

Poets Theatre in Madrid: Narration, Queer Expression and Spanish Ventriloquism

Juf



Ángel desnudo III. (conjunto de la asunción), by Ocaña (1982)

(...)

Speaking of the specificity of producing theater in the hardest moments of the AIDS crisis, with social worlds diminishing with the death of lovers, colleagues and friends, Kevin Killian explained that “I needed to gather around me an army of like minded cultural workers, their bodies interposed between me and the void”. The idea of filling a void that is growing will serve as a starting point to explain the type of relationship that Poets Theater had with narration and representation, pastiche or collage, appropriation and an excess of information. The saturation strategy—the plays introduce information of all kinds: banal, political, social, artistic, personal— allows different subjectivities and expressions to appear, filling any available space. Traditional narration—following the plays of Poets Theatre and their closeness to New Narrative—, hides certain social identities, but this narration can be blown up by applying to it an excess of information that brings to light a particularity that goes beyond static and failed representations. The plot and the illusionism of the plays cease to be relevant, the “reality effect” that reinforces the narrative is no longer of interest, but rather, the transmission of information. What matters is the surface of the text in which constant conversations accumulate between an army of disparate characters, with dialogues conformed from found material, personal anecdotes, newspaper articles, pop mythology, movie scenes and lots of porn...



THAT CERTAIN SOMETHING

I had an epiphany, MAMA,
it was going to be awesome,
a trio of white, green and orange clouds
shaped like snakes
into the top of the sky
Spelling out my name
in the colors of IRELAND - or INDIA
Was it real, MAMA? or was it this
PHILIPK DICK illusion - that I
was in love with him - but it wasn't really me
who had the EPIPHANY
Standing on the edge of the CORN FIELD
with my kachet, feet a tangle of
Irish habitrails spelling my name
in letters that would soar 1,000 feet HIGH
- was it memories implanted in my BRAIN
I WANTED, ONCE, YEARS AGO
BUT NOW I'd rip them out like SPIKE the
CHIP
THAT made him wince
rather than hurt another human being ???
Tell me, MAMA, that certain
Something I felt like a rock in my CHEST

Kevin Killian 2007

Kevin Killian's shelf of Kylie Minogue memorabilia, fan fiction and incantations in 'Lending Library,' Adobe Books Backroom Gallery, 2010; and poem by Killian that functioned as a takeaway “catalog” for the show

(...)

For some time now, we've been trying to think about the figure of Jose Luis Moreno in relation to the ideas about sexuality, narrative and expression raised by the Poets Theater. Jose Luis Moreno is the type of character that would fascinate these poets: kitsch icon, television myth, bodybuilder, decadent glamour, obsessed with show business and fantasy, bad gay¹, head of an international embezzlement and money laundering ring and famous ventriloquist. His biography is very inaccessible and is only told by him in a fragmented, non-linear and incoherent way, pure information that comes and goes generating a very complex identity. His career as a ventriloquist is of special interest to us. The fragile illusion generated by ventriloquism and the plots of the show are secondary: realism takes a backseat in favor of a dialogued exchange of information in the form of critique and mockery. In ventriloquism there are two pre-established and caricatured positions: the power in the ventriloquist who controls the silly object and manipulates it with his voice, and the puppet that answers back to the person who controls it. The puppet has to invent alternative strategies for an expression that has been denied, negotiating with power in a small space of contestation, mockery and novelty.



Ventriloquist José Luis Moreno with his puppets Macario, Monchito and Rockefeller. In the sewers of the internet, someone commented on a forum: “how can he not be gay if he spends all day putting his hand up his puppets’ ass”.

¹ We owe the inspiration to Huw Lemmey and Ben Miller’s Bad Gays podcast about bad queers and complicated figures in LGBTQ+ history.

(...)

For ventriloquists, the hardest sounds to emit are those that contain labial consonants (f, bov, p and m), which is why words containing these sounds are usually avoided in the shows or they are disguised by putting accents on the characters or exaggerated ways of speaking (feminized and high-pitched or very deep and decrepit). There is an anecdote of Kevin Killian that reminds us of this exercise with the voice in ventriloquism. One of Killian's Poets Theater plays was being performed at Kiki gallery. The play was Diamonds and Rust, and it questioned the money raising campaigns for AIDS patients in San Francisco. Rick Jacobsen, who was the owner of the gallery and who had AIDS, had the leading role. Shortly before the premiere, Rick called —with an extremely pained and deep voice— to say that he was too weak to perform. Killian decided to stand in for Rick, and as he got onstage and began to read his lines, he imitated Rick's deep voice. Killian was bringing his sick friend to the scene, channeling him with that deep voice and filling his void. Poets Theater and ventriloquism share the ability to displace voices in order to widen the text until the expression of what is absent, intelligible or difficult to articulate fits into it.

The dead are notoriously hard to satisfy. Mr. Spicer's mixture may please his contemporary audience or may, and this is more probable, lead him to write better poetry of his own. But I am strongly reminded as I survey this curious amalgam of a cartoon published in an American magazine while I was visiting your country in New York. The cartoon showed a gravestone on which were inscribed the words: «HERE LIES AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN.» The caption below it read: «I wonder how they happened to be buried in the same grave?»

Federico García Lorca
Outside Granada, October 1957

Above: Excerpt from Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* (1957). Right: Rick Jacobsen, Kiki Gallery's owner and curator, outside the gallery on 14th Street, San Francisco, circa 1994



HB: In what way has the collaborative nature of the San Francisco poets theater community affected you personally and/or your work?

KK: Personally? For me, as I realize more and more, I have worked in the theater to counteract the terror of AIDS, with its Agatha Christie-like shrinking of one's social world. I need to gather around me an army of like minded cultural workers, their bodies interposed between me and the void. Working communally has comforted me in this time of psychic and physical strength, yes, and strengthened me too. I don't think my own work is important any more. It's what we do as a people that matters.

Excerpt from an interview with Kevin Killian published in *Stage Fright: Plays from San Francisco Poets Theater* (Kenning Editions, 2019)



© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi



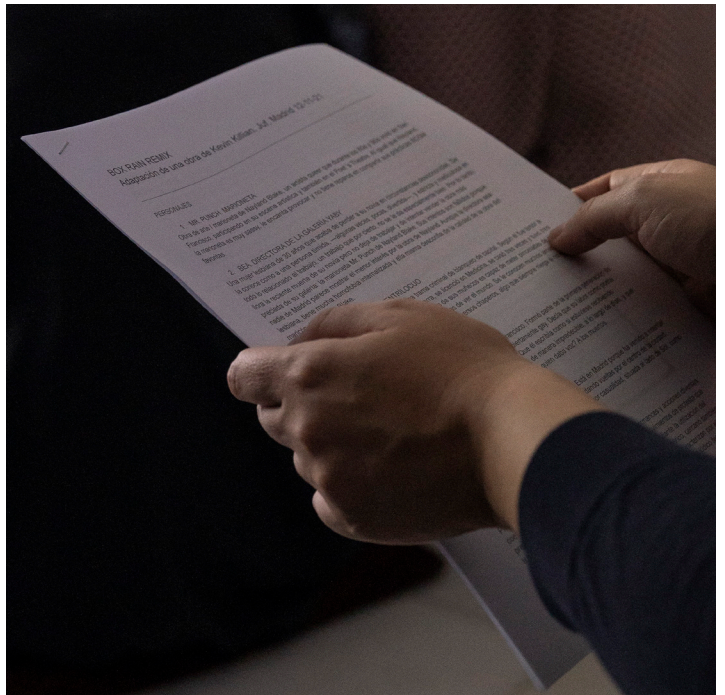
© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi



© Elena Feduchi