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## **Preface: The Spaces Between**

### **María Delgado**

It is impossible to consider Argentine theatre without folding in some discussion of film. Any discussion of 21st century Argentine cinema similarly touches theatrical motifs and prisms. It's not simply about actors—like María Villar, Pilar Gamboa, Esteban Lamothe, Julian Tello, and Esteban Bigliardi, among many others—whose performative ethos has been shaped by both. Dramatists like Walter Jakob and Santiago Loza also work in film, as an actor and director, respectively. These kinds of crossovers are just the tip of the fertile exchange that characterises Buenos Aires' creative arts culture. The essays featured in this collection point to wider currents and exchanges. Romina Paula and Lola Arias work as performers, writers, and directors across both stage and screen cultures. Alejo Moguillansky works as a writer, director, and editor in cinema, but theatre spills into his films through plotting, performance, and intertextuality, disrupting their surface realism in playful, impish ways. The boundaries between these art forms, as the spatial configurations of Buenos Aires indicate, are hugely porous. Part of this has to do with the city's lithe and improvisational theatre culture. Productions shift from venue to venue. A production may "take a break" when actors are filming, or play one or two days a week or play late in the evening—it's not unusual to be heading to a performance at 11:30 p.m. Buenos Aires lives and breathes theatre—from the proscenium arch venues of central Corrientes to the Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires' (CTBA) cluster of theaters to the plethora of fringe theatres that can be found in the Abasto. For a decade the Abasto was home both to Buenos Aires' independent film festival, the Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine (BAFICI), and the city's alternative theaters, and BAFICI's origins can be linked to Buenos Aires's biennial international theatre festival, the Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires (FIBA).

Both alternative theatre and the New Argentine cinema are built on a culture of thrift, of making do and improvising with the means you have at your disposal. All the works discussed in this volume are lean and focused—nothing superfluous, nothing wasted—and they are often marked by an approach to artistic creation that may be branded around the writer/director but is effectively realised in the rehearsal room or on location through group creation. *Minefield* (2016) and *El loro y el cisne* (2013) both show this process at work. This strategy also spills over into the multifarious roles that the artists featured in this collection occupy: directors work as producers or editors on the films of their contemporaries; actors direct and directors act; and groups of actors—ensembles of sorts—feature across the works of Romina Paula and Matías Piñeiro.

The essays in this collection handle a range of productions (across both film and theatre) that articulate the intersections between history, memory, and fiction that have been so prevalent in Argentina's creative arts over the past decade. The stages are varied. In *La forma exacta de las islas* (2012), the Falkland Islands/Malvinas are the theater for a quest narrative where the road movie and travelogue meld together. Lola Arias's *Minefield* also returns to the Falklands/Malvinas, only the islands are here a space of memory and recollection, a place that is conjured through props and photographs, newspaper cuttings and pop songs. Communities are created through performance—whether it's the Argentine and British veterans in *Minefield* or the family forged through film in Moguillansky's *El loro y el cisne*. Community—what it means, how to forge, and sustain it—is key to the works covered in the volume. Community, of course, was central to the oldest documented theatrical cultures of Western Europe. Theatre's origins lie at the interface of democracy and performance. A way for a community to debate the key issues of the time—issues of governance, ethics, and responsibility, of history, memory, and representation. As with the ancient Greek theatre of Dionysus, the stages discussed in this issue offer the space to debate the foundations on which post-dictatorship Argentina has been built. The spaces between theatre and film that Piñeiro, Arias, Paula, Mariano Pensotti, Martín Rejtman, and Federico León all negotiate are the places in-between, the gaps between the said and unsaid, the place where iteration can begin, where a conversation commences.

Indeed, as with the Greeks, modes of rewriting the past as a mode of coming to terms with its fissures and vicissitudes looms large across many of the works discussed. *Minefield* debates the complex ways in which the past is constructed

and how a space might be constructed that moves beyond the victor/victim, them/us binaries that have dominated representations of the Malvinas/Falklands conflict. Processes of historicisation, of thinking through the relationship between thinking and making, of how we relate to our inheritance and the ways in which we refashion it run through all the essays. What Jorge Dubatti terms “*la transteatralización*” (Martyunik), a turn to blur the boundaries between the theatre and life, offers a way of recognising the potency of performance, and its way of disrupting both social and political spaces.

Forms of representation are tried and tested, twisted and reformed. Cecilia Sosa describes *El loro y el cisne* as a “contorted musical.” Matías Piñeiro’s *Viola* (2012)—the second of his four *shakespeareanas*, or playful riffs on Shakespeare’s comedies—is both a statement on the repetition and rehearsal that marks contemporary life—rituals, routines, and the need to master a technique, a routine, or an act—and a celebration of the need for improvisation and spontaneity. Debating cultural heritage and inherited ideals, the film seeks to position cultural heritage as sitting beyond an Argentine trope, within a wider, shared canon of work that travels across national boundaries in a process of interaction and intersection. Close-ups intrude to disrupt the piece’s theatrical texture, moving to ensure the viewer’s perspective darts and dives, shifts and moves, creating a sense of the unexpected and the unpredictable. The sensation is exhilarating; it is on the one hand as if we were seeing *Twelfth Night* for the first time, reimagined and reassembled in a configuration where, as Constanza Ceresa notes, “Reality and fiction are merged to the point of becoming indistinguishable.”

The rehearsal is a dominant trope in much of the work showcased here. The conversation between Rejtman and León around their collaboration on *Entrenamiento elemental para actores* sees the rehearsal as an ongoing process of negotiation and collaboration, a way of thinking through the politics of representation across both media. Paula’s play *Fauna* (2013) also tackles the ways in which the real and the performative interweave, making it increasingly difficult to discern where one begins and the other ends. Brenda Werth signals how Paula’s intertextuality—including the incorporation of references to a range of literary figures, from Calderón de la Barca to Shakespeare—points to cultures of doubling and impersonation where it is not always easy to tell where a shift from “acting to non-acting” has taken place.

Vivi Tellas’s biodramas merge documentary and fiction to offer a version of verbatim theatre where the protagonists of the actions re-enact experiences in modes that offer agency and creativity. Pensotti’s *Cineastas* (2013) also

offers a way of considering, through the narrative of four filmmakers working on their films over a year, the ways in which we author the fictions of our own lives. For Philippa Page, Pensotti's deployment of cinema, installation art, and theatre in *Cineastas* offers a way of rethinking the spatiality of all three media/genres "to create a performative map of the city."

These essays give a taste of currents that are still in evidence in Argentine theatre and film. Piñeiro's latest *shakepeareana*, *Hermia & Helena* (2016), riffs on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Only now he has moved from Buenos Aires to New York, following the adventures and misadventures of two *porteñas* (Carmen and Camila, played by Piñeiro regulars Villar and Agustina Muñoz) as Camila takes up residency in New York, where she is tasked with producing a new version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The play's language offers her a way of trying to make sense of the predicament she finds herself in, with an ex in Buenos Aires, a New York lover, and a father with whom she has lost touch. Once again, adept theatricality and impish role play intersect in a playful tale of loves lost, discarded, and forsaken with Shakespeare's pastoral idyll wittily re-envisaged in a New York park. Nele Wohlatz's *El futuro presente*, winner of the Filmmakers of the Present section at the 2016 Locarno Film Festival, follows a Chinese immigrant to Buenos Aires. Xiaobin arrives from mainland China to join her family without knowing Spanish. They isolate themselves in the laundromat they run, but she is determined to learn Spanish—putting away some of her earnings from the supermarket where she works to enroll at a language school. The other Chinese members of her Spanish class are both a mirror and a chorus, in the latter case commenting on her predicament and articulating how community may operate outside her close-knit, secluded family. The language school becomes a rehearsal room of sorts for Xiaobin's new identity. Her contact with Vijay, an Indian migrant, adds a further layer to the narrative, a way of testing out her new identity through a new language. The film's title speaks to different ways of seeing, and Xiaobin's new name—she tries out both Sabrina and Beatriz—offers both a way of articulating her desire to assimilate and a way of erasing something of her former self. Theatre here, as it did a decade earlier in León and Marcos Martínez's *Estrellas* (2007), offers ways of seeing those so often erased from the picture, those whose lives are given to others to perform. In *Estrellas*, these concerns are filtered through class; in *El futuro presente* it is migration that emerges as the lens through which the film's "others" are refracted. Indeed, both these films, like the works discussed in this volume, point to the ways in which theatre

continues to function as a way of seeing, a mode of questioning, a discourse that rattles and disrupts the surface realism of celluloid.

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**Work Cited**

Martyunik, Claudio. "El teatro argentino se lleva bien con la insatisfacción." *Clarín*, 5 March 2006. Accessed 12 Dec. 2008.