Digitally-Delivered Mexican Theatre during the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020

Timothy G. Compton

Covid 19's appearance in March 2020 closed theatre stages all over the world, including those in Mexico. Countless projects shut down, some after long runs, while others were forced to close after months of rehearsals or precious few performances. Only time will tell which projects will revive. However, no project will be the same, and many will simply never see the stage. August 27 marked the re-opening of theaters in Mexico, albeit with severely limited numbers of spectators, and with strict sanitary rules for spectators, actors, and all involved in the return of in-person theatre. One notable early in-person performance venue consisted of a large stage where spectators witnessed plays (as well as concerts and other events) from their cars, in a sort of drive-in arrangement.

Despite the impossibility of in-person theatre performances during the lockdown, Covid could not stop the creative juices of Mexico's *teatreros*. Some turned to digital delivery of performance art, although this new genre has generated some controversy. Purists say that performing a play without spectators present or seeing a play without being present creates something other than theatre. Others disagree. In a podcast interview, Alberto Lomnitz, who co-authored the "Manifiesto por un Arte Vivo Digital" with María Sánchez Portillo, stated that they purposely avoided the words *teatro* and *teatral*. Instead, their manifesto emphasized new possibilities.[1] "Las creadoras y creadores de la práctica escénica encontramos en el Arte Vivo Digital un medio más para el desarrollo y ejercicio de nuestra creatividad . . . se abren nuevas posibilidades de interactuar de manera íntima con las y los espectadores . . . somos conscientes de que en la práctica artística todo es efervescencia, mutación, adaptabilidad, vida . . . Queremos construir una puerta de entrada a mundos posibles."[2] This manifesto emphasizes live

digital events, which I will call theatre, despite the controversy. I concede that watching one of these events through a computer screen is clearly different from seeing a play in a theater, but the very best of each seems much superior to the mediocre or poor of the other.

Before I survey some of the most compelling digital performances I have seen from June through December 2020, I offer some general observations about the logistics and pros and cons of the genre from my perspective as a spectator. First of all, since theaters were closed or severely limited and international travel was ill-advised during the pandemic, virtual theatre offered a lifeline to those who seek continued access to Mexico's theatre world, and without the hassles and expenses of travel — no hotel costs, no ubers or subway rides, no air or noise pollution, no security concerns, etc. How miraculous to see live performances by world-class actors directed by some of the cream of Mexico's directing cream, and from the comfort of my own home! Depending on where spectators live or stay in Mexico City, and the location of the desired theaters, to see in-person plays they can easily spend hours in transportation alone. Clearly, geography limits the reach of traditional plays. By contrast, virtual theatre extends world-wide, internet (and credit card companies) willing. In addition, every spectator has access to the best seat in the house (both in terms of what they see and, literally, in the most comfortable chair in their own house, with all the leg room they please). Furthermore, depending on the delivery platform, spectators can have a more intimate and interactive relationship with virtual plays than with in-person plays.

And now for some cons. First of all, virtual spectators miss out on the communitarian experience of traditional theatre. Laughing, gasping, and crying alone, rather than with fellow spectators in the same room, packs less of an impact. Part of the joy of good children's theatre is to watch the unfiltered reactions of children. Talking with fellow spectators before and after a performance enriches the sense of community, as does overhearing comments during plays. In virtual performances, spectators can sometimes use the chat function in Zoom or Facebook Live, but it feels less satisfying. Along the same lines, actors obviously feed off the energy and encouragement of responsive audiences, which is lost in virtual performances. Second, not having to sacrifice to experience a play cheapens the experience. When I work hard to get to a play in person, I have overcome the world to get there, and it has been my only focus, usually, for at least an hour before the play even starts. Not so with virtual theatre, in which I do whatever else

until just minutes before the performance, then rush to sit in place. Often, my initial focus for a virtual play rates less than 100%. Third, the screen's two dimensions cannot rival the three dimensions of a human body. I have heard of virtual plays with cameras showing multiple angles of actors at once, almost a cubist approach to theatre, but screens cannot deliver the senses of smell, touch, or taste. Fourth, cameras limit the perspective of virtual spectators—often in-person plays have rich sub-plots happening in the peripheral view of spectators. The audience sees only what the director and camera lens choose, thereby denying spectators an element of choice. Fifth, finding out about virtual live performances has been haphazard and problematic at best. As a new artform, no central digital clearinghouse lists all or even most of the possibilities. Furthermore, announcements (on facebook pages or elsewhere) do not always clarify whether performances are live or pre-recorded. Live performances come with risks —what if the technology doesn't work?, what if the dog barks?, what if someone gets sick?— but such risks heighten the excitement of seeing a live play instead of a movie or a recording of a play. Surely spectator psychology merits study of this difference. I have enjoyed some streamed recorded plays during the pandemic, but I much prefer live performances. Finally, some events are free to whatever public chooses to log on, while others require credit card payments. My credit card worked like a charm with some companies, but not with others. And a company that accepted my credit card refused the card belonging to my colleague. Surely many more pros and cons merit mention, but I now turn my attention to some of the season's best.

I have experienced seven kinds of virtual theatre during the pandemic. They include transmissions of recorded plays of three types: those recorded during the pandemic (usually days previous to their transmission); those recorded previous to the pandemic, and performances that push the boundaries of theatre. I likewise witnessed four types of live performances: an event that posed as a presentation, which I nonetheless consider theatre; traditional plays delivered from theaters; "zoom plays," which originated from multiple locations, and "forum theatre."

Two examples illustrate excellent plays recorded during the pandemic and then transmitted later. The first was a delightful children's play, *Afortunada*, written and directed by Horacio Trujillo, and based on Luis Sepúlveda's book *Historia de una gaviota y el gato que le enseñó a volar*. The Centro Cultural el Hormiguero Virtual produced it. This play had several previous successful runs, relying on the strengths of "muppet" style puppets

and puppetry (actors in plain sight) and a lovely storyline. Haydée Boetto and José Agüero designed the animal puppets and a cast of five brought them to life. In the play, a seagull fell victim to pollution, but before dying entrusted her egg to a cat. The cat kept his promise to teach the next generation gull to fly. Zeiba Kuicani provided live music. The performance I saw included a bit of animation, with words and stars added virtually to the screen. Two of the actors participated via zoom in a question/answer session with spectators after the play. One of them pointed out that he struggled to adjust to the virtual format because his character typically interacts with children during the play.

The other outstanding play of this type was *Los habladores 2020*, written and directed by David Olguín and produced by Teatro El Milagro. This one was advertised as having "funciones presenciales y vía streaming," but it was clear to me that the transmission I saw must have been filmed the first night of the performance. The project consisted of 23 monologues, five to six of which were performed each week, Thursday through Sunday, over four weeks during the month of October. Performing monologues surely solved some of the problems inherent in doing live theatre in times of Covid. The cast listing sparkled with some of Mexico's finest actors. Joaquín Cosío, Alejandrina Hergon, Mauricio Pimentel, Laura Almela, David Hevia and Daphne Keller starred in the session I saw. Cosío played a mentally off-balanced, violent, paranoid man, disheveled and disturbed. Hergon played a young woman traumatized and afraid of relationships with men. Pimentel spoke openly of lessons from the pandemic and his great confidence in treating the virus with Clorox, backing up his claims by going nowhere without a large container of it. Almela told of her saintly grandfather and of his fall from her pedestal when he died from a heart attack while watching porn in a seedy cinema. Hevia played a stuck-up artist filled with professional jealousy, sure that he had been wronged, and fighting for recognition. Keller played a woman trying to overcome an abusive father. All six actors created powerful characters brimming with emotion, each one socially and psychologically fascinating. Although not the focus of all of the monologues, the production gave insight into some of the issues resulting from the pandemic.

The "Festival Virtual de Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes" illustrates the second kind of pre-recorded theatre. Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes has had enormous success and garnered critical acclaim both in Mexico and abroad over the last several decades. Every other Thursday, this festival streamed on YouTube a different play that the group had created and performed over

a period of 20 years. A "desmontaje" followed each of the six plays on Friday afternoons. Seeing the plays, recorded with high visual and sound quality, was a treat, even though spectators missed out on things like the food fight that had spilled into the audience in *De monstruos y prodigios.* The *desmontajes* consisted of live zoom sessions, each over two hours long, of reflections and interviews. Claudio Valdés Kuri, having directed the plays, dominated these events, giving abundant background on the plays. Actors and others involved in the creation of the plays also answered questions and shared their views. Spectators were able to ask questions as part of the events. Last I checked, most of these *desmontajes* were still available on the group's Facebook page, although one seemed to have been disabled.

The final type of pre-filmed play (or was it simply cinema?) was titled *Mujeres decididas e insistentes que lavan y remiendan sus propios calzones*. Valentina Sierra wrote (adapted from the novella *La isla desconocida* by José Saramago) and directed this recording, which premiered in June and is available on YouTube. In this creation, nine excellent women actors shot takes of scenes from their own residences. Sierra and Gabriel Zapata Z. then pieced them together into a visual collage. Instead of trying to conceal the fact that the takes were filmed in multiple locations, the production

Mujeres decididas e insistentes que lavan y remiendan sus propios calzones, by Valentina Sierra. Screenshot: Timothy Compton.

embraced those disparities, showing, for example, a conversation at a table in which both ends of the table were clearly different. With set changes, disparate parts of set mosaics swooped in from different directions. In other scenes, virtual sets opened windows from which the actors acted. Amanda Schmelz carried the most prominent role, while Micaela Gramajo played the determined woman who inspired the others to unite, but all, including Sierra herself with several small roles, acted beautifully. The storyline itself was a fable in which women overcame prejudices and other obstacles to undertake journeys into the unknown in search of their true identities. Was it theatre? Was it film? It was, and is, digital art, produced so quickly that it had the feel of theatre.

The first live event I saw during the pandemic also elicited questions of genre. Was it a play? A happening? A conference? The group Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol performed *Lázaro* on June 12 as part of the Lecture Performance Series called "My Documents," hosted by Lola Arias. Lázaro Gabino Rodríguez and Luisa Pardo gave what, on the surface, was a lecture delivered from their homes. For 71 minutes they told, in English, the story of the actor's shift from being Gabino Rodríguez to Lázaro Gabino Rodríguez, which included not just a name change but also plastic surgery. They told of their artistic trajectory, in which autobiography combined with a preoccupation with Mexico and also in which there was often no clear line between fact and fiction. Lázaro spoke most, sharing his philosophy that life is a stage, that acting is an act of rebellion, that an artist is his name. He spoke of how he wrote and made 16 movies and 8 plays in which he played a character by the name of Gabino, how eventually the line between reality and fiction became blurred, and how he could no longer remember whether something actually had been a part of his life or whether it had been created for theatre. This assault on his identity was exacerbated, he said, by the fact that "I always considered myself worthless—ugly and a liar." After discussing life's injustices to those who aren't the most attractive, he told of banishing Gabino from his life through the name change and plastic surgery. Pardo added observations about his transformation, saying something along the lines of "His voice, gaze, face, and name have changed, but I don't know if he has changed." During the entire performance, Lázaro tantalized the public by reading with his back to the camara. He used a series of bookshelves as his background. Halfway through the performance, without saying a word, he stood up, walked around the table, and unclipped from a type of clothesline part of the backdrop, which was actually an oversized

photo. He left the photo partially hanging, revealing behind it actual bookshelves. The message was clear—reality is multi-faceted and complicated, if not messy. At the end of the performance, Lázaro turned to dramatically reveal his surgically altered face. (His nose and jaw had clearly changed, but not as dramatically as I had envisioned.) After the performance, Lázaro and Luisa fielded questions from spectators. As with other plays Lagartijas has performed, the audience faced more questions than answers—what really does go into our identities? Can we change the essence of who we are? What are the limits to acting? How much truth do we find in plays? Or in talks?

Another Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol play, *Tiburón*, written, directed, and performed by Lázaro, illustrates the second type of live virtual plays while continuing to focus on his identity and acting. The piece premiered at the Centro de Cultura Contemporánea Conde Duque in Madrid with a live audience. Lagartijas created it with live audiences in mind, but organizers proposed transmitting it live to extend its reach and bring in more money. In the play, Lázaro told of researching the 17th-century historical figure José María Barahona, who, born in Spain, went to Mexico and lived for ten years among native indians on the island of Tiburón, in the Gulf of California. Lázaro decided to become Barahona and went to the island to take on his

Tiburón, by Lázaro Gabino Rodríguez. Screenshot: Timothy Compton.

identity. In classic Lagartijas style, spectators sought to find the line between fact and fiction, past and present. Mixed messages abounded, including a pair of Nike shoes that made a strange combination with 17th-century garb. His narrations/representations were interpolated with recordings of his artistic colleagues, all of which told of his transformation into Barahona and his disappearance, apparently to the island. Another screen occasionally showed parts of his journal or pages from the book, which displayed Barahona's writing, or quotes from thinkers on identity and the Other. While Lázaro was the only actor who spoke, three other actors came onto the stage with masks and stood silent. He moved figurines around to represent the actions of others. As with the play *Lázaro*, it left audience members with disconcerting questions about identity, acting, and truth. It was an example of outstanding theatre that works well in live virtual format.

Some plays used this format successfully, while some, frankly, did not. The "traditional" plays that I felt did not work all had casts of more than two. Small casts, on the other hand, often worked out very well. The Tristes Tigres theatre company celebrated 15 years of existence in March, announcing a robust slate of 8 plays from their "hits" to be performed at the Foro Shakespeare. The pandemic disrupted this self-proclaimed "invasion," but it was one of the first companies to give in-person performances once theaters reopened. The company's tendency to have small casts and minimal sets undoubtedly helped make that happen. The plays also fortuitously lent themselves to livestreaming performances. The company's biggest hit, *Wenses y Lala*, figured prominently in the programming, and its live-streamed performances resonated beautifully. *Algo de un tal Shakespeare* starred Sara Pineda and Adrián Vázquez—the company's director and the play's author and director—and included raucous food fights and the use of vegetable puppets for Shakespearean characters. A outstanding example of *narraturgia*, the play flowed between telling the story lines of several Shakespeare plays and having the vegetables act out scenes. Actually, from time to time, the actors would also take on characters for certain scenes. This all translated brilliantly through the camera lenses. Romeo as a beet and Juliet as an onion could not have been funnier in person. Having a deep fryer basket serve as the balcony fit right in. Donning roller derby gear and then baseball catcher garb for war scenes provided for a dazzling spectacle. Vázquez and Pineda acted impeccably and the play communicated, despite the levity, a deep appreciation for the Bard and his work.

Speaking of impeccable acting, Vázquez delivered several other performances in the month of November. He performed, for example, two of his "unipersonales" (meaning he wrote, directed, and acted the monologue) to live and virtual audiences simultaneously at the Foro Shakespeare.[3] In both *El hijo de mi padre* and *Los días de Carlitos,* Vázquez created/acted roughly 20 characters—an amazing acting feat in which each character was clearly defined and took on real personality. In both plays, *narraturgia* prevailed as Vázquez told childhood stories about growing up and becoming aware of the world, and then morphed instantly into himself as a child, family members, friends, enemies, and teachers. With brilliant pacing, he alternated between fast and slow scenes and between frenetic hilarity and meaningful pauses. In both pieces, the characters were compelling and memorable. I laughed out loud at times and at other times felt deeply moved. The "virtual" format worked beautifully, and in fact, offered some advantages over being present—close-ups of the actor's face revealed remarkable nuance as he toggled between characters. With their small stages and minimal casts, these plays offered outstanding theatre to virtual audiences. Unlike *Wenses y Lala*, these plays were performed just once.

Another excellent monologue of this variety, *Parkour*, by Eduardo Paves Goye, directed by Ricardo Rodríguez, and acted by Hamlet Ramírez,

El hijo de mi padre, by Adrián Vázquez. Screenshot: Timothy Compton.

added a few wrinkles. First of all, it had no in-person audience. Second, it used numerous digital special effects to complement the acting and the theme. The play focused on a depressed, cynical airline executive who, as he imbibed in his home, dressed in his pajamas and robe, talked out loud about his life and his dark view of life in general. He discovered parkour and obsessed over whether it represented a new way to live his life. His alcohol-aided, unhappy, confused, delirious state found echoes in the special effects. Much of the play was transmitted in black and white. The images of him sometimes multiplied. Sometimes other images intruded, illustrating his descriptions of a plane crash (inset videos of plane crashes) or a car crash (an animated video done with Legos). Although these virtual elements enhanced the tone in ways that could not have worked in an in-person performance, it was Ramírez' acting that made the play compelling.

The next type of live virtual theatre embraced Zoom fully by simulating Zoom meetings. The first play I saw was *Edificio San Miguel en pandemia*, written by Gabriela Guraieb and directed by Angélica Rogel. Most of the characters and actors, as well as the premise, came from the play *Edificio San Miguel*, which had successful runs in several venues in recent years. It treated spectators to an apartment house meeting with all sorts of fireworks. In this version, the meeting took place via Zoom, and during the

Parkour, by Eduardo Pares Goyes. Screenshot: Timothy Compton.

Covid pandemic. The play worked because its characters were so colorful, so well-designed and acted, and so believable. The building administrator, wearing a tie to show his formality, aimed to run his building like a tight ship, which included establishing irritating internet and meeting protocols. Sra. Robles was a technologically challenged older woman; she often interrupted without realizing it, and when she tried to comment it took her forever to unmute and then check to see whether the others could hear her. Guraieb played a young, multitasking, self-absorbed tenant. Beltrán attended the meeting while lying on the floor. Ingeniero Vallejo, an addition to the pre-pandemic cast of characters, looked down on the other tenants, lectured them on their ignorance, complained about everything, had the right opinion on everything, and moaned/bragged about all the work he had pending. Special guests joined the cast each week. The night I watched the guest was Diente de Oro, a character created by and played by Fernando Bonilla (who also played Ing. Vallejo—how exactly did they do that, technologically? Something was recorded, but it wasn't clear what.) Diente de Oro was just as obnoxious as the other characters, a foul-mouthed, swaggering northerner. These neighbors discussed disposal of garbage, Covid itself, masks, the internet, and apartment noise, among other topics, but the real point was to get to know the characters and to enjoy seeing them gossip and interact with each other. One more wrinkle made this play/series fun—for a higher price, a few spectators were allowed to be "on stage" with the play's characters—on the screen with them. The night I watched they said nothing, but I wonder what kind of mayhem could surface.

Manuel Camacho Bustillo wrote and directed *diZOOMciados*, another weekly series. Its premise was psychotherapy sessions via zoom, each week featuring a different patient. Odiseo Bichir perfectly played the straight-laced, earnest therapist. The night I watched he met with a character played by Jesús Ochoa, and I do not know how Bichir kept a straight face with the ridiculous things Ochoa said, his leaps of logic, his thick accent, and his goofball facial expressions. Bichir's character sincerely tried to make sense out of his patient's story, while Ochoa's character couldn't fathom how the questions being asked of him had anything to do with his problems. It was a delicious, hilarious culture clash. Unfortunately, technical difficulties either cut it short or it had a very abrupt ending. Again, I'm not sure.

I saw several short plays produced by Tercera Llamada Live Online. Unlike most plays in this report, which charged roughly ten dollars per computer access, the business model for these plays allowed spectators

free access and then asked for donations at the end. Lucía Gómez-Robledo wrote and Alberto Lomnitz directed *María Cristina me quiere gobernar*, in which the father of a young son was spending time with his son for the first time after a pandemic-induced 8-month separation. Spectators witnessed him recording a poignant message to his ex-wife that showed the pain of a family breakup exacerbated by the pandemic. Mariana Hartasánchez wrote and Fernando Bonilla directed *El Rey Burger*, which showed a zoom call between an executive of an American fast food company in a disciplinary meeting with an employee of the company in Mérida. Conchi León played the overly exuberant employee beautifully, with a wide variety of facial, corporal and vocal expressions, communicating her love for all things imperial, from the *conquistadores* to multinationals. The executive from the States didn't say a word, but rather had a digitally-imposed Rey Burger face that silently represented a faceless company and approach.

The two plays that made the most creative and effective use of digital technology were *Rumis* and *El niño que se comió la servilleta de su sándwich.* Manuel Barragán wrote and Sandra Félix directed *Rumis*. Each of the six actors performed via Zoom from their own homes (Félix herself played a bit role). All the actors developed their own wardrobes, lighting, makeup, sets, and props. I counted 45 different scenes, each with its own configuration in terms of number of people, locale, and situation. Four of the characters resided in prison, but their situations varied during the play depending on the time of day, their physical position, whether they were outside or in, in solitary confinement or with others, or peeking through a hole in the door. Likewise, the other characters altered their backgrounds and clothing to transport spectators to restaurants, offices, various rooms in their homes, and outdoors. All six actors deserve kudos for not only their rapid setting of scenes and management of cameras, but also for their creation of compelling characters. Sebastián de Oteyza embodied the most flamboyant character, an inmate who, in theatre rehearsals, always insisted on having the lead role. His range of emotion and expression came through beautifully via zoom. He used various camera angles, varied his proximity to the camera, the speed of his speech, and his facial expressions. The other five acted their roles wonderfully as well, creating a dangerous, illiterate murderer (played by José Alejandre), a white-collar inmate wrongly accused of fraud (Angel Rossell), a highly literate inmate who killed his father (Juan Celis), a government bureaucrat (Gilberto Dávalos), and an unemployed actor who took the job of starting up a theatre program in the prison (José Cremayer).

Rumis, by Manuel Barragán. Screenshot: Timothy Compton.

The play showed these very different people developing unlikely bonds and developing significant relationships as roomies, hence the title of the play. The play mirrored what many people have learned during the pandemic, that despite limitations and even confinement, dark clouds can have silver linings, and the best of those are strong relationships. For me, *Rumis* was the masterpiece of the season, a marvelous play adapted to a new set of circumstances. The group never performed the play on a stage, but I cannot imagine it being any better than its zoom version. And as icing on the cake, all the spectators were invited "onto the set" after the play with the actors and director for a question-answer session.

I saw *El niño que se comió la servilleta de su sándwich* in a theater several years ago, so I enjoyed contrasting that experience with a new version in digital format, especially because both versions had many of the same actors. Ricardo Ramírez wrote the play and directed both versions. A children's play, it has a narrative structure, with the actors toggling between telling the story and acting it out. In the live version, the actors sat on stools and "changed locales" through narrative and backdrop projections (of a living room, a schoolroom, etc.). In the virtual version, the characters changed locations on the spectators' screens (their boxes would shift) and

El niño que se comió la servilleta de su sándwich, by Ricardo Rodríguez.
Screenshot: Timothy Compton.

had the various locales foregrounded in children's drawings. The result was a highly personal experience, up close with each of the characters, creating the same excitement and enjoyment as in the live version. Teté Espinoza, Laura Baneco, Hamlet Ramírez, and Luis Eduardo Yee delivered outstanding performances.[4]

The Colectivo Teatro Sin Paredes performed yet another type of "virtual" theatre, which they called "teatro forum." In both *Amor de lejos* and *Aprendiz de león*, a pair of actors performed via zoom a very short play that portrayed bad behavior during the pandemic. In the first, the male character aggressively pressured his girlfriend to set aside her studies and fear of contracting Covid to travel across town to spend time with him. In the second, a man aggressively pressured his cousin to set aside his parenting and spousal responsibilities and concern about Covid to go out on the town with him. After seeing this short play, spectators were told they would see the same play again, but that this time they could intervene and become part of the play, either substituting for the pressured character or as a third person (a friend or relative), to try to change the situation. That is exactly what happened—spectators turned actors tried to convince the perpetrator to back off or to convince the pressured person to hold strong. Beatriz Luna wrote

Aprendiz de León, by Beatriz Luna. Screenshot: Timothy Compton.

both plays, David Psalmon directed both and served as moderator, and Jorge Maldonado very effectively played the part of the instigator in both plays. Teatro Sin Paredes has previously done live *teatro forum*, but it seemed particularly effective to me in Zoom format. Happily, its reach was extensive. For the first play, Teatro Sin Paredes reported that over 100 people joined via zoom, which maxed out the capacity of its license, then over 2000 people watched via facebook live. This was an outstanding collaboration with a government agency that wanted to encourage responsible behavior in the citizenry. I found the "virtual" format extremely fortuitous—it resulted in excellent and purposeful theatre.

This report has focused largely on "virtual" theatre from Mexico City, the theatre scene with which I am most familiar. Increasingly, I see announcements of and have watched offerings of various types originating in other parts of Mexico—for example, Xalapa, Guadalajara, and Tijuana. The annual Festival Cervantino was presented virtually, extending its reach for the first time well beyond Guanajuato. The 2020 Muestra Nacional de Teatro was cancelled, but in its place a series of live online presentations and discussions on Mexican theatre emerged. I have seen workshops for actors and directors offered online by renowned teachers. The possibilities of participation in events that are so important to theatre and its study have extended thanks to creative use of technology, not to mention a nudge from Covid.

I add my statement of hope that, once the pandemic is contained and spectators can return without limitations to live performances, "virtual" theatre will continue to exist. It not only extends the reach of theatrical art well beyond the fortunate few who can arrive in person to see plays, but also creates new possibilities—a new art genre has happily come into existence. I expect progress in improved communications to provide spectators with information about myriad virtual performances. Hopefully, our biggest problem in the future will be the need to establish criteria about what to see in a sea of abundant offerings from Mexico City, all over Mexico, and throughout Latin America.[5]

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Notes

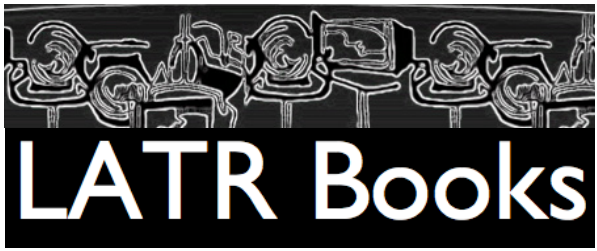
1. Desafora2, episode 450.

2. http://teatromexicano.com.mx/8812/manifiesto-por-un-arte-vivo-digital/

3. Miraculously, Foro Shakespeare, which everyone thought had breathed its last theatrical breath, with a formal closing in 2018, rose from the ashes during the pandemic, of all times. It was NOT turned into apartments, and instead had parts renovated and is once again open for theatre business. It and Teatro La Capilla have been mainstays for live virtual theatre performances, many of which have live audiences as well.

4. It occurred to me during this performance that live virtual performances of this play (and many others), could be arranged for specific sets of publics in other locales—at schools or libraries around the world, with live Q&A sessions. Ramírez confirmed with me a willingness to do such performances, which would bring outstanding theatre to institutions that don't have the funds to cover travel expenses for theatre groups.

5. Sadly, in December 2020, theaters were once again ordered closed in Mexico due to Covid, with no indication of when they will open again.



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