

## *Ceci n'est pas une chaise: the Treachery of the Real and the Conspicuously Cinematic Self in Mariano Pensotti's Cineastas*

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“So the beginning is an impossible place, as meaningless as that dot on my drawing in a class perspective lesson, the spot in the middle of the paper where all lines—roads, streets?—came together at a place called infinity.”

—Dorothea Tanning, *Birthday*, 11.

“...la nube Magritte estaba exactamente suspendida sobre Cazaneuve y entonces sentí una vez más que la pálida naturaleza imitaba el arte ardiente...”

—Julio Cortázar, *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos*, 15.

### Introduction: Screen Realities

“The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought,” claims philosopher Jacques Rancière in a statement that clearly points to the epistemological interdependence of reality and fiction. Art constitutes, rather than represents, reality; reality as it is perceived, at least (*Politics* 34). If, as Julio Cortázar imagines in his playfully subversive *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967), nature pales in comparison to its vibrant and sense-tickling renditions in art, then artistic representations can invariably seem more “real” than the referent that they set out to portray. The importance of sensory organization and stimulation is integral to Rancière’s interrogation of the role of aesthetics in politics. “[A]esthetic acts” defined “as configurations of experience” contain the potential to “create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity,” a phenomenon he refers to as the “distribution of the sensible” (*Politics* 3). One might conclude that in contemporary hybrid worlds the distinction between fiction and reality is nothing more than a false

dichotomy, with little relevance to the way in which society experiences the world—or worlds—constantly navigating back and forth across the apparently seamless frontier between virtual and organic spaces. Does our almost constant mobile exposure to screen media mean that we always perceive through some kind of screen, whether real or imagined?

A variation on this debate translates to contemporary theatre studies in Argentina, foregrounding theatre's privileged capacity, as an embodied form of expression, to explore and expose the theatricality inherent in intersubjective relations, not least of all in the image-conscious arena of politics; reality must be dramatized, or performed, in order to be thought (stripped of its theatrical artifice, that is). Theorist and theatre critic Jorge Dubatti pays close attention to this phenomenon. During the last twenty years, he argues, el teatro se vio en la obligación de redefinirse por una cantidad de fenómenos. El primer fenómeno es lo que se ha llamado *la transteatralización*: todo es teatro. Es más teatro el orden social que el teatro mismo y, en ese sentido, el teatro ha sido "superado" por el orden de lo real. ("El teatro" original emphasis)<sup>1</sup>

Such ideas echo the well-established work of the symbolic interactionists, who approach social interaction from a dramaturgical perspective, positing that intersubjective relationships can only be understood in terms of their inherent theatricality. As Erving Goffman argued in the 1950s, in the *mise en scène* of everyday life, society constantly transitions between what he termed the "front" stage (the role we perform socially and the desired appearance that this creates) (32) and the "back" stage (the space in which this role is rehearsed and considered in private) (127).<sup>2</sup>

More recently, theorists in the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of performance studies have addressed this issue. Coming from an anthropological perspective, performance theorist Richard Schechner articulates this debate in terms of the boundary between what he defines as "aesthetic" performance and "social" performance (192-3). He describes theatre as just one node on a continuum of performance types—both social and aesthetic—pointing to a certain fluidity between these two categories, which incorporate a range of activities including the categories of "sport," "play," and "ritual," alongside artistic forms of performance (xvii).<sup>3</sup>

From within the field of theatre studies, it is important to note that this exploration of theatricality at large is coupled with a need to reflect upon and redefine theatre's specificity as a genre and its relationship to this broader social theatricality. This perceived "crisis" in theatre's identity as an art

form, as other, more popular forms of entertainment encroach, echoes a broader anxiety in millennial theatre studies (Delgado and Svitch 6).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Dubatti's suggestion that theatre has been "overcome" by the Real points to an urgency to redress the imbalance. He articulates this by reasserting the aura of theatrical presence, or "convivio": "sin convivio—reunión de dos o más hombres [o mujeres], encuentro de presencias en una encrucijada espacio-temporal cotidiano—no hay teatro" (*Filosofía I* 43). It is the spatial continuity that exists between both performance and spectator and between spectators within the same audience that, he suggests, is not only specific to theatre, but is also socio-politically symbolic.

This idea(l) of theatre's auratic conviviality must, however, be nuanced by taking into account approaches to spectatorship: on the one hand, sharp criticism of the inertia that characterizes theatre audiences reduced to passive onlookers (Rancière, *Politics* 272); on the other, the various strategies devised by the likes of Bertold Brecht and Antonin Artaud to engage spectators critically across the auditorium's fourth wall. Theatrical presence is, then, not enough to ensure political engagement, a point that Rancière makes emphatically in *The Emancipated Spectator* and to which I will return.

In practice, the biodrama series originally created by theatre director Vivi Tellas—counting some 26 productions to date—has engaged actively with theatre's relationship to this broader concept of theatricality since 2002.<sup>5</sup> The term "biodrama" encapsulates the idea of dramatizing real lives, as it fuses documentary/life (bio) with fiction (drama), its (bio)politics of resistance located in the productive interval between these two elements. As Tellas argues, biodrama's stance is clear in privileging theatre's position as a medium for exploring, drawing on and ultimately contesting this broader conceptualisation of theatricality:

El Proyecto Biodrama se inscribe en lo que se podría llamar el "retorno de lo real" en el campo de la representación. Después de casi dos décadas de simulaciones y simulacros, lo que vuelve —en parte como oposición, en parte como reverso— es la idea de que todavía hay experiencia y de que el arte debe inventar alguna forma nueva de entrar en relación con ella. (qtd. in Moreno)<sup>6</sup>

Tellas marks out a clear opposition between experience (as vitally embodied) and simulation. Like Dubatti, she also emphasizes the need for innovation in theatrical forms to reengage with the reality of the moment. It is important, then, to locate this conceptualisation of the biodrama series within its context: the disastrous aftermath of the acute economic, political, and social debacle

of December 2001.<sup>7</sup> Tellas clearly positions her concept in resistance to the simulacrum of affluence that characterised the accelerated neoliberal structural changes of President Carlos Menem's mandate (1989-1999), while challenging its aggressive individualism and the premise that lives, like commodities, were disposable in a society in which relations were shaped by the market and its consumer logic of programmed obsolescence.<sup>8</sup> Biodrama hence uses theatre to explore the possibilities of rebuilding a sense of community (read: "convivio") in what was, at the time of its inception, a severely debilitated post-crisis social fabric.

Such issues find resonance in the work of Mariano Pensotti (Buenos Aires, 1974), one of Argentina's most bold and innovative contemporary theatre practitioners and the focus of this article.<sup>9</sup> Alongside Beatriz Catani, Pensotti co-created one of the earlier biodramas, titled *Los 8 de julio* (2002), notable for its use of a large screen on the back wall of the set that serves as a window connecting the theatre to the world outside. Documentary footage of interviews with other people born on July 8, 1958 open and close the performance to create a sense of virtual "convivio," or what Dubatti calls—not without reservation—"tecnovivio" (*Filosofía del teatro III* 126), to reach beyond the confines of the theatre.

While suggesting that "convivio" and "tecnovivio" can be combined productively on stage, Dubatti nevertheless reasserts the importance of theatrical presence as a kernel of resistance "[h]acia una política de valoración de lo convivial" (128). "Convivio y tecnovivio proponen paradigmas existenciales muy diferentes," he argues. "Cada tecnología determina cambios en las condiciones del vivir juntos" (126-7). It is these changes that contemporary independent theatre practitioners explore, with rather less anxiety, as already integral to everyday life. This is important in marking Pensotti's use (rather than rejection) of hybrid theatrical/audiovisual forms as part and parcel of this drive to reengage theatre with its context and the world outside.

In a recent interview, Pensotti located *Cineastas* within the concept of documentary theatre established by Tellas's series, while questioning what direction Argentine theatre should take after biodrama: "Desde lo artístico quiero pensar la posibilidad de la ficción después del biodrama o del teatro postdramático," he explains, pointing to the importance of biodrama in defining independent theatre in millennial Buenos Aires, while also suggesting the need to evolve beyond its initial artistic proposition and context (qtd. in Irazábal). This, I will argue, involves looking beyond theatrical presence as a vehicle to recover the Real to instead interrogate how cinema has transformed

the way in which human subjects perceive live events, along with the possible horizons for imagining time and space.

Pensotti seems less interested in shoring up theatre's specificity as a genre, that is separating it from social theatricality, than exploring the possibility of hybrid productions that are better equipped to explore the way in which contemporary worlds are made by a constant dialectic between virtual and organic spaces. What I will try to demonstrate in this piece is that Pensotti explores how virtual spaces, and the global referents that they invoke, play an important—if disjunctive—role in informing local imaginaries. He confronts the role of cinematic affect in shaping the subjective cartographies that city dwellers map and remap out performatively on a daily basis. This is, of course, not without a critique of the problems posed by the cultural frontiers implied in transnational circuits of spectatorship, with particular reference to the way in which spectacles of poverty, political upheaval, and the “exotic” cultures of Latin America are marketed for European audiences seeking catharsis and comfort from the fact that misery happens elsewhere. His works nevertheless seem to demonstrate a genuine fascination with the way in which individuals conduct their everyday lives as if living inside their own personal film, inspired by the affect produced when watching other films, often set in radically different contexts: identities negotiated both remotely and cinematically. This paper aims to work through these issues by looking primarily at the performance piece *Cineastas* (2013).<sup>10</sup>

### **This Is Not a Chair: A Reading of *Cineastas***

As the lights go up at the beginning of *Cineastas*, the audience is presented with a two-tiered installation composed of a pair of identically sized container-like cubicles located one directly on top of the other.<sup>11</sup> The spectator is then confronted with a fairly mundane brown chair on the lower level of the onstage installation, while a painted image of what ostensibly appears to be the same chair stands directly above it on the upper tier. The juxtaposition of the two chairs would seem to invite a Platonic questioning of their respective “chairness.”<sup>12</sup> It might also be read as a citation of Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte's iconic positing of the pipe, versus its “treacherous” painted reproduction.<sup>13</sup> The emptying, vacuum-like sound effect that accompanies this opening vignette, along with the narrowly focused spotlighting on both objects, encourages their abstraction into a framing dialectic for the ensuing performance: the object- and image-laden lower level of the stage is (in this first instance at least) signified as the space of the Real (or the Real as repre-

sented theatrically), while the spartan upper level denotes its representation, in this case taking the form of a simulated cinematic space. Much like Magritte's challenge to the authority of language and pictorial representation—indeed, his allusion to the duplicitous nature of “reality” itself—*Cineastas* uses its daring fusion of theatre, cinema, and installation art to progressively unlock a similar multiplication of “intentional ambiguities” (Foucault 15) across this establishing axiom to the performance. Like Magritte, Pensotti challenges the spectator to think about what she or he sees (and consequently understands) when looking into what can be best described as a life-size television set. Strikingly similar to the glass-fronted cubicles inhabited by the automated citizens of filmmaker Jacques Tati's Paris “of spectacle”<sup>14</sup>—much to the amusement of passers-by mesmerized by the live show in a precursor to reality TV taken to its literal, yet remarkably banal, extreme—the set seems to suggest a clear metaphor for a society living, as Argentine sociologist Beatriz Sarlo puts it, “en estado de television,” albeit—I shall argue quite significantly—stripped of its giant screens (85).<sup>15</sup>

*Cineastas* is a coproduction of the government-run Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires, several international theatre festivals, and Pensotti's Grupo Marea (founded in 2005), which he co-leads with scenographer-cum-instal-

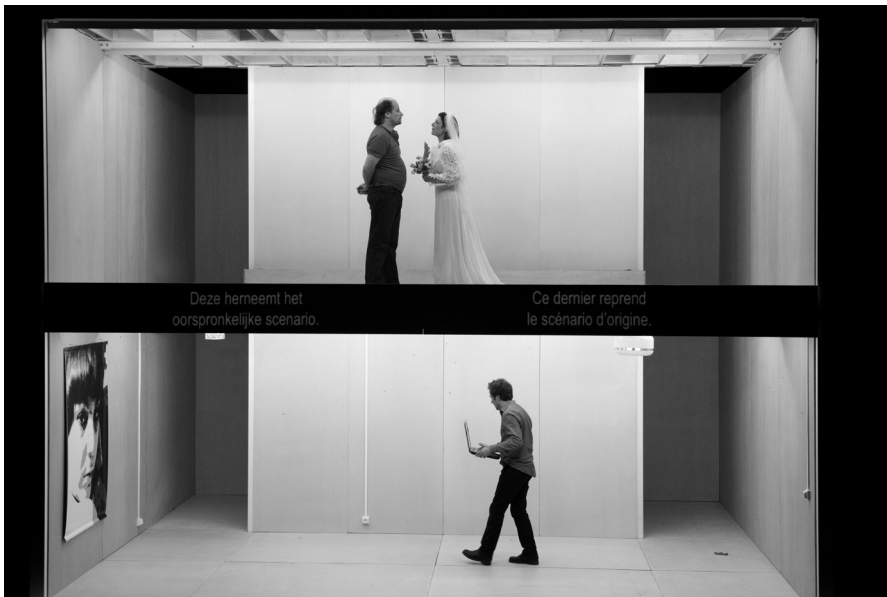


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lation artist Mariana Tirante. The pair are seasoned collaborators and Tirante is the architect of the set for *Cineastas*, which very much takes on the role of the protagonist in the conceptualization of the spectacle (Irazábal). The performance was premiered at the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels, Belgium, in 2013, followed by its domestic premiere at the Teatro Sarmiento later that year. It has since enjoyed a highly successful run both at home and on the international festival circuit and is Pensotti's most widely circulated work to date. It continues to draw the attention of international festival programmers.<sup>16</sup>

Best defined as a cinematic drama that innovatively places filmic technique at the service of theatre, the performance recounts the lives of four *porteño*<sup>17</sup> filmmakers as they each work on the production of their respective films over the period of a year. The lives of Gabriel, Mariela, Nadia, and Lucas<sup>18</sup> unfold on the lower level of the stage, while the split-screen effect created by the separate spaces of the installation enables their films to be played out simultaneously above them, the action in many ways constituting a sublimation of the lives (the film's unconscious, perhaps) happening below. In a tripartite structure of meaning, the performance also explores how this autobiographical tie between auteur and film is symptomatic of context. In this sense, *Cineastas* engages with the biographical spirit of biodrama, creating a narrative of individuals' lives in relation to major public events happening concurrently: history recounted from the intimate space of biography. The simultaneous layers of the performance might even be read as a reflexive staging of the very process of turning someone's (auto)biography into a performance.<sup>19</sup> "Hablo de sujetos que tienen mi edad," states Pensotti, "y que han vivido lo que yo he vivido, en términos sociales y políticos," reiterating biography's location at the interface between the private and the collective, while also inserting his own narrative into the fold (qtd. in Irazábal). Together, this complex, multi-layered and multi-stranded mesh of performative threads maps out the subjective fabric of contemporary Buenos Aires: the performance of a "hypercity" (Presner, Shepard, and Kawano 11-14), as refracted through a kaleidoscope of individual lenses belonging to a generation—Pensotti's own—of young thirty and forty-something Argentineans who have grown up under the dictatorship and its neoliberal aftermath and whose lives have been molded by their consequences.

I chose the opening epigraph to this piece—cited from North American artist Dorothea Tanning's autobiography and account of her life alongside Dadaist pioneer Max Ernst—because it seemed, if not to solve, at least to capture the conundrums I perceived while trying to settle upon an approach

to Pensotti's richly intertextual and intermedial performance. For, the beginning is also an impossible place in *Cineastas*. The layers of fiction and reality stack up as this theatrical map of cinematic Buenos Aires is acted out, ephemerally imprinted on the set's blank, whitewashed canvas. Indeed, the key to its production of meaning lies in its aesthetics of intrusion, confusion, and multiplicity, in deciphering a sense of the city as a whole that can only be understood as the hypothetical sum of its many disparate parts (never visible to the human eye integrally as a whole), or, as the voiceover narrator suggests, a collage of more than 2,500 cinematic iterations of the city since Buenos Aires first became a film set in 1905, not only representing itself, but also providing the *mise-en-scène* for a host of other global cities (as Mariela states at one point).<sup>20</sup>

On a thematic level, as the title unequivocally suggests, *Cineastas* is about authorship; it explores how the individual biography of each auteur finds expression in the film that s/he is in the process of making. Pensotti describes how the project for *Cineastas* began by interviewing filmmakers and, indeed, the story commences by re-enacting this initial stage in the creative process, as commercially successful filmmaker Gabriel is interviewed by a film critic.<sup>21</sup> The interview is, however, rather banal and a parody of the value of such an exercise. The spectator gleans very little about the film from the director's responses, save perhaps Gabriel's affirmation about the importance of the city in shaping what he does: "[B]ueno, la verdad es que estoy muy sorprendido. Me estoy dando cuenta de cómo la ciudad influye en lo que hacemos. Para mí, eso es algo totalmente nuevo" (*Cineastas* 00:02:06 mins). Significantly, this is the response to the very first question the critic asks, establishing a second frame of reference for the ensuing performance: the importance of Buenos Aires as both *mise-en-scène* and protagonist. Shortly afterwards, Gabriel is shown potential props for his film and is presented with an umbrella. In yet another reference to Magritte,<sup>22</sup> the clouds imprinted on the umbrella replicate the painter's signature cloud-filled skies, often deemed to signify the unconscious. The relationship between auteur and film therefore seems sealed, the space of the Real nestled beneath the space of the film, a biographical thread holding the two together.

Yet it is also through the figure of Gabriel that Pensotti stages the (quite literal) "death of the Author"<sup>23</sup>—or Auteur, as is the case here—when he finds out that he is terminally ill and has little time left to live. Facing his own obsolescence—an important recurring theme in *Cineastas*, whether professional, artistic, romantic, or commercial—Gabriel desperately tries to use his



film to put off death by creating a video record of his life for posterity. This attempt turns into nothing more than a frustrated desire that ends in a rather pathetic recording of the objects in his possession—that is, literally in his own reification—as his changes to the screenplay are met with bewilderment by the other members of the film production team and are ultimately rejected for seeming rather odd.<sup>24</sup> “Cómo me gustaría ser un gorilita mecánico fabricado en China al que nunca se le acaban las pilas,” he thinks somewhat desperately—his thoughts communicated by a voiceover narrative delivered by the actress who will then play his wife—as his impending mortality leads him to fantasize about his own spectral existence as a mechanical reproduction. Cinema, the voiceover states, presents the utopian “posibilidad de fijar el tiempo,” but this utopian ideal ends merely in Gabriel’s lamentation that he is nothing more than “una obra maestra de la simulación.”

With the death of the Auteur comes the birth of the Spectator, if this is to be read as a variation on Roland Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), which positions the reader, rather than the author, as the locus of the production of meaning. The opening vignette clearly aims to draw the audience’s attention to its condition as spectator. I would argue, therefore, that *Cineastas* is more about spectatorship than it is about authorship, or at the very least that the two processes conflate. It is also worth pointing to the significance of the polyphonic, anti-*Authoritarian* stance that Barthes’ essay puts forward within the memory politics of the post-dictatorship context, an issue that is dealt with explicitly in Nadia’s storyline and implicitly in that of Lucas. What I would like to argue here is that, although this opening scene is configured as something of a reverse Platonic cave, Pensotti by no means positions the audience under the illusion of the spectacle.<sup>25</sup> Instead, he invites them backstage. Neither does he advocate the urgency for their emancipation from “the spectacle,” as Rancière might. “Spectatorship is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at a spectacle,” Rancière states, the term “spectacle” to be read in the Debordian sense—the action of looking entirely passively and devoid of agency. “Theater,” he continues, “is the transmission of the ignorance that makes people ill through the medium of ignorance that is optical illusion” (*Spectator* 272). Rancière’s echoes of postmodern angst at the noxious effects of the spectacle seem not to entirely fit within the contemporary technological landscape. Positioning the audience in front of this giant TV-like installation is indeed a reference to our reliance on screens to mediate experience and intersubjective relationships, but I would argue that Pensotti encourages the spectator to consider—rather than reject—the role that film

spectatorship has in authoring our daily trajectories through the city. Society is arguably no longer interested in casting off the spectacle—so integral is it to everyday life that the presence of screens might almost be considered organic—but there is an urgency to explore how individuals perceive and make sense of their surroundings cinematically.

### **Affective Cartographies of the Cinematic Self**

The home page to Pensotti's personal website is covered by a background image of Argentine plastic artist Jorge Macchi's installation *Guía de la inmovilidad* (2003).<sup>26</sup> Macchi's guidebook imitates the classic A-Z-style map booklet of Buenos Aires readily available in kiosks, but eschews the purpose of this traditional cartographers plan of the city, which is to provide a precise, to-scale representation of the physical contours of the cityscape, complete with information as to how best to navigate a route through its arteries and transit through the urban landscape. Instead, Macchi cuts away the city's flesh—its buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces—leaving only the roads and avenues exposed. As he reduces the city to nothing more than its conduits, one might expect a piece rather more along the lines of *una guía de la hipermovilidad*—a city reduced to flows—but by layering sections of the city on top of one another, he creates a disjunctive, layered mesh of street names that are misaligned in a way that breaks the spatial continuity of the map and prevents movement around the city.

The palimpsestic character of Macchi's guidebook also evokes the possibility of multiple time frames. *Cineastas* in many ways echoes this idea by creating its own performative map of the city of Buenos Aires, using a similar technique of layering, only this time of subjective maps that overlap but never collide. There is little in the onstage installation—save the sullied whitewash on the walls, which might remind some of suburban Buenos Aires and its sidewalks<sup>27</sup>—to evoke the Argentine capital, but a similar mesh of subjective cartographies is built up as the performance unfolds. It is worth noting here that Pensotti and Tirante work hard to inject a sense of mobility into their *mise-en-scène*. Recent productions have used a revolving set (*El pasado es un animal grotesco*), two treadmill-style mats moving in opposite directions across the stage (*Cuando vuelva a casa voy a ser otro*), and dynamic movement between spaces on the part of the actors and actresses, as is the case in *Cineastas*. Also noteworthy is the fact that theatre and cinema are often differentiated on account of theatre's stasis versus cinema's inherent mobility (Sontag 362). In his edited volume on cinema and the city, for ex-

ample, Mark Shiel refers to the “telling correlation between the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the city and the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the cinema” (1). Pensotti and Tirantte’s dynamic and highly cinematic *mise-en-scène* clearly works to obviate this distinction between theatre’s stasis and cinema’s mobility.

Many contemporary films that attempt to represent concurrent spaces within a city, or global connectivity, such as Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Amores perros* (Mexico, 2001) and *Babel* (USA, Mexico, France, 2006) or Paul Haggis’s *Crash* (USA, 2005), use a modular, or thread structure to portray different storylines simultaneously, as well as the contingency governing urban interaction. The way in which such narratives are often recounted anachronically has also drawn observations that they are memory narratives, collapsing causal chains of logic aligned with linear time by filtering the past through the lens of the present via analepses and prolepses in the narrative (Cameron 79-112). The thread structure gives the play a synchronous quality that allows neighbourhoods as disparate as the affluent Puerto Madero and the marginal Villa Lugano to be performed within the same restricted physical space, much like Macchi’s cartographic manipulation of the cityscape. Pensotti profits from the intrinsic spatiality of the three media/genres that he fuses in *Cineastas*—cinema, theatre, and installation art—to create a performative map of the city.

Each character hails from a different part of the city and different walk of life. Likewise, each is involved in a very different kind of filmmaking, from Gabriel’s commercially driven Hollywood coproduction featuring international stars to Mariela’s independent documentary to Lucas’s low-budget, criminally self-funded fiction film, in which he denounces the very existence he lives and, rather ironically, in which he becomes increasingly embroiled. As the films that each character is making unfold in parallel with their lives underneath, the performance maps out a generation.

This generation is characterized by several recurrent tropes. The figure of Nadia, for example, represents the H.I.J.O.S—children of the 1976-83 military dictatorship’s estimated 30,000 disappeared—as she is commissioned by a film company in Paris to make a film in which one of the disappeared, Carlos, returns from hiding and is reunited with his family. The process causes Nadia intense malaise, as she begins to question both the ethics and politics of making a film that might suggest that the disappeared are still alive and waiting to return, effectively negating recognition of the military junta’s crimes against humanity on a massive scale. Hence, she starts to imagine that

her own disappeared father might still be alive, triggering a series of hazy and fragmented childhood memories.

This storyline problematizes the task of representing forced disappearance, while also evoking the important role of the H.I.J.O.S and both theatre and cinema as spaces for building a cultural memory from the intimate space of the parent-child relationship. It also explores the transnational nature of film production, whereby Nadia is forced to film a screenplay (suffering writer's block, she fails to write her own) that has been imposed on her from France, without the writer ever having set foot in Argentina. Nadia is the only member of cast or crew perturbed by this, which seems to problematize the "transnational marketing of memory in a new global imaginary" for international audiences, a debate that has been raised by Silvia Tandeciarz (63) in relation to Juan José Campanella's highly successful and Oscar-winning *El secreto de los ojos* (2009). To this, one might add Pablo Trapero's recent box office hit on the domestic market, *El clan* (2015), which portrays the crimes of extortion-for-profit brutally committed under the official banner of the dictatorship, the case of the Puccio family curiously capturing the nation's imagination both as a successful film and a prime-time television series in the same year ("El Clan Puccio"). Both films deal with a memory of the dictatorship, albeit obliquely, by characterising the era from the perspective of a broader societal violence, beyond politically defined categories of victimhood and repression.<sup>28</sup>

Lucas's film draws a clear parallel between violence, human rights violations, and the implementation of the neoliberal economic structure, echoing the role of the military dictatorship in instigating the neoliberal turn. In 2004, a stencil on the walls of the Avenida de Mayo<sup>29</sup> read: "Los desaparecidos de ayer son los excluidos de hoy," a graphic version of Eduardo Galeano's statement, "[p]eople were tortured so prices could be free," (qtd. in Idelber Avelar 231) or Latin America's "cruel modernity," as Jean Franco articulates the relationship between dictatorship and its violent embedding of the neoliberal logic that resulted in increasing social divides. As Mariela's documentary charts the musicals echoing the collapse of the Soviet Union and, by association, the demise of the Left and "post-ideological" world (Bell) (or rather a world increasingly dominated by a single market logic), Lucas stages this forceful embedding of the neoliberal ideology. The protagonist of his film is kidnapped, held captive, and tortured. He is made to dress up as Ronald McDonald and force-fed cold hamburgers as punishment for an unspecified "crime." With time, he becomes so used to dressing up as Ronald McDonald

and captivity becomes such a “normal” part of his daily routine that when his kidnappers suddenly disappear, leaving the door to his prison cell open, he dares not venture out and take advantage of his freedom.

This metaphor finds an echo in Lucas’s own unintentional ascent up the management hierarchy of his McDonald’s branch, which eventually ends in him adopting the corporate values of the multinational employer that had previously so repulsed him. The culmination of his ascent is portrayed absurdly when Barack Obama visits his branch, and he is photographed for the local newspaper posing side-by-side with the US president. Meanwhile, his rebellion is reduced to creating a new “meal deal,” named the “McCombo Rebelde.” Again, the theme of obsolescence re-emerges in this storyline, this time professional. When Lucas is injured defending his branch from anti-capitalist protesters, he is forced to take sick leave to recover. By the time he is well enough to work again, he has been replaced, mercilessly cast off for someone who is more productive.<sup>30</sup> The theme of obsolescence in romantic relationships is played out in Gabriel’s film, as protagonist Tony is abandoned by his girlfriend. As he sets out to find her, he encounters a string of abandoned lovers, victims of what Zygmunt Bauman might term “liquid love” (9, 13). Within his broader conceptualization of modernity, Bauman develops the idea of a society in which human relationships are consumed, the romantic bonds that unite one person to another born with an expiration date already stamped upon them. Tony is also terminally ill like Gabriel and the scenes in which both consult a doctor are the only scenes in which both the gestures and dialogue replicate one another simultaneously on both levels of the stage.

As the performance unfolds, the lower level is subtly emptied of objects by a stagehand, turning the lower level of Tirantte’s set design into what seems, by optical illusion, to become a reflection of the space above. The ground quite literally becomes disembedded to separate the two spaces; reality and fiction are hence inverted. The only sign to proliferate—for a while at least—on the lower tier is the unmistakable golden ‘M’ of McDonald’s, carrying the full symbolic weight of the neoliberal ideology in its corporate, globalized expression.

Other techniques contribute to the effect of the two spaces bleeding into one another. By the time Lucas is introduced on the lower level, his storyline is accompanied by an extra-diegetic soundtrack, a technique associated more with fictional films and documentaries. In the early stages of the performance, the front lighting on the upper level, creating shadows on the back wall of the

set (again, Plato's cave springs to mind), contrasts with the more uniform, blanket lighting on the lower level. Likewise, the use of coloured lighting on the upper level, reminiscent of Jean-Luc Godard's *Le mépris* (1963), is eventually replicated on the lower level as fiction invades the real. *Cineastas* certainly performs the emptying out of the real, but instead of lamenting this loss of the real with a narrative advocating its recovery, I would suggest that Pensotti encourages further questioning of the way in which contemporary worlds are made via our own cinematic lens.

### Being Through Cinema

*Cineastas* can thus be said to explore the notion of being through cinema. The idea that film spectatorship is intrinsic to the way in which we author our daily lives and identities is a recurring theme in Pensotti's recent work. "Tener dos vidas es más equilibrada que tener una sola," reflects the omniscient voice-over narrator in *Cineastas*, suggesting that Pensotti embraces the possibilities of hybrid experience and the multiple identities this may bear. In *Enciclopedia de vidas no vividas* (2010), Pensotti explores the possibility of bifurcating lives by asking volunteers to imagine an alternative life through cinema. The performance compiles thirty separate anecdotes authored by writers, playwrights, and theorists from various places, all of whom describe



Photo: Bea Bogers

hypothetical situations they would have liked to have lived, but did not, in person at least. In relation to this project, Pensotti comments:

¿Cuáles son los momentos que hubiéramos deseado vivir y no vivimos? ¿Cuáles son las canciones que deberían haber acompañado esos momentos que no vivimos? ¿Cómo ordenar las vidas que podríamos haber tenido y no tuvimos? Nuestras vidas son películas. No podemos vivir ninguna situación sin sentir una cámara invisible sobre nosotros, sin vernos inevitablemente reflejados en el recuerdo de actores que hemos visto actuando escenas similares. Y, sobretodo, casi podemos escuchar la música de fondo a las escenas cotidianas que vivimos.<sup>31</sup>

He suggests that we spend so much time in front of screens watching the lives of others (whether fictional or not), that we can only imagine our own lives as if they were being filmed, complete with a soundtrack.

In this sense, we are all directors of our own personal life films, an idea Pensotti develops more explicitly in his short contribution to the literary collection *Buenos Aires: Escala 1:1. Los barrios por sus escritores*. As the title suggests, the anthology creates a collectively authored map of the city of Buenos Aires. Each chapter is written by a different author about one of Buenos Aires's many neighbourhoods. It is another variation on the idea of a kaleidoscope of voices piecing together a cultural map of the city, as developed in *Cineastas* and evoked in Macchi's urban installations. Pensotti's contribution to this anthology is a short text on the Parque Patricios neighbourhood of Capital Federal titled "Parque Patricios / Autocine," a play on words between the drive-through cinema and a kind of "auto (or self-directed) cinema" (77-82). The first-person narrator of this short piece recounts the disappearance of his parents during the dictatorship, who fail to pick him up from school one evening. Knowing full well that it is not safe to return home, he seeks refuge in various places around the neighbourhood. The text uses a dual structure, similar to that created by the separate performance spaces in *Cineastas*, by using block, capital typescript to signify the space of the film. As the narrative recounting the aftermath of the disappearance of his parents unfolds, it periodically cuts to seemingly unconnected short descriptions of Wim Wenders' film *Paris, Texas* (1984). One might question what rural Texas has in common with suburban Buenos Aires—the intruding fragments seem to be somewhat divorced contextually from the narrator's reality—but the narrator is clearly fascinated by this film and has created his own dialectic between the film and his reality through the common theme of the abandoned

child, a recurring theme in Wenders's work.<sup>32</sup> Seeing his own reality through the rose-tinted lens provided by *Paris, Texas* makes his life more palatable:

En la película pasa cada cosa que me pasó hasta ese momento. Pero todo es más chistoso, con más brillo, yo soy más ingenioso y las cosas me salen mejor. [...] y yo parezco más lindo, más profunda y sabia mi mirada. Mi película no la ve nadie, claro, pero no hace falta, yo me la proyecto en la cabeza todos los días y a partir de ahí vivo un poco mejor. (181-82)

Another important point to note is that Wenders' film uses the trope of the screen to mediate the interactions between the broken family portrayed in the film. Several of the encounters only ever take place through a window, which acts as a screen (both real and symbolic) punctuating each meeting. This reference is, however, less explicit than the fact that the narrator imagines his own surroundings via the films he has watched.

I would suggest, then, that Pensotti belongs to a young generation of artists—many of whom are discussed in this issue—who look beyond the established categories of the postmodern to explore virtual/organic hybrid identities more openly. In *¿Cómo viajar sin ver?*, for example, Spanish-Argentine writer Andrés Neuman makes an important observation about our relationship to virtual worlds as he makes his whistle-stop tour of Latin America:

Vivimos siempre en varios lugares al mismo tiempo. No importa dónde estés, podemos consultar nuestro correo, leer los periódicos del mundo, seguir la actualidad internacional. Vayamos donde vayamos, continuamos dentro de un mismo paisaje: el de las comunicaciones. Por eso me pareció atractivo intentar un diario que reflejase dos certezas contrarias. La de que, a través de los medios, solemos pasar más tiempo en otra parte (o en varias partes a la vez, o en ninguna parte) que donde nos hallamos físicamente. (15)

Several of Neuman's works explore the role of virtual platforms in mediating human relations. He states that he openly acknowledges their integral role in everyday life and shaping contemporary intersubjectivities, rather than seeing them as a threat.

*Cineastas* posits a Cortazarian enigma wherein the relationship between reality and fiction is indecipherable: Reality does not precede fiction, and neither can fiction entirely precede reality. Just like the matryoshka dolls that Mariela collects as part of her documentary project on Russian musicals charting the Glasnost period, the threads of *Cineastas* exist inside one another like Moebius strips. The same actor or actress may take on several roles



within the same storyline, their transitions often seamless, at times at a speed that defies belief and with minimal or no costume change. This evokes the idea of multiple and interchangeable identities. The constant displacement of the real onto a prefiguring fiction creates the effect of a *mise-en-abîme ad infinitum*.<sup>33</sup> “No vemos ciudades,” advises the voice-over narrator at one point, “vemos ficciones de ciudades.” This point is important enough to be repeated for emphasis: “No vemos ciudades, vemos ficciones.” The point of origin—of the city, of its population, of a work of art—is presented thus as impossible: “Todo lo que vemos está condicionado por lo que vimos anteriormente,” states the narrator in a rehashed version of the quotation from Godard printed in the performance programme. Mariela’s documentary on Russian musicals is part of her own personal search for her (adopted) roots, a journey that leads her rather absurdly into a televised simulacrum of her adopted family’s town of origin on the Russian steppes, as if she suddenly finds herself inside something akin to her own *Truman Show*.<sup>34</sup> The only plausible origin presented in this performance is arguably cinema itself. Or, I would argue, perhaps theatre as the medium able to evoke cinema’s origin, to strip cinema of its screens and reflect upon its role in authoring everyday lives and shaping the way in which we perceive the material world around us. This brings me to the final issue at stake in this study: the nature of the relationship between theatre and cinema within the performance of *Cineastas*.

### Hybrid Identities

It is hard to discern whether *Cineastas* uses theatre to undress the filmic process, or whether film is used in order to revitalize theatre. The critical vocabulary used to analyse a film is certainly the most appropriate for analysing the performance’s style and montage. Yet, for a performance that purports to explore cinema’s role in both shaping the way in which humans now perceive their surroundings and cultivating local imaginaries, there is a curious lack of screens in *Cineastas*. The relationship between theatre and cinema has more often than not been theorised in terms of one’s attempt to differentiate itself as an art form from the other, an issue that Susan Sontag has considered in depth. “The history of cinema is often treated as the history of its emancipation from theatrical models,” she argues, citing its liberation

from theatrical ‘frontality’ (the unmoving camera reproducing the situation of the spectator of a play fixed in his seat), then from theatrical acting (gestures needlessly stylized, exaggerated—needlessly, because now the actor could be seen ‘close-up’), then from theatrical

furnishings (unnecessary ‘distancing’ of the audiences’ emotions, disregarding the opportunity to immerse the audience in reality). (362) Sontag’s discussion of the relationship between theatre and film is, in this sense, very similar to Dubatti’s assertion that theatre’s specificity as a genre lies in its presence, or “convivio:” “If an irreducible distinction between theatre and cinema does exist, it may be this,” she continues.

Theatre is confined to a logical or *continuous* use of space. Cinema (through editing, that is, through the change of shot—which is the basic unit of film construction) has access to an alogical or *discontinuous* use of space. In the theatre, people are either in the stage space or ‘off’. When ‘on’, they are always visible or visualizable in contiguity with each other. In the cinema, no such relation is necessarily visible or even visualizable. (Sontag 362-367, original emphasis)

Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, for example, applauded cinema’s capacity to move out of the theatre and into the factories and onto the streets (Mariela’s Russian lover, Dmitri, cites him during one of their conversations). Pensotti’s work does, however, seem to shun these established assumptions about what is specific to film and theatre, fusing these two performance types together. There is arguably no point in trying to create a hierarchy of importance between these two genres in *Cineastas*. When Dmitri talks about Eisenstein with Mariela, he provides a clue as to how the relationship between the two spaces in the performance are to be read. He cites Soviet montage theory, outlined in Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov’s co-signed “A Statement” from 1928. Soviet montage theory saw editing as the key to cinematic language, the production of meaning—a third meaning—taking place in the dialectic created between two juxtaposed shots. This seems to suggest that identities are produced in a kind of Lev Kuleshov effect between our material surroundings and the influence of film on the way we perceive them. The dialectic between theatre and cinema thus seems to be the best medium for replicating this organic/virtual dialectic.

### **To Conclude: Identity as Intermedial?**

*Cineastas* creates a map of a generation, citing many of the tropes one might expect of the post-dictatorship period in Argentina and, also more generally, of the postmodern. Few of these references are, however, developed in any depth, which has led certain critics to suggest that the performance “lacks flesh.”<sup>35</sup> I would, however, argue that the absurd and, at times, seemingly cursory references to these tropes are deliberate. The very colloquial

nature of the expression adds to the flippancy.<sup>36</sup> Instead of the nostalgic lamenting of the dissipation of the Real and a desire for its return (Žižek 10-11; Baudrillard)—a staple, if now rather tired organising principle of the postmodern and a founding idea of the biodrama series—Pensotti casts out existing categories and asks us to consider the more integral role that virtual spaces, such as cinema, play in making contemporary worlds, inflecting both our sense of being in and (dis)belonging to a specific place. Neither does he advocate the need to liberate the spectator from the pernicious effects of the spectacle (Rancière, “Spectator”). Instead, Pensotti explores the role of spectatorship in authoring the everyday. The residue of such anxieties indeed remains, but it is shown to be insufficient for fully grasping the role of virtual spaces in vectors of identity construction. If there is a message to be read in the medium, it is that Pensotti’s insightful theatrical-cinematic installation draws a set of boundaries along which to better understand the role of screen media in making contemporary worlds. To this I would add the important role of theatre, as cinema’s precursor in a continuum of performance types, in stripping these worlds of their screens, exploring “back stage” beneath the layers of mediation, taking the audience back to the original cinematic encounter, and encouraging each spectator to reflect on the role of screen media in the construction of identity.

What, then, of the subjectivities and identities that are crystalized in this hybrid experience? The performance’s dialectic between the space of the real and the space of the film, their progressive conflation and interdependence should, I would argue, be read as a demonstration of the dialectic through which contemporary identities are negotiated. *Cineastas*’s hybrid structure is clearly instrumental in finding a medium suitable for capturing the way to better understand processes of identity construction. This could be likened to Sarlo’s argument that the speculative structures of television and what she terms “la posibilidad estructural del zapping” shape contemporary social relations (60-1, original emphasis). I, however, prefer to liken *Cineastas* to Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges’s more playful and accepting account of his own hyper- or intertextual subjectivity. Borges’s *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* (1945) is cited as a seminal point of reference in the *New Media Reader* (Manovich 13-16), a hypertext *avant la lettre*. Shortly before his death in 1986, Borges captured this idea of an intertextual construction of identity as a product of incorporated fictions: “No estoy seguro de que yo exista, en realidad. Soy todos los autores que he leído, toda la gente que he conocido, todas las mujeres que he amado. Todas las ciudades que he visi-

tado” (qtd. in Fermosel). *Cineastas* offers a contemporary variation on the same theme: the construction of the cinematic self and his or her hypertextual identities in the making of contemporary worlds.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This may seem like a rehashed version of the old adage “All the world’s a stage,” as cited from William Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*, but, as I argue in *Politics and Performance* (12), the conflation of aesthetics and politics becomes the object of reflexive interrogation in post-dictatorship Argentine theatre in the wake of a dictatorship that, as Diana Taylor argues, was characterized by “obvious spectacularity” (273).

<sup>2</sup> Goffman defines social interaction in clearly theatrical terms: “when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reasons for him [or her] to mobilize his [or her] activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his [or her] interest to convey” (15–16).

<sup>3</sup> Schechner clearly defines performance as “an activity done by an individual or group in the presence of and for another individual or group” (22), explaining the absence of cinema and other virtual performance types from this continuum. I would argue, however, for an extension of this continuum within the contemporary context. More than a decade on from Schechner’s work, the integral role of virtual spaces and identities performed on online platforms in everyday life should be taken into account.

<sup>4</sup> Again, reasserting the primacy of presence in the theatrical encounter, María Delgado and Caridad Svitch’s edited volume, *Theatre in Crisis? Performance Manifestos for a New Century: Snapshots of a Time* (2002), considers the challenges facing millennial theatre productions from the perspective of both theorists and practitioners.

<sup>5</sup> The biodrama series began in 2002 at the Teatro Sarmiento, part of the theater complex run by the Government of the city of Buenos Aires, with Analia Couceyro’s *Barrocos retratos de una papa*. The series was conceived by theatre director Vivi Tellas, who not only curates the series, but has directed some nine out of twenty-six productions. The concept of biodrama, her passion for biography, and her insatiable interest in exploring theatricality are the key topics in the bite-sized TEDxRíodelaPlata presentation given by Tellas on December 17, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Óscar Cornago echoes this in his appraisal of biodrama: “En una sociedad desbordada de representaciones e imágenes, de simulacros y ficciones, la recuperación de lo real ha funcionado como una especie de consigna en campos muy diversos. [...] Tanto en el arte como en la escena mediática se ha tratado de crear un efecto de realidad que estuviera más allá de lo ficticio, de lo que no es verdadero, del engaño y lo teatral” (5).

<sup>7</sup> On December 19, 2001, the Argentine people took to the streets under the slogan “Que se vayan todos,” referring to the political class, in widespread demonstrations against restrictions on the withdrawal of savings. Argentina ended up defaulting on its foreign debt payment and the *peso* devalued dramatically, putting an end to the fixed exchange rate. An economic, social, and political crisis ensued that saw unemployment surge and just shy of half the population was classified officially as being below the poverty line. Alternative forms of representation and participation proliferated as the country saw five presidents in the space of only two weeks. See Alejandro Grimson, *La cultura en las crisis latinoamericanas*, and Mauricio Rojas, *Historia de la crisis argentina*.

<sup>8</sup> In the introduction to Mariana Obersztern’s biodrama, *El aire alrededor* (staged in 2003), Tellas states: “En un mundo descartable, ¿qué valor tienen nuestras vidas, nuestras experiencias, nuestro tiempo?”

Biodrama se propone reflexionar sobre esta cuestión. Se trata de investigar cómo los hechos de la vida de cada persona—hechos individuales, privados—constituyen la Historia” (46). The Menem mandate is often referred to as the “fiesta menemista,” a decade of consumerism unleashed, also characterized by the well-known catchphrase “deme dos” [give me two of everything], evoking its excess. The recent election of President Mauricio Macri, who took office in December 2015 to follow Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s mandate, has revived fears of a return to the unchecked neoliberalism of the 1990s (“Primeros pasos”). It has yet to be seen as to how independent theatre will react to this. The new regime already represents a threat to artistic spaces in the city of Buenos Aires (“Aumento de luz”), continuing with a policy that had already threatened to extinguish many independent cultural spaces under his mandate as president of the City of Buenos Aires (“Ola de clausuras”).

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Mariano Pensotti: <http://marianopensotti.com/>.

<sup>10</sup> I would like to thank both Jordana Blejmar and Cecilia Sosa for recommending this production and suggesting that it would fit in with my research area. The field trip to Buenos Aires that enabled me to attend live performances of *Cineastas* at the Teatro Sarmiento in August 2014 was funded by the Newcastle University Early Career Researcher mobility fund. The remaining fieldwork was funded by the EU Marie Curie RISE researcher mobility project “Cultural Narratives of Crisis and Renewal (CRIC)” (2015-2018), which enabled me to be a visiting researcher at the Universidad Tres de Febrero in Buenos Aires in August and September 2015.

<sup>11</sup> The set design and construction is the fruit of another successful collaboration between Mariano Pensotti and scenographer-cum-installation artist Mariana Tirante. Co-founders of the Grupo Marea, they have worked together on several performances: *El pasado es un animal grotesco* (2010), *Hoy es el día* (2014), *El paraíso* (2014), and, most recently, *Cuando vuelva a casa voy a ser otro* (2015).

<sup>12</sup> I refer here to Plato’s theory of archetypes.

<sup>13</sup> “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” [This is not a pipe] is the legend written onto the canvas of Magritte’s painting *La trahison des images* [The Treachery of Images] (1929). This is certainly no coincidence, given that *Cineastas* was first presented at the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Belgium; the citation of one of Belgium’s most famous painters would have taken on added significance as a wink to the local audience.

<sup>14</sup> “Spectacle” in the Situationist sense, particularly the set of definitions provided in Guy Debord’s work *The Society of Spectacle* (1967). In such a society, argues Debord, “[e]verything that was directly lived has receded into a representation. [...] When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings” (7). This concept of the spectacle as configuring social relations is the founding notion on which Rancière’s call to “emancipate” the spectator is based (*Spectator* 271-80).

<sup>15</sup> I am referring here to French filmmaker Jacques Tati’s film *Playtime* (1967). Tati built a huge set to recreate Paris quite literally as a city of spectacle, as the Situationist International might have defined it. Its date of release coincided with the publication of Guy Debord’s book *The Society of Spectacle* (the eponymous film, directed by Debord, was released in 1973). In Tati’s Paris, the only recognizable image of Paris is a brief reflection of the iconic Eiffel Tower on the surface of a freshly polished window. The rest of the city is designed in monotonous grey according to geometric norms, to facilitate the steady, uninterrupted flow of traffic, people, and capital as businesses market their gadgets to eager consumers. The trope of the screen is vital to Tati’s rendition of Paris, just as it is—albeit in its notable absence—in Pensotti’s performance. The fact that M. Hulot cannot discern where there is glass and where there is not indicates that society is largely oblivious to the role of screens in mediating social interaction.

<sup>16</sup> As this article went to press, *Cineastas* was being presented at the New Zealand International Arts Festival, having been staged at festivals across Europe and United States, along with successful repeat seasons in Buenos Aires.

<sup>17</sup> *Porteño* is the local term in Spanish for someone who originates from or lives in the city of Buenos Aires.

<sup>18</sup> Played by Javier Lorenzo, Valeria Lois, Juliana Muras, and Marcelo Subiotto, respectively. The fifth member of the cast is Horacio Acosta, who takes on various roles within the storylines centered on the four filmmakers. The only other onstage presence is that of a rather active and slick stagehand, who

plays an important role in discretely removing all props from the initially laden lower level of the set as the performance unfolds.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the biodrama series experiments liberally with the unstable frontier between reality and fiction. It is not a series that follows any aesthetic model and each individual biodrama offers a very different approach to Tellas's unifying concept. For more on the biodrama series, see Óscar Cornago, "Biodrama: sobre el teatro de la vida y la vida del teatro," and my previous study of the following biodramas in *Politics and Performance* (127-60): *Los 8 de julio* (Beatriz Catani and Mariano Pensotti, 2002), *Temperley* (Luciano Suardi and Alejandro Tantanian, 2002), and *El aire alrededor* (Mariana Obersztern, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> The voice-over narrator cites the first film set in Buenos Aires as having been made in 1905. However, it is unclear to which film Pensotti is referring. The first film is generally cited as being Federico Figner's documentary footage of the Avenida de Mayo and Palermo in 1896, the same year that the Lumière brothers' films were first screened in the Argentine capital.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note here that Pensotti's performances often stem from some kind of documentary technique, whether in the form of interviews (*Cineastas, Los 8 de julio*), collated fragments of photographs cast out at the local developing lab (*El pasado es un animal grotesco*), collected anecdotes (*Enciclopedia de vidas no vividas*), or personal belongings (*Cuando vuelva a casa voy a ser otro*).

<sup>22</sup> This design of umbrella is commonly found in souvenir shops of contemporary art museums housing Magritte's work in their collection. Many of Magritte's works have a signature cloud-swept background.

<sup>23</sup> If, as Barthes argues, "the true locus of writing is reading," then we might extrapolate this argument and suggest that the true locus of performance lies with the spectator rather than the author: "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. [...] a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148).

<sup>24</sup> One of the objects filmed in Gabriel's final attempt to record himself for posterity is a copy of film theorist André Bazin's essay *What is Cinema?* A staple text in film studies, Bazin advocates cinema's roots in documentary. He also sees art as a means of putting off death: "If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation. The process might reveal that at the origin of painting and sculpture there lies a mummy complex. The religion of ancient Egypt, aimed against death, saw survival as depending on the continued existence of the corporeal body. Thus, by providing a defense against the passage of time it satisfied a basic psychological need in man, for death is but the victory of time. To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life" (9).

<sup>25</sup> Plato's cave provides a seminal point of reference in theories of film spectatorship (see, for example, Jean-Louis Baudry "The Apparatus"). Baudry's approach to spectatorship is informed by psychoanalysis and focuses on the illusion under which the spectator identifies with what s/he is watching, thus facilitating, in Baudry's opinion, ideological interpellation of the spectator. "One always returns to the scene of the cave: real effect or impression of reality," he begins (206-23). "The entire cinematographic apparatus is activated in order to provoke this simulation: it is indeed a simulation of a condition of the subject, a position of the subject, subject and not reality" (222).

<sup>26</sup> For an image of the installation, consult Macchi's website: <http://www.jorgemacchi.com/es/obras/106/guia-de-la-inmovilidad>. Macchi also has an installation titled "Buenos Aires Tour," which creates a psychogeographical Subte map of Buenos Aires, whereby the station names are marked by an emotion, rather than their name. To see how Pensotti uses the image on the home page of his own website, see: [www.marianopensotti.com](http://www.marianopensotti.com).

<sup>27</sup> Gustavo Taretto's film *Medianeras* (2011), as the title suggests, uses the sidewalls of Buenos Aires as a symbol for society's blinkered approach to navigating through the city, coupled with a series of

miscommunications and misencounters between neighbours who, despite living next door to one another, meet virtually in an online chat forum.

<sup>28</sup> Silvia R. Tandeciarz “Secrets, Trauma, and the Memory Market,” discusses *El secreto de sus ojos* in relation to what she terms the “global memory market,” exploring the commercial success of memory films. She also gauges this on Oscar recognition. Chilean director Pablo Larraín’s film, *No* (2012), was also nominated for the category of Best Film in a Foreign Language, further reinforcing her argument and suggesting its relevance beyond the case of Argentina.

<sup>29</sup> This is the main avenue connecting the presidential palace, the Casa Rosada, and the National Congress and is normally the main thoroughfare for demonstrations.

<sup>30</sup> The use of McDonald’s may seem to be something of a stereotype, but it is worth remembering that the economy of the theatrical stage means that props necessarily condense meaning and are required to carry the full symbolic weight of the phenomenon to which they refer. McDonald’s has been an important symbol of globalization in its corporate form in Latin American popular culture. Examples are numerous: the narratives of *McOndo*, edited by Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, fuse the global, urban symbol of McDonald’s with reference to the rural narratives of magical realism (Macondo) in order to explore urban living in Latin America under the influence of North American popular culture.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://marianopensotti.com/enciclopedia.html>.

<sup>32</sup> See also *Alice in the Cities*.

<sup>33</sup> Pensotti and Tirantte create a similar effect in their previous collaboration, *El pasado es un animal grotesco* (2012), using a revolving set divided into four interior spaces that represent the lives of four characters. The performance has a similar thread structure to *Cineastas*; as the set revolves, the protagonist of the previous space becomes the narrator of the next story, using a roving microphone to create the effect of a voice-over narrative. Hence the stories live inside one another in a Moebius-type configuration that is created in perpetuity by the performance’s mobile circularity.

<sup>34</sup> *The Truman Show*, directed by Peter Weir, is a film about insurance salesman Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey), whose entire life, unbeknownst to him, is a popular television show. The limits of his world and the limits of the television series are synonymous. By the time *Cineastas* draws to a close, the two spaces—that of the real below and that of the film above—have conflated and Mariela, like Truman, finds herself in a giant television set replicating her origins. Her world has become a giant fiction.

<sup>35</sup> Discussion with Cecilia Sosa on the contribution to this special edition of the *Latin American Theatre Review*.

<sup>36</sup> One example is when Mariela draws inspiration from the musicals she is documenting: “Yo también tengo que ser entusiasta, como esas películas con Lenin encarando a las masas. Esa es la onda.”

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