Amant

En Parábola/ Conversations on Tragedy (Part I)

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Conversations on Tragedy
(Part I)

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co-authored in
collaboration with:

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Natalia Lassalle-Morillo's practice develops across localities and narratives, merging theatrical performance, experimental film, and participatory research. Bringing theater-based methodologies into the camera, she rehearses an alternative historiography that revises collective relationships to the past, and simultaneously foregrounds the creation of new mythologies and fictions. In *En Parábola/Conversations on Tragedy*, Natalia reassembles the Greek myth of *Antigone* in collaboration with a cast of non-professional actors who reside in Puerto Rico and in New York City's Puerto Rican diasporic community. Developed through a multi-year process of collaborative theatrical rehearsal and experimental filmmaking, the work emerged through the cast's revising, re-writing, and performing of the myth of Antigone inspired by their lived and inherited experiences of migration and belonging.

Taking the form of a multi-channel film installation and a live performance series, *En Parábola* seeks to connect these communities after decades of geographical fragmentation, colonial erasure, dispossession, and cumulative environmental, economic, and political tragedies. This exhibition presents the first chapter of *En Parábola*, a multi-channel film that chronicles the New York City–based cast reimagining the myth of Antigone from their own perspectives. Commissioned after an Artist Research Residency at Amant in 2022, the film weaves together fictional and non-fictional narratives, layering documentation of the rehearsal process with behind-the-scenes footage and staged reenactments performed by the cast themselves.

Inspired by the original discourse of dramatic tragedy as a forum for communal catharsis, Parts I and II of *En Parábola* use theater and rehearsal as a platform through which to bring two casts together. Natalia and her collaborators deconstruct the Greek dramatic structure, using it as a creative device to explore the complexities of the Puerto Rican diasporic experience and the interconnected challenges faced by diverse migratory journeys. Together, they imagine a future for the play's mythological characters wherein they survive the tragedy—a future that aligns with a Puerto Rican post-disaster imaginary in which new definitions of sovereignty and freedom are possible.

Through participatory efforts to reshape collective memory, *En Parábola* proposes theatrical rehearsal as a site of speculation and reunion, where Puerto Ricans can revise, unlearn, experiment, and build narratives, woven from their lived experiences. Re-envisioning sovereignty as an affective citizenship that exists beyond geographical boundaries, this project is fundamentally an invitation to exercise our right to imagination and the potentialities of fantasy and fiction.

En Parábola is part of *Rituals of Speaking*, a film-led series exploring how artists represent the voices of others through collective storytelling.
All programs are presented and commissioned by Amant with additional support from the Mellon Foundation and a fellowship granted by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, in collaboration with Princeton University. With additional curatorial guidance from Natalia Viera Salgado.

Interview 1. (Feb.10.2024)

Natalia Viera Salgado & Natalia Lassalle-Morillo

Natalia Viera Salgado: Could you share the journey to develop *En Parábola* and elaborate on the evolution of this project?

Natalia Lassalle-Morillo: I trace it back to 2017 after Hurricane Maria. I was in California, living my own strange diasporic experience very far away. I think it's the farthest that I have felt from Puerto Rico. I was part of this kind of spectatorship of disaster of what was happening in the archipelago. Nothing really made sense to me, and it was really difficult for me to adjust and be present. At that moment I was pursuing a master's in theater directing at CalArts. And my mother, Gloria, said to me "you know, maybe this is a good time for you to read Greek tragedies." And I think she said it because in my journey studying theater, my focus has been experimental and political theater, not the dramatic canon. So I began to read and consume these tragedies. It was strange, because even though Greek tragedies are considered the canon and they were written almost 2,000 years ago, there's something about them that seems contemporary. There is this piling up of time, where everything happens simultaneously after this moment of catastrophe. A Thebes that is so overcome by the grief of human beings, but also grief of a land that no longer is, and that will never be anymore. So I started thinking about tragedy in the context of Puerto Rico. And also how it was developed in ancient Greece as a forum of communal catharsis, where you would bring diverse human experiences—the people that went to war and the people that stayed in the city-state—together. Greek tragedies were also a control mechanism developed by the government. But I set this aside and focused on how this could be a form that could bring people who embody different experiences of PuertoRicanness. I also became interested in how one becomes an actor and a witness, because in the aftermath of this catastrophe, I wanted to know how this experience was going to live in our bodies. Over time, I started walking away from the narrative of Hurricane Maria and thinking about the tragedy from a more macro perspective. I realized that one of the biggest tragedies in Puerto Rico is the cascading displacement, which leads not only to geographical fragmentation but also to historical fragmentation and a fragmentation of the collective memory. I began to think about how, even though these communities are developed in isolation of each other, they share a mutual desire for the same things—freedom and sovereignty.

NVS: So when did the idea of rehearsals come in?

NLM: I began to think about the communal forum of conversation and discourse, and about rehearsal as a way to unite the diasporic and archipelagic communities through the act of theater making. What happens when you bring folks that identify or relate to Puerto Rico in different ways together to create something and allow the differences to coexist? Antigone then became a unifying portal, a way to ground the conversation in this myth.

Then as part of the residency program at Amant in 2022, I began to work closely with Ruth Estévez, who has a very direct connection to the myth of Antigone because of her extensive research on the representation of Antigone in Latin America. I became much more interested in this back and forth between New York and Puerto Rico, and in spending time with Puerto Ricans that lived or that are descendants of folks that grew up around where Amant is standing right now (East Williamsburg/Bushwick). This led me to an extended process that included historical research, as well as gathering oral histories and testimonies. From there, I shifted to a process of "casting," anchored in what I refer to as "open rehearsal." I carried these out in both Puerto Rico and New York. This is how the cast of collaborators that I'm working with was formed.

NVS: How did working with non-actors in this project shape the casting process, and how were roles renegotiated?

NLM: My interest in working with non-actors comes from my desire to work with my mom. You know when you do something and don't realize you've been doing it for such a long time? When I started working with my mom, I realized that I had ten years of acting training that I rejected. I became more interested in, for example, working with my mother, who is not a "trained artist," but who is very much an artist in her own right, and how her life experiences could influence her process of becoming *another*. She was a housewife and she also was what I call "a clandestine artist,". Before becoming a housewife, she worked in a pharmaceutical company. I'm curious as to what would happen if she was provided with acting tools. How would she take on her personal history, how would she perform it, how would she interpret herself as a character? She didn't have access to an arts education because her life led her to choose other priorities. I wanted to know what would happen if she had a tool kit that allowed her to be present with the character she wanted to play, but also allowed her to disconnect and take care of her emotions, because as an actor you become an acrobat of feeling.

With *En Parábola*, I wanted to use theater and rehearsal in the context of the Puerto Rican experience to create an alternative historiography that's more grounded in the sensorial and affective bonds, as opposed to a history that's based on the primacy of what has been written. I wanted to work with folks who have lived through migratory experiences and allow their perspectives to be foregrounded, along with their mythologies and fictions. Since I am not a Puerto Rican from New York City, I wasn't interested in coming here for two months to develop a project. I wanted to develop a connection and a bond that could be sustained over time.

NVS: How were these rehearsals/interviews conducted, and how was the cast selected?

NLM: I spent almost a year conducting interviews and spending time with people. Learning about their experiences, their memories of water, and their dreams. After these months of interviews, I felt ready to start holding "open rehearsals". These were participatory readings of Antigone. The goal was to read the play, but I had already carved out different interruptions, or what we call "incisions," in the play, which opened it up to a collective conversation about the participants' experiences of displacement and migration or would prompt them to think about how they would fictionalize the story, or how they would reassemble or adapt parts of the story themselves. Participants were invited to come up and respond to an intervention, after saying the word "agua," and were also welcomed to interrupt the reading with their own provocations.

I invited many of the people I interviewed to these rehearsals, and most of the people who came did not identify as artists. For most it was their first time being part of a theatrical rehearsal. They didn't come because they were interested in Antigone; they came because they wanted to share a space with other Puerto Ricans. This is how I became closer to the people that are now part of the core group of collaborators.

NVS: Can you talk about the structure that you used for this project?

NLM: I had to create a methodology for it because it didn't exist. There's a part of my practice that is very influenced by the structure that I unconsciously created in order to work with my mom. I pair this with theatrical training, which includes everything from physically based acting training and trust-building exercises to acting exercises and writing exercises that are anchored in autobiographical writing. Part of my practice is influenced by Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, so there's a part of me that is responding to that history of political theater. But before going into the rehearsal process, I had to borrow and design different acting exercises that were focused on trust building. After these first rehearsals, I focused on how to get the cast to work with the autobiographical and turn it into the fictional. This project and collaboration was truly born from building effective intimacy, as opposed to the intellectualization of concepts. When thinking about ideas regarding Puerto Rican citizenship and sovereignty, I think of how gathering spaces and collaborative processes like this project rehearse some kind of affective citizenship—one that is anchored in a shared relationship to a land, to memory, as opposed to one that is designed by geographical and political boundaries.

NVS: Was there formal training or were there instances of chance and improvisation?

NLM: It incuded a lot of writing and a lot of stream-of-conciousness writing. We also did acting training, and I had the honor of brining my colleagues Jorge Sánchez and Kairiana Nuñez Santaliz to work with the New York Cast. Kairiana led an open workshop at Amant, which helped the cast connect with their bodies and find nuances in the characters they were creating. During rehearsals, because there was so much voicing of emotions that hadn't been voiced before, it was necessary to work with a vocal instructor. That's when we invited multi-instrumentalist Xenia Rubinos to give a vocal workshop for the cast, also open for the broader community at Amant.

The process began with these questions: How do you consent to become another? What is your process of consenting to become another character, and who is the character in the original myth of Antigone that you would like to consent to become? After this prompt, we started thinking deeply about Antigone and proposing alternative futures for the play: What would happen if Antigone didn't die? What would happen if the

characters of the story survived this tragedy? Greek tragedy usually ends with death. Raquel, one of the collaborators, was the one who brought this up. “Why do they have to die? Why don’t we give them an opportunity to have a future, an alternative life beyond the tragedy?” Her questions guided us to work collectively in envisioning a future for these characters after their shared tragedy, which intersected in many ways with the futures they envisioned for themselves, as Puerto Ricans.

After working individually with each one of them, I became more like a dramaturgical director. There were days when I was leading rehearsal, and others where I would sit and listen to them, and they would take me on a journey.

NVS: Could you expand on the importance of the circle and the parabola?

NLM: The parabola is a curve that is formed between two points, especially when an object is thrown up in the air and falls on the ground in a different place. This process is composed of many parabolic relationships, in which I throw something and a collaborator throws something back, and a dialogue is formed. The relationships between Puerto Ricans in the archipelago and its many diasporic communities and nodes are also parabolic. Even though there's Puerto Ricans that never come back to the archipelago after they leave, or that have never had the opportunity to return, there’s a spiritual and metaphysical back and forth. There is an exchange, a longing, a continuous going back to this place, in its real or imaginary form. This figure became a guiding principle for how these conversations and relationships between collaborators coincided. The circle relates more to how the multi-channel film is presented. It's inspired by the communal gathering spaces and the amphitheatrical experience in theater, where people gather together to witness. In our rehearsals, we always sat in a circle, as the shape allows you to see and take in everybody present in the space. Circles also reference cycles of migration and of erasure in our history, and in our process, we asked each other about how to break these cycles.

NVS: Can you elaborate on the concept of the tender archive and its relation to the project?

NLM: My intention behind this project was to propose an affective historiography that was born from the bonds, intimacy and trust. It was not born from the intellectualization of concepts, but actually from a very visceral, sensorial, emotional, and affective place. An accumulation of affects. The term “tender archive” I borrowed from a text written by Olivia Michiko Gagnon, introduced to me by my dear friend Elisa Peebles. The emotional and the affective take precedence over the logical and the intellectual—this can lead us towards imagining different futures for ourselves and different ways of recording a history not based on facts.

NVS: Can you elaborate on your process for selecting rehearsal locations?

NLM: It is crucial to me to think deeply about the context I’m working in, to reflect on the history of this neighborhood but also on the livelihood and history of the Puerto Rican people who live and once lived on this land. This led me to reflect and commune with a broader history of migration, movement, and displacement within the Bushwick, Williamsburg, and greater Brooklyn areas, which connects the history of the collaborators of this project to many generations of peoples who once inhabited this land. We have American citizenship which facilitates a mobility and a back-and-forth relationship, even though this citizenship, as most Puerto Ricans know, is an Achilles heel. Historically the Puerto Rican migration has been prompted by labor—this is the case in Operation Bootstrap, and most recently, the economic crisis resulting from environmental and political disaster is the reason why most folks migrate.

When pertaining to Puerto Rico specifically, I think we're at times imprisoned by ideas around political status and nation-building and sovereignty that perhaps do not align with who we are as a people, with our fluidity, and in-betweenness. So rehearsal for me is anything that allows for you to experiment and try out different ways of being. Our rehearsal started out in the space where the film is installed, and then the rehearsals were staged outside. We rehearsed in the theater, in Inspiration Point, in Washington Heights, in the Gowanus Canal. The sites changed depending on where the story was leading us. I was also interested in seeing the process of filmmaking, too, as a ritual of rehearsal. The cast would suggest their own ideas of how the scenes they wrote should be filmed. Also, the New York based cast came to Puerto Rico and stayed with me for a week. It became a wild one-week shoot throughout the entire island. We went to Sabana Grande, Guánica, Campamento Tabonuco in Jayuya, and Sabana Grande.

NVS: Can you expand on the importance of visual dramaturgy and visual narrative?

NLM: There's a visual narrative, and then there is a process of building the narrative that emerges from a collaborative dramaturgical process. If they proposed that a scene would take place in a specific location, I would go alone with my camera to film. It became a dramaturgical exercise where I was trying to relate to these places because they were important to my collaborators. I would also ask them (and they would also propose) images that they imagined accompanying certain sections of their writing. I became interested in the coastline of New York City, and the history of Puerto Ricans building communities on these coastlines that orbited the factories where they worked. This was a peripheral research process for me, where I went to locations like the Domino Factory in Williamsburg, to film, without intending this to become part of the film.

It wasn't until I sat down to edit that I realized, oh wow, there's a relationship between the water near the factory, and the water near the Gowanus Canal, and between how New Yorkers relate to water and how Puerto Ricans relate to water.

NVS: Could you explain the significance of the participants joining a chorus towards the end?

NLM: The film has a chorus, like many Greek Tragedies do. For this chorus, I collaborated with multiinstrumentalist Xenia Rubinos, who guided a group of around twenty or so people for a three-hour workshop that culminated in this scene at the end of the film. This chorus was composed of a diverse group of recent migrants, along with first-, second-, and third-generation Puerto Rican migrants in the United States, as well as folks who still reside in the archipelago. The lines spoken by the chorus are choral odes based on the many testimonies I gathered throughout the research for this project, which are voiced individually and collectively in this scene. For me, the chorus is a way to release the project, the memories and these histories. Elisa Peebles, in a recent conversation about the chorus, mentioned how we must always remember that there are “otherwise worlds in which we are free, and they are all around and underneath and in-between us.” Elisa reminds me that when land has agency, “it longs for its people, and it longs to be in relationship with those who are in relationship to it.” Some people call this chorus some sort of *despojo*, but for me, it is actually a call for collectivity and freedom.

NVS: Can you elaborate on the historical references that guided the project?

NLM: I am a big admirer of Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, who writes about the Puerto Rican diasporic experience beautifully. Ariella Azoulay is also an important reference for me, especially her theory about “potential history.” We don't need to invent new histories, just because there is a history that wasn’t potentialized because of the intervention of imperial and colonial oppression. I spent time in the archive of the Center of Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO) looking at Joaquín Colón’s papers. Lindsay Wittwer, the digital archivist at CENTRO, led me to Colón after I asked her about materials that referenced the first transatlantic boat trips from Puerto Rico to New York. She suggested I read his manuscript, which I believe might be the first memoir written by a Puerto Rican migrant in New York. It details his experiences migrating in 1917, right after WWI, when Puerto Ricans were made US citizens so that they could serve in the war. That's how I found him and the original manuscript of his book. I think it was written in the forties, but it talks about life in 1917 in Red Hook, the first Puerto Rican enclave in New York. His writing spoke to the experience of migration in a way that is very similar to how I feel right now. There’s a line he wrote that reads, “If it wasn't because of fantasy and the faculty of building and creating fantasy for myself, I don't think I would have survived.” I'm interested in the fictions that we have to build for ourselves in order to survive and myth as a way to create alternative universes that we desire for ourselves. He says that in New York he lived a more fragile existence than Puerto Rico.

Another reference is an exchange between Manthia Diawara and Édouard Glissant aboard the Queen Mary II. In this conversation, Diawara asks Glissant about what the idea of departure means to him. To this, Glissant responds, “It’s the moment when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time. In other words, for me every diaspora is the passage from unity to multiplicity.” This line became a guiding principle for us the diasporic experience, but also about their process of developing their characters, which truly are hybrid.

En Parábola is also about consenting to become another, without fully renouncing being ourselves. It’s about building a fantasy that can maybe one day become true, or a future that can actually become more real. I think that we're imprisoned by reality sometimes. So I think it's really important to exercise fiction as a way to seek truth. I'm not interested in replicating Antigone or doing another adaptation. I'm interested in breaking it apart and liberating her from the canon. And using that process as a way to find an alternative story for ourselves. So I do believe that fiction and myth can become reality.

Interview 02. (Feb.10.2024)

Natalia Viera Salgado, Erica Ballester, Emma Suárez-Báez, Raquel Rodríguez, Nina Lucía Rodríguez & Natalia Lassalle-Morillo

Natalia Viera Salgado: Each one of you has a very specific migratory history. What drew you to the character you chose to re-write? What elements are real and which ones are fictional?

Erica Ballester: What drew me to my character and connected it with my migration story is that I felt like Ismene was doing a balancing act. I wanted to side with my sister Antigone, I was thinking about her survival and dealing with her family. I grew up between Puerto Rico and New York feeling like I belong in both places. Even now, I'm inspired by Raquel's move to Puerto Rico. I want to follow her, but I also have to stay here and hold this up, you know? At the same time, while we were writing and rewriting these characters and giving them a voice, I was going through a loss in my family, and so, in a way, transferring my feelings and what I was processing in my personal life through poetry. And it really infused the emotion behind my participation in the project. And then the fictional part: I don't have sisters, so my relationship with Emma and building that was really beautiful. Also in this deep fictional history, a lot of tenderness developed between us. Even when we weren't our characters; when they weren't feeling closeness, we were physically close. Kind of wrapped up in each other, because we're also processing our grief together. And I always thought Thebes was Puerto Rico. And now I think maybe it's New York City, because it's this place I can't go back to that was my other home. Maybe Thebes was really a place where we found ourselves also. That's not like our motherland.

Emma Suárez Báez: What drew me to Antigone was that I felt she was young, whatever that meant. And there were expectations of her and she didn't have any power to make them true. I love a rebel. And I love someone that says, "No, that doesn't fit me. I don't want that for me." And then Natalia gave us the chance to rewrite them and to liberate them from the script. When I began this project, I told Natalia that I wanted to untangle my Puerto Rican-ness. I wanted to fill certain holes, and Antigone allowed me to do it. I chose Antigone because she's a woman trying to untangle herself from expectations and boxes that directed her to follow the status quo, established by Creon and society. As I went deeper, I felt that she didn't want to be a heroine, she just wanted to bury her brother. So I wanted to liberate her from Sophocles, from the injustices of patriarchy. I have fought for that freedom myself. To be different. To not want to adjust to anything. It isn't comfortable for a woman; they always compare you to men, as if they were the ones who established the characteristics of freedom, leadership, and self-determination. They were the ones that had an opportunity to show this in society at large. That's the only difference. Antigone wants to be who she is, she wants to build her essence. I do as well.

Raquel Rodríguez: I chose Haimon because he offers a breaking point. Also because he offered this potential plot twist, a potential reconsideration, as he invites the villain to reconsider. He's also the only person that mentions the people of Thebes in the whole play. He says: "Listen to the people of Thebes, the people of Thebes say that Antigone is good." I found that to be mind-altering, because as a second-generation Puerto Rican, I've always felt very insecure in my identity.

And without knowing, I created this archetype in Haimon that I needed to give me strength, to take the chance and move back. There are parts that are very much not myself. It's an archetype that is based on hope. And staying and talking to people and being that bridge between the people in power and the people of a place. And being that bridge is also that middle ground. Looking for opportunity in *la brega* is also something that I relate to, but he also isn't viewed with all of these characteristics of power and hope, pride, and security and connection that I yearn for. I needed to create him to give me the strength to feel Puerto Rican enough and to feel like I could take this up, take this risk of moving back to the island and seeing if I can give whatever I can to this beautiful place that I love. My story of reverse migration.

Nina Lucía Rodríguez: It took me a while to realize that I connected to any of these characters. I felt like I was just sort of hanging back, almost contributing to other people's work. And I don't know if that has to do with the fact that I'm second-generation Puerto Rican, born in Massachusetts. So I feel like I've inherited my grandparents' migration, but I also my parents'—a really distinct experience being the first Puerto Rican kids in Massachusetts, which is a really niche experience. This is why my parents found each other and fell in love and had my brother and I. Also, I feel like being second generation, I notice the patterns that happened to my parents when they were children, that happened to my brother and I, that will happen to my children? I don't live where I grew up now. Now I live in New York. I'm changing the direction of things, and we have the power to change the direction of things. This interest in patterns drew me to Tiresias. When I started to read more about the mythology of him outside of the play, he spent some time as a young woman, which I found to be fascinating. I had to live with the old man in me or the blind old man in me. And I have done a lot of sitting in solitude with this character, which has been a circumstantial thing in my life in the past years. And I'm finding the power in it with Tiresias. I have rewritten this character so he doesn't have to be an old man, but that somebody like me can be this perceptive and know what's going on, and somebody who grew up over there, not being this enough or that enough.

NVS: How was the process of working and collaborating as co-authors?

EB: We did physical exercises, we would have these different conversations and these readings and then we would write. It was a very fun process for me as an educator. The way that I relate to writing more often is lesson planning or writing for young audiences, right? So this was really fun and I was very inspired to channel my thoughts and emotions through writing and poetry.

NLR: For me, it felt like weight shifting or like load sharing. I remember images from the rehearsal space of Emma and I leaning on each other and physically sharing weight. But I think on all levels, it also happened in the vulnerability of sharing personal writing and anecdotes and just the emotional palpability in the room, like on any given day it could be anyone's forum, and everyone would be there to support. If today was the day that I needed to confess some sort of deep trauma, I felt everyone was going to be there to catch me and likewise, other days I felt like I was there to take on the load.

RR: It was incredibly therapeutic to hear other people's stories and their meanderings of this identity. This concept of rehearsal gave me so much permission, and I feel that it gave other people permission to crowdsource ideas and concepts. It was like a *desahogo* in a lot of ways as well. There were so many magical moments of people channeling, feeling like other generations were in the room with us. It gives me chills just to say it. These moments I have never seen exist before, and I think that's why this vehicle is particularly potent and important. These sites of rehearsal. The four of us bear so many stories, Natalia bears so many stories as well, but there's also stories we heard that we are trying to bring in, and then the characters we made. So much of what we do is to be really careful with each other's stories, because it's each other's hearts and souls. I learned so much, and it was hard too.

ESB: For me, this started with the audition. And I felt that it was *como un lanzamiento*, you know, you are just gonna fly here. And the way that it was structured; I took risks and I felt that they were received with care. It was almost like there was a room full of clouds where you were pouring our souls. There were no corners; no sharp edges to hurt you. I love to write, and I love to write in private. And in the rehearsals, we wrote collectively. So all those bits and pieces I would then bring back later, and I would check on my notebook and expand on these ideas. I think that we were catalysts for each other. For example, Erica and I riding there together just sweetened the moment. We would get there, and our juices were flowing already or because we had conversations that were like a 180 degrees from the project. It did something for our sisterhood once we were there. It tapped into and reverberated with this experience that I had when I was dancing, of being in an intergenerational community. And I felt that we were equals and we were received with this thing that we were collectively exploring. And that was priceless.

NVS: How did rewriting these characters intertwine with your experiences? Creating hybrid characters resonates with the reality of Puerto Ricans and "diasporicans". Did these characters lead to personal discoveries or the unveiling of desires?

EB: We were invited to feel different things and to connect in different ways. And to remember our childhood. We were getting deep and personal. It wasn't just writing in community, but also feeling and remembering and reconnecting to your past and how you got here. We were asked to write our migration stories, and this made me dig up my family history. To reflect on our ancestors and think about the decisions that they made and how they came to be where they are and then how we came to be. It inspired me to write about my

personal history and to encourage other people to document and dig into their family history. It was an opportunity to look back at my old photos, at all the artifacts of my family life.

We are humanizing these mythical characters. I feel a lot of what this project did was bring together people from different paths, sharing a common history. Have us look at each other and say, “we are in relation to each other.” We are a community. And something that I think was done to us as Puerto Ricans is that we were intentionally dispersed, and we look at each other like we are from different places, but you know, we are in this together. We are also humanizing these characters within our experience: those who had to leave the archipelago, those who stayed, those who cannot speak Spanish, and those who do. We are seeing each other. Getting to know each other truly. But I think that’s part of the mission, right? To bring us together.

ESB: One thing I appreciated about Antigone from the beginning is her hybridism, being in two places at once. And being in two places against the forces of patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, all of these things that we have lived, experienced, or that people in our families have. And I loved to fall in a ditch when I was there. I fell in the ditch of hybridism. Natalia even talked to an herbalist about how hybrid plants are formed, and we were trying to figure out how one can even reverse hybridism, and then we went into multiplicity. Antigone for me was a chance to portray in betweenness. But I also wanted to liberate her from Sophocles and have her go and live her own life.

RR: I think Haimon is about listening and allowing people to be heard—that’s not how Sophocles wrote him, but that is how I wrote him. I want to come to Puerto Rico as a listener not with my own plans, but to listen and share. The whole reason I want to be here is because of what this process has given me—this idea of “sites of rehearsal.” We are co-creating, but we are also building and destroying. Antigone and Haimon are opposite sides, and there's tension there. Emma and I were creating our own versions of these characters, and going on our own personal journeys, but a tension emerged that had to do with leaving, erasing, building, and wanting to keep hope. All of these things can coexist.

Natalia Lassalle Morillo: I wanted to address the concept of destruction and the process of honoring these characters while dismantling the play. There’s this canonical myth that is taught–the typical portrayal of Antigone as a heroic figure. Additionally, I'm intrigued by the idea of breaking down the hierarchy and democratizing the play, collaborating with a 2000-year-old myth to reveal nuances and tell our own story. To deconstruct it to create something new.

ESB: I think by deconstructing it you give the character skin. And you round off their edges and make them human, versus a caricature of just strength and will, but as humans, we know what the weaknesses are. Not making Antigone a heroine was important—when you listen to people who are deemed heroes, they don’t want to be heroes—they were just doing what they felt they had to do. I had a real interest in demystifying Antigone.

NVS: *En Parábola* aims to explore the intertwined histories of migration and displacement between Puerto Rico and the US, as well as internal migrations within both territories. Thebes serves as an imaginary place—a place that one cannot return to, a place that is a mirage, and the *vaivén* in-between Puerto Rico and the diaspora. How do you perceive the historical connection, and what significance does Thebes hold for you in the context of the play and for your character?

EB: I grew up in waves of migration—I was born in New York, raised in Puerto Rico till I was five, returned to New York, and visited Puerto Rico frequently. My family was scattered; some returned to the island and stayed, some created a new home in California, Florida, or North Carolina, and some remained in New York after the first migration by our elders. I was always in the in-between. Not sure if I could consider myself a New Yorker or a Puerto Rican. My parents were both born in Puerto Rico and brought to New York City at a young age. It seemed no one stayed anywhere long enough to be able to claim it. I always thought of this movement as restlessness. When I got older and taught myself Puerto Rican history, I understood this was not quite a free choice but a means of survival.

My grandparents were convinced by colonial propaganda into selling their *parcelas* to afford the move to New York, a place they thought held promise. Instead, they gave up their land to work in factories and live in housing projects amongst rubble in a neglected borough of the Bronx. My father’s family also gave up a coffee plantation in San Sebastián to crowd into a one-room apartment in industrial Bushwick. Both neighborhoods are now overpopulated by overpriced high-rises. We were tricked out of Puerto Rico and priced out of New York City. Puerto Ricans face a common struggle both on the island and stateside. It seems like they don’t want us anywhere.

I think Thebes represents a place of origin, whether it be a physical location or the past, childhood. We cannot return because we can't go backwards. Things will never be the way that they were, yet we live with this desire to return. Thebes is therefore Puerto Rico and New York City to me. I live in Westchester now. I felt a strong need to plant myself somewhere I could not be easily removed.

I couldn't afford either homeland and felt saddened and struggled to stay in New York City, which wasn't making me happy anyway, as I was watching the sky disappear behind metal and glass, overrun by people trying to make my home their playground.

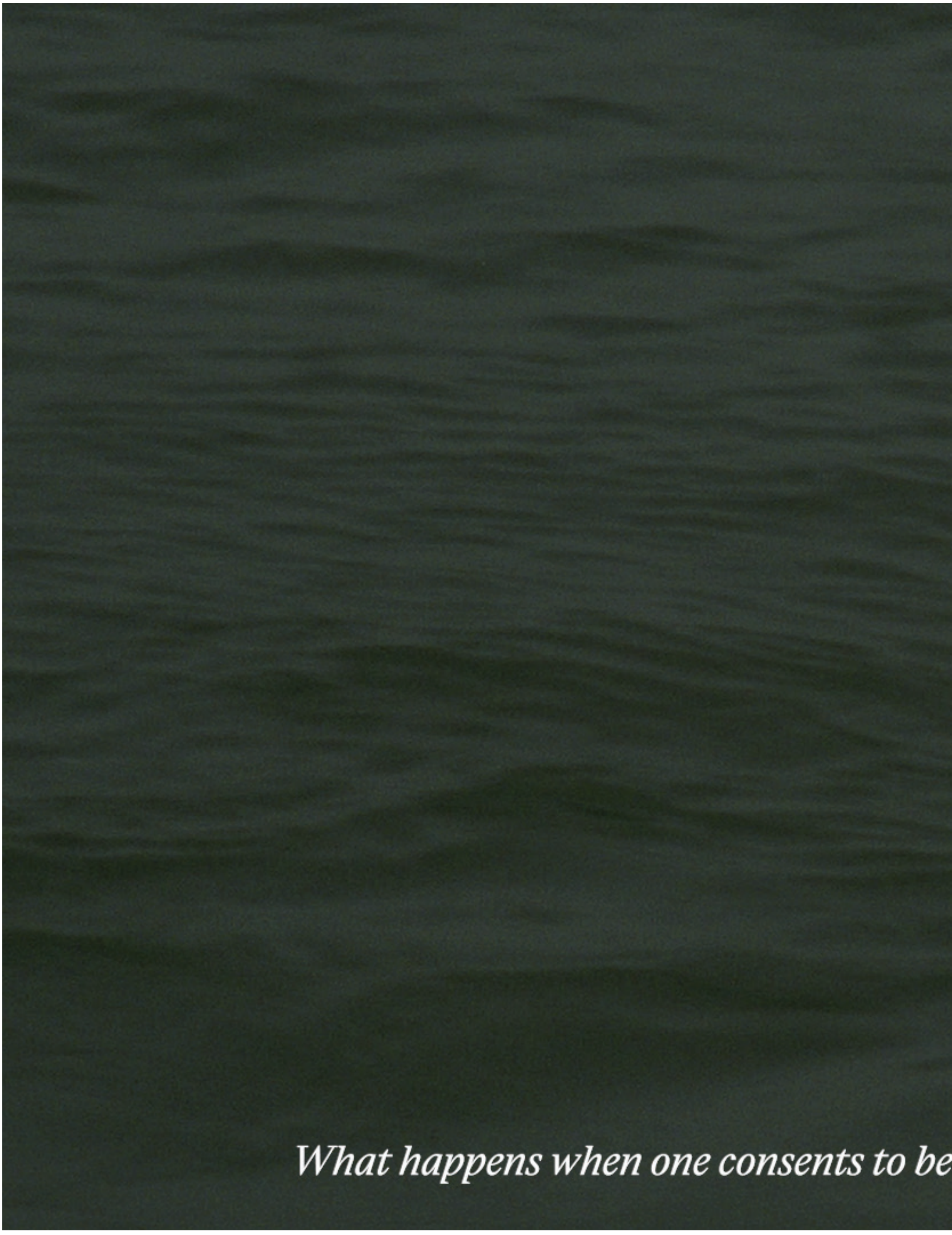
Nostalgia is the suffering induced by wanting to return to one's place of origin. But what happens when you cannot return? What happens to a people whose place of origin, history, and family have been eradicated? They live forever in the in-between, floating *en la nada*—always searching, always longing.

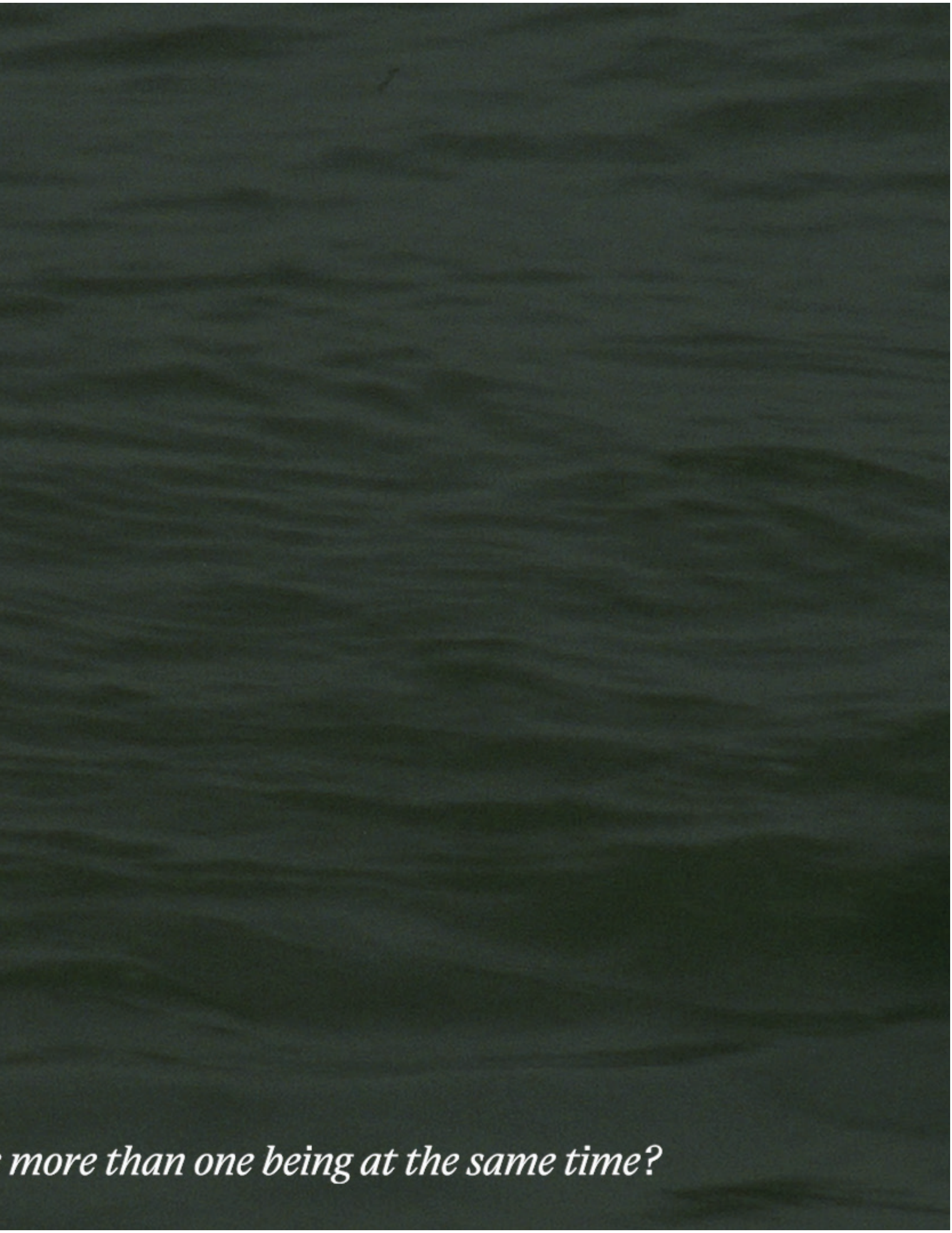
NVS: For each one of you, this creative process of collaboration intersected with a very specific moment of your personal history. How has the process intersected with these pivotal moments in your diasporic experience?

NLR: My mother’s parents purchased land in the neighborhood where my grandpa grew up in the late 80s. They built a house there to ensure that their grandbabies would always have a home. As the youngest grandchild, I had only visited the house once. I was less than two years old, still in diapers. Puerto Rico was the genesis of my cultural identity, but was also somewhere I had no memory of being in. Only photos of me naked in the carport kiddie pool or under the umbrella of a Yagrumo leaf in El Yunque kept the memory of the house and the island alive in me. In February 2022, after 24 years, I returned to Puerto Rico at the age of 25. I can only explain this coincidence as serendipity. Physically returning to the place of my dreams felt like an explosion of emotions. The shrapnel still fresh in my flesh, I found this forum in which I could parse out these new feelings. I had been Puerto Rican my whole life, but up until this point my way of being Puerto Rican didn’t include Puerto Rico as a location. In this rehearsal/writing/filming process, I have been my own anthropologist, an expert on my own Puerto Ricanness. My return gave me the power to own my place there (both literally and figuratively). Conversely, having this ensemble and framework of art making, I have been able to more bravely explore this triumph and my life beforehand. I’ve grown to love, even more, the special Boricua nuances that came up like green shoots through pavement cracks in my Massachusetts childhood. In this collision of significant life experience and art making, I’ve had the distinct privilege of catharsis through practice. Those ten days in August were some of the most emotionally and physically challenging of my life. We have captured the house at the beginning of its new life, and we have captured me at the beginning of a new relationship with Puerto Rico. I’ve hinted a lot at my dread being with me through this process, but none so palpable as when we were in that house, seeing my stroller still there. I never in a million years would have imagined that I would get the chance to wield a machete in the hills of Puerto Rico, let alone have it carefully documented. Archiving these moments has allowed me to absorb their significance and not just become another twig in the nest of my memory.

NVS: In your own words what happens after tragedy, after catharsis? Can it be called that? How do you describe that moment?

RR: This is a question that Haimon asks Ismene in our play: Have you ever thought of what freedom looks like for you? After the revolution, what will become of you? In the making of this project, I have been interested in the concept of freedom, and inviting the audience to think about what freedom means for them, for their family, community, and collective. What does it look like? Can you describe it? Can you suspend disbelief and imagine what freedom would mean for you? Because without a vision of what freedom is, what is it that we fight for? As individuals, as Puerto Ricans? So with these questions, I was interested in inviting Ismene, and the audience, to take a moment to pause and think about what freedom means for them and define the freedom we seek. Defining it, and sharing it, and building on it together is where self-determination lives, I believe. Not all will agree, and that’s part of it. It’s about co-creation, the weaving of a future through many versions of freedom.


What happens when one consents to be


more than one being at the same time?

Essay

Entre esta Agua

Elisa Peebles

Life in the Caribbean is shaped by the water and what it decides to do on any given day: how tightly it hugs the air, how heavy it falls, how full it gets, its overwhelming presence or unbearable absence. Those thirsty for domination have interpreted these hydroaesthetics as rationale for Caribbean unfreedom. The scientific racism of the nineteenth century claimed that environmental conditions like the weather produce racial difference,[1] accidentally confirming, in the name of Western "science," the body's permeability. "Equatorial" races of the Southern hemisphere, like Africans and "Latin people,"[2] were considered inferior due, in part, to their entanglement with water and heat. This biometeorologic inferiority rendered Caribbean people unfit to govern themselves and their environment in the eyes of an imperial United States that turned science into legal scripture. The insular cases of the US Supreme Court provide the legal bedrock for the country's colonial control over the territories it gained through the Spanish-American War in 1898: Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Citing the Dred Scott decision, *Downes v. Bidwell* established that, due to the "alien race"[3] of its inhabitants, Puerto Rico is "foreign to the United States in a domestic sense," a place where conquered people are granted US citizenship but not guaranteed the rights detailed in the US constitution. This decision is one of the first of many acts of legal half-lifeing[4] that have led to multiple waves of forced displacement and outmigration from Puerto Rico.[5]

The humidity has witnessed it all. Water vapor, like all water, absorbs everything: tragedy, exhaust fumes, ozone, Saharan dust, absence. Enclosed in constant aquatic cycles of precipitation, evaporation, and transpiration,[6] the phenomena of a place levitate in its air. Theorists like Teresa Brennan present affect—the psychoemotional "atmosphere"[7] of a room—as contagious, spreading through some act of transmission like scent,[8] or as a biological response to social stimuli. This view frames affect as avoidable, particularly because atmosphere is conceived as something contained within a space that is enclosed by four walls which are presumed inanimate, thus making the people present the sole source of feelings. But when thinking with water, specifically cloud formations, affect exists less like something we catch (or can avoid, perhaps by walking out of a room) and more like something we are always in relation with and cannot escape.

I am guided towards thinking by the hydroaesthetics of Puerto Rico, where there are porous boundaries between outside and inside, and you are in constant connection with all that surrounds you and leaves traces of itself in the humidity: the bones and memories contained in the soil, the breath of trees, the energy that reverberates through buildings, the sweat released from people, sound waves that enchant the air, things that blow in from across the water, like tourists and storms. Through respiration, it all enters the body and bloodstream and comes back out again to rejoin itself as something not quite old or new, singular or plural. Perhaps this dance with totality is what disgusted nineteenth-century colonizers, who were intimidated by the ways it undermines their projects of containment and were made anxious by the possibilities of precipitation and the number of witnesses it implicates. Mediated through the cloud, the air is filled with information, chemicals and organic ephemera, energy and affect—particles of feelings and phenomena clumped together in humidity. If we believe, as Christina Sharpe tells us, that water is an archive,[9] then the rules of hydrotechnology dictate that this capability is not restricted to oceans, and oceans do not end at shores. Through proximity and breath, those engaged with Puerto Rican humidity commune with a waterbound "archive

1. Lorgia García Peña, *Translating Blackness: Latinx Colonialities in Global Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 54.
2. Garía Peña, 54.
3. Downes v. Bidwell, 182 U.S. 244 (1901).
4. Orlando Patterson, "Authority, Alienation, and Social Death" in *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 35-77.
5. Alana Casanova-Burgess, "Levittown, Where the Good Life Begins," *La Brega* (New York: WNYC Studios, February 24, 2021).
6. "Rain and Precipitation," Water Science School, Water Science School of the U.S. Geological Survey, July 6, 2019, https://www.usgs.gov/special-topics/water-science-school/science/rain-and-precipitation.
7. Teresa Brennan, introduction to *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.
8. Brennan, introduction to *The Transmission of Affect*, 1–15.
9. Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

of feelings,"[10] one constructed by a land, people, and atmosphere that have experienced consistent and repeated catastrophe in the wake[11] of colonialism, slavery, and imperialism.[12] Here, in the cloud, float traces of information that evade official archives. For example, the *feeling* of an *apagón* is not contained in congressional legislative hearings[13] about LUMA, but it impacts whether people want the company to have unrivaled control over their electric grid. *That* archive has never been concerned with Puerto Rican desire, but in the cloud that blankets the archipelago, desire is palpable and held close to the ground, along with other feelings that follow tragedy, such as anger, rage, and grief. Grief is a form of desire, a belonging that refuses to be severed, carried by fragments who remember and desire the whole. It can be a radical insistence that speaks back to colonial violence and says, "you are killing us, but we will live anyway." Grief has and can rewrite history. There are freedom strategies tucked away in this cloud, *entre esta agua*. [14]

Let us turn to *En Parábola*. We begin with *el coro*, the film's reimagining of a Greek chorus. Filmed in a dark room drenched in cool blue light, the members of this chorus are diverse in age, gender presentation, race, and skin tone. It is a collected but ununified group of people. Every face appears to be in a daze, but each daze is different. The scene's sound embodies and complicates this heterogeneity. There are traces of melodic humming and singing, at times joined by harmonies, punctuated by whispered words and phrases too soft to be discerned but loud enough to be noticed. Rustling behind and cutting through the soundscape is a myriad of nonverbal utterances, *swishes* and *shhh*s that mimic waves. A microphone stands in front of the chorus. Individuals approach and make noise into it that is sometimes, but not always, amplified or responded to by the rest of the chorus. The cameras sway ambivalently, focusing on the mic when someone is present, but otherwise slowly panning back and forth across the chorus. With this tidal motion, shot entirely in close-up, the scene looks like a stream of floating heads. Watching it is reminiscent of attempting to hold a river in your gaze. Only after convincing your ocular reception to disavow stillness and singularity can one behold a river. The sound editing supports this hydroaesthetic. It's clear that the audio we hear is a part of the diegetic whole, even if it may come from a time or place that is separate from the visual moment on screen. In this way, the chorus simultaneously exists in and beyond the frame. The viewer encounters it, even if we cannot fully behold it. In its totality, the chorus is uncontainable and potentially infinite, like a body of water, or a diaspora. Its heterogeneous members make sounds that converge, diverge, mimic,[15] compliment, and compete. It is a boundless whole that, in chaos, makes sense of itself.

Developed over the course of five years, *En Parábola* is a reimagining of *Antigone* that interrogates what director Natalia Lassalle-Morillo calls Puerto Rico's "grief contract." She has shared that the inspiration for *En Parábola* came from her interest in tragedy as "a system, a form of collective catharsis to maintain the whole,"[16] a reference to the history of ancient Greek theater as a form of communion meant to restore collectivity following catastrophe. The project proposes an affective and cosmological layer to Puerto Rico's decolonial and post-apocalyptic discourses and recognizes Puerto Rico as a nation that, to an extent, exists outside of itself. More Puerto Ricans live in the United States than those who reside in the archipelago.[17] This compounds Puerto Rico's already queer status as a U.S. territory that is neither in or of the United States, and as a nation that has never known political sovereignty in its modern history. Such fragmentation and

10. See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
11. Sharpe, In the Wake.
12. Olivia Michiko Gagnon, "Tender Archives and the Closeness of Cheryl Sim's *The Thomas Wang Project*," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 31, no. 1 (December 10, 2021): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/074077 0x.2021.1985269.
13 Committee on Natural Resources, report, "Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) Post-Implementation of the LUMA Transmission and Distribution Contract," 117–9 (2021).
14. Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, *En Parábola | Chorus (Excerpt)*, Vimeo, 2023, https://vimeo.com/845813626.
15. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, introduction to *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.
16. Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, "Sites of Rehearsal Q&A," October 8, 2023, Union Docs, Ridgewood, New York.
17. Salome Ramirez, "Many Puerto Ricans Leaving US Mainland," *VOA News*, April 2, 2023,https://www.voanews.com/a/many-puerto-ricans-leaving-us-mainland/7032522.html.

denied autonomy politically make Puerto Rico "a strange new kind of in-between thing,"[18] like Antigone. This existential strangeness calls for alternative approaches to imagining Puerto Rico's totality when summoning its future. Part of that work might be creating sites of communion where there can be an interrogation of what remains within reach of Puerto Ricans in the Caribbean and elsewhere, and one of those things is their grief.

Lassalle-Morillo uses theater to facilitate this convening. The project features an ensemble of non-professional and untrained performers who live in New York and Puerto Rico. Through a series of scriptwriting sessions, speculative worldbuilding labs, documentary film shoots, and theatrical rehearsals, they read, discuss, and rewrite *Antigone* through a Puerto Rican lens. In the rehearsal space, Lassalle-Morillo invites performers to "become what doesn't exist": a people that, while fragmented by catastrophe, maintain a potentiality for wholeness that can, "through ritual,"[19] be uncovered and reveal what she calls "continuance that is collectively conjured."[20] The invitation to become what doesn't exist can also be considered an invitation to perform *closeness,* which Olivia Michiko Gagnon argues is a minoritarian strategy for recovering the intimacy disrupted by historical and colonial acts of violence.[21] The project is incredibly intimate. The cast was formed through a series of open rehearsals, advertised through digital flyers, shared by Lassalle-Morillo on social media, that sought out Puerto Ricans with direct or ancestral connections to parts of New York that became enclaves of the city's Puerto Rican diaspora. The flyers were shared by her network and her network's network and so on, leading to rehearsal rooms filled with people connected through invisible threads of relation. These unknowing relatives, what some may call strangers, spent hours in workshops in which they were invited to share their thoughts and feelings about Puerto Rico and engage with the thoughts and feelings of other Puerto Ricans. Mimicking the archipelago's affective cloud, they produced a body of knowledge through a pouring out and taking in that dissolves the boundaries between individuals, time, dreams, and memories. The project generates what Gagnon, building on Ann Cvetkovich, calls a "tender archive": an affectually resonant and intimately tended to "collection of cultural texts," that "preserves and produces feeling difficult to capture in traditional repositories [and functions] as a site of mourning."[22] This work is physically materialized and exemplified in *el coro*.

In July 2023, Lassalle-Morillo held an open call that invited Puerto Ricans based in New York city to co-create a version of a Greek chorus at Amant, in Brooklyn. Conducted by multi-instrumentalist Xenia Rubinos, the chorus was prompted to vocally channel "memories yet to be vocalized,"[23] along with words of reflection from diasporic Puerto Ricans interviewed earlier by Lassalle-Morillo. The result is a haunting and chaotic cacophony. Through breath and vibration, a group of innumerable individuals—strange(r) relatives—becomes enmeshed in a single, sonic moment that has no beginning or end, leader or dissenter. All sound enters and returns from the whole. Even those who approach the microphone to make utterances never utter alone. The room is filled with affective traces of each participant, unvocalized memories that emerge from each body but are not only *of* those bodies. The dazed looks of bewilderment and awe, as well as those of angst, nervousness, or distress, seem to signal the encountering of affect throughout the space and the experience of hydrodynamic exchange. There also appears to be moments of negotiation in the ways some chorus members react to those at the microphone and

18. Sophokles, trans. Anne Carson (New York: New Directions, 2015).

19. Lassalle-Morillo, "Sites of Rehearsal."

20. Lassalle-Morillo, "Sites of Rehearsal."

21. Gagnon, "Tender Archives."

22. Gagnon, 4.

23. Gagnon, 4.

standing next to them, as if to suggest that not all feelings are absorbed equally or unquestioningly. Such moments are representative of the complexity of grief. The diversity of those gathered across age and racial lines makes present different experiences of diaspora, and thus different types of mourning. Some may mourn what they have left and may never return to, others grieve what they haven't experienced, and others may regret the experience of knowing neither position but relating to and being implicated by them nonetheless.

At one point, Raquel Rodríguez, a member of the chorus, walks to the microphone and repeats in syncopated bursts "*Entre esta agua, entre estas aguas,*" meaning, "between this water, between all this water," building in intensity and possibly something like pain or fury, until she is screaming "*Agua! Agua! Agua!*" over and over again before sighing into silence. Water is a through line in the film and rehearsal space. This is no doubt a nod to the role of water in shaping Puerto Rico as a Caribbean archipelago and diaspora, but perhaps it also conjures an imagining of Puerto Rico *as* water: as a shapeless and shapeshifting wholeness that disperses and recollects itself over time and space, like a cloud. Grief, in its stubborn insistence and many forms, demands wholeness and belonging, refusing to relegate these experiences to the past and instead suspends them in time to sit *besides*[24] the phenomena of the present. Grief disrupts time and space, and for diasporic people facing political and existential threats of nonbelonging and discontinuation, tending to grief becomes a mode of saying "we are here, the future is here, *entre esta agua*."

En Parábola's tender archive provides a kind of tender citizenship, an unshakeable belonging that offers an otherwise unavailable sense of wholeness and emphasizes the inability of politics to tend to the harm of tragedy. In some ways, it is in conversation with the sentiments of other Caribbean diasporic people who shirk national belonging and proudly proclaim, "We are our own country!"[25] But *En Parábola* reaches for more than the nowhere space of *El Nie*.[26] In rewriting as opposed to re-performing *Antigone*, the cast undoes colonial acts of legal half-lifeing by inviting Puerto Ricans to rehearse removing themselves from their living entombment. As a collaboration between archipelago-bound and US-bound Puerto Ricans, land remains present materially and immaterially in the way it is provoked within the complexity of the cast's grief. Through this emphasis on grief as a relational thread, *En Parábola* presents a form of affective citizenship rooted in longing: we belong where we are longed for. Water always reaches towards itself, whether it returns to land or the atmosphere, or is carried by interlocutors in between. The hydroaesthetics of this tender citizenship operates via a *besidesness* that topples dualistic[27] notions of belonging. They suggest that fragmentation creates a whole that is forever changed by its fragments but remains present and continuous; a boundless whole that cannot be contained by projects of statehood, foreign or domestic, but is materialized in affect that moves through relating bodies, though belongs to no one. Lassalle-Morillo shared in a reflection on the project: "this affective intimacy is the currency of Puerto Rican sovereignty."[28] To grieve, collectively, is to defy the regime, the archive, the political forces of violence and dispossession, and even the limitations of the imagination; it is to keep the Otherwise constantly present and *besides* the now and refuse severance from freedom. One of the other words that circulates through the chorus is *maravillosa*, meaning marvelous and wonderful, as if to say: "how wonderful, how miraculous we are in our grief."

24. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

25. García Peña, *Translating Blackness*, 144.

26. García Peña, 144.

27. Sedgwick, introduction to *Touching Feeling*, 8.

28. Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, text message to Elisa Peebles, December 8, 2023.

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Natalia Lassalle-Morillo is a visual artist, filmmaker and theater maker whose work reconstructs history through a transdisciplinary approach. Merging theatrical performance, experimental film, and installation, Lassalle-Morillo's work excavates history both imagined and documented, and decentralizes canonical narratives and the primacy of written history through re-enactments, revision, and collaborative re-scripting. Collaborating with non-actors and amateur writers, her multi-platform projects develop across localities and narratives, exploring Caribbean collective memory and the material and spiritual trajectories that have shaped human relationships impacted by the imperialist oppression in that region. Bringing theatrical practices into the camera, she rehearses an alternative historiography that reassembles our relationship to our past, and simultaneously foregrounds the creation of new mythologies.

Natalia has been a fellow at the Smithsonian, and she has participated in residencies with Amant Foundation (NY), MassMoca (MA), Fonderie Darling (Montréal), Pioneer Works (NY), among others. Her work is part of the KADIST collection, and it has been exhibited in at the 22a VideoBrasil Biennale, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (Puerto Rico), Tenerife Espacio de las Artes (Canary Islands, Spain), and the Walt Disney Modular Theater (Los Angeles). Upcoming presentations include solo exhibitions at Dazibao (Montréal), and the 2024 Cooper Hewitt Triennial. She is a 2023 Mellon Foundation Bridging the Divides Fellow. Natalia was born in Puerto Rico, where she is currently based.

Emma Suárez Báez left Puerto Rico at seventeen. Writing has been the thread that allowed her to stitch together the loss of territorial, cultural, linguistic, and relational continuity to the complex and confusing experiences that leaving your country brings. She was born to a feminist without a tag and a man who walked to school without shoes. Her work appears in *Where Beach Meets Ocean*, *Off The Coast*, *3 Nations Anthology*, *the Bronx Memoir Project*, *NYPL Zine Project*, *What Have You Lost?*, *Love Letters to Gaia*, *La Libreta*, *What They Leave Behind*, *Community Unity* and other journals and publications. She presented "Tampons" at The Moth in the Bronx and "What is Enough?" at City Winery with Read 650/Writers Read. Emma Suárez Báez holds a master's degree in Bilingual Education and worked with children and teachers in the Bronx public schools.

Raquel Rodríguez is a Nuyorican product strategy consultant, movement researcher, and semi-professional hype woman. In 2024 she relocated to Puerto Rico in an experimental process of reverse migration. Her professional interests include somatic practice in postcolonial self-actualization, and business impact measurement beyond financial metrics.

Erica Ballester is a teacher and poet. She grew up between Ridgewood, Queens, and Sábana Grande, Puerto Rico. She is an English as a New Language teacher in New York City Public Schools, and she has performed her poetry in venues like the NuyoRican Poets Cafe and the Poet's Passage in San Juan. Currently based in Westchester, New York, she is working on publishing a collection of her poetry.

Nina Lucía Rodríguez is a multidisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, New York. Some of the forms in which she works include performing, screenwriting, poetry, directing, and devising. Nina is a Western Mass Puerto Rican™ and enjoys both leaf peeping and roasting an entire pig on a spit. She has aided in developing new work with theaters across the northeast, such as the Williamstown Theater Festival, Playwright's Horizons, and Hartford Stage. She's a co-writer of the web series, *Gro Up*, for which she also directed the pilot episode. The pilot for Gro Up was shown at the Reel Sisters of the Diaspora, and the Pan African Film Festival, and the Martha's Vineyard Virtual Film Festival. Nina has a Bachelor of Arts in acting and a minor in comedy from Emerson College. Although she did complete her degree, she considers herself a "clown school dropout." Nina is dedicated to taking risks, collaborating with other artists, and engaging with the communities that surround their art.

Elisa (Ayorinde) Peebles was born and raised in Haudenosaunee territory, between two Great Lakes connected by the emancipating Niagara River, and is a guest of the Caribbean archipelago of Borikén. She is a griot and creative strategist currently pursuing a Phd in Theatre and Performance Studies at Tufts University. Her work considers the possibilities at the crossroads of Black Atlantic spirituality and anticolonial futurity.

Natalia Viera Salgado is a Puerto Rican curator and curatorial consultant based in New York City. She is also the founder of :Pública Espacio Cultural, an independent art space in Alto del Cabro, Santurce Puerto Rico. Her art historical research focuses on contemporary art in relation to decolonial practices, architecture, social and environmental justice, and new media with a keen interest in hybrid and interdisciplinary projects. She has worked at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, El Museo del Barrio, Art in General, Socrates Sculpture Park, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, and the Americas Society. Natalia holds an MA in Curatorial Practice from the School of Visual Arts, New York, and is currently the Associate Curator at the National Academy of Design and a curatorial resident at the Abrons Arts Center.

En Parábola/
Conversations on Tragedy (Part I)

Conceived and Directed by
Natalia Lassalle-Morillo

Co-Devised and Co-authored
with the Cast:

Erica Ballester
Emma Suárez-Báez
Nina Lucía Rodríguez
Raquel Rodríguez

Amant, Brooklyn, New York
March 14 — June 9, 2024

Additional text and writing by
Elisa Peebles

Chorus conducted by
Xenia Rubinos

Works courtesy of
Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, Erica Ballester, Nina Lucía Rodríguez, Raquel Rodríguez, Emma Suárez-Báez, María Lulú Varona, Luis A. Vázquez O'Neill and Lori Pérez and Archival materials courtesy of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO).

Chorus

Erica Ballester
Carina del Valle Schorske
Melinda González
Micaela González
Víctor González
Zaida Adriana Goveo Balmaseda
Cristel Jusino
Liz Luyando
Sean Morillo
Camila Pérez
Kevin Emilio Pérez
Sofía Reeser del Río
G. Rosa Rey
José Antonio Rodríguez
Nina Lucia Rodríguez
Raquel Rodríguez
Rojo Robles
Estefanía Soto
Paulathena Stone
Emma Suárez-Báez
Nélida Tirado

Puerto Rico-based Collaborators

Angel Blanco
Francesca Carroll
Tashia Howard Arroyo
Marili Pizarro
Andrea Rovira
Janice Quevedo Santos
Víctor Torres

This project could not exist without the generosity of every single person who shared their time with us. Many of their words, sentiments and silences have incorporated themselves into this project, consciously or subconsciously. May their words produce, as my dear friend Elisa Peebles writes "an eternal chord of freedom, that stretches from the first and the last to yell".

Open Rehearsal Participants

Melixa Abad
Claudia Becerra
Carlos Mario Boscio
Laura Marina Boria
Candace Camacho
Rafael Cañals
Rafael Capó
Amari Cruz Badía
Carina del Valle Schorske
Jose Gabriel Figueroa Carle
Caroline Gómez Lassalle
Desirée González Acevedo
Cionin Lorenzo
Juan Medina
Melissa Montero
Manolo Núñez Negrón
Abdiel Ortíz Carrasquillo
Camila Pérez
Kevin Emilio Pérez
Kevin Quiles Bonilla
Erika P. Rodríguez
José Rodríguez
Laura Rivera Ayala
Jorge Sánchez
Pelé Sanchéz Tormes
Estefanía Soto
Nélida Tirado
Nicole Torres Bruno
Eva Vázquez
Jason Vargas
Estefenía Vélez
Cristóbal Guerra
Tashia Howard Arroyo
Gloria Morillo

Conversations and Interviews

Arcadio Díaz Quiñones
Dennis Flores
Anaís Flores
Amari García Badía
Elia Miranda Vargas
Ana Hilda Figueroa De Jesús
Amari García Badía
Desiré Gónzalez Acevedo
Elisa Peebles
G. Rosa Rey
Angelica Román Lassalle
Iris Morales
Yasmín Herández
Yasmín Ramírez
Yazmín Morales-Vicente
Pepe Flores
Héctor "Chino" Torres
Jocelyn Lebrón
David Galarza
Anaís Flores
Teresa Basilio
Jorge Luis Berrios
MariCruz Badía
Marvin García
Maisha Morales
Paulathena Stone
Angélica Román Lassalle
Nick Luis
Macarena Ramos
Marcel Rosa-Salas
Paulathena Stone
Estefanía Soto
Melissa Montero
Melinda Gónzalez
Pedro Regalado
Monica Uszerowicz
Bernice González Bofill
Helen "Elena" Citrin
Elisa González
Nélida Tirado
Bicho Rivera

Crew

Director of Photography:
Mollie Moore, Laura Sofía Pérez and Natalia Lassalle-Morillo
Editor: Natalia Lassalle-Morillo and Laura Sofía Pérez
Producer: Natalia Lassalle-Morillo, Xiaoyue Zhang, CAVAS Films (Nicolas Santa and Carlos Ayala)
Assistant Director: Jorge Sánchez
Sound Design and Mixing:
José Iván Lebrón Moreira
Color Correcting: Oswaldo Colón Ortíz
Sound Operator: Eduardo Calero, Maxime Robillard, Natalia Lassalle-Morillo
Additional Camera: Jenica Heintzelman, Carlos Ayala, Pablo Calderón Santiago, Xiaoyue Zhang
16 mm Developing and Digitization: CineLab; Negativland

Dramaturg: Amandla Colón, Elisa Peebles, Mireya Lucio
Production Assistants: Verónica Mojica, Sean Morillo, Amandla Colón, Mario Ruben Carrión, Laura Isabel Tropi
Movement advisor: Sophia Treanor
Performance Advisor:
Kairiana Nuñez Santaliz
"Significant Others": Jorge Sánchez, Xiaoyue Zhang, Génesis Báez, Sophia Treanor, Pablo Calderón Santiago, Yara Travieso

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Luis Alejandro Vázquez O'Neill

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San Juan 721
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Center for Brooklyn History
Ruth Estévez
Isabella Nimmo
Natalia Viera Salgado
Ali Rosa-Salas
Patricia Margarita Hernández
Rebeca Navarro
Christina Daniels
Angel Antonio Ruiz Laboy
Yarimar Bonilla
Isabel Guzzardo Tamargo
Cristel Jusino
Dioscaury Rufino
Guillermo Rodríguez
Iris Morales
Arcadio Díaz Quiñones
Frances Lucerna
El Puente
Joe Matunis
Jessenia Mera
JL Umipig
Isshaq Albarbary
José López Serra
Erin Johnson
Marta Aponte
Steve Maldonado Silvestrini
Elissa Hecker
Abdiel Ortiz Carrasquillo
Cynthia Chavez Bermúdez
Yara Travieso
Jaime Suárez
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Ana Arlensiú
Rafael Capó
Juan Pablo Siles
G. Rosa Rey
Ana Beatriz Sepúlveda
Oscar Oliver Didier
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Génesis Báez
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Awilda Sterling Duprey
Mario Rubén Carrión
Chris Gregory-Rivera
Jaquén Castellanos
Jenica Heintzelman
Cristina Pérez Díaz
Cristina Agostini Fitch
Campamento Tabonuco
Al Henriquez
Kate Gavriel
North Brooklyn Community Boathouse
La Sala de Pepe
Lulu Lolo
Peter Chan
La Casita de Chema
Jaime Báez
New York Boricua Resistance
Ricardo Mueses
Lizzie Brooks Yee
Luis Gutiérrez Arias
Rachel Scandling
Union Docs
Jenny Miller
Sophie Cavoulacos
Marcela Guerrero
Nicole Calderón
María Lulu Varona
Lori Rodríguez

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En Parábola is part of *Rituals of Speaking*, a series of film-led projects that explores how artists represent the voices of others through collective storytelling, analyzing the contexts in which speaking and being heard are made possible. The series includes recent and newly commissioned work by Helen Cammock, Dora García, Ephraim Asili, and Natalia Lassalle-Morillo.

All programs are presented and commissioned by Amant.

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Amant

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The core of Amant's mission is to advance the presentation of contemporary art by providing a platform for pioneering exhibitions of visual art, media and performance art, and discursive events. We support both established and mid-career international and local artists who work across diverse creative fields. We are committed to building cultural partnerships with like-minded organizations in the U.S. and abroad while still activating new and ongoing conversations with our local communities.

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