

Introduction

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Scholar, playwright, spoken-word performer, award-winning poet, and avant-garde fiction author, since the 1980s Giannina Braschi has been creating up a storm in and around a panoply of Latinx hemispheric spaces. Her creative corpus reaches across different genres, regions, and historical epochs. Her critical works cover a wide range of subjects and authors, including Miguel de Cervantes, Garcilaso de la Vega, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Antonio Machado, César Vallejo, and García Lorca. Her dramatic poetry titles in Spanish include *Asalto al tiempo* (1981) and *La comedia profana* (1985). Her radically experimental genre-bending titles include *El imperio de los sueños* (1988), the bilingual *Yo-Yo Boing!* (1998), and the English-penned *United States of Banana* (2011). With national and international awards and works appearing in Swedish, Slovenian, Russian, and Italian, she is recognized as one of today's foremost experimental Latinx authors.

Her vibrant bilingually shaped creative expressions and innovation spring from her Latinidad, her Puerto Rican-ness that weaves in and through a planetary aesthetic sensibility. We discover as much in her work about US/Puerto Rico sociopolitical histories as we encounter the metaphysical and existential explorations of a Cervantes, Rabelais, Diderot, Artaud, Joyce, Beckett, Stein, Borges, Cortázar, and Rosario Castellanos, for instance. With every flourish of her pen Braschi reminds us that in the distillation and reconstruction of the building blocks of the universe there are no limits to what fiction can do. And, here too, the black scratches that form words and carefully composed blank spaces shape an absent world; her strict selection *out* of words and syntax is as important as the precise insertion of words and syntax to put us into the shoes of the “complicit reader” (Julio Cortázar’s term) to most productively interface, invest, and fill in the gaps of her storyworlds. Braschi reminds us of the power of *lexis*—asking us to deep-dive into the metaphorical, subtextual, and allegorical layers of meaning. No subject remains untouched in her

fiction making. She draws from Latinx realities as well as metaphysics—even historical archive, sociopolitical, and judicial discourses. Indeed, Braschi invents new forms to express polyvalent Latinx sensibilities that shape-shift across time, place, and identity categories.

In many ways, as a contemporary Latinx author Braschi stands apart. Her radically experimental works continue to grow a genealogy of Latinx letters, but they do so from the avant-garde margins. Taken as a whole her work extends and complicates a trajectory of Latinx experimental fiction that has not received the same critical attention as, perhaps, the work of a more straightforward realist writer such as an Esmeralda Santiago or a Piri Thomas. Lisa Sánchez González sums up the realism of, say, Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican* as “non-confrontational” (140)—as a mainstream-consumable story that focuses on the individual triumphs at the exclusion of the “collective predicament that entails growing problems within racism, poverty, reproductive rights, education, and Colonial maldevelopment” (140). Sidestepping the easily consumable, Braschi's creative work puts pressure on and radically bends a Latinx literary canon, and with this she calls attention to the self-within-the-collective of nation and diasporic community. She converses with Isabel Rios (*Victuum*, 1976), Cecile Pineda (*Face*, 1985), Guillermo Gomez-Peña (*Codex Espangliensis*, 1998), Alejandro Morales (*Waiting to Happen*, 2001), Salvador Plascencia (*The People of Paper*, 2005), or Sesshu Foster (*Atomik Aztex*, 2005). And today we see Braschi joined by a growing number of Latinx canon-benders such as Carmen María Machado, Elizabeth Acevedo, Monica de la Torre, and Naomi Ayala. More globally, Braschi's works extend and complicate a genealogy of avant-garde women of color authors such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Claudia Rankine, and Audre Lorde, and she joins with other planetary cutting-edge contemporaries such as Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi, Pamela Lu, Zinzi Clemmons, and Sumana Roy.

Although standing apart, Braschi as creator clearly doesn't exist ex nihilo. Indeed, we see her build on and redeploy the work of feminist and queer fore-figures, including Cristina Peri Rossi, Alejandra Pizarnik, Clarice Lispector, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, Marguerite Duras, and Gertrude Stein. She does so less from an identity perspective and more from a theoretical practice perspective. We see a similar dynamic with her Puerto Rican family friends and mentors playwright René Marqués and public intellectual Nilita Vientós-Gastón, and with her fiction-writing friends on the island, Rosario Ferré, Manuel Ramos Otero, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and Ana Lydia Vega. I think also of her Nuyoricana poet friends who are cofounders of the Nuyoricana Poets Café, Pedro Pietri and Miguel Algarín, and their precursor Julia de Burgos. From Pizarnik

and Duras to Marqués and Pietri, these voices, each with their own aesthetic (some more experimental than others) and each with their uniquely expressed antiestablishment worldviews, are forerunners to Braschi.

In response to the tremendous cultural output of Latinx (Puerto Rican/Nuyorican) culture, a rich body of scholarship has grown. This scholarship puts front and center the complex ways in which Puerto Rico and its diaspora have been caught within the imperialist web of the United States since its annexation in 1898. For instance, in *Boricua Pop* (2004) Frances Negrón-Muntaner identifies how histories of colonization and US imperialism have led to a deep shaming that informs much cultural production; conversely, she identifies a performativity that resists such shaming. In *Dream Nation* María Acosta Cruz explores how an impulse for independence as “symbolic aspiration” grows a culture that “imagines the nation” through “its heroes, its allegories, its significant stories” (1). Acosta Cruz considers how this culture springs from an influx island identity: as nation, state, commonwealth, colony. Puerto Rican/Nuyorican culture grows from a mixed yearning for sovereignty along what is caught between “dashed aspirations, and hoped-for dreams” (1). In *Defending Their Own in the Cold* Marc Zimmerman turns his attention to how Puerto Rican/Boricua cultural phenomena grow out of this fraught relationship between island and mainland identities. In what he conceptualizes as a “dis-erasure,” Zimmerman identifies a nomadic, spontaneous, and resistant Latinx subjectivity to the colonial power that wraps itself around everyday life of Puerto Rican peoples. In their introduction to a 2014 special issue of *American Quarterly* titled “Las Américas Quarterly,” editors Macarena Gómez-Barris and Licia Fiol-Matta characterize Puerto Rican cultural studies as a field in which scholars work to “refine the conversation on earlier colonial ruptures and Américas exchanges [and to] present the transversality of the flow of knowledge, archives, and geographic spaces . . . as critical inquiry into Las Américas” (494).

In addition to scholarly attention to issues of coloniality and sovereignty, there is a rich and necessary body of scholarship that focuses on translanguaging acts—the interfacing of English, Spanish, and code-switching linguistic registers both as unique cultural markers and as aesthetic shaping devices. (For more on translanguaging, see Francisco Moreno-Fernández’s chapter in this volume.) The use of translanguaging (English/Spanish, code-switching, *caló*, *pochismos*, for instance) resists uniform monolingual expressions and also reminds readers that Latinx identities and experiences are neither island-only nor mainland-aspiring but, rather, are shaped across a linguistically nonbinary hemispheric Américas. (See Martha E. Sánchez’s *A Translational Turn*.) For

Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, an author like Braschi gives power to Latinx women subjects who actively deform and transform language in ways that invite Latinx female readers to fill in gaps and to enact transformations in the world beyond the narrative. (See Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes's *Queer Ricans*.) Likewise, in *Redreaming America* Debra Castillo considers Braschi's translanguaging as clearing a space for resistance and revolt against coercive, binary monolingual Spanish or English dominance. On one occasion, Castillo identifies how Braschi's use of an "aggressive Spanglish" in *Yo-Yo Boing!* becomes the narrative vehicle to convey a mashup of concepts and knowledge from Europe (Michelangelo Antonioni) and the Américas (Julio Cortázar)—that is, Braschi's "linguistic dissonance" gives shape to an ironic metafictional "staged performance" narrative that troubles the concept of "authenticity" itself (174).

Taken as a whole, Giannini Braschi's mixed genre, translanguaging, experimental storyworlds present "conceptions of power and resistance to empire today that is not based on the class struggle within the nation-state class but located within the rhizomatic, deterritorialized multitude" (*Latinx Studies: Key Concepts* 53). In *Yo-Yo Boing!* we see Braschi's disruptive storyworld building at play: urban Latinxs in New York City on a nomadic journey in and through different cultural zones including, of course, those zones where borders between languages do not exist. In this sense, she disrupts the assimilatory pressure and mainstream constraint: that Spanish is private and English is public; otherwise stated of this typical way that language is polarized—if Spanish-speaking, then remain Puerto Rican, and if English, then you can be US. This linguistic elasticity liberates form, where subjects engage in discussions/explorations of cultural phenomena (Nabokov, Fellini, Monique Wittig, Woody Allen, and the Nuyorican arts generally). As Kristian van Haesendonck points out, the novel's translanguaging "goes further than a postmodern linguistic game" (179). It "enjoin(s) the reader to accept the language of the other, without falling into a new marketability of 'cross-over' writing" (179). In their introduction to *Yo-Yo Boing!* Doris Sommer and Alexandra Vega-Merino identify how the novel "transmutes poetry into novel, into screenplay, dialogue, and by extension to more and sometimes unidentified variants" ("Either And" 11).

And yet, Braschi turns the table on this, too. Her translingual characters and imaginings are not anchored in named characters. All we have are speaking voices identified by a dash. Here we do encounter a variety of "characters." The novel opens with a woman performing an extended monologue in Spanish ("Close-Up") on her physical, emotional, and intellectual features. A multiplicity of translanguaging "characters" fol-

low in the “Blow-Up” section; and in the final section, “Black-Out,” we hear the voice in Spanish of the “character” Giannina. Van Haesendonck articulates this as a postmodern move whereby the “doubling and the absenting” undermines “the authority of the traditional narrator” (179). For Van Haesendonck, Braschi creates traces of formless characters who are “simultaneously antagonists of their own selves.” He concludes how, “in a Beckettian way, we find nothing more than some reminders of a narrative instance: the narrator has been reduced to a disembodied, amorphous voice” (179).

Braschi stages in ways that go beyond Beckett. She stages a Latinidad. This is driven home by Debra Castillo when she analyzes how “Braschi mixes opera, salsa, rock, and Mexican folk songs with Barbra Streisand, Frank Sinatra, and *The Sound of Music*, working to capture not only the promiscuously defined cultural referent, but the very sound and rhythm of these different musical genres” (179). Castillo enriches our understanding of how Braschi stages identity and experience.

Others have also remarked on how the characterless narrative functions. For Mila Popovich, this re-creates a sense of how “migrancy, and its consequent existential form of metalives, necessitates a multiple positionality that, in turn, produces multiple reflexive modalities. Sharing an understanding that mimesis itself is a form of displacement, these authors create alternative aesthetic states inhabited by characters who experience synchronously multiple placedness in the world” (117). And for Sommer and Vega-Merino, this move creates a “roller-coaster ride of shifting subject positions” (11) that ultimately resists our locating of Latinx subjectivities either in a culture-geographic location of Puerto Rico or in that of a Nuyorican Bronx; its constant shape-shifting also calls attention to the restless sociopolitical realities of the island as nation, state, postcolonial outpost. Sommer and Vega-Merino illustrate how the novel performs “the juggling of selves: a poet who doubles as an academic; a Puerto Rican who is also an American; a woman who is a match for any man’s world” (13). Presciently, translingual tongues and imaginings are indeed the common doxa for Latinxs in Braschi’s world. Sommer and Vega-Merino appraise Braschi’s self-reflexive translingual play as a forceful resistance to any assimilationist moves, including that of the bildungsroman typified by the progress from “Spanish intimacies to English public life” (18). Rather, it creates a spectacle out of the Spanish to English “bilateral movement” (18).

In *Permissible Narratives*, Christopher González enriches our understanding of how Braschi creates what he calls a “challenging reading situation.” He attends specifically to how her translanguaging allows her to give shape to a narrative that resists the monolingual Spanish or

English reader's attempt to contain it. He asserts: "because language is inextricably bound to identity," Braschi's translingual code-switching functions as an "unabashed assault on [the] reader" (89). The net effect is that her code-switching puts "more distance between the characters and reader" and thus at once challenges storyworld construction and opens a space for the storyworld to "complicate notions of identity within the minds of the audience" (67). Thus, for González, Giannina moves "beyond the limitations of identity-bound aesthetics—of the atavisms of Latino/a literature" (106). Finally, González identifies this as a Latinx narrative that "anticipates readers who can easily decode both languages in order to co-construct the storyworld" (106). José L. Torres-Padilla argues that Braschi's translingual storyworld at once creates a poetics that "undermines the essentialist perceptions of literature and purity in language held by the island's cultural elite" and functions "to reverse colonial authority by unmasking it and showing its ambivalence" (291). However, Torres-Padilla cautions us to be mindful of bringing too much idealism to a linguistic analysis of Braschi. He identifies how relying on language alone as a "stance of resistance against imperialism and hegemony" promotes an idealism that arguably "supports the continuing colonial status of Puerto Rico and undermines any desire for self-determination that might effect real change" (292). Torres-Padilla questions whether the aesthetics of *Yo-Yo Boing!* is "elitist and bourgeois" in ways that uphold the "the status quo" (293).

In 1988 Braschi published *El imperio de los sueños*, an epic mashup of poetry and prose, deploying a myriad of storytelling forms. In her introduction to Tess O'Dwyer's 1994 English translation, Alicia Ostriker qualifies *Empire of Dreams* as a masterpiece of poetry cross-dressing "in the garb of dramatic monologue, love letter, TV commercial, diary excerpt, movie criticism, celebrity confession, literary theory, bastinado, manifesto, etc." (ix). In this work, a parade of nomadic characters and migrant voices crowd the city streets, stores, and tourist attractions of New York (such as Macy's, the Empire State Building, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Central Park). In "New/Nueva York in Giannina Braschi's *Poetic Egg*," Diane E. Marting identifies this as a "parodic elegy" to Cervantes and a contemporary example of "historiographic metafiction" that reconstructs a "fractured, cosmopolitan cityscape" populated by globally placed and displaced Puerto Ricans who make up a "global South consisting of two islands within the same country" (167). Braschi's New/eva York exists as an "ideal creative cityscape and a dystopic urban wasteland" (181). It's a city of "glitz and glamour" and where culture is coopted for "self-promotion" (181). But because it is so complexly layered, it showcases the urban Latinx "multiplicities within the identity of persons" (181). On Braschi's

pairing of frivolity with the sublime, Jerónimo Arellano situates *Empire of Dreams* within the context of the McOndo movement in Latin America, alongside edgy urban novelists Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez who take a stand against commercialism and magic realism. In *Magical Realism and the History of Emotions in Latin America*, Arellano identifies “a central tension” in *The Intimate Diary of Solitude* (the final section of *Empire of Dreams*) as “a conflict between the controlling narrator and a rebellious protagonist,” Mariquita Samper, a Puerto Rican writer who works as a makeup artiste at Macy’s, “The Greatest Store in the World” (165). Spoiler alert: Mariquita murders the ever-looming, omniscient narrator of the Latin American Boom because he keeps rewriting her diary against her will, erasing her adventures and replacing them with a suffocating solitude. Refusing to die of solitude, Mariquita shoots the narrator: “Boom! Boom! He’s dead. He’s dead. Mariquita has killed the narrator. Revolution in *The Intimate Diary of Solitude* (203).” This declaration of revolution—not unlike later manifestos by the Mexican “Crack Generation” writers and the McOndo novelists of the 1990s—signals “the epochal death of magical realism” in Latin America (167).

Like *Empire of Dreams* and *Yo-Yo Boing! United States of Banana* is also revolutionary in style and subject matter. In *United States of Banana* we meet an unlikely cast of disparate characters: Fidel, Artaud, Cockroach, Rubén Darío, Wishy-Washy, Puerto Rico, Hamlet, Giannina, Zarathustra, and Segismundo (a Latinxified Sigmund Freud?). As we travel from a dungeon beneath the Statue of Liberty (where Segismundo’s been held for one hundred years) across the Hispanophone archipelago, Braschi asks us to seesaw between individual and collective acts as shapers of history—including the 9/11 terrorist attacks and US imperialism. María Acosta Cruz identifies the work as a “good, old-fashioned independentista tirade” (162) that “uses an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink” approach to denunciate US global imperialism: from “Puerto Rico to Iran, Iraq, and the fall of the Twin Towers” (162). But, Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé sums up *United States of Banana* as a “political-poetic, anti-imperial book [that] does not seek to attain a new space of sovereignty from which to exert an alternative, progressive hegemony; instead, it attempts to imagine and foster . . . new forms of interaction, communication, and cooperation ‘from below,’ literally from below” (815). Indeed, Braschi’s decolonial experimental narratives clear space for readers to experience new positive and progressive forms of human relationality. Cruz-Malavé concludes that Braschi’s storyworlds forge networks of “camaraderie, compañerismo, and yes, love” (816). In *Precarious Crossings*, Alexandra Perisic contextualizes a “Declaration of Love” in *United States of Banana* as a “reinvention of the language of love” through a

political lens of “universal mourning” not of a “specific life but of the precariousness of life in general.(173)” Braschi dramatizes how “the immigrant condition, the dispossession of one’s roots, country, and family create the conditions of possibility for an ethics of mourning”(173). Imprisoned immigrants, second class citizens, and suspected terrorists from around the globe are imprisoned under Lady Liberty’s skirt, where they “share their breath and space, as they mourn together.(173)” In *Novelization in Decolonization, or Postcolonialism Reconsidered*, Peter Hitchcock observes how *United States of Banana* is “forthright in disabusing readers about how so called ‘Banana Republics’ come about and wonders aloud, from its title on, about the location and order of knowledge said to grow them (189)”. Hitchcock affirms Braschi’s clarity about the power of “cultural force” (189). Her namesake character Giannina demands that the republic open its doors to poets, philosophers, and lovers: “the powers of the world are shifting. Culture is becoming more relevant than politics. Cities more relevant than nations. Continents more relevant than nations. But continents less relevant than cities. Languages more relevant than nations. Languages are alive. Nations are dead (229).”

Without doubt, Braschi’s books challenge the constructs of society and the expectations of readers. They ask us to work for our pleasures—and displeasures. As with others who have come before and those creating today, there is a kind of gatekeeping when it comes to the teaching, studying, and dissemination of Braschi and other vanguardistas of color. With radically experimental artistry, the analytical optic has traditionally been focused on men: Joyce, Barth, Danielewski, Pynchon, among many others. And yet, assuredly, readers and scholars of today’s generation hunger for the kind of mind-, body-, and genre-bending work of a Braschi. And this happens in spite of the hunger for such writing. Torsa Ghosal (a former student of mine and now a professor) calls attention to this academic imbalance that skews to male authors who “feature women characters who are stalked, groped, and abused.” She identifies another arguably more destructive element to this trend, calling attention to how “white, male authors often perform their dissent by sustaining illusions of possessing or plundering language imagined as the female body.” Literary canons, classrooms, scholarly and mainstream writings at best don’t know what to do with vanguard authors such as Braschi who trouble the reading experience—at worst they deliberately shun such authors. (See Ghosal’s “How I Learned to Love Experimental Fiction as a Brown Girl by Seeking Out Books by Women of Color.”)

This isn’t to say that scholars, teachers, and even some mainstream reviewers haven’t turned their analytical optic to Braschi. They have.

Within months of *Asalto al tiempo*'s debut in 1981, major news outlets in Barcelona, Mallorca, San Juan, and Mexico City praised the young poet's originality and sensitivity. Juan Martínez Capó was among the first newspaper critics to review *Asalto al tiempo* and proclaimed it "one of the most illuminating documents in recent Puerto Rican poetry" (15). However, much of the academic exploration is only just burgeoning in our contemporary moment. For instance, in the 2013 published *¡Muy Pop!* (coauthored with Ilan Stavans), I identify Braschi as a Latinx creator propelled by this aspiration to establish a new aesthetic relationship with her readers; how she ceaselessly searches for the new; how she radically awakens readers to new ways of perceiving, feeling, and thinking about the world; how she creates new aesthetic objects that trigger new perceptual, emotional, and cognitive relations between the narrative and the reader, constantly fighting against our habituation (paraphrase 58–59). She has been doing this since the 1980s when many of, say, her ideal readers like myself were still to become professors—and those like Torsa Ghosal were still to be born. In this sense, I consider the long game of Braschi's work as itself creating its ideal readers. I consider her work in the 1980s and 1990s as anticipating a future ideal reader, who apprehends, understands, and emotes as a Ghosal or an Aldama. And we see more of these ideal readers in the flesh and blood today; they are the ones like Ghosal, like me, and like many others who relish an aesthetics of discomfort; in narrative fictions that challenge our gap-filling and puzzle-solving capacities in and across multiple languages, identities, and experiences. (See Aldama's "Chicana/o Literature's Multi-spatiotemporal Projections & Impacts"; or "Back to the Future.") Braschi creates works that project forward to a future where they will encounter readers like myself and others whose scholarly optic didn't exist at the time of her writing, say, *Yo-Yo Boing!* These are scholars who will not only get it but—in the words of the coeditor of this volume Tess O'Dwyer—are "savvy bilingual [readers] who can enjoy the novel hot off the shelf 'as is'" (35). For instance, today a critic like Kristian van Haesendonck doesn't stop at the doorstep of *Yo-Yo Boing!* declaring it unreadable. Rather, he considers it an extension and troubling of a theater of the absurd and postmodern fiction writ large in its quest to destabilize fixed notions of the self and world. (See van Haesendonck's "Enchantment or Fright?")

The first section in this volume, "Vanguard Forms and Latinx Sensibilities" brings together chapters that focus on Braschi's narratives, identities, and worldviews. This section opens with Madelena Gonzalez's essay "The Uncommon Wealth of Art: Poetic Progress as Resistance to the Commodification of Culture in *United States of Banana*," which

springboards off Jean Baudrillard's theory of the viral stage of capitalism in relation to Deleuze's theory on the societies of control. Gonzalez makes the case that Braschi's novel suggests "the utopian potential of the aesthetic as an ethical alternative to . . . the fabricated consensus of capitalism" and how art may be used as "a weapon of delegitimation of these ubiquitous structures of control and their universalizing tendencies." Next is John "Rio" Riofrio's chapter, "*Rompiendo esquemas: Catastrophic Bravery in United States of Banana.*" Rio formulates an analytical framework based on the concept of *romper esquemas* that enriches our understanding of not only how Braschi breaks with schemas in terms of aesthetics but how *United States of Banana* powerfully wakes us from our habituated states and repetitive cognitive and emotive patterns of acting in the world. Then comes Anne Ashbaugh's chapter, "Exile and Burial of Ontological Sameness: A Dialogue between Zarathustra and Giannina." Ashbaugh's analysis of the dialogue between author, character, and ancient prophet Zarathustra sheds new light on Braschi's articulation of autonomy and freedom in *United States of Banana* and reveals otherwise occluded aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy as formulated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Next is Francisco Moreno-Fernández's chapter, "*Yo-Yo Boing! Or Literature as a Translingual Practice.*" Here Moreno-Fernández uses the concept and practice of translanguaging as a way to enrich understanding of *Yo-Yo Boing!* The term "translanguaging" identifies how multilingual speakers fluidly exist at the nexus of the integration of different linguistic systems. Moreno-Fernández prefers this to identifiers such as "Spanglish" or "code-switching," which conceive of multilingual speakers' use of languages as still distinctively different. Rather, by identifying Braschi's use of translanguaging to shape *Yo-Yo Boing!* he explains how it ultimately creates the "liquid and translingual reality" experienced by Latinxs. We end the first section with Maritza Stanchich's chapter, "Bilingual Big Bang: Giannina Braschi's Trilogy Levels the Spanish-English Playing Field." Stanchich's comprehensive analysis of Braschi's unofficial trilogy—*El imperio de los sueños*, *Yo-Yo Boing!*, and *United States of Banana*—demonstrates how language informs genre and how Braschi deforms both to give shape to multilingual hemispheric American Latinx experiences. Stanchich finds inspiration in María Mercedes Carrión's brilliant analysis of the role of translation in *El imperio de los sueños* in "Geographies, (M) Other Tongues" (172). Although Braschi's aesthetics at once allude to European avant-gardes, her translingual linguistic deployments wrestle and forge parity with the "staggering legacies" that Spanish and English as colonial languages have left in their wake. For Stanchich, Braschi's interlingualism and translingualism clear a new borderland space

for trans-canonical locutions that counter Enlightenment grammars and canons along with their consequent exclusionary politics. Finally, Stanchich situates Braschi within the work of other Puerto Rican/Nuyorican writers such as Urayoán Noel, Edwin Torres, and Edgardo Vega who clear new space for hemispheric Latinx literary traditions as a “global poetics of dissent.”

The volume’s second section, “Persuasive Art of Dramatic Voices,” brings together chapters that focus on the different forms and locutions Braschi uses to move her audiences both emotively and cognitively. We open with the chapter “Giannina and Braschi: A Polyphony of Voices,” by Cristina Garrigós. Launching from a discussion of Jorge Luis Borges (specifically, “Borges and I”), Garrigós argues that Braschi’s self-reflexive and self-inscribed poetics necessitates that readers conflate author with narrative voice in all of her works. For Garrigós, Braschi writes and Giannina performs. Garrigós analyzes this in *Empire of Dreams*, where she determines the significance of the character Giannina’s playing the roles of Mariquita Samper, Berta Singerman, and Uriberto Eisensweig; in *Yo-Yo Boing!* she unpacks how the voices form an anonymous authorial chorus; and in *United States of Banana*, she determines how the dialogic interplay of the authorial with the narrative opens a space that gives voice to the “subalternity, invisibility, and silence of Puerto Rico—and of Latinos, in general.” In her chapter, “The Poetry of Giannina Braschi: Art and Magic in *Assault on Time*,” Laura R. Loustau analyzes the transformative power of Braschi’s first book of poetry *Asalto al tiempo* (1981). Loustau uses Merleau-Ponty to formulate a Braschian poetics that shows how Braschi creates a poet-artist/poet-reader dyad that at once pays homage to César Vallejo (specifically, *The Black Heralds* and *Trilce*) and radically innovates poetic forms to open us to new ways of physically sensing and acting in the world. In “The Human Barnyard: Rhetoric, Identification, and Symbolic Representation in *United States of Banana*,” Elizabeth Lowry explores how Braschi creates a complex life tableau to reconstruct the politically charged event of 9/11. Lowry uses a rhetorical studies analytic to demonstrate how Braschi’s cross-genre aesthetic persuades readers to step close to the discomfiting and ontologically different. For Lowry, Braschi “communicates the problematics of singular representation by resisting formal genre conventions, thus refusing to fix the very shape of her text.” This allows Braschi to deploy a tactic of “rhetorical listening” whereby multiple worldviews are presented and understanding is achieved across cultural and national differences. Then, in “Gamifying World Literature: Giannina Braschi’s *United States of Banana*,” Daniela Daniele analyzes how Braschi’s alchemical and vernacular *United States of Banana* gives shape to playful picaresque drama

formed in and between a Caribbean and mainland US Latinx experience. As “alien poet who carries the weight of a bookish tradition while walking with a light foot in the ruins of Ground Zero,” Braschi pushes the envelope on a European/United States–rooted avant-garde art-making tradition to breathe new life into representations of a post-traumatic 9/11 global scene. Daniele identifies how Braschi revamps video-game poetics and cartoonish, programmatic consistency to make for a critical gamification of the literary tradition that wakes us to the brutalities of US imperialism.

The final section of the volume, “Intermedial Poetics and Radical Thinking” brings together chapters that analyze how Braschi’s aesthetics reflect on and refract questions of existence. We open with “Leaping Off the Page: Giannina Braschi’s Intermedialities,” in which Dorian Lugo Bertrán analyzes the strategies Braschi deploys across hybridized genres (novel, short story, chronicle, essay, diary, theater, prose poetry), inter- and intra-textual referencing, and intermediality to move readers beyond the notion of in-betweenness. Bertrán points to adaptations by other artists of Braschi’s writings—into paintings, lithographs, video, theater, photography, sculpture, drawings (such as Joakim Lindengren’s graphic novel adaptation of *United States of Banana* published in Swedish in 2017). Bertrán points to instances of “sound in writing” that lead readers to a place akin to Nuyorican spoken word and slam poetry performances where image/word and the visual/performative create new ways of articulating a poet’s “inter-life.” In Ronald Mendoza-de Jesús’s chapter, “Free-dom: *United States of Banana* and the Limits of Sovereignty,” we see how Braschi shares common ground and worldviews with the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida. For Mendoza-de Jesús, the fact that Braschi and Derrida are exiles who live in and around the legacies of colonization leads to common expressions of unfixity and the concept of unconditionality; Mendoza-de Jesús defines the latter as “the absence of any internal or external constraints” that is often invoked “implicitly as a synonym of freedom, if not as its very essence.” Braschi and Derrida seek to have us “rethink unconditionality, and therefore freedom as such, . . . [so as] to dismantle the hegemonic political and juridical configurations that transform the force of unconditionality into the power of sovereignty, beginning with that political machine known as the sovereign self, who understands itself as a political entity by making its existence coincide with its ability to *possess itself*.” Finally, Mendoza-de Jesús identifies how both Braschi and Derrida leave readers at the displaced center of paradox, where “the liberation of freedom from freedom is the entrance into a space of doubt without end.” It is from this “unstable place” that Braschi and Derrida,

he states, “invite us to rethink what we mean by freedom, what we regard as a right, and what we understand by sovereign power.” We end this final section with “The Holy Trinity: Money, Power, and Success in *United States of Banana*.” Here Francisco José Ramos uses Herbert Marcuse, Guy Debord, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to scaffold a higher appreciation of the “specular game” that Braschi constructs in *United States of Banana*. In the society of the spectacle where we no longer have direct access to the experiential and authentic, Braschi creates “an open work of art” whereby theater morphs into philosophical essay into prose poem and operetta to dismantle capitalism and its neoliberalist tenets. Indeed, Braschi’s specular game—created out of the intermixture of the author, the character Giannina, and her theatrical voices—destabilizes fixed notions of subjectivity and a reality constructed out of spectacle. Braschi’s specular game also, he writes, functions “as political satire, a trenchant dramatization of Puerto Rico’s pathological dependence on the nation that invaded the island in 1898 and imposed US citizenship in 1917, which was consecrated in 1952 as a colonial experiment that has since served as a launching pad for America’s imperial proclivities.” Braschi’s dramatic texts resist categorization as either “Spanglish” or “post-modern literature.” For Ramos, Braschi takes literature to the “limit of its possibilities,” a writing practice “that is fully installed out in the open air, and its flight rises skyward, like the birds, those prodigious and free messengers of the void.” The volume concludes with Rolando Pérez’s interview with Giannina Braschi, conducted specifically for this endeavor. Here Pérez and Braschi take us on a journey through deep time that explores aesthetics, metaphysics, language, politics, and her buoyancy in life and poetry.

Braschi smuggles into a US imagination a sensibility created in and across a hemispheric American history, aesthetic, and culture. And she does so to create hard-hitting, no-holds-barred, mind-expanding story-worlds. She wakes us to the world in and across languages, ontologies, metafictional epistemologies. In closing, I would like to say how excited I am to be publishing Joakim Lindengren’s graphic novel adaptation of Giannina Braschi’s *United States of Banana* in English, with scholarly commentary by Amanda M. Smith and Amy Sheeran. This along with Braschi’s magisterial corpus will at once build on a planetary literary past and anticipate a reader today and tomorrow. I look forward to seeing, too, how new generations of multi- and translanguaging Latinx authors and comic book creators will be inspired to shape radically experimental fictions. I look forward to seeing what materializes from Braschi’s invitation for us to look into and beyond dreams of the self and to open to the limitless possibilities for transforming tomorrow’s selves in the world.

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