

FOUR ENCOUNTERS: AN EXPLORATION OF *LOS*
VENDIDOS

by
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This thesis explores how I have encountered Luis Valdez's 1967 play *Los Vendidos* as a researcher and allied theatre-maker. I have explored *Los Vendidos*, how it came to be, how it fits within Chicana and Latina theatre, and how I can engage with this work and potentially with other pieces of Latina theatre. This case study of Luis Valdez's *Los Vendidos* initially bore the ultimate goal of producing a framework that describes the best practices for producing this piece, but I ended up building a framework that features tenets of allied theatrical scholarship instead of production as the best form for my current engagement and support. The framework foregrounds respect: for the playwright's message, for actors and their cultural identity, and to encourage more Latina language and culture on American stages. Focused allyship is a way in which I can use research to expand my awareness of culture and create a space of inclusion in theatre, especially when encountering plays that utilize negative racial stereotypes as a device to subvert racist ideologies.

I have organized my discoveries into a framework guided by my encounters with *Los Vendidos*. Specific sections of this project consist of four encounters: discovery and interest, dramaturgical, directorial, and framework encounters. These

distinctions are based on the flow of my research, and it makes the most sense to me to discuss them in linear order to demonstrate how I came to my conclusions. My first encounter regards my discovery of *Los Vendedos* and how I understood it to be an exciting piece of theatre that could help me advance my knowledge of Chicana and Latina theatre. My second encounter explores the dramaturgical research I conducted to gather knowledge on Luis Valdez and the history of El Teatro Campesino. I explore the influences that collate to create Valdez's theatre and *Los Vendedos*. My directorial encounter follows with explorations of character and themes that the play interrogates with ideas aimed toward a production of *Los Vendedos*. My fourth, and final, encounter is my reflection on the culmination of my prior research and the discoveries I made in the process of research, most notably, my decision to refrain from production. I have used the reflection to lay out my tenets for allied theatre scholarship: connect to the work, collaborate, do your research, stay open, and be flexible. This thesis focuses on my exploration of allied theatre making and the unexpected conclusions I have reached.

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Table of Contents

Encountering <i>Los Vendidos</i>	1
Introduction	1
Encounter 1: Initial Encounters	3
Encounter 2: Dramaturgical Encounter	5
Encounter 3: Directorial Encounter	6
Encounter 4: Framework Encounter	7
Encounter 2: Dramaturgical Encounter	9
Context and History of <i>Los Vendidos</i>	9
Context	9
The History of El Teatro Campesino	13
Chicanx Theatre	15
Linguistic Considerations	18
Dramaturgical Conclusions	19
Encounter 3: Directorial Encounter	21
Stereotype	23
Identity	26
Directorial Approaches	29
The Sell Outs	30
The Sold Ones:	33
Unifying Production Concepts	39
Encounter 4: Framework Encounter	41
Connect to the work	44
Do your research...and keep researching	45
Collaborate	45
Stay open	46
Be flexible (the support you provide may not be what you expect)	46
Works Cited	49

Encountering *Los Vendidos*

Introduction

Inclusive representation matters because it enforces the understanding that all are valid members of society who have the ability to enrich the community with creativity and new perspectives. Theatre plays a vital role in representation because it has the opportunity to celebrate peoples' stories publicly and to inform audiences that they have a part in telling their own story. Creating spaces of inclusion and understanding is crucial to building a society where all peoples are respected and treated equitably, and theatre is especially suited to holding space for communities and cultures whose voices often go unheard because it can preserve culture by creating opportunities to showcase, embellish, and develop stories. An intimate glimpse into the life of another has the ability to make an audience sympathetic to shared plights, and such stories broaden our shared understanding of humanity and culture.

At present, a diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural landscape is not embodied on American stages. There are social efforts with eloquent and pointed demands for a more equitable and accurate representation in the theatre, but, at present, these demands are not being met (*Dear White American Theatre*). This is a significant detriment because the arts, in general, and theatre, in particular, have an ability to communicate things in a way that connects people beyond words. By excluding vital representation, the opportunity to cultivate connections is lost along with the understanding that comes with those connections. Toby Stein suggests that a workforce that emphasizes, "racial and ethnic access, diversity, equity, and inclusion" is a workforce that breaks down

conscious and unconscious biases (Stein 1). It is proven that cultural pluralism in the workplace promotes innovation, respect, and engagement among workers (Stein 2, 3). Stein's literature uses Latinx identities as an example of the vastly variant types of identity that are present in broader American society. In the case of Latinx individuals, one can identify innumerable rich cultural traditions and histories that a non-Latinx person must be completely and collaboratively immersed in to encapsulate the vibrancy of Latinx peoples (Stein 3, 4). Works of theatre have the ability to explore some of the intricacies of Latinx culture within the breadth of their pages and on stage, and the promotion and production of Latinx stories helps to bring them into the folds of broader American theatre.

I have explored one of these theatrical pieces, Luis Valdez's *Los Vendidos*, a play that can be critically examined as a lens into early Chicana *teatro* that is still relevant and imperative to the American theatrical landscape. My primary methods include dramaturgical analysis and historical research as well as directorial analysis to explore stereotypes as a useful tool to deconstruct the social biases that are weaponized against Latinx people. My investigation intended to focus on a case study of Luis Valdez's *Los Vendidos* to explore how I could build an environment in the theatre to support inclusive representation of Latinx people and stories. Through contextualized research, I have encountered *Los Vendidos* from a position of allied theatrical scholarship. My focus on allyship is how I have elected to support Latinx theatre in pursuit of more equitable representation onstage and my exploration of *Los Vendidos* investigates the subversion of negative, racist stereotypes.

Throughout this document, I have elected to utilize the gender-neutral terms of Latinx and Chicanx because I believe them to be the best terms to describe the Latin-descended community in the United States. I understand that these terms are not always used by the Latin-American community. However, because of my positionality as a white scholar and ally and my own experience with Latinx people who do not reside on the gender binary, I have made the conscious and informed decision to use these terms. There will be more exploration and evidence to support this decision in Encounter 2.

Encounter 1: Initial Encounters

Los Vendidos takes place in Honest Sancho's Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop where models of Mexicans are sold to willing buyers. Miss Jimenez, a government secretary, arrives to purchase a model that will appeal to the Mexican demographic for an upcoming election. After Miss Jimenez dismisses three models, Honest Sancho, the shop's owner, surprises her with his newest model, the Mexican American. Miss Jimenez is so pleased with the model's performance she tries to drive it off the lot, but all of the models malfunction and come to life. They frighten her away with cries of "¡Viva la raza! ¡Viva la causa! ¡Viva la huelga! ¡Chicano Power!" and the like (Valdez 10). In a twist ending, these "models" are the real people and Honest Sancho is a robot used by the characters to outwit customers who try to take advantage of them.

In my first encounter with this play, I found that Luis Valdez's *Los Vendidos* captures a pointed story about racism, assimilation, and establishing one's identity. I also found it hilariously clever and interesting. The captivating nature of undermining a racist society and the tokenism in the government was so prevalent in this play that I felt

that it was the perfect companion to lead me into my study of Latinx theatre. The author, Luis Valdez, drew from powerful cultural history and theatrical traditions to weave the vibrant tale of Honest Sancho's Shop. *Los Vendidos* is a story with nuance and historical importance that must be given special dramaturgical attention. I believe it to be especially crucial to examine the influences on this type of theatre to explore how they inform the stereotypes of character that the play features.

Due to its layered complexity, I realized that I would need to establish historical and cultural context before I could begin the intensive task of research. I contacted Dr. Theresa May via email and asked if she had any helpful materials I could use for my project. Her advice and breadth of knowledge helped me situate *Los Vendidos* in the history of Latinx/Chicanx theatre, and her keen questions helped to direct me toward a rounded and in-depth exploration of the dramaturgy of this play. She also pointed me to recent Ph.D graduate from the University of Oregon, Dr. Olga Sanchez Saltveit, who I had the tremendous opportunity of conversing with during the beginning stages of my research. She helped me narrow my research and introduced me to the idea of organizing my thesis as "encounters." This idea paralleled an article by Chicanx scholar Jorge Huerta. Huerta describes a sequence of festivals in which Latinx theatre-makers collaborated to celebrate and advance Latinx theatre (Huerta, *Encuentro 2014*). My thesis endeavors not to appropriate these *encuentros*, but to find inspiration in the success of Latinx theatrical collaboration.

In my initial engagement with the play, I planned to create a generalized way to approach Latinx theatre through a case study of Luis Valdez's *Los Vendidos*. After speaking with scholars and advisors, I learned this would be problematic because of the

specific stylization that Luis Valdez was experimenting with in the early days of El Teatro Campesino. This piece grew from a pivotal point in Chicana theatre and history as well as El Teatro Campesino, but it is not a universally representative piece of all Latina theatre. By acknowledging this history, I have critically examined *Los Vendedos* for its contemporary relevance as a historical milestone in the emergence of Chicana theatre to determine how it fits within current theatrical perspectives.

Encounter 2: Dramaturgical Encounter

In my second encounter, I conducted thorough dramaturgical research to approach this play from an informed historical context and to ensure that I understand how this play emerged along with El Teatro's legacy in relation to the Chicana movement of the 1960s and 1970s, *el movimiento*. I have included explorations of the influences that acted upon Chicana theatre, including: Aztec mythology, Brecht, *commedia dell'arte*, and Cantinflas. I also conducted research regarding Luis Valdez and his impact on El Teatro. I expand further upon the encounters later in this thesis in their respective sections. I asked myself the following questions in my dramaturgical encounter with the intention of guiding myself towards a production of *Los Vendedos* that could effectively tell this story:

- How can I engage with *Los Vendedos* from a position of scholarship as dramaturgical research that supports production?
 - What is my experience with *Los Vendedos* and how does this translate into my exploration of Chicana culture?
 - How can I work with the history and context that influences *Los Vendedos*?

Encounter 3: Directorial Encounter

In my third encounter, I approached the play from the perspective of a director. I attempted to ask how I could foster an environment of theatrical diversity and respect for Latinx materials and engage with Latinx materials in a way that does not lead to a misrepresentation of culture and experience. I asked these questions with the hope of establishing a framework with which this and other Latinx plays can be ethically directed.

- Can I direct this material as a white/non-Latinx theatre maker?
 - How can I establish a framework that pays respect to and supports the playwright/actors/audience in a piece intentionally filled with racist stereotypes?
 - What is the most effective use of stereotype to relay the message of the play to the audience?
 - How can I work with characterized stereotypes and respect the history behind these stereotypes?

These questions led me to discover how I could break through the degradation stereotypes are often known for and apply a newfound understanding of history. I have encountered stereotypes on stage in a way that I had not yet been exposed to, but hopefully in a way that I can apply to future directorial opportunities. I have discovered that stereotypes can be molded into vessels of healing if we allow them the opportunity to shine in their absolute preposterousness.

Encounter 4: Framework Encounter

In my fourth encounter, I expected to propose a framework of respect and informed context to produce and direct *Los Vendidos*. I desired to participate in conversation with Latinx theatre from a position of critical scholarship with the goal of exploring new narratives and finding a way to uplift and interact with them. However, my fourth encounter was more of a roadblock than a way through. I discovered that I could not ethically and respectfully move forward with any production: I did not want to, from my current position as a student, a white theatre-maker, and ally to Latinx theatre. I sought to discover if I could create a climate of representation. As I positioned myself within this research, I discovered that my preferred position is that of researcher, scholar, and ally -not director- for critical cultural pieces of Latinx or Chicanx theatre.

Starting with a story told by El Teatro Campesino and its founder, Luis Valdez, increased my awareness of Chicanx culture and helped me track how *Los Vendidos* fits into the wider repository of American theatre. *Los Vendidos* allowed me to focus on the context and history behind the play. This piece is one of Valdez's most well-known plays and has thus given me a sturdy foundation when delving into techniques for staging and direction. Widely produced productions dealing with Latinx characters have shown that theatre big and small, professional and educational, have the opportunity to work respectfully and creatively with Latinx stories so as to include them in the repertoire of American theatre without misrepresenting them (Herrera 28).

Not everyone can be a political leader or the catalyst in a national movement, but small acts of rebellion fight racism and discrimination as well as support the work of those fighting at the national level where institutionalized changes are made. *Los*

Vendidos is the story of a few small people who take advantage of a society that actively exploits them. The events in this play are an example of this kind of rebellion, but the play itself is the thing wherein subversion really becomes clear. El Teatro Campesino helped to forge a space for Chicanx and other Latin-identifying people to tell their stories. Even if the venue is inconspicuous, the celebration of those voices remains hanging in the air long after the audience has gone home. Theatre is an invitation towards empathy, a call to action, and a way to uplift the stories of others. This thesis ventures to rebel in the smallest way by uplifting the voices and stories of Latinx people and to use this platform as an invitation to knowledge and empathy.

Encounter 2: Dramaturgical Encounter

Context and History of *Los Vendidos*

Context

The unique nature of Chicana theatre and its position in the broader realm of Latinx theatre requires a bit of dramaturgical preface. Dramaturgy is “the art or technique of dramatic composition and theatrical representation” (“Dramaturgy”). It describes the practice of theatrical research in pursuit of production. This is a process that can be undertaken by a director alone or in tandem with a designated dramaturg who is dedicated to ensuring depth of understanding in the production process regarding things like historical context, cultural knowledge, and production history.

El Teatro Campesino arose in 1965 as a direct response to a need for cultural awareness and celebration for minorities in America (El Teatro Campesino). This theatre company followed shortly after a centralized, focused effort to unionize the farmworkers. El Teatro used theatre to show the struggles that the *campesinos* (farmworkers) faced in the fields and to rejuvenate the spirits of the strikers. Because of the atmosphere of its emergence, El Teatro Campesino’s works embraced a certain cultural context where the main focus was *el movimiento* and the unionization of farmworkers. This focus has since broadened to include celebrations of culture and explorations of Chicana identity (Huerta).

The Chicano Movement or *el movimiento* was a political awakening that began in the 1960s that aimed to encourage “Chicanos,” “Mexican Americans,” “Mexican immigrants,” and “Latino immigrants” to take “pride in their own identity,” to assert

“their civil rights,” and to work “toward self-determination by improving their financial, social, and political circumstances” (Bankston 165). The word “Chicano” was developed as a way to escape the derogatory use of the word “Mexicano” by white people, which had come to mean “dirty and lazy” (Bankston 168). This was a term of reclamation. To proudly proclaim themselves as Chicano was to reassert their place in history as the indigenous residents of land invaded and conquered by European Americans (Bankston 167). In reclaiming this culture, Chicana peoples were able to reengage with a history that had been buried. El Teatro Campesino arose as a way to explore this burgeoning identity and investigate what it meant to be Chicana onstage.

With the emergence of new terminology, it is important to clarify what I mean when I say Chicano/a/x and Latino/a/x. Latinx is a term that is inclusive of all Latin American identities, whereas Chicana is specifically referring to people of Mexican origin who are living in the United States. American, Mexican American, and Chicano are all terms that hope to embody this lived experience. All are words that attempt to capture the complex nature of establishing oneself socially, politically, and individually. Raymond A. Rocco explores the sometimes subtle but important contrast between these terms that have outlined a lot of the characterizations around the Chicana identity. Rocco describes how the term “Mexican-American” carries with it a negative connotation because of the way racism has affected those who have identified as Mexican American, while “Chicano” is: “...those of Mexican ancestry who are committed to the preservation of Mexican culture” (Rocco 76). The distinction between these terms is important for *Los Vendidos* because of the play’s specific temporal

context and the fact that these identities are becoming more complex within the current context of the U.S.

In addition to the discussion of cultural nomenclature, I have recognized a dramaturgical conundrum of naming origin and identity. The term Latinx was devised as a way to address all people of Latin American ancestry without the need to specify gender; it is a neutral label to accommodate non-binary identities. This term was meant as a neutralizing label. This term does not account for other identities by which an individual may address themselves, such as a country of origin: “Nicaraguan,” “Dominican,” “American,” or any combination which suits the individual best (Lopez). Other people do not agree with the term Latinx and say that it “ignores the Spanish language and its gendered form” (Noe-Bustamante). However, others have said that term is the future and reaches a wider audience of Latin people (Reyes). Within the complex systems of culture, there are different names for different concepts of identity, notably, Chicano/a and Latino/a as well as Chicanx, and Latinx. Spanish is a heavily gendered language as are all of its dialects; this means that every name, city, person, etc. has a gender assigned by the language and it must align with either a feminine or masculine suffix, adjective, or determiner. Latino and Hispanic have been the most common labels to describe those who live in the U.S. but can trace their roots to Latin America (Noe-Bustamante). This creates a conflict when people with Latin heritage do not identify on the gender binary, such as those who are transgender, non-binary, or gender-fluid. A compromise has been made in recent years to adopt a gender-neutral term, Latinx, as a pan-ethnic label for those whose lineage can be traced to Latin and

South America. This term applies to a broader populace of Latin peoples and can be used as a tool for inclusion.

I will use the terms Latinx and Chicanx (the gender-neutral term for Chicanos/as) because of its gender neutrality and broad scope. I believe this term to be more comprehensive of all the identities I see represented around me. I have no other choice but to perform my research from a current lens, and I will use the tools available to me to create an environment I feel is most inclusive. That being said, the terms Chicanx and Latinx did not exist in the time of *Los Vendidos*' creation. The people who lived in the 1970s and beyond would have used the terms Latino/a and Chicano/a respectively. When I use the neutralized form, I am still speaking about these same people, but I am speaking from a contemporary perspective and using contemporary language that I feel is appropriately encompassing.

The conflation of Latin American and Mexican identities is something to address before exploring the particulars of *Los Vendidos*. The conflation of Latin-American race, culture, and ethnicity has its roots in the early colonization of the North American continent. The Monroe Doctrine, "Manifest Destiny," and Christian ideologies have all contributed to the Western expansion of Europeans across the continent as well as the disregard exhibited by all those who dispossessed natives of their land and culture (Sandrino-Glasser 108-110). "These policies and ideologies served to perpetuate homogenizing popular perceptions of Mexicans, and other Latin American origin groups as 'foreign Others,' excluded from the nation's self-identity" (Sandrino-Glasser 113). "Mexican" in the mid-nineteenth century became a term not used for Mexican nationality but instead a term ascribed to all Latinx peoples

(Sandrino-Glasser 111). I believe this is a key concept in the decolonization of theatre. Understanding the generalizations that led to misrepresentation is part of the journey to separating the truth from the fiction and finding the distinction and subtleties of every personal, racial, and cultural experience.

The History of El Teatro Campesino

The birth of El Teatro Campesino or The Farmworker's Theatre arose from theatre's capacity for storytelling, which helped to inspire a group of farmworkers who dedicated themselves to performing in pursuit of rights for migrant farmworkers (Huerta). The *actos* they performed served the purpose of expressing dissatisfaction with those who ran the farms and encouraged those who worked on them to band together and form unions. One of the founders and major playwrights of this movement was Luis Valdez (Huerta).

Luis Valdez was the catalyst for El Teatro Campesino, and his clever playwriting emboldened the *campesinos* to their eventual and hard-won success. Valdez grew up in a family of migrant farmworkers and saw every day the struggles of an itinerant life in the fields (Bagby 72). His childhood shaped his path and inspired the work he would grow to accomplish. At only 26, Valdez founded El Teatro Campesino to inspire and galvanize the young United Farmworkers Association (UFW) on their mission to unionize the migrant farmworkers who traveled from across the border to work the fields of south and central California (Bagby 72). He would go on to teach at three different universities and win numerous awards for his writing and cultural-artistic efforts ("About Luis"). Valdez's work led him to become one of the most celebrated and influential American playwrights.

Luis Valdez, farmworker-turned-playwright, and the *campesinos* who acted in his early plays were severely mistreated. They were paid an average of less than a dollar per hour, and were housed in, "...unheated metal shacks-often infested with mosquitoes-with no indoor plumbing or cooking facilities," and they were charged high-rates to rent these decrepit facilities ("UFW History"). Poorly treated, under-paid, and ignored by their employers these workers were banded together to resist the efforts of farm owners who continued to exploit them.

By optimizing accessibility for workers who were constantly on the move, El Teatro was able to reach as many as possible and spread their message. Because these workers were migratory by necessity, their theatre would also go where there was work (Carpio). The mobile theatre allowed for the shows to travel to wherever the workers were striking that day, and it allowed the performances to follow the marches as they moved from town to town (Jiménez 101). The more widespread the Teatro, the more people they would be able to reach with their unifying message. The more people shouting these battle cries, the harder their voices would be to ignore.

The *actos* were poignantly relevant. They directly reflected the situations that occurred in the fields and out of them (Jiménez 104). These short plays or skits would carry clear messages that were either implied or blatantly stated: "Join the Union" or "Boycott grapes"-- essentially battle cries for the fair and respectable treatment of the farmworkers (Huerta). The *actos* did not have set scripts, and they were often improvisational based around a relevant narrative, like unionization or cultural pride. Actors would wear what they had available and place signs around their necks to clarify their roles (Huerta). Luis Valdez noted that the *acto* form developed naturalistically as a

reflection of life, "...the reality reflected in an acto is a social reality" (Jimenez 104). By placing the actual *campesino* onto the stage, the *actos* celebrated what it meant to be a Chicana person. This spurred the striking workers on to continue the important work they were doing and to have faith that they could maintain their culture in an oppressive environment.

It was through humor that *la causa* (the cause) was emboldened and motivated to take on the farm owners and fight for equitable treatment. Valdez notes, "We try to make social points, not in spite of the comedy, but through it. This leads us into satire and slapstick, and sometimes very close to the underlying tragedy of it all--the fact that human beings have been wasted in farm labor for generations" (Jiménez 102). These pieces satirize the reality of life as a *campesino* and tell the story of struggling workers without demoralizing their audience, the *campesinos* themselves. Valdez speaks about how the actors were not focused on being witty and clever, they were concerned about: "...the truth of the moment, and humor was found in raw truth" (El Teatro Campesino). Weaving humor into the performances boosted the morale of *huelguistas* (strikers) who had been on strike for over a year, who had to sit through hours of organizational meetings (Jiménez 101). Humor gave El Teatro a powerful tool with which to reach the *campesinos* and imbue them with energy and the stamina to make it through the long endeavor of fighting for equality. It emboldened and motivated Chicana persons to take on the farm owners and fight for equitable treatment.

Chicana Theatre

El Teatro Campesino and Luis Valdez's writing marks the beginning of modern Chicana theatre, a highly hybridized art form that incorporates cultural, ethnic, and

racial identities into a multi-faceted theatrical form. The Chicano theatre of El Teatro is an amalgamation of influences that draw from Valdez's experience and his college education at San Jose State University (Bagby 73). Valdez drew on theatrical cultural traditions that included Aztec ritual, Mexican dramas, Bertolt Brecht and *commedia dell'arte* (Worthen 101). Valdez enriches these theatrical traditions with his own flair to meet the needs and goals of Chicano theatre.

The Chicano identity adapted and developed into its own aesthetic: *Rasquache*. Resilient, versatile, and cleverly innovative, *rasquache* encapsulates the attitude of the underdog (Anderson). In Spanish this word means "leftover" or "of no value" (Anderson). For the Chicano person, *rasquache* "...belongs to the people, and is nothing more, nor less, [...] the sensibilities of the *barrio*, that mingle Mexican and Anglo-American experiences into everyday life" (Anderson). El Teatro utilized *rasquachismo* to create a space for themselves in broader society as well as within the realm of theatre.

Another of the cultural traditions Valdez encapsulated in his works is the narrative and history of Aztlán, the original settlement of the Aztecs, the ancient homeland of the Chicano people. Aztlán holds an important symbolic value in Chicano culture because of its ability to function not only as a place and symbol but also as a concept of identity. Chicano identity and theatre is fortified by its connection with Aztlán as an all-encompassing metaphor for *Chicanismo*, the essence of the Chicano person, the political ideal of the rising underdog, a point of pride, and the feeling of cultural rebirth that provided dignity to the burgeoning Chicano populace (Chicano Movement - Ideology). *Mitos* were another form of the Teatro's performances, and

these called upon the mythology of Aztlán, myths that are a part of the indigenous Chicana heritage (Huerta). They formed theatrical spaces between the present and ancient, real and mythic, the physical space between what was Mexico and what is now the American Southwest, and the spaces of identity between what it means to be Chicana and American. Aztlán helped to ground that in-between identity and to support those who build off of Aztlán's foundation. El Teatro drew strength and performative identity from its deeply rooted cultural connection to Aztlán and its mythology.

Cantinflas, a famous Mexican comedian, also had a potent cultural and theatrical impact on El Teatro's performances of Valdez's works. Cantinflas, "Latin America's Chaplin" was a household name for most of the migrant farmworkers who populated the fields of California (Krebs). The majority of the workers who performed in the *actos* almost assuredly knew who Cantinflas was, and much of their performance was based on him. Cantinflas gave *campesino* actors a style on which to base their performances and contributed to the concretisation of Chicana identity.

Another foundational concept in Valdez's writings is Bertolt Brecht's theatrical philosophy, specifically his Alienation effect or *Verfremdungseffekt* (Pizzato 54). This technique takes the audience out of their role as immersive play-watcher and ensures they are fully aware of their position as spectator to the events happening on stage. Brecht asks the audience to look at the system in which the characters operate in order to accentuate the disparities in society. To incite the audience to thought and action is the ultimate goal of the Brechtian Alienation effect. This transfers to Valdez's *Los Vendidos* through outlandish stereotypes, direct addresses to the audience, and the idea that a government official would buy a mechanical model of a Mexican in order to

appeal to voters. If one takes a step away from the theatricality of these events, one can see them reflected in real life. Politicians do in fact co-opt minority peoples to be tokens in their political goal of pulling as many voters as possible. Brecht is a potent influence in Valdez's writings and the Alienation effect can be used as a theatrical technique to help the director achieve the goal of communicating Valdez's message to the audience.

The style and flair of the early Teatro mirrored another traditional theatrical style, *commedia dell'arte*, as both shared exaggerated performance and archetypes. A classical Italian theatrical style, *commedia dell'arte* utilizes standard archetypes such as Arlecchino, Pantalone, or Columbina to easily communicate stories to people who may not be versed in classical theatre conventions (Mazzone-Clementi 59). This is almost an exact reflection of what the farmworkers theatre encountered in their efforts to reach the *campesinos*. The broad, easily understood characterizations from *commedia dell'arte*, helped to inform Valdez's style of theatre (Bagby 73). The signs that El Teatro actors wore around their necks to communicate their character have the same effect as the classical costumes and masks of the *commedia* tradition.

Linguistic Considerations

Theatre that works in two languages requires a supportive framework to ensure that the voices of the Latinx people are being incorporated at all levels. Often these considerations are left to the dramaturg or translator, but bilingual theatre needs to have language as a focal point for all those involved. To consider staging bilingual plays like *Los Vendidos*, one needs to recognize the linguistic elements of the play. *Los Vendidos* translates to "the Sell Outs" or "the Sold Ones," a fact which is necessary to a complete dramaturgical understanding of the play. Prior to the time of any Latinx inclusion in

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creative development of widespread media, one sees Latinx peoples brazenly stereotyped and mocked in the media (Gunckel 333). Even now, there is a distinct lack of Foreign-Other and Nonstandard American accents on television, and one can find reflections of the flaws in representation on the stage as well as in filmed representations of race (Dragojevic 59).

Working with the intersection of identity through language and dismantling colonialist ideals are important steps in creating a safe and productive space on stage. Presently, there is an active effort to decolonize the stage in American theaters of the pervasive colonialist idea that non-standard forms of English are inherently “wrong” or “bad.” The inseparable nature of race and identity is all the more apparent in performance (Pao, *No Safe Spaces* 11). It is vital to call upon actors who have the accent or dialect being portrayed because of the systemic racism present in modern media surrounding the portrayal of accented speakers, and one way to disrupt this trend is to include the voices of those whose story is being told (Pao, “False Accents” 353). By acknowledging the traces of colonialism in the idea behind “standard” English as superior, we can work to break down these notions (Tomic 4). If I were to cast *Los Vendidos*, I would engage with actors who have experienced linguistic discrimination, discuss with non-native speakers of English, and utilize the play’s message to dismantle this colonial system of standardized English superiority.

Dramaturgical Conclusions

In the midst of our current racial and political climate, my goals for this project were to pursue a working knowledge of how to respectfully handle and interrogate pieces of theatre that did not center around white experiences and Valdez’s *Los*

Vendidos gave me the perfect vessel. I wanted to focus on the way we approach racial and cultural theatre. Valdez wrote in layers of subtlety that remained invisible to me until I had done dramaturgical research on the culture of the *campesinos* and El Teatro. I am not often exposed to this kind of theatre and only by chance did I discover Valdez's works.

I've been wrestling with my place in this research, and it has by far been the most difficult part of this thesis. I want to be a part of the uplifting of Latinx theatre to the broader public and mainstream theatre. I am still trying to figure out how I can contribute to the conversation without dominating it. I continue to think that I am inherently colonizing the play by being an outsider who is attempting to engage a work that does not belong to me. I cannot avoid that challenge, so I am making conscious efforts to avoid appropriating the work. Every step of the way, I have questioned why I am performing this research and every time I answer my question with the knowledge that I am here to observe and learn. By actively building critical and dramaturgical understanding for myself around Valdez's works and the type of theatre he built, I hope I can introduce others to this work and its importance.

Encounter 3: Directorial Encounter

The themes that carry *Los Vendidos* have woven their fingers between the lines of text and must be utilized to help bring this play from script to production, even themes that were not intentionally incorporated into the play. This is a part of understanding the history and origin of the play. In my directorial encounter, I have aimed to find the specific themes while uniting general themes as sources of common ground and understanding. I have attempted to distinguish the individual identity underneath the stereotypes and to derive the history of these stereotypes. I am trying to configure a space that acknowledges individual histories and also acknowledges that these and other histories are tied together by cultural similarities and experiences of colonization.

I have used *Los Vendidos* as a guide as I explore and encounter this kind of cultural work and interaction with stereotypes. As a scholar, I want to be able to explore as much as I can by relating my content to the rest of society, but that does not have to be a goal for all directors and dramaturgs. I know my goal has been to learn and embrace as much information as I can which is why I am trying to relate my research to a broader audience.

Finding the common goal adheres a community together. I want to find a way to approach other cultures in my theatrical work, so I am seeking at a broader level of understanding while diving into *Los Vendidos* and its origins in Mexican culture and El Teatro. This play demonstrates the power of a bonded community in fighting against a system that demonizes and divides. At the end of the play, there is an element of community and comradery. Sancho sells different types of Mexican, which implies that

these subgroups are more important than the community as a whole. This tactic, used by people in positions of power, intends to elevate certain subgroups of a minority community in an attempt to set them against others. By focusing on the similarities that tie them together as a community, the characters in *Los Vendidos* are able to turn the tables and subvert the power structure in Honest Sancho's Used Mexican Lot.

The additional analysis I have done as a director is to understand the dramaturgical nuances of specific stereotypes and identities present within this piece in order to make possible broader connections while staying true to the historical and cultural context of the material. While Valdez's play is written by and for a specific audience, I think there might be a broader contextualization for it in American society. Understanding the historical and cultural context of a specific stereotype is to honor and encounter this history and to grapple with it respectfully. This connection should be a part of the research, and understanding it should be a goal for the production team. It is alright to allow audience members from other cultures with potentially similar experiences to draw these connections in the play -- or not. The audience has agency in determining if they are represented. If they find solace in the play's representation then that is the purpose of the piece, if not then they do not have to connect with the material. My hope is to reach as broadly as possible within the respectful context of the play and its history still, it is possible to dilute the narrative if a director were to wash the stereotypes of their specific cultural and historical context. However, I hope an understanding of historical and contemporary context has led me to a greater understanding of the broader population of Latinx and Chicax peoples.

I wish to contribute to the universality of human experience, but as a director and dramaturg, I aim to practice and honor the specificity of *Los Vendedos*. I want to understand the mindset and motivation that underlays this play. My goal has been to understand the human beneath the narrative in the hope to integrate humanity where it is appropriate and to delve between the lines of the stereotype to see the clarity it offers.

Stereotype

In Valdez's *Los Vendedos*, the "models" in Honest Sancho's shop all represent one of the generalized versions of how Mexican people have been viewed in American society. The characters of the Farmworker, Pachuco, Revolucionario, and Mexican American are generalized variations on the Chicana experience in America as seen by white society. This effect can be seen more broadly in the Latinx experience because many of these stereotypes persist and extend to Latinx people. These characters are representations of the ways in which Latinx men have been "caricatured, stereotyped, and eroticized" in U.S. media throughout history (Perez 37). Acknowledging the harm and power in these stereotypes is an effective way to reclaim the memories muddled by stereotype and generalization.

By characterizing Mexicans as robots or automata it places the dehumanizing effect of these stereotypes as the focus in *Los Vendedos*. There is an outer layer, the stereotype, the robot, that masks the real person living inside that filtered perception. By dramatizing the caricatures of the *campesinos*, Valdez draws attention towards the humanity and personality beneath the Pachuco, Farmer, Revolucionario, and Mexican American and their real-life counterparts. Dehumanizing Latinx peoples and presenting

them as animatrons creates a foil for the humans revealed at the end as identifiable persons, individuals masked by broad generalizations of who the dominant society thinks they are.

Stereotypes are derived from the past, and, as such, they hold memories. While these stereotypes have been used to dehumanize Latinx people they also hold power. Memories of the hardworking laborers who supported their families or the pachucos who resisted police brutality and urban discrimination can be powerful memories in the process of healing from the negative effects of stereotypes. These images can be honored if they are not used in a derogatory way to break down the people who embody them. One must acknowledge the history of the stereotype in order to respectfully approach it as a director.

Every one of us is a multiplicity of memories and identities, and embracing these creates a space in which to interrogate catharsis through embodied experiences. “No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity,” and researching to understand the nuances of identity is the key to achieving catharsis through stereotype (Delgado 10). Theatre director, Anne Bogart, writes: “[...] through the embodiment of severe stereotypes, a small exorcism was performed” (Bogart 100). Here the author is describing how recoiling away from stereotypes is to erase the history and memory held in those ideas. Instead, we must embrace them and recognize their history and learn from the past. Through this catharsis, we can hope to dispel some of the power and trauma intrinsic in negative racial stereotypes.

In reasserting the stereotype’s place in history and giving the power of the stereotype back to the people who it represents, there can be a kind of catharsis for

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those who have had to bear the burden of this stereotype. Oftentimes in trying to escape the stereotypes, people will pull away from their cultural history because it is so closely associated with the negative connotations and consequences of the stereotype. There is trauma inherent in stereotypes; parents and children were forced to give up their heritage and identity in the hopes of building a life in a society that looked down upon their culture. This identity erasure and trauma can be passed down through generations affecting people long after the stereotype may have become outdated and unpopular (Grand 2). Learning all the facts about the stereotype --instead of only the negative traits of that stereotype-- creates a potential for healing in reclaiming the power behind the stereotype.

By examining the roles these characters play, I am able to explore the way humanity ties itself into every person's experience in an effort to oppose the othering effects of racism. *Los Vendidos'* satirical characterizations of stereotype and identity depict Latinx experiences with racism in America. The play builds through various versions of the Mexican models: hard-working, urban, romantic, American. This progression shows that Miss Jimenez, a representation of the U.S. government, will only accept American, that is what she wants. She does not care about the other qualities of the Mexican, only that he is American, assimilated. But he can never really be that. He is Mexican American always, in some way, tied to his culture, which places him in a permanent position of "other". Theatre has the quality of binding together those with common objectives, and this makes it a sturdy vessel for discussing social issues and working towards broader awareness. One of my primary goals in the practice of theatre and this research has been to find the undercurrent of humanity and the

commonality between cultures. I have aimed help find common ground for a wider populace and encourage audiences to consider the effect racism has on others' lives.

This play puts on a lucid display of what racism looks like and does not sugarcoat or dilute the effects it has. The play's comedy thrives on the truth beneath its inspiration. Mexican people have been used and abused by white, American society, and to tell that story without the notes of lighthearted humor that Valdez brings might dissuade audiences from connecting with the play. As esteemed Chicana scholar Jorge Huerta notes, "Political theatre [...] could and should be entertaining *and* educational (Huerta, *Encuentro 2014*). This play is a clear snapshot of a history that is often buried, and it is told in a fashion that is palatable in the sense that: it does not victimize the models and it does not outrightly blame white society, which can shut down and deter white audiences. Valdez built a piece that ensures audiences' scrutiny because it is such blatant satire. It weaves in moments of reality that remind the audience that though *this* world is fictional it is a reflection of the racist world we inhabit and the stereotypes we associate with groups of people.

Identity

Identity is another of the critical themes to be explored in Valdez's play because it illustrates the humanity that underlies the stereotypes. In bridging the gap that separates the "other," I hope to highlight the true identity that lies beneath these stereotypes, so as to avoid the perpetration of the harmful effects of these stereotypes while utilizing their power to deconstruct the systems that built them.

This play is written by a Mexican man about a movement started by Mexican people, and it features specifically Mexican stereotypes. Unfortunately, many of the

stereotypes that were initially only applied to Mexican immigrants have been applied to other groups from Latin America due to the conflation that began in the early 1800s (Sandrino-Glasser 111). While this has consequences like misrepresentation, it also creates a strange bond between these groups of nationalities. I posit that the resulting connection between these groups can be explored in pieces of theatre that were initially written regarding one cultural context to unite and connect. As long as there is a consistent effort to understand the origins of the play, and there is a purpose in exploring the universality of the content, one can pursue a contextualized yet universal performance.

In *Los Vendidos*, the characters isolated identities make the audience uneasy. They are portrayed as extremely disparate and non-compatible, at least in regards to the uses that Miss Jimenez needs. The play begins by highlighting one character at a time in an effort to set apart each individual stereotype. The frozen nature of the models in between each's showcase highlights the idea that these identities are absolute and unchanging. The audience knows this is not possible. Personality and identity are constantly in flux as we make our way through the world. By posing these models as unrelated and unchanging characters, the audience hopefully can acknowledge that we all present multiplicities of identity and experience and that this presentation of identity is absurd.

When the characters come back to life together at the end of the story, they come together under one voice and one battle cry, "¡Viva la revolución! ¡Viva la huelga! ¡Viva la raza!" (Valdez 11). This demonstrates the crossover between the models that had been set up to oppose each other by Sancho and Jimenez. There is a

unification of influence and experience. All of these identities coalesce through their common goal and enemy. They have all experienced racism, this is at least partially what brought them together to perform their con. These friends are interpretations of ways in which the Mexican identity, and by extension Latinx identities are formed through life experience, as all people are. We are all a product of our environment and experiences as well as our history. Thus are they an amalgamation of all the historical and cultural identities that have coalesced into the Latinx-American experience.

The twist of this play works because the models turn their perceived identities to their advantage. Jimenez is not expecting a brilliant scheme, and that is why she is ultimately duped. The models used the power of Jimenez (a representation of the U.S. government) and her assumptions against her. By demonstrating that the smallest of dissents can disrupt a system of racial discrimination, the play encourages audiences to utilize their strengths to help interrupt a corrupt system.

Another act of rebellion in this play is that the models reject assimilation. At the end of the play, when all is revealed, they discuss normal things like going to a party or the divvying up of funds and the man who plays the Mexican American laments always having to play the assimilated character (Valdez 11). This group does not want to be assimilated into a culture that does not welcome them. They wish to exist in their shared cultural identity without punishment. The rejection of assimilation shows how strong the cultural and communal ties are within this group and prove that their individual and shared identities does not need to be assimilated to be valid.

Machismo is as much a social theme that has informed *el movimiento* as it is a theme in *Los Vendidos*. Octavio Paz describes the “Mexican Mask” and illustrates how

it affects every relationship that Mexicans have, including the one with themselves. Men especially have a difficult time allowing the hurt that results from discrimination to show: "...his face is a mask and so is his smile" (Paz 29). The *machismo* that is a large part of Mexican identity does not appreciate victimization, and one might observe this in the fact that the men in *Los Vendidos* are definitely not victims. Paz notes, "In addition, our masculine integrity is as much endangered by kindness as it is by hostility. Any opening in our defenses is a lessening of our manliness" (Paz 30). Valdez understands this concept and knows that it would do no good to portray the Mexican as the victim, that would not be the battle cry they needed, he needed to craft characters that are clever and have agency in their fates. He weaponized that agency for the movement so that it could be utilized to improve the livelihoods of the Mexican people.

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Directorial Approaches

As part of my directorial encounter, I created depictions of the characters as I might design them for the purposes of exploring stereotype and identity. As mentioned earlier, *Los Vendidos* translates to "The Sellouts" as well as "The Sold Ones." These translations can act as categories into which the characters can be sorted. The sellouts of the story are Honest Sancho and Miss Jimenez, and the sold are the models. As part of my directorial encounter, I created a series of inspiration slides with images to help visualize these characters and their potential designs. This was part of my process much in the way a director would prepare for a first production meeting to begin to visualize the production with a collaborative team. I have included detailed character descriptions in this thesis that illustrate my directorial approaches to these characters.

The Sell Outs

Honest Sancho:

The first sellout is Honest Sancho. As both seller and sellout, Sancho seems best embodied by a robot for the inhuman actions he takes in selling another one of his people, arguably the most inhuman crime possible. Sancho serves to represent those who scabbed in the fields when the workers were on strike, another destructive act that undermined the efforts of *el movimiento*.

Sancho is the most abrasively stereotypical character to grace the stage. As the ultimate sell-out, I would costume him as a bastardized version of actual Mexican clothing. He is presenting himself as a purveyor of Mexican curiosities, and his actions align him with the white society that he is selling to. Thus, he is using the white idea of foreignness as a marketing tactic. Because he represents everything that is false or decontextualized about Mexican culture, he should wear the least culturally appropriate and most Americanized costume. He is every racist misconception you can think of rolled into one. He might wear a garish poncho with a matching oversized sombrero as seen in every derogatory Mexican Halloween costume. He should have a comical mustache adhered to his face to complete the look.

Miss Jimenez:

Miss Jimenez is the other sellout. Jimenez is a Mexican American woman working for the Reagan governorship in California. She is the prim, proper epitome of assimilation. She looks down upon the Farmworker because he does not speak English, the Pachuco because he steals, and the Revolucionario because he is “Made in Mexico.”

Miss Jimenez is a reference to one historical figure who was also a sellout. She is a reference to the so-called *malinchistas* who were feminist Chicanas in *el movimiento*. These women were named in reference to: “La Malinche, the iconic translator and consort to the Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortes who was portrayed as one who betrayed her own, the indigenous of Mexico, during the era of conquest” (Sanchez Saltveit 89). Women’s participation in the Chicana movement was often suppressed because of the movement’s inherent *machismo* and focus on the liberation of the male part of the culture (Sanchez Saltveit 89). The feminists within the movement were accused of undermining their community’s efforts by focusing on their individual liberation of identity, which is not an unrealistic or selfish objective. This goal was introduced to combat the *machismo* that was woven into the movement by the nature of Mexican masculinity and the suppression of feminine voices. There was a conflation between the rejection of American assimilation and the rejection of the patriarchal mannerisms of the Chicana *movimiento*.

There are layers to the fact that Miss Jimenez, the only woman in the play, is the villain. Her villainy is performed through her role as the assimilated woman who attempts to purchase and use another person. Valdez characterizes her as a sellout. She has discarded her connection to her Mexican heritage and holds active disdain for anyone who does. Jimenez kicks and insults the “models” in the process of inspection and she is encouraged to this behavior by Sancho (Valdez 6). She sells herself out and shirks her culture for the chance at what she thinks is a better life. Part of the unbalanced characterization may be due to the fact that women were not often the ones

in the fields and on strike, but the unfortunate reality was also that women were not valued to the same degree as men in this movement.

In my directorial approach, Jimenez might have big hair and a bigger ego. I imagine her in a classic American color -red, white, or blue- given she works for the office of Governor Reagan. She would do anything to prove her assimilation. There should be some slight reference to her Latinx heritage, but it should be something she has tried to cover up or something she has not noticed. Her tight skirt might make it difficult for her to walk, making her comical in literal uptightness. She is assertive. Her shoes could make a lot of noise when walks in. She is a woman you hear coming.

The dichotomy between Miss Jimenez and the other characters in the play, the divide between the assimilated and unassimilated person, is one of the most potent motifs in *Los Vendidos*. Even though Valdez is clearly emphasizing the idea of maintaining one's cultural connection as a motivational tactic and rallying cry, all these characters have nuances in cultural identity and adaptation. The characters exist on an implied binary, the "ideal" immigrant and the real immigrant. These opposed ideas are embedded in a spectrum of reality. Some Latinx people who migrate do fully assimilate, like Miss Jimenez, and some hold onto aspects of their native culture. But many people exist in the in-between, adopting some new cultural aspects and leaving others behind. To yield your identity because you do not feel safe expressing your identity in a foreign society is problematic at best, and it is unrealistic to expect someone not to adapt in a new environment. By highlighting the opposite ends of this cultural spectrum, it invites critique of either side.

The Sold Ones

The characters who are sold are the models. They are stereotypes and generalizations of what American society has reduced their entire culture to. These are four easily digestible versions of a Mexican person, and all of these versions are to be used. That is of course why they are sold; they are a commodity to be traded.

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Farmworker: Diminutized

“Hard-working” is the phrase that cues Honest Sancho to introduce the Farmworker model, as this is his most prominent feature (Valdez 2). It is mentioned again by Sancho when he states, “...his most attractive feature is that he’s hard-working,” followed by the selling point that he is cheap, which is a result of not being paid fairly instead of being worth less, though Sancho implies otherwise (Valdez 2). Many of the migrant farmworkers’ struggles that led to *el movimiento* were derived from being mistreated, underpaid, and overworked. Migrant farmworkers came following the harvests, and they found work, but due to their lack of citizenship as well as their race, the government was under no obligation to protect them from labor violations.

It is notable that Sancho is selling “used” Mexicans in his lot. Mexican people have been used and exploited, which is what initiated the movement led by Cesar Chavez and others into a movement towards the liberation and fair treatment of farm laborers. While all of the models have been used and abused by society, I argue that the farmworker has been the most exploited of the models on display. They were housed in dilapidated shacks without access to proper resources and underpaid for their arduous labor in the heat of the California summer (UFW History). Because of these conditions,

the farmworkers were lauded as hard-working. In fact, the Farmworker is defined by his hard-working manner and his durability (Valdez 2).

Farm owners failed to see the humans beneath the farmworkers perceived “otherness.” The Farmworker’s especially mechanical quality sets him apart from the other models. He is the most machine-like of all the characterizations in Valdez’s play because of his multiple produce picking functions and his fast and slow speed (Valdez 2,3). The Farmworker’s characteristic demeanor is what he has been reduced to: a machine to be used and operated. His settings are for labor, including picking different kinds of fruit. The Farmworker would wear clothes typical for work in the fields. A button-down long sleeve shirt with a straw hat to keep the sun out of his eyes and loose-fitting jeans. One might incorporate the colors or symbology of the United Farm Workers logo into this costume to reference the efforts of the movement for equitable treatment of laborers.

This character is a product of El Teatro Campesino as well as Valdez’s upbringing in a family of migrant farmworkers. The farmworkers were the original audience of El Teatro so it follows that they would be one of the main audience considerations. Valdez honors the farmworkers in this character.

Pachuco: Villianized

The pachuco is one of the most iconic symbols of Chicano presence in America. This bold, young character was broadly villainized by the media throughout the 1940s. They were seen as “dangerous criminals in stylized clothing” (Lucas 62). Their notoriety really began after the Sleepy Lagoon trial in which seventeen young men were wrongly convicted of murder (Lucas 62). This trial kicked off the Zoot Suit Riots along

with help from biased media sources (Lucas 62). Zoot suits became symbols of identity, demarcating young Mexican Americans who adapted their own language, style, and culture from the complexities contributing to their personhood. Spanish, English, and “archaic gypsy Spanish” helped configure the new pachuco dialect, and this, combined with their brazen fashion, made them symbols of *chicanismo* (Lucas 64). This same symbolism also made them very identifiable targets.

The pachucos was “...portrayed in the media as perpetrators of violence with enormous potential for further violent behavior” (Lucas 64). This set these young people up as not only villainized characterizations but also as people with a limitless power to execute violence. This stereotype was then falsely blanketed over other Mexican people: “In the general public’s eyes, the racialized depictions of the pachuco in the news linked all ethnic Mexicans in the United States to crime, defining them as fundamentally outside of mainstream society” (Lucas 64). In reality, only three to five percent of Mexican Americans were pachucos, and this vast oversimplification closely mirrors Valdez’s intentional stereotype in *Los Vendidos* (Lucas 66).

Valdez’s Pachuco perfectly fits the media’s persistent myth. This outrageous character is: “Streamlined. Built for speed, low-riding, city life. [...] Mag shoes, dual exhausts, green chartreuse paint-job, dark-tint windshield, [and] a little poof on top,” and when Sancho turns him on he performs a Chicano shuffle (Valdez 4). Sancho describes his pachuco model as, “a great scape goat,” which calls back to the Sleepy Lagoon murder that villainized the pachuco (Valdez 5).

The outlandish Pachuco will benefit from leaning into the ridiculous nature of the myth behind the character. By playing on the demonic descriptions of

“...bloodthirsty gangsters and drug addicts, [the] assaulters of men in uniform and mother, sister, and wife rapers,” the hope is that the audience will clue into the overdramatic coded racism inherent in this characterization (Madrid-Barela 32). For the pachuco stereotype to work as the play demands, he must be outrageous. He must be the man of “mythic dimensions,” and he must be fabulous (Madrid-Barela 31). To dull the impact of the pachuco’s reputation would be to do a disservice to the long-standing effects of the myth that has caused discrimination against many (especially young) Latinx people.

Pachuco is a suave, confident character, and his clothes reflect this. Bold colors and accessories are crucial to capture the essence of the confident Pachuco. He will have a brimmed hat that matches his swaggy attire and a long gold chain draped along one leg of his pants. The zoot suit is a symbol of power and confidence. When wearing the suit the actor will have to embody this swagger.

Revolucionario: Exoticised

The *revolucionario* is the romanticized and exoticized variant of the Latinx identity. He is a play on the Latin lover stereotype perpetuated by film and media around 1967 when the play was published. The typical Latin lover type possesses a few key characteristics. First, he must be attractive --whatever that may mean-- in the context of the time period. He must also exude masculinity and have some reference to his ethnic-ness, such as: dark hair, olive skin, or an alluring accent (Perez 38). This type of man is presented as a foreign version of male beauty thus making him a luxuriant, enticing promise of sex and uncouth character. This stereotype reduces the person to nothing more than a sexual object-- someone who, while enticing, expends their use

rather quickly. This portrayal of Latinx identity arose in the 1920s beginning with characters played by Ramón Navarro. These portrayals increased exponentially from then on with characters played by actors such as Desi Arnaz, Fernando Lamas, Antonio Banderas, Javier Bardem, and Mario López (Perez 37). The history of this stereotype is built on the fantasy of the “primitive-type love” and the idea of danger and sex rolled into one tall, dark, and handsome package (Perez 38). While not the most negative of the presented stereotypes, it is demeaning for both character and actor to be reduced to one’s sexuality as their only asset.

The Latin lover is another way of creating a hierarchical expression of race in the media; he may be sexy and exciting, but he is a dangerous forbidden pleasure. The Latin lover’s identity is built around his ability to be intoxicating to women; they just cannot seem to resist his wild charms, and this makes him a threat (Perez 38). His hypnotic presence, supposedly, lures women to do things that they do not wish to do, and this is a direct counter to the “reserved, gentlemanly” white man (Perez 38). He represents all of the animalistic, base desires that no polite man would ever indulge. He is a creation of white culture to both present the Latin man as lowly and to indulge the desires of the white man. In this way, the Latin lover also appeals to men, allowing them to experience what they could not (Perez 39).

The Latin lover must be suave and romantic enough to sweep Jimenez off her feet but tough enough to scare her a few pages later. The first “Latin lover,” Rudolph Valentino, was actually Italian, as were many of the other actors who were type-cast into these roles. In order to be the “Latin lover” one must have dark swoopy hair, darker skin than the average white guy, and typically European features. It is an exoticized

version of European beauty standards. They took a European man and made him “spicy” with darker features and an air of mystery. The Revolucionario is also a reference to Pancho Villa, the famous revolutionary, and so one might incorporate iconic pieces of Villa’s style like the crossed ammunition belts and hat featured in historical photos.

Mexican American: Idealized

While the Mexican American model is not placed above white folks, he is still idealized as the most perfect version of a Mexican, specifically, or Latinx person generally. By exclusively highlighting the most palatable edition of Mexican society, white audiences get a falsified view of what an entire culture is “supposed” to look like and may extend that view and apply it to the entire Latinx society. Then, when white Americans are faced with an alternative view of what they think Mexican is, they are affronted because they think that this is an incorrect version. This is why it is important to feature all kinds of identities. When white society becomes familiar with only a narrow view of the Latinx identity, they are excluded from a vastly variant experience that can inform and expand the white notion of this identity.

This idealization of personhood creates an unrealistic standard also known as the “model minority.” The model minority stereotype, generally applied to Asian-Americans, holds this group to a higher standard than others (Blackburn). I am applying the model-minority stereotype that Blackburn applies to Asian Americans to the Mexican American character. This higher standard creates an environment where less help is offered to struggling persons, and they are expected to perform higher than their white counterparts. In the case of the Mexican American, he is literally valued more

than the other models. At \$15,000 he is prized above the others who are said to work for “pennies a day” or “nickels and dimes” (Valdez 3, 5).

The Mexican American’s look might resemble Jimenez’s costume, but hers may be tight whereas his will be looser. He is a man of the late 60’s, smooth and professional. He should be appealing to Jimenez because she does eventually buy him. He should look like he could walk into a government function and not be noticed because he has dressed the part and acts like he belongs.

Unifying Production Concepts

I have added some notes regarding my thoughts about how I completed the preparatory directorial process. This portion consists of considerations that helped lead me through the final phases from my third encounter into my fourth and final encounter. While I do not intend to execute these ideas, I felt they were important to include because they were catalysts in realizing my fourth encounter.

Set:

The setting of the play is during the Reagan governorship, presumably in 1967 when the play was published. Set in California, where *el movimiento* began, Honest Sancho’s Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop houses and displays the model Mexicans for customers in need. This is the home of Honest Sancho and the base of operations for the “models.” The stage would be sparse because the play really does not need anything other than actors to tell the story. I would use small platforms or pedestals to indicate the models and a sign reading “Honest Sancho’s Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop.”

I would want the set to be simple: essentially a bare stage with only three displays for the models. These displays will resemble a glass display case, but instead of glass there will be no front panel and the back three panels will be covered with a chain link fence. The idea is to create the image of a cage mixed with a display. The cage is intended to reference the U.S. Mexican border crisis where thousands of families have been detained in cages for seeking asylum in the United States (Jordan). This cage also resembles a box to indicate the confining quality that stereotypes have. To put people in a box is to restrict their identity to a diminutized, narrow version of who they really are. Sancho has displayed the models in their boxes, and their identities are thus caged and confined.

Costume:

I would make the costumes oversized as a play on the way stereotypes are like shoes that are too big to fill. They are also ridiculous, which is how someone looks when they wear clothes that do not fit them. It is like a costume they are forced to wear. At the end of the play the actors will disrobe from their costumes (stereotypes) into their regular street clothes. Contrasting this with Jimenez in restricting clothes shows that she has squeezed herself into an identity that does not fit. I would feel free being heavy handed with this concept because this style of theatre is influenced by *commedia dell'arte*, which uses distinct costuming and masks to indicate character type.

Encounter 4: Framework Encounter

Through the process of applying my research, it has been revealed to me that I am not an appropriate person to be at the head of a production of *Los Vendidos*. Only through my attempt to apply my knowledge was I confronted with this realization, and it was a vital part of my process. My framework will be based on the conclusion that I am not able to function as a director, but I may function in a supportive role as an ally to Latinx theatre.

The process of this research has revealed that I will not be creating a framework of production but a framework of support and allyship. The initial goal of this research was to educate myself in order to direct a production of this play, but, as the old saying goes, “Man plans, God laughs.” While I will not be directing a production of *Los Vendidos*, I have discovered something more important to my experience with cultural theatre and anti-racism: one does not need to be directly involved or in charge to create change within oneself. I feel as though I have learned an important lesson, one that I could not have learned without this process. I can support Latinx theatre by being in conversation with the play, and I can pass this knowledge on to others like me, new students, or I can work to support Latinx artists through allyship and continued education.

I started my thesis process in a manic panic not knowing what to write a thesis about or how to write it. I quickly concluded that I needed to make this a project that was meaningful to me because I would not be able to execute such a lengthy project if I felt like nothing would be achieved except checking off the last box on my degree requirements. So, I elected to educate myself with the hopes of applying this knowledge

Commented [j6]: Include ideas of future in encounters, not yet

in my field of study: theatre. I remembered an essay I had written my sophomore year about Chicana culture during *el movimiento* at the same time that I was searching through plays and came across *Los Vendidos*. This play's bold take on stereotype and subverting of racist culture caught my attention, and I hoped that this play could guide me into research about stereotype on stage.

As soon as I began the actual research, I realized that I would need to narrow my focus to Latina/Chicana stereotypes, and I would need to center my research specifically on *Los Vendidos*. I thought that my research might be applicable to other plays and representations of stereotype, but I discovered that I would need more time to take on a challenge of that breadth. I wanted to ensure that the work and research I did were done efficiently and effectively without glaring gaps of missed information. So, I concluded that my research needed to be pinpointed and thorough. I would dig deep, not wide to focus on *Los Vendidos* and the specific stereotypes represented in this play.

I went through the process of researching everything I could about Valdez's *Los Vendidos* and then tried to apply it. I concocted a pseudo-production with design and directorial concepts, but something that had been nagging at the back of my mind came to the forefront. I felt off, uncertain, guilty-- but I could not figure out the reason why. I had endeavored to foster respect for this critical piece of theatre, and I was trying to understand why it felt so wrong for me to attempt to take on this work when I had done everything I could think of to honor it. Only after innumerable discussions with my primary advisor could I put into words why I felt "icky" about trying to produce this work. I can learn as much as possible in the span of time allowed, but at this point in my

life, I have not had the life experiences or breadth of knowledge needed to feel confident directing this work.

Los Vendidos is a key piece of cultural theatre for Chicax and Latinx peoples, and, as a white student, I should not oversee it. In fact, I pray that no one ever asks me to direct *Los Vendidos*. This play is so deeply entrenched in the cultural history of the Chicax population that it would be inappropriate for me to assume that the research I have performed over a 9-month period is any sort of replacement for life experience and the cultural knowledge that comes with being a person of Latin descent. This piece is intentionally anti-racist and opposes the way white people see Latinx people. For a white person to then try and produce it defeats the entire anti-racist message that the play preaches. In the end, I have realized that I cannot ethically, respectfully, and productively direct with this critical piece of cultural and racial theatre right now.

I made a choice. I knew that I had to write a thesis, so I chose a topic I did not know much about and went about attempting to educate myself. And so, I did. I have elected to make a second choice from the knowledge I have gained. I came to this project with a genuine desire to understand and explore *Los Vendidos* in the hopes of directing this play. However, the keen specificity of this style of play and its critical historical importance places it in a realm that is out of reach at present. I have learned much about the history and themes of this play, but most importantly I have learned that one can have a genuine desire to be a part of the conversation and effectively acknowledge when to participate and when to observe. I am still learning, and I will continue to learn. My knowledge has guided me to a position of support so that I may

function as a voice of allyship. For now, that is how I ethically, respectfully, and productively engage with *Los Vendidos*.

As I have discovered, I have not created a framework of production but instead a framework of allyship. My goal to educate myself regarding this content has been achieved, though not fully for no one should ever believe they have learned all there is to learn about a subject. I have crafted my own theoretical version of what I would do with the show as a sort of pseudo-test to see what I have learned and how I might apply it. This preparatory process helped lead me to the conclusion that I do not wish to be placed at the helm of a production. However, I would still like to be in conversation with Latinx theatre and theatre makers. I have instead been working towards how I might function in a supportive role. The framework below outlines how I might approach work like this in the future from a position of allyship in relation to cultural theatre. These are not set up as a hierarchy of ideas or a step-by-step process but simply how the framework revealed itself to me. My tenets of allied theatrical scholarship at this point are as follows.

Connect to the work

It is always good to ask yourself one question before embarking on your project: “Why are you doing this?” For me, the answer was, “I want to learn more about this type of theatre.” I had never had the opportunity to see any work in the style of El Teatro and very few opportunities to learn about it, so I decided to pursue this project. I also had noticed there was a distinct lack of Latinx representation

in my theatre viewing, which I found to be an insidious crime given that many of my friends, coworkers, and classmates are of Latinx descent.

Do your research...and keep researching

The foundation of thorough knowledge is quality research. Start from scratch: knowing something is better than knowing nothing, and if you are starting with the basics then you can avoid making untrue assumptions. Once the foundation is built, then continue to research. You will never know too much about the play. For example, near the conclusion of my writing I was introduced to the concept of Critical Race Theory and Delgado and Stefancic's book by that same name, and how well its tenets could enfold themselves into my research.

Unfortunately, I did not have the time to fully explore this theory. Thus, it will be a part of future research. There will be new discoveries that you are not able to incorporate into today's work, but tomorrow holds opportunities to apply that new knowledge.

Collaborate

In the same way that you can never do too much research, you will never have too much discussion of your research regarding racial and cultural content. If you are able to have conversations with experts about your research, you will be all the more knowledgeable. One of my favorite parts of writing my thesis was the opportunity to discuss my research with Dr. Olga Sanchez Saltveit, a preeminent Latinx theatre scholar. She helped me clarify my research, answered my questions, and gave insight into a cultural perspective that I had

not found in academic publications. If you have the chance to work with actors of color, speak with them about their insights and experiences surrounding racial and cultural theatre. There will always be opportunities to learn, and they should be utilized.

Stay open

As someone who came in almost blind to this process and this topic, I discovered a lot of gaps in my knowledge. There were (and still are) gaps in my understanding of Latinx theatre, culture, and race politics in the U.S. My goal has been to bridge as many of these gaps as possible and to fight some of my own unconscious biases. I was embarrassed when I realized that I had set myself up for failure. Not that *I* was a failure, but in the sense that I failed to reach the goal I had set so many months ago. What I did reach was much harder for me to accept because I did not yet realize how my research could be helpful. By staying open, I learned that I could function in other ways to support the work without placing myself at the head of a production.

Be flexible (the support you provide may not be what you expect)

I thought that the only way I could achieve my goal was to apply my knowledge towards production. I was confronted with the realization that my support can come in other ways, and those ways will be different in every situation. For now, my support comes in the form of self-education with potential application in the future. For example, my experience in researching stereotype may prove useful with my combined knowledge of subverting these same stereotypes.

I would offer these thoughts to anyone who wishes to find a path toward engagement with critical pieces of cultural theatre, particularly to beginners in the practice of cultural theatre or interested young folk. I believe there is a lot to be learned from starting early in pursuit of cultural appreciation and anti-racism. These stories are a gateway. They can lead those of us who are white or have very little experience in a diverse array of cultures and identities towards a goal of understanding and appreciation.

These are my first four encounters and they have laid the foundation to continue on to encounters five, six, seven, and beyond. While my role in this research has led me to allyship, my future encounters are aimed towards production because the end goal of this research is to actually get equitable representation on the stage. In order to achieve this, I am learning how to conduct research geared toward production so that, when I do produce works featuring non-white people and culture, I can do it ethically and respectfully.

At this point, my role of support may take different forms as I continue to explore how I can fit into the conversation around anti-racism and equitable representation in the theatre. This research was done during a time when collaboration was extremely difficult, so I did not have the opportunity to test how my support might have manifested in person. I took the external research and applied it to my internal self. I asked what I could do right now to educate myself in a way that could be helpful and applicable elsewhere. The answer that has come to me is simple: to understand. Theatre is a place to foster understanding and empathy. I have made every effort to put myself in that place. In this year where theatrical spaces are empty and inaccessible, I hope that

my research has allowed me to fill a space that lies within myself with compassion and empathy.

I hope to take this empathy and activate it as a form of dissent. My individual understanding of *Los Vendidos* and some of the histories of Latinx theatre may have the power to encourage others to empathy. Maybe, in the future, I will have the opportunity to advocate for more representation on stages big and small, regional and national, educational and professional. I like to think that this is my small act of rebellion, my subversion of the power structure and racist ideologies because I created the opportunity to learn about a type of theatre that I had not yet encountered in a meaningful way. I hope that even my smallest contribution can change the course of the future and it can be a tiny step in the direction of equitable representation on stage.

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