

“Sliding Into the Beyond”: On *Testimonio* in the Cuban Diaspora

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, testimonial writing has established itself as a central form of expression and resistance. Rooted in nonfiction narrative modes, as well as in storytelling and oral history traditions, it developed into a literary genre in Latin America and the Caribbean in the wake of national liberation movements such as the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Testimonial writing achieved its greatest recognition and attracted serious critical attention in U.S. academic circles in the 1970s and 1980s. To date, however, critics have yet to agree upon a clear and uncontested definition of the genre. In addition to providing an overview of this debate, the purpose of this essay is to contribute to this ongoing dialogue through a discussion of the collection of testimonial expressions *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*.

Keywords: Cuba, testimonial, autobiography, oral history, discourse, exile, diaspora, displacement, Cold War

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RESUMEN

En las pasadas décadas, la escritura testimonial se ha establecido como una forma eficaz de expresión y resistencia. Partiendo de ciertas modalidades narrativas arraigadas en la realidad así como de la cuentística popular y la historia oral, el testimonio se ha convertido en un género literario significativo en Latinoamérica y el Caribe a raíz de movimientos liberadores como la Revolución Cubana de 1959. La literatura testimonial se difundió sobre todo en los 1970 y los 1980, atrayendo la atención de la crítica estadounidense. Sin embargo, hasta el presente no se ha elaborado una definición precisa de la modalidad. Además de sintetizar la polémica en torno al modo en que debe enfocarse el testimonio, propongo en este ensayo aportar algo al diálogo crítico en torno al tema reflexionando sobre la génesis y el contenido de *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*, una colección que reúne numerosas expresiones testimoniales tocantes a la diáspora cubana.

Palabras clave: Cuba, testimonio, autobiografía, historia oral, discurso, exilio, diáspora, desplazamiento, Guerra Fría

Testimonial writing is first and foremost an act, a tactic by means of which people engage in the process of self-constitution and survival. It is a way of using narrative discourse whose sole function is not solely pragmatic (that is, for the purposes of self-defense and survival) but just as significantly aesthetic (insofar as the subjects of the testimonial discourse rework their identity through the aesthetic)...
George Yúdice, "Testimonio and Postmodernism"

It is not the *testimonio's* uncontaminated positing of some pure, truthful, native history that makes it so powerful, but rather its subversion of such a subject [...]
only the mutability of its form, as determined by different contexts, ensures the *testimonio's* continued viability as a form of cultural resistance.
Santiago Colás, "What's Wrong With Representation: Testimonio and Democratic Culture"

Representation can therefore only exist to the extent that the transparency entailed by the concept is never achieved;
and that a permanent dislocation exists between the representative and the represented.

Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*

Over the past few decades, testimonial writing has established itself as a central form of expression and resistance. Rooted in nonfiction narrative modes such as the *crónicas*, as well as in storytelling and oral history traditions, *testimonio* as we recognize it today developed into a literary genre in Latin America and the Caribbean in the wake of national liberation movements such as the 1959 Cuban Revolution.¹

As Gustavo Péllon points out, *testimonio* had its origins in Cuba in the 1960s with the publication of Che Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* and the poet and anthropologist Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* —a self-proclaimed “testimonial novel” based on a series of interviews conducted by the editor with Esteban Montejo, a 104 year-old former Cuban slave. It achieved its greatest recognition and attracted serious critical attention in U.S. academic circles in the 1970s and 1980s.² To date, however, critics have yet to agree on a clear and uncontested definition of the genre. In addition to providing an overview of this debate, this essay seeks to contribute to this ongoing critical dialogue through a discussion of the collection of testimonial expressions *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*.

Although there has been little agreement regarding how to define the genre, the first phase of critical discourse regarding *testimonio* tended to focus on written (as opposed to visual) narrative expression, and emphasize the notion that testimonial writing is a literature of resistance, produced in response to oppression or struggle by a witness who is “moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation.” According to George Yúdice, testimonial writing offers “an authentic narrative” in which “truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation or oppression or in exorcising or setting aright official history” (1996: 44). Taking another tack, others focus their critical energies on categorizing and classifying testimonial writing according to genre. Distinguishing testimonial writing from autobiography or memoir, for example, scholars such as John Beverley emphasize that *testimonio* is a “democratic” literary form representing a collective experience, as opposed to “presenting an individual account of a unique experience.” Unlike oral histories, in which the recorder’s “intentionality” is paramount, *testimonios* draw on and privilege direct, participant accounts (26).

Representing a shift in critical perspective, scholars such as Doris Sommer focus upon the silences or lacunae of testimonial narratives such as *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, a text which in her view draws attention to the “uncrossable” cultural and historical differences among the reader, the collaborator and her subject.³ Others wrangle over more fundamental questions regarding the historical transparency of the testimonial form, as well as question its apparent claim to veracity and authenticity.⁴ Originally hailed for its “pure,” “objective,” and “authentic” qualities, testimonial writing came

under the scrutiny of academics such as Elzbieta Sklodowska, who nuances the debate by focusing attention on the myriad problems attendant to the production of “collaborative” testimonial projects. Sklodowska, among others, challenges the notion that testimonial writing offered its readers an unmediated or transparent account of history. In a discussion of Barnet’s *Biografía*, she likens “literate” editors’ “creative mediation” of their “illiterate” subjects’ accounts to an act of “ventriloquism.”⁵ Critiques such as Sklodowska’s paved the way for a third phase of scholars, who regarded the mediation of oral testimony as an ultimately self-serving, exploitative “First World” appropriation of “Third World” subaltern narratives. Nevertheless many scholars continue to regard *testimonio* as a “specifically Latin American” form of “postmodernism,” which is “counterhegemonic” in its rejection of elitist and paternalistic “late capitalist master narratives,” and as a result of its “attendance to marginality.”⁶

“Sliding into the beyond” of testimonial discourse and practice (to borrow George M. Gugelberger’s phrase), current scholarship tends to emphasize and further explore the genre’s postmodern attributes by concentrating on its hybrid, nomadic, and anti-discursive qualities (1996a: 5). Claiming that testimonial writing resists classification, a host of contemporaries argue that it is a “post-literary” form, a “homeless anti-genre” that resides sometimes uneasily among disciplines and genres, and is “placed at the intersection” of multiple discursive forms (1996a: 11). This characterization of *testimonio* most closely speaks to the spirit of *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*, a wide-ranging collection of testimonial expressions drawn from Cuban diasporic communities across the U.S.

ReMembering Cuba’s aims are multiple and wide-ranging, despite the fact that its parameters are narrow and clearly defined. The collection’s general focus is the experience of displacement, exile or the diasporic condition –emotionally and politically charged terms, which are nuanced and distinct as several contributors suggested. Within this overarching, seemingly unifying frame, however, resides a multiplicity of voices and expressions, which sit side-by-side in a kind of “collaborative tension” in that they simultaneously affirm individual and collective experience, and yet are in counterpoint with one another as often as they are in consonance.⁷ As indicated in my personal testimonial reflection, *Una cubanita pasada por agua*, and also in the preface to the collection, *ReMembering Cuba* was originally inspired by an increasingly pressing need to record and thereby preserve and perpetuate the stories and memories of a generation that was literally vanishing. Yet this project was founded also on the parallel desire to reinvent and thereby challenge the way in which *social apparatus*, such as the academy and popular media, construe exile, diaspora and loss. Quite simply, the

collection simultaneously seeks to counteract the manner in which some academics intellectualize, commodify, and convert the Cuban diaspora into what Frederic Jameson among others refers to as “cultural capital.” Likewise, the collection takes to task the Cold War and post-Cold War rhetoric generated by media (both in the U.S. and abroad), which treats what I term *Cubands* residing in the United States and abroad as a homogenous or monolithic entity. In effect, this particular form of narrative discourse diminishes the trauma of loss and displacement, and thereby simplifies deeply complex social, political, cultural and historical phenomena. My original editorial goal, therefore, was to initiate a shift in thinking that introduces new, open-ended, and more elastic ways to understand the Cuban diasporic community writ large without creating the illusion of some essential coherence or establishing some singular, stable or fixed approach or perspective.⁸

Although the collection is structured according to a thematic organizing principle, *ReMembering Cuba* is, by its very nature and construction, dedicated to accomplishing these latter goals. The preface and introduction, for example, seamlessly intertwine theory with personal anecdotes and epigraphs drawn from contemporary postcolonial critics as well as Cuban writers. In the same vein, its content is fundamentally anti-discursive in its mixture of expressive forms (including visual expression and the creative and non-fictional); blurring of genre and disciplinary categories; and anti-hierarchical or (as some have suggested) *radically inclusive* format.

That *ReMembering Cuba* defies categorization, as well as academic norms and expectations, is witnessed by the initial response following the circulation of the call for submissions. During the process, several acquisition editors representing reputable presses sent queries expressing interest in the project. However, upon discovering that the vision for the collection was something outside the realm of “classic” or “traditional” *testimonio* (i.e. first-person, non-fictional subaltern narratives, based on oral interviews and transcribed into written form by some second party) (Beverly 28), they quickly lost interest. Several insisted that the approach was too “creative,” too “non-traditional,” and too “experimental,” words which all of the acquisition editors actually used to describe the proposal. At least one editor assured me that it would be impossible to find a press willing to publish the collection in its current form; she consequently suggested that I radically alter my vision and adopt a more traditional paradigm in order to make the work more marketable.

Despite this lack of encouragement, my call for submissions continued to invite potential contributors to follow their impulses and instincts and approach the central themes of exile, diaspora, and/or displacement in any way and form they

deemed appropriate. In other words, the call made it clear that the collection would not be limited to written narrative expression, thus contributors were free to choose the modes of representation with which to express or communicate their perspectives and experiences. Although some either requested personal interviews or chose to submit more traditional written narratives (which for the most part followed a relatively linear chronology), many submitted what turned out to be an eclectic array of responses, ranging from various forms of visual art, to fiction, poetry, journal entries, letters and recipes.

In the case of a Roberto Fernández for example, who submitted the short story “Abode,” fiction provided a kind of “hyper-real” vehicle, which enabled the author to simultaneously explore his personal experience of “exile” (his term) and comment upon the exile community’s tendency toward hyperbole and idealization —a theme which he takes up in much of his writing.⁹ The central thrust of Fernández’s “belletrization’ of ethnography” is, therefore, not to convey some definitive version of the “real” —even though a “trace of the real” is clearly present in all fiction— but rather to satirize the Cuban exile community and, more generally, explore with depth, sophistication, and poetic license fundamental aspects of memory and nostalgia.¹⁰ Rather than foregrounding the question of what is *real* or *true*, “Abode” —by nature of its form— circumvents the insistence on “the reality of reference,” and points up the complex and ambiguous relationship among history, lived experience, and imagination (Sommer 154).

Several additional contributors submitted nomadic works, which freely cross genres, media and disciplinary boundaries. Yara González-Montes’s and Matías Montes Huidobro’s collaborative *t’essay* (testimonial essay) “Autobiography, Historiography, and Mythology in Matías Montes Huidobro’s *Desterrados al fuego*,” shares some of the same impulses as Fernández’s “Abode,” yet it defies classification as a genre in its interweaving of photography and multiple literary forms. Reflecting González-Montes’s training as an academic, this testimonial expression opens with a critical reading of *Desterrados al fuego*. Midway through her work, however, the author shifts her narrative voice in order to discuss her personal experience of displacement and “exile” (her term), stressing all the while the manner in which various sequences in her husband’s novel correspond to actual events in their lives. In addition, González-Montes’s *t’essay* is punctuated by Montes Huidobro’s commentary, which appears in the form of director’s notes and “interpolate[s] in the voice of the author” the larger frame narrative. Finally, the written text is accompanied (as a result of my encouragement) by an actual photograph of the couple on their wedding day, which is alluded to in Monte Huidobro’s novel.¹¹

In its cumulative effect, González-Montes's and Montes Huidobro's contribution is a duo-vocal, multi-media commentary, which sheds light on the relationship between art and life as well as reflects upon the diasporic or displaced condition — particularly in respect to its impact on the creative process. The addition of the wedding photograph, which is by nature performative (as are the director's notes), taps into a long tradition of critical debate regarding the notion that photography is an “institutional activity,” and its cultural or societal function, Roland Barthes suggests, is to “integrate” and “reassure” (1982: 210). Although the photograph provides empirical *proof* “that the thing has been there,” that the subject is “caught in history” and thereby has a “literal reality” (1981: 76, 64) and meaning, ultimately, as Barthes goes on to suggest, “the real is not representable.” (1982: 465). Thus any ultimate meanings imposed or projected onto the photograph — like the *testimonio* — are “external to the object, without relation to its essence” (Barthes 1981: 4).

Not unlike González-Montes and Montes Huidobro, María Martínez-Cañas and Carlota Caulfield's testimonial expressions combine multiple expressive forms. Martínez-Cañas, for example, overlays photographs of ancient maps of Cuba and Spain, which she discovered in archives in Sevilla, Spain with written excerpts from the *crónicas*. In this manner the artist creates a kind of visual palimpsest that draws a parallel between colonial and contemporary history. Her artwork is accompanied by a corresponding written *testimonio*, which contemplates the relationship between her photography and her personal experience of displacement. This narrative was born of a string of (our) personal conversations regarding the project, which were eventually transformed into an integrated written text by the artist. Carlota Caulfield, on the other hand, fuses or braids together what would be recognized as a traditional *testimonio* with her poetry.¹² In addition to revealing a central aspect of Caulfield's identity as a poet, these poetic interventions and interludes serve as supplementary commentaries on her first-person narrative account.

In their use of various genre and artistic expressions, contributors such as the ones identified above transform *testimonio* into what George Yúdice refers to as a kind of practical aesthetics. In his words, “[los testimonios] enfocan las maneras en que diversos grupos oprimidos [...] practican su identidad no solo como resistencia a la opresión sino también como cultura afirmativa, como estética práctica” [testimonials help reveal the ways in which diverse oppressed groups [...] practice their identity not only as a form of resistance to oppression, but also as an affirmation of culture, a kind of practical aesthetics.].¹³ In their near total disregard for the boundaries that traditionally circumscribe genres and media, these testimonial expressions problematize the

implications of using only one form of discourse or representation to express personal experience and decipher, translate and interpret historical events.

Complementing its experimentation with representation and form, *ReMembering Cuba* consciously avoids privileging any one perspective or subject position. Rather, the collection seeks to displace hierarchies of all kinds and thereby deconstruct the notion that a centered or central subjectivity exists. This aim was accomplished in several ways. For example, in addition to issuing a widely dispersed, open call (as opposed to soliciting submissions), I positioned the contributions of established artists, writers and intellectuals alongside what Frederic Jameson has characterized as “anonymous” voices (190).¹⁴ Although many of the writers and artists are readily recognized inside and outside the Cuban community –such as Heberto Padilla, Carmen Herrera, Lourdes Gil, and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, for example– I intentionally refrained from differentiating among the contributors in respect to both their placement within the various sections of the collection and also regarding the content of the biographical information that appears at the outset of each entry. Rather, the various sections are organized according to thematic categories, and the biographical entries are presented in a relatively uniform manner, providing information regarding birthplace, date of birth, as well as the year each contributor left Cuba (if they were born on the island), and where they currently reside in the United States. This basic information virtually levels the collection in respect to all social categories with the exception of age, and consciously avoids distinguishing certain contributors according to their intellectual or artistic accomplishments or socio-cultural status.

In the same vein, avoiding the creation of experiential, emotional hierarchies –including the hierarchies of suffering and loss– was also a conscious decision, despite the wide-ranging and oftentimes contradictory admonitions by self-appointed commentators. As noted in the introduction to *ReMembering Cuba*, one potential contributor was highly insulted and withdrew both her submission as well as her husband’s when she discovered that the collection would include the *testimonios* of Cubans and Cuban Americans who, in her words, “hadn’t undergone the suffering and persecution” that her partner had experienced. The latter was, among other things, detained for his purported dissidence. Arguing (at the very top of her lungs) for what was tantamount to a hierarchy of suffering, she claimed that the only other *valid* voices in the collection, outside of those belonging to Cubans who had been physically or mentally abused and persecuted, were those of Black or Afro-Cubans, lesbians, and homosexuals.

Attempting to persuade along different lines, a second individual complained that the collection was myopic in that most of the testimonial expressions tended to focus on individual, as opposed to collective, loss. "Our exile," this particular contributor insisted, marks the loss of an "entire civilization." Though he eventually conceded that each individual experience of loss is distinct and tragic, he bemoaned what he described as the "exile community's failure" to situate this loss within a more global or universal context. My response proposed that despite their intimate and personal nature and their apparent claim to singularity, all of the testimonial expressions in *ReMembering Cuba* represent some collective experience, in that they are bound by the project's central theme: the experience of exile or the diasporic condition (depending on the manner in which individuals characterize their state of displacement). Moreover, the testimonial expressions collectively express some shared and seemingly universal sense of what the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortíz termed *cubanía*.¹⁵ However, I also pointed out that just as *ReMembering Cuba* illustrates the points of intersection that unite displaced Cubans and their children across time and space, thereby creating the illusion of coalition or collectivity, the collection nevertheless remains slightly *off balance* in that it puts into relief the distinctive yet interlocking sets of socially constructed categories (such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, age/generation, ability, sexual and religious orientation, etc.) that differentiate one contributor from another. Each testimonial expression, I explained, creates its own category of analysis; yet at the same time the collection—when viewed in its entirety—reveals the structured, categorical differences within single generations and among the various sectors of the exile population residing in the United States.¹⁶ This polyphony of voices and perspectives (represented in the collection) ultimately subverts the notion that there exists a singular, communal experience of displacement. In this sense, *ReMembering Cuba* constitutes what Beverley refers to as "an affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode" (29). In spite of my response, this particular contributor remained skeptical and unconvinced.

Yet another observer-commentator criticized the inclusion of works by "Hispanic" or "White Cubans" from the first wave of exiles. In other words, he petitioned for a hierarchy based on class and race. From his perspective the fact that many of these first wave contributors arrived in the United States with their material possessions or with money and "connections" didn't qualify them as "true or authentic exiles."¹⁷ At least one other person objected to the inclusion of this latter group simply because they were (primarily) white.

Reflecting a slightly different agenda, another person objected to the use of the term exile, while others disapproved of the term diaspora. A handful of contributors representing the first wave of exodus insisted that they had a more profound understanding of loss and exile as a result of their age. Simply put, they felt that they alone had the *authority* to speak about displacement, exile or the diasporic condition because (in their view) their losses were more profound than others specifically because they had lived in Cuba during the Republic for a greater period of time. Constructing yet another hierarchy based on longevity and political orientation, many took great pains to distinguish themselves particularly from adolescents who left Cuba during the same wave of the diaspora, as well as from the *rosaditos*.¹⁸ Another individual encouraged the omission of what I have tagged the *lost generation*—those who were either born or raised in the United States (a request that was especially comical since I actually represent this group).¹⁹ On the other hand, a second person insisted that *ReMembering Cuba* should exclusively highlight the voices of the Miami enclave, insisting that this was the “*real center of the exile*.”²⁰ Conversely, and as one might expect, several other contributors—including one who claimed to have experienced a “double exile,” the first from Cuba and the second from Miami—suggested the collection should only feature testimonial expressions from *exiles* residing outside of South Florida.

After seriously weighing the political implications of these various suggestions, I decided to retain the work of every contributor who submitted a testimonial expression that had some clear bearing on the collection’s overarching themes of exile, diaspora, and/or displacement. Nevertheless, I was acutely conscious that *ReMembering Cuba* is filled with lacunae and silences. The introduction addresses the fact that the collection is not as inclusive one would wish, and acknowledges at several junctures those who refrained from contributing yet felt compelled to confidentially and anonymously share their thoughts and experiences.²¹ In effect, as John Beverley observes, by nature of its very presence, each individual *testimonio* “evokes” a host of “absent” others (28).

Traveling to the island since the publication of *ReMembering Cuba* has heightened my consciousness of these absences in the collection, as well as the gaps in my empirical knowledge of Cuba—voids which I had hitherto filled with vicarious and creative imaginings or, perhaps, some form of genetic memory. In the struggle to articulate my personal relationship to Cuba in the preface to *ReMembering Cuba*—a place where I do and do not belong—I describe my maternal grandfather’s dogged silence regarding the things he’d witnessed in the years just before and after the revolution. His refusal to *tell* was informed by fear for those family members and friends who remained in Cuba, and fueled by the notion that no one would believe him if he told them what

he knew (XI-XII). These multiple silences, both in the collection and in my own lack of empirical experience (at the time), served as a reminder of the distances that separate reader from witness, and witness from mediator. Yet as Doris Sommer claims in her essay on “I, Rigoberta Menchú”, these self-same silences become an integral aspect of testimonial expression.

Attempting to maintain authorial distance from the *testimonios* entrusted to me spoke to the limitations of my role as collaborator and mediator. As many critics have observed, the matter of voice and mediation is fundamental to all testimonial considerations. Attempting to assume the position of *partera* or midwife, as opposed to “curator, prompter or censor” (O’Reilly 2001: XX), I focused on keeping the submissions focused and on task, while simultaneously encouraging and supporting contributors with and through what became for most an act that was as painful as it was cathartic. As a result, repetitions and digressions were deleted, and mechanical errors corrected. In the case of *testimonios* based on first-hand, tape-recorded interviews, I transcribed, edited and (when necessary) translated the transcripts into written form, and then drafts were delivered to each respective contributor for final review and revision. At no time did my personal desire or intention override their prerogative; in other words, the contributors maintained absolute control throughout the process over their narratives. The only editorial interventions were to suggest that select individuals eliminate repetitions or elaborate on subjects that other contributors had taken up—in this respect many of the testimonial expressions are in direct dialogue with one another, unbeknownst (at the time) to their authors. In addition to choosing the image for the frontispiece, I also collaborated with several of the artists in choosing the work that would appear in the collection, knowing that it would compliment other testimonial expressions; or in the case of González-Montes and Montes Huidobro, I encouraged the couple (as mentioned above) to pair their written text with a personal photograph.

Despite these efforts, the impossibility of any essentialist notion of positional transparency was always present. By its very nature representation, in all of its manifestations and transformations, is biased and mediated—a refracted image of the real as it were. And thus, in compiling *ReMembering Cuba* I attempted to maintain a respectful emotional distance from the material, fully aware of my own limitations and shortcomings and ever conscious of the great responsibility of delivering over what was for many the only remaining testimony to, or relic of, their pasts. In this respect the testimonial expressions in *ReMembering Cuba* fulfill “the ethnographic function” (to borrow Naomi Lindstrom’s phrase) of preserving in some form what in many cases has literally vanished (O’Reilly 2001: 70). Yet in the process of constructing themselves

in relation to loss and displacement, and in some cases refashioning their pasts, the contributors collectively initiated the possibility of creating something new –something beyond the psychic and physical conditions of exile or diaspora. And thus *ReMembering Cuba* is at once a project of recuperation and survival, built upon Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of *differend* and the Deleuzian premise that “the task” is not to establish consensus, or “render/reproduce but to make visible.”²²

When approached from this angle, *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora* is perhaps more accurately described as a “project of transformation,” a kind of “post-testimonial paradigm,” which ultimately resists closure in its presentation of variously constructed positionalities. In this respect, the collection allows for a kind of Caribbean chaos (à la Antonio Benítez-Rojo) in that it opens up the possibility for both an inside and outside audience of multiple –albeit contradictory at times– readings, and creates a space for alternative, if antithetical, conclusions.²³ In its plurality of voices and forms, *ReMembering Cuba* consciously stages a kind of “altermodern” (192) contemplation (to borrow Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept) of its own limits and shortcomings; in this manner it foregrounds the inadequacy of existing cultural forms or paradigms that aim to convey social, historical, and cultural *truths* or *realities*. In other words, *testimonio*’s lack of closure is the very thing that captures the nomadic and transitory nature of identity formation in the context of movement, and thus compels us to continue searching for ways to combat the totalizing narratives that simplify, reduce, and sometimes efface the variegated experiences of a people.

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NOTES

¹ For more on this subject see John Beverley's essay (25).

² For a general overview of the development of the *testimonio* see Gustavo Pellón's essay. See also George M. Gugelberger's edited collection of essays *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*. In his introduction Gugelberger divides the evolution of the *testimonio* into three general stages. In its first stage, testimonial writing originated in Cuba following the Revolution and reappeared in Bolivia before becoming a Central American genre. The second stage, according to Gugelberger, was the critical response by “progressive liberals” (such as Margaret Randall) in the United States; the third is marked by its entrance into academic critical discourse. In this latter stage, the *testimonio* drew the response of American critics (many of whom were Latino/a) who “struggled with the issues of ‘lo real’ and started to refute the presumed ‘left’ poetics of solidarity” (5).

³ See “No Secrets,” reprinted in *The Real Thing*, 130-157.

⁴ For a concise overview of the development of testimonial writing (as well as its attendant critical debate) see chapter three (“Testimonial Narrative: Whose Text?”) in Naomi Lindstrom's *The Social Conscience of Latin American Writing*, 70-91. See also Julio Rodríguez-Luis's *El enfoque documental en la narrativa hispanoamericana*, and George M. Gugelberger's *The Real Thing*, which traces the evolution of the theoretical debate surrounding *testimonio* by showcasing its most seminal essays.

⁵ See “*Testimonio* mediatizado: ¿ventriloquia o heteroglosia? (Barnet/Montejo Burgos/Menchú)”.

⁶ See especially Frederic Jameson; Alberto Moreiras; Gareth Williams; John Beverley; and Santiago Colás, all of whom are featured in *The Real Thing*.

⁷ Homi Bhabha employs the phrase “a nice collaborative tension” in his edited collection *Nation and Narration* (4). Though it does not claim to be comprehensive or totally inclusive, the collection represents the voices of the various Cuban ‘presences’ residing in the United States. The latter is an open-ended tag I devised in the introduction to *ReMembering Cuba*, which aims to simultaneously represent and accommodate the complexity and vast heterogeneity of Cuban exiles and their children both in regard to subject position and also in respect to

more specific categories such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, age/generation, sexual and religious orientation, and geographical location (see Introduction, pages xxviii-xxx).

⁸ All of my consequent scholarly work has sought to expand and refine this original concept. See especially *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced* and *Cuban Artists Across the Diaspora: Setting the Tent Against the House*.

⁹ I also chose fiction (as well as poetry) as a vehicle for exploring my generation's relationship to exile, as well as my feminist concerns. Although it was written some time before I began the task of gathering together testimonial expressions for the collection, my novel *The Pearl of the Antilles* appeared in print concurrently with *ReMembering Cuba*.

¹⁰ Sklodowska employs the former phrase in reference to Miguel Barnet's "belletrization" of Esteban Montejo's oral narrative (93). She then points the reader to Michal Glowinski's discussion of "belletrization" and "formal mimesis" in his essay "Document as a Novel," *New Literary History*. The phrase "a trace of the real" is borrowed from Beverley (34). For more on Fernández, see his satirical portrayal of the exile community in *Raining Backwards*.

¹¹ The English title of Montes Huidobro's novel *QWERT and the Wedding Gown* makes an allusion to his wife's actual wedding dress.

¹² In addition to the preface and the introduction, my contribution(s) to the collection include a poem and a first-person narrative, which concludes with a recipe for "pie' de guayaba." The recipe, in turn, corresponds to a painting of a bar of Ancel guava paste (also included in the collection) by one of my contributors, Alberto Rey.

¹³ My translation. See "Postmodernity and Transnational Capitalism" (213. Cited in Alberto Moreiras' "The Aura of *Testimonio*" 221).

¹⁴ I have refrained from employing the vastly overused term subaltern in part because the preponderance of contributors are what I call *symbolically literate*. Most can read and write either as a result of their class, or because of the educational reforms instituted in Cuba after the revolution. The artists featured in the collection are multi-literate in that they can express themselves through alternative forms or modes of representation outside of writing.

¹⁵ *Cubanía* can be roughly defined as the *essence* of being Cuban. This concept, moreover, refers to the point at which a nation achieves a certain level of consciousness in respect to its identity.

¹⁶ When I first began collecting testimonial expressions, I had hoped to present a more global view of the Cuban diaspora, however, it soon became apparent that this vision was too ambitious and beyond the scope of the project. As a result, I decided to pare down my efforts and focus exclusively on displaced *Cubands* residing in the United States. My consequent edited collection *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced* attempts a more global, inclusive and interdisciplinary vision of the diaspora.

⁷ Ironically, the strongest response to my call came initially from exiles who were adolescents during the first wave of the diaspora, as well as from members of the ABC (American Born Cubans) and ARC (American Raised Cubans) generations. Although this phenomenon still merits further contemplation, in the introduction to *ReMembering Cuba* I suggest that the enthusiastic response from these particular generations may be a factor of age in the case of the former, and placement in regard to the latter. More specifically, middle age seems to be a time when many people seem to have gained enough distance to begin to reflect upon their pasts; facing the prospect of old age and mortality, on the other hand, many grow anxious to record their memories and trace their family roots. In the case of the generation of Cubans born or raised in the United States, many contributors expressed their deep-rooted sense of cultural identity, yet many also told me of their frustration at being marginalized. In general they felt as though their deep-felt feelings regarding their cultural identity were either devalued, or in some instances completely overlooked. Reenacting what many sociologists characterize as the third generation's desire to retrieve and identify themselves with their cultural roots, many were thrilled at the opportunity to speak of their longing for all things Cuban and thereby position themselves as *authentic* subjects within the diaspora.

¹⁸ Generally speaking, *rosadito* (pinko) or *gusano rojo* (red worm) are pejorative tags that refer to diasporic Cuban who either initially supported the ideology of the Castro regime or were raised under this system.

¹⁹ See my essay “The Politics of Mis-Remembering: History, Imagination, and the Recovery of the *Lost Generation*.” During the course of collecting testimonial expression for *ReMembering Cuba* my favorite suggestion was from a contributor who insisted that she should be editing the collection as opposed to me. When I asked why she believed this was true, she told me that she had actually been born in Cuba, while I was born outside the island (albeit during the first week of January 1959). She then went on to explain that her mother was pregnant at the time that the family was about to leave the island. Her mother went into premature labor and consequently she (my contributor) was born in Havana, rather than the U.S. Years later I discovered (during the process of interviewing my mother) that I was conceived in Havana. A Cuban friend assured me that where you are conceived is far more significant than where you are actually born; as a result, I was fully authorized to speak about Cuba and the diaspora.

²⁰ One person actually took offense at my use of the word diaspora; he argued that this term suggested that the exile didn't have a *center*. When I asked where that center was located, he promptly replied, “Miami.”

²¹ See especially pages xviii and xxxi.

²² In her essay “Spanish American Testimonial Novel: Some Afterthoughts,” Elzbieta Sklodowska defines Lyotard's concept of *differend* as “the intricate tension between the indeterminacy of experience and the closure of discourse. Between the act of living/surviving/witnessing and the act of testifying/transcribing” (87). In her essay, Sklodowska regards this tension as being problematic; in my view, it is this very same tension that keeps *testimonio* open-ended and ultimately (to borrow the latter's phrase) “immune from ideological blindness” (97). For more on Deleuze, see *The Deleuze Reader*. Cited in *The Real Thing*, Introduction, 4.

²³ See *The Repeating Island*.