Albert Sergio Laguna, *Diversión: Play and Popular Culture in Cuban America (Post-millennial Pop)*. New York: NYU Press, 2017. xiii + 269 pp. (Paper US\$30.00)

Almost to a fault, analyses of contemporary Cuban and Cuban-American culture are colored by negative affect. Whether dissecting the Revolution's ups and downs or exiles' accusations of betrayal in response, passion and pathos—not mirth—are Cubanology's defining emotional registers. By contrast, Albert Laguna's much awaited study of humor and popular culture in the Cuban diaspora sets out to answer a question Cubanists should have asked long ago. Namely, how have Cubans remained so funny amidst all of the drama since 1959, and to what end?

In truth, the story Laguna tells is not about jokes alone, but a wider world of diasporic *diversión*—variably translated as “distraction,” “enjoyment,” or “fun.” Thus, if the book's first chapter introduces a legend of exile stand-up comedy like Guillermo Álvarez Guedes (most active in the 1970s and 1980s), subsequent chapters survey a more recent archive of “ludic sociability” (p. 5): radio sketches, a nostalgia-themed fair, Spanish-language TV variety shows, and even the online antics of a Miami Muppet. Such “lighter” sides of popular culture, Laguna shows, are central terrains on which the day-to-day contours of what it means to be Cuban in the diaspora are forged. Laguna thus revives an older tradition in Cuban letters dedicated to reflecting on revelry's meaning. But whereas authors like Jorge Mañach (*Indagación del Choteo*, 1928) saw an inherent Cuban lack of seriousness as a source of political failure, Laguna treats laughter as the nation's best cultural product—or perhaps its only salvation.

Still, attention to the positive contributions of humor does not mean ignoring the ways laughter channels problematic assumptions. Ludic culture, Laguna shows, has served both “as a mechanism for self-critique” (p. 19)—particularly of anticommunist political dogmas in Miami—and as a space in which a wide array of normative ideas are reproduced. Consistent mockeries of the Cuban revolutionary project are one predictable manifestation of this trend. But Laguna's argument excels in its attention to race (the construct of Cuban-American “whiteness”), gender, and sexuality (homophobic jokes) as constants in the diaspora's comedic repertoire. The combination makes for some confounding results: for example, “how [anti-black, specifically anti-African-American] racist jokes can be uttered right after a satirical skewing of Anglo discrimination [against Cubans] in South Florida” (p. 17), or how one of the few female comedians active on the Miami circuit today personifies the stereotype of the *chusma* (rude, materialistic woman), even as her punch lines attack prevailing gender norms.

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Importantly, Laguna also explores the ways comedic culture in the diaspora increasingly draws from, and radiates toward, the island. If the tight-knit fabric of the post-1959 Cuban exile enclave drew its strength from a sense of isolation from home, advances in digital technology (even in a still relatively unconnected country such as Cuba), coupled with the context of U.S.-Cuban normalization after 2014, have allowed a much greater degree of cross-fertilization. Havana-based comics do guest bits on Miami TV; viral videos from Cuban diaspora YouTube stars spread to the island via Facebook, or on portable hard drives. Laguna's emphasis on Miami-based players slightly undersells the degree to which island Cubans are also generating digital content. But he astutely reads the cultural and political balancing acts involved in courting transnational audiences, as well as the intracommunity generational fissures these moves reveal.

Like any good book, this study raises new questions. What is the relationship *between* comedy and the displacement typically associated with the Cuban migrant condition? Is *diversión* simply a cover up, literally a *diversion* from the exile's pain? Or do newer forms of digital play suggest that the latter weighs less today on the diaspora's cultural fabric overall? In another vein, what jokes did island-based comedians tell before appearing on Miami stages? What space did laughter—of the official and counterofficial variety—occupy under distinct periods of Cuban socialism? If a new generation of island-born comics is now achieving success in the diaspora, humor under the Revolution found ways to thrive. How? (One thinks of the quite opposite message in Carlos Puebla's famous revolutionary folksong from the 1960s. "*Se acabó la diversión*," says the refrain: "Fun time is over. The *Comandante* has arrived.")

The latter, undoubtedly, is a harder story to tell. But it remains pending, as are more carefully historicized studies of popular culture on the island. To this end, the transnational threads of Laguna's book provide provocative leads, while his talent for reading the complex out of the everyday can act as a methodological guide. Together these qualities make this study a must-read. Students of Latina/o and Latin America alike will find themselves thinking hard while laughing along.

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