

Bridging the Gaps in Cultural Memory: Carlos Gorostiza's *El puente*, and Gabriel Peveroni's *Sarajevo esquina Montevideo (El puente)*

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Bridges, at the most basic level, are what unite the diverse works of Carlos Gorostiza and Gabriel Peveroni in their most well-known plays, *El puente* and *Sarajevo esquina Montevideo (El puente)*. These two River Plate authors employ the image of the bridge with very similar aims by providing critical commentary on the socio-political elements that envelop the ensuing plots, and by extension the times in which these plays were written. Furthermore, the bridges that occupy the imaginations of the characters also function as metaphorical connectors, holding together plot, structure and message. Because the bridges are never really seen in either of the plays, the absent but present quality of these markers also reminds the actors and public alike of the metatheatrical and performative nature of history and behavior within the sphere of cultural memory. In both Gorostiza's and Peveroni's plays, this act of remembering occurs through repetition and restored behavior manifested throughout the dramatic action in dialogue, gestures and other staging devices.

The reiterative quality of these enacted behaviors will be observed through various lenses of performance theory. Specifically, in the case of Gorostiza's play, this analysis examines the doubling that occurs as part of the mimetic quality of theatre. Political reforms enacted in real life in Argentina will be examined as repeated behaviors, situations, and linguistic performances within Gorostiza's play. In contrast, in Peveroni's play one observes how and why collective memory is transmitted through ephemeral, embodied practices. Ritualized actions become the basis for repertoires of behavior handed down from generations across time and geographical divides as a way of preserving history and personal experiences. Though more than 50

years separate these two powerful plays, they share many of the same preoccupations with the politics of performance, most specifically the focus on social life and human behavior as embodied actions.¹

Gorostiza's *El puente* debuted in May of 1949, in Buenos Aires, Argentina to great acclaim and popular interest. This play marked Gorostiza's first big theatrical success and one he would not duplicate until 1958, with *El pan de locura*. *El puente* has since gone on to enjoy the status of being one of Argentina's canonical works in theatre. The play was translated into English in 1961 by Louis L. Curcio and appeared as the topic of a critical essay on Gorostiza in the 1976 landmark book *Dramatists in Revolt* by Leon Lyday and George Woodyard.² Gorostiza's play has also been anthologized in the well-known theatre series by Ediciones de la Flor. This important play centers on the story of two segments of society, the upper and lower classes, whose lives overlap in disturbing coincidences through the construction of a bridge in Buenos Aires. The two characters, who unite the town, Luis, the engineer, and Andresito, the young laborer, are never present during the play's action, nor is the bridge that they are building.³ When neither of the two returns home from a day of work, a series of complicated exchanges and conflicts take place between and among the two classes. The lower class is represented by Andresito's mother, his sister (Angélica), and a group of his friends, who spend their time hanging out on the street, playing soccer, doing odd jobs, and bothering the upper class tenants. The upper class is made up of Luis's wife (Elena), her father, and her brother (Rodolfo), and Elena's friend (Tere). The *panadero* moves in and out of these two groups, communicating with both as he sells his bread, thus symbolizing the underlying elemental similarities among all humans through their basic needs (bread as food) and the biblical references to the body of Christ (bread as the Eucharist). In this way, the *panadero* becomes, in essence, the first example of a bridge. The nature of the conflicts between these groups can be divided into two main themes: those surrounding money, and those surrounding generation gaps.

In *El puente* the greatest attention is given to the theme of wealth and the divisive nature of economic status as an anchor of the dramatic action. This theme also encompasses differences between the generations. The audience is first introduced to the group of young men, Andresito's friends, who loiter along the street in front of Luis's home in the morning, gossiping. Their discussion revolves around dating, whom and whether or not their friends have been able to wed, the main inhibitor to marrying being the lack of money.

The focus narrows to an encounter between Tilo and Angélica, which occurs during this discussion. Angélica rebuffs her boyfriend, Tilo, and his friends as she makes her way down the sidewalk. After some persistence, Tilo learns that Angélica is depressed over the economic ruin of her family and the future ruin that the young and poor Tilo represents. When Angélica's brother does not return from work with his wages, the family is unable to meet the deadline for paying their mounting debts, and fears that they will be arrested. Angélica exclaims to Tilo: "¡Ya estoy cansada de todo! ¡Estoy harta de vivir así!" To which Tilo responds: "Muchos viven peor," and Angélica argues: "Sí. Eso es lo que dice mamá. Pero también hay muchos que viven mejor. ¿O eso ustedes no lo piensan? Por ahí hay un montón de casas llenas de lujo. Con auto y qué sé yo...¿Vos tenés alguna? ¿Eh?" (Gorostiza 320-21). The economic disparity highlighted in the exchange between Tilo and Angélica is the leitmotif that characterizes the rest of the action.

This tension over money can also be seen in the conversations between Elena and her father. Although the father comes from the elite class, the public learns that he has managed to lose all that he had through gambling and other misadventures. Now, in midlife he lives under the roof of his son-in-law's house and receives allowances from Elena and Luis. Elena berates her father: "No es posible que además de haber derrochado todo lo que tenías, pierdas ahora jugando los pesos que...(titubea)," and her father responds: "(tranquilamente) Que me das" (Gorostiza 358). Elena continues to belittle him, explaining that they do not need his money, but rather that he should occupy his time with some kind of work: "No digo que ganes plata, total yo y Luis tenemos bastante, pero que ocupes tu tiempo..." When her father questions her claim to the money repeating "Yo y Luis," Elena responds: "Bien sabés que su dinero es mío" (Gorostiza 359). In spite of what Elena hopes to communicate, her dialogue with her father simply reinforces the arbitrary nature of her power. Class becomes a result of circumstantial power associated with wealth, which can be disposed of, lost or gained by chance. Elena is a part of the upper class only because of her association with Luis, the wealthy professional engineer. Her father, though he once had power, is now at Elena's mercy because he has lost money, and therefore his claim to superiority.

The final example involves the interaction between Andresito's mother and Elena. When Andresito fails to return home, his mother decides to pay Elena a visit. Asking after her son, the mother is confronted by a haughty Elena, intent on reducing the mother's dignity, just as she has done

with her own father. Unknown to the mother, Andresito's friends are rummaging through their own pockets to find the money, which Angélica will grudgingly accept, only after she realizes that it is not charity, but rather a social pact between the have-nots which allows them to survive. When the mother learns that Elena does not know about Luis's whereabouts, she worriedly begs for an advance on Andresito's pay. Elena snaps:

Vea. Tengo por costumbre no dar limosnas ni prestar plata. Para mí, las dos cosas tienen igual significado. En este mundo todos tienen la misma oportunidad. El que no la sabe aprovechar, allá él. Nosotros no tenemos por qué después ir salvándolos de los apuros. Mejor es darles una lección. (Gorostiza 401)

Though the mother tries to explain that they all work and try to save, the salaries they receive just do not go far enough to cover their expenses. However, unwilling to accept this explanation, Elena continues to escalate the discussion into a violent argument, promising to fire Andresito because of his mother's so-called impertinence. The moment of climax arrives when Elena's father returns home after a visit to the bridge, gives the money to the mother and divulges the unhappy ending: the deaths of both Luis and Andresito from an accident on the bridge. The decisive moment of action (the deaths of the two men) is shrouded in a discourse of wealth and the distribution of power. Gorostiza further complicates this exchange when the bodies are delivered to the homes, and members of the audience learn through Elena's hysterical reaction that the ambulance workers have mistakenly switched the bodies, delivering Andresito's body to the engineer's house, and Luis's body to the laborer's house.

This discussion of power is of extreme importance within the play because it functions as the motor for the dramatic action. However, this same discourse of power becomes a "restored behavior," to borrow from Richard Schechner's terminology, if seen in the light of historical context. This historical context can be observed in the structure of the play, which reinforces the system of dualities that characterize the socio-political context of late 1940's Argentina. In this manner, cultural memory, here understood as historical discourse, becomes solidified through the repetition of behaviors taken from real life and performed on the stage, thereby entering into collective consciousness.

Schechner defines restored behavior as, "Physical or verbal actions that are not-for-the-first time, prepared, or rehearsed. A person may not be

aware that she is performing a strip of restored behavior. Also referred to as “twice-behaved behavior” (22). Schechner goes on to explain:

Restored behavior is a living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behavior can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the causal systems (personal, social, political, technological, etc.) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. The original “truth” or “source” of the behavior may not be known, or may be lost, ignored or contradicted – even while that truth or source is being honored. (28)

Restored behavior, understood in this way, then, is an important element in every mode of performance, whether it be in everyday life, in healing, in ritual, in play, or in the arts (Schechner 28). Diana Taylor sees Schechner’s theory of performance as a means for transferring or transmitting social knowledge and memory through iterative behaviors, and acknowledges the divide between performances that are bracketed off from other behaviors and understood as discrete “performances” and those which are simply part of daily life (3). However, Taylor also informs the reader of the increasing use of “lo performático” (the performatic) as an expanded definition of performance in its broadest sense (12). As such, the performatic encompasses the set of behaviors known as embodied or corporeal that appear in social life (Taylor 12-13). The performatic is, as a result, a term that approaches the divide between the mimetic qualities of the staged lives in the play and those that exist on the greater stage of Argentina. Though the lives in Gorostiza’s play are “bracketed off” for analysis both in the theatre piece and in this study, their relevance to and reflection of everyday life cannot be overlooked. This overlapping between the isolated performance on the stage and greater performatic quality that it embodies had implications in the political landscape during the premiere of Gorostiza’s play in 1949, because of the focus on the distribution of wealth and power.

Judith Butler’s more narrow definition of the doubled performance is particularly helpful in understanding the leap between the stage and the political realm, emphasizing a linguistic approach through interpellation. For Butler:

The performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the most powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part

not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated. (160)

Butler uses speech acts as the basis for the performative, noting that the appropriation of staid authoritative speech in new, different, and non-ordinary performative contexts grants it the possibility of assuming an insurrectionary quality (160).⁴ The speech acts that Gorostiza's play highlights find their double in Argentina's political atmosphere, and in the reinscription of political debates from the year 1918 into the context of 1949. Butler's theory of the performative's ritualized practice finds its reflection in the metatheatrical world of *El puente*, and the contested and reformulated world of Peronist politics.

Argentina embarked on a path in 1946 that would change the course of its political life for the rest of the twentieth century. Juan Domingo Perón was elected president and began to reshape the structure of the nation. Intent on nationalizing industries in the country, Perón set out to abolish all remaining imperial and colonial ties in sectors such as the railroad and the electric companies with the 1947 "Act of Economic Independence" (Hodges 28). This act also established many new state owned companies. In 1947, he built strong ties with the *descamisados* or shirtless ones, through his wife Evita's extensive charitable contributions with the Foundation of Social Aid.⁵ Incidentally, Evita was also responsible for the inclusion of women's suffrage as a plank in the Peronist Party during this same year. The final component of his reform was through labor channels. Perón's government raised fringe benefits, increased paid legal holidays, provided accident and health insurance for most workers, initiated a social security program and gave important positions within the government to workers (Hodges 30-31). These radical changes threatened the oligarchy's traditional power, and began to redistribute the wealth once enjoyed by only a few to the millions who had gone without for so long. In this way, the traditional class divisions in Argentina began to crumble. With the labor reforms in place, the arrival of the *cabecitas negras* (dark-haired ones) seeking employment and social services also changed the physical identity of the city, thereby creating a new bridge between the indigenous provinces and the Europeanized capital.

Gorostiza keenly highlights these performances, as they are enacted on the national political stage, and restores them as strips of behavior collected and redesigned for the small stage. Gorostiza's play is divided into two

acts, both of which are comprised of two movements. The play's action also takes place in two locations: the street and the interior of the engineer's house. The first movement of each act revolves around the characters that share Andresito's world: his friends, his mother, and his sister. These movements take place in the street outside the wealthy homes. The second movements pertain to the engineer's world. These include Luis's wife, her father, her brother and her friend. All of these interactions take place within the luxurious space of the home. As has been noted, the first act sets up the discourse of wealth as the main theme. This can be seen in the discussions of Andresito's friends, the weddings, and the disagreement between Angélica and Tilo, as well as the arguments between Elena and her father over monetary matters.

The second act deals with the redistribution of money. In the case of Andresito's friends, this reapportionment of funds comes through collaboration among the group, wherein each contributes what he can to the collection. In the second movement the funds are again circulated when Elena's father gives the 100 pesos to Andresito's mother. In both examples, money is disseminated to those in need. This dispensing of money to the needy functions as a restored behavior on two levels. First, within the structure of the play the double quality of this performance can be seen at the level of metatheatre in which one movement mimics the actions of the other. However, at another level this behavior becomes twice-performed when taken in the context of the changing national scene under the emerging politics of *Justicialismo* designed by the Peróns in the roles of benevolent rulers. At yet another level, the division into doubles through mimesis becomes a referent for the pervasive dichotomies that characterize Argentina: oligarchy/workers, provinces/Buenos Aires, civilization/barbarity, creoles/immigrants, colonial/post-colonial, Peronist/anti-Peronist, and "subversive"/non-subversive, among others. In this way, cultural memory is performed on several levels: textually, metatextually and through embodied actions.

The title *El puente*, or the bridge, is at once confusing and appropriate. On the one hand, it confounds because at the textual level both the structure and the themes of the plays, as we have seen, tend to emphasize divisions instead of connections. However, beyond the text, the cultural content inherent in the stylized repetitions of behavior harks back to government and social conventions that characterize Argentina's development, thus linking the past and the present. Likewise, the architectural structure of the bridge is the point of contact between the two classes through the design and

labor provided by Luis and Andresito. In this way, the absent but present quality of the bridge, as well as that of the two characters throughout the play, lends a liminal quality to the theme of transition for which the bridge stands, and which the political arena of Argentina is constantly repeating. Though Luis and Andresito are formally considered the points of contact between the two classes through their work on the bridge and the exchange of their bodies during the resolution of the play, it is also clear that Gorostiza intends the audience to see Elena's father and Andresito's mother, as the union bridging the gap between the past and the present, between the upper and lower classes and as the symbolic heads of the Argentine family and its story. Through the comments of the father and the mother, Gorostiza uses these characters to provide a look at the interlocking elements of political thought, which at once unite and divide Argentina's history and population beyond the context of the 1940s, building yet another bridge.⁶

These parental figures are of particular importance for their symbolism and for their political commentary. In the mother, the voice of the collective *pueblo* can be heard begging for some assistance. In the father, the nexus with the past becomes apparent:

Vea. Antes las clases sociales eran dos. Aquí estaban los de arriba y aquí estaban los de abajo. Ahora no. Ahora todo está más entreverado. Ahora hay una escalera.... Cada uno tiene un escalón. Unos están abajo de todo y otros arriba, pero hay un montón de escalones llenos de gente. Y todos luchan por subir y por no bajar....
(Gorostiza 351)

The father delineates for his daughter and her friend the changing perspectives, and the growing middle class that result from the Peronist reforms. His imagery of a staircase dovetails perfectly with the concept of transition and linkage that the bridge provides structurally and metaphorically in the play. The father further connects the present moment of transition with another epoch in Argentine history when he mentions his own father and the year 1918. He recounts: "¡Ah, cómo lo atormentó en el dieciocho la idea de una revolución mundial! Ya se veía despojado de todos sus bienes y pidiendo limosna en la vía pública. La solución: ¡alarmas en puertas y ventanas...! ¡Cómo temblaría y se estremecería con las cosquillas de los de abajo!" (Gorostiza 361). Not only does the year 1918 mark the end to the first World War and the great upheavals that this signaled in international relations with the redistribution of power and national boundaries (following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the previous year), but it also marks the

period in Argentina when Hipólito Yrigoyen controlled the government as president.

Under Yrigoyen's first presidency, which lasted from 1916 through re-elections in 1918 and into the 1920 term ending in 1922, Argentina was the site of clashing political changes and populism. Yrigoyen's reforms, like those of Perón's presidency, centered on labor issues: the establishment of a minimum salary or the determination of a maximum number of hours for work-day shifts, paid vacations and workers' insurance. As Nelson Martínez-Díaz explains it: "Nuevos grupos sociales, capas medias procedentes de familias de inmigrantes, o de criollos hasta entonces marginados del poder, estaban desplazando del marco político a la clase rural tradicional. Eran aquellos a los que la oligarquía denominó despectivamente *la chusma*" (64). Those that followed Yrigoyen, mainly from the growing middle class and lower classes, wanted to participate in the decisions concerning modernization and its benefits (Martínez-Díaz 64). In just over 20 years, this same struggle for participation and the transition from a two-class society would reach its apex during the Perón administration.

In this manner, the father in Gorostiza's *El puente* reminds members of the public of the repetitive performance that Perón undertook in office, and which becomes the basis for the restored, or performatic behavior, of the characters in the play. The cultural string of political behaviors then conforms with Schechner's definition of "not-for-the-first time prepared or rehearsed physical or verbal actions." The similarities between the circumstances of Gorostiza's characters, the Peronist era and the unrest of the Yrigoyen government demonstrate the transition the country would struggle to solidify throughout the twentieth century: from colonial ties to modernization, from oligarchy to democracy, and from a two-class society to a growing middle class. These transformations, as we have seen, take shape in the family, in the homes and on the streets of Buenos Aires in Gorostiza's play, as the performatic suggests. The ritualized performance of the repetition of the grandfather's words in the mouth of the father make explicit the possibility of using "authoritative" speech out of its historical context in order to prompt what Butler sees as "counter-hegemonic" actions (160). In Argentina, this dismantling of the institutions of power can be observed in the rhetoric and actions of the Peronist government and its politics of *justicialismo*, also seen as a reinscription of Yrigoyen's platforms. Through repetition and embodied performances, Argentina's experiences become part of the national repertoire of behaviors and cultural memory.

In the artistic realm, the play itself also enacts a struggle for power that mirrors the themes it stages as spectacle. As both Luis Ordaz and Osvaldo Pellettieri have documented, *El puente* was the play that revitalized the independent theatre movement in Argentina. In 1943, during Perón's rise to power the independent theatres (Teatro Independiente, Juan B. Justo and La Máscara) suffered serious blows as they were ousted from their locations by the government in an attempt to censure and control the cultural diffusion of ideas (Pellettieri 91). The production of *El puente* in 1949 served to invigorate the independent theatre movement because of its success and "new" approach. Gorostiza returned to the ideals of the original Teatro del Pueblo, with the use of colloquial language and specifically Argentine themes and contexts, instead of the neutral language and Europeanized themes of the commercial theatre. Gorostiza's play *El puente* itself relied on a restoration of a style in much the same way that the characters and the political actors had done. In this way, *El puente* becomes its own bridge to understanding Argentine drama and political-social behavior in the country.

Similarly, Peveroni's play *Sarajevo esquina Montevideo (El puente)* demonstrates an embodiment of past situations and invokes the struggles for power as they are seen in several contexts, while engaging the audience in a decidedly more complex structure and message. *Sarajevo esquina Montevideo (El puente)* debuted in Montevideo in April 2003 in the Teatro Puerto Luna. The play has been published by Ediciones Trenes y Lunas in Montevideo (2003) and by Casa de América in Madrid, in the volume Premio Dramaturgia Innovadora (2003), as part of the contest in which *Sarajevo esquina Montevideo (El puente)* was a finalist.⁷ Peveroni's play also received a mention in the Premio de Dramaturgia del MEC (2002),⁸ and was nominated in several categories for prizes at the 2003 Florencios in Uruguay, where it received an award for its leading male actor, Iván Solarich. As Peveroni indicates in the introductory note at the beginning of the play:

El puente fue concebido en sus orígenes como un unipersonal que relataba las últimas horas de Bora Parzic, un matemático croata internado en un psiquiátrico de Sarajevo en los días del sitio serbio a la capital bosnia. Bora estaba obsesionado con los puentes. Y el actor que lo interpreta no saldrá ileso de entrar en el personaje. Uno a uno ingresan todos los fantasmas – del personaje y también del actor – que delinean diferentes historias paralelas, lazos que unen la desesperación en una ciudad sitiada con la búsqueda de identidad de descendientes de inmigrantes yugoslavos en Montevideo. Uno a uno,

esos fantasmas se transforman en personajes que cobran vida en el escenario.... (4)

Peveoni's description highlights one of the main arguments of this essay by pointing to the parallel histories that are united through the embodied actions of the Actor/Bora. The remembering that occurs through this repetition and bridging of differences functions in much the same way as Gorostiza's techniques did in his *El Puente*.

To better understand the more complicated form that Peveoni employs in *Sarajevo esquina Montevideo (El puente)*, one must turn to Taylor's latest book, titled *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003). Taylor perspicaciously identifies two forms of transmission of collective memory, which determine what, how, and why things are remembered, and connects these elements back to the study of performance and power. In her theory, the notions of "archive" and "repertoire" are key aspects in understanding this type of cultural recollection. Taylor defines the archive as the gathering of "supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)" and the "so-called ephemeral repertoire [as] embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)," noting that in many cases these two concepts work together (19). Taylor correctly points out that while the contents of the archives do not change, their relevance, value and meaning frequently do with time (19). She also goes on to explain that the repertoire is often mistakenly thought to contain non-reproducible knowledge because of the prominence of written and tangible objects in Western thought (20). Taylor argues that performance and performance studies allow the investigation of the repertoire finally to be taken seriously as a method of knowing and transmitting this knowledge (26). Seen in this light, art and social situations can now be brought into the same realm of study. Taylor maintains:

Performances, even those with almost purely aesthetic pretensions, move in all sorts of circuits, including national and transnational spaces and economies. Every performance enacts a theory, and every theory performs in the public sphere. Because of its interdisciplinary character, performance studies can bring disciplines that had previously been kept separate into direct contact with each other and with their historical, intellectual, and sociopolitical context. (27)

In other words, Taylor's analysis offers theatre practitioners, critics and scholars alike the opportunity to expand connections among historical periods, disciplines, ideologies and other once-separate elements of culture.

Taylor's theory has great relevance when applied to Peveroni's work, because of its many layers of history, as well as ritualized gestures that work in tandem to exemplify the difference between the archive and the repertoire. Peveroni consistently plays with this idea of remembering and the transmission of cultural knowledge through the ages. In fact, the theme of the play is, at its most simple level, memory. Peveroni reinforces this thematic quality with his dedication of the play to the memory of civil victims in all cities under siege (2). The symbolic nature of the bridge is again crucial for its connective properties as it was in Gorostiza's work, and Peveroni uses it as a way of connecting different time periods, different cultures, and different ways of what it means to behave identity through remembered actions.

Unlike Gorostiza's *El puente*, Peveroni's play is not divided into acts and movements, but rather is comprised of five short scenes titled: "Entrada," "La construcción," "Espejos," "El baile" and "La destrucción." The longest scene titled "Espejos" forms the axis of the play including dialogue with all of the characters engaging in separate conversations within their own spheres. The exchanges in the play can be grouped into several categories: Bora and the Doctora in the ward, the two young lovers Lejla (a Muslim) and Gligoric (a Serbian), the Actor and Bora, the Actor and his mother, Bora and Sandra (a young orphan in the ward), and the Camarógrafo, who speaks alone, but is embedded within the various scenes sometimes interacting with other characters as a war reporter. The scenes vacillate without any regular order between the 1991-95 War in Yugoslavia seen in the psychiatric ward in Sarajevo, and the contemporary scenes in Montevideo, in which the Actor represents Bora and converses with his mother. A characteristic of the Actor who represents Bora in the playscript is that he is to be of Yugoslavian descent, and coincidentally this was also true of the actor who played Actor/Bora in the version that was staged in Montevideo in 2003. The more complicated structure in Peveroni's play correlates with the nature of the conflicts presented. Whereas Gorostiza's sought to dramatize the conflicts between past and present, between the rich and the poor and between the political conservatives and the radicals in the form of binary opposition, Peveroni's play tackles the more controverted politics of Yugoslavia, between Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Bosnians and Macedonians, between Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims and between the European powers, as well as the questions of identity for those residing in the region, and for those that have escaped. Identity in Peveroni's play is not as easily defined or categorized as it was in Gorostiza's play.

The year 1918 is just as crucial in Peveroni's play as it was in Gorostiza's for the historical script that it confers as a legacy in the present because it marks the end of the First World War and the creation of the Yugoslavian nation state. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, and the weakening of the German and Russian Empires led to great upheaval, and a new map of Europe emerged, in which lines were reconfigured, and rivalries intensified. This was particularly the case in Yugoslavia, where Serbs, as the majority preferred a centralized government, which promoted Serbian ideals and Orthodox religion, thus marginalizing the Croats, the Slovenes and Bosnian Muslims who hoped for a federal arrangement (Rogel 8). With the fall of Yugoslavia in the Second World War, the political rifts only intensified. The two main divisions of resistance were between Colonel Draza Mihailovic and his followers called Chetniks, and Tito (Josip Broz) and his communists. Mihailovic (a Serb), fought for the reestablishment of the prewar regime, and Tito (half Croat, half Slovene), a communist trained in the Soviet Union, fought for a federation of nations, communism, and the elimination of the Serb-dominated monarchy (Rogel 11). With the collapse in 1991 of Tito's government as a result of the fall of communism, all of these tensions came to a head once again, when on June 25, 1991, Slovenia and Croatia announced their independence in response to Slobodan Milosevic's grab for Serbian power, thus sparking the war between these different factions in the region.⁹

The memory of these divisions of identity and nationality is recuperated in Peveroni's play through the repertoire of behaviors enacted by the characters, and especially through the gestures of Bora and the Actor. Peveroni plays with the notion of official history as it might be recorded in archival materials by highlighting the repetition of personal history through embodied actions (the repertoire) of Bora, the Actor and the other characters. In this manner, the public is able to see and hear the voices which were lost or silenced through a reenactment on the stage, and the metatheatrical performances of the Actor. Peveroni's accounting of the conflict allows members of the audience to draw parallels between the slippery notion of identity in a post-Communist, globalized world of transnational politics and the situation of a family of Yugoslavian immigrants, residing in Montevideo, who are hammering out the definition of what it means to be Yugoslavian and Uruguayan at the same time.

The first instance in the play of the reiteration of social behavior that Taylor alludes to in her study can be seen, or rather heard, in the opening

“Entrada.” In this scene, spectators file in and are filmed by the cameraman. They hear in the background gunfire, and once they are seated, bits of disparate dialogue can be heard: Bora explaining how there is only one way to cross the river, an amorous exchange between Lejla and Gligoric, and one between Bora and his doctor, in which she asks him: “¿Así se hacen los puentes, Bora?” and he responds, “Así cruzando sangre cristiana con sangre musulmana” (Peveroni 5). These bits of dialogue, which exist as memory in 2003, are enacted later in the play by actors representing Bora and the others, who in turn represent the many caught up in the civil conflict in Bosnia. In this way, the pieces of dialogue become metatheatrical in that they highlight the role-playing inherent in theatre. More importantly, they become part of the repertoire demonstrating how that which is supposedly ephemeral, to use Taylor’s word, is transmitted through embodied actions when it is taken up by the actors who appear on stage later in the play repeating these same words. The image of the bridge and the crossing of the two bloods (Christian and Muslim) in Bora’s and the doctor’s exchange, as well as the romance between the young Serbian and Muslim lovers become the referents for years of conflict and the mingling of the many ethnic, political and religious groups in Sarajevo and the greater region.

The image of the bridge within the play is also a site for the struggle of identity and the manifestation of acts that pertain to the repertoire. In the second scene titled “La construcción” Bora/the Actor explains the importance of this symbol while physically manipulating wooden pieces into the likeness of a bridge on stage. Bora repeats, through this scene and the entire play, the line “Hay una sola forma de cruzar este río...” and in the course of this scene we learn that he is referring to the bridge constructed over the river Drina. The Drina separates what is now Serbia from Bosnia and runs down the center of what was once Yugoslavia. This river, Bora explains, marked the sad journey that Christian families had to make as part of the “tributo de sangre,” in which a number of children between the ages of ten and fifteen years were to be converted into Islamic followers during the sixteenth century. The mothers followed their children until they could no longer cross the river into the ruling Turk territory. One of the children, Mehmed-Pachá Sokoli, rose to power in the sultan’s court and ordered the first bridge be built so that he could find his real mother again. However, the Christians, led by Radislav, feared that the Turks were only building the bridge so that armies could come after them. In the end, as Bora explains, Radislav

was captured and tortured to death, mounted alive on a stake and left to die. That, Bora exclaims, is how the first “maldito puente” was born.

This history is first enacted by the Actor, as he plays Bora; however, he also slides into and out of character, telling his own story of a bridge. In the Actor’s story, he remembers how his grandfather recounted Tito’s escape over a bridge to safety during the Second World War, and how his grandfather outwitted the police by swimming through the river where no bridge existed to the other side and escaped. The Actor finally explains that these are the same stories he heard from the refugees who arrived in Montevideo and settled into the neighborhood that is named the Cerro, and which is populated by Yugoslavian immigrants. Through the character Bora, and the retelling of these tales by the Actor, the memories of the conflict are performed and thus transmitted to the audience. These non-privileged sources of oral accountings of history are staged through the use of scenarios. Taylor defines a scenario as a “‘Sketch or outline of the plot of a play, giving particulars of the scenes, situations, etc.’ like performance, [it] means never for the first time” (28). These scenarios of conflict on bridges metaphorically represent the war in Bosnia, and the inner turmoil of the young Actor who struggles to understand the distant history of his family, when he knows only the world of Montevideo. In the second scene, the Actor breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience, explaining how he read Bora’s diary and learned of the gruesome deaths of the patients: the decapitation of Lejla, and the subsequent bombing of the psychiatric ward. This information (the scenario) is later revealed in the subsequent scenes by the performances of the other characters on stage who enact these events. The Actor is only able to access his ethnic past by embodying Bora, and participating in the very play the audience is viewing, and the history it is also retrieving. In this way, the purpose of the scene “La construcción” is to set up the multi-layered performances, which allow oral, personal, and eye-witness accounts of history to enter into historical discourse through the imitation of other individuals and cultural behaviors. This transmission of knowledge through live acts, received by live individuals, constitutes another channel for preserving history, and thus presents a challenge to established forms of power and official ideology.

The bridge is also figurative in the emotional sense in Peveroni’s play, connecting the Actor and his mother. The Actor explains that, unlike Bora, he is unable to confront his pain; the pain of being a child and seeing his grandfather killed by the military for his association with a political party

during the recent dictatorship in Uruguay during the 1970s and early 1980s. The Actor muses:

el puente... el puente... el puente de siempre... estaba ahí... separando el dolor de mi familia... debía cruzar el puente y decirle a mi madre lo que había pasado... pero me quedé allí llorando hasta que se hizo de día... Ahí me quedé dormido... Y nunca le dije nada... Nunca te dije que había visto morir al abuelo. (Peveroni 16)

The Actor in the final line addresses his mother, who is presumably in the imagined audience watching her son perform as Bora, but who also represents the families of all those who lost someone in military conflict, and as such is a stand-in for the national audience in Uruguay. Here, the Actor points out how, through the embodiment of Bora and the conflict in Bosnia, he has come to relive his own past, and that of his country. Bora says for the final time, “Había una sola forma de cruzar este río,” and the Actor replies, “Había una sola forma y ya llegué hasta aquí y no entiendo qué pasa conmigo” (Peveroni 16). This declaration by Bora and response by the Actor who plays him demonstrates the transfer of memory and identity from one to the other, from past to present and from region to region.

The final bridge appears in the actions of the camarógrafo, who films the audience during the opening scene, “Entrada,” and the scene entitled “Espejos.” His other task in the play is the filming of the destruction of one of the bridges during the Balkan conflict for the televised news reports. During the filming of the audience, the footage is broadcast live, and at times manipulated, onto monitors on stage. This conflation of reality, performance and news speaks to the pervasiveness of media in the modern world. The technology, which allows one to be ever present, yet absent in all parts of the modern, globalized world through live television and news media is part of the breakdown of cultural unity. The Actor remarks on Bora’s concept of bridges in a conversation he has with his mother:

Sí, los puentes que unen y separan a los pueblos. Pero no es tan sencillo tampoco. El ama y odia los puentes. Tiene una teoría sobre la “esencialidad de los muros en las culturas modernas.” Para él, las personas, los grupos, las sociedades, los pueblos y las naciones deberían estar separados por altos e infranqueables muros... lo concibió como parte de una nostalgia por la caída del Muro de Berlín. (Peveroni 11)

This discussion that the Actor has with his mother is encapsulated by the comments of the camarógrafo as he waits in a neighborhood in Sarajevo to

film the bombing of an ancient bridge by the Bosnians to prevent the Serbs from crossing. Consequently, the Bosnian conflict for power and identity becomes displaced onto the modern Post-Cold War stage, in which almost unlimited contact between different parts of the world threatens cultural heritage at the same time that it bonds diverse regions of the globe together in communities like the European Union, NAFTA and the United Nations, as well as other less formalized associations. Peveroni's characters suggest that the bridges built between modern cultures destroy as much as they unite, making identity and the struggle for power as relevant as it was in the sixteenth century between the Muslims and the Christians, in 1918 after World War I, during the Second World War and finally in the 1991 Bosnian conflict.

Through performance, both Gorostiza's and Peveroni's plays examine the politics of remembering and the transmission of knowledge in embodied actions. In both *El puente* and *Sarajevo esquina Montevideo (El puente)* the use of metaphorical bridges joins diverse groups, time periods and messages reminding audiences of the absent but present nature of cultural behavior and memory. Both Gorostiza and Peveroni capitalize on this important icon of remembering in their works in order to bridge the gap in understanding history, politics and social conventions in the River Plate and beyond.

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Notes

¹ Both works share a similarity in terms of production as well. *El puente*, like *Sarajevo...* debuted in an independent theatre, La Máscara (Buenos Aires, Argentina), whereas the more recent *Sarajevo* was staged in Puertoluna (Montevideo, Uruguay). Each of these works reflects the techniques in vogue at the time the performances were given. In the case of *El puente*, Gorostiza's staging utilized the "postwar Italian cinematic technique of 'neorealism'" (Cortés and Barrea-Marlys 5). As a result, the production reproduced the realistic settings of mid-century Buenos Aires neighborhood, its homes, and occupants. On the contrary, Peveroni's play offered a postmodern aesthetic which included an unusual staging that imagines several different "worlds":

Detrás de los alambrados de púas que se elevan a ambos lados de la escena y la encierran en un estrecho corredor-puente rodeado de escombros, se encuentra el público. El único personaje que se mueve "fuera" de este espacio, es decir, entre el público y los alambrados, es un camarógrafo...inspirado en el periodista gráfico de *Territorio Comanche*, la novela autobiográfica de Arturo Pérez-Reverte..." (Masci qtd. in Ruegger).

Peveconi's director, María Dodera, also included original music by Exilio Psíquico throughout the play (Masci qtd. in Ruegger). Lucía Masci reminds the reader of her review that the original production imagined a more elaborate "combinación del lenguaje audiovisual y el teatral" with a projection of slides at the end to convey the violence of the death of one of the characters, Lejla, at the hands of the Serbs, but for economic reasons this staging was not fully realized.

² The essay "The Theatre of Carlos Gorostiza" was written by Merlin H. Forster, pp. 110-19.

³ The body of Andresito is seen at the end of the play.

⁴ For Butler, language precedes and exceeds the subject, because that subject has its "existence" in language, whose historicity includes a past and future that exceeds that of the subject who speaks (28).

⁵ Evita was able to raise these enormous funds through the obligatory extraction of two day's pay from each worker's salary. Workers paid and owners gave extensive contributions fearing that a refusal would bring about reprisals from the Peróns.

⁶ As Luis Ordaz notes: "La acción de la obra transcurre 'en Buenos Aires, alrededor de 1947' y esto merece ser recordado. Se están realizando experiencias políticas que persiguen el entendimiento de clases sociales que, desde el fondo de la historia, aparecen en pugna y enfrentadas" (26).

⁷ Peveconi will publish his second theatrical work in 2004, titled *Tribus Urbanas*, which has already been contracted for staging and will be directed by María Dodera.

⁸ MEC (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura)

⁹ For a more detailed account see Rogel, Carol. *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and the War in Bosnia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998.

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