
Afterword: The Transmedial and the Communitarian

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In a seminal text on embodied meaning, Mark Johnson writes, “To discover how meaning works, we should turn first to gesture, social interaction, ritual, and art, and only later to linguistic communication” (208). His work makes a philosophical and scientific contribution to the flourishing field of embodiment studies, which engage with the material, the sensory, and the corporeal to explore human (and nonhuman) experience. Such approaches provide a corrective to the “linguistic turn” that put philosophies of language in ascendancy for much of the 20th century and presided over the influence of semiotics in film studies and the dominance of the text in theatre. They have also shaped a move from studying media’s role in mediation—how images and discourses are considered to interpose themselves between us and reality—to a focus on mediatization, which describes how media technologies are transforming modes of subjectivity and sociability.

The cinematic and theatrical productions discussed in this special issue are often rooted in Argentine traditions, events, and debates, but they also clearly participate in these broader, transnational shifts in artistic practice and theory. The strongly transmedial quality of these texts and performances brings theatre and cinema together with music, poetry, and other arts to produce heterogeneous spaces of performance, reflection, and critique. In many cases, the use of theatrical tropes and devices in cinema (especially the rehearsal) and, conversely, the intrusion of media technologies in theatre (including the large screens used by Lola Arias, Mariano Pensotti, and Rafael Spregelburd) act to bring mediality into a close and seemingly paradoxical relationship with materiality. In cinema, an emphasis on embodied presence, the aleatory, the ritualistic, the immediate, and the contingent reasserts that which seems entirely negated by film as a technique of mechanical reproduction. In theatre, the use of digital video technologies expands embodied experience

into the virtual and the mediatic, connecting the here-and-now of theatre to a wider community and to other forms of experience, as it does in Pensotti's *Los 8 de julio* (2002).

The recent emergence in Argentina of such transmedial, reflexive performance practices is not without national precedent. Two cinematic examples from a previous generation in the 1990s may put in relief a couple of key continuities and differences with the present moment. The use of theatrical devices and performances-within-performances in Fernando Solanas's *La nube* (1998) fractures the *mise-en-scène* into a heterogeneous space of performance and critique, drawing on Brechtian techniques to distance the spectator from any easy emotional identification with the characters. The film presents an homage to the community-based practices of independent theatre, neglected by the state and under threat of extinction in the context of the neoliberal 1990s, with the rise of multiplexes owned by multinational conglomerates. While the more recent productions discussed in this issue often articulate a similar critique of the commercialization of art, they share nothing of *La nube*'s nostalgia. Despite continued barriers to funding and constraints on exhibition and distribution, these transmedial performances manifest a new confidence in the power of art to create communities in the face of the increasingly privatized spaces of the culture industry.

Lita Stantic's *Un muro de silencio* (1993) offers another instructive comparison from an earlier era, in which actors play actors playing political activists who were disappeared by the military regime. Rehearsals of the film-within-the-film do not yield great insight for the director or her actors into the lives of the disappeared militants they represent, however, reducing them simply to repeated statements whose motives or actions they cannot understand. The film as a whole bears witness to a fractured community in which "todos sabían" what was happening during the dictatorship and in which relationships are now riven beyond repair. By contrast, works such as *La forma exacta de las islas* and *Minefield* affirm the therapeutic and restorative functions of art as a practice of integration, and its potential to stage real encounters between past and present, individual and community, private and public. Importantly, this is not a gesture towards the subsumption of difference in some kind of watered-down politics of reconciliation; as Arias maintains with respect to *Minefield* (2016), there remain crucial points of disagreement and divergence. Her work stages the (often precarious) triumph of solidarity over political and cultural differences in a way that does not erase or belittle them. If the "todos sabían" of *El muro de silencio* accuses the spectator,

trapping us in a web of societal complicity, later scenes of *Minefield* work in a similar way to interpellate us, eroding the distinction between us and the veterans on stage. Yet the emphasis of the latter production, as Jordana Blejmar points out, is on the creative potential for new understanding that may emerge from the recognition of “our own responsibilities towards that shared history, its present legacies, and the impossibility of drawing a clear line between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (119).

Indeed, there is a strong ethical underpinning to many of these projects’ experiments with different methods of sharing experience. It is for this reason, I would suggest, that acting becomes one of the major themes of many of the productions discussed here, as the actor is someone who consciously stands in the place of another, adopting his or her perspectives and gestures, staging an encounter with otherness and an entwining of experiences that is the basis of ethical practice. The donning of clothes in *Fauna* (2013) and *Mi vida después* (2009) lays bare the nature of this process as an intimate *investment* of, and in, the lives of others. The intermingling of personal and vicarious experience in acting is particularly clear in *El loro y el cisne* (2013) and *Viola* (2012), as it is in Eduardo Coutinho’s *Jogo de cena* (2007) and *Moscú* (2009), Brazilian films that share many concerns with the works of Alejo Mogueillansky and Matías Piñeiro that are explored here.

It is in the intensely communitarian gesture of these recent productions that I find, along with many of the contributors to this volume, strong resonances with the anti-capitalist discourses and practices that have emerged or expanded in post-crisis Argentina. These works bear a relationship with the deliberately amateur, shoestring budget films that inaugurated New Argentine Cinema in the late 1990s, in which the directors of *Bolivia* (2001) or *Mundo grúa* (1999) had to resort to persuading friends and family to become actors or to provide shooting locations. But they have made of those friendships a new form of collaborative practice that extends beyond financial necessity to create a new transmedial aesthetic and a mode of production that exceeds or circumvents the purely commercial. They express a radical adherence to communitarian values in the face of neoliberal individualism. As Blejmar and Sosa observe in their introduction, many of these productions become “an exaltation of friendship” (17). They are characterized by a reflexive concern with performative art, not simply as the expression of the experience of an individual or a community, but as a crucial process through which the two are bound together. In many cases, the communitarian thrust of these productions is embedded precisely in their transmediality, in the forging of relation-

ships between individuals from the worlds of theatre and cinema in order to engage with other lives and experiences, a process described by Martín Rejtman and Federico León in the interview transcribed in this issue. While these productions often exploit the artifice and the spectacle of performance (eschewing the naturalism and minimalism of New Argentine Cinema), they are committed to the recovery of affective bonds between actors, characters, and spectators. This is often achieved through an emphasis on the rehearsal as a space of encounter in which identities, memories, and practices are shared and transformed and new communities forged. The inclusion of rehearsal scenes here does not primarily serve a deconstructive function, puncturing the narrative with scenes from the “making of” the film or play. Instead, such scenes point to the very genesis of these productions in spaces of collaboration, friendship, exchange, and intersubjectivity.

These performances are “productive” in the sense defined by Steven Shaviro in *Post-Cinematic Affect*, as “they do not *represent* social processes, so much as they participate actively in these processes, and help to constitute them” (2). This emphasis on what film or theatre *does* rather than what it represents, what it brings into being rather than what it describes, renders meaningless the already much-eroded distinction between fiction and documentary, or drama and autobiography. Both fantasy and history, fiction and truth, may serve the same aim of the expansion of the self to embrace other stories and experiences. The productions explored here evince a renewed confidence in the capacity of both theatre and cinema to become spaces of genuine encounter and experience and reaffirm their basis in relations of friendship and collaboration that transcend commercialism. They respond to a broader shift from the political to the ethical in contemporary art across many contexts, focusing less on questions of ideology or the limits of representation and more on the ethical potential of empathy. Their emphasis on the communitarian rather than the collective marks both the limits of utopian thinking in post-dictatorship Argentina and the conditions of the possibility of its resurgence.

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Works Cited

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- Shaviro, Steven. *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Zero Books, 2010.