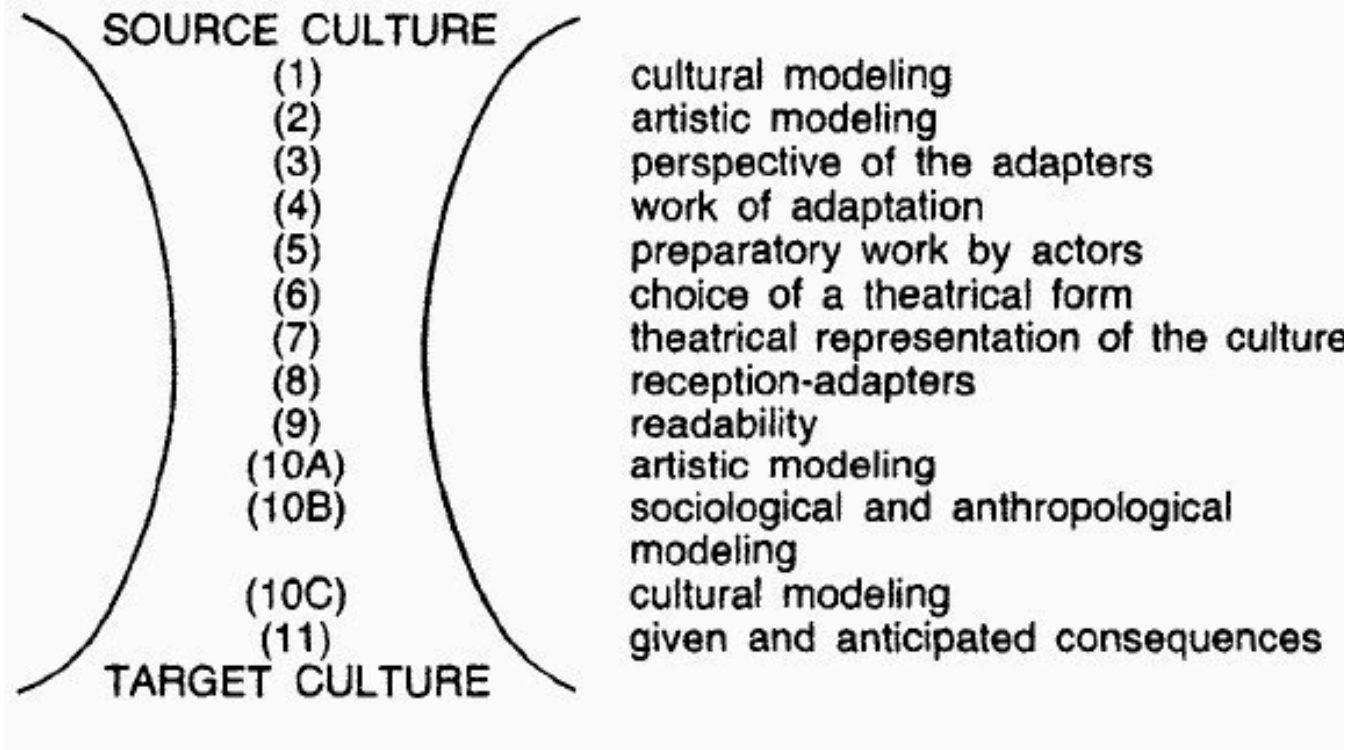


Fig. 3

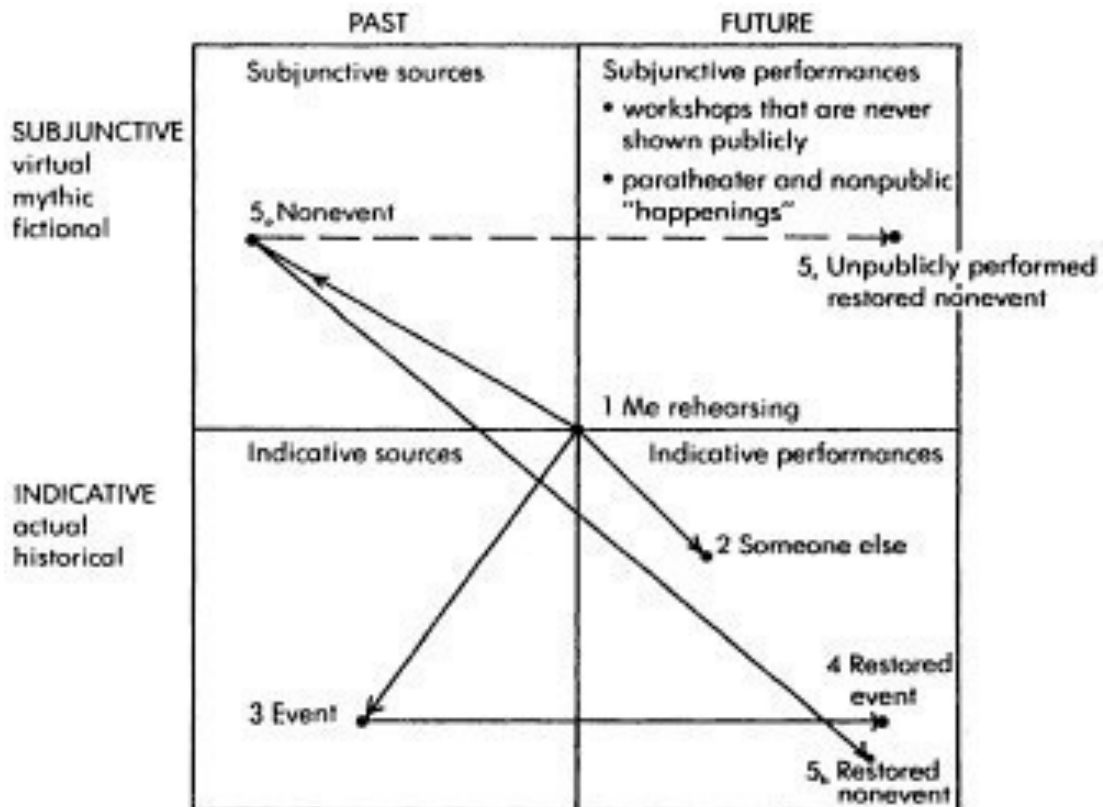


Fig. 4

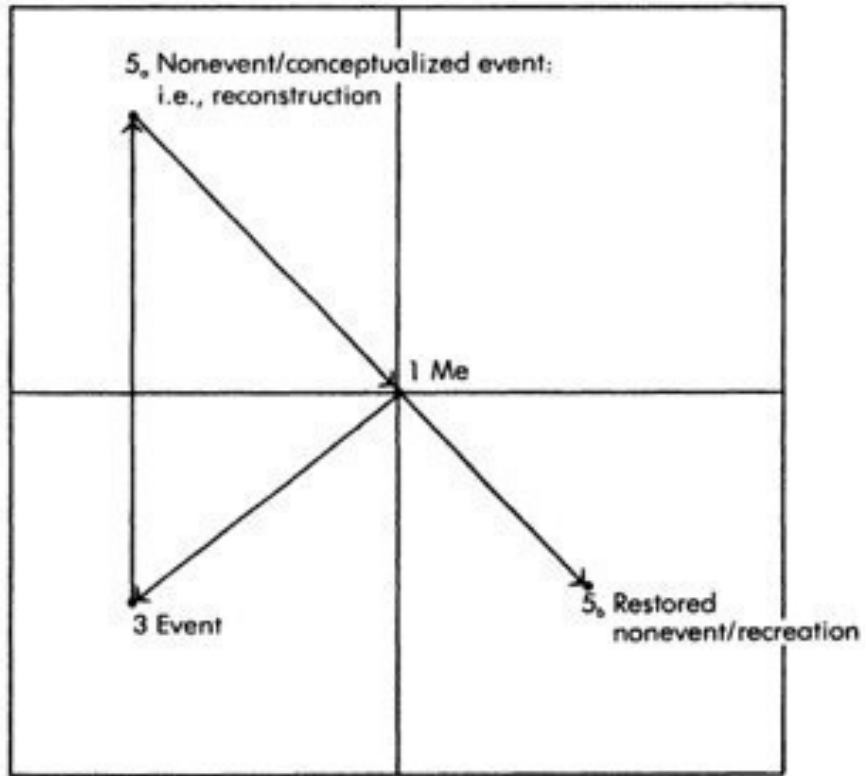


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

San Diego Wild Animal Park
http://graphics.stanford.edu/~merrie/San%20Diego/photos/photo_22.html



Fig. 7

“Shakers: Their Mode of Worship”
Lithograph by D.W. Kellogg



Fig. 8

“Shakers” by Doris Humphrey
Photo by Barbara Morgan, 1938 (Scott Nichols Gallery)