

# The Seams of a Cuban Contemporary Playwriting. Autofictions and Prosthesis in Rogelio Orizondo's Work

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

## Abstract

The article explores the dramatic work of Rogelio Orizondo (Santa Clara, 1983) and suggests a search focused on autofiction as a discursive device. By analysing the play *Ayer dejé de matarme gracias a ti Heiner Müller* (2010), it provides the generational connective perspective between the playwright's poetics and his dramatist colleagues. To do so, this play is presented as a model through its structural development, as a reflection of an aesthetic project shared by the graduates of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA). The article seeks to characterise the construction of the autofictional device in Rogelio Orizondo's poetics, shed light on the intertextual relations between Heiner Müller and the Cuban playwright, and showcase the effect of a prosthetic memory in the generation of the Novísimos, of which the playwright forms part. With a structure based on Orizondo's view of the theatre tradition and its autoreflexion in the layers of his writing, he returns to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to commit to a recontextualisation focused on issues distanced from the original, this time of a socio-political nature in Cuba. The research shows how the play by the English dramatist works as a jack of all trades to describe the resistance of a generation of playwrights who assume the prosthesis of other temporalities and geographies to filter their own aesthetic, ethical and political questionings.

**Keywords:** Cuban theatre, memory, autofiction, the Novísimos, Rogelio Orizondo, Hamlet

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## The Seams of a Cuban Contemporary Playwriting. Autofictions and Prosthesis in Rogelio Orizondo's Work

In contemporary playwriting processes, dramatists assume a corporeality that goes beyond the presence of their context as a way of verbally expressing their life. Memory has left the halo of mysticism over the closeness with the epic, based on the need to put the stories of each individual on an equal footing. With these thoughts, 21st-century creators seek the interaction with an audience that feels them to be part of their personal story, an audience that changes through the consumption of a story other than their own and that they nevertheless incorporate as if it were.

The plays that inhabit the field of today's Cuban theatre take part in a search that is close to confession. This particularity has enabled the emergence of a generational voice in the playwrights who graduated from the Playwriting Seminar of the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA). This textual inclination has become a presence expected by the followers of these playwrights as a result of a popular *chanson de geste*. The autofictional expression leads this reception of the performative act towards the clamour for a cultural limit because, inspired by the voices of an earthly life, they are transmuted to the field of the famous readymade gesture, this time beyond the objectual and embodied in language as an expressive medium.

The change of projection and scenarios exceeds the limits of the stage and builds a bridge in the place of the theatre piece. With the telling of a vulnerable story which the audience is familiar with, the theatrical device turns the character behind the convention into a cognoscible reference, ready to manifest the artistic reception as a therapeutic event. The pretensions of Cuban theatre have today reached the space of the mirroring dialogue; in other words, the geography in which the theatre score appears as the return of the inspiring biography; the field of study is reference and receiver. They are extractions of a political process in progress.

## The Marks in the Seam of a Surgery

Havana is one of the cities with the most extensive development of theatre on the island and, as it is the capital, many of the main theatre groups are based there. This is why there is a vibrant work atmosphere and a constant dialogue with guests that arrive on tours or exchange programmes. Festivals offer an updated repertoire of the national and international premieres, thus becoming the right place to discover aesthetic or poetic currents that inspire performing arts students. Such was the case of the theatre weeks organised by the embassies based in Cuba to promote the study of their playwrights and financially support the productions of young playwrights and directors, sponsoring premieres in the framework of these thematic weeks.

A part of the programme is led by groups with a long history in theatre and that are usually present in American and European festivals. For this reason, they are in contact with the creators of a poetics that brings fresh air to the visions of a theatre in constant change on the island. Through these conversations, workshops are devised that are later held in the city and arouse in the audience an interest in a path distanced from the usual representational tradition.

With a view to a study of the closeness of some of these international currents that have taken root in the voice of the creators, we look, as a research question, at how an autofictional device is built through the study of *Ayer dejé de matarme gracias a ti Heiner Müller* (2010), by Rogelio Orizondo and, in doing so, consider how prosthetic memory is shaping a generation of playwrights who incorporate it into their poetics as a means of autofictional construction.

Orizondo's plays make up one the outcomes of the dialogues of these workshops with students from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA), as well as of the influences of playwrights from distant regions on the continent. As a hypothesis based on the questions, we consider autofiction in Cuban theatre to be a discursive strategy with a wide representation in contemporary theatre, incorporated since the 2010s by several young dramatists in their poetics. However, the studies on theatre today develop an analysis of the theatre productions that does not value the autofictional displacement as part of the generational characteristics of the *Novísimos*. Consequently, this article sets out the intertextual links between Heiner Müller and Rogelio Orizondo derived from the emergence of a prosthetic generation in Cuba through an autofictional device.

To set out the arguments of the hypothesis we will have three objectives: to characterise the construction of the autofictional device in the poetics of Rogelio Orizondo, to set out the intertextual relations between Heiner Müller and the Cuban playwright, and to highlight the effect of prosthetic memory in the generation of the *Novísimos*, of which Orizondo forms part.

The article begins with a definition of autofiction as an aesthetic current that focuses on the study of *Ayer dejé de matarme...*, along with the intertextual relation with the play *The Hamletmachine*, by Heiner Müller, a playwright whose influence on contemporary playwriting we consider fundamental;

next there is a characterisation of some elements of the generation of the *Novísimos* highlighted in the text to reach prosthetic memory and its identification with the ISA graduates; and, finally, we introduce the triangulation between autofiction, prosthetic memory, and Orizondo's poetics as a sediment of a contextual narrative.

### *On Autofiction and Rogelio Orizondo's Genealogy in Hamlet*

In the workshops held based on the questionings unleashed by the generations of recent graduates we find the renewal of several writing currents, as well as the spaces of representation. Formal experimentation maintains the themes that have been present throughout our cultural history and asserts the presence of a bond with the symbolic territoriality as a statement. These themes, which address the socio-political conditions of Cubans, emigration, uncertainty about the future, tourism as an escape mechanism and identity complexity, among others, delve into a vision underpinned in the psychology of all Cubans for as long as we can remember: what part of historical memory is our memory?

Among the playwrights who have come to the capital is Sergio Blanco, who has a wide international presence and is one of the most performed Latin American dramatists today. His production focuses on a search for the particularities of autofiction as a writing language and, based on his study and search in the history of art, he has been able to assemble a genealogy and build a concept that defines it, as well as a work method. His pieces have focused on the evolution of fiction and the contact with the autobiographical and have resulted in stories with the matrix of both perspectives.

This stance called the attention of playwrights who sought a way of including part of their life, of their past or future experience, in their plays. Sergio Blanco's autofiction gave them the passion that was being developed in the wake of documentary theatre and which some searches based on the postdramatic had begun to put under the spotlight. Autofiction gave them the freedom to show themselves as part of their story, of the story of everyone that so often they had thought to blow apart.

Blanco, in his book *Autoficción. Una ingeniería del yo*, provides an essayistic reflection that shows some of the particular keys of his personal stance in relation to the theatrical phenomenon. In the workshop he led in Havana he laid the knowledge and roots of something that would be one of the main pillars in the voice of the poetics of many of the ISA graduate playwrights.

The French-Uruguayan playwright defines autofiction as an intersection; that is, not one dimension or another, but both in the same text. In his book he argues:

(...) I have got used to quickly defining autofiction as the crossroads between a story of the life of the playwright, an experience lived by him, and a fictional story, an experience invented by him. What is interesting is that autofiction is neither one thing nor another but the union of the two at the same time. We are not faced with the disjunctive of "to be or not to be" but with the certainty of "to be and not to be" in a single time. (Blanco, 2018: 22-23)

By introducing his study of autofiction to a group of young people eager to be able to “reinvent” contemporary Cuban theatre, the playwright showed them the path of a personalised voice, of an illegality in the construction of their stories, a crack in the contract with fiction. The playwrights’ texts had already begun to test the field of autofiction; however, Blanco’s workshop provided them with a tool with a historical and theoretical background. His book contains a short and concise journey through some creators who were included in their own stories and these work as antecedents, cultivators of the current without the name by which we know it today.

The popularity of autofiction as an aesthetic stance is one of the main incentives of Cuban playwrights. On the national scene, the reconstruction of history and the questioning of memory are two elements that appear recurrently in many of the plays premiered. For this reason, this capacity inserted in the discursive between reality and fiction becomes the perfect lure to argue this imposture without the risk of being “politically incorrect”.

There is another important characteristic that autofiction exhibits as a place of suspicious enunciation. This possibility that Blanco extracts from a dialogue referring to Philippe Lejeune’s “pact of truth” from the autobiography brings freedom in the theatrical convention. In his book the playwright argues:

The second aspect that emerges from this definition is what I have called the *pact of lies* and that is what separates and distances autofiction from autobiography. This formula of a *pact of lies* is something I invented in response to the notion of a *pact of truth* which the greatest autobiography scholar, Philippe Lejeune, speaks about, and in 1975 states in his famous book *Le Pacte autobiographique* that in all autobiography there must be a pact of truth that the author establishes between himself and his reader. (Blanco, 2018: 23)

The teachings of Sergio Blanco’s workshop can be seen in the premieres that took place once the exchange was over. The plays that were in the process of being written, and those that would later be conceived, incorporated the mission of this cross between truth and lie in a transparent manner; that is, without the possibility of being fragmented between one dimension and the other. Although theatre already has this capacity to enforce the lie experienced in the stage experience, with autofiction a bridge is built that goes beyond the fourth wall and inserts the audience, without necessarily interacting with them, in the story of the life of playwrights.

In Rogelio Orizondo’s plays, these autofictional dialogues can be verified on the path of his rereading of *Hamlet*, the story of the Danish prince, as a genealogical relationship. In other words, in its construction of the character of amlet, the play tells a family history of references where Orizondo’s alter ego, amlet, is the grandson of Hamlet, the Shakespearean character. Thus, we draw a line of three generations where the English playwright’s Hamlet would be the grandfather, Müller’s Hamlet the father, and Orizondo’s amlet the grandson.

These relationships are just the beginning of the scope of the young Cuban's play. With this generational relationship, it looks at the theatrical tradition from the rewriting of the same story in various timeframes and modified by each of its writers. However, the tragedy of Hamlet would come to be the blood type that everyone shares. The history of theatre as a deconstructed reference in *Ayer dejé de matarme gracias a ti Heiner Müller* confirms the choice of the autofictional body in Orizondo's approach.

The story of the play written by Rogelio Orizondo is the story of a Cuban playwright — although the geography where it takes place is never tacitly stated —, who is about to graduate from an art school, and his uncertainty regarding the future. Along with this crossroads we find the characters of Ophelia, Laertes and Braz, friends of the playwright Amlet who show in the play their insecurities as individuals, their emotional vulnerability and the love relationships that unite them as a circle of loving friends.

This theatrical story was written as part of a thesis exercise by acting students Alegnis Castillo, Judith González, Manuel Reyes and Dixan Romero, at the request of the actor and ISA professor Mario Guerra, as stated in the book published by Ediciones Alarcos *Ayer dejé de matarme gracias a ti Heiner Müller*, which also includes an account of the production process and some diaries that the playwright commissioned from the actors as part of their own writing exercise. The inclusion of the production process and the actors' writings in the publication goes beyond the fictionality that could be conceived once the play was presented, since precisely in these diaries and what has verifiably been included in the final text we discover the playwright's relationship with his theatrical past, such as his autofictional intention that is exhibited from the metatexts at the beginning of the publication: emails exchanged between Sergio Blanco and Rogelio Orizondo, where the latter explains some details of the writing of his text.

*Ayer dejé de matarme...* is an autofiction by Orizondo that contains, in its turn, the autofiction of the actors who premiered the play. But in this article we will focus on the playwright's voice and how it incorporates — to begin with — the intertextuality of a theatrical tradition in the allusion to/rewriting of *Hamlet*. The family closeness shown in the relationship between the three playwrights begins the presentation of the layers of cross-references in the text. Rogelio Orizondo is Shakespeare's grandson, his character is the alter ego, Amlet, heir to the tragic past of his grandfather in another time, and this is the first layer of autofictional surgery that we face. When we discover the trilogy of generations that underlies the text, we agree to the lie, and the debt to Sergio Blanco in the tutorial body begins to become undeniable.

The play combines intertextuality with a perspective on autofiction in a double directionality. Although intertextuality focuses on the preceding texts, autofiction places a personal vision of the playwright in this rereading. Orizondo's voice presents the writing of a different text while enhancing it as a process of introspection, where attachment to the lives of the actors and his own are the breeding ground. That is why he shows himself as Hamlet's grandson and faithfully incorporates into Amlet's life other conditions that are not those of the English grandfather.

However, the intertextuality highlights the juxtaposition of the Ophelias, Shakespeare's Ophelia and Müller's. Let's look at a fragment of *The Hamletmachine*:

OPHELIA [CHORUS/HAMLET] I am Ophelia. She who the river could not hold. The woman on the gallows The woman with the slashed arteries The woman with the overdose ON THE LIPS SNOW The woman with the head in the gas-oven. Yesterday I stopped killing myself (Translated by Dennis Redmond, 2010.)

This Müller quote is revived by Orizondo from the very name of his play, displacing the score of the German character to himself, which converts him into the wife of Heiner Müller, Inge Müller, who the playwright references in his character. The German's wife, who was a poet who always lived in his shadow, made several suicide attempts until she succeeded in 1966. Hence, this Ophelia mentions various self-mutilation techniques in her speech. Orizondo, however, and following one of the elements of the decalogue, the autofictional writing method that Sergio Blanco creates from his experience in the aforementioned book, proposes "multiplication" as the strategy to occupy the skin of the German's Ophelia. Therefore, although his Ophelia also recycles some elements of Müller, the playwright himself is embodied in another more general sense, in dialogue with that death, referring to his present as a creator, to death in the face of the appearance of German playwriting as salvation to continue living/writing.

Although the ideas advocated by the characters come from the English playwright, the truth is that the intertexts that we identify are from Müller's play. Between the corporealities of Orizondo and Müller an aesthetic proposal is developed that flows with complete transparency while both use *Hamlet's* model to discuss their own issues. Every time the Cuban playwright demonstrates his inspiration, the DNA of the Novísimos is revealed as part of a legitimisation exercise. *Ayer dejé de matarme...* opportunely sets out the urgency of considering the voices of young people as a transcendent participation in the contemporary scene.

In a dialogical relationship between the Cuban and German playwrights, a revision of the details that move Müller is asserted. Marco Antonio de la Parra, in his text "La máquina Müller o cómo sobrevivir al siglo xx (sobre Hamlet-machine de Heiner Müller)", analyses the piece in a dialogue with the German playwright's own life and his circumstances, in order to shed light on the reception and study of this particular piece. Parra mentions the following:

If anything runs through the whole of Müller's play, it is that disturbing relationship between biography and history, between class consciousness and individualism, between the obsession with utopia and discouragement. His autobiography *Krieg ohne schalacht* [War without Battle], does not yield to this conflictive coexistence. He describes his "life under two dictatorships", with the guilty feeling of overcoming the very evolution of all the events around him. (De la Parra, 2000: 361-362)

Rogelio Orizondo knows the determining factors of a writing inspired by Müller's context and inserts in the characterisation and dialogues of his characters not only the aura of his German background but also the verbatim quotation of some passages spoken in the play. Therefore, he is not presenting his bibliographical credentials, but absorbing them as part of his actors' own biographies. The characters in *Ayer dejé de matarme...* conspire with each other to overcome their present. The conspiracy does not imply, as is traditionally known, a political action, but rather a psychological conversion. In their biographies there is a need to overcome what is to come and they do not want to accept it. So they conspire to find in the other this subterfuge that will allow them to stop killing each other, to stop suspending their youth as if it were eternal, waiting for a better tomorrow.

The writing of *Ayer dejé de matarme...* before our eyes becomes a remix of *The Hamletmachine*, a free version of the German original, like many of the songs on the album *Mi bollo vegetal*, which one of the characters has just finished promoting in the Congo. In the adaptations of the album, included in the book, there is a quote that enables the consumption profile of its characters, of the four individuals who inspired the fiction and of the playwright who built the autofiction. The songs on the album are a metatext from which to extract the philosophy of a generation, the thought of a group of people who sing about the popularity of the hits of their time. The ofelia by the Cuban playwright returns from a promotional tour in Africa and debates whether or not to accept abortion as part of her current musical success. However, in a fragment of the play she says:

amlet. and you're interested in being a mother

ofelia. no when I give birth to him I'll kill him

amlet. sure

ofelia. I'll drown him in the river and if someone knows about it I'll say I was raised like this since a child it was the only thing they taught me to drown and with this love I'll have a very successful career nothing better for a singer than a good scandal front pages in the newspapers and millions of links on the web the diva ofelia murders black people I can imagine unicef stepping on my name in the middle of a demonstration and millions of neonazis tattooing it on their arse don't you think it's a good start. (Own translation.)<sup>1</sup>

ofelia is a girl who is not necessarily talking about a real character, but reinterpreting the drowned virgin of the English playwright that Orizondo inserts. In the writing of the Cuban play, there is not a constant updating of what happened in his previous plays but rather a landing platform. In the

1. amlet. y te interesa la maternidad  
ofelia. no cuando lo para lo mataré  
amlet. ya

ofelia. lo voy a ahogar en el río y si alguien se entera diré me criaron así desde niña fue lo único que me enseñaron ahogar y con eso querido tendré una carrera muy exitosa nada mejor para una cantante que un buen escándalo primeras planas en los periódicos y millones de links en la red la diva ofelia asesina de negros me imagino a la unicef pisoteando mi nombre en medio de una manifestación y a millones de neonazis tatuándoselo en el culo no te parece este un buen comienzo. (Orizondo, 2010: 21)

ambiguity of the dialogue with Shakespeare and Müller there is a strategy to undermine the expectation of respect for the canon. The playwright's text sets out some data that reveals the behaviour of certain references from pop culture at that time, in an allusion that proposes a critique of consumption and mimicry of followers.

ofelia's cynicism has a fragment of her two previous Ophelias, both sacrificed, both victims, and this version rebels against that past. This ofelia is shown as a woman who does not follow the mould of the politically accepted woman. She tricks her destiny and manipulates her success as a smoke screen against the broken mental health that she never recognises. Rogelio Orizondo's ofelia is an intertextuality because Inge Müller's poems are now songs in *Mi bollo vegetal*, the lyrics belong to a public imaginary and not to a public educated in poetry, because this time the Cuban playwright receives the voice of his colleagues and empowers them on stage. Although the audience cannot connect in the performance with all the intertexts of the playwright, they probably are sometimes provoked, and that is the objective of its symbolic network: to offer a window on the theatrical tradition and to dialogue with it, deconstruct it, outrage it and modify its novelty. The evolution that ofelia sings is in the writing of her lyrics, it is in the absorption of the voice of a temporality, and it is in the recycling of a past facing a greener present like her album.

### **Dramatic Surgery. The Novísimos and Rogelio Orizondo: A Surgical Clothing to be Made Visible.**

The work of Rogelio Orizondo, like that of the rest of his contemporaries, stems from an inspiration that comes together with the playwriting of various European countries such as Germany, Poland, England and Spain, among others. Hence, in his recognition with the most important theatre award on the island, the Virgilio Piñera award, in 2010, came an opening and updating in the consumption of foreign influences in the national tradition. The premiere of *Ayer dejé de matarme...* meant the legitimisation of the playwright and, with him, of his contemporaries.

Orizondo's play approaches the issues of young people in their mid-twenties, recently graduated from art schools and with great hope to change the state of theatre with their creative input. There are four characters: ofelia, laertes, amlet and braz. After graduating, the first three ask themselves what the future holds for them in a country like Cuba. The group of the Novísimos, so-called by the teatrologist Yohayna Hernández in her anthology *Teatro cubano actual: novísimos dramaturgos cubanos*, published by Tablas Alarcos in 2008, was the first platform to bring these playwrights to the attention of those interested in youth theatre in Cuba.

The selection that included the play was not intended to set in stone what was happening on the national scene, or to overshadow other writings that continued to emerge at that time. However, its publication was an important watershed for what was written in the rest of the country and for the directors who learned about the student pieces now through a publishing label and not class essays. With the graduation of the students of the Playwriting

Seminar came its adoption by various groups and the consequent premiere of the plays.

What was problematic about this anthology was the attitude with which they appear in the national arena and the presentation of the book itself as something completely innovative and far removed from the rest of Cuban theatre tradition. Many of the playwrights included in the anthology did not turn their backs on the past, even if they did not state it, and it is because in the issues of their plays, as well as in the characters or the approach to the stories that were apparently “very new”, they could follow a line of other similar voices in Cuban playwriting.

The Achilles heel of these young people was the arrogance with which they attacked the country's past that they were unconsciously absorbing into their plays. Just as Rogelio Orizondo's amlet at his graduation ceremony is insecure about what will happen, so too these writers when they were shown to the world. The stance with which they made themselves known was inspired by the writings of contemporary European theatre, but outside of the structure and theatre solutions, the rest remained attached to the context of their creators, to the island loved and rejected in equal measure.

The approach to the characters and autofiction in amlet, Rogelio Orizondo's alter ego, is one of its clearest references. He is a twenty-five-year-old playwright and an Instituto Superior de Arte student who graduated facing the uncertainty of a future trying to keep his passion afloat. In a fragment of the piece the character sees himself like this:

amlet sitting among an enormous crowd of young people all are waiting for a  
graduate qualification they all laugh take photos hug their parents  
amlet has summoned for such a special day his friends foster brothers orphans  
also the fearless ofelia and the scourge of her brother under the same roof  
ten years after me laertes don't say anything if there's trouble there's trouble  
amlet has specially invited a German girl called braz the first on his list of  
friends on facebook braz comes from germany only to attend this graduation  
event  
amlet has prepared several pages speaking of his learning process at the uni-  
versity of the arts and his function as an artist in contemporary society  
figures of the world of culture are present here  
figures of the world of culture are missing here  
canonical reproduction machines loudspeakers  
teachers  
colleagues  
friends (Own translation.)<sup>2</sup>

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2. amlet sentado en medio de una enorme multitud de jóvenes todos esperan por un título de licenciados todos rien toman fotos abrazan a sus padres  
amlet ha citado para este día tan especial a sus amigos hermanos de crianza huérfanos también la intrépida ofelia y la lacra de su hermano laertes bajo el mismo techo diez años después a mí no me digas na si se va a formar que se forme  
amlet ha invitado especialmente a una chica alemana su nombre es braz primera de su lista de amigos en facebook braz viene de alemania solo para asistir a este momento de la graduación  
amlet ha preparado varias cuartillas hablando de su proceso de aprendizaje en la universidad de las artes y de su función como artista en la sociedad contemporánea  
personalidades de la cultura aquí presentes

The writing of *Ayer dejé de matarme...* takes place at a specific stage in the life of its protagonists and this, in turn, coincides with that of the actors with whom they worked to conceive this piece. The situation portrayed in the excerpt is a graduation ceremony, the same one that everyone would come to experience shortly after premiering the piece, which would serve as a graduation exercise for the actors. What then happens is that the playwright's voice is projected towards the future and occupies the corporeality of his alter ego to express what everyone feels: uncertainty.

Through the structure with which it has been constructed, the play proposes a visit to the example of German playwriting. The segmentation by tableaux and the narrative in the conception of the actions, of the scenes as taken from a story, with that speed with which short stories are shown, relate to other traditions that are not of the island. This constant cutting capacity in the enunciation, absence of punctuation marks, flirtation and citation of the vocabulary of the social imaginary are characteristics that the recent ISA Seminar graduates would make fashionable in contemporary Cuban theatre.

Thus, the Novísimos renewed their approach to the stories and maintained many of the characteristics that documentary theatre had begun to work on: the use of the document as materiality on the stage, the reference to real events that are recycled in the story to be told, adding other symbolic twists typical of what these playwrights defended. The stagings acquired a performative character that came from the visual arts, but which resulted from the juxtaposition between the documentary, the visual arts, autofiction and the postdramatic, which was also in vogue.

When we look at the writing of *Ayer dejé de matarme...*, we discover a displacement in the voice of the narrator/playwright towards the unconsciousness of his character amlet, as part of the dramatic structure revolving around autofiction with the subtlety of an arabesque. Thus, the voice that belonged to a fictional biography appears as part of a generational statement. The scene narrated by amlet, where he waits for his certificate, is more than the illustration of a commonplace in the future of the colleagues who studied together; by deciding to show a version of the future, Orizondo shares a place in the immediate narration of himself. The decision to occupy a space in history also refers to Müller's *The Hamletmachine*. In his play the German tells his own story as follows:

I don't want to eat drink breathe love a woman a man a child an animal anymore. I don't want to die anymore. I don't want to kill anymore. Tearing up of the photograph of the author. I break open my sealed-off flesh. I want to live in my veins, in the marrow of my bones, in the labyrinth of my skull. I withdraw into my intestines. I take refuge in my shit, my blood. Somewhere bodies are being broken, so that I can live in my shit. Somewhere bodies are being carved

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personalidades de la cultura aquí ausentes  
máquinas de reproducir canónicas altoparlantes  
maestros  
compañeros  
amigos (Orizondo, 2010: 24)

open, so that I can be alone with my blood. My thoughts are wounds in my brain. My brain is a wound. I want to be a machine. (Translated by Dennis Redmond, 2010)

The playwright's voice appears as a part of his own life and, although he does not confess his story, there are enough referential elements to deduce the pain of an existence in the wound of the disagreement with an emotional tranquillity after his wife's suicide, and the constant change in the socio-political conditions of a troubled Germany. Müller distances from himself to project himself into the body of his text. He is not the first to do so, but we can establish a pattern between his strategy and Orizondo's. Both question themselves, look at themselves, portray themselves in the society that contains them, the one they have to save with their writing, which they will later incorporate into the play.

But, how are Shakespeare's and Müller's temporalities passed on to Orizondo? When do the characters of the Cuban playwright get involved in an un-known theatre tradition?

In *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* the American researcher Alison Landsberg suggests the concept of prosthetic memory when we incorporate into our experience something that is alien to us, which we have never experienced, but we keep it in the personal memory as it had occurred. She defines it as follows:

This new form of memory, which I call *prosthetic memory*, emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history. (...) In the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics. (Landsberg, 2004: 2)

Through this conceptualisation, the story of *Ayer dejé de matarme...* appears as the extraction of a memory that has not been experienced by the playwright but that he has assumed as his own. Prosthetic memory appears as the expression of an intimate identification with the process experienced. In this way, the biographies of the actors in the diaries they have written and the play by the German playwright with his confessions of a life from another time and geography are juxtaposed with Orizondo's characters as part of his activism in the dialogue with the German writing tradition.

Prosthetic memory is a phenomenon that usually occurs when visiting a museum, seeing a play or going to the cinema, Landsberg argues; in other words, much of its experience is formed through the reception of high intensity level experiences. Contemporaneity resorts to the immersion of cultural events as a means of transmission of emotions that act straight onto the audience's psychological vulnerability. By using this methodology, in the *mise-en-scène* the playwright states his expectations to a possible receiver who is

conditioned by sharing the same reading, musical and political background with the characters constructed by the Cuban playwright.

The process of creation of Orizondo's play faces the mixture between his stage and biographical searches with the actors and the need to express an aesthetic stance through the *mise-en-scène* before the audience. On this path the playwright provokes us as the musical producer of *Mi bollo vegetal*, ofelia's album, and introduces the names of the adaptations in the titles of the tableaux that make up the structure of the piece, so that the songs are an extract of a temporality experienced by the playwright and his characters, and the biographies built in the theatrical fiction, a sample of the prosthetic memory through its link with *The Hamletmachine* as inspiration and referential corpus. The prosthetic memory built in *Ayer dejé de matarme...* begins in the audience; in other words, in the imposture through the music that is gradually inserted between the tableaux of the piece that are taken from ofelia's tour. The experience of being in a concert of a diva which he alternates with the central story of the play assumes the first possibility of building the prosthetic memory in the audience as if they had participated in her tour in the Congo.

The phenomenon of planting the memory of something in the mind of an individual is a narrative strategy with which the playwright works. When he collects several songs to create an auditive narrative and weaves it into the body of the *mise-en-scène*, not only does he propose a mobility in the rhythm of the production but also the complexity in the audience of unifying both discourses: the musical and the dramatic, without being a piece of musical theatre. The prosthetic memory then begins to emerge in the audience who feel part of the music concert of *Mi bollo vegetal*, while in the actions of the rest of the story other events occur that are gradually explained, or argued, in the tableau after the song. The prosthetic memory in the audience appears as the remembrance of attending a concert in which the diva ofelia narrates her story in the lyrics of the songs and the text of the play, which in its turn is the dramaturgy of *Ayer dejé de matarme...*

The *mise-en-scène* of Rogelio Orizondo's play promotes the vision of a group of young people who explain their *modus operandi* in the seams of this play as *ars poetica*. They are the construction of the characters' life, the Müller structure, the search for a socio-political impact, the voice of a generation and the presence of an autofictional displacement in amlet; i.e., the commitment of a complex relationship between past and present.

### **The Value of the Prosthesis. Projected, Juxtaposed and/or Autofictional Memories**

The prosthetic memory which revolves around the poetics of the *Novísimos* is a mechanism that they have incorporated into their writing as a means to commit to their geography, and from this tribune to talk about the personal that they include in the fiction of their plays. In this search for the juxtaposed that accompanies the creators' corpus a generational vision through the prosthetic stands out as a common factor, and it does not do so individually but is all encompassing.

If we focus on looking at the characteristic of the *Novísimos* through their plays and concerns, we can discover this shift towards what is projected of the other in the personal experience. The training of Cubans is based on an education that legitimises and incorporates the myth as part of a corporeality to be understood. The subject of History of Cuba, present in the education system from the moment children begin to be aware, along with Spanish Language and Mathematics, raises a suggestion in the individuals that leaves a permanent mark.

The teaching of History forms part of the student's syllabus until university, regardless of the specialisation sought. Thus, young people gradually create for that date a resistance to what they are taught through a lethargic repetition of the content in all the training years, and because of the absence of analysis and verisimilitude with reality. However, with the passage of years, although they reject the subject, they incorporated into their memory what occurred in the national History as if it were part of what was experienced by some of their relatives. Such a continuous repetition produces a prosthetic effect in students and their mechanical response in the exams and other tests.

The generation of the *Novísimos* is one of the examples of the love-hate relationship with History as a dogmatic involvement without in-depth explorations or analyses that entail a seduction of knowledge by youths with a challenging critical thought. However, although after adolescence youths rebel against this expected attitude, the truth is that the legend of the construction of an identity has been incorporated, as has tradition of a past that has not been experienced by anyone, and a very small part of what the teachers say can be checked, at least at this level of heroism promoted in public education.

Thus, in the memory of the learners a mythical idea emerges that forms part of the history of their lives, as suggested by Landsberg in the definition of prosthetic memory. The autofiction that accompanies the teaching of the subject of History of Cuba is conceived as the prosthetic memory in the long term that students will repeat without hesitation. The issue that comes from the reality-fiction, critical thinking-dogmatism dichotomy drinks from the body of the pieces that the *Novísimos* produce in their poetics. The prosthetic memory planted through the conception of education in Cuba projects a love for the motherland born out of theatre told as a sediment of an identity. This account is what becomes prosthetic memory based on the technologies of memory set out by the Alison Landsberg:

Prosthetic memories are transportable and therefore challenge more traditional forms of memory that are premised on claims of authenticity, "heritage," and ownership. This new form of memory is neither inherently progressive nor inherently reactionary, but it is powerful. This book contends that rather than disdain the new memory-making technologies, we must instead recognize their power and political potential. Taking on prosthetic memories of traumatic events and the disenfranchisement and loss of privilege that such an experience often necessitates can have a profound effect on our politics. (Landsberg, 2004: 3)

When the Novísimos decide to reconstruct the History and tradition that they have been taught in their years of study, they are starting from the prosthesis to react to their construction in memory by challenging their verisimilitude. Although at that moment their generation is already a product of prosthetic memory, their individualities have assimilated the non-existing past as their own, although not experienced in their body, but familiar enough as if it were so. In other words, the History of Cuba has become a part of their lives, in a genealogical version, as if its protagonists were their ancestors.

The technology created by memory and later reflected in several of the plays by young ISA graduates makes in Rogelio Orizondo's play a metaphorical shift when, towards the end of the play, amlet goes to a laboratory of medicine and sneaks in to see a skeleton used by students for their anatomy classes. The scene is as follows:

amlet goes where hamlet  
 sir allow me this piece this drama this work material this concert this last minute download  
 amlet sees amlet with his mouth open as if saying yes yes yes and takes down his grandfather's skeleton holds him tight and starts dancing. (Own translation.)<sup>3</sup>

In the play Hamlet is the grandfather of amlet, hence the playwright tells us towards the start that amlet had to go through an endless bureaucratic process to remove the h from his name. These two acts, the scene in the laboratory and that of the name, are imbued with the parricidal spirit of a generation that is not interested in the link with a tradition that, although included in their dramatic story, is a break rather than a push. The aesthetic stance characteristic of the Novísimos designates their behaviour as part of a scenario that they both reject and long for.

Rogelio Orizondo's relation with his past uses prosthetic memory to incorporate the layers of his story as well as the story/biography of the others. The life of his characters, who have an undeniable relationship with his previous plays, that is, Müller's *The Hamletmachine* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is shown through the incorporation/adhesion into his political stance. The play by the young playwright not only questions the present of his country in the uncertainty of his work role but also inserts in the metaphor/reference of the skeleton his questioning of the present of a society that does not move, which everyone still studies, but has ossified in the myth of what it was.

The corpse of his grandfather is the metaphorical expression of the rejected renewal, it is the body of a tradition which is not updated, and thus it is better to replace its truthful memory with a prosthesis. The Novísimos

3. amlet amlet va donde hamlet  
 señor me permite esta pieza este drama este material de trabajo este ensayo este concierto esta descarga de última hora  
 amlet ve a hamlet con la boca abierta como diciendo sí sí sí y descuelga al esqueleto de su abuelo lo aprieta bien y se pone a bailar. (Orizondo, 2010: 50)

assume the denial of the past as an ethical and aesthetic attitude by transferring their field of inspiration to the outskirts, to the writings of another continent, their thesis reveals the impossibility of a sufficient inside.

When Orizondo narrates the experience of the laboratory in front of his grandfather's skeleton and facing his thoughts about the theatrical/political tradition, and his expectations in the character of amlet faced with the truncated desires of writing theatre in an island/prison — the prosthetic memory that kept growing based on the reference to Müller's biography as his own, and then shown in the skin of the Novísimos as a prosthetic generation faced with the history and the tradition of a Cuba conceived through the myth — amlet's reaction to the grandfather takes on another meaning:

amlet goes to the school of medicine where his friend horacio studies speaks with the security guard allows the security guard to give him a blowjob and reaches the anatomy classroom there is the guy hamlet the grandfather hamlet lots of bones hanging and open mouthed amlet sits down like a medical student and imagines himself in a master class these are the bones nomenclature definitions functions true or false tick the box argue summarise in fourteen lines

here you are open mouthed why are you open mouthed old man you bore me on your back made me laugh and now you are open mouthed and you are laughing at me old man you feel pain or it is a grimace of disgust poor hamlet the whole of eternity at the service of science all fucking eternity supplying the quota of morbid interest in death oh hamlet they did not know how to understand you if you had made clear that it was not about being or not being or about being present or not present but the two things about the need of being and not being and being present and not present everything would have been different at least no one would have regretted felt confused afraid poor hamlet a misspent life a buffoon for the medical students for my friend horacio who puts pieces of paper and cigarette butts in your open mouth

amlet wants to write wants to do theatre lots of theatre write powerful short plays and anyone who does not like it can go to the devil and if he wants to go let him go and the people get bored people do not want look do not want to go to theatre any more. (Own translation.)<sup>4</sup>

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4. amlet va a la escuela de medicina donde estudia su amigo horacio habla con el cvp se deja mamársela por el cvp y llega al aula de anatomía ahí está el tipo hamlet el abuelo hamlet muchos huesos colgando y la boca abierta amlet se sienta como un estudiante de medicina y se imagina una clase magistral estos son los huesos nomenclatura definiciones funciones verdadero o falso marca con una cruz argumente resuma en catorce líneas ahí estás con la boca abierta qué haces con la boca abierta viejo tú me cargaste en tus espaldas me hiciste reír y ahora estás con esa boca abierta te ríes de mí viejo sientes dolor o es una mueca de asco pobre hamlet toda la eternidad al servicio de la ciencia toda la puta eternidad abasteciendo como libreta de cuota el morbo de la muerte oh hamlet no supieron entenderte si hubieras aclarado que no se trataba de ser o no ser de estar o no estar sino de las dos cosas de la necesidad de la y ser y no ser estar y no estar todo hubiera sido distinto por lo menos nadie se hubiera arrepentido confundido cagado así pobre hamlet una vida malgastada un bufón para los estudiantes de medicina para mi amigo horacio que pone rabos de papel y cabos de tabaco en tu boca abierta
- amlet quiere escribir quiere hacer teatro mucho teatro escribir obritas fuertes y al que le duela que reviente y si se quiere ir que se vaya y que la gente se aburra no quiera mirar que la gente no quiera asistir al teatro nunca más
- amlet quiere cambiar la historia del teatro pero cómo hacerlo si el teatro de la república está podrido si el teatro de la república es una cárcel. (Orizondo, 2010: 38-39)

The scene in the laboratory is the proof the thesis of the play: the playwright reacts to the past with an apathy that involves an urgent renewal; however, this evolution is impeded because its context prevents it. Consequently, the solution lies in the German prosthesis, in the structural and formal journey to another symbolic territoriality as a resistance to an urging reality.

The autofiction and teachings of Sergio Blanco form the perfect framework for a generation to show their prosthetic memory and feel the relief of a veiled confession. Amlet's allusion when he says to the skeleton that "it was not about being or not being or about being present or not present but the two things about the need of being and not being and being present and not present" repeats what Blanco defines as one of the characteristics of autofiction. In this quote, Amlet refers through Rogelio Orizondo to the secret of survival of a prosthetic generation, "it is not about what is or is not, but about both at the same time." The assimilation of the teaching of a mythical history, of an ossified tradition and of a past that is recycled in the plays of a contemporary playwriting in Cuba, proposes through autofiction a prosthesis in its memory that replaces its projected past with an ambiguous and multiple present. The present of Orizondo's characters is told in Ofelia's album and that attitude maintains his piece, he selects the texts from the public imaginary in which to inhabit a country. In the end, this is the discursive strategy of the Novísimos.

The map of contemporary Cuban playwriting adheres to the lines that a surgeon would draw on the inert body, the skeleton, the body of Hamlet in the laboratory. The surgery proposed by the Novísimos is a reaction to a past with which they do not identify, which is why they resort to prosthesis as a solution. The prosthesis of memory that is narrated through the autofictional body.



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