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Source: *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3, Folklore and Semiotics (May 1985), pp. 179-193

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814391>

Accessed: 13/10/2009 08:26

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*Olivia Cadaval*

**“The Taking of the Renwick”:  
The Celebration of the Day of the Dead  
and the Latino Community in Washington, D. C.**

Beginning with the sixties the discipline of folklore has experienced a shift from the study of tradition as survivals to the study of living and emergent traditions.<sup>1</sup> Certain cultural institutions have reinforced this direction by bringing contemporary traditions to public settings. In this paper I will look at the re-creation of what is still a living tradition in Latin America—the celebration of the Day of the Dead—for a museum setting in the United States and a non-Latino audience.<sup>2</sup> My concern is the shift of meaning that occurs when a contemporary tradition is re-created by tradition bearers in nontraditional contexts and for nontraditional purposes. The source event for the museum production was a traditional observance, remembered but no longer practiced by the participating individuals. The performance that emerged in the process of re-creating this traditional event turned out to be more relevant to the dynamics of the community producing it<sup>3</sup> than to the tradition it intended to represent. While the event was produced for the general public, the embedded emergent performance was self-reflexive: by and for the participants themselves. The multiple character of this re-creation/production/performance<sup>4</sup> provides some interesting problems for the simulation of tradition in nontraditional settings, and for the analysis and interpretation of that performance. To discuss this multilayered process, I will use a multidimensional semiotic analysis<sup>5</sup> that will consider both the relationship between the tradition and the re-creation and the relationship between the production and the emerging cultural performance.

The tradition of *El día de los muertos*, the Day of the Dead, is celebrated throughout Mexico. In the rest of Latin America, it is more properly known as *El día de los fieles difuntos*, the Day of the Faithfully Departed or All Souls' Day. In Mexico, this celebration is part of the “*fiestas de los muertos*” which take place October 31 and November 1 and 2 each year, dates consecrated for the dead by the Catholic church in the seventh century. The

church incorporated the traditional European pagan harvest-time festivals within its calendar. Pagan elements can still be observed in various European celebrations. In particular, the Spanish cult of the dead was expressed through dramatizations such as “The Court Dances of Death” (*Danzas de las Cortes de la Muerte*) from the sixteenth century and the allegory of the “Triumphal Chariot of Death” (“*Carro del Triunfo de la Muerte*”).<sup>6</sup> Vigorous new world manifestations of death cults and ceremonies for the dead also contributed to the character of the celebrations in Latin America, which combine Spanish Catholic and indigenous religious beliefs and customs that in many ways are diametrically opposed to each other. According to Mexican artist and journalist Felipe Ehrenberg, “It is a complex, multi-level feast born long before the Spanish invaded Indio-america and which today glows on through the veneer of Christian piety that it has acquired since the days of the conquistadors.”<sup>7</sup>

Throughout Latin America certain elements, such as offerings and prayers, are basic, but vary in manner and intensity from country to country and from village to village. Material, spiritual, magical, religious, festive and cultural aspects are interrelated simultaneously in a spontaneous way among the different social sectors.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in individual societies and localities, different traditions have evolved. In Mexico, satirical poems are written about local politicians and candy skulls bear the names of friends and loved ones. Paulo de Carvalho-Neto describes the Feast of All Souls in an Ecuadorian village where four friends disguise themselves as *cocuruchos* (tricksters) and wear comical masks. Their role is to entertain and joke with the public.<sup>9</sup> The celebration of the Day of the Dead in Latin America continues to be permeated with religious, social, political, and commercial characteristics. In 1982, it took yet another dimension during a museum re-creation at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution.

The Smithsonian wanted to add live and participatory presentations to its static exhibition on celebrations, to “reinforce the concept of celebration.”<sup>10</sup> The participating Latino community felt proud to display their culture in a national museum and playfully referred to the event as “La toma de la Renwick.” The formal French Empire Salon of the Renwick was “taken” by Latino Virgins and Christs, homemade paper crafts, a cemetery complete with earth-covered graves and wooden headstones and an atmosphere pervaded by bright colors, church incense, votive candles, and festival foods.

While the re-creation of the Day of the Dead for the Renwick Gallery was viewed as an interpretative program by the sponsoring organization, I would suggest that another event with a very different meaning for the participants was embedded in the program. The event was created primarily by a group of nine women who emigrated to Washington, D.C. from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Ecuador. I served as event organizer

and coordinator. In addition to the families of the women, seven young people from the Latin American Youth Center collaborated with us.<sup>11</sup> The process of developing the program involved my meeting many times with the women and their families in their homes. We also held several meetings in a community center. At these meetings I would talk about some of the traditions that the young people and I had collected from interviews with other community members. The distinction made by Dell Hymes between “knowledge what and knowledge how, or, more fully, between assumption of responsibility for knowledge of tradition and assumption of responsibility for performance,”<sup>12</sup> was blurred, since the same people were responsible for remembering the tradition and for the performance. Because these people come from different countries we created a pan-Latin American Day of the Dead model as the basis for the museum presentation. The Day of the Dead activities have lost importance for the D. C. immigrants partly because the dead have been left behind. A conceptual framework was developed from their recollections of celebrations in their countries. The basic material components were identified, then re-created or found among objects the participants owned, and incorporated into the museum setting. Surrounded by significant objects, the participants carried out a performance at the Renwick Gallery that went beyond the original plan.

From the interviews, the visit to the cemetery on the Day of the Dead emerged as a major event, particularly in small rural villages where there is only one cemetery, and it is therefore possible to center the celebration at one site. In larger towns with several cemeteries, the visiting of friends and relatives in their homes gains prominence. A service may be offered at a church before visiting the cemetery. At the cemetery it is common for a priest to offer his services to the people visiting their dead. Often these people cannot afford to have a mass said for their dead in church, but they can pay the priest to say a *responso*, a prayer for the dead. Itinerant musicians can be hired to play a favorite piece. I found no traditional songs for the dead; the songs usually requested are ones the dead liked. The same is true with food offerings.

The participants further informed me that in the country the visit to the cemetery often becomes a family picnic. In more urban areas the visit to the cemetery may consist of no more than cleaning the tomb and changing the flowers. But as illustrated recently by Felipe Ehrenberg in Washington, D.C., the superimposition of the traditional framework on the urban setting exists:

Every year, thoughtful members of every household in the nation (Mexico) set up an offering to the departed ones and place on it all the good things they enjoyed: food, drink and flowers. Nowadays, one might even find their favorite

cassette tapes next to the candles. An offering may be lavish or meager, according to the family's means.<sup>13</sup>

The participants attempted to portray selected elements of this Latino observance for a non-Latino audience. Since the observance takes different forms in different parts of Latin America, several traditions were juxtaposed or layered. In the large French-style salon of the Renwick Gallery, the space was framed on one side by a cemetery represented by three gravestones, and on the other side by a home altar, to indicate the home component. These settings were developed by the participants and approved by the Smithsonian staff. The participants were very insistent that the three graves be humble ones, *humildes*, which meant mounds of earth bordered by brick or stones and a simple wooden cross. The participants wanted to give the non-Latino audience a "truthful" or correct picture of their culture, the culture of the people, *el pueblo*, and more specifically of the lower class people, *la gente humilde*. They felt responsible to the D. C. community and to their culture to represent this image in the created setting. They were very disturbed at someone's suggestion to build the graves out of wood, not only because wooden boxes would look like caskets, but most importantly because they would also suggest wealthy graves which could boast a stone slab. The sense of correctly indexing the class of people who would celebrate a traditional Day of the Dead dominated the planning process. The graves were made of chicken wire covered with bark and evergreens to simulate the earth. According to all participants it is traditional to cover graves with evergreens, pine, cypress, or fir—elements of "the earth."<sup>14</sup> One grave was that of a child. The traditions for offerings for children are in a different category than those for adults. When children die, it is said they become little angels, *angelitos*, and therefore their burial is a happy event.

The cemetery area was marked off by potted palms and an entrance was indicated by a flower stand holding buckets and tin cans of fresh-cut flowers, including many marigolds, the "rose of the dead" (*rosa de muerto*), from the participants' gardens. At the entrance of most cemeteries in Latin America, there usually are stands that sell everything from flowers, rosaries, crosses, candles and wreaths to beverages and food. At one side of the room stood tables where the participants made traditional wreaths and bouquets with paper, wire, fresh flowers, greens, and fabric to place on the graves. Usually only the very poor make their offerings. Wreath and bouquet-making, as well as the making of cemetery crosses, are regular businesses in Latin America.

At the head of each grave were crosses made of wood and each had an inscription. In Latin America the text written on the crosses usually consists of names, dates, and epitaphs. Masculine and feminine names such as Juan

Pérez or José González were suggested. The discussion on the choice of text for the crosses sparked the playful suggestion to “bury” “Pájaro Chogüí.” “Pájaro Chogüí” is the nickname of a particular individual in the community who is seen as part of an aspiring bureaucracy making its way up at the expense of everyone else. The use of his birthdate was suggested, but discarded because it was not readily available and because it might be going a little too far. People in the know in the community “lovingly” offered their flowers to “Pájaro Chogüí” during the cemetery procession.

In the participants’ home countries, the wooden crosses are replaced or repaired and repainted each year, and the inscriptions are rewritten. A participant from El Salvador explained that after seven years the death date is usually eliminated in hopes that the grave will remain undisturbed. Other participants agreed. The cemetery plots are often state-owned and after seven years the dead may be disinterred to make room for others.

Epitaphs usually run from “May he rest in Peace” (*Qué en Diós Descance*) to “Happy Voyage” (*Feliz Viaje*). Initials are also used. Q.D.D.G. stands for *Qué de Diós Goze* (“May he rejoice in God”). During the joking session already mentioned, participants said that children joke that Q.D.D.G. means *Quedó Debiendo Dos Gallinas* or “He died owing two chickens.” And so, as the result of another instance of play among the planner-participants, one cross bore these initials.

Flower vases were placed at the head and foot of the graves. Beside the more elegant grave, large white and blue ceramic vases made by one of the participants were positioned, while tin cans were used for vases at the *más sencilla*, or simpler grave. These arrangements were consciously chosen to underline the class status. Short votive candles in little glass jars, bought in a local Latino store, were placed around the graves.

For the home altar, a portable screen served as a wall and a French imperial-style table held the crucifixes, candles, and incense. In D.C., home altars are often found in kitchens, bedrooms, or in common living areas. Because food was also a part of this program, the altar area was depicted as a dining room. The screen was decorated with paper cutouts made by one of the participants. An Italian Renaissance print of the Virgin of El Carmen, known as *La Virgen del Buen Morir* or Virgin of the Good Death, a large wooden crucifix and a virgin in silver relief, all from the participants’ homes, were hung on the screen.

The critical elements for the home altar were candles and a glass of water. An employer of one of the participants lent us a traditional Day of the Dead black pottery candelabra from Oaxaca, Mexico, and one of the youth helpers obtained candles and incense from a community church, which were set in tin cans. Two tall votive candles, also from a local Latino store, were placed on the table along with smaller virgins, crucifixes and a cross made from

clothespins. All came from the homes of the participants or their relatives. To complete the setting another small table was covered with cloth, its corners gaily decorated with colored paper, to display samples of traditional Day of the Dead food and beverages prepared by participants.

To one side of this space, other tables held additional samples of traditional festival foods, such as *guaguas de pan* (bread dolls) from Ecuador, *buñuelos* (fritters) from El Salvador, and *pan de maíz* (corn bread) from Nicaragua; fancy dishes like the *fiambre* (assorted meats and fish salad) from Guatemala; and different drinks mostly based on corn, like *chicha morada* made from black corn from Ecuador, *atol* from Central America and the ginger drink, *chicha de jenjibre*, from Nicaragua.

Thus, the cemetery and the home were settings for the program which was designed to move in a circular direction from home to cemetery to home. The program began with the ritual of the rosary in front of the home altar. Latinos responded traditionally to the saying of the rosary, falling to their knees and answering in the appropriate places. The people they prayed for were immediate members of the family, *compañeros* or brothers who died in the wars in Central America, and George Washington. The saying of the rosary was followed by a procession of all the participants and audience out of the room, around the stairwell and back to the cemetery. Everyone was given a fresh-cut flower to carry and then place in one of the vases by the graves. Afterwards the participants made other traditional offerings and the priest<sup>15</sup> recited a *responso*. A procession and cemetery drama followed, with musicians and costumed “villagers” from the Ecuadorian group. The scene then shifted back to the home setting where marimba players and itinerant guitar players were engaged for a home celebration.

I had invited two Ecuadorians, a panpipe or *rondador* player and his daughter, an accordion player, to be the itinerant musicians. Both are members of a music ensemble for a folkloric dance group. They would participate only with the rest of their music group. Attempting to keep to some criteria of authenticity, I initially rejected the participation of the whole group, partially because one of the players is Greek. I then realized that this multiethnic involvement is not unusual among Latino ethnic groups in D.C. I was invited to several rehearsals in the home of the *rondador* player. These visits reinforced my interest in having the two musicians participate, even if it meant inviting the entire music group. Everyone at the rehearsals, including the dance group, wanted to “sign up.” Two days before the program they made it clear that I was not dealing simply with a music group, but with the official *Grupo Folklórico del Ecuador*. Although I had explained we did not want “folkloric dancing,” because it was not customary in a Day of the Dead celebration, the group choreographed a procession and prepared a skit for the cemetery.

The major components of the Day of the Dead conceptual framework are the cemetery and the home altar, public and private sacred spaces, the visit to cemetery, prayer, and the offerings. These components served as the basis for constructing the Renwick program. Nevertheless, the relationship of the Renwick program to celebrations of the Day of the Dead is primarily metonymic, for although the basic components were identified and represented, the meaning was not the same. The conceptual framework provided the model. The components, space and paraphernalia, as used in the program are iconic and indexical<sup>16</sup> of a Day of the Dead celebration. The symbolic action of a Day of the Dead celebration is embedded in reciprocity and is made manifest in the offerings during these celebrations, activities that do not take place at the Renwick.

In Latin America, the Day of the Dead celebration is based on principles of reciprocity and obligation. The essential activity is gift-giving, manifested in the *ofrenda* or the offering. Gift-giving reinforces community ties, beginning with the most intimate unit, the family, and extending to kin and fictive kin. Through the offering, a system of reciprocity connects members of the community. "Food becomes an index of social relationships by marking who gives what to whom and when."<sup>17</sup> Ritual gift-giving is in response to past, and in anticipation of future, reciprocation. Offerings made to the dead create reciprocal relationships between the dead and the living as well as between the living world and the spiritual world. Reciprocal relationships are also established horizontally among the living. On the Day of the Dead, the importance lies in home hospitality and the giving of gifts: "to reinforce and regenerate obligations of exchange between relatives and *compadres*."<sup>18</sup>

At the cemetery, the emphasis is on the peculiar relationship between life and death, and on the collective nature of all life when death is the host.<sup>19</sup> The offerings are made for past or future interventions, to keep the dead quiet or to simply honor them. The altar offerings may correspond in quality and quantity to the gifts received from the spirit during the year. As Frances Toor puts it, "When good crops are obtained, the living never receive any credit for the work they put into them; the success is always attributed to the vigilance of the dead relatives and their intercession with God and the saints. If the harvests have been good the *ofrendas* are very elaborate, otherwise not."<sup>20</sup>

The reasons for the exchange may vary but the reciprocal structure remains constant. This reciprocity is expressed in a concrete act embodied in the offering. According to a Latino priest in the D.C. community, the connection to a spiritual reality is made possible through concrete religious experience: "The offering is the symbolic gesture of another reality."

At the Renwick something else happened. Within the larger framework of the production, a performance was embedded whose frame of reference is the D.C. Latino community and not the tradition of the Day of the Dead. The dominant symbolic action that emerges in the Renwick program is one of identity and reflexivity. The program is about being Latino in Washington, D.C. While the celebration of the Day of the Dead is not necessary and indeed not well observed in this community, it becomes the context for reflexivity and assertion of identity, much like the reflexivity that occurs in ephemeral art in ritual contexts. "All this work and attention to aesthetic detail for a single significant occasion involves both makers and percipients in re-learning and re-celebrating deeply meaningful cultural symbols."<sup>21</sup>

Reflexivity and the expression of identity most strongly characterized the play upon cross inscriptions, the saying of the rosary and the use of color in the offerings made at the simulated cemetery. The play upon the cross inscriptions manipulated and secularized the sacred frame of the paradigm. The use of parody allowed the event to emerge outside of its traditional context yet be constitutive of traditional elements. Parody, a form of play based upon violation of codes, "is as much the consolidation, reaffirmation and revitalization of another performance code as it is the violation of that code. The very act of de-constructing re-constructs and celebrates the forms."<sup>22</sup> The inscriptions also situated the event in the D.C. Latino community and served as a communicative event within that community. I would suggest that parody also contributed to the transformation of the event from a ritual to a festival mode. Play, which is also a part of traditional celebrations, framed the reflexive nature of the event. "Reflexivity involves play and play involves reflexivity. . . . Play, moreover, is not as spontaneous and ingenuous as we might assume and can only occur if the participants are capable of some degree of meta-communication. . . ."<sup>23</sup> Reflexivity was a condition required for re-creating the event. "Playful-like serious reflexivity is concerned with the process of signification, of communication."<sup>24</sup> A dual process was taking place; first, the translation of information open to interpretation, and second, a performance or ceremony."<sup>25</sup>

The saying of the rosary touched upon spiritual, political, and social realities. It evoked the relationship with the spiritual world. Beyond the iconic manifestation, the saying of rosary was an index to the commemoration of the dead, the ancestors. The prayers were laden with personal meaning, and with meaning for an immigrant community whose majority consists of refugees from battle-torn Central America. The inclusion of George Washington resonated with meanings relevant to the celebration, to the program and to the D.C. Latino community. George Washington is given status in the ceremony partly because this is a program for an American audience in an American museum; it is a form of recognition as

well as of audience inclusion. On the other hand, George Washington is identified as the ancestor of "Yankee imperialism." I think that while the saying of the rosary was intended to suggest the religious/ancestor worship aspect of the celebration, it was a symbolic enactment of identity. This identity emerged from the interaction among the participants, from the conceptualization and manipulation of the Day of the Dead celebration, and from the perceived relationship between performers and audience. The event was not conceived by the participants as a celebration of the Day of the Dead, but as a presentation for an outside audience. More than a prayer for the dead, it was an assertion of identity by Latino immigrants in Washington, D.C. In the same manner, the offerings lost some of their meaning in terms of reciprocity and became vehicles for stating the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural character of the D.C. Latino community. Offerings are interactional devices, but instead of the exchange of promises/services, there was the negotiation between different Latino cultures in one community, and between that community and the host culture.

Color was used as a basic metaphor in the offerings. White/black, white/purple, white/multicolor, blue/pink, either in combination or in opposition, were used according to generally shared conventions by all the participants to indicate the status of the dead: a child, a virgin, an adult, a man or a woman. While white was used by some of the participants for a child or a virgin, symbolizing purity and virginity, other participants used multicolor offerings to express their happiness for the child who died in a state of purity. The colors used for an adult symbolized, not the state of the dead, but rather the emotions of the living toward their dead. Although the participants shared the code, they manipulated it in culture-specific ways. Thus, the offerings made at the Renwick by the participants from different countries differed in color for the children's grave as well as for the graves of the adults, and the participants seemed to intensify this play on color for the museum. For the Guatemalans the wreaths for a child ideally are made with multicolored flowers, while the Nicaraguans prefer white. For adults, Ecuador uses purple and white, El Salvador black and white, Nicaragua multicolored. All the offerings made in forms of wreaths, bouquets, and other ornaments were placed on the three graves, producing a layering of color symbolism. The graveyard thus became the site for ethnic interaction. It became another instance of serious play, not informed by ritual obligation but rather by personal choice to represent the tradition of a country. Yet from the action of the offering emerged a statement of multi-ethnic identity.

Food, on the other hand, was simply displayed, together with an explanation of how it would be traditionally used in a Day of the Dead celebration as part of a reciprocal exchange. But the food served only as an index and played no part in the symbolic action. The participants never

developed a model, although food was an important key during the fieldwork phase, stimulating the memories of the interviewees about past celebrations of the Day of the Dead.

The participants' presentational frame of reference was also dichotomized. The performance of the group from Ecuador illustrates a very different attitude towards presenting one's culture. They resisted involvement in the total performance and consciously performed only their part. The public image they chose to present was that of a formal folkloric performing group rather than themselves as individuals, members of a Latino community. The actions seem to embody the concept of folklorization that Marianne Mesnil discusses with regard to the European masked festival: "The plays were then recuperated, as formal entities, and presented as spectacles, exclusively for the 'showing.' From the point of view of meaning, the consequence of this evolution was the 'desemantization' of the festival; it became an object of consumption."<sup>26</sup> This was in contrast to the behavior of the rest of the Day of the Dead participants, whose " 'lived lives' meshed with their 'performed lives' in so strong a way that it fed back into their performances."<sup>27</sup> Their participation was desemantized in the context of the celebration of community that took place at the Renwick. Their dramatization actually approximated the simulation ideal. Yet desemantization is relative to the frame of reference and the Ecuadorian performance made a different statement about cultural identity. They chose to present themselves as representatives of a reified tradition that corroborates the concept of tradition as survivals.

In terms of meaning, the Ecuadorian performance related to the production but resisted the embedded performance. It nevertheless influenced it. The participants had agreed in general that no particular dress was used for the Day of the Dead, just "your Sunday best." The director of the Ecuadorian group informed me on the night before the performance that the group could not possibly perform without costume—"It would be ridiculous, we would look like ordinary people." This choice of wearing costume or conventional clothes marked the distinction made by the Ecuadorian group between the private side of culture and what is proper for an artistic, "folkloric" presentation in public. I had experienced the former in their home, but the performance at the Renwick was of a different kind. A new aesthetic was expressed in the wearing of costume. On the second day, many other participants chose to wear their "typical" national costumes. This indicated an uncertainty about the type of program they had created and a desire not to be outshone.

In the emerging event, an opposition developed between two operant frames of reference: that of the Ecuadorian group and that which emerged from the interaction among the rest of the participants. While the individual

participants were involved throughout the event in the preparation of the cemetery and the altar, in the laying out of food and in informal conversation, the Ecuadorian group, dressed in stereotypical costumes, stood at the wings, as it were, awaiting their time “to come on.” The two frames of reference affected the participant/audience relationship differently. Although other program events were no less structured and formal, the typical museum audience expects costume, music, and dance in a public ethnic presentation. Yet it seems to me in an analysis of the relationship between the performance and the audience, while the Ecuadorian presentation was expected and well-received by the audience, the differentiation between performer and spectator was maintained. Although the audience may not have known how to respond to some of the other program events, such as the saying of the rosary or the procession, these events broke down experientially the distinction between audience and performer. In both cases, the events successfully communicated, but the process and the level of understanding were different.

In positioning the elements and sorting out the frames of references and relationships, a rather complex three-dimensional event emerges that is both production and performance. The symbolic action of the event emerges in the context of a cultural production<sup>28</sup> and in the context of community identity. Although for purposes of analysis the two patterns can be separated, “they are interdependent and constituted by means of each other.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore in this event, the boundaries between artistic production and cultural performance<sup>30</sup> or the “authentic” thing, were very permeable. Erving Goffman’s use of the terms *front* and *back regions* may also apply. He warns “that under certain conditions it is difficult to separate front from back, and that these are sometimes transformed one into the other.”<sup>31</sup> The predominance of iconicity within the framework of the cultural production created a powerful and concrete experience of religiosity and death. The chanting of the rosary, the smell of the evergreens and incense, and the burning of the candles are icons of experience which indexed as well as evoked an experiential substrate.<sup>32</sup> Saturday the word was passed among the participants that there was a spirit, a ghost, *un muerto*, in the place. It smelled *hediondo*—heavy, musty.

Dell Hymes describes the transformational process from model to event as metaphrasis, “a technical term for interpretative transformation of genre.”<sup>33</sup> As Richard Bauman further explains it, “The participants are using the structured, conventional performance system itself as a resource for creative manipulation, as a base on which a range of communicative transformations can be wrought.”<sup>34</sup> The process of creating the program can also be seen in Schechner’s terms of “restored behavior.” He says, “the performers get in touch with, recover, remember, or even invent these strips of behavior

and then re-behave according to these strips either by being absorbed into them . . . or by existing side-by-side with them. . . . Restored behavior is symbolic and reflexive.”<sup>35</sup> In the Day of the Dead program the participants identified the basic elements, recreated them, used them in a traditional manner and manipulated them to express their present reality. Schechner discusses the building blocks of performance in terms of rehearsals. “During rehearsals a past is invented or assembled out of bits of actual experience, fantasies, historical research; or a known score is recalled. Earlier rehearsals and/or performances quickly become the reference points, the building blocks of performances.”<sup>36</sup> In the Day of the Dead celebration at the Renwick, the rehearsal started with the first meetings between the participants as the program was being created. Each meeting was a rehearsal of identity as each participant interacted with the others. These initial interactions formed the basis for the expression of community and identity that emerged in the event, the performance. The difference between performance and rehearsal is the difference between “is” and “as if.” “The frame and visible structure of the performance is an ‘is,’ the finished show, the more or less invariable presentation of what has been found, kept, and organized into a score. But the deep structure under this ‘is’ is an ‘as if.’ ”<sup>37</sup> In a sense, because of the high degree of reflexivity and rehearsal, the performance is the final organized text, the final analysis and structuring of the celebration components by the participants.

Although the Day of the Dead had a surfeit of signifiers,<sup>38</sup> it was minimal compared to a Day of the Dead celebration in Latin America. Yet in part, the Day of the Dead program was a celebration and became true “by virtue of being performed. As Geertz put it in another context, their self-interpretation came into being as it was formulated.”<sup>39</sup> Like the film of the Vedic ritual discussed by Schechner in *Altar of Fire*, the program is somewhere between a real event and a media event, documentation and presentation, enactment and display. “The Brahmin priests went to texts, their own memories, and what old people could recall of the *agnicayana* . . . and an audience of Americans who see *Altar of Fire* mainly as a documentary of an actual ritual. But ritual with a difference: ritual for study, for entertainment: a ‘specimen.’ ”<sup>40</sup>

In summary, although the participants manipulated their experiences and made compromises, they participated in an enactment that was, in their own view, meaningful in itself. They were recruited, but they took over, using the time and space for a very personal ritual, at once a very private exploration of who they are becoming and a public expression of who they are. “A performer experiences his own self not directly but through the medium of performance, of experiencing the Others. While performing, he

no longer has a 'me' but a 'not not me,' and this double negative relationship also shows how restored behavior is simultaneously private and social.<sup>41</sup>

The heuristic value of this event is suggested by the semiotic problems raised in textual interpretation, intertextual relationships of paradigm and program, and the contextualization of an emerging new text. Although I have suggested some basic units for analysis I have also suggested the dual nature of the event. It is both a show, and an enactment. I have suggested a permeability between these two aspects. In the eyes of the participating group of Latinos, a meaningful event took place. Without a contextualization of the event within the D.C. Latino community and without analysis of the performance-centered text, the event is only a thin representation or index to a Day of the Dead celebration in Latin America.

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Washington, D. C.*

#### NOTES

*An earlier version of this paper was written for the fourth International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies and presented at the 1983 meeting of the American Folklore Society. I would like to thank Richard Bauman, Beverly Stoeltje, John Vlach, Jack Santino, and David Bosserman for their help in developing the paper and the ideas it contains.*

1. Richard Bauman and Roger Abrahams, with Susan Kalčik, "American Folklore and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 28 (1976): 363.

2. A celebration of the Day of the Dead was held at the Smithsonian Renwick Gallery on October 30 and again on October 31, 1982. This celebration formed part of the series "Living Celebrations" of the Smithsonian Folklife Program's "public interpretative programs," which complemented the exhibit, *Celebration, A World of Art and Ritual*. Working with the series coordinator, Jack Santino, I put together this Day of the Dead program with members from the multiethnic Latino community of Washington, D.C.

3. The Latino community of Washington, D.C. had its beginnings as a self-ascribed entity in the early sixties. At this time, the Adams Morgan/Mt. Pleasant area began to take on the characteristics of a Latino neighborhood or *barrio*. It was originally a wealthy upper class neighborhood, which first began changing during World War II with the revision of housing codes in the area and with the white exodus following the 1968 racial riots. The Latino community is made up in large part by working class immigrants, refugees and exiles from the Caribbean, South and Central America. There are also diplomatic and professional Hispanic communities in D.C., but they do not identify with the *barrio*. It is estimated that there are between 80,000 and 100,000 Latinos in D.C. The earlier immigrants came in the twenties and

thirties from Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico, in the most part with government jobs. In the fifties and sixties the largest migration continued to come from the Caribbean, especially Cuba. The seventies saw an increased migration of people from South America, and the eighties is characterized by the mass migration of people from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. In most cases Central Americans come from rural areas and, unlike the earlier immigrants, they have not been able to legalize their status easily. Unlike other regions of the U.S., in Washington, D.C. no one national group dominates. Often an individual first identifies himself as Latino and then by nationality.

4. I am using the terms production and performance as used by Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 71.

5. Benjamin Hrushovski, "The Structure of Semiotic Objects: A Three-Dimensional Model," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979-80). Hrushovski's model of analysis of texts can be extended to aid in the identification and organization of different components of a performance in a way that focuses more clearly upon the analytic problems created by this type of event. He organizes the components of the text into three dimensions: position, meaning and reference, and organized text.

6. Gabriel Moedano, "La ofrenda del día de los muertos," *Folklore Americano* 8-9 (1960-62): 32; see also Jack Santino, "Halloween in America: Contemporary Customs and Performances," *Western Folklore* 42:1 (1983): 1-20.

7. Felipe Ehrenberg, "Day of the Dead Celebration" (mimeographed leaflet for Day of the Dead exhibit at Fondo del Sol Gallery, Washington, D. C., November 2, 1981).

8. Editorial, "En torno de la tradición del dos de noviembre," *Arte Popular* 19 (Nov. 1977): 1.

9. Paulo de Carvalho-Neto, "Fiesta de las almas," *25 Estudios de Folklore* 4 (1971): 278-80.

10. Smithsonian Institute, "Celebration, A World of Art and Ritual" (exhibit brochure, Washington, D.C. 1982).

11. The women who formed the core of the program are all from the working class and are currently employed either by hotels or as domestics in private homes. Besides the participation of the youth from the Latin American Youth Center, research carried out by the Center's Youth Oral History Project (1981-83) and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (October 1981-83) provided contacts and background information on the community. The focus of the program was limited to four countries because of time and budget limitations.

12. Dell Hymes, *"In Vain I Tried to Tell You"* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 23.

13. Ehrenberg, "Day of the Dead."

14. Saustiano García San Martín, "Día de los difuntos en Chinautla," *Tradiciones de Guatemala* 2 (1974): 47.

15. A local priest participated in the program.

16. See, for the use of icon, index, and symbol, John J. Fitzgerald, *Peirce's Theory of Signs as Foundations for Pragmatism* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1966), pp. 44-70.

17. Suzanne Seriff, "'To the Health of the Departed': Ritual Gifting on the Day of

the Dead in Mexico" (paper read at the American Folklore Society meeting, Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 13-17, 1982), p. 2.

18. Ibid., p. 4.
19. Ibid., p. 5-6.
20. Frances Toor, *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947), p. 240.
21. Barbara Babcock, "Reflexivity: Definitions and Discriminations," *Semiotica* 30 (1980): 9.
22. Barbara Babcock, "The Novel and the Carnival World," *Modern Language Notes* 89 (1974): 920.
23. Babcock, "The Novel," p. 936.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Marianne Mesnil, "The Masked Festival: Disguise or Affirmation?" *Cultures* 3 (1976): 24.
27. Richard Schechner, "Collective Reflexivity: Restoration of Behavior," in *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 63.
28. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 24-26.
29. Hrushovski, "The Structure of Semiotic Objects," p. 365.
30. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*, p. 71.
31. Goffman quoted by MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 95.
32. John McDowell, "Beyond Iconicity: Ostension in Kamsá Mythic Narrative," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 19 (1982): 121-23.
33. Hymes, "In Vain," p. 87.
34. Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1977), p. 34.
35. Schechner, "Collective Reflexivity," p. 40.
36. Ibid., p. 43.
37. Ibid., p. 72.
38. Babcock, "The Novel," p. 927.
39. Barbara Meyerhoff and Jay Ruby, "Introduction," in *A Crack in the Mirror*, p. 34.
40. Schechner, "Collective Reflexivity," pp. 59-60.
41. Ibid., p. 75.