FICTIONS OF THE REAL

SYNERGIES BETWEEN SCREEN AND STAGE IN ARGENTINE PERFORMANCE

BRENDA WERTH

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Introduction

Argentina's Culture of the Real

> Si la historia de Miguel Ángel Boezzio es verdad, no lo sé. No sé si es verdad, sé que es real. (Tomás Abraham, in León 2005b, 74)

"I don't know if it is true; I know it is real," summarizes philosopher Tomás Abraham's experience as a spectator of Federico León's 1998 documentary performance *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* (León 2005b, 74). It captures a central premise of this book, that expressions of "the real" do not depend on any certainty of truth. The real, an elusive and capacious concept and area of study, seems both on the verge of saturation and at a critical point of inflection, finding itself front and center in critical analyses of how the arts are being transformed by AI, in dialogue with digital culture, shifting definitions of realism, and the posthuman. The concept of the real continues to be invoked and reimagined in the arts and discussed as a vital register, category, method, and culture. In recent decades, reality TV, verbatim theater, and discourses of authenticity and truth show us that the real is still a concept utilized by artists, critics, and mainstream audiences. I am invested in analyzing what the real means to the artists in this book, to the critics who use the term to discuss the work, to spectators who feel the allure of the real, and to the field of performance studies as it intersects with the expanding field of documentary studies and intermediality.

Fictions of the Real situates a discussion of the real in dialogue with distinct but intertwined lineages in film and theater. I discuss the work of Argentine artists who have been at the forefront of this trend since the early twenty-first century, creating both theater and film: Lola Arias, Federico León, Grupo Krapp, Romina Paula, and Mariano Pensotti. These artists assume the roles of translators, curators, researchers, archivists, and collaborators vis-à-vis their creative process and methodology, informed by the dynamic and shifting context of Argentina between 1998 and 2023, a period roughly bookmarked by the economic crisis of 2001 and the pandemic.

In each chapter I have chosen to focus on works that propose unique approaches to the real in relation to method or process, as effect, or as discourse. I have selected works that are often mistakenly assumed to be documentaries even though they contain fictional aspects. The works I analyze here propose intermediality—the "self-reflexive interplay of live and digital media in performance"—as central to expanding and reinvigorating conversations on the real (Arfara et al. 2018, 8). While the works here are extraordinarily diverse, they nonetheless reveal a shared set of methods and practices and a fascination with exploring the real through performance. The artists discussed in this book are, in a sense, self-translators, interested in occupying a range of creative roles and positions, moving between media in collaboration with set designers, lighting designers, musicians, dancers, and actors. They create stage architectures that transform into movie screens, and they borrow and swap personal objects that disappear and reappear as props between works. Tech crews (set designers, lighting designers, and choreographers) enter the stage and into the film frame, making the invisible visible and obliterating the bounded nature of performance. The artists are, at times, curators who play active roles in programming, networking, and framing their works. Following Baz Kershaw, they are, in many ways, practitioners of performance *as* research (2009, 105). Characteristic of their work is a preference for unconventional venues such as museums, gardens, train stations, apartment buildings, and homes; the blending of documentary and fiction; the self-referential use of baring devices; and a DIY approach to production. They create generative feedback loops and sustain relationships among collaborators over the course of long rehearsals, extended runs, and the exploration of themes and alternative modes of knowledge production across multiple platforms. The aim of bringing these artists together in this book is to examine these shared practices and how they illuminate the vibrant body of intermedial performance work that has flourished over the last two decades in Argentina and elsewhere.

Biodrama and Argentina's Culture of the Real

In *Fictions of the Real*, I examine how these artists engage with documentary modes across theater and film to expand, question, and critique the real. One of the tasks throughout this book is to unsettle the categories of fiction and the real and to engage more precisely with concepts in dialogue with the real, such as autofiction, autobiography, realism, the postdramatic, the hyperreal, neorealism, and reenactment. Another major aim of this book is to highlight Argentina's homegrown articulation of the real called Biodrama, first envisioned by artist-curator Vivi Tellas in 2001 in Buenos Aires. Tellas contributed greatly to

shaping the direction of contemporary documentary theater in Argentina and on the world stage (Hernández 2021) and forging the identity of the curator-artist in Argentine theater (Pinta 2014). A director with training in the visual arts, Tellas is well-known for curating inventive performance series, including *Proyecto Museos* (Museums Project, 1994–2001), *Biodrama* (2002–8), and *Proyecto Archivos* (Archives Project, 2003–8), among others.

In Argentina, Tellas cultivated an era of Biodrama and attuned audiences to a particular approach to documentary theater. As Pamela Brownell and Paola Hernández observe, *Proyecto Biodrama* "shook up" the theater scene in Argentina when it premiered in 2002 (2017, 7). For the *Biodrama* series, Tellas asked directors to choose a living person as inspiration for their work and, in collaboration with an author, to transform the person's story into a staged performance (Tellas's handbill 2002, qtd. in Pinta 2014, 80). Tellas further explains that Biodrama, situated on the border between reality and fiction, reflects what could be called "a return to the real" (el retorno a lo real) (Tellas's handbill 2002, qtd. in Pinta 2014, 80). Tellas's Biodrama introduced a new wave of documentary performance to the Buenos Aires theater scene that has contributed to shaping practices beyond theater and shifted focus to a new set of priorities, including an emphasis on archival preparation of performance work, an exploration of museum practices, and a focus on lived experience and the first person. Tellas's Biodrama conceptualizes the real not only as a return but also, as Marcela Fuentes notes, as an "interruption of the performance of self in everyday life" that illustrates a process of emergence rather than repetition and simultaneously interrupts "theatre as a system of representation" (2017, 30). This book thus examines works that reflect on and transform the culture of the real in Argentina.

The impact of Tellas's Biodrama is such that contemporary noncommercial theater in Buenos Aires is frequently interpreted through the lens of Biodrama or in relation/opposition to Biodrama. Sandra Contreras refers to "the times of biodrama" that characterize the culture of the real and the heightened interest in biography in contemporary artistic production in Argentina (2012, 155). In this book, I consider the implications of this desire for the return of the real in a context of an acute crisis of political representation in the wake of the economic collapse of 2001. Artist Beatriz Catani confesses, "I've spent this whole year wondering about the effectiveness of theater processes; fundamentally a question about representation, the basis for fiction, in a country living through such a pronounced and profound crisis" (in Cornago 2005, 8).[1] The economic crisis of 2001 produced a crisis of representation that had implications for the arts and created the conditions for a deep questioning of fiction and the real.

Post-Crisis Creation: The Art of Survival

Ranging from 1998 to 2023, the works examined in *Fictions of the Real* belong to a generation of artists that came of age in the aftermath of Argentina's civic-military dictatorship that ended in 1983. They began their artistic careers roughly around 2001 or in the aftermath of the crisis. Groups like Pampero Cine (2002), Piel de Lava (2003), Mariano Pensotti's Grupo Marea (2005), and Romina Paula's El Silencio (2006) all formed in the years following the crisis and reveal the emerging interest in working collectively during this time. The origins of the crisis are frequently linked to the introduction of neoliberal reforms under the civic-military dictatorship (1976–83), followed by a decade of debt accumulation and the overvaluation of the peso in the '90s.[2] In 2001, Argentina defaulted on its national debt and was forced to devalue its currency, a measure that decimated Argentines' savings. A bank freeze, *corralito* (little corral), was put in place as a drastic measure to prevent a run on the banks, and as a result, Argentines had extremely limited access to their bank accounts. People spilled into the streets in protest, clanging pots and pans (*cacerolazos*) and chanting "¡Que se vayan todos!" (they all must go) in unified denunciation of the political class. The crisis of 2001 "effectively marked a before and after in the country's social and cultural imagery," ushering in a period of economic and political instability that affected how art was made and intensifying the "collectivization of art practice" (Giunta 2009, 105, 113).

Arias first used the term *postnuclear* in reference to her trilogy—*Striptease*, *Sueño con revólver* (Revolver Dream, 2007), and *El amor es un francotirador* (Love Is a Sniper, 2007)—and she later used the term to name the company she cofounded together with Alejo Moguillansky, Luciana Acuña, and Leandro Tartaglia. Arias's description of the company captures a post-2001 ethos that penetrates much of the work in this book:

> It's the idea of a territory where characters appear as survivors of a catastrophe; they're a little adrift, they don't know where they came from or what happened to them, but there they are, in strange neighborhoods, in a city they feel disconnected from, as if they were observing a world that no longer exists. They live routine, invisible lives. What is the catastrophe? It's not a question that translates into a direct answer. (Arias 2011)[3]

Arias describes the fallout of an unknown or unknowable catastrophe, perhaps an accumulation of catastrophic events, including the childhood experience of dictatorship and firsthand experience of the severe economic and political crisis of 2001.[4]

In the immediate aftermath of the crisis, artists formed collaborative networks, improvised and recycled props, took on new artistic roles, and experimented with risk and the unpredictable (Graham-Jones 2014). In Giunta's words, they worked "within the post-crisis era of precarious labor and the forms of survival that it engendered" (2009, 119). Artists developed support systems, deepened affective bonds of co-creation, and created tight-knit artistic communities that depended on the collective but that at the same time valued self-sufficiency, autonomy, self-generated practice, spontaneous reorganization, and resistance to hierarchy (Giunta, qtd. in Graham-Jones 2014, 53). Philippa Page proposes that theater and cinema during this period became "test beds for renewed projects of societal 'convivencia' thrown into disarray in the wake of economic, social, and political crisis that affected Argentina in December 2001" (2011, 129). The collaborative energy, creative borrowing of props and objects, and migrations between creative roles and media that characterize production of these artists are key to understanding the ecology within which many of these artists work (Graham-Jones 2014; Delgado 2017b). I focus on how the "culture of thrift" (Delgado 2017b, 4) and the "art of making do" (Goldgel-Carballo 2014) that settled in after the economic crisis of 2001 urged innovative approaches to creating art and reflecting on practices and discourses of improvisation, acting, labor, authorial control, and funding (Goldgel-Carballo 2014; Delgado 2017b).

In her insightful look back at 2001 twenty years later, scholar and translator Liz Mason-Deese writes about her encounter with the radical Buenos Aires research collective Colectivo Situaciones, which assembled during the crisis, and the importance of "keeping 2001 open" through continued engagement in "inquiry-action" (2021, 5). While the impact of the crisis was felt acutely in 2001 and in its direct aftermath, long-term effects on artistic practice and modes of engagement endured well into the Kirchner years (2003–2015) and continue to the present. The research-based, collaborative process of creating art during this time continued to develop; community theater flourished and theater cycles like Teatroxlaidentidad continued to have a strong presence on the cultural scene. Néstor Kirchner assumed power in 2003 in a context marked by default on public dept, high unemployment, and extreme disenfranchisement with politicians. A major part of his plan was to craft a national narrative through alliance with the human rights movements in Argentina, particularly the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. Indeed, the Kirchner years (the period between 2003–7, when Néstor Kirchner was president, and 2007–15, when his widow and successor, Cristina Kirchner, served as president) were decisive in shaping memory discourse, a culture of mourning, and artistic representation of the past in Argentina (Delgado and Sosa 2017). During this time, remembrance of the dictatorial past became a state matter (Verzero 2022). As Maria

Delgado and Cecillia Sosa observe, the Kirchners envisioned an "expanded lineage of memory" that included the entire nation (2017, 240). Artistic production during the Kirchner years was committed to promoting memory of the dictatorial past, though, as Delgado and Sosa note, the forms and genres this articulation took were extremely varied, ranging from commemorative to playful, and always "provocative" (242). According to Lorena Verzero, and in tandem with the Kirchner focus on national memory politics, the years 2008–15 saw an explosion of theater dedicated to exploring themes of memory and dictatorship (2022, 144). Arias's Children's Trilogy (2009–12) and War Trilogy (2014–18) showcase this trend.

In Argentina, in alignment with the social progressivism of the Pink Tide in the early 2000s, Cristina Kirchner enacted legislation to protect women from gender-based violence (2009), to protect marriage equality (2010), and to protect gender identity (2012).[5] As Cristina Kirchner was ending her final term in 2015, the NiUnaMenos (Not One Less Woman) movement exploded in collective repudiation against gender violence and femicide, revolutionizing feminist protest in Argentina and beyond and in solidarity with movements like #8M, the International Women's Strike, *el estallido* (the uprising, 2019), and the flashmob *Un violador en tu camino* (A Rapist in Your Path, 2019) in Chile. Across movements and actions, protesters and feminist activists exercised a collective horizontal, transversal, and intersectional methodology. The power of NiUnaMenos continued unabated throughout the presidency of Mauricio Macri, a more conservative centrist who moved away from the Pink Tide progressivism, though the campaign for legal, safe, and free abortion, symbolized by green handkerchiefs and known as the Marea verde (Green Tide), ramped up during the Macri years. In December 2020, under President Alberto Fernández, Macri's successor, in a landmark decision, abortion was legalized in Argentina, in the wake of lockdowns when COVID-19 had halted the massive outpouring of feminist mobilization in the streets.

The impact of COVID-19 is felt profoundly throughout this book, most acutely by the members of the dance company Grupo Krapp, who lost their friend, colleague, and cofounder Luis Biasotto to the virus in May 2021. Their performances *Réquiem* (Requiem) and *Hielo negro* (Black Ice) (discussed in chapter 3) are meditations on loss and grieving and a celebration of Biasotto's life. For all the artists in this book, COVID-19 stalled work, redirected projects, and left its imprint in countless ways. COVID-19 has entered cultural production as a theme, for example, in Alejo Moguillansky and Luciana Acuña's film *La edad media* (The Middle Ages, 2022), a portrait of lockdown from the point of view of their eight-year-old child. Lola Arias curated the project *My Documents/Share Your Screen*, a series of lecture performances focusing on artists and their personal research, obsessions, and experiences. The work first premiered in 2012

in Buenos Aires, but Arias reconceptualized it during the pandemic, and it had its global premiere on Zoom in 2020. As Clio Unger notes, the series "was among the earliest attempts to put on theatrical programming and engage with audiences during the lockdown in ways that went beyond streaming previously recorded productions online" (2021, 471). In Pensotti's film *Le Public/Het Publiek* (Brussels version), premiered in 2021, we see spectators in the cinema wearing masks with spaced seating. Artist Lorena Vega observes that it is still common to hear people say that they are just now premiering work they started before the pandemic (2022). The postponed premieres of so many projects have created a strange "convivencia" in which current works mingle with works that were made for a different moment (2022).

This book ends with the December 2023 election of Javier Milei, an ultra-conservative, self-professed "anarcho-capitalist" and member of the new libertarian party La Libertad Avanza (Freedom Advances). Milei's "chainsaw" (*motosierra*) plan to drastically cut state spending has been disastrous for the arts and has slashed state funding for the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts, the National Theater Institute, and the National Institute of Music. Milei's Law of Bases (Ley de Bases), passed in June 2024, ordered the closure of National Theater Institute and the National Fund for the Arts and eliminated the Ministry of Culture (Cholakian 2024a).[6] Milei's chainsaw approach to cutting public spending, the mass layoffs, his government's disregard—even contempt—for gender, sexuality, and reproductive rights, and his attempt to resurrect the symbols and rituals of a patriarchal canon constitute the most recent catastrophe. For artists, this dramatic shift in policy and cultural values has demanded new strategies of survival, solidarity, and affective-creative communities of support.

Methodologies of the Real in Argentine Performance

Based on performances, interviews, essays, and engagement with the critical literature, *Fictions of the Real* analyzes each step in the creation of these works, from rehearsals and methods of practice to performance, production, and reception. I develop a methodology for approaching the real in this new body of interdisciplinary work centering on five key figures: the researcher, the archivist, the collaborator, the translator, and the curator. Critics cite these figures frequently in theorizing the roles of the artists included in this book, and artists themselves describe their work in terms of research, translation, the archival process, collaboration, and curation. More globally, these figures, when considered together, explore vital links and cross-pollination between theater, film, and the visual arts. I am drawn to the figure of the researcher, archivist, collaborator, translator, and curator here because of the action they convey, again highlighting

Clavin's "real procesual" (processual real) and the focus on process and doing in approaches to the real (2022, 36). Focusing on the real as process shifts our attention away from the obsession with establishing a taxonomy of the real and instead asks us to recenter our discussion of the real on the praxis of art and the liminal, generative spaces of creation.

The Task of the Researcher

The artists in this book identify as researchers, and they all engage, to a certain extent, in the research of the past, whether this past be a collectively experienced one or a personally lived one, shaped by dictatorship, economic crisis, or personal loss. These artists develop methods to explore questions that drive their work, such as Arias's: "What is the memory that stayed in your mind until today? . . . The image you can't get rid of. The ghost that is following you" (Bither 2019); or Pensotti's: Is there any similarity between death and theater? Do a cemetery and a stage scene generate theatricality?;[7] or Grupo Krapp's: "How do you make theater after death? How do you make theater with ghosts?" ("Danza BA" 2022). As researchers, they stage the creative process, modes of production, and the circumstances that inform their work. They are attentive to method, process, and documentation; they are interested in studying the lives of others (and their own); and they engage in assessing and critiquing their own work. The artists included here create through doing, an approach that reveals the tendency to take charge of all aspects of the work related to creation, venue, funding, production, and dissemination of the work. Though they embrace the role of experimental researcher, they are uninterested in establishing final outcomes or results. In fact, there is a blending that occurs in many of the works studied here between the rehearsal and production phase. Rehearsals do not culminate in a performance but rather constitute the work itself. They envision "final" performances as works in progress that continue to evolve and change over time.

While the artists here identify as researchers, and at times take on an ethnographic role, they unsettle the traditional relationship between researcher and research subject. They are often the "subject *in* and *of*" their work at the same time, a doubled position implied in Michael Renov's work on autobiographical documentary film (Renov 2004; Lebow 2012). The artists here view their role as a profoundly collaborative one. León, Paula, and Arias are at times writers, directors, and actors. This flexibility destabilizes the fixed positionality of researcher and subject. The artists conceptualize and critique their own work; they blend theory and practice and exemplify a trend toward auto-theory and a way of creating works that "exceed existing categories and disciplinary bounds, that flour-

ish in the liminal spaces between categories, that reveal the entanglements of research and creation" (Fournier 2021, 12).

The Task of the Archivist

In the field of performance studies, Diana Taylor and Rebecca Schneider, among others, have identified the exclusionary and patriarchal nature of the archive and its history of consolidating colonial power. Their contributions draw attention to everything that is left out of this traditional archive, focusing on the range of embodied practices that form what Taylor calls "the repertoire" (Taylor 2003, 18–19). As Taylor observes, "The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning" (20). The live performing body carries the traces of the past into the present. Schneider calls this the "staying power" of the body and asks why we are reluctant to call a gesture a record of history or a photograph a record of live gesture (2011, 37). Remaining, reappearing, and staying power describe the bodies of performers engaged in reenactment practices in works by Arias, León, and Grupo Krapp, discussed here. Artists and performers here put their bodies on the line and reenact past experiences and memories to recover a lost or hidden archive, whether from a war that was kept out of public discourse (Malvinas/Falklands) or from a civic-military dictatorship during which bodies were disappeared and archives were destroyed.

The convergence of performance and digital culture has transformed the archive and concepts of presence, prompting a reassessment of the archive, the repertoire, the body as archive, and the archive as body. Since the 1990s, too, galleries and museums have housed live performance and time-based art, and institutional demands to document have added another dimension to the question of the archive. The works here find themselves at this juncture, characterized by different logics of the archive at work. These artists are interested, conceptually and pragmatically, in documenting and creating a record of their performance work, including rehearsals and preproduction work. Through their creation, these artists ask where the archive resides—the work of art, lived experience, or the body. And they view the archive as a starting point and inspiration for creating artistic work.

The Task of the Collaborator

The artists discussed in this book are friends, colleagues, and sometimes family members, who build on and consolidate long-standing affective and creative relationships over time; they work across disciplines and share resources. Together they form what Jordana Blejmar, Philippa Page, and Cecilia Sosa have

called "creative-affective communities," formed by a generation of artists uninhibited by disciplinary boundaries, eager to explore "audacious filiations" (2020, 19). They can also be described as what Lucas Rimoldi and Alicia Monchietti call a "cohorte de artistas-gestores" (a cohort of artist-creators) that generates an ecosystem of creativity and sociability (2020, 342). The collaborative nature of their artistic work can be traced to practices of resistance and solidarity that emerged or expanded in post-crisis Argentina, later reinforced by the collective ethos of feminist mobilization embodied by NiUnaMenos and the Green Tide.[8] Long rehearsal processes and modes of collaboration have also played a role in consolidating theater groups that have worked together for years, sometimes decades. As Delgado notes, "The rehearsal is a dominant trope in much of the work" by these artists, emphasizing the reflection on rehearsal process as part of performance (2017b, 5). They create generative feedback loops and sustain relationships among collaborators over the course of long rehearsals, extended runs, and the exploration of themes and alternative modes of knowledge production across multiple platforms.

The Task of the Translator

Taken as theme, practice, and metaphor, translation is at the center of discussions on representation and how art moves across contexts, recurs, and transforms. There are also productive synergies to consider between discourses of "fidelity" and "the real" in translation studies and documentary studies, respectively: expectations of fidelity in translation and expectations of the real in documentary work have motivated scholars in both fields to reckon with these enduring associations. Artists in this book enact self-translation as they alternate between artistic roles and engage in performative code-switching. Because they work constantly between theater and film, and additionally engage dance, live music, the visual arts, and photography, the paradigm of translation is attractive for approaching the transmedial iterations across works. In their book, *Performing Arts in Transition*, Susanne Foellmer, Maria Katharina Schmidt, and Cornelia Schmitz discuss the utility of the concept of media transfer when talking "about transmission and transposition, of migration from one art form, from one medium of expression to the other, or from artefact, document, or work to an event" (2020, 3). Understanding media transfer here as a kind of translation not only allows us to consider the translations between genres that artists explore in their work but also poses translation as an important discourse and practice for approaching the event and its documentation and the relationship between live performance and the archive.

The Task of the Curator

All the artists discussed in this book can be considered artist-curators whose work in the context of Argentine performance and transnational production engages with global trends in curatorial practice. They participate actively in producing and promoting their work and critiquing the local and transnational conditions that have shaped this involvement. They engage with audiences in their capacity and desire not only to form connections and encourage different forms of audience participation but also to curate long-standing publics through new programming models. And they expand the framework of artistic creation through exploration of unconventional performance venues and a commitment to moving beyond genre categories. These artists are actively involved in the production of their own work: they negotiate venues and institutional support (private or public); they are savvy networkers capable of forming ties with international organizations and agile promoters of their work, gaining access to prizes, festivals, and funds (Mochietti and Rimoldi 2017, 115). As a result of this active involvement, artist-curators become well-versed in explaining, critiquing, and interpretating their work in interviews, artist statements, and essays. The artist-curator here is devoted to establishing links with the audience, and this takes various forms, such as staging works that include audience members (Ferdman 2014a) and creating unique community experiences that transform bystanders into spectators and cultivate long-standing, dedicated audiences through new projects, series, and programming models.

Claiming the Real

Sustained interest in documentary modes, in theater and film and across media, reflects and contributes to current mainstream obsessions with truth and reality and ongoing disciplinary debates about the real. Documentary performance, for example, claims truth and authenticity, even as scholars agree that documentary works are curated and crafted like fiction.[9] By "documentary performance" in this book, I refer to a range of works employing documentary or verbatim modes in theater and film, primarily, and in conversation with dance, installation, photography, and the visual arts. These modes are often perceived as relaying an objective truth, a "sober," "honest," "authentic," "sincere" reality.[10] Many of the works included in this book can be considered documentary, though at the same time they playfully exploit and subvert discourses of authenticity and the real. All the works I discuss here are concerned with the performing body onstage and on-screen; they are self-aware of creative process, genre, subject for-

mation, and documentation. In analyzing these works, I intervene in a range of questions and themes that are of central importance to the field of performance studies: shifting conceptions of presence; the use of reenactment techniques in reanimating the past; the expression of subjectivity as both lived experience and fictional performance; tensions between improvisatory acts and the creation of an archive; and the limits of representing and commemorating loss in the wake of overlapping catastrophes of dictatorship, war, economic crisis, gender violence, and COVID-19.

The works I analyze in this book propose a range of approaches to the real, including the exploration of the spontaneous, unrehearsed, improvised, and accidental moments and events that can break through or interrupt the theatrical frame or, when captured on film, reveal a moment of unscripted action.[11] Other works demonstrate keen interest in generating the unpredictable through collaboration with children, animals, and experiences with precarious stage environments. In some works, the real derives from a sense of transparency generated by hypermediacy and the baring of the mechanisms of creation, an awareness of how the performance is made through the inclusion of cameras, lighting equipment, computers, tech crew, and microphones in the frame. Related to this self-reflexive sense of the real are works that meditate on the experience of real time in performance and play with duration. And last, this book explores the versions of the real that derive specifically from intermediality, the juxtaposition of live embodied performance and digitally produced audiovisual media in performance.

The artists discussed here are primarily playwrights and theater directors who over the course of their careers have started making films. An important focus of this book is the examination of this trajectory, the artists' turn to film, and in many cases, their return to theater. The result is a generative braid that joins and blends genealogies of film and theater, inviting reexamination of mimesis (as representation and process) along with discourses of repetition, spontaneity, materiality, embodiment, reflexivity, and acting. I situate my analysis in dialogue with artists and critics who engage interdisciplinary perspectives of the real. Foundational for many of the analyses in this book are Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal as a model of the real without origin or reality (1994); Lacan's theory of the traumatic real as a missed encounter and that which resists entry into symbolic language (1976); and the real as an act of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

In this book, I approach the real in relation to method and technique, as an effect and as a discourse that has local meanings and implications. I agree with Jens Andermann and Álvaro Fernández Bravo who argue that the "reality effects" in contemporary Latin American cinema should not be considered in

abstract terms, but rather should relate specifically to the "wider context of film production and circulation from which they have emerged" (2013, 4). Scholars have critiqued the indiscriminate use of the discourse of the real in the arts and mainstream culture in Latin America. Beatriz Jaguaribe laments the "naturalized encoding of the 'real'" in literature and film that reifies and locks representations of marginality into a persistent realist register (2004, 328). Beatriz Sarlo and Nelly Richard criticize the reductive image of Latin America as authentic, natural, embodied, and spontaneous produced by discourses of the real (Sarlo 1997, 38; Richard 2007, 23).[12] Richard further cites the banality of the real deriving from a visual politics privileging neoliberal culture (2007, 88). In one of the earliest critiques of the discourse of the real in Latin America, Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo's *Agarrando pueblo* (The Vampires of Poverty, 1978) denounces Europe's and North America's voracious appetite for the Latin American real, critiquing the exportation of Latin American documentary film as *pornomiseria*.[13]

Theorists, critics, and artists have attributed characteristics of the real to theater and film respectively that exemplify tension or even a competition between the two media forms in claiming realness. In theater, critics have historically located the real in theater's ephemeral nature and dependence on live, embodied presence in the here and now, famously argued by Peggy Phelan in her influential book, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993). By contrast, film historically has evoked the real as a photographic trace, a result of the precise capture and replication of an image. Critics who uphold film as "more real" base their arguments on film's indexicality and its shared lineage with photography (Bazin 1960; Sontag 1966; Barthes 1977b). To these critics, theater cannot escape the artifice produced by the presence of the theatrical frame (Eco 1979; Feral 1982). The counterclaims made by critics historically siding with theater as the "more real" medium are based largely on the live, embodied copresence invoked by theater and the shared energies and affects that are generated by the theatrical event as singular and unrepeatable, an idea captured by Walter Benjamin's description of the aura existing in a "strange weave of space and time" (1972). The possibility of replicating an exact image (film) versus the impossibility of replicating the experience of the live (theater) have both been used in the past as arguments of how film and theater generate realness.

While these conceptions of the real in theater and film have endured, they are not static and have changed over the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Shifts in conceptions of the real in theater are linked to transformations in how presence is conceived in relation to performance. Sarah Bay-Cheng and others have observed that with the emergence of digital culture, presence is no longer "exclusively about live bodies in physical proximity to one another" (2023, 11). Shared time has replaced shared physical proximity as a dominant defini-

tion of presence in performance. In 2008, Auslander predicted a shift toward a new paradigm of the live that relies on the audience's affective experience and places a premium on performances that "feel live to us" (110). Bay-Cheng goes a step further to argue that "presence is defined not by physical touch but through avenues of participation" (2016, 130). This emphasis on participation aligns well with Alejandra Ceriani's conception of digital performance as a laboratory open to the public (2012, 135). Viewing presence as participatory, experimental, and involving performers and audiences in research-oriented work has implications for theater's traditional claims of realness. In film, too, critics such as Tom Gunning have suggested a move away from the indexicality model based on the photographic trace, toward an exploration of cinematic motion that foregrounds the spectator's kinesthetic engagement: "We do not just see motion and we are not simply affected emotionally by its role within a plot; we *feel* it in our guts or throughout our bodies" (2007, 39). Gunning presents a model of spectator engagement that attributes the impression of reality not to the photographic trace but to the spectator's kinesthetic participation in cinematic motion (43).[14] Deriving from the formal characteristics of film and theater, these definitions of the real divulge different stakes and transform as they engage the debates between evolving digital and live art forms.

Spectators often judge documentary work based on perceptions of how real it seems and how closely it transmits and reanimates the historical past onscreen and onstage. Both documentary film and theater present evidentiary, forensic archives of the real, whether through the captured image, material objects, or the "fleshy kind of document" of the body (Schneider 2011, 37). In her work on documentary theater and the real, Carol Martin observes "an obsession with forming and reframing what has really happened" (2013, 5). Bill Nichols identifies the impossible task of reenacting the past in documentary film: "to retrieve a lost object in its original form even as the very act of retrieval generates a new object and a new pleasure. The viewer experiences the uncanny sense of repetition of what remains historically unique" (2008, 74). Martin writes, "More often than not, documentary theatre is where 'real people' are absent—unavailable, dead, disappeared, yet reenacted" (2013, 18). Throughout the book I examine how documentary theater and film reanimate the past through strategies of reenactment, recurrence, flashback, narrative voice, cinematic technique, and the incorporation of diverse archival materials, including audiovisual content, documents, and personal objects. I rely on a performance studies lens to examine the many ways in which the past returns to the present, including Rebecca Schneider's concepts of "staying power," "touching time," and "cross-temporal mimesis" generated by reenactment practices (2011). Richard Schechner's "restored behavior" (1985), Joseph Roach's theories of surrogation (1996), and Marvin

Carlson's theory of "ghosting" (2003) all offer productive approaches to understanding the real as the past that is invoked, reenacted, reframed, reimagined, and reembodied through performance and audience engagement.

From Distinct Lineages to Converging Practices

Documentary theater and documentary film in Latin America have distinct lineages that intersect productively but have historically been examined largely as parallel phenomena and separate disciplines. Paola Hernández's excellent *Staging Lives in Latin America* examines trajectories of documentary theater by Erwin Piscator and Peter Weiss, in tandem with the rich tradition of collective creation in Latin America developed in the 1960s and 1970s by Enrique Buenaventura, Augusto Boal, Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, and others, that have influenced a new documentary theater in Latin America (2021). Contemporary documentary film in Latin America has been studied largely in relation to the revolutionary film of the 1960s, created as part of the Third Cinema, founded by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, members of the Grupo Cine Liberación (Chanan, 2017). Getino and Solanas's film *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1968) exemplifies this movement, in which documentary film was created collectively and viewed as a means of political intervention (Chanan 2017). Influenced by the Italian neorealist tradition, Third Cinema documentary film employed nonactors and sought to frame everyday life as culturally authentic.

In the 1960s, both documentary theater and film in Latin America embraced the collective "we" as part of the revolutionary ambition to mobilize the pueblo against imperialism and US intervention in the context of the Cold War. Antonio Gómez identifies the "passage from a first-person plural to a first-person singular" in Argentine documentary film, spanning from the social documentaries of the 1960s and 1970s to the documentary films of the 1990s onward, that captures a shift from a "collective, militant, solidary first person" to a "singular, recognizable voice, a first person that identifies itself by its proper name" (2014, 46). In Argentine theater, too, this shift is prominent in projects like Vivi Tellas's *Biodrama* series, focused on the lives of individual Argentines. The highly regarded theater cycle Teatroxlaidentidad (Theater for Identity), inaugurated in 2001, also features documentary plays prominently, oftentimes based on real-life stories, and places emphasis on the use of the first-person narrative in asserting the right to identity in the context of the Grandmothers' demands for restitution of the babies stolen by the military and collaborators during the civic-military dictatorship.

This book joins a wave of emerging scholarship interested in examining a genealogy of theater and film as technologically and formally intertwined. I

build on Philippa Page's examination of the synergies between film and theater in post-dictatorship Argentine performance from the 1980s and 1990s in her foundational work, *Politics and Performance in Post-Dictatorship Argentine Film and Theatre* (2011). The works I analyze here form part of a "documentary culture" encompassing a range of artistic genres that thrives in the hybrid configurations of live performance and audiovisual media in contemporary theater and film (Renov 2004; Piedras 2014a; Aguilar 2016).[15] These convergences between documentary theater and film shift attention to a set of concerns shared by both disciplines, including an affinity for the first-person narrative voice, the desire to reenact the past, and a pronounced self-referentiality that draws attention to the creative process and poses the artist as critic and theorist of their work.

Autobiography, Biography, Autofiction: The First-Person Real

Fictions of the Real explores the subjective turn that twenty-first century documentary film and theater have taken in Argentina, evidenced by a performative, reflexive style, the prominent use of the first-person perspective in documentary film, and a focus on the lives of real individuals in documentary theater.[16] As Antonio Gómez notes, following Sarlo, in the years following the dictatorship, the first person came to "be perceived as the only respectable authority for narrating history" (2016a, 63). Ana Amado identifies a generation of filmmakers and artists in Argentina who use audiovisual materials and film to "process their own past," in autobiographical films such as *Los rubios* (The Blonds, Albertina Carri, 2003), *Papá Iván* (María Inés Roqué, 2004), *Encontrando a Víctor* (Finding Victor, Natalia Bruchstein, 2005), and *M* (Nicolás Prividera, 2007) (Amado 2005). The "common denominator" for films like these, according to Pablo Piedras, is that filmmakers act as investigators of the past, sorting through and organizing documents and critically examining familial and affective ties in the past and present (2014a, 77). In both documentary theater and film, this shift to the first-person curator of the past has parallels with what theater scholar Ryan Claycomb describes as the move from "document-based approaches" to "account-based" ones, occurring from the sixties to the eighties in the US, the UK, and Canada, where the sourcing of material for documentary work came from interviews and testimonial accounts rather than official documents, showcasing an interest in the "affective subjectivities of their subjects . . . rather than the 'objective' facts and documents of earlier modes" (2022, 2).

I reference scholarship on autobiography but find paradigms of autofiction more compelling in addressing the slippages between documentary and fiction and between autobiography and biography.[17] Anna Forné's evocative term "archival autofiction" describes "artistic expression in which the authorial subject—

identical to the protagonist—exhibits the creative processes of archival recycling and reflects on notions of authorship as a way of engaging the reader" (2022, 2). Autofiction, according to Rebecca Van Laer, admits flexibility and ambiguity of interpretation, allowing readers to decide whether to focus on the "auto" part or the "fictional" part (2018). Jonathan Sturgeon suggests ambitiously that the concept of autofiction transcends the "tired discussions" concerning fiction versus reality, as these new works of autofiction consider the self "a *living thing* composed of fictions." What is at stake, he adds, is a redistribution of "the relation between the self and fiction." "Fiction is no longer seen as 'false' or 'lies' or 'make-believe'" (2014). What resonates for many of the works included in this book is the idea that fiction is a part of the real and that the real can be encoded through fiction.

The first-person narratives that pervade contemporary Argentine performance evoke a subjective, personal, and intimate point of view that establishes legitimacy through testimony of lived experience. In her discussion of Pensotti's work, Sandra Contreras refers to the voracity of "lo vivencial," devouring the boundaries between private and public, real and fantasy (Contreras 2012, 154). This shift of focus legitimates the artist's experience as a vehicle of truth (Piedras 2014a, 78). In the works examined in this book, lived experience is often a premise for the creation of works that transmit real-life stories, whether in Tellas's *Biodrama* series or Lola Arias's Children's Trilogy plays *My Life After* (2009) and *The Year I Was Born* (2012), in which performers recount and reenact autobiographical experiences. Lived experience is so crucial in this work that Arias states that the performers are irreplaceable: "Nobody can do another's 'role.' If a performer changes, the content changes" (Ferdman 2014b, 32).[18] Jenn Stephenson talks about the distinctive iconicity that occurs when "the body of the actor does not represent generically some other body but instead represents itself in autobiographical performance." In these cases, "the theatrical gap between actor-self and character-self is virtually nil" (2019, 7). All the artists here play with the sense of the real created by this distinctive iconicity, although they treat it self-reflexively, through a constant questioning of what constitutes acting, experience, and self.

These artists position themselves as critics and theorists of their own work and draw attention to their creative process. Their acute self-referentiality aligns with the performative turn, elaborated by film and media studies scholar Stella Bruzzi, who describes how performative documentary films "use performance within a non-fiction context to draw attention to the impossibilities of authentic documentary representation" (2006, 153). This heightened reflexivity characterizes the films discussed in this book: *Teatro de guerra* (Theatre of War, 2018); *Estrellas* (Stars, 2007); *Entrenamiento elemental para actores* (Elementary Training

for Actors, 2009); *El loro y el cisne* (The Parrot and the Swan, 2013); *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again, 2019); *Edición ilimitada* (Unlimited Edition, 2020); and *El público* (The Audience, 2020). The theatrical works I analyze here are likewise reflexive and meditate on their own creative process: *Melancolía y Manifestaciones* (Melancholy and Demonstrations, 2012); *Las ideas* (The Ideas, 2015); *Por el dinero* (For the Money, 2013); *Réquiem* (Requiem, 2021); *Fauna* (Fauna, 2013); *Los muertos* (The Dead, 2004); *El pasado es un animal grotesco* (The Past Is a Grotesque Animal, 2010); and *Cineastas* (Filmmakers, 2013).

Arts of Return, Reenactment, and Recurrence

The reflexive performativity that cuts across film and theater in contemporary Argentine artistic production is heightened by artists' interest in representing and reanimating the past in the present. As a result, reenactment, "the practice of re-playing or re-doing a precedent event, artwork, or act," is one of the most prevalent and nuanced practices employed by the artists in this book (Schneider 2011, 2). Reenactment creates "cross temporal jumps" between past and present and asks, "What is the time of a live act when a live act is reiterative?" (36). Reenactment, in these works, functions doubly, to reinforce the importance of the tangible objects and remains of the archive while at the same time posing the body as capable of generating a record, carrying a trace (Schneider 2001, 2011; Taylor 2003). The prevalence of reenactment in performance, dance, and film has led to a generative coalescence of these concepts. For André Lepecki, writing from contemporary dance, "there will be no distinctions left between archive and body. The body is archive and archive is a body" (2010, 31). Again, reenactment gets caught up in deliberations on the real, as reenactment in film, according to Nichols, "forfeits its indexical bond to the original event. It draws its fantasmatic power from this very fact" (2008, 74; see also Matusiak 2022, 89). In theater, reenactment is powerful because of its ability to summon live bodies in the present. As Amelia Jones notes, reenactment "activates the tension between our desire for the material (for the other's body; for 'presence'; for the 'true event') and the impossibility of ever fixing this in space and time" (2012). Jones's statement highlights the tension between the archive and the repertoire (Taylor 2003) and the desire for their convergence, an impulse captured by Freddie Rokem's "actor as witness" (2002), Fernanda Pinta's description of the actor as the "living archive," and Denise Cobello's "actor document" in Lola Arias's theater (Pinta 2013, 723; Cobello 2021a, 1).

When performers reembody events they have already experienced, their past selves ghost their present selves (Carlson 2003; Upton 2011). The resulting "in-person reenactment" poses a unique set of questions that Ivone Margulies

explores in her examination of the testimonial role of in-person reenactment in postwar cinema (2019). She also explores the implications of the belatedness of this "second act" and considers the possibility of self-revision and redemption through in-person reenactment (10).[19] Of relevance to my book is Margulies's statement that "death, mortality, and age [are] unquestionable limits for in-person reenactment" (15). Several of the artists I discuss in this book are haunted and inspired by this insurmountable limit. I examine the commemorative function of reenactment and its capacity to reimagine utopian futures and posthuman fantasies. Examples from this book show how reenactment practices create copresence and accentuate absence at the same time, marking the collapse and expansion between past and present. I investigate the emotional stakes of reenactment, and I consider strategies these artists employ, in collaboration with performers, to help work through trauma creatively and collectively, without imposing closure or narratives of healing.

Intermedial Connections: Theater and Film

The artists featured in this book are theater makers who integrate diverse media and technologies into their plays, performances, and installations. They are also filmmakers whose films reveal a fascination with the languages, tropes, and techniques of theater. For Gonzalo Aguilar, the exchange between film and theater creates a new kind of "real" that is constituted by a back-and-forth movement between theater and film (2007, 19). Artists create intermedial performances highlighting the "co-or interrelations between media" in their works that generate new meaning and forms of perception and experience (Kattenbelt 2010, 35). Arias, Grupo Krapp, and León frequently embed "screenic arrangements" in their work to develop dialogue, to expand the context, and to provide archival evidence of the past (Birringer 2014, 209). Kattenbelt understands theater as a "hypermedium" that "can contain all other media" (Kattenbelt 2008 23). Theater as hypermedium works well conceptually for many of the works included here and aligns especially well with Pensotti's description of his theater as "omnivorous," capable of devouring stories, personal experience, and historical and political context, in addition to diverse genres and media (Méndez 2023). In some cases explored here, artists also seek to transcend the containing function inherent in the notion of theater as hypermedium, particularly regarding how digital technologies and live streaming in/of performance are changing paradigms of presence.

Closely related to, and sometimes considered a subset of, intermediality is transmediality, a concept that, according to Ana M. López, "addresses the translation or transposition" across media, for example, "in the musical version of a

novel or the poetic rendering of a painting, as well as narratives that span distinct media" (2014, 136).[20] The artists in this book do not only reflect on the interconnections between media in individual works; they also work transmedially across different works, resulting in complex trajectories, extended dialogue on themes, and sustained relationships with actors who perform across media. Arias's video installation *Veteranos* (Veterans, 2014), the theatrical performance *Campo minado* (Minefield, 2016), and the film *Teatro de guerra* (Theatre of War, 2018) demonstrate this transmedial relationship, as do the film *Reas* (2024) and the play *Los días afuera* (The Days Out There, 2024). Likewise, Romina Paula's play *Fauna* (2013) has a transmedial connection to the film *Edición ilimitada* (Unlimited Edition, 2020). In this book I examine the translations and transpositions (between media and sites) that characterize the relationships between these works; their routes of circulation; and the expanding archive that results from the production of recurrent works across different media. Recurrence, translation, and transposition are all linked to transmediality in these works and constitute a feedback loop of material and immaterial effects, as proposed by Michael Darroch, Meike Wagner, and Sarah Bay-Cheng, which can "return to affect later performative work" (2010, 141).

Artists move back and forth between screen and stage and between sites where they premiere work, collaborate with artists, and take part in workshops and residencies.[21] I propose a transnational framework for understanding the mobility of artists featured in this book, their methods, funding mechanisms, and the production, circulation, and reception of their work. Following Maria M. Delgado, Michal Kobialka, and Bryce Lease, I am interested in "the ways in which memory cultures, artistic and curatorial strategies, and critical discourses circulate and recur across different geographical spaces" (2023, 11). The artists here travel across georgraphical and disciplinary borders, weaving in themes of recurrence and transnationalism into their work: Grupo Krapp has done numerous residencies in the US including Colgate University, Reed College, and the University of Michigan; their works frequently critique artists' dependence on neocolonial structures of arts funding. Lola Arias has lived and traveled between Berlin and Buenos Aires for many years. Mariano Pensotti describes the experience of nomadic writing while on tour, and Federico León trained under Robert Wilson in New York as part of the prestigious Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. Artists' works tour the international circuit and are frequently premiered in Europe and North America prior to Argentina. Their works of theater are, in some cases, conceptually more mobile than their films, many of which are set in and around Buenos Aires, suggesting perhaps an affective return to the city, a nostalgic longing, an homage, or a gesture of solidarity.[22] The works featured in this book do not uniformly ignore a national framework, but they are overall

more interested in urban culture and architectures and engage with institutions and iconic landmarks in specific cities (an exception is Paula's *Fauna*, which takes place in the Littoral region of Argentina). Even works that do engage with discourses of national identity and memory, such as Arias's War Trilogy, do so in service of making a transnational comparison.

All the works included in this book have been impacted by the advent of digital culture, integral to intermedial creation. As Bay-Cheng et al. note, "the digital is foundational, for it has changed our experience of time, space and bodily implication" (2010, 124). I define "digital" broadly to refer to any form of computer-generated media, storage, or dissemination in relation to performance work. While several works explore virtual presence through digital streaming, in this book, my use of "digital" usually refers to digital projections of computer-generated images, video, or audio files in performance that create an interface and/or connection between the digital world and embodied performance onstage.[23] Artists in this book frequently project images and videos on a screen as a way of introducing filmed interviews or verbatim testimony, generating landscapes, and creating immersive and interactive environments with performers. Digital tools, like projection of visual or audio media onstage, produce the intermedial exchanges between theater and film that are a focus of this book.

The combination of embodied reenactment and intermediality multiplies the reality effects of the works examined in this book. This happens, according to Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink and Sigrid Merx, because "in intermedial performance different axes are present at the same time, crossing each other, creating temporary 'knots', and thereby intensifying the experience of dislocation or the perception of disjunctive media relationships" (2012, 221). Approaching the "constellations" in Marcela Fuentes's work, these knots help us rethink how temporality, embodiment, and participation are traversed by digital media and intermediality in performance (Fuentes 2019, 3). These knots, entanglements, and constellations exist in what Jorge Dubatti describes as a liminal "third zone" that contains the crossovers, hybridity, mixing, juxtaposition, exchange, or community between *convivio* and *tecnovivio*, concepts describing performances in which performers and audiences share the same physical space (territory) and performances in which technology makes it possible for audiences to participate remotely (deterritorialized) (2021). Performing bodies in this third space are subject to critical expansion, hybridity, digital transformation, and technical infiltration (Ceriani 2012, 132). These intermedial entanglements are key to understanding how a sense of the real is created in these works, relying less on representation and more on positionality or "a process of continuous repositioning, or negotiating different positions" (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 2012, 224). Intermediality creates a relational sense of the real through constant shifts in

perspective between past and present, the fluidity of narrative voice, and the self-awareness of creative process and point of view.

These artists' use of documentary and fictional modes creates a range of affects and effects. Many works long for different kinds of archives that contain, liberate, and transform the past and desire to capture processes, record the past, preserve memories of loved ones, acknowledge loss, and imagine utopian futures. In turn, I examine how fictional modes, in some instances, generate a sense of protection, self-preservation, justice, the unburdening of trauma, and perhaps even escape. While my focus is on the dialogue between theater and film, these artists' exploration of media is much more fluid and expansive, and I detail their use of visual arts, photography, poetry, dance, and live music. In addition to discussing the contexts of creation, the strategic use of documentary and fiction, and the citational nature of the works, I highlight a shared aesthetics among artists influenced by collaboration with set designer Mariana Tirantte, lighting designer Matías Sendón, and choreographer Luciana Acuña, whose vision has defined in large part the architectures, affects, and atmospheres generated by the works examined here.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1, "Lola Arias: Researching the Past With Stunt Doubles and Time Machines," focuses on Arias as researcher, specifically on her commitment to excavating the past and bringing it into dialogue with the present, collaboratively and affectively, through techniques of reenactment and audiovisual recordings. As Arias's documentary performance has evolved over the last decade, so too has her vision of her work as a social experiment, a laboratory, and fieldwork. In this chapter, I explore Lola Arias's research methodology in relation to key concepts of performer-archivist, stunt double, and time machine in the play *Melancolía y manifestaciones* (Melancholy and Demonstrations, 2012) and the installation *Doble de riesgo* (Stunt Double, 2016) in the first section, and the Malvinas/Falklands War Trilogy of *Veteranos* (Veterans, 2014), *Campo minado* (Minefield, 2016), and *Teatro de guerra* (Theatre of War, 2018) in the second section. In this chapter, I discuss works that engage the Argentine context explicitly and showcase Arias's use of intermediality and transmediality to enhance the documentary real. Throughout the chapter I focus on how Arias's use of video and sound archives in her performance cultivates both intimacy and dissonance, exploiting tensions and synergies between screens, stages, body, and voice.

In chapter 2, "Federico León: Everything Is an Archive; Everything Is Recorded," I examine one of Federico León's central preoccupations, the preservation of a record, whether posed as an impossibility, a critique, or a pragmatic

concern. León calls his work a documentary of the creative process, a register of all the conversations, improvisations, and rehearsals that take place in preparation for the performance. This chapter examines one of the signature tensions in León's work—that between the impulse to improvise and to explore a poetics of the unpredictable and the uncontrollable, and the strong pull to create an archive, a documentary register, a record of creative process and performance. I discuss four of León's works, each of which represents a new direction in the exploration of the real, beginning with an analysis of the museal in relation to documentary performance in *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* (Miguel Ángel Boezzio Museum, 1998), created as part of Vivi Tellas's *Proyecto Museos*. The second work, *Estrellas* (Stars, 2007), codirected with Marcos Martínez, explores discourses of authenticity and provides a self-reflexive critique of the uses of the documentary genre to perpetuate a "Latin American real" based on stereotypes and neorealist tropes. The third work, *Entrenamiento elemental para actores* (Elementary Training for Actors, 2009), codirected with film director Martín Rejtman, asks whether children acting onstage might constitute an immutable category of the real, unable to represent anything other than children. The fourth and last work, *Las ideas* (2015), showcases a series of experiments designed to illuminate León's creative process. I examine a range of questions prompted by these experiments: What role do accidents and failures play in generating new artistic ideas? What triggers ideas, and how are they archived, lost, and recovered? In turn, how does the archive inspire new ideas?

In chapter 3, "El Grupo Krapp: A Collaborative Choreography of Affects," I analyze how the praxis of Grupo Krapp exemplifies the collaboration that is a defining practice of the artists featured in this book. They have established long-standing relationships with their casts and crews and with one another in diverse roles and through long rehearsal processes. I show how their documentary works, with a focus on curated biographies and in-person reenactments onstage and on-screen, gesture toward a reengagement of politics and subjecthood and a reassessment of authorship and artistic autonomy. This chapter examines the collaborative exchanges and synergies between theater, dance, and film that have shaped Grupo Krapp's collective work over the last twenty years. Divided into two sections, the chapter first centers on the dance/theater performance *Por el dinero* (For the Money, 2013), cocreated by Luciana Acuña and Alejo Moguillanksy, and the exchanges with the film *El loro y el cisne* (The Parrot and the Swan, 2013), created by Alejo Moguillansky. The second section of the chapter turns to themes of death and the limits of representation in works dealing with personal loss, focusing on *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado A)* (Where Do the Dead Go? [Side A], 2011) and *Réquiem* (Requiem) (2021). These works, combining video testimony, choreographed movement, and reenactment onstage,

explore death, memory, mourning, and the possibility of homage and commemoration through intermedial performance.

Throughout chapter 4, "Romina Paula: Translating the Fantasy of the Real," I analyze Romina Paula's works of theater and film through the elaboration of translation as theme, practice, and metaphor. I trace Paula's creative trajectory beginning with a more dominant realist style in her early plays, to experimentation in narrative voice, alternative forms of kinship, and documentary techniques in her later works, concluding with a more detailed analysis of the play *Fauna* (2013) and her autofictional films *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again, 2019) and *Edición ilimitada* (Unlimited Edition, 2020), cowritten and directed by Paula and Edgardo Cozarinsky, Santiago Loza, and Virginia Cosin. Throughout the chapter I draw on Paula's novels and essays in my examination of her theater and film. Translation is signaled as an explicit theme in works like *Fauna* (2013) and *De nuevo otra vez*, providing metacommentary on the role of translation in transforming meaning, art, heritage, and notions of self. As practice, translation is central to Paula's own process as a writer and a heritage speaker of German as she translates the rich intertexts included in her work from German and English into Spanish. I also pose translation as a metaphor for the fluidity between genres her work exhibits. Specifically, I propose strategies from the field of translation—modulation and transposition—to discuss the shifts in point of view and movement from one grammatical category to another, achieved through the use of technologies and the languages of theater and film in her work.

Chapter 5, "Mariano Pensotti: Curating Live Novels and Impossible Films," discusses Pensotti as an artist-curator who actively participates in programming his work, reframing the relationship between performance and audience, closing the gap between the visual arts and performance, and envisioning, in collaboration with stage designer Mariana Tirantte, innovative stage devices that double as omnivorous machines. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss site specificity and urban landscapes in Pensotti's work. The city is a muse for the meditation on how art influences daily life and how artists' experiences shape the art they create. In his site-specific performance *A veces creo que te veo* (Sometimes I Think I See You, 2010), part of the *Ciudades paralelas* (Parallel Cities) project curated by Lola Arias and Stefan Kaegi (2010-2011), the city becomes a stage, transforming bystanders into actors, blurring life and art, and showcasing the creative process. In these works I explore the documentary encounters between the city and the biographies of the individuals whose daily itineraries intersect with the urban archive, generating new fictions (*Los 8 de julio* [The 8th of July, 2002]; *Los muertos* [The Dead, 2006], with Beatriz Catani; and *El pasado es un animal grotesco* [The Past Is a Grotesque Animal, 2010]).

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss Pensotti's recent works created with the company Grupo Marea (Mariano Pensotti, Diego Vainer, Mariana Tirantte, and Florencia Wasser), with a focus on theatrical performances that explore cinematic language, tropes, and techniques in *Cineastas* (Filmmakers, 2013). I analyze the use of the split screen, a dominant architecture in Pensotti's theatrical stagings, and the resonance it creates with film techniques, such as crosscuts, montage, and flashbacks, but also its structural resemblance to installation or even museal exhibition, bringing Pensotti's work into dialogue with the visual arts, the role of curatorship, and questions of temporality, presence, liveness, and the archive. I end the chapter with an analysis of the film *El público* (The Audience, 2020), part of a trilogy that reflects on the experiences of theater audiences through film (*El público* [Buenos Aires, 2020], *The Audience* [Athens, 2020], and *Le Publik/Het Publiek* [Brussels, 2021]).

Throughout the chapters I discuss works in roughly chronological order, spanning from the early twenty-first century to 2023. In the conclusion, I take the opportunity to highlight key works premiered by the artists in 2024 and 2025 that continue to investigate questions of the real at a moment of major transformation in infrastructure and funding of the arts, resulting from the extreme cuts to the cultural sector enacted by Milei's government, and the introduction of new models for creating art and curating audiences in Argentina that emerged during the pandemic and have strengthened under Milei, such as Paraíso Club and Arthaus. I also discuss the emergence of AI in performance and reflect on its effects on the real and conceptions of presence and acting through analysis of Lola Arias's 2019 work *Futureland*, a work that is not included in this book because it does not engage with the Argentine context but that is nonetheless significant because of how it prompts questions about how the category of the real in performance will continue to expand and transform in the future in tandem with AI and other emerging technologies.

In emphasizing the roles of researcher, archivist, collaborator, translator, and curator, I want to shift attention to process and the diverse range of interdisciplinary approaches artists engage in generating the real in these works. A focus on process includes rehearsals, workshops, and pre- and post-performance activities in a productive feedback loop and framework of analysis, particularly useful in the case of artists here who are frequently reluctant to identify a final, definitive, or finished work. Equally important in this book is the examination of the techniques of the real, often in line with the postdramatic paradigm, revealed in performances that emphasize presentation over representation, such as in-person reenactment, baring devices, and incorporation of documentary material. I am interested here, too, in examining the real as an effect of performance that is linked to artists' and audiences' complex affects and the desire to come

closer to the real, to commemorate loss, to assert cultural rights and the right for representation, to witness the forensic real evoked by documentary evidence presented through performance, and to reimagine the present and future. In this book, I hope readers will come away with a vision of the real in performance that is both past and future looking, engaged in revitalization, redemption, and recovery and in proposing alternative concepts of the real that are imaginative, generative, and ultimately complicit with fiction to expand notions of the human and ways of being in the world.

1: Lola Arias

Researching the Past With Stunt Doubles and Time Machines

As Arias's documentary performance has transformed over the last several decades, so too has her vision of her work as a social experiment, laboratory, and live event. Arias has referred to rehearsals as a kind of experimental group therapy, calling herself a "therapist-director" (2016b, 11). For Arias, theater is "investigative" and keenly interested in exploring and reflecting on the past (Ferdman 2014b, 32). Known internationally as a theater and film director, writer, and performance curator, Arias is also a researcher, committed to excavating the past and bringing it into dialogue with the present, collaboratively and affectively, through techniques of reenactment, flashbacks, and the incorporation of personal objects and artifacts, videos, audio recordings, and photographs. Focusing on her role as researcher in her documentary work, I examine her creative process and the methods and ethics she employs in her work with performers. Alternating between roles of participant observer and co-performative witness, Arias asserts and relinquishes control of authorship and the directorial process, takes risks, and tests the boundaries between immersion in and critical distance from her work.[1] A part of Arias's research process involves preserving and reproducing her performance experiments, which together form an evolving multimedia archive that is at once embodied and digital, forensic and fictional, a "living creature" in constant state of preservation and reproduction (Wicker 2017).

Arias explores the researcher role rigorously in her documentary work, referring to herself as a documentarian or a detective. She describes an innate interest in other people's lives and her desire to understand their points of view (Scherer 2011). Over the course of her career, she has worked with individuals who have been affected by violence, including veterans (*Veteranos* [Veterans, 2014]; *Campo minado* [Minefield, 2016]; *Teatro de guerra* [Theatre of War, 2018]) and children coming of age during and after dictatorship (*Mi vida después* [My Life After, 2009]; *El año en que nací* [The Year I Was Born, 2012]; *Melancolía y manifestaciones* [Melancholy and Demonstrations, 2012];

and *Doble de riesgo* [Stunt Double, 2016]). She has also worked with groups of people whose rights are systematically threatened, including asylum seekers (*Futureland*, 2019; *What They Want to Hear*, 2018), undocumented workers (*Mucamas* [Maids, 2010–11]), and incarcerated cis women and trans people (*Reas*, 2024; *Los días afuera* [The Days Out There, 2024]). As researcher, she is conscious of the ethics and responsibility this position entails, and her methods reflect this, for example, through providing support services (mental health, tutors) to performers during the production of the work. Long rehearsals allow her to develop a sustained relationship with performers, and she reveals her own willingness to place herself in vulnerable positions, as she does in *Melancholy and Demonstrations*. In her acceptance speech of the International Ibsen Award in October of 2024 at the National Theater in Oslo, Arias affirmed that "there is no method except spending time together, because time is the currency of trust" (2024). She frequently employs methods in her documentary work that allow performers to occupy the position of director, in control of orchestrating the reenactment of their own past experiences. In this way Arias decenters her own subjectivity and prefers to envision herself rather as a medium that channels the voices of performers in her works (2024).

Arias's fluid positionality and diverse research methods have developed in tandem with transnational collaboration that has increased and deepened over the last thirty years, a shift in direction that can be linked to her pivotal encounter with Stefan Kaegi of Rimini Protokol, cocurator with Arias of the urban intervention series *Ciudades paralelas* (Parallel Cities, 2010–11). Arias moves between Buenos Aires and Berlin, and she situates her performances in diverse contexts and in dialogue with a range of communities; for example, *The Art of Arriving* (2015) explores the experience of migration from the perspective of Bulgarian children recently arrived in Bremen; *Atlas del comunismo* (Atlas of Communism, 2016) invites women between the ages of eight and eighty-four to talk about growing up under socialism and to reflect on the socialist idea through narrative and old communist propaganda songs; in *What They Want to Hear* (2018), Syrian refugee Raaed Alkour offers a harrowing account of being in bureaucratic limbo while seeking asylum in Germany; *Futureland* (2019), a sci-fi documentary piece, follows the lives of unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Guinea, and Bangladesh who are seeking asylum in Germany; and the performance *Mother Tongue* (2021–22) is an "encyclopaedia of reproduction in the twenty-first century," taking into account perspectives from trans mothers and fathers, lesbian and gay parents, migrant mothers, teenage mothers, mothers who have used IVF, and women who do not want children.[2] The project *My Documents/Share Your Screen* (2021), a Zoom performance that Arias curated during the pandemic, invited artists from around the world to give a talk with the

help of personal archives. Whether streaming online, premiering in cities across Europe, or touring via the international festival circuit, these works (among others) reveal how Arias's research methods travel between contexts and generate affinities between practices of reenactment, translation, and transcreation across time and space.

Lola Arias's play *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, from the Children's Trilogy, her installation *Doble de riesgo*, and the War Trilogy (the installation *Veteranos*, the play *Minefield*, and the film *Teatro de guerra)* attend to lives affected directly and indirectly across generations by the violence of dictatorship and war.[3] They eclipse the distance between past and present, creating what Rebecca Schneider has called "cross-temporal mimesis," generating an uncanny encounter between past and present lives, and signaling at the same time intimacy and dislocation between them (2011, 18). Arias's documentary work, in dialogue with other forms of cultural expression during post-dictatorship, exploits this slippage between past and present in the aftermath of violence. As researcher, Arias develops a methodology for investigating the past that allows performers to occupy the roles of performer-archivist, stunt double, and time machine. I pay close attention to how Arias's use of video and sound archives in her performance cultivates both intimacy and dissonance, exploiting tensions and synergies between screen, stage, body, and voice.

The first part of the chapter examines Arias's *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, the third of the "children's plays," a trilogy of works in which performer-archivists investigate and reconstruct their parents' lives through the presentation of photos, films, personal objects, and texts and the reenactment of memories and family stories. Compared to the first two plays in the trilogy, *My Life After* and *The Year I Was Born*, the third, *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, has received relatively little scholarly attention, but it deserves further consideration for several reasons. First, as Arias herself remarks, *Melancholy and Demonstrations* "condenses many of the things floating in the other two [plays]" (Arias, 2019e, 45). *Melancholy and Demonstrations* culminates an exploration of prominent themes in the first two plays relating to inheritance, legitimacy of voice, and the concept of the stunt double. As such, I move between these three plays in my analysis here. Second, *Melancholy and Demonstrations* represents a novel research experiment for Arias in which she practices her own directorial method on herself. Third, the play features one of the most innovative yet least explored forms of reenactment in Arias's work, that of lip-synching, a dubbing technique that, when used in collaboration with the documentary mode, expands the boundaries of verbatim performance and probes the relationship between voice, embodiment, and archive. And last, I show how *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, Arias's most autobiographical play, becomes one of her most

political through her hypothesis that public demonstrations and political activism might be a cure for her mother's depression.

The second part of the chapter turns to the examination of Arias's film *Teatro de guerra* in dialogue with the documentary play *Minefield*. In these works, Arias brings Argentine and British veterans of the Malvinas/Falklands War together to re-create scenes of battle and other experiences of the war. Drawing on reenactment and role-playing techniques, interviews, examination of letters, clothing, artifacts, and musical performance, Arias brings individuals together in collective examination of the past. Specifically, I examine how flashbacks in film and reenactment in performance compare, contrast, and activate one another across these two works. I analyze the role of the actors as both performer-archivists and embodied archives of the past and how this lived experience of the archive is framed and animated differently by theater and film. *Teatro de guerra*, though featuring the same actors, is not a film *about* the play but rather redirects our attention to the question of how to make a film about the effects of war. In the works discussed here, Arias plays with the temporalities associated with different media, locating the potential of film in its ability to capture and preserve moments of process. Not a translation or adaptation of the play, *Teatro de guerra* emerges synchronously with, or even precedes, live performance, troubling temporalities associated with theater and film, performance, and the digital archive.

Arias has described her documentary theater as a time machine, an evocative metaphor for the ways in which she shuttles performers and spectators between past and present in her work (Sosa 2014, 107; Gardner 2016). To create the transfers between past and present, Arias has developed a sophisticated repertoire of reenactment practices over the years, enhanced through her deft exploration of visual media across theater, film, and installation. Early performances such as *Estudios sobre la memoria amorosa* (Studies of Loving Memory, 2003) already evidence Arias's fascination with reenactment, though *My Life After* is the first play that showcases reenactment as a dominant technique in Arias's work. In the handbill to *My Life After*, Arias uses the word "remake" to describe how the actors re-create scenes of the past to understand the future: "Like stunt doubles of their parents, children dress up in their [parents'] clothes and try to represent their family stories" (qtd. in Brownell 2009, 1). Techniques such as the superimposition of photographs, the juxtaposition of before and after images, the reenactment of events onstage, lip-synching, and flashbacks in film all seem to dissolve the distance between past and present, while at the same time highlighting the irretrievability of the past event and the spectral quality of return (Nichols 2008, 74). A focus on reenactment practices in post-dictatorship cultural production, and specifically here in our consideration of Arias's work, allows us to attend more thoughtfully to the interplay between temporality, performance, and generational identity.

The Children's Trilogy (2009–12): A Generation of Performer-Archivists

Arias's Children's Trilogy tells the stories of a generation that came of age in the aftermath of dictatorship. In reflections on *My Life After*, Arias refers to the children as "detectives investigating their own parents, rummaging through family albums in search of clues, signs, traces that might explain secrets or point to future episodes" (2019e, 41). In *My Life After*, performers employ humor in the re-creation of their parents' pasts, marking a departure from the traditionally solemn portrayals of and by the parents' generation in post-dictatorship Argentine cultural production (Longoni and Verzero 2012; Sosa 2014; Blejmar 2016; Hernández 2021). Finding humor in the narration of the past was crucial for Arias, who, inspired by the work of Felix Bruzzone and Albertina Carri, sought to disrupt the canon by venturing to explore the ironies and absurdity of horror (Longoni and Verzero 2012, 7).

Arias's Children's Trilogy became a flashpoint for debates surrounding the legitimacy of narrative voice in creating artistic work about the disappeared. *My Life After* and *The Year I Was Born* featured performers with a range of experiences: some were children of disappeared parents or children who grew up in exile, others struggled to come to terms with the knowledge that their fathers had been torturers, yet others had parents who considered themselves apolitical. In these plays, Arias made room for a broader community of voices belonging to adult children with diverse histories and relationships to the dictatorship (Sosa 2014, 1). As a result, journalists and artists pressed her about her own lineage and the reasons why she wanted to make theater about the second generation. In an interview with Ana Longoni and Lorena Verzero, Arias relates that journalists frequently asked her, "Why you? What is your story? What right do you have?" and these questions in part motivated her to create *Melancholy and Demonstrations* (2012, 11). Arias writes, "After years of making documentary plays about the lives of others, rewriting, asking, challenging the experiences of others, I needed to try out the experiment on myself, like someone deciding to take her own medicine. . . . Would I have the distance required to carry out the experiment?" (2019e, 44).

For Arias, the play represented a personal challenge requiring introspection, self-analysis, and confrontation of the effects that her mother's debilitating depression had on her childhood. Arias expands the community of voices here by including her own. She shares intimate testimony of her relationship with her mother, Amelia, and explores different vantage points in the theater-making process, embodying the roles of author, director, and performer while at the same time generating the "frenzy of signification," which, according to Susan Bennett, is unique to live, autobiographical performance (2006, 34). For

Bennett, "the singularity of autobiographical subject, author, and performer can hardly fail to create . . . an over-investment of spectatorial response in corporeal evidence" (2006, 41). Bennett takes this idea of "corporeal evidence" further, calling the onstage body an archive and a "literal vessel of a somatic history" (35). Arias herself empowers this interpretation of the onstage body as archive when she describes herself as a documentarian-researcher. With Arias as researcher, author, performer, subject, and object of her own play, her presence onstage generates the powerful illusion of autobiography, a somatic archive she curates onstage, but her mother's refusal to play herself and Arias's subsequent decision to use a stand-in who lip-synchs to her mother's voice force audiences to question the limits of autobiography onstage and, more importantly, to consider how embodiment and narrative accounts compete for evidentiary status in documentary theater.

Arias occupied many diverse roles in the creation of this play, allowing her to identify and disidentify with a range of subject positions. As Arias got closer to her mother's painful past, the possibility of establishing artistic distance from it became more urgent. This need for distance or disidentification is also evident in her mother's reaction to the play. When asked if she felt well represented in the play, Amelia answered, "The woman in the play isn't me; that's the mother of my daughter" (Arias 2019e, 45). Arias's experimentation with narrative voice blurs the boundaries between documentary and fiction, and it plays with autobiographical and biographical modes, allowing her and her mother to expose their real lives while exercising self-preservation through the creative process and the sanctuary of fiction.[4] In an interview, Arias concedes, "This is fiction. As a writer I am interested in real experiences, but I don't get onstage to make a confession. This is my mother as seen through my eyes" (Yaccar 2013). *Melancholy and Demonstrations* exemplifies what Jordana Blejmar has called the "autofictional turn" in post-dictatorship Argentine culture, characterizing works that are "based on true events (autobiographical pact) but presented within imaginary frameworks (fictional pact)" (2017, 121). Arias, as "author-archivist," mines the tensions and synergies between the creative process and archival research in her creation of *Melancholy and Demonstrations*.[5]

Melancholy and Demonstrations (2012): Performing Fiction, Verbatim

Following its premiere in 2012 at the Wiener Festwochen in Vienna, *Melancholy and Demonstrations* toured the international festival circuit and had its Buenos Aires debut in 2013 at the General San Martín Theater as part of the 9th International Festival of Buenos Aires. Arias wrote the play and codirected

it with Luciana Acuña, a long-time collaborator who also choreographed the play.[6] In *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, Arias reflects on her own experience as a child born during dictatorship and re-creates memories and experiences of her mother, whose struggle with depression began in 1976, both the year the military junta took power and the year Arias was born. As Arias recounts, she asked her mother to play herself onstage, but she declined, and "that decision complicated everything" (2019e, 45). While it may have complicated things, it made the play that much more innovative, requiring Arias to improvise, adapt her method, and use her skills as researcher, ethnographer, therapist, documentarian, and detective to generate the realness of her mother through a performative double onstage. In the end, actor Elvira Onetto played Arias's mother, lip-synching to the real voice of Arias's mother, taken from the interviews Arias had recorded as part of her research for the play. The effect, according to Arias, was phantasmagorical, a sort of séance theater: "Elvira opened her mouth and out came my mother's voice. The actress had converted herself into a medium calling forth my mother to make her present in the theatre" (45).

Melancholy and Demonstrations is structured into a prologue, fourteen short chapters, and an epilogue. At the beginning of the performance, the stage is dark, except for a large wooden box, about twelve feet wide and nine feet high, center stage radiating warm orange light.[7] The front of the box is made of vertical blinds that open and close like a curtain. When closed, they create a smooth surface that becomes a screen. The box is a versatile installation that functions as screen, stage, and book at different moments in the play. To the left and right of the stage, one can make out some chairs and lighting equipment. Arias enters and approaches the microphone, located downstage right; actors follow and take their seats. Musician and longtime collaborator Ulises Conti, seated downstage left, begins to play slow-paced, wistful notes on his guitar, as scrolling text appears projected on the front of the box, resembling movie credits on a screen. The text serves as a prologue, explaining Arias's rationale for the play and the sequence of events that led to its creation. Audiences read the first line of the play on-screen: "This is a play about a daughter who wants to understand her mother's depression" (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 131). As audiences read through the scrolling text, they learn that "the daughter" first consulted with her mother's psychiatrist and that the psychiatrist told her that the play would be too dangerous for her mother. Initially dissuaded, "the daughter" then wonders if there might still be a way to pursue the project if she and her mother collaborated. Her mother then agreed to help but ultimately refused to perform in the play (131). Reading further, audiences learn that "the daughter," fearing her mother's untimely death, then "follows her mother around with a notebook and camera . . . [and] writes down all the things she remembers about her

mother's illness" (131). Arias describes the play as "a kind of diary of a mother's melancholy written by her closest witness, her own daughter" (2019e, 45). As closest witness, Arias nonetheless establishes distance when she avoids the use of the first person or proper names in the prologue and instead uses the universal "mother" and "daughter."[8] Ana Longoni calls this "passage to a generic universal" striking, especially compared to Arias's first two works of the trilogy, in which actors go by their real names onstage (2019, 151). In the end, Arias's most intimate and autobiographical work is the one that depends most heavily on devices for universalizing and/or fictionalizing her subject matter.

The prologue introduces "the daughter" and "the mother" to audiences as Arias stands silently to one side; in the first chapter of the play, titled "The Two Faces of My Mother," Arias/the Daughter narrates the harrowing story of her birth: "When I was born, my mother's uterus exploded and there was blood everywhere: on the bed, the hospital floor, the nurses' uniforms. It was 1976 and the country had also exploded after the military coup" (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 131). She goes on to explain that a few days after her birth, her mother became very sad and started to take medication for depression. As the years went by, her mother began to exhibit bipolar behavior. Arias/the Daughter relates, "Over the course of my life, I've had two mothers: one sad and one euphoric, and they took turns like an actress playing two roles in the same play. There were times when I started to think that my mother had the two faces of theatre: one laughing and one crying" (131). Arias/the Daughter describes how as a child she began to interpret her mother's illness through a theatrical lens, a precocious preview to the creation of *Melancholy and Demonstrations*.

In this first scene/chapter, Arias establishes the significance of the double, a dominant paradigm throughout her work and one she exploits through multiple forms of reenactment onstage and on-screen, through a range of visual media and techniques. Following this description of her mother's two faces, spectators see a close-up of the Actress projected on the screen. As the stage directions indicate, "We hear the original recording of the mother's voice. The Actress moves her lips like she's lip-syncing. It should look like the mother's voice is coming out of the Actress's mouth" (131). The Actress/Mother's first words in the play convey her personal experience of melancholy: "Melancholia has to do with emptiness, with the feeling you don't know what you're doing in this world. You can't enjoy any kind of love, you can't enjoy art or reading, or anything because it's a very big emptiness and the only thing you feel all the time is suffering. . . . You think about violent ways to escape it, this pain" (132). Following this introduction, the curtain opens to reveal the Actress standing inside the box, secured to a bed mattress that is propped up vertically by a paper belt. Arias/the Daughter announces, "That's my mother's voice, but she's not my mother. Her name is

Figure 1. *Melancolía y manifestaciones* (Melancholy and Demonstrations), Centro Cultural General San Martín, Buenos Aires, 2013. Actors: Lola Arias and Elvira Onetto. Photograph courtesy of Lola Arias.

Elvira, she's an actress and an acting teacher. She and her students are going to help me reconstruct my mother's story" (132). Arias's use of expository language to introduce her mother evokes post-dictatorship techniques, such as stand-ins, stunt doubles, and body doubles, used frequently by artists of the so-called second generation to reconstruct their parents' lives.[9]

For most of the play, aside from a couple of key moments discussed further on, Arias/the Daughter remains downstage right, positioned in front of a microphone and music stand. At one time during the performance, she assumes the role of choir director, and at another she sings a song while the actors dance onstage. Arias/the Daughter reads accounts of her mother's life, assembled from her own childhood memories, interviews with her mother, and her mother's journal. The play's chapters depict fragmented episodes ranging in tone from humorous and endearing moments to deep and probing inquiries into the Mother's suicidal thoughts. Roughly the first two-thirds of the play focuses on how depression affected her mother's daily life through the narration of specific episodes from her past. The chapter titled "1976" marks a shift in tone

and a deepening of Arias/the Daughter's exploration of the political origins of her mother's illness. Arias employs a range of sound (lip-synching, live music onstage) and visual (films, screened images, tableaux) techniques throughout the play to facilitate intimate access to her mother's story, yet the connection that is perhaps most powerful is the one forged through a joint love of literature. Books figure prominently throughout the work both as a motif and as physical objects. Notably, the play is organized into chapters; Arias/the Daughter reads from a notebook resting on the music stand; her mother's journals serve as a main documentary source for the play; and Arias describes the play as a diary of her mother's illness. Even the blinds on the front of the large box onstage open and close almost as if they were pages in a book.

In the beginning of the play, in the chapter titled "The Bed," the Actress/Mother is strapped to a mattress leaning against the back wall while reading a book; it is unclear if the paper strap is meant to be supportive or restrictive. In this chapter, Arias/the Daughter states that the bed is her mother's favorite place and that when she was a child, she would skip school to stay at home with her: "So we'd spend the whole morning in bed, drifting in and out of sleep, reading books or making up stories to tell each other" (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 133). To Arias/the Daughter, this experience seemed like a "parallel world" where "sleeping was also a way of learning" (133). Some of the most tender moments in the play reveal the bond between them that is sustained through their love of reading. Another example of this is the path of books that the Actress/Mother creates in the chapter "1976" to physically connect the box to the space where Arias/the Daughter stands onstage. The Actress/Mother gently and methodically tosses books on the floor and tiptoes across them to get to Arias/the Daughter: "The Actress reaches the Daughter, gives her a book and then follows the book-path back to the box" (144). This is the same path Arias/the Daughter uses to reach the box before the chapter "Suicide." Throughout the play, Arias presents reading, writing, and literature as vital strategies for both mother and daughter in dealing with the effects of depression and for sustaining their close bond. The proliferation of books in different forms and genres in the play—diaries, field notes, journals, literature—also highlights the importance of research and the potential of fiction and nonfiction alike to create intimate connections and stories of lives lived.

Stunt Doubles: Perilous Choreographies of Survival

The conventional understanding of stunt doubles often comes from the Hollywood film industry. In her article "Missing Persons and Bodies of Evidence," Ann Chisholm analyzes the contract between producers and actors issued by

the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which stipulates that a stunt double must be used when "in the opinion of the producer, the failure to use a 'double' for the performance of hazardous acts might result in physical injury to the artist" (2000, 130). According to Chisholm, the substitution of the principal player by the stunt double is often understood as an act of masquerade (139). Stunt doubles are successful when they trick viewers into believing they are the actors they are doubling. Like stunt doubles, reenactors of historical events frequently strive to replicate the past as authentically as possible, but the objective is not masquerade but rather the display of mastery of skills and knowledge or the desire to get closer to the history that the reenactor must possess in order to re-create the past event. And occasionally, as in the case of reenacting "extreme history," reenactors, too, subject their bodies to the physical challenges of the past, seeking to demonstrate strength and resilience (McCalman 2004). Despite some notable affinities between the stunt double and the reenactor, there is a different logic at work in reenactment. Inherent to the endeavor of reenactment is the acknowledgment by spectators that the reenactors are not the original actors (Nichols 2008, 74). Unlike the stunt double, traditionally conceived as an agent of masquerade or trompe-l'oeil, the reenactor must be acknowledged as a distinct double, who nonetheless evokes the fantasy of conjuring an authentic past.[10]

In the context of performance studies, the stunt double is an intriguing metaphor for the reenactor, interested in identifying with the past, even experiencing the past, but always protected by the role of being a double in a version of history that, even if extremely violent, remains a simulation of past events (Werth 2022). Arias's decision to use the concept of the stunt double to frame the works included in the Children's Trilogy is provocative, as it invites us to reflect further on the synergies and tensions produced by the reenactor as stunt double in the context of post-dictatorship. Some of the original events or memories the children reenact onstage involve acts of disappearance, murder, torture, and repression committed by the military government. Employing the concept of the stunt double highlights the fact that performers in these works at times are reenacting scenes of extreme physical violence.

Carla Crespo, one of the performers in *My Life After*, pronounces a line in the performance that consolidates the stunt double as one of the most crucial concepts in Arias's work, in the Children's Trilogy and beyond, particularly in the subsequent War Trilogy, *Veterans*, *Minefield*, and *Theatre of War*. In the chapter of *My Life After* titled "Remakes," in which performers reenact different scenes from their parents' lives, Carla Crespo announces, "During my life I've heard so many versions of how my dad died that it's as if he died several times, or he never died. If my dad's life were a film, I'd like to play his stunt double" (*My Life After*, 61). Carla's father, a militant member of the People's Revolutionary Army

(Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo [ERP]), was killed in an armed confrontation when Carla's mother was five months pregnant with her. In what follows, Carla plays a directorial role, narrating the scene for the actors who reenact the different versions of her father's death onstage (car crash, armed confrontation, execution). She wears the same clothes her father wore as an ERP militant, creating a doubling effect, but as Mariana Eva Pérez observes, other performers play his friends or comrades, and "by doing so, the play states that the story does not belong only to Carla; she is not obliged to carry its weight all by herself" (Pérez 2013, 15). Carla emphasizes how important it was for the play to incorporate live testimony, and she refers to testimony as both the genesis of the work and the most significant part to convey to audiences (Pérez 2013, 12). Though testimony typically takes the form of a first-person narrative, here it is collective and indexical, uninvested in evoking a literal past. Since the play presents several versions of her father's death, reenactment and imagination of the event become inseparable exercises.

Returning to *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, we might wonder if the paradigm of the stunt double is as effective when discussing the doubling that occurs between Arias's mother and the actress, Elvira Onetto, onstage. There are some crucial differences. While *My Life After* reenacts the story of Carla's father, who suffered extreme physical harm and death at the hands of the civic-military dictatorship, *Melancholy and Demonstrations* attends to Amelia's experience of acute emotional and psychological distress. Amelia's psychiatrist, almost as if in the producer role, tells Amelia that performing herself onstage might cause her harm. A stunt double/reenactor is needed to perform the emotionally challenging scenes, a role fulfilled admirably by Onetto. One could also say that Arias plays a stunt double of her own life, embodying her childhood self. She revisits the emotionally painful memories of her mother's depression without reexperiencing harm, like a stunt double, whose training and method have prepared her to reenact the past and return to the present unscathed.

The reenactor as stunt double, in the Children's Trilogy, exemplifies the survival and agency of a second generation, poised to commemorate and reflect critically on their parents' lives, without succumbing to the status of victim or inheriting the trauma of their parents' generation. Stunt doubles engage in the bodily re-creation of a perilous choreography; they stand in, act as double agents, relive harrowing moments, and then reemerge in the present, intact, if not unaffected. In a cultural landscape still haunted by the disappearance of tens of thousands of people during dictatorship, body doubles abound, and the figure of the stunt double conveys multiple valences, embodying both the fantasy of return and the agency of a second generation in control of the narrative of the past.

Cadena Nacional (2016): Body Doubles and Subversive Stand-Ins

While the film industry historically has marginalized body doubles and coded them as nonessential, in Arias's work, body doubles are recognized in their roles as such and exhibit greater agency as autonomous subjects. This is evident in Arias's multimedia installation titled *Doble de riesgo*, staged between August and November 2016 in the PAyS Gallery, housed at the Memory Park and Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism in Buenos Aires.[11] *Doble de riesgo* consisted of four interactive installations, each combining sound and image in novel ways to explore the concept of the stunt double and to bring into focus the relationship between voice, body, and archive.[12] In the context of this analysis of *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, I want to briefly turn to the installation titled *Cadena Nacional* because of its use of playback and lip-synching by a stand-in, which, like the lip-synching technique central to *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, creates a dislocation between body and voice, past and present, producing an uncanny effect and cognitive dissonance for spectators.

In *Cadena Nacional*, performers stand in as doubles of Argentine presidents. The set for this installation, an exact replica of the presidential office in the Casa Rosada (The Pink House), includes a replica of President Rivadavia's legendary armchair and the Argentine flag against a background of beige curtains. Participants take a seat and lip-synch some of the most famous presidential speeches over the last forty years, delivered by Jorge Rafael Videla, Leopoldo Galtieri, Reynaldo Benito Antonio Bignone, Raúl Alfonsín, Carlos Saúl Menem, Fernando de la Rúa, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, and Mauricio Macri. The premise here is that all the performers who stand in for the presidents were affected personally by the actions supported by the national discourse encapsulated in these speeches. So, for example, Carla Crespo, the performer from *My Life After* who proclaimed she wanted to be the stunt double of her father in a film about his life, appears again in this installation. Here she stands in and lip-synchs to Videla's inaugural speech of the dictatorship in 1976. Likewise, Mariano Speratti (also a performer in *My Life After*), whose father disappeared during the dictatorship, takes a turn lip-synching to this same speech (Civale 2016). While the performer lip-synchs the speeches, subtitles on the screen tell the story of how performers were affected by the historical moment captured in the speech. In the case of Mariano, we learn that he was three and a half years old at the time of his father's disappearance and "is still sorting through the emotions that mark that decisive moment" (Bulman 2017, 26). Establishing an intertext with *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, Elvira Onetto appears in *Cadena Nacional* standing in for Cristina Kirchner, reciting the speech she gave after former president

Figure 2. *Cadena Nacional* (National Broadcast), part of the video installation *Doble de riesgo* (Stunt Double). Exhibition PayS Gallery, Buenos Aires, 2016. Actor: Denise Groesman. Photograph courtesy of Lola Arias.

Néstor Kirchner died. As the subtitles indicate, Onetto's husband had died the same day.

The installation design highlights the contrast between official discourse and personal experience through contradicting subtitles or nonconforming gestures, as in the case of the performers moving their lips to the presidential speeches. As Graciela Speranza notes, "The national broadcast, official history's privileged genre, is superimposed by the life stories of those occupying the place of presidents, repeating their words with more or less the same timing, recreating their gestures with empathy or ironic smiles, distant neutrality or farcical emphasis" (2019, 220). According to the curator of the PayS Gallery, Florencia Battiti, *Doble de riesgo* is more interested in asking uncomfortable and impertinent questions than in pronouncing emphatic, conciliatory discourse.[13] As in *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, the use of a body double prompts questions among spectators—for example, whether the doubling achieves a kind of shared catharsis between performers and spectators, or a condemnation of the official discourse, or the sobering acknowledgment of the fact that the words of these speeches prevail and continue to circulate in public discourse. For Gail Bulman, this ambiguity generates a productive paradox between emotional and political agency (2017). One of the central questions raised by *Cadena Nacional*, according to Cecilia Macón, regards the possibility of reconfiguring the archive and what the political effects of this reconfiguration might be. For Macón, the act of installing bodies in place of the presidents who originally made the speeches performs an "opera-

tion of estrangement," producing distance between the image of the performer on-screen and the audio archive of the president's voice recording (2017, 431). While subtitles put forth an alternative history in this work, Macón is critical of the emphasis on the written text as the privileged form of creating and sustaining the historical archive (431). Yet ultimately, she argues, the installation is successful in generating a "counter-archive" if one views the performers' bodies as a kind of "prosthesis" of the presidents' voices that extends into the present and embodies the past both ironically and more authentically (432).

Through embodying these speeches, these performers act as double agents; they replace the originals and displace national discourse at the same time. The body here doubles as archive and evidence of the past; the mere presence of the performers' bodies elicits an emotional response from spectators. For this reason, Cristina Civale calls *Cadena Nacional* one of the most powerful of the installations in the exhibition (2016). Yet equally impactful as the body doubles in this piece are the audio recordings of the speeches. Speranza relates that listening to the presidents' speeches and apocryphal references to "internal pacification" and "respect for human rights" "grate[s] on our ears when spoken by a government that would leave behind a balance of 30,000 disappeared" (2019, 220). As in *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, one of the most provocative tensions in *Stunt Double* is produced by synchronizing performing body and sound recording, seemingly discrete archives engaged symbiotically and competitively in this piece, inviting audiences to consider which archive is most powerful, most affectively gripping, most authentic. To arrive at an interpretation that rejects official discourse in Arias's piece, one must side with the body as the most legitimate archive, the one that upholds the personal narrative of the affected performer.

In *Doble de riesgo* the genre of installation art effectively captures the liminality between live performance and art object. *Doble de riesgo* frames a conversation about archives that is internal to the work, but the installation itself is situated in a space that can be considered an archive, creating a multilayered, meta-archive effect. Gail Bulman's elaboration of the concept of the "sensichive" proposes a novel approach to the archive linking the preservation of history and memory to feeling (2022, 304–20). The PAyS Gallery is located in the Parque de la Memoria, an expansive public space that borders the coastline of the Río de la Plata river in Buenos Aires: "Erected as a place of memory, it combines the force of a monument with the engraved names of the disappeared and murdered persons by the State's repression, and the critical approach elicited by a work of contemporary art and direct visual contact with the river, silent witness to the fate of many of the victims."[14] The PAyS Gallery also houses an archive containing information on the lives and circumstances of the disappeared, built into the base of the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism. The meaning

of Arias's installation is site specific; it must be interpreted in the overlapping contexts of gallery, monument, memory park, and river, each of these contexts constituting a distinct archive of knowledge, memory, and affects. Reminiscent of Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the visually arresting mural on which the names of the disappeared are etched in stone appears to emerge from the depths of the river waters where drugged prisoners were thrown to their deaths from airplanes during the dictatorship. Described as a scar by the architects in charge of the design, the wall commemorates the disappeared and carves out a space for mourning.[15] The monument elevates the names of the disappeared, legitimizing the written word as a means of witnessing and acknowledging a past that was not included in official discourse, much like the subtitles do in Arias's *Cadena Nacional*. The gallery, monument, sculpture garden, database, and river all document the absence of bodies artistically or forensically. The proximity to the river, a mass grave to individuals thrown to their deaths from military planes during dictatorship haunts the site with a spectral affect that is magnified by the artistic renderings of body doubles that dot the landscape of the sculpture garden and occupy the gallery space.[16] In the context of these overlapping and intersecting archives, the stunt double in *Cadena Nacional* acquires greater significance; the mere presence of the bodies of performers as stand-ins holds multiple meanings, at once commemorative and disruptive, signaling a future embodied by those who are present yet must nonetheless reckon with the official soundtrack of the past.

Archives of Sound and Body: Synergies and Tensions

Arias's *Cadena Nacional*, in the context of her installation *Doble de riesgo*, negotiates competing archives, in the end foregrounding the significance of the body, as I have argued here, largely due to the site specificity of the work. In *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, on the other hand, the exact opposite occurs. As in *Cadena Nacional*, sound and body are dislocated through lip-synching and the use of a body double, but it is recorded voice that Arias puts forth as the most authentic archive of the past in *Melancholy and Demonstrations*. Comparing the use of sound and body as conveyers of meaning in these two works urges reflection on the ways in which artists may privilege certain archives over others to foster the illusion of legitimacy of an authentic connection to the past or to a real life.

Archives do not speak by themselves. As Carol Martin notes, "The process of selection, editing, organization, and presentation is where the creative work of documentary theatre gets done" (2010, 9–10). In an interview with Bertie Ferdman, Arias states that "curating is a work of coauthorship" that enables her to

"think differently" in relation her own work (2014b, 41). In a sense, then, Arias coauthors *Melancholy and Demonstrations* with her mother. She then curates the archive of her recorded voice onstage in collaboration with the Actress, whom in this work Arias describes as a "stand-in" or "medium" for the voice of her mother. Arias's mother playing herself onstage would have eliminated the dislocation between voice and sound, but this would also have eliminated the productive tension between presence and absence generated by the disembodied voice onstage. And this tension allows Arias to explore further a certain fascination she has with the human voice in relation to life and death. Arias questions what happens to the voice when one dies, comparing the staying power of the voice and the body: "There is something to the voice that is life itself. Because the body is still there: you can see it, venerate it, say goodbye, acknowledge it . . . but the voice, how do you say goodbye to someone's voice? How do you say goodbye to the voice that you're never going to hear again? A register might remain, but it's already a strange one because it gives the illusion of a life that no longer exists."[17]

In the context of *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, the use of the audio recordings of her mother's voice reveals a desire to preserve a register, to create a material archive capable of reproducing sound, to capture her life and preserve (the illusion of) its essence. Another example highlighting the voice and its relationship to life and death comes from *My Life After*, when Mariano plays the voice recording of his disappeared father onstage for his three-year-old son. An adult child playing a voice recording of a disappeared parent onstage offers the audience a moving demonstration of the phantasmagorical power of the voice as (after)life. Frequently in documentary theater, an archive is assembled around the absence of a real person through film clips, photographs, letters, personal objects, and audio recordings (Martin 2010, 17). Carol Martin writes, "In documentary theatre, the performers are sometimes those whose stories are being told. But more often than not documentary theatre is where 'real people' are absent—unavailable, dead, disappeared—yet reenacted" (2010, 17). Janelle Reinelt similarly notes, "Many successful documentaries are built around the death of a figure that comes to public prominence as a result of an untimely death" (2009, 18). This characterizes the narratives that several of the adult children reconstruct of their disappeared parents in *My Life After* and *The Year I Was Born*. *Melancholy and Demonstrations* marks a departure: notably, Arias's mother is living and in fact attended the performance and commented publicly on it. Yet there is an urgency here, precipitated by the fragility of Arias's mother's mental state, that is conveyed poignantly in the chapters titled "Drugs and Landscaping" and "Suicide," chapters in which Arias/the Daughter confronts her mother's suicidal thoughts.

In "Drugs and Landscaping," Arias/the Daughter begins by giving audiences

an overview of the range of psychoanalytic/psychiatric treatments her mother had undergone over the course of her life and identifies one behavioral psychologist in particular who was her favorite because he had converted his office into an artificial landscape with a floor made out of AstroTurf, wallpaper with life-size trees, a hammock, and a merry-go-round. As Arias/the Daughter relates, it was the "trippiest office" she had ever seen—"an artificial park, a simulacrum of nature"—located on the seventh floor of a building in the heart of the bustling theater district in Buenos Aires (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 144). A panoramic video gives audiences a tour of this office on the screen before the curtain opens to reveal the inside of the box transformed into a replica of the office. Actors stand in for Arias's immediate family members during this family therapy scene, in which the psychologist reveals to the family that Amelia/the Mother was having suicidal thoughts and that she would have to be hospitalized (144). Arias/the Daughter narrates the surreal scene: "I was so disoriented by the decor that I had trouble taking the matter seriously and I wondered how everyone else managed to discuss whether or not suicide was a real risk with their feet standing on that plastic lawn." The effect of this "environmental fiction," at first jarring, gradually begins to seem almost appropriate for the subject matter at hand (144). Arias/the Daughter continues, "But pretty soon I got used to it, and it seemed normal to me that we should debate my mother's mental health while trapped in a stage set, like characters in a Chekhov play" (144). While Arias/the Daughter narrates this scene, the Actress/Mother ties a rope to the ceiling and gets on a chair as if she were about to hang herself. This scene is pivotal because it combines therapy and fiction, key referents in the life of Amelia that are also central to Arias's approach to her work. Here Arias/the Daughter narrates from the sidelines, but in the following chapter, "Suicide," she joins the Actress/Mother in the box, effectively trapping herself in the stage set.

The chapter "Suicide" begins with Arias seated next to her mother inside the box; they face each other with their chairs turned slightly toward the audience so we can see their faces. At the end of the preceding chapter, Arias/the Daughter has tiptoed over a path of books guiding her across the stage and into the box, where Amelia is standing with a noose around her neck. Arias/the Daughter takes down the noose, and they sit down together. This chapter marks the moment of greatest vulnerability for both. The scene begins with Arias/the Daughter recounting how her mother frequently made references to suicide: "When my mother became very sad, she'd start saying she didn't want to live anymore, that she would be better off dead. Hearing her say that, in the middle of lunch or while I was brushing my teeth, or before I left for school, gave me a kind of electric shock, while other times it went through me like some kind of voice saying 'see you later'" (145). The fast-paced urgent music accompanying

this scene fuels the emotional intensity of the conversation in which Arias/the Daughter finds the courage to ask her mother how she planned to end her life. Elvira lip-synchs Amelia's response, enumerating in a matter-of-fact tone the various methods Amelia had considered and discarded, weighing the pros and cons of each: "Jumping off the balcony is the most tempting because it's just a second and the pain explodes and it's over. . . . Grabbing a gun and shooting yourself, no, that's not for me. Very messy, splatters all over the bathroom" (145).

In *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, it is the anticipation of death, rather than its aftermath, that lends the work a phantasmagorical aura. The audio recording of Amelia's voice here is an archive of precarity, one revealed to be in a state of limbo between life and death in its projection onstage. Might Arias's mother's voice nonetheless contain traces of her body? This is a question that has preoccupied Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and others who have theorized the division between sound and body (Thomaidis 2017, 45). It also preoccupies Arias, as evident in her probing questions about how to say good-bye to a voice. The desire to find traces of the body in the voice reveals an underlying anxiety surrounding the fleeting nature of the voice. Ascribing materiality to the voice permits the fantasy of "staying power," evidence of a life lived, a poignant archive and homage to lives lost and the vulnerable (Schneider 2011, 37).

Locating bodily traces in the voice requires an act of imagination on the part of the listener/spectator. As Steven Connor notes, the voice holds the creative potential to evoke an infinite number of alternative bodies and subjectivities: "The vocalic body is the idea—which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine, or hallucination—of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice" (qtd. in Thomaidis 2017, 60). The possibility of establishing new subjectivities or "points of audition," a term coined by Rick Altman, emphasizes sound as an essential counterpart to the visual "point-of-view" that is generally privileged in analyses of character and argument in film studies (qtd. in Paget and Roscoe 2006). This brings us back to the doubling of the subject, present thematically in Arias's work and formally through the method of lip-synching in *Melancholy and Demonstrations*. While the voice recording delivers evidence of a real life, the body that issues the voice remains a fictionalized double in the minds of audiences.[18] The pain and anguish exposed by Amelia's confession are mitigated through disembodied voice and the possibility of fiction. Amelia can watch the scene from the audience and assert with certitude, "That's not me."

While Arias's mother may feel protected through fiction and artistic distance, Arias/the Daughter herself is in the box with her mother, embodying her autobiographical narrative in the first person. In this scene, Arias/the Daughter

as subject and character coalesce. Arias/the Daughter leaves her post, located on the border between the audience and stage space, and joins her mother in the onstage box that encloses them in a miniature stage, a mise en abyme that doubles as a fictional world and testimonial space. Arias has discussed at length how difficult it was to make this play because of the painful traumas it revives and because she was "alone with all of this material—I was the performer, the director, the writer and I was on stage so there was no escape. . . . I was inside my own nightmare" (Gough 2019, 311). Arias relates, "I didn't have the distance of being outside . . . because I was inside the story" (311). Even though Arias/the Daughter is inside the box facing her mother, she does not address her mother directly. She simply declares, "I eventually got up the courage to ask my mother how she planned to commit suicide," after which we hear the recorded voice of the Mother (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 145).

Arias/the Daughter abandons her role as outside director in this scene, but she recovers critical distance if one views her in the role of therapist; in a sense, she reenacts the therapy scene from the previous chapter, taking control of asking questions about her mother's suicidal thoughts. Arias once referred to her role as "therapist-director" in the creation of *My Life After*, and in general occupying this hybrid identity has had a major influence on her creative process in works dealing with personal trauma, such as the Children's Trilogy and the War Trilogy. Arias, herself a lifelong child of psychoanalysis, displays ease with this integrated approach, and she clearly expresses the parameters and aims of her work with performers. She emphasizes that her goal is not to heal wounds but to create a space in which performers can work through trauma and find empowerment through artistic collaboration (L. González 2019). This approach requires a significant emotional commitment from performers in Arias's documentary plays dealing with past trauma. In her reflections on the creation of *My Life After*, Arias explains that "since [the performers] were not characters but people, their participation in the project implied for them a leap into the void. They had to want to tell their story, ask their parents uncomfortable questions, deal with the others' stories, air their family secrets in front of a different audience every night" (2019e, 42). She offers examples of her method and the exercises she asked performers to do in *My Life After*: "At first, being in rehearsal was like participating in some type of experimental group therapy where the therapist-director gave instructions like: 'put on some piece of your father's clothing and reconstruct his death using your fellow performers;' choreograph your family tree;' film your parents' exile as if it were some genre picture, a melodrama, a crime story, a sci-fi movie'" (42). In her rehearsal process, Arias takes care not to exploit the painful experiences of performers while facilitating a productive collaboration for working through trauma. Arias stresses that processes of working

through the past are long and require her sustained engagement with performers. This commitment, she explains, marks the difference between generating a space of artistic collaboration and simply taking what you want from each performer to do what you want with it (Ibarra Grau 2018).

In her documentary works dealing with traumatic memory, Arias is interested in curating individual stories and fostering opportunities for individuals to reconstruct their pasts through reenactment and role-playing; superimposition of sound, image, and body; and presentation of objects, photographs, and films. But ultimately, she aims to integrate individual stories into a collective artistic creation. Yet while the collective experiences her works generate may resemble networks of solidarity and new communities of belonging, she shies away from discourses of healing and closure, focusing instead on the power of art to allow performers to connect with the past and step into the shoes of another to explore other perspectives.

Arias's documentary work shows a preoccupation with the collective resonance of individual experience, and in her role as therapist-director, she uses techniques such as reenactment and role-playing that bring individuals together in collective examination of the past. *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, perhaps more than any other of her documentary works, exemplifies this concern, first and foremost through the title of the play, which juxtaposes a condition generally attributed to the individual (melancholy) and a collective phenomenon (demonstrations). Structurally, the play traces the shift of focus from individual accounts of depression to collective protest. In the last chapter of the play, "Journal Entry: Demonstrations," Arias recites an entry from her mother's journal chronicling the *cacerolazos* that followed the protests of December 2001 and captured the widespread disillusionment and frustration of Argentines whose bank accounts had been frozen by the *corralito*:[19] "Bands of bank employees, in the rain. The others wearing uniforms cross the street, clutching their clubs. All that shouting in front of the embassy next door keeps me from staying in bed with my tears. Just when I'd scheduled myself to spend that morning crying" (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 148). The protesters disrupt the mother's melancholy, and Arias/the Daughter "thinks that the cure for her mother's melancholy might be demonstrations" (148).

A significant turn from personal to collective experience occurs when, immediately following the mother's exposition of the pros and cons of different ways of ending her life, the audience hears an approaching demonstration. "The older actors burst on stage, dressed in street clothes, carrying posters, megaphones and drums, as if they were participating in a demonstration of retirees" (145). They are pensioners demanding their benefits, and they are the mother's age, though "unlike her they are irate" (148). Several of the older actors lip-synch

to the voices of protesters taken from footage from the demonstration: "We're going to keep fighting for 82% for all retired people," in reference to a vetoed bill that that would have set the basic pension at 82 percent of minimum wage (184). Though not too many specifics of the speeches are given, one senses that the protesters feel overlooked when one of the actors lip-synchs, "No one has even bothered to come down here, to speak with us over our mobile radio" (148). The older actors stand in and lip-synch for the protestors; onstage they command the gaze, whereas offstage they denounce feeling overlooked. In her comments on casting actors over the age of seventy in this play, Arias has remarked that they "were the project's least-expected discovery." According to Arias, spectators are unaccustomed to seeing older actors onstage; they bring "slowness, fragility, bodily authenticity." This "bodily authenticity" onstage combined with the authenticity of voice achieved through lip-syncing conjure feelings of vulnerability and realness onstage (Hammond and Steward 2012).

In preparation for *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, Arias followed her mother around with a notebook and camera and assumed the roles of ethnographer and documentarian. Her method aligns with verbatim theater, which relies on recordings or transcripts of interviews with real people (Hammond and Steward 2012). Verbatim is a technique frequently used in documentary theater because of the evidentiary function it connotes onstage, linking dramatic presentation to actual testimony. Lip-synching might be considered one of the purest forms of verbatim because the recorded voice of the character is played directly onstage, unmediated by editing, arrangement, or the delivery of the actor. Robin Soans discusses how verbatim theater affects audience expectations, observing, on the one hand, that audiences will expect the play to be political and, on the other, that they will feel a responsibility for the "deeply personal conversation" that is transferred onto the stage (2012, 19–24). Though frequently compared to a journalistic register, verbatim theater can also be intimately personal. Furthermore, lip-synching in this play has the power both to engage spectators affectively in the experience of communal listening/witnessing and to alienate audiences through the dislocation of body and voice.

While the play's title and the order of the chapters allude to the eventual integration of personal into a public framework of political activism, the political, though hidden, remains powerful throughout the entire work and constitutes a robust through line to the other two plays in the trilogy. While *My Life After* and *The Year I Was Born* present the perspectives of adult children reflecting on the political militancy of their parents' generation, *Melancholy and Demonstrations* charts a different path between the personal and the political. The play ends in political protest, but the political is present from the beginning because of the link Arias establishes between the origin of her mother's depression and

the advent of the military coup. In the chapter titled "1976," Arias declares, "I wonder if my mother's illness might also have a political origin. If we made a list of all those who became depressed because of the dictatorship, how many names would there be on it? Thirty thousand, fifty thousand, a million?" (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 144).[20] Arias's Children's Trilogy illuminates the diverse experiences of those affected by the dictatorship, but as Ana Longoni observes, in *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, "More than an attempt at expanding the category of 'victims of state terrorism,'" what is at stake here is "a question about the ways in which terror inscribes itself irremediably in every single body and concretely affects all of us from that point on" (2019, 152). Likewise in her analysis of women's testimonies under dictatorship, Barbara Sutton poses the question, "How much of the violence produced during the dictatorship and disseminated to the rest of society still survives in direct or subtle forms?" (2010, 135). Arias draws attention to one of these indirect forms in the examination of her mother's ongoing depression in *Melancholy and Demonstrations*.

Melancholy, Mourning, and Mobilization

Arias's work signals the pervasiveness of more subtle, overlooked psychological and physiological effects of dictatorship and the possibility of resistance through collective protest. Arias's use of the term "melancholy" in the title of the play bears further consideration here because of the multiple meanings the term conveys in different contexts and schools of thought and how the term has been theorized alongside mourning in relation to public protest. In this play, Arias refers specifically to German artist Albrecht Dürer's print *Melancolia I* (1513–14), a "depiction of the intellectual situation of the artist" (discussed further below) in which the artist balances precariously between creative genius and insanity.[21] Yet melancholy is also frequently associated with Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), in which Freud describes melancholia as a "mode of pathological mourning" that prevents one from properly grieving the loss of an object (Eng 2000, 1277). Both in Dürer's engraving and in Freud's essay, melancholy is a gendered concept associated with women. For Freud, melancholy aptly describes female subjectivity (1275). And the parallels in form between the bipartite title of the essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and Arias's play *Melancholy and Demonstrations* invite us to situate our analysis of this play in dialogue with discourses of melancholy, mourning, and demonstrations.

Specifically, in post-dictatorship Argentina, both melancholy and mourning have been theorized at different times as crucial components of resistance to different forms of violence. For Christian Gundermann, the early resistance of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, their fight for truth and justice, and their rejec-

tion of closure or reconciliation of the past constitute melancholic acts (2007). In contrast, Idelber Avelar puts forth mourning as an exemplary practice of post-dictatorship cultural production (1999). In more recent analyses of the feminist mobilizations in Argentina against gender violence and femicide that have taken place as part of NiUnaMenos, public mourning is once again posited as central to the movement. María Pia López establishes a genealogy of public mourning practices used by the Mothers, Grandmothers, and NiUnaMenos movement to commemorate the loss of life and establish networks of solidarity (2020). As López notes in her discussion of the NiUnaMenos protests, melancholy "confines us to the position of victimhood," whereas public mourning creates networks of "active, powerful women" (16).

The epilogue of the play culminates in one of the most visually stunning scenes, in which actors help re-create an installation based on Dürer's engraving *Melancholia I*. Audiences first see an image of *Melancholia I* projected onto the screen. The actors then take on the role of stagehands as they start to re-create the image with elements from the performance, including a ladder, the supermarket cart, a pillow, and Minnie Mouse's head. Arias/the Daughter then undresses the Actress/Mother and puts on her clothes. She then dresses the Actress/Mother in a kimono and puts on wings. The actors litter the stage with boxes of antidepressants. The Actress/Mother assumes the pose of Dürer's *Melancholia I* (*Melancholy and Demonstrations*, 148–49). In this last scene, Arias/the Daughter lip-synchs to her mother's voice as she narrates an anecdote of accidentally taking one of her mother's antidepressants when she was two years old. Adding another layer of stunt doubling, Arias lip-synchs to her mother recounting how she was rushed to the hospital and was given Coca-Cola to induce vomiting. She then reassumes her role as the Daughter and ponders, "Years later, I thought that maybe those pills had turned me into a kind of Achilles who'd been dipped in a lake of antidepressants as a child, and I secretly feared that at any moment the arrow of depression could strike me right in the heel" (149). In this final scene, dressed in her mother's clothes, Arias doubles as her mother, as she confronts the fear of inheritance: "They say that manic depression is hereditary. I wonder if I will succumb to my mother's illness, if it's true that depression is a cursed jewel you carry in your blood, always there, lurking, waiting for the right moment to pounce" (149). Arias, who was pregnant for much of the play's run, embodies three generations, both highlighting the intergenerational and breaking out of the paradigm of the double at the same time. The end of the play captures the moment when Arias becomes the parent, in addition to the child, initiating what she observes as a "change in position" experienced by artists then in their thirties and forties who were interested in narrating the stories of their families and exploring questions of inheritance in their works ("Todo sobre madre e hija" 2013).

Critics who are uneasy with the concept of inheritance in post-dictatorship discourse cite the passivity connoted by the term in relation to the second generation. In her critique of post-memory as an analytical framework for understanding *My Life After*, Mariana Eva Pérez emphasizes the agency that the performers embody onstage vis-à-vis the past: "Arias's piece is rather about what the performers do and have done with the legacy of the past, than about 'overwhelming inherited memories'" (2013, 10, quoting Hirsch 2008, 107). In Arias's Children's Trilogy, reenactment, when performed by an adult child onstage, is both a powerful homage to and a rejection of filial determination. Reenactment onstage becomes a moving performance of inheritance that gives the power to the inheritor to determine what inheritance means or what form it will take. In the context of the Children's Trilogy, *Melancholy and Demonstrations* is no exception. Arias acknowledges the fear of inheritance, yet through techniques such as the stunt double or reenactment, she uses art to reject the "compulsory demand of genealogical inscription."[22] In an interview with Richard Gough, she reveals the following: "I think I wouldn't have been able to be a mother myself had I not made this piece. I really think that art does very concrete things in the lives of people to enable change" (2019, 312).

Arias's Research Method: Question—Research—Experiment—Fiction

In the second part of this chapter, I turn to Arias's Malvinas/Falklands War Trilogy, a transnational project consisting of a video installation, a play, and a film for which she worked with British and Argentine veterans from 2014 to 2018 to investigate and reenact their memories of the war collectively. Arias began this project by posing a question to the veterans: "What is the memory that stayed in your mind until today?" Arias then conducted interviews, took notes, drafted the text, and proposed experiments with the veterans. She describes the process as a complex negotiation, requiring rounds of rewriting and consultation with the performers, who must feel like the text "represents them" (Bither 2019). Arias's method evokes the "process-oriented, workshop-based, non-hierarchical" nature of collaborative creation and reflects a commitment to "risk-taking" and embodying ideas and images that is characteristic of devised theater (Castillo 2016, 73). Arias is conscientious in her role as researcher, attuned to the postcolonial and gender power dynamics at play and the ethical implications of working with performers who have experienced trauma.

Yet Arias's process is not easy to categorize. Though she values collaborative creation, she also sees herself first and foremost as a writer: "For the plays and films, I write the storyline, based upon the stories of the participants. So, in a way, I fictionalize their reality. I write during the interviews and intertwine

the stories into one narrative. When you see it in the theater or cinema it may seem improvised, but it has all been written out. What you see is the product of a writer" (Rottenberg 2019). In the context of global performance trends, Arias's perspective reveals some of the tensions around authorship in the debates on aesthetics and social engagement explored by Claire Bishop, Nicholas Bourriaud, and others. Yet what is most relevant to this chapter is her self-identification as author and fiction writer of a trilogy of works largely interpreted as documentary performance. The works included in the War Trilogy, and especially the film *Teatro de guerra*, reveal the tensions and synergies between documentary and fiction in Arias's work. In the War Trilogy, Arias co-conducts multiple rounds of experiments with performers, transforming material and reiterating narratives across media, languages, and genres over the course of years of rehearsals and production runs. Her focus on life experiences of actors, reflection on process, and audiovisual and narrative experimentation engage dialogue with currents in contemporary documentary film (Piedras 2014a). As Blejmar, Page, and Sosa observe, current trends in Argentine film and theater reveal creative proposals that moved beyond New Argentine Cinema and Biodrama (2020). Arias embodies this movement as writer, theater director, and filmmaker in the creation of a trilogy of works that blend and transform media, reflect on one another, and together form a collection of experiments that reveal moving, fictional worlds.

Embodying Flashbacks in Arias's War Trilogy

In 2018, Arias's film *Teatro de guerra* premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, the last iteration in a series of interdisciplinary works that examines the Malvinas/Falklands War from the perspectives of Argentine and British veterans, beginning with the video installation project *Veteranos* (2014), commissioned as part of the London International Festival of Theatre, and followed by the highly acclaimed theater performance *Minefield* (2016), premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Two of these three works, together considered a trilogy, have additional versions: a bilingual edition of the plays *Campo minado/Minefield* was published in 2017, and *Veteranos* was included in the multimedia installation staged in Buenos Aires in 2016 called *Doble de riesgo*. The corpus of works spans a five-year period of intense research and questioning about the effects of the war. They are all concerned with the embodiment of trauma and its mediation through memory and different art forms and technologies. They are "living, breathing creatures," according to Arias, who stresses that the performances are "designed to evolve between runs, as perceptions of events begin to change through talking about or re-enacting them on stage" (Wicker 2017; Hernández 2021). The documentary plays *Minefield* and *My Life After* had runs

that lasted for several years, like durational performances, constantly transforming, blurring life and art, and capturing changes in the lives of the actors that are then registered in subsequent performances. *Minefield* contrasts productively with the film *Teatro de guerra*, which crystallizes a process into what Arias calls "a capsule of time" that evolves through its global circulation, presentation, and reception (Lucca 2018). All the works included in the Malvinas/Falklands project are living creatures that together form a multimedia ecosystem in which works intersect, run parallel, and dialogue synchronously and asynchronously.

Arias has also suggested that although theater is a live art, it is "an art that dies" (2024). Less of a contradiction and more of a provocation of the notion of her work as a "living creature," Arias's statement alludes to a process of regeneration in her work that folds experiences of death into life. As Arias notes, "Sometimes I think my plays are full of ghosts because in them live all those fallen in war, people who died in prison, those who drowned crossing the Mediterranean, murdered trans women, missing mothers and fathers. . . . And those ghosts hold our hands in the darkness and allow us to summon them" (2024). Arias's intermedial work creates space for the archive and ephemerality, for the comingling between life and death, and the decomposition and regeneration, according to Annalisa Dias, that serves as "a tender invitation beyond loss toward re-membering our interconnected futures" (2023). In Arias's work, this interconnectedness includes spectators whose copresence is vital for the summoning of ghosts onstage and the collective reimagining of past, present, and future.

Often considered the most impactful work of the Malvinas/Falklands project, *Minefield* achieves the unprecedented and almost unfathomable in bringing together Argentine and British veterans onstage to reconstruct their wartime memories (Visconti 2019). Representing the British side are Lou Armour, now a special needs teacher; David Jackson, a psychologist; and Sukrim Rai, a Nepalese Ghurka soldier, who served in the British Army and currently works as a security guard. On the Argentine side are Rubén Otero, who survived the sinking of the ship *General Belgrano* and now has a Beatles tribute band; Marcelo Vallejo, a triathlete; and Gabriel Sagastume, a criminal attorney.[23] On a stage designed to look like a film set, complete with cameras, amplifiers, and other cinematographic props, the veterans come together to reenact battle scenes, read letters and diary entries, consult maps, perform live music in a rock band, interact with photos and filmed footage from the Malvinas/Falklands Islands, participate in role-play therapy, and talk about the effects of the language barrier in creating the project.

In *Minefield*, scholars are drawn to the coalescence between performer and historical subject onstage and the fact that the performers are reembodying traumatic events that they themselves experienced over thirty years earlier dur-

ing the war. Interest in this raw form of autobiographical reenactment has generated a robust body of scholarly work, focusing on the ethics of staging autobiographical trauma.[24] Of this ethics, Hernández wonders, "How high are the stakes?" and Blejmar asks, "Can, and should, theatre become a site of mourning and catharsis for vulnerable and traumatized subjects?" (Hernández 2021; Blejmar 2017). The performers reflect on this question over the course of the play. In one scene, Lou, while looking through his diary, which is also projected on the screen behind him, shares the following: "When I arrived in Buenos Aires, I started to keep a diary. During rehearsals some questions brought back memories of something in my past that I never told anybody about. I began to have sleepless nights, flashbacks" (*Minefield*, 284).[25] Arias notes that they had a psychologist present at the rehearsals ready to assist veterans when rehearsals became too difficult (Bither 2019). Arias, who frequently works with vulnerable groups, makes a practice of incorporating social and psychological support for performers in her works. In this sense, her projects are social experiments that cultivate communities of care. Arias's commitment to providing support to the people she works with is sustained over a long period of time, as research for her projects usually lasts for a year.

Arias does not shy away from the affiliation between her work with therapy, and therapy, both as a theme and as a practice, is central to works like *Melancholy and Demonstrations*, the Children's Trilogy, and the War Trilogy. Her interest in recovering or completing memories collectively and her techniques of role-playing and reenactment during the rehearsal resonate strongly with drama-therapy and psychodrama techniques.[26] In *Melancholy and Demonstrations* and *Minefield*, the stage, during key scenes, transforms into a therapist's office. In *Minefield*, for Blejmar, this "parallelism between stage, battlefield, and therapy" is critical to the questioning of the ethics of creating work based on traumatic memories and the potential for therapeutic benefit (2017, 109). While committed to addressing therapy in this work, Arias treads lightly around discourses that might be associated with a therapeutic outcome, such as healing or closure, that in the context of this work could also be critiqued as an attempt to advance the narrative of resolution regarding a territory in dispute. There is nonetheless a sense that through art she encourages performers to work through their trauma, and she facilitates this process through varied approaches and techniques, including reenactment, role-playing, lip-synching, interaction with personal objects, media and clothing, and performance of live music onstage.

Theatre of War (2018): Reenactment and Fictional Unburdening

Here I focus on the film *Teatro de guerra* and the dialogue it establishes with *Minefield* as part of the "living creature" constructed from technologies that

evolve, transform, reflect on, and are in dialogue with one another. As Arias reveals in interviews, the project began with a question: "What is the memory that stayed in your mind until today? . . . The image you can't get rid of. The ghost that is following you. The flashback that comes to your mind" (Bither 2019). The question assumes the presence of war trauma and haunting effects, as well as the experience of flashbacks, a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder described by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders* (DSM) as a "dissociative reaction in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event were recurring."[27] In film, the term "flashback" generally refers to a plot device designed to insert scenes from the past into the present narrative, which, in works dealing with traumatic events, can be used to signal and explore the return of traumatic memories (Turim 2001). As Maureen Turim notes in her study of flashbacks in post–World War II Holocaust films, flashbacks are fragmentary, repetitive, haunting, and "cross-cutting of past and present," slicing uncontrollably into the daily lives of survivors (209). Arias uses the term "flashback" both in its psychological and artistic sense, linking individual feeling and mode of recollection to performative practices of embodiment and reenactment of the past. Throughout the War Trilogy there is a constant exploration of how flashbacks and reenactment compare, contrast, and activate one another in theater and film and a questioning about how memories are created and narrated as embodied, individual, and collective processes. Two works that are frequently cited in relation to the trilogy are Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), a massive site-specific reenactment performance of the violent confrontation between police and striking coal miners that occurred in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, in England in 1984; and *The Act of Killing*, Joshua Oppenheimer's 2012 documentary film about the Indonesian mass killings of 1965–66, in which perpetrators reenact scenes of killing for the camera.[28] Like Arias's trilogy, these works exemplify the deepening interest in reenactment of traumatic events across genres of performance and film and highlight how discourses of memory, affect, site, and embodiment become central to the artistic remaking of violent pasts.

From the beginning of the project, Arias was interested in experimenting with the theme and practice of flashbacks through experimental film techniques and embodied performance. When describing the video installation *Veteranos*, Arias notes that unlike in film, where flashbacks entail a change in scene and sometimes actors, in *Veteranos*, "the past breaks into the present without a change of scene or protagonist, creating a strange fold in time where the past wipes out the present, invading it completely" (Arias 2019f, 254). Commissioned by the London International Festival of Theatre, the *Veteranos* video installation features five veterans narrating and reenacting their accounts of the war simultaneously, on separate screens, set up in the *Doble de riesgo* exhibition space in

the PAyS Gallery, discussed earlier in the chapter, so that spectators can go from one screen to the next, witnessing each story as they pass by. Important to highlight here is that these are individual accounts, brought into dialogue through their physical arrangement in the exhibition space, each performance framed by a separate screen, in contrast to subsequent works in the trilogy, which depend on a shared space of collective remembering, reenactment, and performance (Delgado 2019b, 297). Also important, and in contrast to the other works in the trilogy, is that all veterans featured in the project are Argentine, so the focus is not on the novelty of bringing British and Argentine veterans together in collaboration but rather on the everyday lives of these Argentine veterans and how they reconcile their memories and identities as veterans with their postwar professional lives. In each performance, a veteran narrates and reenacts a vivid memory from the war against the backdrop of their contemporary lives. We see Daniel Terzeno, a psychologist wearing his lab coat in his office in a psychiatric hospital, narrating and reenacting the explosion of a bomb. Dario Volanté, an opera singer, wanders around the boiler room and backstage of an opera house as he narrates his rescue after the bombing of the Navy cruiser *General Belgrano*. Guillermo Dellepiane, second lieutenant in the Argentine Navy, is seated in his office, wearing a bomber jacket, surrounded by photographs, and demonstrating with miniature airplanes and soldier figurines how he was saved after almost being shot down by the British. Fabián Volonté, an auto mechanic, reads out loud the diary he kept while he was a soldier in the war. Marcelo Vallejo, a former metalworker and triathlete, reenacts the death of his friend at the pool where he swims every day.

The reenactment techniques used in *Veteranos* through manipulation of toys, miniature figures, clothing, diaries, photographs, and personal objects, recall Arias's *My Life After* and are elaborated further in *Minefield* and *Teatro de guerra*. The use of these accompanying objects and props by the veterans highlights the fact that they are in control of the narrative and reenacting their memories of the war. Arias states that in *Veteranos* the "past wipes out the present, invading it completely," creating a type of flashback that evokes continuity with the past rather than the jarring interruption of the past in the present common to PTSD flashbacks. In her analysis of reenactment in *The Act of Killing*, film scholar Homay King makes a distinction between reenactment motivated by the repetition compulsion, "in a sense time-traveling to the past," and reenactment driven by a desire to detach from the past: "The former, like Method acting, involves a high degree of affect; the latter, like Brechtian acting, a stoic detachment" (2013, 32). Both, she asserts, entail a loss of awareness of the present (32). Throughout the trilogy, Arias carefully avoids reenactment practices that could be interpreted as the repetitive acting out of trauma or an exercise in Brechtian

distanciation. Arias stages a dialogue between the past and present that is self-reflexive and very much rooted in the present-day realities of the veterans, even if, as Arias insists, the past is a dominant influence in the present. Veterans reenact their pasts, without compulsively repeating them. It is the awareness of the process of re-creating the past that, according to Maria Delgado, is crucial to *Veteranos* and allows for alternative modes of representing the past that bypass compulsive repetition or emotional distance (2019b, 295).

Curating Impossible Encounters

While making *Veteranos*, Arias began to think about putting both Argentine and British veterans onstage together. This represented an enormous step conceptually and logistically, entailing artistic risk and the possibility of failure given the unresolved trauma and lack of consensus on both sides regarding the Malvinas/Falklands War. Arias interviewed more than seventy veterans before selecting the final six who would star in *Minefield* and *Teatro de guerra*. The casting process reveals important decisions influencing how Arias curated the overall vision of the trilogy. Of the five Argentine veterans who participated in the video installation, only one, Marcelo Vallejo, continued in the subsequent play and film. In interviews, Arias relates that from the beginning of the audition process, she knew that she would make a film and include clips from the theater auditions in the film. Indeed, select interviews from the auditions are featured at the beginning of the film *Teatro de guerra*. In this way, flashbacks are internal and external to the trilogy, interconnecting the works. Through incorporating the clips from the audition interviews, the film reflects not only on the war but also on the creative process of making both the play and the film.

In his audition interview, Argentine veteran Guillermo Dellepiane states that if he were to play a character in a movie about the war, he would want to be the star, since that is how he feels when he tells the story of his role in the war. Dellepiane, a pilot in the Argentine Navy with an extensive military career, does not embody the characteristics that Arias was drawn to exploring in the joint collaborations with Argentine and British veterans. As Arias has commented in interviews, rather than telling an epic story of the war, she wanted to "tell the story of a failure, of a disaster that was produced by this war" (Bither 2019). For Arias, being a woman director was crucial to reshaping narratives of the war and dismantling the masculinist narratives of heroism that seemed to creep into, almost unconsciously, the veterans' retelling of war experiences. Arias's work pushes back on these normalized accounts of the war to create a work that confronts linguistic, colonial, gender, and generational dynamics of power and pushes toward collective empathy (Caresiani 2020). The shared experience of

being victims of an unjust and meaningless war is central to fomenting this collective empathy. As Blejmar discusses in her work on *Minefield* and *Teatro de guerra*, it would have been difficult to applaud the work featuring the story of a former Navy pilot with a pro-dictatorship stance, though, as Blejmar argues, this does not mean that Arias's trilogy homogenizes the experience of war (2020). What these casting decisions do reveal is the curatorial expertise required in bringing bold and unprecedented work, considered impossible, to fruition.

The filmed audition clips made in preparation for the play and included in *Teatro de guerra* introduce moments in which veterans respond spontaneously to Arias's interview questions. This spontaneity, characteristic of the participatory mode of documentary filmmaking, contrasts with the film's emphasis on reenactment, which, as a documentary mode used here, is to an extent always a prescribed form of embodied action. In *Teatro de guerra*, Arias juxtaposes spontaneous and rehearsed action, inviting spectators to reflect on how acting, documentary performance, and fictional reimagination of events can transform personal narratives of war experiences. In *Teatro de guerra*, we are reminded of Arias's authorship when we hear her voice in the background asking veterans a series of questions: "Name, age, rank, role in the war, current profession." There is a sense that the "living creature" of the trilogy evolves spontaneously but that it is also the result of careful, premeditated choices on Arias's part through casting and the audition process. *Teatro de guerra* encapsulates many of the ideas found in *Veteranos* and *Minefield*, suggesting a chronological relationship between the three, but time is complicated in this trilogy, because already when Arias began filming the auditions for the play *Minefield*, she knew she was going to make a film and include the footage from the auditions. In effect, the processes of making the play and the film are simultaneous, and this parallel process dissuades interpretations of the film as an adaptation or work based on the play. Arias's works, frequently described as time machines because of how they excavate memory and re-create collective stories in the present, also operate as time machines within the trilogy itself, as works animate one another.

Arias's subsequent works, the film *Reas* (premiered in February 2024) and the play *Los días afuera* (The Days Out There, premiered in Buenos Aires in May 2024), are linked to *Minefield* and *Teatro de guerra* structurally and methodologically and offer another example of how Arias uses film and theater not necessarily as tools of adaptation but rather as alternative approaches to the same topic, resulting in final works that are closely related yet could exist independently on their own. *Reas*, a docufictional musical film, features fourteen performers, including formerly incarcerated cis women and trans people, who reenact their past experiences of incarceration through songs and narrative. *Los días afuera*, a play with the same performers, documents their lives once released from prison

and premiered just four months after the film's debut at the Seventy-Fourth Berlin International Film Festival. The origin of *Reas* and *Los días afuera* can be traced to a screening of *Teatro de guerra* that Arias organized at the Ezeiza women's prison in Buenos Aires province. As Arias relates, the viewing inspired those in the audience to think about doing something artistically similar (Laube 2024). Spectators of a film become actors in another and then decide to create a play, shape-shifting across media and time as they document and reflect on their lives before, during, and after incarceration.

Chronologically, *Los dias afuera* is a continuation of *Reas* in the sense that it shows the performers' lives once they are released from prison. They are "liberated," though, as performers reveal throughout the play, in society they continue to feel marked as ex-incarcerated, almost as if their former incarceration were something they wore like a tattoo (Laube 2024). The transition from film to theater, from bodies encapsulated in time and space through film to bodies released onstage in the performative present, invites us to reflect on the contrast between the enclosure, control, and discipline of bodies in prison and the liberatory time and space these performers inhabit after incarceration. Arias notes, "Now I realize how absurd it was to go from film to theater" (L. Gómez 2024). Theater, especially when devised and created collectively, is more unpredictable than film, where editing and multiple takes give the filmmaker more control of the project. Reality infiltrates fiction more spontaneously and, combined with the theme of liberation in this play, creates a dynamic energy and creative potential.

Reas and *Los días afuera* chart a chronological relationship, while *Minefield* and *Teatro de guerra* play with simultaneity through an intense exchange of film and theater techniques. The play *Minefield* self-consciously reflects on filmmaking through the use of montage, close-ups, and the inclusion of film props onstage; the film *Teatro de guerra* resembles theater in its use of long takes to denote real time, scenes of rehearsed performance, and the creation of film sets that evoke theater stages (Visconti 2019, 212). These works are hypermedial in their capacity to incorporate other media and intermedial in generating a "self-reflexive interplay of live and digital performance" (Maguire 2019; Arfara et al. 2018, 8). Lorena Verzero's interpretation of the overflowing (*desborde*) of media into one another in this trilogy—of theater into film, performance into installation, photography into words, and the screen into the page—captures the dynamic shifts and synergies of this exchange between genres and affects (Verzero 2018). In the opening scene of *Minefield*, the stage is set up to look like a film studio, with a white screen as a backdrop and cameras, amplifiers, and other props. Both the play and the film include the audition scene early on. In the play, the auditions are reenacted by the performers who stand in front of a camera, a close-up of their faces projected on the white screen for audiences.

The opening scene of the film, on the other hand, reveals a tightly framed, interior space of what appears to be an abandoned building. Walls are covered in faded, chipped green paint, and the checkered tile floors are broken in places, creating piles of rubble and a puddle of water that seeps across the floor. A couple of buckets of paint and water bottles litter the floor. A ladder is to the right, and a small wooden table sits in the middle of the space. Resembling a stage, the space is in ruins but appears to be under construction, signaling both a neglected past and a hopeful future.

The film is called *Teatro de guerra*, after all, prompting audiences to expect a filmed theater performance or a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the theater production. Arias herself notes that the fact that she is a theater director created even more confusion about the film but that she meant "theater" both in the military sense—the territory where the war takes place—and in an artistic sense, the spaces created by the film for encounter between former enemies (Lucca 2018). The film alternates between the neutral white box space Arias identifies as a "third space" or "nowhere land of memory," where veterans talk about their experiences of the war, and the real spaces of Buenos Aires, where veterans visit and engage with the community in the film (Delgado 2019b, 299–300). During the film, veterans visit a public school to talk to schoolchildren about the war, and we also witness veterans in other settings, including a military psychiatric hospital, a locker room, a hotel room, a pool, and a bar. Some critics argue that what the film loses in live presence it gains in its ability to represent a broader community of voices and range of spaces of encounter (Blejmar 2020). Author and critic Félix Bruzzone considers *Teatro de guerra* almost as an antidote to *Minefield*, which, in his view, promotes an unrealistic reconciliatory embrace between two sides still very much in conflict. The film, he argues, creates a more varied and intimate depiction of the veterans' experience (2019). A key scene of dissent included in the film occurs in the bar where British veterans Lou and David complain about how one-sided the project is, focused on Argentine suffering, from the point of view of an Argentine director, and produced largely in Argentina. Though entirely staged, the scene represents real conversations that took place and were central to the process of creating the project. This is not to say that dissent is absent from the play. There is a scene appearing in both *Minefield* and *Teatro de guerra* where Lou and Gabriel stand in front of a map arguing over sovereignty of the islands from the British and Argentine perspectives. And Delgado argues compellingly that all three works of the trilogy are successful in giving the veterans agency and generating spaces where "difference might remain between the different combatants" (2019b, 301).

Teatro de guerra illuminates processes that were crucial to the creation of the film, including the act of translation, the transformation of nonactors into

actors, and the shift from documentary to fictionalization of the war. The film thus represents and preserves an archive of these processes as they occur over time. While the play achieves the unlikely feat of bringing together former enemies onstage, as Blejmar observes, the film lends us insight into the development of the relationships between the actors and the film crew over time (2020). The film thus provides an extraordinary register of this process. The film, for example, reveals with much more detail how important translation was at every step of the project, while the play offers more of a summary of the role translation played. The first lines in *Minefield* allude to language difference, when Marcelo reads from his notebook, "I'm there with the enemy, swapping stories. I don't understand much, but I get what they're saying from their expressions, their looks. I imagine us all together in a trench, chatting about the war" (*Minefield*, 1). From these first lines, we learn that there were obstacles to understanding because of the language barrier, but that meaning was conveyed through body language and facial expression, and that dialogue about the war here is achieved through collective imagination. The film contains many more instances in which translation is centered as a key process to the creation of the project. While watching the film, one wonders if the emphasis on reenactment in the play resulted at least partially from the linguistic barrier the veterans faced. For example, in the film, we see veterans introduce themselves to one another in their respective languages and shake hands. In a following scene, Lou and Marcelo are having a conversation against the white background. They start out introducing themselves in the other's language. Marcelo: "My name is Marcelo." And Lou: "Me llamo Lou." But as the conversation gets more complex and they ask about where they were stationed and what their roles were in the war, they revert to their first languages and compensate with body movement and hand gestures to make themselves understood. For example, with his hand, Marcelo imitates the high arc of a mortar to indicate that he was a mortarman, while Lou walks in place pretending to shoot a gun to indicate he was in the infantry. Other scenes provide commentary on the difficulties that resulted from language difference. In one intimate scene, we see Sukrim, whose first language is Nepali, speaking to his wife on the phone from his hotel room, confessing his concern that his English is not good enough for the project.[29] And in another scene staged at an indoor pool, in which Marcelo narrates and reenacts his suicide attempt and near drowning, Erika Teichert, a director's assistant for the film, sits on the side of the pool and provides consecutive interpretation from Spanish to English.

The focus on translation in the film reveals the day-to-day logistics of rehearsals and questions of how best to understand one another. Jean Graham-Jones recounts how the performers told her they were proud to have learned

Figure 3. *Teatro de guerra* (Theatre of War). Written and directed by Lola Arias, 2018. Actors: Lou Armour, Marcelo Vallejo, David Jackson, Rubén Otero, Sukrim Rai, Gabriel Sagastume, and Erika Teichert. Photograph courtesy of Lola Arias.

some English or Spanish along the way (2020, 123). In the play, however, performers do not switch languages, and in the film, they rarely do, which leaves us wondering what the lingua franca of the project is. Answering this question requires expanding the category of translation, as Graham-Jones does, to include "considerations of dramaturgical logic, actor training and performance styles, choreography and gesture, and performance aesthetics and reception" (2020, 119). Performers find mutual understanding in the translation of the past into the present through reenactment and the choreography of reembodied movement. Live music, too, is presented as a universal language in the film and play. And they all share the experience of war trauma and loss, which, over the course of the film, we see translated first through documentary performance and then through fictionalization. The performers, too, transform, from nonactors into actors over the course of the film. The video clips from the real auditions that Arias conducted during the casting are included early in the film, revealing the veterans responding to interview questions. This bit of spontaneous, unscripted footage marks an important starting point for a project interested in documenting their transformation into actors.

The significance of having access to this process and witnessing this transformation can best be appreciated through examination of an episode that appears in the play and that is repeated multiple times in the film in different

formats. The episode, narrated by Lou Armour, is one of the most traumatic in the play and film. Lou describes how in the aftermath of a battle at Mount Harriet, he tends to an Argentine soldier who has been mortally wounded. It is possible, Lou concedes, that he shot an Argentine who was trying to surrender. While holding the Argentine soldier in his arms, the Argentine speaks to him in English about a trip to Oxford. Lou confesses that he wished the Argentine hadn't spoken to him in English, again highlighting language and translation as central to this exploration of shared experience, trauma, and loss. Lou has flashbacks of this episode. It is the moment that continues to haunt him over thirty years later. The episode is recounted four times in the film, and each time the story is narrated a little differently. In the first, Lou narrates the episode in the first scene, on the set in ruins/under construction, surrounded by the other veterans, who stand in as the British and Argentine soldiers involved in the scene, following Lou's cues as he narrates the sequence of events. Significantly, in the film, Lou uses the past tense to narrate this episode, calling our attention to a shift from the present tense he uses in the play *Minefield*. This technique of reenactment, in which co-actors listen to and follow instructions, lends the person recalling the memory, in this case Lou, a directorial function and a sense of control over the reenactment. This is a signature technique used by Arias, present in works like *My Life After*, that allows the person retelling the event to restage it according to their narrative, already reframing the retelling of trauma as an artistic project. Arias gives performers the tools to collaborate in exploring the experience of shared loss and pain and perhaps even in fictionalizing the event to alleviate the burden of trauma.

The second time Lou narrates the story, he is standing in front of a white screen, surrounded by light reflectors. A handheld boom pole with a microphone hangs over his head noticeably. While the first retelling of the scene resembles a filmed rehearsal or performance, the second time includes the cinematographic elements in the frame, drawing our attention to the production of the story and showing us that it is not just being recorded but that it is in the process of transforming into something else. In the third retelling, we see a close-up of Lou seated in an armchair wearing a green Royal Marines sweater. He is once again narrating the story of the wounded Argentine. Suddenly, his lips stop moving, but we continue to hear the voice. The scene cuts to footage from a 1984 documentary film, *Falklands War: The Untold Story*, in which Lou tells the same story of the Argentine soldier. We realize that at the beginning of the scene he was lip-synching to his younger self. In the clip from the 1984 documentary, Lou is wearing the same sweater; his eyes are filled with tears. He asks the interviewer if they can stop. The scene then cuts to present Lou seated in the armchair, this time at a distance, once again surrounded by the film

equipment. He talks about how participating in the 1984 documentary affected his life and made it difficult for him to talk about the war because he felt guilty about grieving an Argentine soldier. He also talks about the process of retelling the story and how, over time, he has learned to control his emotions while narrating the episode.

The film's emphasis on this episode and its repetition in multiple forms also gives us a sense of the emotional toll that retelling and reenactment entail, even when carried out in an artistic framework. For this reason, the fourth scene of retelling the episode is unique because it allows for a powerful unburdening and act of transfer from the performers to a new cast of young actors standing in as the young soldiers reenact the episode one more (last?) time. The last scene of the film uses realist cinematography; camera movement is more dynamic, shifting between long shots and close-ups; the setting, no longer the production studio, has been transposed to the woods to imitate a more realist setting. As Delgado notes, "The framing shifts as the film progresses and the camera moves into a more active role, chopping and changing, darting and diving, within the filmmaking process" (2019b, 300). Building up to this final reenactment scene, we witness the veterans and the young actors in conversation. The young actors ask questions to learn about their roles, and the veterans tell them about their lives and how they ended up in Malvinas/Falklands. The veterans help them prepare for their roles and assist them with their makeup and costumes. The reenactment of the episode is more realistic than the previous episodes relying on stylized movement and lip-synching, for example. This last scene of reenactment, fictionalized through the use of alternative actors, is also more "real," in a sense, through the style and setting and the fact that the actors themselves are the same age as the veterans were when they were in the war. In this last scene, very ceremonial in nature, the veterans reenact the encounter between the British and the Argentines. They assume their positions at the moment Lou discovers the wounded Argentine. At this moment, the veterans leave the scene one by one and are replaced by the young actors. At the end of the scene, the camera shifts to the veterans, sitting on the sidelines, witnessing their stunt doubles in their place. As Arias notes in an interview, this scene allows the veterans to "give away their stories" (2018). The final static shot of the performers on the sidelines transforms them into spectators and both acknowledges and unburdens them of the physical and emotional work they performed in the rehearsals and the many performances of the play over the three years they were on tour. The ritual of substitution by a new generation of actors creates "therapeutic distance" for the veterans and directs our attention to these stunt doubles, who, as time machines, travel to the past in reenacting the traumatic war memory but also signal the future through their young bodies on screen (Visconti 2019, 213). The

end of the film gestures imaginatively toward closure and continuity without declaring either.[30]

In this chapter, I have focused on the diverse roles Arias assumes in the creation of documentary performance, ranging from ethnographer to therapist, documentarian, and detective. Arias develops her creative process and method in response to the question of how to recall and represent the past, individually and collectively, especially in the wake of violence and war. As researcher, Arias is reflective and engaged, proceeding ethically yet boldly, taking risks and implicating herself in the process. The subjects of her works discussed here—adult children, mothers, veterans—are performer-archivists who, like stunt doubles, reenact moments of violence, danger, and heartache, in the company of co-performers and witnesses who help create the scenes and facilitate empathy and the unburdening of trauma. Arias creates works in dialogue that reenact the past and reflect on one another in unexpected ways, generating intimacy and distance and unsettling our sense of time, liveness, and embodiment. If her guiding research question is how to reflect on past trauma, her research tools are reenactment practices enhanced through technologies of film, audio recordings, and photography and fictional creation. Moving between theater and film, Arias creates performances that are living creatures, at once time machines, constantly evolving and in motion, and time capsules, capable of capturing a record of performance in time.

2: Federico León

Everything Is an Archive; Everything Is Recorded

"EVERYTHING IS RECORDED," Federico León, in the role of Federico, types on his laptop during the performance of his play *Las ideas* (2015), words that are then simultaneously projected on the screen onstage in bold for the audience to read. León has stated that his work is a documentary of the creative process, a register of all the conversations, improvisations, and rehearsals that take place in preparation for the performance (2005b, 239). It is through the accumulation of ideas, labor, and repeated actions in the rehearsal process that a work is born. I begin with this statement because it embodies one of the core tensions in León's work: between the impulse to improvise and to explore a poetics of the unpredictable and the uncontrollable, and the equally strong pull to create an archive, a documentary register, a record of creative process and performance. It is this tension that makes León one of Argentina's most daring theater makers and filmmakers, driven by the desire to test limits of theatrical representation and the realization that the uncontrollable, unpredictable elements in theater that are of most interest to him might best be captured by film.

León's early plays—*Cachetazo de campo* (Country Slap, 1997), *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* (Miguel Ángel Boezzio Museum, 1998), and *Mil quinientos metros sobre el nivel de Jack* (1500 Meters Above the Level of Jack, 1999)—presented unique challenges to actors that in turn made the possibility of repeated performance precarious and potentially unsustainable. *Cachetazo de campo* required actors onstage to sob inconsolably throughout the performance; *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* introduced a Malvinas/Falklands veteran onstage who suffered PTSD; and in *Mil quinientos Metros sobre el nivel de Jack*, actors, one of whom was in her seventies, remained submerged in a bathtub filled with lukewarm water throughout most of the performance. In his essays on theater, León asserts that he likes to challenge actors to step out of their comfort zone and try what might not be easiest or even best for them ("no le conviene") (2005b, 10). In 2002 León was partnered with theater director and visual artist Robert Wilson as part of

the prestigious Rolex Mentoring Programme. According to Wilson, there was a certain element of risk that drew him to León, and the experience generated a productive exchange between the two artists.[1] As we will see, risk is a key concept for León in his projects, in the themes he explores, and in the diverse ways he challenges actors in his work.

During rehearsals, León and actors participate in a group experiment of trial and error, pushing emotional and bodily limits to reveal the actor as human being onstage. There are synergies between León's vision of the actors in his work and Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of the postdramatic actor as performer who does not play a role but rather offers their "presence onstage for contemplation" (2006, 135). León centers his exploration of the fluid boundaries between fiction and the real most intensely on the figure of the actor. In the works discussed in this chapter, audiences are left wondering if the actors are acting or not and questioning the extent to which everyday life experience might constitute a form of durational rehearsal process. Here I examine in depth how this uncertainty prompts questions about the role of the actor in the context of documentary theater and autofictional performance.

León is interested in approaching the archive as a register (*registro*), something he theorizes in his book *Registros* (2005b), but the function and purpose of the register diverge productively throughout his work. For example, like Arias and Grupo Krapp, he is interested in the archive's function of recovery, as in *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio*, a work created for Vivi Tellas's *Proyecto Museos* series (1994–2000), in which a Malvinas/Falklands veteran gives a presentation/conference on his life. León explores the museum as an "asylum for the 'ex'," as Boezzio as "ex-soldier" who was "ex-cluded" from society upon return from Malvinas (Pauls 2002). Here León explores the body as archive as a form of recovery of public space. In the performance, audiences witness Boezzio's process of self-memorialization; he in effect creates his own archive through performance. In his later work, León begins to experiment with the archive as document of his artistic process. León explains that the traces of the rehearsal process (usually one to two years for his works) accumulate over time and are present and perceivable in public performances (Koss 2010). One of the most unique innovations in León's work is that he develops interest in the film and digital archive not only as a way of documenting performance and preserving a register of process but also as a way of capturing a spontaneous, unscripted moment or a moment in which an idea is born. Thus, León explores not only what Philip Auslander identifies as the "fine-art tradition of the reproduction of works" but also what has largely been considered the "ethnographic tradition of capturing events" (2018, 36). For León, the digital archive of the creative process is about documentation for the purposes of reproduction but is more so about

creating an archive that captures the moment in which an idea is generated. I would argue that the archive in León's work shifts between document, record, and the artwork itself.

In works like *Las ideas*, León introduces a notion of the archive as generative and understood as process, much along the lines of Brian Massumi's concept of the anarchive, which Massumi describes as a "*repertory of traces* of collaborative research-creation events" that help "trigger a new event which continues the creative process from which they came, but in a new iteration" (2016, 6). In Massumi's conception, the anarchive does not replace the archive; rather, it uses the objects of the archive as "springboards" and "lures for new projects" (6). The anarchive here also inspires future artists' work, signaling what Marcela Fuentes has identified as a retheorizing of performance and new media studies and a shift toward "understanding liveness as an effect of processes of mediation" (2019, 14). Following this concept of "liveness as effect," the digital archive is the impulse for the creation of new performances across genres and modalities that carry the traces of previous works. Massumi, too, describes the work of the anarchive as a "cross-platform phenomenon," activated between media and "between all of the various archival forms it may take and the live, collaborative interactions that reactivate the anarchival traces, and in turn create new ones" (2016, 6). My discussion of León as archivist throughout this chapter maintains dialogue with Massumi's anarchive and the proposal to think of research creation as a "process-making engine," interested in the creative potential of reiteration (6). Throughout this chapter I join scholars in moving beyond a conventional understanding of the archive as repository of knowledge linked to colonial power and toward an archive that is process oriented, collaborative, and engaged in artistic creation.[2]

I discuss four of León's works spanning from the late 1990s to 2018: *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* (Miguel Ángel Boezzio Museum, 1998), a play he created as part of Vivi Tellas's *Proyecto Museos*, featuring Miguel Boezzio playing himself, a Malvinas/Falklands veteran; *Estrellas* (Stars, 2007), cocreated with Marcos Martínez, a documentary following Julio Arrieta, a resident of the shantytown Villa 21 in Buenos Aires who owned a production company dedicated to casting socioeconomically marginalized shanty dwellers in television and film roles; *Entrenamiento elemental para actores* (Elementary Training for Actors, 2009), cocreated with filmmaker Martín Rejtman; and the play *Las ideas* (Ideas, 2015), an autofictional, intermedial performance in which León (as Federico) with Julián Tello (as Julián), through light, humorous, marijuana-enhanced banter, carry out a series of experiments designed to illuminate León's creative process.

All four works exploit the instability of the categories of fiction and documentary, and, in fact, all four are often interpreted as documentaries even

though they contain fictional aspects. They all foster an illusion of documentary through the use of encoding of the real, documentary tropes, and tactics of disguise. All four test the boundaries of theatricality through an exploration of acting in tandem with practices of the unpredictable, improvisation, and experimentation. Throughout the chapter, I chart important transformations in León's conception of the archive, beginning with *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio*, where Miguel Ángel, veteran of the Malvinas War, curates himself as museum, and ending with *Las ideas*, where the archive is both a register of process and a source of creative potential and collaboration.

Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio: Bodies as Archives as Theaters as Museums

Even at first glance, museums and theaters have much in common: both are spaces for production and reception; both generate publics and provide a record of human experience; and both are involved in simultaneously preserving, resurrecting, and revising the past. In the framework of *Proyecto Museos*, directors envisioned museums as theatrical spaces filled with performative elements and theaters as spaces for memorialization and display. The process of reconceptualizing the functions and intentions of these spaces draws attention to the politics behind the memorialization and exhibition of past events and experiences as well as to the affinities between theaters and museums as archival and performative spaces. Directed by Federico León and inspired by his visit to the National Aeronautical Museum in greater Buenos Aires, *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* stars Malvinas War veteran Miguel Ángel Boezzio playing himself in an act of self-memorialization. In the performance, Boezzio generates bonds of attachment and intimacy with audience members to create a sense of shared experience that transcends the personal.[3] Boezzio's autobiographical performance creates affective bonds that are integral to the processes of memorializing his experiences of the war.[4] The relationships between memorials, museums, and performativity are key to understanding the ways in which societies address individual and collective trauma, contextualize it historically, and engage jointly in the commemoration of the past and critical dialogue that carries into the present and looks to the future. Federico León's *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* expertly combines the roles of the memorializing museum and theater to create a performative space in which commemoration and critical analysis coexist. The play anticipates the era of Biodrama that has shaped contemporary performance practice in Argentina and instilled a deep interest in the real, first-person autofictional narratives and the reanimation of the past onstage. The dialogue between museums and theaters also focuses our atten-

tion on the synergies between the visual arts and performance, and the shift from object-based to time-based art.

Proyecto Museos began in 1994 under the auspices of the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center at the University of Buenos Aires. For the project, Tellas gathered a group of Argentine directors together and paired them with nonartistic museums in Buenos Aires. Their assignment was to transform the museums into an object of investigation and then stage the results of that investigation. Directors were sent to a variety of museums, including mainstream ones such as the Museum of Natural Sciences and the National History Museum, as well as eccentric, off-the-beaten-track ones such as the Dentistry Museum, the Morgue Museum, the Medicinal Herb Museum, the Police Museum, the Penitentiary Museum, the Museum of Money, and the Railroad Museum. Instead of staging the resulting works in the original museum spaces, Tellas had the directors transfer the performances to the theater space at the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center, where they premiered between 1994 and 2000. Before presenting their works, directors held workshops where they talked about their process. The aim was not to create finished works, according to Tellas, but rather "to explore the theatricality of the spaces, rituals, situations, and objects of the museums" (qtd. in Trastoy 2018, 244).

This transfer of the final works to a performance space created a museum-theater hybrid blending theatrical and archival energies. Indeed, one of Tellas's main motivations for this project was to draw out this theatricality (to an extent already present in the museum exhibitions) and to think about both the performative qualities of the museum and the museal qualities of theater. Tellas's experiment anticipates convergent trends in theater and museums. As Maria M. Delgado, Michal Kobialka, and Bryce Lease observe in their book *Staging Difficult Pasts: Transnational Memory, Theatres, and Museums*, "Museums, and history museums in particular, have become more invested in theatrical and immersive environments, while theatre makers have been staging archives that included objects and historical images typically confined to museum displays" (2022, 3). Paul Williams analyzes the emergence of memorial museums in the late twentieth century that combine the commemorative and interpretive functions of memorials and history museums, respectively (2007, 8). A shift toward performativity in memorial museums suggests that these museums increasingly resemble theaters in the way they contextualize, evaluate, and present material. The coalescence of these institutional functions raises important questions regarding what constitutes the official history, what is considered the legitimate vehicle for transmitting historical narratives, and how audiences are involved in the production and reception of these narratives. León transposes the frame-

work and attending questions of the memorial museum to the performance of *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio*.

León relates that when he first visited the Malvinas room at the Aeronautical Museum and saw the photos, the mannequin dressed as a pilot, the planes hanging from the ceiling, the official illustrations of war, and the names of the fallen soldiers, he knew immediately that he wanted to work with a Malvinas veteran.[5] He began thinking about the idea of a museum as an asylum for the "ex": something that was but no longer is (León 2005b, 64). As a Malvinas veteran, Boezzio is, according to Alan Pauls, an "ex-vivo, ex-Malvinas, ex-actor" (ex-living, ex-Malvinas, ex-actor) who represents to the audience the multiple realities from which he has been excluded (in León 2005b, 63). Staging this play proved delicate because it challenged the silence of the Malvinas War by providing a veteran a public forum, and it exposed the emotional and physical vulnerabilities of an individual who had spent over ten years in the José Tiburcio Borda Psychiatric Hospital, where many Malvinas veterans found themselves after the war. León found Boezzio through the playwright Norman Briski, who had worked with the ex-soldier and ex-actor when he was a patient there. León recounts that the first time they met, without prompting, Boezzio began to tell him the story of his life. León insists that he heard Boezzio say toward the end of his account, "I am the museum" (El Museo soy yo) (Pauls 2002). It is perhaps this first interview with Boezzio that planted the idea for the structure of the play *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio*.

Boezzio approached the performance of the play as though it were a conference about his life. During the performance, he enters wearing a dress shirt and tie, ushers in the audience himself, sits down at a table in front of a microphone, and delivers a talk in which he shares stories and presents certificates, photos, and diplomas that he has collected over his lifetime. Recounting both everyday and tragic events, his narrative ranges from descriptions of the number of hours he spent as a gas station attendant to his girlfriend's suicide upon believing that he had been killed in the war when a coffin was mistakenly delivered to her house after the war. During the presentation of his life story, Boezzio takes breaks to smoke a cigarette and naps while the audience waits expectantly. At the end of his narrative, he tells the audience, "Thank you for accepting me in this country" (Gracias por aceptarme en este país) (León 2005a, 83).

Boezzio wears an earphone that allows León to communicate with him directly from backstage without the audience's knowledge. In this secret role, León can influence the course of the narrative and remind Boezzio of details he might have forgotten. Gently guiding Boezzio's performance allowed León to anticipate and evaluate audience response: "to see if the spectator laughed at

Miguel for the excessive value he attributed to seemingly insignificant events. Or if the spectator remained respectfully silent or solemn" (León 2005b, 65). León's strategic placement backstage both diminishes and accentuates the importance of the director, making his role seem invisible while at the same time reframing the director's work as a covert operation. The fact that León is communicating with Boezzio, the one performer, in a piece centered on Boezzio's real life, suggests here that León is a theater director whose work in this play verges on interpreter, life coach, and curator of the archive of Boezzio's life, ultimately throwing the concepts of director, author, and curator into productive chaos.

Theater critic Tomás Abraham wrote that the performance evoked a range of emotions: "We laughed several times, at other times it was heart wrenching. The performance moved us, and made us think not only about Malvinas, but also about the depth of personal tragedies, about the cruelty of war, about forgetting and the ignorance of the true stories that are not patriotic but rather existential" (in León 2005b, 84). Both León and Abraham place emphasis on the emotional responses Boezzio's personal account elicits from the audience. Boezzio's status both as a veteran of a largely unacknowledged war and as an ex-patient of a psychiatric hospital that treated Malvinas vets suffering from PTSD doubles his vulnerability and makes the exhibition of his past life that much more moving.

The presence of a Malvinas veteran onstage evokes a museal sense of the real through the exhibition of a body as archive. León's play exemplifies the "show and tell" function inherent in the museum but turns the object of display into an active subject by giving Boezzio the stage to articulate or curate (in collaboration with León) the testimony of his life, each time reinventing, improvising, and commemorating his life experience. Audiences expect or at least have the fantasy that the autobiographical testimony onstage will deliver both truth and realness, but this is not the case. In her study of autobiographical theater, Beatriz Trastoy writes, "The actor who narrates his own life onstage is there to tell us about himself, but the audacious and ambiguous theatricality of that exhibitionist gesture tells us that he is there to talk about something else, as well" (2002, 161). The mere existence of the theatrical frame compromises realness and protects its elusiveness.

The autobiographical component of Miguel Ángel Boezzio's self-commemoration generates compelling reality effects, just as historical contextualization offered by the institution of the museum approaches but does not perfectly represent history. In reference to Tellas's documentary theater, Cecilia Sosa notes that Tellas creates a space "in which the border between public and private is blurred, and biography, without losing its uniqueness, reveals its unexpected collective resonance" (2004).[6] Boezzio draws in spectators with the promise of realness and then captivates audiences with a presentation of

human vulnerability as an intimate ritual. The revival of a museal object, normally safely archived and preserved in the past, and its reanimation as a living, speaking, human being able to tell their own story, generates affective bonds with the audience. Indeed, perhaps more important here than focusing on the construction of realness is considering the role these affective bonds have in making possible the transformation of intimate ritual into public discourse on Malvinas. The play does not, however, try to resolve Boezzio's marginalization as a veteran of a largely unacknowledged war. I agree with Delgado, Kobialka, and Lease when they write, "Public memory of difficult pasts can be activated, contested, and pluralised in performance and museal practices as part of a process of generating *shared* histories and broadening publics' historical consciousness" (2022, 6). The affective bonds formed in the intimate space of theater inform and facilitate memorialization, yet they do not prevent a critical discussion of the Malvinas War or ongoing dialogue on how the nation addresses the collective trauma of the dictatorship.

Estrellas (2007): Cultural Agency and the Right to Fiction

As in the performance *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio*, the film *Estrellas* (Stars, 2007) centers vulnerable and socially marginalized subjects as they negotiate their own cultural representation through performance. Through an exploration of what constitutes acting and cultural agency, and the blending of fiction and documentary in *Estrellas*, Federico León and Marcos Martínez avoid reducing Villa 21 residents to worn documentary tropes, inestead showing them working as entrepreneurs, filmmakers, and producers.[7] Directed by León and Martínez, the film *Estrellas* features the charismatic *villa* resident and entrepreneur Julio Arrieta, popularly known as "the ambassador of Villa 21" (el embajador de la Villa 21). *Estrellas* belongs to a wave of Argentine films, television shows, popular music (especially cumbia), and other forms of cultural production through which socioeconomically marginalized groups became visible in Argentina in the wake of Argentina's economic crisis of 2001.[8] Consisting largely of interviews with Arrieta filmed from his home in the *villa*, *Estrellas* provides a platform for Arrieta to present his philosophy on acting and his argument that if "marginalization is in vogue" (la marginalidad está de moda) (as one TV show host says in the film), then instead of hiring actors to play the parts of marginalized characters, *villa* residents should be paid to do it. The film explains Arrieta's vision and the inner workings of his production company, which seeks to find employment for *villa* residents playing stock roles. The company also provides location services. Already constructed *villa* sets include "typical *villa* dwellings, houses for holding people hostage, a dealer's house, etc." (casa clásica villa, casa

tipo secuestro, casa tipo dealer, etc) (*Estrellas* 2007). As Arrieta explains, his production company offers a wide range of services: not only are individuals prepared to play a variety of *villa* types, but they also have experience in catering and are equipped to provide security as well. As Jens Andermann observes, these are not nonprofessional actors but rather professional nonactors (2011, 133). What Arrieta puts forth is the professionalization of individuals expected to play their "real" selves.

Arrieta's main goal is to create a production company that provides access to both culture and employment for *villa* residents. Making sure that everything runs smoothly logistically is essential to achieving this joint desire to "fill their heads and their stomachs" (llenarles la cabeza y el estómago) (*Estrellas* 2007). In Arrieta's view, work and culture go hand in hand in contributing value to human experience. Focusing on culture alone would only result in producing "cultured cadavers" (cadáveres cultos) (*Estrellas* 2007). As a former Peronist political liaison turned community organizer, Arrieta possesses the background and skills to be an effective producer and casting agent. Seated in his makeshift office in his home in the *villa*, his name flashing across a computer screen in the background, Arrieta shows viewers a database filled with residents' acting portfolios, complete with headshots and basic biographical information. He also describes some of his key duties as producer. For example, he assists the director in working with the *villa* actors during the filming process; he makes sure actors arrive on time, follow rules, and generally are good employees; and he negotiates their payment, keeping a small percentage for himself.

In one scene, Arrieta accompanies a group of *villa* residents to a studio where they will have their makeup done and will be photographed professionally for their acting portfolios. In the scene, set to the tone of loungy club music, we witness individuals striking a variety of poses in their everyday clothing. The environment is relaxed and playful: in the background someone is tending to a barbecue, and a couple of people are batting a beach ball around the room. Arrieta himself poses for the camera. Naked from the waist up, he strikes several highly staged poses, always with a deadpan expression on his face. It is moments like these that make us question the extent to which Arrieta is parodying the entire film and television industry. Through these parodic acts, Arrieta acknowledges that he is buying into a system that essentializes *villa* residents as stock types and profits from these kinds of representations. As a result, as Paola Cortés-Rocca observes, Arrieta and members of his production company demand a cut of the profits: "The documentary presents the demands of a group as part of a political-unionist struggle, for the right to be agents of this phenomenon that commercializes poverty instead of being merely objects in this transaction" (2014, 194). And this agency (literally becoming agents

Figure 4. *Estrellas* (Stars). Directed by Federico León and Marcos Martínez, 2007. Esther de Arrieta on the set of *Estrellas*, 2007. Photo by Nora Lezano and Sebastián Arpesella. Courtesy of Federico León.

for their own self-representation) portrays *villa* actors as active subjects in the production and shaping of culture instead of passive consumers of objects of cultural production.

One of the most frequently referenced episodes from the film concerns the anecdote of English film director Alan Parker's visit to the *villa* as part of a scouting expedition to find a slum to use in his film *Evita* (1996), based on Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Weber's 1976 musical.[9] In Arrieta's recounting of the story, a "short gringo" came to talk to him about the *villa*, and according to Arrieta "he was delighted" (quedó encantado) by what he saw but ultimately could not use the *villa* because of the many satellite dishes that dotted the landscape (*Estrellas* 2007). Arrieta offered a practical solution, telling him that, with ten men, in an hour he could construct twenty *villa* houses. And in fact, in the next scene of the film, Arrieta proves this through a mini staging of this claim. We wit-

ness six workers as they construct a *villa* dwelling in three minutes and twenty-six seconds in one long take. There are no cuts; the timer at the bottom of the screen silently calculates the time elapsed as the house goes up. The last scene resembles a tableau featuring a *villa* family drinking *mate* in the recently constructed abode.

The final tableau of the workers resembles Oscar Bony's *Familia obrera* (Working Family), first exhibited at the avant-garde Torcuato Di Tella Institute in 1968, in which Bony paid a working-class family to pose quietly as onlookers took in the "real, authentic" working class, featuring a father, wearing his work uniform, seated next to his wife and their young son who read or did his homework during the exhibition. Next to the work was a sign stating that Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, tool and die maker by profession, would be paid twice as much to sit with his wife and son in the exhibition than if he worked. Both the timed construction of the *villa* dwelling in *Estrellas* and Bony's *Familia obrera* generate a mixture of fascination and discomfort in audiences. The fascination results from the unusual performative framing of an activity (labor) that is generally not considered a form of artistic practice; and the discomfort results in part from the knowledge that the workers represented already belong to an exploited class of laborers. Turning underpaid, overworked individuals into a spectacle draws attention to viewers' complicity with the system that is responsible both for disenfranchising the unemployed and underpaid and for creating the conditions that enable the consumption of these performances of labor by the public, in the case of *Estrellas*, in the form of a documentary.

This scene offers a pointed critique of how poverty in Latin America has historically been portrayed in documentary film, most notably during the 1970s. Colombian filmmakers Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo coined the term "*pornomiseria*" (poverty porn) in their 1978 essay "¿Qué es la porno-miseria?" to denounce the exploitation of socioeconomically marginalized populations in film for consumption by Western audiences.[10] Ospina and Mayolo's film *Agarrando pueblo* (Vampires of Poverty, 1979), a quasi-documentary satire, exemplifies this critique. In the film, a director (played by Ospina) and his crew, commissioned by a German television company, wander the streets of Cali in search of vulnerable subjects to film—unhoused individuals, children, street performers—essentially seeking out anyone who seems to be suffering. In its final scenes, the film stages a fabricated scene of economic hardship: the film crew hires actors to perform the roles of a destitute family, seated before a crumbling wooden shack presented as their home. This act of staging resembles the construction of the *villa* dwelling that Arrieta recounts in *Estrellas*. Yet while *Estrellas* engages with the legacy of *pornomiseria*, it ultimately reframes the discourse by foregrounding Arrieta and the *villa* residents as cultural producers and

entrepreneurs—agents who negotiate their own representation and actively participate in the creation of images for circulation on their own terms.[11]

Estrellas generates a similar kind of discomfort through its presentation of *villa* residents—individuals generally considered outsiders in the film industry—as capable of breaking down industry barriers and participating as producers of culture. As Graciela Montaldo observes, this sudden access to culture, in the face of systemic exclusion, produces a novel reconfiguration of the social, cultural, and political in relation to the marginalized and oppressed: "Those who have been expelled from the market, from the world of work, from the world of politics, from health and education, are taken up by 'culture,' which becomes one of the only spaces where they can—at least temporarily—live" (2013, 7). While culture first and foremost presents itself as a survival tactic in *Estrellas*, as Montaldo suggests, culture can also pave the way for the excluded to reconstitute their social and political subjectivity (7). Arrieta offers his own, sometimes contradictory, commentary throughout the film on the different ways in which this engagement with culture should take place.

At first glance, Arrieta's rationale for hiring *villa* nonactors seems problematic, because it perpetuates a reductive, essentialist view of *villa* identity and a "realness" only attainable through lived experience. Film scholar David Oubiña is critical of the directors' gaze in *Estrellas,* suggesting that León and Martínez are so "bewitched" by Arrieta that they romanticize his heroism, ultimately creating a depiction of him that isolates him from his precarious context (2013, 36). Yet, both the film and Arrieta are in the end more complex than this. Arrieta contradicts himself throughout the film, so even though he advocates forcefully for using real, authentic "portadores de cara"[12] to play the roles of marginalized folks in films and television shows, in the same breath he states the exact opposite. For example, he maintains that some *villa* residents are more than prepared to play the roles of poor people and extras, but he also remarks that they can play roles outside of the context of poverty, such as the new rich, foreign tourists, and hippies. Jens Andermann writes, "Thus, without so much as noticing the contradiction (or at least, pretending not to notice), Arrieta insists, at one and the same time, on the primacy of experience over performance and reasserts the capacity of performance to transcend experience" (2011, 131). The fact that this contradiction is left unresolved forces viewers to think about how subjectivity is constituted as both a lived, personal experience and fictional performance.[13]

The film captures the shift in Argentina's national narrative as the nation's entrenched myth of racial homogeneity began to crumble amid the economic crisis of 2001. During the neoliberal 1990s, politicians and the media blamed immigrants for increasing crime and rising unemployment as part of a vicious xenophobic and racist campaign based on false claims, and racial diversity

began to be "increasingly highlighted or 'hypervisibilized'" (Grimson 2005, 25). The creation of *Estrellas* occurred at the peak of this visibility. The 2001 crisis prompted public reflection and activism on ethnic and racial diversity in Argentina that has continued to grow and deepen in momentum. The artivist collective Identidad Marrón (Brown Identity), founded in 2019, seeks to affirm brownness and the "ancestry that contests the idea that Argentina is white and homogenous" (Capasso 2023, 12). Composed of people of Indigenous ancestry, *campesinos*, and migrants, the collective describes itself as "a group of brown people, united in the effort to address and seek answers to structural racism in Latin America" (Instagram, qtd. in Capasso 2023, 12). Actor and member of the collective David Gudiño created a TikTok video, "Argentina no es blanca" (Argentina Is Not White), that went viral and was nominated for best TikTok short at Cannes in 2022. The video featured short sketches documenting Gudiño's daily encounters with ignorance and racism in Argentina. This intervention, along with other artivist actions and the documentary series created by Identidad Marrón for Canal Encuentro in 2022, sought to subvert racist stereotypes and official national narratives promoting the mythology of a white European enclave (Capasso 2023). Particularly relevant with respect to *Estrellas* is the collective's focus on cultural representation. The series on Canal Encuentro highlighted the difficulty of accessing opportunities to cultural representation and spaces of institutional exhibition (13). According to Ariana Budasoff, as soon as the collective was formed, members began to reach out to cultural organizations to explore ways of featuring/centering racially diverse work (2022, 4).

Throughout the film Arrieta argues that everyone has the right to culture, an idea nearly universally embraced, but his argument that everyone has a right to act is more contested. There are two scenes that bring Arrieta's vision into dialogue with the official acting community in Buenos Aires. In the first, Arrieta attends the prestigious Martin Fierro Awards ceremony, the annual event honoring Argentine television and radio stars. For this event, he steps in to accept Adrián Caetano's award for best television director. In this scene documenting his acceptance speech, Arrieta offers a bit about his background as director of the theater group of Villa 21 (Teatro de la Villa 21 Barracas) and explains that through his work with that group he was chosen to participate in Caetano's *Tumberos*, a fictional show about prison life in postcrisis Argentina.[14] At one point in his speech, he apologizes for interrupting and barging in on the lives of those present at the awards ceremony. While he is talking, the camera pans across the room full of Argentina's most beloved celebrities. The camera lingers on individuals who are conversing among themselves while others remain impassive and are clearly not paying attention. As we watch the scene, we get the impres-

sion that the people assembled there are generally uninterested in what Arrieta has to say.

In a second scene taking place at the headquarters of the Argentine Association of Actors, filmmaker Adrián Caetano sits down with veteran actors of the organization to talk about their views on the post-2001 trend to employ nonprofessional actors in films and television. For these veteran actors representing an organization responsible for institutionalizing acting as a national, professional endeavor, it is perhaps not surprising that they are skeptical of the newfound interest in nonprofessional actors, and their views clash with Caetano's. One of the actors, Jean Pierre Reguerraz, states that there are certain codes that must be followed and that if nonactors want to work as actors, then they should seek professional training. Caetano, a filmmaker who has employed nonprofessional actors in critically acclaimed films such as *Pizza, birra, faso* (Pizza, Beer, and a Joint, 1997), responds by invoking Godard, saying he believes that as soon as someone steps in front of a camera, he becomes an actor. In response, Reguerraz suggests that this sudden infatuation with nonprofessional actors represents an irresponsible phenomenon, because it is short-lived and only serves to satisfy a fleeting curiosity held by the industry and the general public. This exchange is revealing for several reasons. First, the simple explanation offered by Reguerraz that nonprofessional actors should just get training is not realistic for the *villa* dwellers because of their extremely limited resources. In proposing this solution, the association representatives reveal the exclusive nature of the organization. Second, while access to culture may be a right held by all, it seems that in the views of the association actors, this access should be limited to consumption of culture and not necessarily extend to participation in the production of culture as (paid) actors.

The actors' arguments here have just as much to do with workers' rights as they do with artistic rights. One of the main functions of the Argentine Association of Actors is to serve as a union and protect the rights of its members. In fact, in Argentina, actors have a long history of identifying and demanding rights as workers. The first actors' guilds emerged in the early twentieth century and eventually led to the founding of the Argentine Association of Actors in 1919. This association provided Argentine actors with solidarity and the means of representation, though its scope was limited. Historically, the definition of formal acting in Argentina was influenced by European models, and popular forms were categorically excluded (Leonardi and Mauro 2014, 8–9). This changed under Perón, whose government strategically framed marginalized classes as part of the all-inclusive worker category, and for the first time, popular actors were included and recognized as workers in addition to the formally trained

actors (20). Questions of inclusiveness, the definition of work, and what is considered acting are polemical topics in *Estrellas*. The film makes it clear that Julio Arrieta's goals for the *villa* residents—to organize and professionalize them as working actors—are similar to the goals of the nationally recognized association. One might think that the existence of these common goals would foster solidarity between these two communities, but despite these shared goals, they cannot overcome the disagreement over what constitutes or legitimates acting.

For Caetano, acting begins with the presence of a camera; for the association actors, acting is a learned profession acquired through formal training. While the association actors depend on institutional criteria to define who is an actor, Caetano suggests that acting encompasses an entire spectrum of behavior, from everyday rituals to highly stylized acting forms, so long as it is framed by the camera lens. The question then remains: what is it that nonactors are suddenly performing with the introduction of the camera? The camera may have the power to transform nonactors into actors, and yet at the same time it seems to enable the fantasy of trying to capture an authentic realness or naturalness only possessed by the untrained, and specifically in the case of *Estrellas*, the socioeconomically vulnerable.

In her analysis of *Estrellas*, Joanna Page proposes a novel approach to understanding the relationship between experience, acting, and truth. She argues that the film "points to a missed encounter with the other that results from our fascination with the real" (2013, 83). Page suggests that the way to lessen the allure of the real is to revise our preconceived notions of what constitutes experience and acting. The film itself aids viewers in this process by meditating openly on the theme of acting. As Page observes, "For nonactors—as in *Estrellas* and in so many contemporary Argentine films—the ability to act is predicated on previous experience and existing knowledge" (83). When defined in this way, acting plays a role in reinforcing essentialist notions of identity as predetermined and locked in an identification with past personal history. But if, as Page suggests, we consider the performative and discursive dimensions of experience, we are less likely to view experience as primarily complicit in creating essentialist portrayals of otherness (83). Andermann likewise discusses the role of performativity in *Estrellas* and suggests that the film exemplifies a global "performative turn" identified by Michael Renov and Stella Bruzzi that produces "more open and negotiated representations of social experience in a time of crisis" (Andermann 2011, 100). Broadening the definition of experience also frees nonactors from having to (re)present themselves based on *who* they are or *what* they have lived.

In other ways, the film makes it difficult to sustain the fantasy of documentary realness, because over the course of the sixty minutes, the direction of the film changes, and it becomes less about Arrieta's casting company and

more about the fiction film that Arrieta is making with director Sebastián Antico called *El nexo* (The Nexus), an action film about aliens that land their spaceship in the *villa*. Arrieta explains his rationale for the film: "Don't people living in the slums have the right to have Martians?" (¿Acaso los villeros no tenemos derecho de tener marcianos?) (*Estrellas* 2007). Arrieta laments the fact that whenever aliens show up in science fiction films, it is never in poor neighborhoods. He is also critical of the fact that the only films that are ever made about the *villa* are documentaries (implicating *Estrellas* in his critique). Over the course of the film, we see *villa* residents rehearsing scenes and building props. León and Martínez capture images of the *villa* during one of the takes, in which residents have been told to keep quiet and stay out of sight. Deserted and bathed in the pink hues of dusk, the *villa* momentarily becomes a fictional landscape.

A large part of the film centers on Arrieta's philosophy of acting, which both prioritizes the lived experience of the *villa* residents and capitalizes off stereotypes held by the film and television industry. Yet one of the film's most important contributions is ultimately being able to denaturalize stereotypes through the fictionalization of the *villa*, an urban site that historically has been portrayed through the documentary lens as "real," in the neorealist-influenced Latin American Third Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Examples include Argentine films such as Fernando Birri's *Tire Dié* (Throw a Dime, 1960) and Fernando Solanas and Oscar Getino's *La hora de los hornos* (The Hour of the Furnaces, 1968) and Brazilian films such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos's pioneering *Rio, 40 Graus* (Rio, 100 degrees, 1955). The impact of these films, as well as related movements of the 1960s such as Argentina's Grupo Cine Liberación and Grupo Cine de la Base and Brazil's Cinema Novo, has been investigated extensively elsewhere.[15] The aesthetics of neorealism continues to be influential in contemporary Latin American documentary film, but of equal importance, and of relevance here, is how films like *Estrellas* propose an alternative aesthetics through a self-reflexive meditation on acting and experience and the conscious shift to fiction.

Though no longer explicitly tied to the political militancy of the films of the 1960s, more recent depictions of slums continue to recycle realist tropes. In her analysis of the representation of Brazilian favelas in the national and global imaginary, Beatriz Jaguaribe writes, "Not all cultural representations of the favela rely on a realist register, but those that have a greater repercussion and press coverage have made use of the impact of verisimilitude associated with the realist encoding of the 'real'" (2004, 328). Though consistently portrayed in the vein of the real, as Jaguaribe points out, favelas also have played a central role in imagining the nation: "Cast as both the locus of the 'national imagined community' and as a 'fearful stain' on the landscape of modernity, the favelas were often metaphorized as an emblem of Brazil's uneven modernization" (327). In

her analysis, Jaguaribe wonders why it is that the favelas are designated almost exclusively as real, unmediated places, when in Brazil other popular cultural forms such as Carnival or soap operas draw so richly from the realm of fantasy (330). This insistence on the real again refocuses attention on the role of film, media, and other forms of cultural production in portraying slums as authentic, natural places.

But Jaguaribe emphasizes that this obsession with depicting slums as real, authentic places is not only a Brazilian phenomenon, suggesting that these "new forms of the 'return of the real' have emerged as global narratives" (2004, 330). In her work examining poverty as a tourist commodity, Bianca Freire-Medeiros identifies a similar trend and explores the circulation of the favela as a global trademark (2009, 580). Freire-Medeiros focuses specifically on the increase in tourism to the slums and links this growing interest in "reality tours" to a new politics of visibility placing the slum as both "the extreme Other, capable of seduction (for its authenticity and solidarity) and threat (for its violence and non-rationality)" (580–81). Once again it is the image of the slum as an authentic place that is used to entice tourists to participate in and interact with a "real" place and mingle with its real inhabitants. And yet, as Freire-Medeiros observes, there are rules in place that limit interaction with slum dwellers. For example, she writes, "Guides also recommend tourists ignore any teasing by locals, not to block the passage of any locals in narrow alleyways, and not to give alms to anyone, because as explained the owner of 'Be a Local, Don't be a Gringo,' 'we do not want to stimulate the professionalization of poverty as an instrument of labor'" (586). Freire-Medeiros is quick to point out the irony in the fact that the guide denounces the professionalization of poverty while being an agent of that very professionalization by turning the slum into a consumable object for tourists (586). Both Freire-Medeiros's research on favela tourism and this analysis of *Estrellas* show how an aesthetics of realism—whether in documentary film or favela tours—can facilitate the consumption and the professionalization of poverty.

There is a parallel between the slum dwellers of reality tours playing to the desires of the tourist industry and the *villa* dwellers in *Estrellas* playing to the film and TV industry. Arrieta nonetheless complicates the critique of turning poverty into a commodity through embracing the professionalization of *villa* residents and making cultural and labor rights integral demands to that professionalization. León and Martínez shift the focus of the documentary to the production of the action film *El nexo* and show Arrieta exercising his cultural right to participate actively in the creation and not just the consumption of culture. In making fiction the explicit subject of the documentary, León and Martínez draw attention to the unsustainability of the category of the real in defining both

the *villa* and the documentary genre. In the fictional film *El nexo*, one of the key plotlines is that the water from the *villa* is the only thing that can destroy the evil aliens. In creating this fictional narrative, León and Martínez avoid the dangers of the realist aesthetic through exploring alternative ways of imagining the *villa* that "subvert the realist real" (Jaguaribe 2004, 339).

Entrenamiento elemental para actores (2009): Children Acting as Children

León's interest in troubling essentialized identity categories continues in his work *Entrenamiento elemental para actores* (Elementary Training for Actors, 2009), a joint venture with filmmaker Martín Rejtman, this time centering on children. The film questions whether children can act anything other than their identity as children.[16] *Entrenamiento elemental para actores* is a telefilm, a work commissioned by the television channel Canal 7 in 2008 as part of a collaborative project titled "200 Años" (200 Years), designed to bring together Argentina's most innovative theater directors and filmmakers. The objective, according to Executive Director of Channel 7, Rosario Lufrano, was to create original works of fiction in an atmosphere of "absolute creative freedom" (Soria 2016, 2). Claudio Morgado, the director of the project, invited thirteen pairs of theater/film directors to participate. Of the thirteen works produced, only one did not air on television: *Entrenamiento elemental para actores*. Instead, the film premiered at the International Festival of Independent Film in Buenos Aires (BAFICI) in 2009 and in the same year at El Camarín de las Musas, an independent theater space in the Abasto neighborhood in Buenos Aires. Following these premieres in film and theater spaces, the film toured extensively at international festivals, including the Los Angeles Film Festival (2009), the Zurich Film Festival (2009), the London Film Festival (2009), and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts (2010), among others.

Canal 7 reached out to theater directors and asked them to choose film directors they were interested in working with, and León chose Rejtman because he was someone he had wanted to work with for a long time. In fact, Rejtman had been León's professor in film school (CIEVIC)[17] and had also produced León's first film, *Todo juntos* (Everything Together, 2002). While León was cast as the theater director in the pairing, both artists belonged to a generation of film-school-educated directors. As Delgado notes, Rejtman is considered by some critics to be the "father of New Argentine Cinema," known for his use of "deadpan dialogue, his offbeat sense of rhythm, his quirky narratives and grasp of the more absurd facets of the human condition" (2017a, 435). León, meanwhile, brings "rawness" and a "poetics of danger" to a theater practice that writer and

critic Alan Pauls describes as "hardcore" (2003). Both artists are interested in the unpredictable, the logic of chance, the arbitrary, and the coincidental and how these elements shift narratives in their work (Depetris Chauvin 2012; Delgado 2017a). Their collaboration resulted in what Sosa described as, a "perfect" and "almost impossible" work (2017c, 139). León and Rejtman seldom do commissioned work, and in this sense, their collaboration on *Entrenamiento elemental* represented a unique opportunity for them. At the same time, their collaboration exemplifies the cross-fertilization between film and theater that was gaining traction in Argentine artistic production. As León explains, suddenly film became more aware of independent theater in Buenos Aires: "Filmmakers started paying attention to theater's independent approaches to production and started copying them, so to speak" (Maxwell 2013). Television, too, seemed to take note of the booming independent theater scene, evident in initiatives such as Canal 7's series of telefilms. Though *Entrenamiento elemental* was never aired as part of the telefilm series, it enjoyed international circulation and has received critical acclaim.

As León has noted, he and Rejtman did not have any preexisting material; they had to start from scratch, and they spent a year and a half writing the screenplay (Sosa 2017c, 140). The result was an unusual and thought-provoking work centering on an acting class composed of fourteen children between the ages of eight and twelve. León had quite a bit of experience working with children in his plays *Mil quinientos metros sobre el nivel de Jack* (1999) and *Yo en el futuro* (I, in the Future, 2009), though none of his previous works had ever focused a lens so closely on the concept of children. Over the course of the film, we witness the acting teacher, Sergio, played by Fabián Arenillas, guide the class through an eclectic series of exercises, some conventional and others less so, such as playing animals, practicing guided memory, doing yoga breathing, climbing a ladder onstage, and simply waiting. According to Pauls, one of the central experiments of the work was to see what would happen if the teacher disregarded the fact that he was teaching children (2012, 13). As León wonders in an interview, "Why aren't there acting classes for children that teach them how to do a scene from Chekhov?" (Sosa 2017c, 140). The results of this experiment are humorous, profoundly absurd, and sometimes disturbing.

Exercises that are clearly designed to test the students' limits and build character come close to transgressing ethical standards of what is considered appropriate work with children. In one scene, for example, Sergio realizes that one of the children with braces refuses to smile, and he makes him go onstage and dance in front of everyone, even though he is embarrassed (Rejtman and León 2012, 32). In this case, the student overcomes his inhibition and ends up smiling widely as he dances wildly "as if possessed" (33). In another scene, however,

a similarly questionable lesson does not go as well. Sofía, a student Sergio had already criticized harshly for her aspirations of stardom and for acting too effusively, is climbing a ladder onstage hesitantly. Sergio urges her to keep climbing: "Come on, Sofía, keep climbing." At the top of the ladder, Sofia, near tears, says she wants to get down, at which point she slips and falls. Given these examples, is it any surprise, then, that Sergio's character is described as a "monstrous invention" (Pauls 2012, 12), possessing a rigor that is "almost violent" (A. Gómez 2016b, 797). And yet, when asked directly whether the fall off the ladder was real, Rejtman affirmed that it was entirely fiction.[18] This statement leads us to question or at least hesitate in our assessment of the film as ethically transgressive if students were willingly acting all along and the fall was a fictional, staged part of the film.

Despite criticism of the film's questionable ethics, León explains that there was something revolutionary about the "radical and almost utopian methodology" presented by Sergio in the film: "In a sense, it's a film that believes it can transform people" (in Sosa 2017c, 146). Examples of this methodology are revealed in a meeting with parents, where Sergio explains unapologetically that he is uninterested in delivering results, an end-of-the-year performance, or any type of final measurable outcome: "Your children aren't products; they're people. . . . I want to train artists and the training of an artist goes far beyond the search for immediate results" (Rejtman and León 2012, 54). This aversion to a final "product" signals the revolutionary nature of Sergio's acting philosophy in the context of the film and more broadly reflects León and Rejtman's relationship to process: León, throughout his work, is more interested in documenting the creative process than producing a final work of art (product), while Rejtman is committed to a critique of the neoliberal market's treatment of persons as commodities. In her discussion of Rejtman's work, Irene Depetris Chauvin observes, "In his films and short stories, the logic of chance produces an estrangement that leads to a critical reconsideration of the mechanism of interchange, the production of value and the flow of desire required by the market economy" (2012, 215). León and Rejtman's commitment to a lengthy creative process, long rehearsals, and a slower production pace were contributing factors to Canal 7's decision not to air *Entrenamiento elemental* with the rest of the telefilms in the series.

Another example from the same meeting occurs after a mother (Paula) asks Sergio when they are going to have a chance to see what the students have been learning and Sergio responds, "Don't you remember, Paula, how Camila was when she started? Don't you notice a difference between Camila then and now?" (Rejtman and León 2012, 53). When the mother responds that she doesn't understand and, seeking clarification, asks Sergio, "How she *acts* or how she

is?" (emphasis mine) (¿Cómo actúa o cómo es?), Sergio responds with exasperation, "Are you serious? You still don't get that it is part of the same thing?" (53). Sergio's pedagogy makes no distinction between life and art and advances the notion that we perform all aspects of our lives, not just in conventional performance spaces. In her comparisons of the acting philosophies put forth in both *Estrellas* and *Entrenamiento elemental*, Joanna Page concludes that, while in both works subjects "reflect on the complex constructions and reconstructions that govern the relationship between acting and everyday reality," in *Entrenamiento* (unlike in *Estrellas*) acting oneself "is associated, not with a farcical pretense at authenticity, but with a real act of personal integrity" (2013, 78). If nothing else, *Entrenamiento* achieves the impressive feat of creating wildly divergent interpretations of Sergio's acting pedagogy, capable of generating both sadistic humiliation and personal integrity.

Given the work's attention to acting and everyday life, Sosa's musings that *Entrenamiento elemental* might be considered one of the first works dealing specifically with performance studies in Argentina are intriguing, especially when considering scenes like the following, in which a student (Matías) raises his hand and asks timidly, "Are we already acting, professor, in everything that we do?" (Rejtman and León 2012, 78). What follows is a brief exchange between the two in which Sergio seems to avoid the question. Instead of a clear response, Sergio has Matías do an acting exercise with another student, which consists of the two of them reenacting the exact dialogue Matías and Sergio had just had. What León and Rejtman seem to be interested in exploring here is the exact moment when one acquires awareness of one's own acting. Without this awareness, is one acting? As Mercedes Halfon observes, "*Entrenamiento* . . . centers on the exact moment of the gestation of these concerns" (2009). This desire to capture the moment and document the evolution of self-awareness anticipates León's exploration of the moment of gestating a new idea in *Las ideas*. What brings this exploration closer to performance studies is its reenactment by two students onstage. The moment of acquiring consciousness of something is a one-time experience; its repetition onstage gestates something other than the moment of awakening, something purely performative.

Before turning to *Las ideas*, I want to shift attention to the frequent interpretation of *Entrenamiento elemental* as a documentary film, corrected by Rejtman and León consistently, who affirm that the film is completely fiction (Sosa 2017c, 144). León and Rejtman had just made documentary films prior to *Entrenamiento elemental*, so perhaps these works (*Estrellas* and *Copacabana* [2006]) had a ghosting effect on *Entrenamiento elemental*. Rejtman ventures that people might assume it is a documentary because the names of the children and parents are the same in real life. As we have seen, this practice, prominent in

autofictional work, was very common in the works of the *Biodrama* cycle. León, too, suggests that "there was something very real about the film in the process, something that went beyond the script" (Sosa 2017c, 144). There is something about this willingness to misrecognize fiction or the idea of fiction in disguise that is central to León's work and to this book's exploration of the real.

León and Rejtman's use of children and the focus on the teaching of a class are the two factors that contribute most powerfully to generating an encoding of the real. In a long monologue after the animal-playing exercise, Sergio declares, "A kid can only act as a kid. A kid can't play a police officer, an old person, a prostitute, for example. The greatest advantage kids have is that they're the only ones who can play a kid naturally" (Rejtman and León 2012, 26). León and Rejtman play with the idea that children, on some level, are always essentially children even if they perform additional roles. This notion of an identity category resistant to performance is one that León explores frequently in his work, such as *Mil quinientos metros sobre el nivel de Jack*, when actor Ignacio Rogers was nine years old, and *Yo en el futuro*. Arias, too, has explored the use of children and animals in several works, such as *Striptease* (2007), *My Life After* (2009), and *Airport Kids* (2008). The presence of a one-year-old onstage in *Striptease* marks a pivotal moment for Arias when she realized the powerful "reality effect" of the baby onstage. Paula, too, in her film *Again Once Again* (2019), draws on these reality effects generated by the inclusion of her three-year-old son in her autofictional film.

Equally persuasive in creating a documentary vibe is the film's focus on the teaching of a class. The effect of this focus on the structures, routines, and practices of teaching is that the film resembles a how-to film, a process genre film, or a show-and-tell film. *Entrenamiento elemental* is one of several performance projects premiered in roughly the same time period in Buenos Aires that explored the real through works with a pedagogical aim or emphasis on technical knowledge or manuals. Vivi Tellas's *Escuela de Conducción* (Driving School, 2006), included in her *Archivos* series, is a prime example. *Proyecto Manual* (Manual Project), a series curated by Matías Umpierrez from 2011 to 2013, invited artists to create performances inspired by nondramatic variables, in this case manuals, such as a manual of instructions to assemble a piece of IKEA furniture, a human resources manual, or a manual on spiritual mediums, among others (Umpierrez 2011–2013). Sosa, too, suggests that *Entrenamiento elemental* could be read as a theory on Argentine theater and film or a (pseudo) acting manual (2017c, 83). *Entrenamiento elemental* effectively reinforces the idea that we are performing all the time, while at the same time introducing categories (children) or approaches (pedagogy, how-to) that challenge the notion of performance as ubiquitous and all-encompassing.

Las ideas (2015): Experiments of the Archive and the Real

León's *Las ideas* first premiered at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels in May 2015 and toured internationally before arriving in Buenos Aires in September 2015 for its premiere at the International Festival of Buenos Aires at Espacio Cultural Zelaya.[19] In an interview, León describes the play in the following manner: "*Las ideas* stages the intimacy of the creative process. The informal meeting between two friends gradually transforms into an intense session of creative work" (Cruz 2016). In the beginning of the play, the character Federico (played by Federico León) announces that, in principle, what he would like is for people to take away from the performance an understanding of what he is trying to say about representation. At first glance, a play conceived of as a conversation about representation and the creative process between two actors sounds tedious, at best, and potentially insufferable. Several critics reference their initial weariness upon learning about the play's conceit. Marcos Ordóñez, theater critic for Spain's *El País*, writes that a play about "ideas" reeked of the pompous avant-garde (2017). Pablo Ramírez refers to what initially appears to be the "abysmal simplicity" of León's approach (2015). Mercedes Halfon astounds at the literalness of the play's title (2016). Yet despite initial skepticism, in the end critics overwhelmingly agree that León manages to pull off something quite extraordinary.

In just an hour, León (as Federico) presents an exhaustive range of conceptual questions relating to representation and the creative process, and he does it informally and humorously in conversation with long-time collaborator and friend, actor-musician Julián Tello (in the role of Julián) while they are perhaps stoned (more on this later). *Las ideas* addresses these conceptual questions through a range of experiments onstage geared toward the exploration of what constitutes as real or fiction onstage and what role accidents and failures play in generating new artistic ideas. Through smoking, drinking, and other experiments onstage, *Las ideas* engages audiences' senses (tactic, olfactory, visual) in testing the boundaries between fiction and the real. Onstage experiments also reveal León's fascination with examining what triggers ideas and how they are archived, lost, and recovered through performance and, in turn, how the archive inspires new ideas. *Las ideas* is one of León's most intermedial pieces, and many of the experiments carried out onstage explore how technology explodes traditional concepts of theatrical mise en abyme. As part of this investigation, León is also interested in how spontaneity, improvisation, and the unpredictable are altered by the incorporation of prerecorded material in theater. León also live streams the performance on YouTube, in an experiment designed to reinforce and undermine spectators' conceptions of performance as ephemeral and occur-

ring in a present defined as proximity to the audience. Along with these philosophical inquiries, León reflects on logistical matters during the performance relating to the financial cost of production and legal questions of what can be done onstage. At the end of the performance, Federico states, "What doesn't kill you becomes an idea," a riff off of Nietzsche's "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." In the context of León's work, the phrase signals the artist's desire not only to push limits and take risks but even to experience danger, according to Pauls (2003).

The premiere of *Las ideas* in Buenos Aires inaugurated the theater space Espacio Zelaya, which prior to 2015 had served as Federico León's private residence and studio (*casa-estudio*), where he lived, taught classes, rehearsed, filmed, conducted research, and edited his work. Espacio Zelaya is one of the many pocket theaters located in the Abasto neighborhood, "a traditionally working-class area once home to the tango star Carlos Gardel and famous for the open-air market Abasto," which in the years following the socioeconomic crisis of 2001 also became the epicenter for independent, off-Corrientes theater in Buenos Aires (Graham-Jones 2016, 251). The premiere of *Las ideas* in Espacio Zelaya marks a pivotal moment in which León is essentially evicted from his home by art or, as other critics have noted, the moment in which art devours or "conquers" León's home (L. Gómez 2018). In interviews, León relates that before the metamorphosis of the space, during rehearsals, the kitchen was used as the dressing room and that after rehearsals, actors continued to wear their characters' clothing. While the blending of fiction and the real is a constant in León's work, the artist confesses that the conflation of home and rehearsal space proved difficult in his everyday life (L. Gómez 2018). Like Mariano Pensotti's description of his theater as "omnivorous," discussed in chapter 5, León's theater is a devouring machine, in this case consuming the space in which he lives and works.

León is deeply interested in the accumulation of information and energy generated by the rehearsal process. Rehearsal and development lasted two years, a rather typical timeline for León's sustained creative process. The opportunity to stage the play in the same space as rehearsals allowed him to draw on the reservoir of accumulated energies and affects produced there during rehearsals and to establish continuity between processes of creation and production. According to León, his final works always contain the traces of the creative process: "One has to trust that what appears to be discarded (conversations, improvisations) is present in some way and forms part of the work" (2005b, 239). In this sense, and in line with Natacha Koss's critique, León's work might be considered a documentary of his creative process (2010, 2). The concept of the register is central to León's conception of his creative work, and the term is also the

title of his anthology *Registros*, edited by Jorge Dubatti and published in 2005. According to Dubatti, the term "register" alludes to a set of key concepts in León's work: It refers to León's interdisciplinary use of film, theater, and photography; it also refers to the published text itself as register of the testimonies, memories, documents, and notes that form part of León's creative process. The term highlights the blending of the registers of fiction, performance, and the postdramatic prevalent in Argentine theater since the early twenty-first century (Dubatti 2005, 317–18). In addition to conveying a sense of mode or archive, I would argue that another connotation relates to the verb *registrar* /"to register," as in "to perceive." In this sense, tactics of disguise and illusion are central to León's *Las ideas* and throughout his body of work. This "registering" generates the instability between fiction and documentary.

With León ousted from his former home turned performance space, *Las ideas* premiered in Espacio Zelaya, an interdisciplinary space for theater, film, literature, music, and the visual arts where audiences could mingle and attend plays, film series, and readings in the garden. Espacio Zelaya also supported research, creation, and a space for experimentation where authors, directors, teachers, musicians, and filmmakers could come together to reflect on their processes of creation. The versatility of the space was crucial for proposing new modes of relation between artists and audiences. Additionally, León envisioned the programming of Espacio Zelaya as if it were itself one continuous work of art or performance. For example, following *Las ideas*, Romina Paula staged her play *Cimarrón* (Rewilding, 2016) in the garden area of Zelaya. Paula's play, also called by critics a "theater of ideas," depended heavily on dialogue for its exploration of abstract concepts relating to love, art, literature, gender, and family.

The transformation of León's home into a performance venue lent the space a site specificity that created a feeling of intimacy among artists and spectators. In describing her experience as spectator of *Las ideas*, Lola Arias writes that ringing the doorbell to León's home and being ushered into the small wooden theater space felt like being invited to a treehouse, "a secret place for creating all kinds of fictions and wild ideas" (2016c). Arias concludes, "Federico literally penetrates you with his ideas; it's as if he kidnapped you for a while to get you inside of his head" (2016c). In effect, spectators found themselves inside León's former home, as if inside multiple overlapping archives of his life. Arias in her review called the play an authentic self-portrait, one that features the director himself (instead of the painter with paintbrush in hand) as he thinks and questions the boundaries between what is true, false, real, fiction, life, and theater (Arias 2016c).

León has argued that all his artistic work is autobiographical in that his creative process draws on every aspect of his life. As such, he is skeptical of

the usefulness of the category of the autobiographical (León 2005b, 240). The metaphor of the self-portrait is imperfect for theater in its two-dimensionality; likewise, the term "autobiography," in referring to the written word, addresses imperfectly the significance of the embodied self in theater. More productive in discussing León's *Las ideas* perhaps is the mode of autofiction, in which the author and protagonist share the same name and registers of the autobiographical and fictional blend generatively. Jordana Blejmar discusses the prominence of the autofictional mode in post-dictatorship cultural production, citing examples from photography, narrative, documentaries, and theater (2016). Taking a cue from Blejmar and building on the potential of autofiction to describe works of performance, Nina Mila Longinovic proposes the term "postdramatic autofiction" in her analysis of *Las ideas* as "an autofiction, a self-portrait and ludically fictionalized testimony of the process of artistic creation in an increasingly technologized world" (2020, 57). Likewise, Anna Forné moves beyond narrative in her analysis of autofictional narratives in Argentinian literature specifically in reference to cultural production by children of the disappeared. She coins the term "archival autofiction" to describe "an artistic expression in which the authorial subject—identical to the protagonist—exhibits the creative processes of archival recycling and reflects on notions of authorship as a way of engaging the reader" (Forné 2022, 1). Highlighting the embodied and archival aspects of autofiction invites us to reflect on the role of the actor's body and the creative process in *Las ideas* and in León's theater more generally.[20]

In Argentina, the postdramatic shift has generated a vibrant body of critical scholarship exploring the role of the actor and the actor's body vis-à-vis the self-reflexivity of postdramatic theater and against conventions of realism and psychologically driven character development. Scholars, critics, and practitioners of Argentine theater have both embraced and critiqued postdramatic theater as a major paradigm for interpreting trends in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century theater practice in Argentina.[21] The shift away from Aristotelian, plot-driven dramatic theater toward self-reflexive theater, the dissolution of the conventional character, the breakdown of space and time, and the prominence of the concept of the real all characterize Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic and what in Argentina has been designated variously as theater of disintegration, theater of the real, and Biodrama (Trastoy 2018, 19). Beatriz Trastoy argues that Argentine artists have taken charge of the critical interpretation of their work, through explanations in handbills, essays, and press releases. In response to this development, Trastoy wonders what role is left to critics in evaluating theater that by definition is self-critical (2018, 16).

For Lehmann, the actor's body itself becomes the self-reflexive subject (2006, 96). Lehmann's conception of the physical body, which "does not 'tell' this or

that emotion but through its presence manifests itself as the site of inscription of collective history," comports with León's view of the creative process as the embodiment of accumulated ideas, the sedimentation of bodily actions reenacted over time during rehearsals (97). León's early theatrical work reflects on the labor of actors' bodies onstage, the bodily transformations and modifications that actors undergo in their interaction with the stage, and the stage as material archive of successive performances (León 2005, 120). For example, in his breakout play, *Cachetazo de campo* (1997), León presented actors with extreme bodily challenges. Actors Paula Ituriza and Jimena Anganuzzi, in the roles of mother and daughter, sobbed uncontrollably, their faces covered in tears and snot throughout the play. As critic Alicia Aisemberg observes, the play effectively breaks free from realist framing and instead allows for an intense emotional bond to form between actors and spectators. A similar effect can be witnessed in León's *Mil quinientos metros sobre el nivel de Jack* (1999), in which a mother character, played by actor Beatriz Thibaudin, who was in her seventies when the play premiered, spent the entire time onstage immersed in water in a bathtub with coactor Ignacio Rogers, who was nine years old at the time of the premiere. León relates how the process of creating and staging the play measured the passage of time; over the years, Rogers grew up, and he began to state his lines more purposefully. Along with the passage of time, León wanted to explore the deterioration of the stage, which essentially became worn with use and water damaged over the course of the production: "The stage design from performance to performance shows signs of wear and tear; it's like an actor" (León 2005b, 120).

Added to the physical endurance required by the submersion in water was an unsettling sense of precarity and risk generated by the presence of a television set and electrical appliances onstage. As one critic remarked, one had the feeling that the actors could be electrocuted at any moment (León 2005, 120). The volume of water onstage generated a feeling of "threat, discomfort, danger, and even destruction" (Dubatti 2005, 124). As the bathwater spilled onto the floor, it splashed spectators, and actors seemed on the verge of slipping at all times (124). The audience, too, became immersed in this water world and was thus a part of this intimate and precarious experiment. According to León, he wanted spectators to feel like they were inside the work and that they had a real encounter with the actors, that they were witnesses to a staged present that would never happen again (2005b, 121). What is curious about this assertion, on the one hand, is León's interest in cultivating encounters between spectators and actors, and not between spectators and characters, which reflects Lehmann's claim that in postdramatic theater, what is highlighted is the "provocative presence of the human being rather than the embodiment of a figure" (2006, 135). On the other, what is striking is the premium León places on improvisation

and the unpredictable in performance in contrast with his desire to generate an archive through the creative process, one that takes shape through accumulation, repetitive action, and deterioration.

Working with elderly or child actors or uncontrollable onstage elements like water or animals entails risk in theater, making repetition a challenging if not impossible endeavor. It was precisely after making *Mil quinientos metros* that León turned to film as a medium that might be more suitable for creating a *register* of the work. Far from seeking a solution to the problem of representation, for León, experimenting with film allowed him to explore more profoundly questions relating to live performance, the unpredictable, the archive, accumulation, theatrical labor, the actor's body, and risk. In León's work after *Mil quinientos metros*, the filmic lens is constant and lends his creative process multiple vantage points and an interdisciplinary perspective.

Las ideas invites us to reflect on the postdramatic concept of the material onstage body and the autofictional resonances through León's embodiment of a fictionalized version of himself onstage. In the opening scene of the play, the stage is dark, and one sees the glowing apple from a Mac computer sitting on what will be revealed to be a ping-pong table. Animal sounds can be heard in the background, and León (Federico) and Tello (Julián) are seated on opposite sides of the ping-pong table. The atmosphere is casual, and the tone is familiar and playful: just two old friends hanging out like they've done countless times before on what seems like an average Sunday afternoon. In the first line of the performance, we hear Federico telling Julián about a project he is working on: "They're animals dressed up as other animals."[22] After further elaboration, we learn that Federico has hired an actor (Alejandra Manso) to play the role of a visual artist who is creating a project about animals dressing up as other animals. Questions ensue: Is she really an artist or is she just playing the role of an artist? Does it matter if she is really an artist if she is acting? Can a turtle represent anything other than a turtle? If so, must it be considered fiction? Julián asks about the format of the work and how it will be presented, prompting Federico to suggest that they upload it to YouTube right then and there. While the video is uploading, they play ping-pong, the batting of the ball back and forth like a metronome in sync with the rhythm of their conversation, measuring the time it takes for the video to upload and the duration of the performance itself. When the video is done uploading, the computer chimes to indicate its completion, and Julián and Federico fold up half of the ping-pong table to create a makeshift screen facing the audience on which the video will be projected. In effect, the video reveals the actor gently putting costumes on animals: a turtle wears a crab on its back; a rabbit wears a cat costume; a dog is dressed up like a sheep. Julián asks Federico if the actor had seen any of the footage, and Federico tells him that

he showed her video footage of the making of the project. They begin to watch the film documenting the making of the project, and at one point Federico tells the audience, "We filmed the moment when we realized that we had to begin filming everything." This phrase, repeated throughout the performance, illustrates of the urgency of capturing an idea and of documenting the moment in the creative process in which an idea becomes the inspiration for a work. After this pronouncement, Federico plays a video in which he asks Julián, "We should begin filming these videos seriously because they might be useful to us later on, right?" Here Federico alludes to the possibility that the documentary footage not only captures artistic creation but can be the origin of new forms of creation and performances. The video, projected on the ping-pong table screen, creates a compelling mise en abyme effect, as it replicates perfectly the scene in which Federico and Julián are conversing. As Federico and Julián watch the video of themselves from outside of the frame, the scene continues to multiply itself on-screen in an infinite sequence of smaller framed images of Federico and Julián talking about that moment.

What the opening scene reveals most powerfully is the desire to preserve a *register* of the creative process, and specifically the moment during the process in which a work is born. Additionally, in this scene, the definition of authorship gets complicated, as the actor playing the role of visual artist is not really an artist, according to Federico, but in the filmed footage we see her playing the guitar and filming material herself with a camera. Federico asks, "Does it matter if we know it is set up or not? If she really exists or not?" She is an actor who is not really an artist who nonetheless creates art. As the scene multiplies on-screen, Federico and Julián find themselves replicated in and outside of the frames indefinitely, positioned as actors and spectators, artists and editors. The technical reproduction of their image generates a mise en abyme through serialization, making the exploration of representation one in which the urge to create a *register* of the creative process is in constant tension with the excessive proliferation of the image. Beyond the philosophical questions that the opening scene raises, what is engaging is the sense of playfulness Federico and Julián bring to the performance. Everything they try onstage is first and foremost an experiment, one that is designed to seem improvised and unrehearsed. While the conversation about representation is surprisingly entertaining, what draws audiences in and ultimately makes the performance a success is the sense that we as spectators are co-conspirators, participants in a brainstorming session, and part of the experiment and creative process.

León explores the question of what constitutes acting through a range of bodily experiments he proposes in his theatrical work, as we have seen in *Cachetazo de campo* and *Mil quinientos metros*. He does this again in *Las ideas*, through a

Figure 5. *Las ideas* (Ideas), Espacio Cultural Zelaya, Buenos Aires, 2015. Photograph by Ignacio Iasparra. Courtesy of Federico León.

discussion (and practice?) of smoking marijuana and drinking whiskey onstage. In the marijuana scene, Federico and Julián appear to be smoking weed, and Federico asks, "Doesn't it exhaust you to act while high? And if you were acting, how could the audience tell if you were really smoking marijuana or if you were faking it?" Julian suggests that the smell is the proof you need, as he exhales smoke into a fan that blows the smoke into the audience and strikes a single long note on his keyboard. They entertain the possibility of using a substitute, like patchouli, but Federico insists that they must really smoke because of its potential to alter actors' behavior and influence the delivery of the text differently: "How can you control the state that is created by smoking the joint? It's uncontrollable." It is both this lack of control in performance that interests León and the desirable effect it has on creating the sensation that the performance is taking place for the first time, spontaneous and unrehearsed. At the same time, Federico confesses his concern that the play will become known simply as the "play with the joint."

In the scene with the joint, Federico's musings shift from philosophical to logistical, and we see the following words pop up on the screen as he types out

the note: "Find out if you can smoke marijuana live." Audiences witness a similar shift in the scene in which they are drinking whiskey. Federico remarks that it is too expensive to drink real whiskey in every performance, and he calculates out loud the amount of money they would end up having to spend if they performed the play twice a week. He suggests diluting the whiskey with tea, at a ratio of 70 percent tea and 30 percent whiskey, or 70 percent fiction and 30 percent reality. These pragmatic concerns ultimately serve to ground the philosophical in the day-to-day social reality of theater making in Buenos Aires, in which funding is frequently scant and recycling and improvisation are key to the creative process. Discussing the exact percentages of whiskey and tea (reality and fiction) also provides self-reflexive ironic commentary on León's own interest in exploring different ratios of documentary and fictional modes in his work.

Dubatti prefers the term "micropoetics" to describe León's work because the term encompasses multiple aesthetic approaches that defy traditional categories of genre (2017). In one scene of *Las ideas*, Federico suggests looking at the best of the discarded projects that are in the trash can on his computer. He pulls up a video and tells audiences conversationally that the idea was Martín's (Rejtman). It is a compilation of scenes from a porno film with the sex scenes edited out. The question is, Can a porno film still be a porno if all the sex scenes are removed? Audience members are left pondering this question, watching the substantially edited porno film on-screen, which is essentially reduced to a sequence of video clips in which we see actors beginning to undress numerous times. The name of the file including the reedited porno is "La censura no existe mi amor" (Censorship doesn't exist my love), an allusion to Juan Carlos Baglietto's iconic song by the same title, released in 1982, denouncing censorship during dictatorship. Julián accompanies Federico on guitar as Federico sings the song, consisting of one single line that is repeated, each time with another word left off until the last word of the song is simply "censorship."[23] This scene must be considered in the context of Argentina's post-dictatorship memory politics, as Longinovic does thoughtfully in her analysis of the play (2020), but it also invites us to consider the fine line between editing and censorship and the broad range of political and aesthetic influences that make artists and censors decide to cut and rearrange material. In the overall framework of León's play, the question loses some relevance, as we are constantly reminded that everything is recorded anyway, preserved in an archive of raw material before it is streamlined into the final edited (censored) art object/performance.

A harrowing strategy León devises onstage to entrap the audience in the performance of *Las ideas* involves gradually inflating a gigantic balloon. The experi-

ment reveals Federico's desire both to amplify something intimate onstage, and implicate the audience physically and affectively in the performance. As the air pump inflates the balloon, Federico announces it will pop if its circumference gets bigger than 1.8 meters. This creates heightened expectation and anxiety for spectators seated in the intimate space. Federico and Julián measure the circumference of the balloon, and once it is greater than 1.8 meters, they hide under the ping-pong table. In a moment of palpable suspense, the balloon pops, followed by a collective sigh of relief. Spectators are left in total darkness, chuckling nervously; only the sound of Federico's voice can be heard:

> I dreamed that the computer was dreaming. Just like human beings, the computer dreams with all the material it has, a mix of navigations that it made, texts, videos, photos, music. . . . Someone breaks the computer and loses everything. But the accident is the starting point of a new idea. I have to write down everything I remember that I lost. That is the play. (*Las ideas*, 2015)[24]

The play ends with a poetic reflection on memory, archive, and artistic creation. What is initially considered an accident, or a failure, becomes the source of an idea and the starting point for a new creation. Like a survivor being told to write down everything they remember about the accident, León, through Federico, seeks to create a documentary register of everything he has lost through activation of his memory.

The archive in León's work is dynamic and expansive; on the one hand, in works like *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio*, the archive functions as a mode of embodied self-musealization, self-commemoration, and recovery of the past and affirmation of existence and belonging in the present. On the other hand, in works like *Las ideas*, the archive of interest is generative, a digital recording "of everything" that captures the moment an idea is born, a record essential for bringing new art into existence. León proposes multifaceted archives that seek to preserve a register of a process that resists containment, to document a continuum, and to capture the impulse for a new idea. His risky, even dangerous poetics challenge performers and audiences alike. León's interest in accidents, improvisation, and the unexpected, explored throughout his work, reflects his engagement with the real and the desire to discover ways of escaping theatricality. Likewise, his work with children and animals in *Entrenamiento elemental para actores* and *Las ideas* reveals an interest in exploring what constitutes acting and how it relates to lived experience and the self-awareness of acting. In works like *Museo Miguel Ángel Boezzio* and *Estrellas*, León considers the extent to which lived experience can be attributed a validating function. León offers a nuanced

exploration of how this validating function both serves to legitimate the idea of "in-person" as authentic and at the same time leverages a critique against this assumption. These works recenter people who have been invisible in the public sphere and validates them as artists with a right to cultural creation. In León's performances, everything is an archive, marking the beginning and end of a creative process, subject to revision and reinvention, through bold and perilous experimentation.

3: Grupo Krapp

A Collaborative Choreography of Affects

In this chapter I examine how diverse modes of collaboration have shaped the contemporary dance group Grupo Krapp's unique aesthetics, practice, and positioning in the art world. Grupo Krapp's method aligns broadly with a social turn in the arts valuing collaboration and devised work.[1] Exploiting the porous boundaries between media and art forms, Grupo Krapp establishes new social networks and expansive frameworks for critical interdisciplinary dialogue between dance, theater, and film. In dialogue with performance studies, with its attention to embodiment and more recent turn toward intermediality, I attend to this multifaceted, interdisciplinary body of work to highlight synergies and relationships between dance, theater, and film that are frequently overlooked in conventional frames.[2] Grupo Krapp has produced work consistently for more than two decades, and the familial nature of the collective lends much of their production an intimate and personal feel. While Grupo Krapp's collaborations are numerous and constantly shifting, in this chapter I focus on the importance of interdisciplinary, intermedial, and familial collaboration with the aim of showing how their collaborative practice has led to some of the most productive exchanges between screen and stage in Argentine performance.

Grupo Krapp was founded in 1998 by Luciana Acuña and Luis Biasotto, dancers and choreographers from the Córdoba province in Argentina committed to exploring new forms of expression and the limits of language through movement. Shortly thereafter, they were joined by musicians Fernando Tur and Gabriel Almendros and the actor Edgardo Castro. Grupo Krapp straddles the worlds of contemporary dance and theater and is often described as a group of *danza teatro* (dance theater). All Krapp members act onstage in addition to assuming a primary role of choreographer, dancer, or musician. They all identify Ricardo Bartis, an established Argentine playwright, theater director, and actor, as a significant influence on their training. In another nod to theater, the group is named after Samuel Beckett's tragicomic one-act play *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), itself a meditation on memory, technology, and the archive.

Grupo Krapp's extensive trajectory spans over two decades and includes more than fifteen works.[3] The group is a key referent for contemporary dance in Argentina and internationally, and it has toured across Latin America, Europe, and the US and participated in major dance and theater festivals.[4] Grupo Krapp also has long-standing collaborations with theater and dance practitioners in the US and has taken part in artistic residencies at Colgate University, the University of Michigan, Bard College, and Reed College. Acuña and Biasotto chaired the program in choreographic composition at the University of Buenos Aires and have taught choreography at the National University of the Arts and the National Company of Contemporary Dance in Buenos Aires.

Alternating between expressions of irony, melancholy, and the absurd, Krapp's works are at times playful and disconcerting, dreamlike and magical. They are futuristic yet constantly return to the past to reflect on their artistic practice. A *Los Angeles Times* review calls Krapp's characters "psychotic but endearing" (Looseleaf 2002). Their movement has been described as "visceral and anarchic" (Lingenti 2013), and their choreography "tender and animalistic" (Prieto 2013a). They reanimate the archive of their work in the present and bring it into dialogue with explorations of loss, mortality, and friendship through reenactment and digital editing in works such as *Réquiem* (2021) or in the retrospective series on their work *Retrocedida* (2013).[5] Through the embodiment of ideas ("poner el cuerpo a las ideas"), they represent the everyday and the fantastical and seek to reimagine new forms of expression. Their movement is characterized by its powerful physical energy; fast, frenetic pace; nimble gymnastics; and violent collisions between bodies onstage. Grupo Krapp embraces unconventional bodies, including performers in their group who are not trained in dance. They prefer risk over comfort, process over product, and bodily expression over technique. Like all the artists featured in this book, they see themselves as researchers whose work stages the creative process, modes of production, and the economic circumstances and life events that inform their work. In collaboration with filmmakers, musicians, writers, and playwrights, Grupo Krapp works across media to expand artistic networks and helps deepen our understanding of how bodies and presence are theorized across dance, performance, and film.

Collaboration in Context

Any discussion of the significance of collaboration in the creation of performance must acknowledge the lineage of collective creation in Latin America, where the practice flourished in the sixties and seventies in the framework of the Cold War and in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. Iconic groups such as Enrique Buenaventura's Teatro Experimental de Cali, founded in 1955, and La

Candelaria, founded in 1966 at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá, consolidated a revolutionary practice focused on implementing change and social justice predominantly in rural areas (Alegret 2016). Drawing on Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed and influenced by the dramaturgies of Bertolt Brecht and Jerzy Grotowski, these groups and others exercised a horizontal politics to bring about change and to denounce both economic and cultural colonization (Alegret 2016). More recent companies like Peru's Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, founded in 1971, and Mexico's Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes, founded in 1997, continue to revive the tradition of collective creation in Latin America through their devised theater practices (Castillo 2016). Notable in all these groups is their "commitment to a sustained collaboration over an extended period of time"—"each new, original performance will have successive iterations, often taking several years of intense work to reach its final form" (Castillo 2016, 64). The artists in this book engage the devised model of creation through sustained collaboration, process-oriented work, aversion to the idea of finished work, and a DIY approach and involvement in all aspects of production. In many cases, the process of sustained, collaborative work extends even further and is reinforced through multiple restagings on the international circuit and through the creation of new and related works across genres.[6]

The work of choreography is essential to configuring the social and collaborative aspects of dance. In the case of Grupo Krapp, Acuña's role as choreographer is inextricably linked to her roles as networker and spokesperson for the group.[7] As choreographer, Acuña both curates the movement of bodies onstage and participates in the artistic framing and programming of the work. As choreographer for theatrical works by other artists discussed in this book (Pensotti, León, and Arias), Acuña demonstrates how choreography can be "seminal for creating a new or different experience of the social" through the cross-pollination of ideas, spaces, and aesthetics across works (Kowal et al. 2017, 12). Choreography is a key facet of collaborative work that poses new questions for work that is interdisciplinary and intermedial. For Rudi Laermans, choreography in the age of videography creates "a multi-medial performance machine" that engages human and nonhuman movement in "a genuine form of sociability" (2010, 235). The synergies between videography and choreography are pronounced in Krapp's work because of the collaboration and influence of Alejo Moguillansky, filmmaker and cofounder of Pampero Cine. Moguillansky occasionally performs in Krapp's works (the plays *Por el dinero* [For the Money, 2013] and *Réquiem* [Requiem, 2021]) and frequently edits video content of Krapp rehearsals and performances that become integrated into subsequent Krapp performances (*¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado B)* [Where Do the Dead Go? (Side B), 2010]; *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado A)* [Where Do the Dead Go? (Side A), 2011]; *Réquiem* [2021]; and

Hielo negro [Black Ice, 2019]; and into films by El Pampero Cine such as *El loro y el cisne* (The Parrot and the Swan, 2013), discussed later in this chapter.

Familial, Interdisciplinary, Intermedial Approaches

Grupo Krapp's most significant and long-standing collaboration is with Pampero Cine and particularly with the films created by Alejo Moguillansky, cofounder of Pampero Cine. Moguillansky is also Luciana Acuña's partner and father to their child, Cleo, who has begun to play roles in their work (*La vendedora de fósforos* [The Little Match Girl, 2017] and *La edad media* [The Middle Ages, 2022]). In my analysis of the modes of collaboration between the dance company Grupo Krapp and the independent film company Pampero Cine, I center my attention on three aspects of their work through familial, interdisciplinary, and intermedial approaches. Moguillansky explains the collaboration between companies the following way: "We work together, amongst ourselves and with our friends, for affective and artistic reasons" (Laube 2022). This blend of the affective and artistic is foundational in Grupo Krapp's work. It is in this affective context among friends where works are born spontaneously and collectively. Blejmar and Sosa refer to this mode of collaborative work as "an exaltation of friendship and a space for joy and experimentation" (2017, 17). "Friendship" is a word that comes up frequently in interviews with collaborators of Grupo Krapp and Pampero Cine when describing their process and motivation to create art together. As Agustín Campero notes of this rich collaboration between film and theater artists, "They are friends and peers who gather around to reproduce acts of joy" (2009, 93).

Artists Arias, Paula, and Grupo Krapp occasionally include family members in their work (mothers, sons, and daughters), and this familial aspect of artistic production lends their work a biodramatic realness that is of key interest to this book. At the same time, when families create art together, they engage discourses of family that circulate in the public sphere. As discussed in chapter 1, in her Children's Trilogy, Arias included actors who both were and were not affected directly by the violence of dictatorship and gave them a voice to speak about their experiences of the dictatorship. In doing so, she pushed back on the idea that only those affected directly by the violence of dictatorship were the legitimate narrators and creators of artwork documenting the experience of dictatorship. As a result, Arias created space for an expanded community of voices and new ways of thinking about family and experiences across generations. In Krapp's work, family is linked much more closely to artistic creation and less to the intergenerational positioning in relation to the dictatorial past. Though intergenerational dynamics are prominent in works by artists in this chapter,

Grupo Krapp's collective mode of collaboration asserts less of a passing down or inheritance of affects and more of a sharing or circulation of affects among those who work collectively and horizontally in the present.

Grupo Krapp's work is also richly interdisciplinary, bridging dance, theater, film, music, and performance, creating more expansive networks, and fostering overlapping and intersecting communities of artistic practice. Acuña, as dancer, choreographer, and actor, exemplifies the vibrant crossovers between disciplines and artistic communities that accentuate the collaborative ethos that permeates artistic production of the artists studied here. The exploration of interdisciplinarity through these works remains anchored in the body and the orchestration of collective embodied experience in time and space. Grupo Krapp's work highlights both the ephemeral nature of performance and the desire to document their process of collective creation. The documentary impulse in this group can be attributed in part to the collaboration with filmmaker Alejo Moguillansky, who films rehearsals and performances and edits the film content in their work.

The intermedial aspect of Grupo Krapp's work is incredibly varied and responds both to their artistic interests and the life events and circumstances that affect the group as a whole. Works like the performance *Por el dinero* or their retrospective series *Retrocedida* are citational and show Krapp's interest in generating a feedback loop and a digital archive of projects over time that they can consult and resuscitate in the present as a way of taking stock of how their methods, language, and bodies have changed. In Grupo Krapp's later work, such as *¿A dónde van los muertos?* (*Lado A* and *B*) and *Réquiem*, the audiovisual archive takes on new meaning: to commemorate and grieve the loss of loved ones and artistic collaborators of Krapp and to reflect on what it means to create art after death. In one of the group's most hauntingly intermedial works, *Réquiem*, the group reflects on the profound loss of Luis Biasotto, who died from complications of COVID-19 in May 2021. Intermediality in this work serves to preserve his memory and ensure his presence in current and future works. Collaborative, intermedial work in this instance allows for impossible encounters in the here and now, heightening spectral effects and transcending boundaries between life and death, presence and absence, and real and fictional registers.

Pampero Cine: The Eventness of Film

Pampero Cine, like Grupo Krapp, is a long-standing collective of artists based in Buenos Aires that has revitalized how the arts are produced, funded, presented, and distributed. Founded in 2002 by Mariano Llinás, Alejo Moguillansky, Agustín Mendilaharzu, and Laura Citarella, Pampero Cine has produced over twenty films in the last twenty years. Pampero members create films col-

lectively and trade off roles as cinematographer, actor, producer, writer, and editor (Brodsky 2023). The collective maintains a horizontal structure and values input from all members during the production process. As Laura Citarella notes, "Nobody makes a film at Pampero without the rest seeing it and without the rest being able to give their opinion, so it is set up as a form of work, of constant exchange" (qtd. in Brodsky 2023). El Pampero rejects the cult of the individual author, setting its work apart from what Mariano Llinás called "the gritty naturalism" of independent Latin American cinema at the time (Brodksy 2023). Pampero Cine embodies the values of exchange, consensus, and collective creation that fomented post-2001 artistic production aligned with the slogan "La salida es colectiva" (The way out is collective).

Pampero Cine's early work reflects the economic and political instability of post-2001 and moves toward "a more eclectic (and enterprising) aesthetic of thrift" characteristic of the Kirchnerist years (2003–15) (Delgado and Sosa 2017). Pampero Cine embraces traits of cross-genre exploration and adventurous narrative and reflects the aesthetic of the Kirchnerist years that produced "the material of tantalizing fictions—playful, volatile, and endlessly performative" (241). It is, perhaps, this commitment to exploring the potential and limits of fiction and the "deft, intertextual game-play" that best captures the ethos of Pampero Cine (246). As Brodsky notes, "Although the films are decidedly low-budget, they never sacrifice the possibilities of fiction filmmaking" (2023). Though reflection on the socioeconomic conditions is a constant aspect and assertion of the real in Pampero's artistic production, like other works examined in this book, a commitment to fiction is integral to this ethnography of the real.

Pampero Cine's commitment to artistic autonomy stemmed from the desire to work outside of capitalism's logic, but it also created tensions with the state funding apparatus, the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA), and led to their exploration of alternative modes of production and exhibition. Pampero Cine from the start declined to seek state funding from INCAA as a way of maintaining artistic autonomy. This stance has had to do largely with the fact that INCAA funding was contingent on compliance with a set of bureaucratic procedures requiring, for example, prior submission of a script, a budget, and a timeline for production (Campos 2019). Pampero's film projects represent "an expansion of the communitarian subjectivity" that manages to flourish despite objective historical conditions and sometimes because of them (Kratje and Dagatti 2017, 218). And even though Pampero refuses state funding, the collective seeks out financial funding from private investors, such as Copenhagen's CPH Docs, Hubert Bals Fund, World Cinema Fund, and others. As a matter of fact, it is Pampero's dependence on international funding that becomes one of the major themes explored in its work (discussed later

in this chapter). As Kratje and Dagatti observe, this dependence locates Pampero's production at the "interstice between the local (subsistence, precarity) and the global (cosmopolitanism, fantasy, and the transnational)" (2017, 215). Or, as Giunta puts it, "the spheres they insert themselves in are simultaneously the closest points and the furthest corners of the planet" (2011, 118). President Milei's proposal to defund INCAA and support for the arts as part of the comprehensive omnibus reform bill in 2023 has further complicated the funding scenario for filmmakers in Argentina, driving artists more than ever to seek out international funding to support their work.

In addition to exploring unconventional modes of production and distribution, Pampero Cine prefers to screen their films at cultural centers, theaters, and museums outside of the state-sponsored cinemas.[8] Pampero views their film screenings as unique, unrepeatable events that should be shown on the big screen (Campos 219, 158). Conceptually, their vision of how their works should be exhibited aligns closely with theatrical performance or museum installation. Beginning with Llinás's film *Balnearios* (Beach Resorts, 2002), Pampero began to screen their films at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires, MALBA). This way, filmmaker and collaborator Matías Piñeiro explains, Llinás inaugurated a new method of exhibition: "Instead of opening on six screens with five daily shows for what would probably be one deadly week, a film could be shown in the cinema of the MALBA, twice a week, for an entire month" (2019, 33). Another advantage of this method is that if the films were popular, their run could be extended; so, for example, *Balnearios* ran for five straight months (Brodsky 2023).

With a run time of fourteen hours, the longest film in Argentina's cinematic history, Llinás's *La Flor* (The Flower, 2018) also bears mentioning because of the challenges and innovations its length presented to exhibition. With such a long running time, screenings cultivated an atmosphere of a durational performance and were usually divided into three or four days, creating an air of a mini film festival. The film opens with Llinás announcing to the camera that he is going to try and explain what the film is about. He takes out a Sharpie and begins to sketch a flower with six petals, a metaphor for the structure of the film, each petal representing one of the six episodes of the film. As he draws, he explains that four episodes begin but do not have an ending; one begins and ends; and one starts in the middle and has an ending. The unfinished and finished stories come together to form a flower, a rather abstract looking one, into a cohesive whole. The stories ultimately cohere together but do not follow a linear chronology. In 2018, anticipating the premiere of *La Flor*, Pampero, together with other artists, created the Sociedad de Exhibidores Trashumantes (Society for Transhumanist Exhibitors, SETH) as a way of establishing a "nomadic and expanded

notion of exhibition" (Piñeiro, 2019, 33). The idea behind SETH was to travel around the country to "find new places and new ways of showing films" (33). On social media, SETH defines itself as "a group of people in constant movement that organizes movie nights. Unexpected and announced. Nationwide. Premieres and repetitions on the big screen. Long live the resistance! The cinematographer will conquer!" (qtd. in Campos 2019). This brief manifesto captures the group's spirit of community, spontaneity, and resistance and its desire to challenge conventional screening norms and explore new avenues of exhibition. *La Flor* premiered at the Espacio Zelaya, an interdisciplinary arts space founded by theater and filmmaker Federico León (discussed in chapter 2). *La Flor* features actors from the theater collective Piel de Lava (Elisa Carricajo, Valeria Correa, Pilar Gamboa, and Laura Paredes), best known for its long-running play *Petróleo* (Petroleum, 2018), a comedic reflection on extractivism, masculinity, and gender stereotypes. Spread across three days and accompanied by concerts and food, the screenings had the feel of a social gathering.

Through the work of SETH, Pampero showed interest in conceptualizing the cinemagoing experience as live performance. This echoes Llinás's assertion that the screening of films was becoming more and more like staging theater and that, like independent theater, the goal was not to make money but to cultivate an audience and make art (Campero 2009, 93). Declaring that the screenings are unrepeatable, one-of-a-kind events heightens this affinity with the theatrical and live performance. The fact that public links to Pampero films are rarely available helps promote the idea of a film screening as a live, theatrical event that exists in the present. Pampero embraces what Jorge Dubatti, from theater studies, has termed *convivio* to highlight theater as a gathering of bodies belonging to actors, spectators, and technicians in the present, cohabitating in a unique affective zone, rooted in time and space, that is uncapturable, unpredictable, ephemeral, and auratic (2015, 45–46). In contrast, *tecnovivio* characterizes the relationship a spectator establishes with a technology, device, or digitally produced object, in this case the film, which is detached from its creator (46). Emphasizing aspects of theatrical staging, Pampero seeks to cultivate the eventness of its screenings as live performances. The screen remains an important part of this interest in the live performance; Llinás's insistence on presenting his films on the big screen for audiences generates frictions between live performance and film to produce what Dubatti identifies as the poetic crossovers between *convivio* and *tecnovivio*. The result is an intimate gathering and shared experience that plays with the spaces and temporalities of film and performance and juxtaposes bodies, screens, live event, and digital archive.

Pampero's choice of museums and theater spaces such as Sala Leopoldo Lugones at the Teatro San Martín likewise accentuates the affiliation between

film, theater, and the visual arts. And Pampero regularly draws on a pool of actors from the independent theater scene in Buenos Aires, including actors from the collectives Piel de Lava and Grupo Krapp and actors Romina Paula (discussed in chapter 4), Mariana Chaud, Esteban Lamothe, Walter Jakob, Andrea Garrote, Santiago Gobernori, Matías Feldman, and others. Rafael Spregelburd, playwright, director, and actor, insists that this joint work urged Pampero collaborators to "think about the present and the future in playful terms and not in terms of money" (qtd. in Campero 2009, 93). Pampero's borrowing of spaces, actors, modes of production, and exhibition from independent theater creates a hybrid blend of film and theater practice, production, and experience.

Stages of Labor and Precarity

Grupo Krapp, like Pampero Cine, prioritizes collaboration and friendship, the sharing of resources, and the ability to occupy diverse artistic roles as a way of maintaining artistic autonomy and resisting neoliberal capitalism. While both Pampero Cine and Grupo Krapp insist that their artistic work is not motivated by the desire to make money, the theme of money and economic hardship, the local conditions of economic precarity, and their positioning in the art world vis-à-vis funding for their projects are central to many of their works. Grupo Krapp pushes the limits of interdisciplinarity and exchange between genres but remains firmly rooted in contemporary dance. As such, Krapp brings to the discussion bodies and their performance as labor, the different forms of labor, and how this labor is valued, measured, circulated, and consumed by audiences and art markets.

Grupo Krapp has pioneered trends in contemporary dance in Argentina over the last twenty some years, reflecting on the precarious conditions and marginal position of contemporary dance in Argentina. As Juan Ignacio Vallejos explains, in the 1940s, professional ballet dancers acquired the status of state workers while other modern dancers were excluded, remaining in precarious working conditions: "Precariousness is essentially determined by the lack of official support of independent dance production" (2019, 35). And as Ayelén Clavin further notes, while independent dance in Buenos Aires, excluded largely from institutional support, might benefit from the creative freedom this entails, the flip side is the precarity that modes of flexible work imply (Jackson 2012; Clavin 2021). Krapp cofounders Acuña and Biasotto reference precarity frequently as a constant influence that has defined their work since its inception. In an interview, Biasotto relates, "When money is on your mind all the time, when your main worry is how to survive, there is little room to think about art. And this hasn't changed for us from when we started to today" (Lingenti 2013). For Clavin, con-

temporary dance in Buenos Aires includes not only the marks of the creative process and production but also references the specific circumstances that surround creation (2022, 36).

Grupo Krapp's twenty-year trajectory evolved during the aftermath of Argentina's economic crisis of 2001 and bears signs of the crisis thematically in individual works and in modes of production favoring collective collaboration, improvisation, exploration of risk, borrowing of resources, exchange of artists from other groups and disciplines, and reliance on international funding. And while the crisis of 2001 and its aftermath reshaped modes of production for all the artists examined in this book, the crisis deepened the precarity already felt by the marginalized field of contemporary dance. In their work, Grupo Krapp addresses other moments of acute financial crisis and the struggle to survive, such as the cash flow crisis of 2013, explored in their play *Por el dinero*, and the lockdown during COVID-19, depicted in the film *La edad media*, in which Acuña and Moguillansky (romantic and professional partners) ask themselves how they will pay for everything when they don't have work, performances are postponed, tours are canceled, and classes and rehearsals are difficult to adapt to an online format.

Artists have always reflected on and explored modes of working and the production of artistic work (Klein and Kunst 2012). Klein and Kunst identify a critique of the established order of production that emerged in tandem with the field of performance studies in the 1960s that denounced neoliberal post-Fordist working conditions within a globalized economy (2012). At the same time, the concept of labor shifted with the arrival of the immaterial turn, influenced by the process-based artwork of the 1960s, when "labor became more service oriented and engaged in the production and exchange of affect" (Jackson 2012, 12). Contemporary dance engages both material and immaterial forms of labor through the live dancer's body, which creates performance that, rooted in the present, "organizes emotion to produce immaterial experiences" (13). Questions of how to value this immaterial labor in a capitalist system have preoccupied scholars like Rebecca Schneider, who affirms that "what preserves value is the ongoing extraction of the labor of the live" (2012, 156). Throughout this book, the labor of the live is a key component of the exploration of the real in performances that represent bodily exertion and the accumulation of fatigue over time. Vivi Tellas's 2000 precursor to the *Biodrama* series, *El precio de un brazo derecho* (The Price of a Hired Hand), in which a bricklayer works onstage throughout the performance, is a prime example of this. In dialogue with central themes and personal accounts of economic precarity in works like the performance *Por el dinero*, the sheer physicality of Acuña and Biasotto's dance onstage focuses attention on labor as a link between live and the real in Grupo Krapp's work.

Por el dinero (2013): The Labor of Performance and the Performance of Labor

Described in the playbill as a perfect combination of theater, dance, documentary, and economic essay, *Por el dinero* depicts the performance of labor and strategies for making a living and undertaking creative work: in the case of *Por el dinero*, so that the artists and creators of the project, Luciana Acuña and Alejo Moguillansky, are able to continue to dedicate themselves to their professions as choreographer and filmmaker, respectively. The performance consists largely of autobiographical narratives—sometimes light, sometimes anxiety provoking—of how difficult it is to reconcile love and money as artists working in Argentina, that is, love for their creative work and the money that is needed to fulfill their family's real, experienced, basic day-to-day needs.

Por el dinero premiered in 2013, in the middle of Argentina's cash flow crisis, which prohibited Argentines from buying dollars, generated a booming black-market exchange, imposed grotesquely high taxes on international credit card purchases, and generally put enormous constraints on how Argentines dealt with money. I attended a restaging of the play in 2014 at the Centro Cultural General San Martín. The performance opened with the four cast members walking onstage toward the audience.[9] Acuña began counting how many people were in the audience—twenty-five—and then multiplied the number by the cost of the ticket—80 pesos. Mentally she calculated and came up with how much they would make with that evening's performance: 2,000 pesos or US$250. This improvised opening transitioned nicely to the first scripted scene in which Oxford-trained economist Paul Segal, whose image was projected on a screen at the back of the stage, explains a graph depicting the relationship between GDP and income and further explains why the material criteria (e.g., a flat-screen TV, a new autocar, private education, and medical insurance) for belonging to the middle class in Argentina are no longer realistic. The performance examines intricately how Acuña and Moguillansky, at once choreographer and filmmaker, a couple, and parents to a young child, can make a living as artists in Buenos Aires.

The play enacts the stressful relationship between lived experience and the economy, biographies and money, through choreographed movement, dialogue, shared expense lists, music, and email correspondences with funders. Moguillansky and Acuña were moved by the idea that each life event depicted in the play corresponds to a specific economic reality: "There was something that became very clear to us, and moved us: the idea that biography, understood in all of its dimensions, including what happens to you, what you think, what you create, etc., correlates to economic history" (Halfon 2013b). In the following scene, Acuña and friend and collaborator Perpoint are seated in chairs facing one

another with lists in their hands. Alternating back and forth, they go through all their expenses: gas, water, electricity, cable, telephone, school, security system, gas, auto insurance, parking, yoga, groceries, going out, takeout, and miscellaneous. The list is long. At the end of this exchange, Moguillansky shows them their totals. They all get up, move the chairs out of the way, and begin to run around the stage in circles and then walk back and forth toward and away from the audience in unison, gyrating their hips casually. Their movement seems perfunctory yet playful. They stop to have a drink at a makeshift bar at the side of the stage.

In the next scene, Acuña is seated facing the audience, reading a letter Moguillansky has written to her, about her, describing her life story and the constant impact money has had on her creative work and the direction of her career. Reading the letter out loud in second person to the audience creates an atmosphere of an intimate, shared space: "You're 17 years old, cheerleader at your high school, you want to study dance and psychology. . . . Your parents give you 50 pesos a week" (*Por el dinero*, 2013). The letter continues to document the development of her career as choreographer, dancer, and actor and her achievements as an artist, interspersing personal moments such as how she met her partner and the father of their daughter and the death of her mother. What is constant throughout the narrative of her life is that there is never enough, or just barely enough, money to get by. The letter ends the year that the play premiered, in 2013: "Now when you look at the trajectory of the last several months, and you see that nothing in your life is certain, you start to ask new questions about the money you make, the expenses you have, about what your basic needs really are" (*Por el dinero*, 2013). During the reading of the letter, Perpoint is dancing in the background, dressed as a firefighter (one of his former professions), his body jerking back and forth in choppy, seemingly uncontrollable movements.

The play features an interlude, in which a series of slides projected on the back screen enumerate for audiences seven fundamental rules of Argentine folkdance, taken directly from the *Manual de danzas nativas* (1954) by Pedro Berruti. The immediate explanation for this brief incursion into folkdance is that *Por el dinero* was envisioned as part of *Proyecto Manual* (Manual Project, 20112013), a project curated by Matías Umpierrez, for which participating artists were asked to create a theatrical work that in some way, shape, or form incorporated an instruction manual.[10] The sudden interruption of slides introducing the rules of etiquette for folkdance in *Por el dinero* is a bit jarring but creates a productive contrast with the choreography of the work responding to the specific economic context of 2013 in Argentina. In the scene immediately following the projection of folkdance rules, Acuña and Moguillansky dance together to "Pala Pala pulpero,"[11] one of the songs included in the compilation that accompanies

the manual. A traditional Argentine folkdance popular in the northwest provinces from the 1870s to the 1920s, the "Pala Pala" is both a love story and the story of a predator (a crow) capturing its prey (dove).[12] Traditionally both partners wear ponchos that fan up and down like wings, and the end of the dance culminates in an embrace and the exchange of a red scarf, symbolizing the crow's ripping out the dove's heart. Moguillansky wears a dress with a floral pattern loosely draped over his clothes. Though ill-fitting, the dress is adorned with frills that do somewhat achieve the effect of wings flapping. Their version of the "Pala Pala" is bouncy and carefree, with arms flapping playfully up and down as they dance toward and away from each other flirtatiously. Their embrace at the end of the dance is tender and long and does not in any way recall the viscerally graphic scene of the predator killing its prey. The sustained embrace provides a touching moment in the play and shows a moment of physical and emotional intimacy amid the anxiety caused by the precarity of their economic situation, though the image of predator and prey engaged in a dynamic dance lingers in the audience's minds in a following scene documenting the artists' dependence on European investors.

Por el dinero ends with a recounting of a delirious and maddening email exchange, in which Moguillansky (here "Alejo," played by Perpoint) tries to describe the unique limitations of Argentina's banking system to European funders (Tine, Cecile, and Basia, whose emails are read by Acuña). The exchange, though largely detailing the bureaucratic minutiae involved in international reimbursement, is surprisingly suspenseful and ultimately exposes the imbalance of power and privilege between artists and international funders as well as the interactions that both produce and reflect the relationship of dependence between them. The email exchange is also an effective vehicle for showing the rituals of diplomacy that govern interactions even when artists and funders cannot seem to understand one another or the specific circumstances that shape their needs and priorities.

The exchange begins with Acuña and Perpoint seated facing the audience with scripts of the exchange in their hands. They alternate reading the emails between Alejo and the funders, always starting by announcing the date of the emails (spanning a total of six months) to give the audience a sense of the time that has passed. In the first email (read by Acuña), Alejo asks Tine if she has heard anything about the additional funding from Sweden that he was supposed to receive to complete a film project, which had already received significant (but insufficient) funding from a Danish film festival. Alejo adds that the film is going extremely well and that several prestigious actors have agreed to work on the film for practically nothing. Tine ("just back from a very cold and rainy Cannes") responds that she has reached out to Cecilia at the Swedish Film Insti-

tute and that Cecilia believes the film is a low-budget project and does not have any available funds for the project at the moment. Despite the bad news, Alejo perseveres and begins shooting the film. Throughout the exchange, he reiterates his deep investment in the project (the love he is trying to reconcile with the lack of money available for the film). To compensate for the sudden and unexpected cut in funding, Tine comes up with an alternative solution and asks Alejo if he might be interested in participating in a project that she is directing, called *Little Sun*, created by the Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. The project, as described in her email, involves a solar-powered lamp, created by Eliasson, which would be sent to Third World regions of the world without electricity, where filmmakers would shoot thirty minutes of footage by the light provided by the lamp. The final project would be assembled and screened at the Tate Modern in London, and Alejo, as a participating filmmaker, would receive 1,000 euros for his work. Alejo responds enthusiastically and tells Tine to send the lamp immediately to Argentina.

This is when the exchange gets interesting because the focus shifts from Alejo's attempts to secure more funding for his film to his participation in the *Little Sun* project. The remaining exchange reveals effectively both the frustrating limitations of participating in transnational collaborations from within Argentina and the ways in which good intentions of funders can sometimes backfire and end up causing unintended hardship. A series of emails reveals the following events: Alejo never receives the lamp because it has been retained by Argentine customs. So, he decides to shoot footage without the lamp, and he buys a hard drive (1,000 pesos) in order to do so. He sends the footage to Tine and the people at the *Little Sun* project, and they are delighted with his work. Alejo receives an invitation from Olafur Eliasson to attend the premiere of *Little Sun* at the Tate Modern, all expenses paid. Alejo accepts happily but asks if it is possible for him to be reimbursed in cash in London instead of through a bank transfer directly to his account. Unfortunately, it is not, so when he sends his credit card receipts for reimbursement, he adds on 15 percent, the tax amount he is charged for using his credit card outside of Argentina. Several months go by without receiving any word on his reimbursement. In the last email of the exchange read onstage, Alejo reveals in emotional terms how vulnerable his economic situation is:

> Three months later . . . January 14: Dear Basia, Tine, Olafur and Cecile: I am desperate. It's evident that Argentina is a complicated country to transfer money to, but I really need you to help me with this. . . . It's very uncomfortable for me to write this email, but I can't do anything besides this. I really need my money back. (*Por el dinero*, 2013)[13]

After Acuña and Perpoint finish reading the exchange, a slide appears on the back screen with text explaining that Alejo was finally reimbursed for this trip six months later, though at the premiere of the play he was still waiting to hear on the 1,000 euros he was promised for working on the *Little Sun* project, as well as the 1,000 pesos he paid out of pocket for the hard drive.

Over the course of this exchange, the measured language of diplomacy reaches its limit and is replaced by the desperate and emotional appeals of the artist. For example, during a particularly infuriating section of the email exchange, Perpoint breaks out of character, looks at the audience, and yells incredulously, "C'est incroyable!" And it is also Perpoint who blasts the message "Quel horreur est l'argent!" at the top of his lungs during one of the musical interludes. These emotional releases accentuate the affective dimension of transnational collaboration and the anxiety involved in securing international funding. But on another level, and in the context of the performance, Perpoint's very collaboration with Acuña and Moguillansky offers a concrete example of how transnational partnerships can work well, leaving audiences with a more nuanced critique of the potential and outcomes of transnational collaboration.

But what is ultimately most striking about this performance is not the detailed exposé of the interactions between artists and international funders but rather the way in which bodily movement onstage is choreographed as both a reflection on the relationship between art, work, and diverse economies and a conscious performance of labor. In his comments on the play, Gerardo Naumann observes that "the work consumes itself, like a dog running in circles biting its tail, slowly and mechanically" (2013). The performance produces and consumes itself through circular, perfunctory movements, evoking a model of self-referential artistic production but also perhaps self-sufficiency and the utopian ideal of creating art that relies on itself, free from institutional dependency. The performance's perfunctory movement might also be read as a metaphor for the banal, enervated, and repetitive work they are forced to do to support themselves. In effect, *Por el dinero* is a work that participates in a parallel, informal economy, which is not the source of their income, as both Acuña and Moguillansky earn their income in the official economy, as choreographer and advertising designer (Naumann 2013). The labor they perform in their own creative work is not remunerated, and in this sense, *Por el dinero* exposes its "own apparently peripheral structures of value and labour that support the art event itself" (Schmidt 2013, 15). At the same time, spectators are witnesses to the performers' bodies, over the duration of the play, engaged in work, burning calories, becoming fatigued. It is a work that creates and consumes itself as it produces the affective, immaterial labor of performance for spectators.

In their introductory essay to the 2012 special issue of *The Drama Review*, "Precarity and Performance," Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider write, "How do we pay attention to precarity—economic precarity, neoliberal precarity—through a close reading of the performing body?" (6). Both the onstage body and the body captured by the documentary lens accentuate a perceived realness that sensitizes viewers to the specific vulnerabilities of the human body and the physical manipulation of bodies choreographed in the performance of work. At the very least, this heightened awareness of precarity makes us realize our own complicity as spectators paying for the spectacle of affective labor. And yet, what makes questions of precarity, bodies, and art even more complex is the emphasis on the auto/biographical subject in the works discussed here. This attention to the subject in these works has a biographical function that goes against the production of undifferentiated human labor. It lends an intimate dimension to these performed lives, drawing us in as spectators and enveloping us in the affective space of the personal.

Moguillansky captures this acute and visceral precarity through a critique of the colonial relationships underpinning transnational collaboration in the 2013 film *El loro y el cisne*, clips of which are projected on the screen at the back of the stage throughout the performance of *Por el dinero*.[14] Cecilia Sosa writes that the performance "could be read as *El loro*'s counterpart and a live biodrama emerging out of the backstage of the film" (2017b, 50). Indeed, Acuña and Moguillansky can be seen simultaneously in the clips projected on the back screen and in their onstage performances in *Por el dinero*. Thematically, both works also share a concern for the restrictive economic conditions under which artists in Argentina are forced to work, particularly when in a more experimental capacity and outside of institutionalized frameworks of unions, subsidization, and support (though minimal) offered to official dance companies. In addition, both works explore the interactions and relationships that develop between Argentine artists and international donors and how the dependence on transnational funding networks affects the creative process and the aesthetic autonomy of their work.

El loro y el cisne (2013): Ethnography Meets Fiction

The inspiration for *El loro y el cisne* (The Parrot and the Swan), according to Moguillansky, began with an interest in documenting Grupo Krapp's creative process, in the early stages when everything is uncertain and improvised, unsolidified in form and direction (Tambutti 2016). Shortly after Moguillansky started filming, he invited Rodrigo Sánchez Mariño, a boom operator and sound technician nicknamed "Loro," to join him in rehearsals. When Loro arrived, Moguillansky realized that he wanted to include the cameras and recording

equipment in the frame as a way of exposing the documentary process (Boetti 2013). As a result, Loro, too, was "forced" into the frame and began to emerge as a potential character of the film (Boetti 2013). Loro's gradual entrance into the main frame serves an effective baring device that not only exposes the behind-the-scenes technologies at work in the creation of the film but also allows "Loro" to develop into a character whose biography becomes linked to the audio equipment he carries with him at all times. Loro becomes a cyborg, his body, fused with the film equipment, "suggesting an enhanced form of subjectivity" moving in and out of the frame and at the same time shifting from filming to filmed subject (Sosa 2017b, 54). As Loro begins to develop into a character in *El loro y el cisne*, he embodies the tensions between labor, body, and biography examined in the film and in the play *Por el dinero*.

Moguillansky views himself in an anthropologist's role, less interested in documenting a "pedagogical record of the rehearsals" and more motivated by the desire to capture an intimate portrait of the artists who make up Grupo Krapp (Boetti 2013). Moguillansky also witnesses and urges the transformation of Loro from offstage sound technician to onstage character. As Kratje and Dagatti observe, Moguillansky, somewhat paradoxically, is less interested in the encounter with the other and instead sees himself as an ethnographer of his own community and environs (2017, 55). As in the work of Arias and Paula, Moguillansky occupies an ethnographic role that is participatory, collaborative, and affectively engaged. In an interview, Moguillansky asserts, almost defensively, that he didn't make the film for the general public but rather for Luciana and "the four other cretins" belonging to Grupo Krapp ("Sobre *El loro y el cisne*" 2016, 193). There is an aspect of resistance in this assertion as well, in dismissing the demands of the market for circulation and dissemination and cultivating an intimate audience consisting of the creators and actors of the film, a kind of revolutionary model of self-sufficiency that is a mantra of Pampero Cine.

The film begins in the documentary mode and centers on established dance companies in and around Buenos Aires, featuring footage of rehearsals by the Classical Ballet of Argentine Theater of La Plata, the Contemporary Ballet of San Martín Theater, and the National Folkloric Ballet, as well as the experimental Grupo Krapp.[15] According to Susana Tambutti, renowned Argentine choreographer, dancer, and professor, one of the most significant contributions of the film is the opportunity to explore the positionality of independent dance vis-à-vis classical ballet and folkloric dance and to add to the sparse archive of filmed dance footage from Argentina (Tambutti, 2016, 189–90). As the film progresses, however, it shifts away from a documentary focus and turns to the fictional love story playing out between Acuña, choreographer and dancer in the Grupo Krapp, and Loro. At the same time, we witness interactions between the film director

(Walter Jakob) and a caricaturesque US film producer who has commissioned and funded the film, to be titled *Southern Dances*, by Capone Productions and distributed to markets in New York City, Miami, and Chicago. The US producer rides around with the filming crew and sits in on rehearsals, presses the director on deadlines, and exclaims emphatically while eating a *pancho*, "This is a great hotdog!" (*El loro y el cisne*, 2013). The US producer embodies the crassness, questionable ethics, and extractivist tendencies motivating the US-based production company signaled by the name Capone.

In the first scene of the film, Loro is seated in his car reading a scathing breakup letter from his ex-girlfriend, filled with insults and rage. The scene provides a first glimpse at the absurd hilarity that runs through the film, as Loro, a rather unassuming character throughout, seems unlikely to provoke such a furious emotional reaction. We witness this vein of absurd humor when, after filming rehearsals of the classical ballet companies, featuring traditional choreography of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, for example, the filming turns to Grupo Krapp, described with some irony as "cutting edge" in comparison to the official dance companies. In contrast to the tightly choreographed ballet and folkloric dances, the company representing contemporary dance, Grupo Krapp, introduces dancer Luis Biasotto hurling himself at the ground repeatedly and walking around the studio space playing a recorder with his shirt pulled over his head, rising and falling with the sound as if his body were a musical instrument. Looking on, the US producer seems puzzled by Biasotto's movement, and the director assures him that their work is all about "résistance!" This excites the US producer, who exclaims enthusiastically that "Miami will love that!" (*El loro y el cisne*, 2013). There is a sense throughout the film that the Argentine director is constantly translating the documentary footage into a consumable product for a US audience. This provides comic relief and further caricaturizes the naive US producer, who earnestly buys into the farce.

The film is not all about satirizing the relationship between local dance and international funders, however. The film also documents valuable testimony offered by Biasotto and Acuña exploring their creative process and the guiding philosophies behind their work. At one point in the film, the US producer asks Biasotto if he thinks he should get paid for what he does (in reference to contemporary dance). (*El loro y el cisne*, 2013). Whether perceived as insulting or earnest, the question brings to the fore the focus on the value and worth of dance labor and the arts in general outside of institutional or official space. As Kratje and Daggati assert, "money, credit, and instability" are three components of the precarious condition that afflicts artists in geographically peripheral areas (2017, 214). Kratje and Daggati identify "credit" as a major theme in the film (214). None of the performers ever have any credit on their cell phones, and the

phrase "I don't have any credit" becomes a refrain throughout the film. Credit is in some ways much more relevant than money in the film because it is crucial to be able to establish credit as an artist in order to get out of a precarious state. Susana Tambutti, too, discusses the importance of credit in the film: "It's not just a question of money, but rather that a part of the drama of being a dance artist is the attempt to legitimate and achieve social recognition" (Tambutti, 2016, 190). When the US producer asks Acuña and Biasotto what resistance means to them, Biasotto responds that it means "to feel disoriented all of the time; knowing that you can fail at any moment; to sink lower and lower into darkness; to believe in nothing" (*El loro y el cisne*, 2013). The tone of the film oscillates between extremes: on the one hand, satire, farce, and absurd humor and, on the other, an exploration of vulnerability, the unknown, and the abyss through creative experimentation.

Added to this expansive tonal range is the love story that comes into focus as the film progresses, based loosely on the story of *Swan Lake*, the ballet we see the La Plata company rehearsing in the film. In an interview, artistic director Mario Gallizzi explains that "all of the stories in ballet are identical," consisting of a love triangle and the fight between good and evil (*El loro y el cisne*, 2013). The maestro then describes the plot of *Swan Lake*, highlighting the main characters, Odette the Swan Queen, the Prince, and the evil sorcerer who has placed a curse on Odette. As Gallizzi begins to describe each character, Moguillansky inserts a close-up shot of Luciana, Loro, and the US producer, respectively, in an overdetermined manner to draw parallels between the two stories and sets of characters. In drawing these parallels, Moguillansky also connects the documentary and fictional layers of the film, though Moguillansky downplays the distinction between genres in interviews.

In discussing the evolution of the film, Moguillansky relates that he was interested in creating a documentary that became fictional over the course of the project (Mattio 2013). The result is, as Sosa calls it, "a film informed by never-ending layers of documentary and fiction" (2017b, 51). This gradual transformation of documentary into fiction over the course of the film is a pattern that we have seen in other films discussed in this book, such as Arias's *Teatro de guerra* (Theatre of War, 2018) and León's *Estrellas* (Stars, 2007), and we will see this again in Paula's *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again, 2019). Moguillansky is uninterested in defining the exact moment when documentary becomes fiction, or even in acknowledging a distinction between the two registers in the film, asserting instead that everything in the film is "real." The realness he refers to seems to relate largely to the way unpredictable events change the course of the film in unexpected ways. For example, Luciana realizes that she is pregnant during the filming, requiring flexibility and improvisation in altering the direction

of the film. The second half of the film shifts attention away from recording documentary footage of official dance companies, focusing more on Luciana and Loro's fictional romance. At the same time we see Luciana's real pregnancy progress, and toward the end of the film, we see Luciana at her real father's home in San Francisco, in the province of Córdoba, Argentina, with her baby.

The interplay between documentary and fiction is both an aesthetic experiment and the result of the low production budget of the film, which made it necessary for the film crew to use their own materials, lending another facet of realness to the project. For example, in an interview, Moguillansky reveals that the producer's car in the film is his car; Luciana's real father plays her father; and her apartment in the film is the actual apartment where she lived at the time: "The production is zero because the materials in the film are our own" (Mattio 2013). Moguillansky describes the scavenging of materials that the staging of scenes required and the effect this mode of production had on the film itself: "The film is very haphazard; we gathered materials based on scenes that I thought up and found entertaining" (Mattio 2013). Thus, while one layer of documentary is achieved conventionally through the visually striking takes of the dance companies' rehearsals, another layer emerges through the precarious nature of production and accentuates the material realness of the life stories and personal items featured in the film. To the sense of nonfictional realness achieved through Luciana's on-screen pregnancy and to the material realness generated through the use of all the personal items in the film, one must add the realness achieved through the intimate connections established through bonds of family, friendship, and artistic creation. In effect, the film features a lineage spanning three generations from Luciana's father to her infant daughter, Cleo. Complementing this intergenerational lineage are the families of artists formed more horizontally, including Grupo Krapp but also the film crew's friendship both on- and off-screen and the collective Pampero Cine.

Grupo Krapp's shared values belong to what Alicia Monchietti and Lucas Rimoldi have identified as an ecosystem generated through collaborative efforts tethering social and artistic formations (2017, 6). In their analysis of early twenty-first-century independent theater production in Buenos Aires, Rimoldi and Monchietti propose the concept of the "cohort of artist-managers" (*una cohorte de artistas-gestores*) adept at occupying roles of writer, director, and actor; promoting their work; and implementing collaborative modes of production (2020, 348). The notion of the "cohort" identifies a group of individuals sharing a set of characteristics and a form of belonging that is more horizontal in nature. Rimoldi and Monchietti note the ability of these artist-managers to negotiate artistic venues and partnerships with state and/or private institutions and the ways in which they establish artistic legitimacy through international funding,

stipends, invitations to international festivals, and participation in tours (348).

Like Pampero Cine, Grupo Krapp locates the creative origins of much of their work in the act of friendship. In an interview, Biasotto says, "We're not organized. The way our works have come together in the past is, we'll be sitting on a terrace having a drink and someone will say, 'let's make a work', as if saying 'let's make an *asado*'" (Yaccar 2016). Biasotto's comment signals the improvised nature of artistic creation in Grupo Krapp, which is nurtured by friendship, and the desire to work together with artistic and economic autonomy, on their own terms and independently of institutional support. These are traits that Andrea Giunta identifies in her work on postcrisis art in Argentina, rooted in a strong local tradition of collective art practice that flourished before the economic crisis but developed into a distinctive set of practices after 2001 that persisted into the Kirchner years (2011). As Giunta notes, the economic crisis "put solidarity and imagination to a test as the only possible resources for implementing forms of immediate subsistence, without mediation of any kind" (105). Artists valued working together collectively and in horizontal fashion; they saw themselves as researchers who based decisions on consensus; and they put a premium on self-management, networking, and the potential of contagion generated by cross-disciplinary work (113–17). With an emphasis on friendship, family, and collective artistic creation, Grupo Krapp can be described as what Jordana Blejmar, Cecilia Sosa, and Philippa Page call a "creative-affective community" (2022). Situated in a genealogy of works and interventions in Argentina that theorize friendship as a key component of community building and reparation of social ties, such as Argentine conceptual artist Roberto Jacoby's "tecnologías de la amistad" (technologies of friendship, 1998–2010) and NiUnaMenos's manifesto on political friendship (2018), Grupo Krapp links the affective and familial to acts of collective creation that blends art and life.

The theorization of political friendship by the NiUnaMenos collective, as a mode of activist intervention, offers insights toward understanding the affective and political dimensions of collaboration in Argentina post-2015. There are relevant points of contact in how the concept of friendship is used by NiUnaMenos and artist groups such as Grupo Krapp and Pampero Cine, who create work collectively, horizontally, and in critical opposition to neoliberal forms of production. In the anthology of documents and manifestos by NiUnaMenos, *Amistad política + inteligencia colectiva*, authors describe writing together as an act of political friendship and collective intelligence, an act that does not seek to represent their movement but rather serves as an additional mode of intervention and a way to "occupy the streets, reinvent communal space and to explode state-centric, patriarchal, and colonial discourse" (2018, 4). As we will see throughout this chapter, the friendship between Grupo Krapp members and with Pampero

Cine is at once affective and political, reflecting both the long histories of personal relationships, shared experiences, and familial ties and a mode of collective creation that in some ways resembles the *asamblea* structure with its emphasis on consensus, horizontality, and self-sustaining work.[16] Grupo Krapp and Pampero Cine also seek to expand and reenvision public performance spaces and create work that critiques the colonial dynamics of international funding structures.

Frames Within Frames Within Frames

Moguillansky first conceived of the idea for *El loro y el cisne* while filming rehearsals of Grupo Krapp's *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado B)*, the first piece in a two-part conceptual performance that lends space to the group's reflections on death. Rehearsals of *Lado B* appear in the film *El loro*, which is projected on-screen during the play *Por el dinero*. While critics frequently describe *El loro* as a film within a film because of its conscious reflection on filmmaking and its filmic framing of the work of the sound technician, what is sometimes overlooked is the framing of and by dance and theater in the film. In effect, *El loro* presents audiences with a film within a film but also dance within a film within a film and theater within a film within a film. While the extent of framing here is dizzying, it is also not uncharacteristic of work explored in this book.[17] These techniques reveal the desire for cross-media contagion and a playfulness in breaking down disciplinary boundaries, which at the same time might also allude to a productive artistic dislocation between fiction and the real.

Lado A and *Lado B* foreshadow scenes and questions relating to art and death taken up in subsequent works, by Arias in *Melancholy and Demonstrations* and by Grupo Krapp in *Réquiem*. They also introduce an aspect of melancholy that intersects with Grupo Krapp's exploration of economic precarity. Premiered as part of the Works in Progress series at the Festival Buenos Aires Danza Contemporánea (Buenos Aires Contemporary Dance Festival) in 2010, *Lado B* came about in the wake of the death of one of Krapp's members, lighting designer Marcelo Álvarez (Cruz 2011). *Lado B* captures the moment in which company members are in the early stages of grieving yet unable to articulate their experience of loss. Acuña confesses, "It was extremely hard for us to talk about death. So, we made the decision to let others talk" (Cruz 2011). For example, at the beginning of the performance, someone from the audience is selected at random to come onstage, put on headphones, and repeat the following, "I am going to talk in the first person. I am the audience. I'm an audience that speaks to another audience" (Cruz 2011). These same words are repeated as a voice-over narration in

Réquiem, discussed below. It is the second part of the performance, *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado A)* (Where Do the Dead Go? [Side A]), that tackles the question of how to represent death. Premiered several months after *Lado B, Lado A* brought together ten artists (among them Lola Arias, Federico León, Mariano Pensotti, and Rafael Spregelburd) who were interviewed about their ideas for representing death onstage. While audiences watched their filmed testimony on a screen located stage left, performers from Grupo Krapp simultaneously enacted the artists' proposals for how to represent death onstage.

Réquiem (2021): Intermedial Acts of Copresence

In May 2021, Luis Biasotto, a founding member of Krapp, passed away from complications relating to COVID-19, sending waves of shock and grief through dance communities in Argentina and around the world. In the wake of his sudden death, Grupo Krapp created the piece *Réquiem* to mourn and celebrate the life of Biasotto. Not quite a retrospective or an homage, as cofounder Acuña notes, the work represents Grupo Krapp's desire to create a work together *with* Luis, not *for* Luis. As such, "Luis is present more than ever" (Antuña and Antuña 2022). Through audiovisual documentation of his image and his past work projected on a screen onstage, readings of his notes of works in progress at the time of his death, and recollection of dreams in which Luis appears, members of Krapp conjure his presence. Staged as part of the Fourth Biennale of Performance in Buenos Aires at the Centro Cultural Kirchner in December 2021, the piece brings together members of the dance company Krapp (Gabriel Almendros, Fernando Tur, Edgardo Castro, Luis Biasotto, and Luciana Acuña) with long-standing collaborators and members of the technical team: Alejo Moguillansky, filmmaker and curator of the audiovisual archive of Biasotto's work during the piece; Mariana Tirantte, stage designer; Matías Sendón; lighting designer; and Gabriela Gobbi, producer, theorist, and Biasotto's partner and mother of their child, who was born just months after Biasotto's death.

Réquiem performs the feat of making one present while deferring to its impossibility and reflecting on the unimaginable loss of the company's collaborator and friend. Grupo Krapp reveals the mechanics of audiovisual production onstage, effectively pulling the spectator into the creative process. Krapp exposes the inner workings of the group, obliterating the boundaries between process and production and introducing members of production and the technical crew as onstage performers. Together they explode roles, genres, and the work itself, described by Acuña as all mixed up, "fused and confused," as if a bomb had gone off in each of their previous creative works, leaving them to put together the pieces (Pacheco 2021). Artists reassemble pieces together as an act of love,

Figure 6. *Réquiem, la última cinta del Grupo Krapp* (Requiem, Krapp's Last Tape), Central Cultural Kirchner, Buenos Aires, 2021. Performers: Luciana Acuña, Alejo Moguillansky, Fernando Tur, Gabriel Almendros, Gabriela Gobbi, Mariana Tirantte, Matías Sendón. Photograph courtesy of Luciana Acuña.

healing, and creative anarchy: "It doesn't matter who we are or whether we're making a performance or concert or what, or even if we are alive or dead" (Varela 2021).[18] The technical team joins the artistic members of Krapp to represent the impossible through an extraordinary feat of editing, in which the past is commemorated, brought into the present, and reimagined in the future through a work that crosses the borders between life and death.

Due to COVID-19, I was unable to see this work in person at its premiere, and I base my analysis on the filmed recording of the work available publicly on YouTube and on conversations with spectators who were there. Perhaps the only advantage to seeing *Réquiem* on YouTube is that the performance has been divided into thirteen chapters, not visible to in-person spectators, giving the online version an accessible and curated feel and enhancing the archival aspect of the performance. Titles frequently refer to the songs written and played by Fernando Tur and Gabriel Almendros, like "I Wish" and "Get It Down," and occasionally refer to the theme of the scene, as in "Críticas" (Reviews), when Acuña reads reviews of Krapp's work to the audience. The opening scene reveals six microphones lined up onstage against the backdrop of a large screen divided into six panels. A drum set, desk and computer, and lighting equipment inhabit

stage left and right. On the back screen, we see footage of rehearsals including members of Krapp, some including Luis Biasotto. We see performers onscreen moving with urgency to loud, pulsating music. And then complete darkness and a voice welcoming the audience to the performance with the following announcement, fragments of which are taken from the work *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado B)*:

> I am the bearer of the body and voice of Compañía Krapp
> This is not a work in progress
> It is a release
> Many scenes that will form part of a work that doesn't exist
> I am going to speak in the first person
> I will not be responsible for what happens onstage.
> I am also the audience
> An audience that speaks to another audience and for a moment stopped being an audience. (*Réquiem*, 2021)[19]

Articulated in the disorienting darkness, these words anchor audiences while at the same time creating a shared vulnerability through the expectation of risk. The manifesto-like pronouncement creates suspense in this anticipation of what might happen onstage, always future looking, though the piece also situates itself in the aftermath, as a release in the wake of a tragic event that affected the members of Krapp collectively and individually, here expressed explicitly in the first person but shifting in and out of position to occupy the role of the audience or spectator witnesses. The work, anarchic in its embrace of an unpredictable future, revives memories of lived experiences and documents from the past. One rule guided the work's creation: No member could ever do anything onstage that Luis did. For Acuña, it was imperative to highlight that no performative strategy could fill his absence (Varela 2021). In this sense, the performance concert is not a work in progress and the scenes that are assembled for *Réquiem* will never be part of a new work. *Réquiem* is a reflection on and acknowledgment of Luis's artistic work and the expenditure of bodily labor in the past that cannot be replicated by another person onstage but that through filmed documentation of this labor can continue to reappear in subsequent works, as we will see further on.

As the voice penetrates the darkness, two lights from onstage blink on and off slowly, pulsating rhythmically, like two eyes opening and closing, a beating heart or an SOS call from a ship at sea. The lights, combined with the voice, activate the senses, making audiences acutely aware of body, sight, and sound and the relationship between light and darkness, which structures the performance. In the scene "Walking Light," Gabriela Gobbi talks to the audience about what

was going to be Luis's next work, *Noche* (Night), a work that, reading from Luis's notes, is "about darkness and the monsters that inhabit our minds." Though Luis was unable to finish the work, Gobbi confides that there is something of his last work in *Réquiem*.

At moments during the performance, light becomes a protagonist and acquires presence through movement and interaction with onstage performers. In the beginning of the scene "Get It Down," Tur says to Acuña, "Lu, do the duet you used to dance with Luis." And Acuña responds, "Alone?" Tur replies, "Alone, no." A circle of light appears onstage, and Acuña yells, "Who is it?" And Tur says, "It's Matías Sendón, light designer, who else would it be?" The audience laughs softly, and Acuña begins to dance a duet with a circle of light that moves across the stage in unison with Acuña, marking Luis's place. At the end of the duet, Acuña takes aim and pretends to shoot at the circle of light. The sound of gunshots reverberates in the theater space as the light moves upward, as if released, traveling silently across the entire theater space beyond the stage, while audiences follow the light with their eyes.

The light travels across the darkened theater and moves freely between the audience and the performance space, its movement unhindered by gravity or the physical textures of the space. As Rudi Laermans observes, in recent contemporary dance, light becomes an independent force onstage, moving dance "beyond its human-centered understanding" (2010, 230). Light rays acquire their own protagonism and "no longer just emphasize bodily actions, adding or subtracting possible meanings, but interact with them as movements displaying their own characteristic physicality" (231). The light's movement defies the laws of gravity controlling dancers' bodies onstage and traditional conventions of theater demarcating audience and performers' space. At the end of the scene, the light vanishes and rolling text illuminates the dark screen, generating for the second time in the performance a moment of reflection in which the group ponders its future and the relationship between audience and darkness, life, and death in theater:

> Now the group finally understands that after all these years, the group has died. They ask themselves if darkness is the form theater takes after death. They realize that for the first time they are together with the audience in darkness in the same space. They ask why theater requires spectators to be in darkness and actors to be in the light. They realize that darkness makes everything more democratic, like death. They ask themselves if it might be possible that the one who died is present in the darkness. The group finds it absurd to think of ghosts, but they still think of him. (*Réquiem*, 2021)[20]

Here darkness erases the division between audience and performance space, bringing performers and spectators, alive and dead, together in an act of copresence. It represents throughout the performance, as articulated here, a space for fantasy and imagination, where Luis can be present. The enveloping darkness also reminds performers and audiences more generally of the impact of COVID-19 on theater, the headlines announcing in March 2020 that theaters around the world had gone dark.

The use of light to summon presence and absence in this work creates a powerful spectrality that is further enhanced through the reproduction of documentary footage of Luis projected on-screen in the back of the stage. In the scene "I Wish," Moguillansky curates Luis's digital archive on-screen and onstage to enact his copresence. The audiovisual archive adds an additional layer of spectrality to theater, a genre obsessed with haunting and ghostly returns and generating encounters with "the identical thing" in a "somewhat different context" (Carlson 2003, 20). Theater spectators are already conditioned to engage in the suspension of disbelief, and the intermedial aspect of the performance accentuates this suspension, or, in this case, the desire for real copresence. The scene features a video of Luis wearing jeans and a V-neck sweater, standing with his arms crossed, shifting weight subtly from one foot to the other, a witness to what is happening onstage, where Acuña is seated with Fernando Tur, Gabriel Almendros, and Alejo Moguillansky, who accompany Acuña on guitar. As Acuña narrates, their music marks the passage of grief through its slow, meditative pace. Luis appears to be listening intently to Acuña, who narrates recent dreams she has had that capture her visceral reaction to the extreme loss of her friend, everyday moments of humor they shared, and surreal transhumanist fantasies. After each dream recollection, the on-screen image of Luis multiplies, until at the very end of the scene there are eight images of Luis witnessing Acuña's retelling of her dreams. It is only the subtle flickering of the image at times and the multiplication of the image that remind us that co-presence is an illusion. He is simultaneously a part of the performance, engaged in co-creation with Krapp, and a witness, listener, and captive audience to the live performance unfolding onstage.

Acuña's dreams, blending fact and fiction, evoke the imagination, speculation, and storytelling that motivate recent experimental choreography, according to Lepecki, who observes that the dancer claims the role of "transmitting speculative experience aimed at times that are yet to come, and in this sense reorients dance toward formations of futurity, as opposed to the notion that dance moves toward the past" (2017, 150). In the account of her dreams, Acuña's storytelling is speculative and alludes to the formation of a magical future, though against the backdrop of the screened images of Luis, a provocative contrast develops

between the real past and a dreamed-of future, demonstrating how screened aspects of choreography have the potential to influence the temporality of dance. In the most detailed dream, Acuña describes a gathering on Luis's birthday, where they are all sitting around having a drink. Suddenly, a dog stands up on its hind legs, revealing itself to be enormous, "with a manly torso and ripped abs, strong arms," and paws that turned into gigantic hands before them (*Réquiem*, 2021). Tur, in the background, sings "I Wish I Was an Animal." In the dream, the half beast half man grabs a bottle of cleaning product (Poett) from the table and downs it before turning back into a dog, as if nothing had happened. In the dream, we witness once again a conjuring of presence, this time a transhumanist fantasy, in which a dog, transformed into man, exhibits superhero powers when he drinks the bottle of cleaning product. The scene evokes the absurd, the fantastic, and, maybe most profoundly, the longed-for hope of return or the magical reappearance of their friend and collaborator. At the same time, it refers audiences back to an earlier scene in the performance, "I Got the Face," featuring clips from the group's 2017 performance *El futuro de los hipopótamos* (The Future of the Hippopotamuses) projected on-screen, depicting five members of Krapp donning shiny futuristic attire, zipping across the stage on electric Onewheels. One wears a black feathered bird mask with a long beak; another wears a long blond wig that blends into a shaggy fur outfit. The work is a meditation on the future: whether dystopian or utopian remains unclear. It is a world in which "beasts and humans cohabitate freely, things become live beings, death becomes a fantasy, and rebirth is a part of everyday life and eternity."[21] An obsession with how the past haunts the future, the relationship between life and death, and the impossibility of distinguishing between creation and destruction are themes central to the work that carry over into *Réquiem*.

Transcending the categories of animals and humans, live beings, and things highlights an interest in transhumanism that, in the context of COVID-19, reveals what Fintan Walsh refers to as "a desperately optimistic discourse of life extension, weighed down by an underlying burden of unresolved grief for the inevitability of death." In his article "Grief Machines," Walsh views transhumanism as unifying in its ability to address multiple vectors of loss resulting from COVID-19, providing the space for reflection on how the death of theater has intersected with the mass human death during the pandemic (2021, 393). Transhumanism's "desirability of radical human enhancement," in the context of Krapp's *Réquiem*, takes shape through an array of artistic forms, media, and techniques, whether through animal masks, furry and feathered costumes, or dreams of metamorphosis in which animals become humans and vice versa (Ross 2020, 5, qtd. in Walsh 2021, 393). In *Réquiem*, transhumanist performance facilitates the fantasy of life extension and a space for reimagining return, reenacting presence, and mourning the loss of their friend and collaborator.

While transhumanism in Grupo Krapp's work proliferates alternative channels of life through metamorphosis from human to animal form, the transfers between document and live performance similarly create a dynamic, translational space in which past and presence, life and death are joined symbiotically in repeating and extending the creative work of a group that has declared its ending. A central question for Schneider and other scholars invested in examining the relationship between performance and its documentation is how to conceive of the remains of performance, whether through reenactment or the creation of a digital archive.[22] Authors elsewhere urge a shift in focus to the multiple media transfers involved in capturing performance remains, framed as transmissions, transpositions, and migrations from one medium to another and from "artefact, document, or work to an event" (Foellmer et al. 2020, 3).

In *Réquiem*, Krapp conjures the co-presence of their collaborator through a range of intermedial and performative techniques that transmit, transpose, and migrate past affects and traces to the present. In the scene "Sharom," for example, Krapp loosely reenacts their second performance piece, *Mendiolaza (Un drama coreográfico)* (Mendiolaza, a Choreographed Drama, 2003), bringing the audiovisual archive of the 2003 performance back to life. Inspired by popular fiestas that Acuña and Biasotto had witnessed in small towns in Córdoba, where they grew up, *Mendiolaza* featured a host of "bizarre creatures" whose physical movement is described as "frenetic," "extreme," and "ferocious" and features kamikaze leaps and horizontal falls (Prieto 2013a). Considered one of Krapp's most important works, *Mendiolaza* captures their signature dance language at the time of the premiere in 2003 and the rejection of the contact improvisation that was in vogue in favor of bodily collisions and physical risks onstage (Halfon 2013a). With a choreography described as both "animalistic and tender," the performance combined dance, theater, and music and consolidated Krapp's commitment to including diverse bodies onstage belonging to dancers and nondancers (Halfon 2013a).

In *Réquiem*, during the scene "Sharom," audiences see videos of the 2003 performance of *Mendiolaza* on-screen while a live band plays onstage. Krapp members accompany the video on drums and guitar while Acuña performs breathwork stage left, hyperventilating to the beat of the music. At the end of the scene, Acuña, center stage, faces the audience, glances back at the video to synchronize her movement, and performs the same dance leap as her 2003 self, producing both an act of simultaneous movement in the present and a reenactment of the past, highlighting once again the diverse techniques *Réquiem* employs to collapse and highlight the passage of time. The insert of the video footage of *Mendiolaza* in *Réquiem* illustrates how Krapp manipulates the digital archive to generate copresence, affectively bringing the remains into the present.

Mendiolaza also provides a site of introspection for the group, as it has a rich

history of reiteration and was one of the key performances restaged as part of the *Retrospective* of Krapp's work sponsored by the San Martín Cultural Center in 2013, a title Krapp members insisted on changing to the *Retrocedida*. The preference for the word *retroceder* (translated as "go back" or, in some cases, "move backward" or "retreat") reveals the group's self-deprecating humor and irony and also reveals their desire to move away from the concept of a retrospective and instead to propose the *Retrocedida* as an opportunity to research the question of what it means to try and reproduce past works (Prieto 2013b). The *Retrocedida* featured restagings of five of Krapp's most important works, including *Mendiolaza* (2003), *Olympica* (2007), *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado B)* (2010), and *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado A)* (2011), and included videos, documentaries, and a series of roundtables. Grupo Krapp's idea of the *Retrocedida* was experimental and interactive and was concerned above all with how to reanimate in the present artistic work performed in the past.

The *Retrocedida* ends with the unique experiment of restaging Krapp's first work, *No me besabas* (You Didn't Kiss Me, 2000), premiered at the Centro Cultural Rojas in 2000 and restaged as part of Grupo Krapp's North American debut in 2002 at the Roda Theater in Berkeley. The work was amply reviewed by critics, but there is scant video evidence of the work, making its reproduction thirteen years later that much more difficult. Grupo Krapp members decided to convene three choreographers (Celia Argüello Rena, Florencia Vecino, and the group Los Mismos) to re-create three distinct versions of the work, based on reviews, photographs, and interviews with Grupo Krapp (Prieto 2013b). This last experiment highlights Grupo Krapp's interest in the archive, even when there barely is one, especially compared to later work that is extensively documented and intervened by film. In reproducing this work, choreographers rely on ethnographical methods, interviews, and the excavation of traces (photos, reviews). Choreographers stage the lives of others at the same time they stage their own, a kind of Biodrama with a focus on the real lives of those who are doing the staging and not on the performers whose lives are staged.

The *Retrocedida* proved to be a vital experiment for Krapp and an opportunity for the group to reflect on their identity, performance trajectory, and evolving dance language and aesthetic priorities. Described by critic Mercedes Halfon as "déjà vu espectacular," the *Retrocedida* explores the physical, affective, and intellectual demands and effects of embodying memory ("poner el cuerpo a un recuerdo") (2013a). The *Retrocedida* thus undertakes questions of reenactment, the body as archive, and explores the way the dancing body "releases layers of memory affects, photographic contact, digital depth, and choreo/graphing" (Lepecki 2004, 6). The group's rejection of the term "retrospective" reveals their wariness of showcasing works as consumable objects, frozen in time, museum-like

and unalterable. Krapp's consistent use of audiovisual documentation in their later work adds nuance to questions of the ephemeral, the archive, the collapsing of time, and present and past bodies. In filming their process, they are less interested in creating an object and more interested in creating an intimate archive, a family album whose images reappear in subsequent works and offer glimpses of the past. The audiovisual archive contributes to the preservation of the group's memory and moments of their aesthetic and emotional trajectory. While the camera participates in the preservation of a record of their work, it also captures moments of improvisation, risk, and exploration; the camera thus engages in related but different functions of the reproduction of art and the ethnographic work of capture (Auslander 2018, 36). Krapp's interest in returning to past language, bodies, and gestures reveals the adventurous spirit of a group unafraid of reencountering the past and revisiting old methods, as a mode of self-reassessment in the present.

The group's reflections are telling of their own preoccupations. Acuña talks about the paranoia the group felt about the possibility of recovering the language they had developed for *Mendiolaza*, a language they had outgrown as a group. Biasotto wonders about how to represent a past work and whether you're in the past or present when you reenact something you've done a long time ago (Lingenti 2013, 3). Schneider explores this question in her discussion of the temporality of reenactment: "What is the time of a live act when a live act is reiterative?" (2011, 37). Ultimately, the *Retrocedida* reinforced Krapp's vision of their work as a process of investigation. The return of *Mendiolaza* almost ten years later, reenacted in the performance piece *Réquiem*, acquires new layers of meaning and affective significance in the wake of loss. The reenactment of the work is commemorative and a part of the process of mourning that the piece conveys, yet much like the whole of the performance, this newest version of *Mendiolaza* resists objecthood or completion; it exists somewhere between life and death, memory and future iteration. Embedded in *Réquiem*, the newest reiteration of *Mendiolaza* contributes to an archive in flux, one that is process oriented rather than object oriented. Gabriella Giannachi examines the shifting function of the archive in relation to the arts and argues, along with Simone Osthoff, that users of the archive are now co-creators of an archive that is no longer stable and retroactive but generative (Giannachi 2023, 15; Osthoff 2009, 12). Members of Krapp, too, are archivists, users, and co-creators of a multisensorial archive, one that includes audiovisual documentation and embodied traces of past performance. In flux and constantly evolving, the archive is also "where we bear witness to our encounter with the remains of history" (Giannachi 2023, 143). As Krapp shows, bearing witness through performance and the reiteration of past work reanimates and reimagines the remains of history in the present and into the

future, sustaining the fantasy of copresence and defying any foreseeable ending of their work.

Hielo negro (2022): Theater by Ghosts

Though in the performance of *Réquiem* Krapp members allude to the death of the group, they in fact continue to produce work; their performance *Hielo negro* stages the last work Biasotto had started to work on with Acuña in 2019 but was unable to complete. There is a sense that everything Grupo Krapp does starting with *Réquiem* constitutes a kind of afterlife, works in which Luis continues to be present even after his death. *Hielo negro* originated while Acuña and Biasotto were in a dance residency at Colgate University in February 2019, where they were leading a seminar. Inspired by the snowy landscape, unfamiliar and magical to them, they began to work on a new performance that would be workshopped in three residencies over the next two years in the US, Ecuador, and La Plata, Argentina, each time capturing the rehearsal process and a work constantly in progress. A fourth iteration of the work is an "apocryphal" documentary short that Acuña and Biasotto created as a way of reflecting on the creative process, incorporating photos from their everyday lives and a voice-over narrating the history of two friends (Eandi 2022). The plan was to premiere the work at the Sarmiento Theater in 2020, when the pandemic hit. It can best be envisioned as an epilogue to *Réquiem*, as it is closely linked in theme and follows some of the same rules that guided the group in creating *Réquiem*. As Acuña notes, the performance is a work about death but also about two friends. In a text she cowrote with Luis in 2020, they cite the work's interest in ghosts, the "unfathomable abyss of creation," impossible landscapes, and the liminal space between fantasy and reality (Pacheco 2022). The program for the 2022 performance introduces Acuña and Biasotto as ghosts who become present through representation; "authors who died and return disguised in the present: How do you make theater after death? How do you make theater with ghosts?" ("Danza BA" 2022). *Hielo negro* marks the first time that Biasotto and Acuña were the only two performers in a work, and for that reason, the final staging of the work proved to be particularly challenging. Acuña explains that there was no one person who could perform Luis's part onstage, so she came up with the solution of including three performers, each of whom possessed aspects of Luis's character, to play his role and distribute his extraordinary energy. The result is a beautiful homage and a chaotic, fragmented, physically explosive work without resolution, a work critics describe as absurd, dreamlike, precarious, and filled with uncertainty ("*Hielo negro*" 2022).

Réquiem and *Hielo negro* attend intimately to the loss of Luis and conjure

Figure 7. *Hielo negro* (Black Ice), Teatro Sarmiento, Buenos Aires, 2022. Actors: Luciana Acuña, Milva Leonardi, Santiago Gobernori, and Francisco Dibar. Photograph by Carlos Furman.

his presence through a range of embodied and audiovisual techniques. In both works, Acuña expresses commitment to collaborating with Luis in the present: "Luis will always be in my work; it's impossible for me to think of work without having him close. He is in me" ("*Hielo negro*" 2022). While in *Réquiem* members of Grupo Krapp grieve and celebrate their friend and collaborator, *Hielo negro* is driven by Acuña's desire to complete a project she and Biasotto had begun and worked on together. Yet, as in *Réquiem*, completion, closure, and even death are met with resistance through the reiteration of past performances and the creation of "déjà vu espectacular," the blurring of process and production, and the reconfiguration of material in new forms. Both works create space for the cohabitation of life and death and expand the notion of the human through exploration of fantastical landscapes, dreamlike narration, and animalistic costumes and movement. Particularly, *Hielo negro*, inspired by a dangerous and unpredictable phenomenon, allows for what Acuña describes as "error as method" or the "flirtation with the precipice," which also describes the artistic urge to "throw oneself into the abyss" (Eandi 2022). The fantastic, imaginary, magical elements of the works, juxtaposed with the exploration of vulnerability, risk, and the unpredict-

able, create tensions and synergies for performers and spectators, implicated together in these works through techniques that draw audiences into the performance, for example, through direct address, the use of lighting to eliminate boundaries between performance and audience space, and the baring devices that reveal the behind-the-scenes work, props, equipment, and technologies that transform material into performance and acknowledge the audience's presence in the process. Driven by loss and grief and the question of how to create art after death, *Réquiem* and *Hielo negro* are works of magic, encompassing past and present, life and death, and documentary and the real. Grupo Krapp's work over time creates an archive of memory that resists completion and generates new work.

Throughout this chapter I have sought to bring into dialogue contemporary dance, theater, and film through analysis of the collaborative work between the dance company Grupo Krapp and the film company Pampero Cine. Familial, interdisciplinary, and intermedial, their collaborations generate new modes of creation, production, presentation, and dissemination that value the unpredictable, improvised, live performance; shared resources and roles; a blending of fact and fiction; and unconventional venues. Pampero Cine borrows actors from independent theater and premieres their work in theaters and museums. Grupo Krapp consistently incorporates videos clips of rehearsals and fragments of films created and edited by Alejo Moguillansky, making Pampero's films seem more like live performance and Grupo Krapp's works seem more like films. The playful subversion of traditional performance and film genres in their work results in a dynamic fluidity between past and present able to encompass both forward- and retrospective-looking approaches to loss and grief. While precarity is central to the themes and working conditions of both groups, and both groups work from the margins of the independent arts scene, they both find resistance through solidarity and artistic collaboration.

4: Romina Paula

Translating the Fantasy of the Real

Romina Paula is one of Argentina's most celebrated artists, winning critical acclaim both at home and abroad for her plays, films, and novels. The imaginative use of translation and citation in her plays and films reveals her love of literature but more poignantly signals a complex play with time and the conjuring of uncanny doubles, a haunting superimposition of past and present, and a comingling of time frames and contexts. Paula is highly regarded for her inventive exploration of narrative voice, her ability to evoke vulnerability in characters and audiences, and her clever interweaving of literary and visual intertexts in her work. In this book, Paula is unique for being the artist who is most committed to fiction, yet she nonetheless reveals a profound interest in the real through strategic use of an ethnographic style of writing, documentary techniques, and personal objects in her work. In this sense, Paula is a skilled conjurer of the fantasy of the real.

In this chapter, I trace Paula's artistic trajectory, beginning with a more dominant realist style in her early plays; moving into experimentation in narrative voice, alternative forms of kinship, and documentary techniques in her later work; and concluding with a more detailed analysis of the play *Fauna* (2013) and her autofictional films *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again, 2019) and *Edición ilimitada* (Unlimited Edition, 2020), the latter cowritten and directed by Paula and Edgardo Cozarinsky, Santiago Loza, and Virginia Cosin. I discuss the richly collaborative nature of Paula's work, her artistic self-translations, and the diverse artistic communities that inspire her. Throughout the chapter, I situate her work in dialogue with the transformative feminisms and shifting perspectives on gender, sexuality, and reproductive health in Argentina.

Paula's interdisciplinary work engages translation as metaphor, practice, and theme. As metaphor, translation helps to understand the multiple transformations, migrations, transpositions, and transfers between languages, genres, and diverse media (Trastoy 2012; Foellmer et al. 2020; Graham-Jones 2021). I exam-

ine the back-and-forth movement in Paula's work between stage and screen as a kind of translation that creates heightened awareness of how past performances are reinscribed, documented, and reanimated in subsequent works. As practice, I analyze the role of translation in Paula's creative process and her translation into Spanish of German and English poetic and literary texts in her work. And as theme, the act of translation is referenced explicitly in *Fauna* and *Again Once Again* as a defining practice and key to exploring questions of identity, heritage, and family, as well as questions related to the limits of language and performance, the legitimacy of voice, and the narrating of life stories. As co-translator with April Sweeney of Paula's plays *Algo de ruido hace* (The Sound It Makes, 2007), *Fauna* (2013), and *Cimarrón* (Rewilding 2016) in the anthology *Fauna: and Other Plays* (2023) by Romina Paula, I reflect on my own role as researcher and translator of Paula's *Fauna* and my collaboration with Sweeney, who directed the play for its New York City debut at the Torn Page Theater in 2022.

Paula's Plays and Novels: An Evolving Dialogue

Key to understanding Paula's innovative use of narrative voice is an appreciation of the many artistic roles and positions she occupies as writer, director, actor, and filmmaker. Paula's trajectories as playwright and novelist have developed in parallel and in dialogue with one another. Argentine playwright Mauricio Kartún once commented that Paula writes theater as if it were narrative and writes novels as if they were theater (Soto 2016). Indeed, while her novels are praised for their unique use of dialogue, her plays are often complexly interwoven with literary intertexts. Paula has published four novels—*¿Vos me querés a mí?* (Do You Love Me?, 2005), *Agosto* (August, 2009), *Acá todavía* (Still Here, 2016), and *Hija biográfica* (Biographical Daughter, 2025)—in addition to *Archivos de Word* (Word Archives, 2020), a collection of short stories and essays, and *Otra cosa es permanecer* (Another Thing Is to Remain, 2024), an anthology of short opinion pieces and chronicles she wrote for the newspaper *El Diario Argentino*.[1] Elsa Drucaroff includes Paula's novels in the capacious category of new Argentine narrative, which includes authors born after 1960 and whose works started appearing during the post-dictatorship nineties and onward. As Drucaroff notes, the novels produced during the post-dictatorship period excel at linking the intimate to the public sphere and exploring the complex politics of class and gender (2011, 252). In her discussion of Argentina narrative, Florencia Angilleta notes the importance of the use of the first person in translating intimate experiences into public ones in the wake of Argentina's 1994 constitutional reform, which acknowledged a more expansive rights framework and a gender perspective.

Angilleta cites Paula's use of the first person as an example of how writers align the politics of their private lives with the public politics of the feminist movement and LGBTQIA+ activism.[2] According to Angilleta, the use of the first person urges a subtle alignment that does not insist on fixed identities of what it means to be a woman, lesbian, or feminist (2018, 99). Rather, in these novels, authors play with the potential of the first person to rehearse different ways of expressing a relationship to a community (100). This relationality is central to Paula's work and describes how she articulates her positionality through her writing without explicitly identifying her politics.

Paula has received praise for her innovative use of narrative voice and second-person address in her novels, prominent in *¿Vos me querés a mí?* and *Agosto*. Paula attended writing workshops, eager to learn new literary techniques, but she eventually started to write dialogue almost exclusively from material excerpted from her diary (Paula 2018). Reminiscent of a journal entry, this style has led critics to identify an ethnographic impulse in Paula's novels. Beatriz Sarlo identifies a shift from an interpretive approach in the novels of the eighties to a more ethnographic one in the early twenty-first century, reflecting a move away from the urgency to reinterpret the dictatorial past and toward reflection on the present (Sarlo 2006a, 1). Sarlo includes Paula in this group and discusses her novel *¿Vos me querés a mí?* in detail, citing it as a perfect example of the use of a "cinta grabada" (tape recording) style (4). For Sarlo, the dialogues in Paula's novel so closely resemble authentic speech that they seem like an exercise in linguistic ethnography (4). In her 2007 essay "Literaturas postautónomas," Josefina Ludmer identifies a corpus of works documenting the everyday reality of urban life in Buenos Aires that resists categorization as literature or literary analysis (2007). Taking the form of testimony, autobiography, journalism, diaries, and "even ethnography," these works eschew traditional realism and seem indifferent to distinctions between fiction and reality (Ludmer 2007). The ethnographic traits in Paula's writing once again invite interpretations of a documentary style in her work, though as I show later, the presence of documentary style in Paula's theater and film reveals strategies for reflecting on what is real or fiction without attempting or desiring to escape theatricality.

Retelling is another trademark of Paula's writing, and one that draws attention to narrative voice, translation, and citation. She employs the technique of retelling not only to describe characters who are absent from the stage but also to weave in productive intertextual references through the retelling of a wide range of works, like Sarah Ruhl's *Late: A Cowboy Song* (2003), the short story "La canción que cantábamos todos los días" (The Song We Sang Everyday, 2013) by Luciano Lamberti, or "La intrusa" (The Intruder, 1966) by Jorge Luis Borges. These examples of retelling are explicit in her works; a character draws attention

to the fact that they are retelling a story they've heard or read, sometimes mentioning that they don't remember some of the details in the retelling. Retelling in Paula's work is just one aspect of the adventurous exploration of narrative voice present in all of her work, notably in her use of the second person in her novels, citation, and her rigorous questioning of the use of first person in film. She switches roles between director, writer, actor, and translator in her work with ease, calling attention to the translation strategies of modulation and transposition as she changes point of view and mode of artistic expression. Paula grew up in a bilingual household speaking Spanish and German, and she attended German school in Argentina. She exemplifies the traits of a self-translator in this multimodal, multidirectional capacity. Through her translations of intertexts from German and English, she creates a community of coexisting voices and subject positions that reflect on one another simultaneously and in dialogue.

Like the other artists included in this book, Paula borrows from theater, film, photography, dance, and music. Paula started acting in film in 2006 and in 2011 had her breakthrough role in Santiago Mitre's film *El estudiante* (The Student). She has also worked closely with Argentine filmmaker Matías Piñeiro, acting in three of his Shakespeare-inspired films, *Rosalinda* (2010), *Viola* (2012), and *La princesa de Francia* (The Princess of France, 2014), together with Piñeiro's regular cast of actors including Agustina Muñoz and two members from the group Piel de Lava, Elisa Carricajo and Laura Paredes. She wrote her first film, *De nuevo otra vez*, in 2019, a film in which she also stars along with her mother and son. Despite working more frequently in film, Paula nonetheless feels that she belongs in independent theater, where artists are "united by a shared mode of production" and everyone gets a share (Paula 2018). According to Paula, multitasking is good for artists, because of the dialogue and contagion that result from cross-disciplinary creation (2018). Even when working primarily within one discipline, Paula seeks out ways of connecting or creating what she refers to as "hyperlinks" to other ideas, texts, and media through incorporating intertexts from literature, music, and the visual arts (Sabatés 2017).

The Intertextual Universe of Paula's Theater

Paula's plays are broadly influenced by Argentine literature, contemporary North American theater, German romanticism, diverse strands of feminism, the visual arts, and pop culture. One of her greatest interlocutors is the Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke, whose reflections on art, identity, love, and death are central to her dramatic works, in particular *Fauna* and *Rewilding*. Paula introduces her play *Fauna* with her own translation of Rilke's "Todeserfahrung" (Death Experience). Her plays are frequently in dialogue with one or more

canonical works, such as Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* in *El Tiempo todo entero* (The Whole of Time) and Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Intruder" in *The Sound It Makes*. Paula radically retells and transforms the stories in these works while at the same time questioning the patriarchal structures that constitute them. In other cases, she references works that speak to the present moment, such as Frida Kahlo's painting *A Few Small Nips* (1935) or Sarah Ruhl's play *Late: A Cowboy Song* (2003), works that touch on themes relating to gender violence and explore shifts in gender identity and definitions of family. Paula's intertextuality, a tribute to her love of literature and the visual arts, also reflects her obsession with time and the desire to bring past and present texts into dialogue: "I think about how to narrate simultaneity: it's impossible" (Koza 2019). Paula uses intertextuality to disrupt the chronological organization of moments in linear time (Hughes 2019). Through citation, she brings other authors, words, and ideas into her own work, creating a kind of coexistence in a productive limbo (Halfon 2013c). The retelling of stories onstage in Paula's work relies on the copresence of actors and audiences to bring these intertexts to life and into the present.

Paula's work is representative of this new generation of interdisciplinary and genre-defying artists, though her theater in many ways marks a notable departure from the significant body of work that emerged in the nineties exploring documentary modes and the real, first in Vivi Tellas's work and a decade later in the work of Lola Arias, Federico León, Mariano Pensotti, and Grupo Krapp, among others.[3] Describing Paula's dramaturgy, Jorge Dubatti writes, "Those who speak of the death of representation or of the postdramatic will soon realize that those categories are not valid for the theater of Romina Paula, which multiplies the power of fiction, the thickness of great dramatic situations, and recovers storytelling, emotion, and the monumentality of character" (2011, 63). Paula's exploration of the real at times shares characteristics with Vivi Tellas's *Biodrama* and other modes of documentary theater. But Paula is less concerned with staging the real than she is with reflecting on the relationship between fiction and the real in the context of creating intimate dialogue with audiences about what constitutes art, acting, experience, and identity.

Paula wrote and directed *The Sound It Makes*, *The Whole of Time*, and *Fauna* in collaboration with El Silencio, a theater group she cofounded together with Pilar Gamboa, Esteban Lamothe, and Esteban Bigliardi in 2006. Susana Pampín joined the company for their second production, and Rafael Ferro came on board during rehearsals for *Fauna*. Over the course of the seven years of collaboration with the actors of El Silencio, the group developed a close-knit community, and the processes of writing, acting, and rehearsal became more organic, to the extent that Paula created the play *Fauna* with the actors already in mind. All three plays produced by El Silencio were staged at El Callejón de Deseos in

Buenos Aires, an intimate and versatile performance space in the Abasto neighborhood, known for its experimental, underground theater venues. Because the three plays were staged by the group El Silencio in the same theater space, they are often referred to as a trilogy. *Fauna* closes an important artistic period and marks a ten-year pause of the collaborative work of El Silencio. In 2023, the group came together again to create *Sombras, por supuesto* (Shadows, of Course, 2024), staged at Arthaus in Buenos Aires, a play in which the group members ask questions about who they have become and whether their reunion evokes what they once were or establishes something new.

Paula's trilogy of plays charts a transformation from realism to a more conceptual style of theater, from the traditional living room setting and intimate family drama in *The Sound It Makes* to the intricate social relationships and minimalist stage design of *Fauna*. Even *Fauna*, despite its austere setting and rustic props, still features characters with first and last names, biographies, and psychological development (Sabatés 2017). The real departure occurs after *Fauna*, when Paula's work becomes less structured and more abstract. *Rewilding*, following *Fauna*, marks a definitive shift toward a more conceptual vision of theater. There is no classical narrative structure, and character development is minimal. To one side of the stage is a pyramid of wooden crates; to the other is a painting by Denise Groesman, one of the actors in *Rewilding* who is also a prominent visual artist and whose work also is featured in Paula's film *De nuevo otra vez*. In the play, actors experiment with movement freely onstage as they reflect on love, art, poetry, gender, family, and philosophy. *Rewilding* culminates a process of abstraction that reveals Paula's interest in cultivating a more personal experience for audience members that is less structured, more open-ended, and perhaps even wilder.

Interweaving Past and Present Feminisms

Paula belongs to a generation of writers influenced by NiUnaMenos and a wave of activism referred to in Argentina as the "the revolution of the daughters" (la revolución de las hijas) and the "Green Tide" (Marea verde), a swell of feminist activism that demanded free, safe, legal access to abortion in Argentina. In a landmark victory for feminists, in December 2020, Argentina legalized abortion. This generation expresses new perspectives on gender, sexuality, and reproductive rights that resonate with transnational feminist movements such as #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo and the emergence of the fourth wave of feminism, especially its focus on oppressive gender norms, intersectionality, a critique of interlocking systems of power, and social media as a powerful tool of activism. Influences in Paula's work include Concepción Arenal, María Luisa

Bemberg, Dorothea Lange, Katherine Anne Porter, Flora Tristan, and Sarah Ruhl, among others. In *Fauna*, for example, Paula names one of the central characters María Luisa, an homage to the Argentine feminist filmmaker María Luisa Bemberg. Citing from these rich genealogies allows Paula to historicize the multiple strands of feminist thought originating in distinct contexts. When asked if the themes she chooses to highlight in her work could be considered a form of activism, Paula responds that their inclusion stems less from an activist impulse and more from a deep personal need to write about them (Viola 2009). Driving Paula's work is the desire to critique traditional conceptions of femininity and masculinity and to explore the fluidity of gender and sexual identity.

Her reflections on gender identity are most developed in *Fauna* and *Rewilding*, whereas *The Sound It Makes* and *The Whole of Time* explore gender violence by establishing dialogue with well-known works that either reinforce or critique narratives of violence against women (Borges's "The Intruder") or document it visually (Frida Kahlo's *A Few Small Nips*). A frequent strategy in Paula's work is the development of an inquisitive female character who questions and disrupts existing patriarchal structures, patterns of violence, and gender expectations. In *The Sound It Makes*, Mariana doubles as a detective, determined to uncover a dark family secret. In *The Whole of Time*, Antonia is an unsettling presence though her rejection of prescribed gender roles and her insistence on living on her own terms. In *Fauna*, Julia reflects on gender in relation to maternity, the acting profession, and the narration of life stories.

The Sound It Makes (2007) and *The Whole of Time* (2009): Undercurrents of Violence

The Sound It Makes tells the story of two reclusive brothers living in a resort town off Argentina's Atlantic coast. Premiering at the Callejón de Deseos Theater in Buenos Aires in 2007, the play was also staged at the Fourth International Theater Festival in Buenos Aires and toured internationally in Spain and Brazil. As in Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Intruder" (1966), on which the play is loosely based, the two brothers exhibit a pathological closeness. The actors playing the brothers, Esteban Lamothe in the role of Nacho and Esteban Bigliardi in the role of Colo, share the same first name and look surprisingly alike. In fact, it was their resemblance in real life that inspired Paula to revisit the Borges story, an oblique gesture to the Biodrama tradition of staging real lives. In the Borges original, the brothers fall in love with Juliana Burgos, a socially and economically vulnerable housekeeper they have brought to their home and whom they later murder because she has provoked jealousy between the brothers and threatened their relationship. The older brother treats the woman like an object.

Figure 8. *Algo de ruido hace* (The Sound It Makes), Espacio Callejón, Buenos Aires, 2007. Actors: Esteban Bigliardi, Pilar Gamboa, and Esteban Lamothe. Photograph by Florencia Murno.

They sell her to a brothel in the hopes of forgetting her, but it's not enough. In the end, the older brother kills her, and together they bury her in a field: "They embraced, almost in tears. Now they shared an extra bond; the woman sorrowfully sacrificed and the obligation to forget her" (Borges 1969, 17). In the context of twenty-first-century feminist movements and an evolving gender perspective in Latin America, what stands out here as vitally important is not the intense bond that unites the brothers at the end of the story but the femicide that serves as its unexamined premise.

Like in Borges's short story, in Paula's *The Sound It Makes* the intruder is a woman, in this case the inquisitive cousin Mariana. She arrives at the brothers' home asking probing questions about their past in an attempt to uncover the brothers' involvement in their mother's death and to learn more about an undisclosed violent act the older brother carried out against his girlfriend. In Paula's version, the intruder Mariana does not only disrupt the brothers' relationship; she also scrutinizes their behavior and attempts to make them accountable. In Paula's play, the younger brother, Colo, carries around a notebook everywhere he goes, obsessively scribbling down his memories. While Borges's story ends with the brothers united in the task to forget and erase their crime, in *The Sound It Makes*, Colo keeps a secret record of the past. The insinuation is that the note-

book might include the details of his brother's crime. Paula re-creates the sinister Borgesian universe of the brothers but gestures toward a reckoning of the violence that takes place in the original through Colo's testimony and Mariana's truth seeking. Music by Robbie Williams lightens the mood of the play but also has a jarring effect in a context of the repressed violence. The play ends with Colo recounting the Borges short story to Nacho. In the background, Mariana is lying under a sheet. Despite her agency during the play, in the end she is silenced, ostensibly asleep, though one cannot help but think of the Borges ending and accept the possibility that she might be dead. Paula leaves this open for audiences, the image of the body returning spectators to the Borges original and asserting the spectacle of femicide in the present.

Paula's *The Whole of Time* builds on and expands the intertextual richness of *The Sound It Makes* to include visual and musical texts, most prominently by Mexican artists, including Frida Kahlo, the singer-songwriter Marco Antonio Solís, and singer Chavela Vargas. Inspired by Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, the play references the popular myth that the Mexican singer Marco Antonio Solís murdered his wife. Other references include Kahlo's painting *A Few Small Nips* (1935), a visual rendering of a femicide that took place in Mexico. Kahlo's painting depicts the body of a woman, stabbed multiple times, with her killer standing next to her holding a knife in his hand. A banner at the top of the painting held by doves reveals the words "¡Unos cuantos piquetitos!" (A few small nips), quoting the killer's defense that it was "just a few small nips" to the judge while on trial for the murder. Paula's play also references a highly publicized case of familicide and quadruple femicide that took place in 1992 in Argentina. On November 15, Ricardo Barreda killed his wife, two daughters, and mother-in-law in La Plata, Argentina. In his testimony he revealed that his actions were triggered by feeling disparaged by his wife. Both references reveal the murderer's attempts to diminish or justify their acts of violence. Antonia, inspired by Laura in Williams's play, expresses fascination with these events, and her account of them at the beginning of the play introduces an unsettling undercurrent throughout. As in *The Sound It Makes*, dialogue between family members in *The Whole of Time* is clever and fast-paced; the banter is humorous and ranges from deadpan to quirky, yet in both plays latent violence threatens to erupt at any time.

Paula's *The Whole of Time* complicates Antonia's fragility by giving her a strong and lucid voice, which she uses to argue with her mother and defend why she would prefer not to have a boyfriend. Another significant intertext in the play is Chavela Vargas's song "La Macorina" (1961), based on the poem by Alfonso Camín and commonly regarded as a queer anthem. Vargas, rumored to have had an affair with Kahlo in the sixties, came out as a lesbian in 2000 when

she was eighty-one. In one scene, Antonia dances with her mother to the song, and they struggle until Antonia takes the lead. In juxtaposing Antonia to figures such as Frida Kahlo and Chavela Vargas, women who defied societal expectations and gender and sexuality norms, Paula creates an alternative family for Antonia that gestures toward liberation from the stifling environment of home life with her mother and brother. Premiering at the Callejón de Deseos Theater in Buenos Aires in 2010, *The Whole of Time* won the Florencio Sánchez Prize for best Argentine play, and in 2011 it took part in the prestigious Theatre du Rond Festival in Paris. In 2012, the play continued to tour as part of the Santiago a Mil festival in Chile and the Napoli Teatro Festival in Italy, and in 2013 it premiered in Girona, Spain, and throughout France in Aix-en-Provence, Arles, Pau, Toulouse, Montbéliard, Corsica, and Montpellier.

Both *The Sound It Makes* and *The Whole of Time* incorporate references to gender violence and femicide taken from literature, pop culture, the visual arts, and the media. Paula is interested in how accounts of gender violence enter public circulation and are normalized. *The Sound It Makes* and *The Whole of Time* ask audiences to consider how popular accounts and cultural narratives of gender violence intersect with the family dramas she portrays. While these references may seem far removed from the private family settings depicted in these plays, Paula shows the continuity between these oftentimes spectacular public accounts of violence and the everyday violence that takes place in the home. It is, in fact, in her more traditional family dramas, such as *The Sound It Makes* and *The Whole of Time*, where Paula's most complex exploration of gender violence takes place. In establishing this continuity, she draws attention to the structural nature of gender violence and contests the notion that gender violence taking place in the home is a private, family affair, above or outside of the law.

Paula leaves the traditional family drama behind and explores new forms of kinship and community in her play *Fauna*. In *Fauna*, Paula distances herself from themes she had been working on in *The Sound It Makes* and *The Whole of Time*, and she celebrates the fact that in *Fauna* "at least there isn't an armchair! And they aren't a family, either!" (Halfon 2013c). This departure situates her work in dialogue with other artists of her generation who are interested in exploring alternative forms of community and kinship in their work. Cecilia Sosa's poignant discussion of "queering acts of mourning" in the wake of the Argentine dictatorship is fundamental to understanding these shifting paradigms of family (2014). Sosa proposes new forms of belonging that contest the rigid heteropatriarchal image of the family reinforced by the military government during dictatorship (2). Unlike Arias, Paula does not address the dictatorship explicitly in her work, and she belongs to the post-dictatorship generation in a broad sense, but the framework Sosa provides for understanding this recon-

figuration of family in the arts and activism during post-dictatorship is useful, particularly when considered in tandem with the twenty-first-century emergence of feminist activism against gender violence, a shift in gender perspective, and progressive legislation protecting gender and sexuality rights in Argentina. Cecilia Palmeiro describes the sense of the collective that characterizes the work of feminists in neighborhood assemblies and mobilizations (Giorgi, n.d.). The widespread denunciation of gender violence, the advocacy of gender and sexuality rights, and a general shift in gender perspective have generated new forms of kinship and activism that no longer adhere to prescriptive or politically imposed models of the heteronormative family.

The Fantasy of the Real in Romina Paula's *Fauna* (2013)

Romina Paula's play *Fauna* is about the making of a film that will never take place, a film that brings together a daughter, a son, an actor, and a director in the attempt to tell the story of Fauna, a wild but well-read, sublime being who over the course of her life becomes Fauno. Highly intertextual, reflexive, and subtly ironic, the play contemplates how to tell the story of one's life, how to capture what is true and real, and how to decipher where reality ends and fiction begins. *Fauna* also introduces the motif of translation through the character Fauna, who, we learn, translated Rilke throughout her life. From the beginning of the play, the character Fauna is deceased, so the entire play focuses on Fauna's afterlife and the retelling of her life story by her daughter, María Luisa, and through rehearsals of scenes from her life for a film that will never be made. The play centers around the filmmaking process and the difficulties the characters encounter while trying to retell Fauna's story.

Structured into nine scenes, *Fauna* brings together four characters onstage involved in the making of a film about Fauna, a legendary figure who in her lifetime dressed like a man, translated Rilke, and rode her horse with abandon through the *campo* until she was in her nineties. Julia, an actor, and José Luis, a film director, arrive in the provinces where Fauna lived and meet with her daughter and son, María Luisa and Santos, to learn more about Fauna's life. Halfway through the play, we learn that Julia had once seen Fauna from a distance, and the vision affected her so deeply that she became obsessed with the idea of creating a film about her life, though Fauna dies before they have the chance to meet and talk about that possibility. Over the course of the play, debates erupt between the siblings and the creators of the film regarding the authenticity of some of the events making up the life story of Fauna. Characters argue about which episodes of her life to film and whether it is even important or possible to try to remain faithful to the telling of her life story. Julia expresses

her concern that perhaps she does not have what it takes to play the role of Fauna, but she identifies strongly with the charismatic figure, and halfway through the play she puts on the men's clothes Fauna wore as Fauno. Underlying all the characters' discussions of how best to represent the life of Fauna is shifting, multivalent romantic tension. This tension manifests itself when characters take turns rehearsing scenes from Fauna's life, casting off prescriptive notions of gender roles as they do so. The play ends with all the characters professing their love to another and directing emotional uncertainty toward yet another, leaving audiences with a vision of love that is complex and unpredictable in its many forms and iterations.

In contrast to the intensity of emotion displayed by the characters, the stage itself is austere and minimalist in design. The floor of the square-shaped stage space is covered by weathered wooden planks. At stage left toward the back there is a wooden table fastened with a saddle. Without the familiar naturalist props and the traditional family unit, the play generates an uncertainty, an unsettling feeling that anything could happen (Halfon 2013c). In fact, the most unusual stage details in this play are the square-meter-sized holes in the wooden floor, filled with stones, soil, and various stage accoutrements, and the places in the floor where the boards seem to buckle, creating the sensation that the floor is barely able to contain something that is about to erupt from below. These holes and cracks in the floor provide a mysterious physical manifestation of the poetic fissures that are alluded to in the text of the play.

Though Paula moves away from depicting the traditional family in *Fauna*, she continues to explore relationality, intimate social bonds, and the shifting subject positions the characters assume during the play. Paula describes how she envisioned herself in the actors' roles to write her early plays and that over time she gradually began to assume the director's perspective in her writing ("Romina Paula: La dueña de la palabra" 2007). These shifts in positionality in Paula's creative process reveal an ethnographic preoccupation with how we perceive ourselves and others and how we are in turn perceived by others. The epigraph of the play by Dorothea Lange introduces the role of the camera in this exploration of positionality: "*The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera*" (Paula 2023, 89). Given Lange's subject matter, her statement about the camera teaching us to see gestures to an ethical obligation to acknowledge the pain and suffering of others. In *Fauna*, Paula questions what form this acknowledgment should take and whether the camera is the most suitable tool for this task.

Lange is well-known for her documentary photography. Her iconic 1936 photograph *Migrant Mother* of a mother huddled together with her three children

in a pea picker's camp in California captures the extreme poverty of the Depression era. Lange's photograph was not based purely on observation but was the result of her experimentation with family, positioning members in various poses (Curtis 1986). While the conditions depicted in the photograph are real, the fact that it was artistically staged has given rise to debates surrounding the authenticity of the image or whether it constitutes documentary. This question of artistic rendering and composition and their relation to real life and claims of documentary authenticity is central to the focus on how to represent Fauna's life through film in the play.

In his famous treatise on photography, Roland Barthes considers the multiple vantage points and narratives the camera introduces: "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art" (1981, 13). In *Fauna*, characters reposition themselves as if looking through a camera lens; they rehearse their roles for the film; they switch roles and try again. Julia, the actor who aspires to play the role of Fauna, seeks answers from María Luisa about Fauna's life, while José Luis, the director, insists they are making a fiction film. At one point, María Luisa comments, "Now, what I don't understand is why you didn't bring a camera if you're going to make a film" (Paula 2023, 102). The camera never arrives in the play, but it does not matter because, much like in Lange's epigraph, they are seeing as if the camera were there. They rehearse their roles for the film and argue about which episodes of Fauna's life to document, but their work never culminates in a film, and Fauna's image remains uncapturable.

On one level, the film project represents a failure, but in the context of the play, this failure is productive, vindicating Fauna as subject and protecting her from the reappropriation of her life story and its transformation into a "consumable image of Fauna as spectacle" (Santana 2018, 66). In Analola Santana's sharp analysis of *Fauna*, she discusses the implications of representing Fauna in film: "Fauna is the lost (and last) Amazonian, an anachronistic relic of the past. Through her gender and social behavior, as well as her ethnicity (considering that she is not a city dweller but an other from the jungle), she will be transformed into a freak on film" (71). In fact, in the process of failing to make the film, José Luis and Julia learn more about themselves than they do about Fauna: "Their presence in the littoral becomes a sort of perverse voyeurism that leads to the horror of identification as the characters project their own fears and fantasies on the freaks before them (present and absent) and are shocked by what answers them back" (72). Thus, while the film project fails, the outer play succeeds in destabilizing the subject positions of the onstage characters,

revealing their vulnerabilities and manifesting their unexplored desires. This metadramatic layering of film and theater reveals competing strategies of representing the self and others and allows Paula to explore the tension and synergies between the two genres. Whether in fiction or documentary, the filmic lens curates a story, generates an archive of embodied actions and events, and crystalizes a series of images based on the vision of the filmmaker. In an interview, after the premiere of Paula's first film, *Again Once Again*, she observes, "For me, as a theater director, it's shocking to cut, cut, cut, because I always want to see both actors in closeup. I don't like this about making movies. In the theater, you choose what to look at. You look at the character's hand only, you look at the eyes, you look at the whole body. But in cinema you can't decide as a spectator" (Hughes 2019). For Paula, theater offers audiences more decision power and this allows spectators to cultivate a very personal relationship to the play, but even in *Fauna*, where the interplay of film and theater motifs multiplies the possibilities of spectator engagement and representation, the absence of Fauna onstage accentuates the fact that the play is about control of a narrative that cannot possibly capture Fauna's life story.

Beyond the exploration of reflexivity on film and theater, Paula infuses her play with intertextual references from Calderón de la Barca, Shakespeare, Horacio Quiroga, Rainer Maria Rilke, María Luisa Bemberg, Concepción Arenal, Roberto Arlt, and Juan L. Ortiz. In reflecting on her motivations for writing literature, Paula confesses that, for her, writing is more about finding a form of protection than a form of exposure (Viola 2009). She invokes an eclectic canon of literary and artistic figures and then reveals, in their protective company, her own vulnerability through a probing examination of what constitutes fiction, love, truth, gender, life, death, experience, representation, and art. She embarks on this quest both earnestly and in a subtle, self-parodying fashion. For example, early in the play, during a dialogue on the use of metatheatrical techniques, one of the main characters, María Luisa, explains in a nonchalant, mildly condescending tone to the director character, "The stage referred to is the stage of life. It's a familiar trope, you know, that all the world's a stage. It's in Shakespeare and Calderón, it's an Elizabethan trope" (Paula 2023, 91). Through her work, Paula breathes new life and meaning into well-worn literary tropes. Like other works explored in this book, Paula's work is in dialogue with the postdramatic, the biodramatic, and other documentary techniques that are currently popular in Argentina, but her work constantly gravitates toward the exploration of the limitless potential of fiction. Ironically, as I will argue below, through interrogating fiction, Paula's *Fauna* provides one of the most nuanced discussions on the real in contemporary Argentine theater.

A Note on the Translation

April Sweeney, theater director, actor, and professor of theater at Colgate University, and I translated three of Paula's plays in the volume *Fauna: and Other Plays* by Romina Paula, published in 2023.[4] We had both seen *Fauna* in Buenos Aires in 2013 and had been mesmerized by the play. From the beginning, we were interested in translating it, and April was interested in directing it, and together we collaborated to do both. *Fauna* had its New York City premiere in English in 2022 at the intimate, off-Broadway theater space Torn Page, together with Paula's play *The Whole of Time*, translated by Jean Graham-Jones and directed by Tony Torn.[5] Paula opens *Fauna* with her Spanish translation of Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Death Experience." This presented unique challenges for our translation of the play because we were faced with the task of translating into English Paula's Spanish translation of Rilke's German original, and we wanted to convey the spirit of both Paula's rendering and Rilke's original text. The result is a hybrid translation that takes into account both the Spanish and the German and highlights Paula's innovations, for example, preserving Paula's voice in the translation that occurs in the second verse of the second stanza: "The world is still full of roles that we must enact." We chose "enact" instead of "play" because Paula's Spanish emphasized the act of staging (Aún está lleno el mundo de papeles que en escena ponemos), while Rilke's original refers to role-playing without the precise reference to theater. We liked how the emphasis on the staging in Paula's version strengthened the connection with theater and the performance of the real, in the poem linked to the brilliant green that flashes through the stage and evokes the color of Fauna's eyes and lushness of the vegetation of the Littoral region in Argentina, the setting of the play. In translating the Rilke poem, we consulted existing translations into English, among them highly regarded versions by Edward Snow, Len Krisak, and Walter Arndt. Paula makes a valuable and necessary contribution, particularly in the context of the play's attention to gender and feminist critique.

Fissures, Flashes, and Glimpses of the Real

The first scene of *Fauna* begins with Julia reciting Maria Rainer Rilke's poem "Death Experience" from her perch on the saddle. In this poem, translated into Spanish by Paula, Rilke offers a reflection on the performative roles we play in life, the sudden intrusiveness of death, and the loss of a loved one. The third stanza is of central significance to the play:

Figure 9. *Fauna*, Torn Page Theater, New York City, 2022. Directed by April Sweeney. Actors: Richard Jesse Johnson, Veraalba Santa, and David Skeist. Photograph by April Sweeney.

> But as you left, the stage cracked
> To reveal a flash of the real, a fissure
> Through which you departed: green of real green,
> Real sunshine, real forest. (Paula 2023, 90)[6]

Here Rilke describes the flash of the real or truth that is revealed at the very moment in which the departed one disappears through a crack in the stage of life. The image of this flash of truth, linked to the color green, recurs throughout the play at key moments. These flashes introduce moments of intense feeling and heightened consciousness that coincide with experiences that also remain in the realm of the ineffable.

The first episode concerns Julia's encounter with Fauna. From a distance, Julia describes the moment when she sees Fauna appear on her horse: "Suddenly out of the vibrant green, rain drenched grove, there emerged a woman on horseback, well, a person, I wasn't sure what I was seeing at first" (Paula 2023, 103).[7] We are once again reminded of the Rilke poem in which a flash of truth emerges from a crack on the stage. In this case, it is Fauna who breaks through the brilliant green landscape, arresting in her intensity and yet impossible to fully make out. Julia continues, "Those brilliant eyes looked into mine

for a brief second. I can't explain what I felt—it was like I was in shock. I wasn't sure if the terror I felt had to do with the possibility of danger, but at the same time it wasn't only terror, it was something more, something closer to pleasure" (103). Julia describes witnessing Fauna for the first time as an event that interrupts her frame of reference, a sublime encounter, allowing her, in a sense, to transcend herself. Though fleeting in duration—but a flash—the moment is foundational for Julia and marks the beginning of her artistic, intellectual, and personal infatuation with Fauna.

The second episode takes place in scene 2 and refers to the account Santos offers of the gruesome deaths of his two horses. The description of Santos as a kind of Horacio Quiroga in the stage directions gestures toward Paula's interest in exploring the wild and savage in her work and more broadly toward nineteenth-century discourse on civilization and barbarism in Latin America. Quiroga wrote short stories about the Littoral region of Argentina, where the play *Fauna* takes place. Not coincidentally, Fauna's last name is Forteza, also the second last name of the writer (Horacio Silvestre Quiroga Forteza). Influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, Jack London, and Rudyard Kipling, Quiroga's modernist works contain elements of the fantastic, the tragic, and the supernatural. In this scene, Santos arrives onstage and says to Julia and José Luis, "I have something for you artists that is real, something true" (107). He then proceeds to tell the story of how his horses were devoured by a swarm of bees near the river. He makes use of the historical present in his account, which is commonly used in the dramatic narration of past events, but here this usage seems to reflect the traumatic nature of the episode as well, of first hearing the intense buzzing, then stumbling upon the dead horses covered with bees, and having to run back to the river in order to avoid being attacked by the bees himself. In his account, he describes the thick green foliage that surrounds the horses. After he finishes telling what happened, Julia once again repeats the stanza from Rilke in which a flash of truth emerges through the green. Here, Santos's insistence with identifying the death of his horses as something that is true or real (que es verdad) resonates with Lacan's definition of trauma as an encounter with the real, or that which is impossible and resists mediation or signification (1979, 55). Santos's choppy narrative resurrects the event in the present, like a traumatic symptom that resists symbolic assimilation.

Another disarming flash of truth occurs in act 4 when Julia reflects on the relevance of biographical accuracy in representing Fauna. The characters are arguing over an episode from Fauna's past in which she allegedly suffers a bout of amnesia and is unable to recognize her husband, who has come to fetch her and take her home. For the four characters, there is a lingering uncertainty as to whether Fauna feigned amnesia during the episode, and it is impossible to

prove it one way or the other. In response to this uncertainty, Julia proclaims the following: "To me it's not the same if it happened to me or if it's something I wrote. Maybe it's something that happened to me, but precisely because it was an episode of amnesia, I don't remember it and then they tell me about it and I feel ashamed of myself afterwards, and the only way I can face the pain is through fiction, through the act of creating fiction" (Paula 2023, 119). Julia uses the first person to explore the hypothesis that Fauna may have written a fictional account of what happened to her. As her identification with Fauna intensifies in this scene, it also becomes steadily clearer how little is known about Fauna's life. María Luisa refers to the "recovery notebooks" Fauna wrote after her episode of amnesia, but she herself had never read them. Santos insists that the account of amnesia was just a story that Fauna liked to tell. But it is the reaction of the other characters as spectators to Julia that is revealing here: "*Something mysterious happens. Santos and María Luisa stare at her as if Fauna had suddenly materialized before them and José Luis is a bit frightened*" (119). The three characters are left in a state of awe as they witness what appears to be Julia's transformation into Fauna. Ironically, this moment occurs after characters display the highest level of confusion about the actual events in Fauna's life. What is clear is that Julia has transformed into her own invention of Fauna through the sheer power of infatuation. Yet there is also something of the uncanny here in this doubling of lives and their seeming coalescence into one body. Paula complicates the significance of this doubling, because while theater audiences might view Julia's transformation into Fauna as evidence of her acting method and process of getting into character, the onstage characters, María Luisa, José Luis, and Santos, react with emotion to her transformation as if witnessing the real resurrection of Fauna. Audiences witness both Julia's transformation into Fauna and the other characters' reaction to her transformation. Through introducing these competing frameworks of perception, Paula shows that modes of fiction and strategies of the real are both antagonistic and complicit in the construction and representation of Fauna.

But what does it mean to refer to strategies of the real when talking about a fictional play about a fictional film? Even in the play, José Luis, the director character, makes clear that the film they are making is not a documentary but rather a fictional film based on the life of Fauna. When I refer to strategies of the real and their use in *Fauna*, I wish to draw attention to the ways in which Paula employs the biographical and the personal in the play to construct a sense of authenticity and realness that has little to do with historical accuracy. Fauna is, after all, a fictional character, but creating a play about the filming of her life and in the process revealing some of her most personal and vulnerable moments all serve to imbue her character with a sense of realness that to some extent even

Figure 10. *Fauna*, Centro Cultural General San Martín, Buenos Aires, 2013. Actors: Esteban Bigliardi, Rafael Ferro, Pilar Gamboa, and Susana Pampín. Photograph by Sebastián Arpesella. Courtesy of Romina Paula.

surpasses the realness of historical figures whose lives have been archived in documentaries and memoirs.

One excellent example of how the biographical, and in this case the expression of personal experience, can accentuate a sense of realness occurs when the four characters are discussing from which point to begin narrating Fauna's life in the film. The director wants to start with the scene in which Fauna reencounters her husband after he has left her for another woman. As a result of the trauma of being abandoned, Fauna is left in an amnesiac state. While rehearsing, Julia interjects, "I'm sorry, can I say something? I like this scene, it seems powerful to me in its own right, but what I don't understand, and I'm thinking about the film here, is why we've chosen such a peculiar moment in Fauna's life to start with? A moment that's clearly sad and traumatic and shows her to be weak and confused" (Paula 2023, 115). At first glance, Julia's attitude toward Fauna seems protective; she is conscientious of the implications of beginning her life narrative at a vulnerable point in her life. She seems to be seeing with an ethical lens, echoing the sentiments of the epigraph by Dorothea Lange. At another moment, Julia says, "There's something about her that's profoundly familiar to me, as if I've known her forever" (106). Julia's careful attention to how the biographical details of Fauna's story are filmed and the almost confessional tone she uses to express the close bond she feels to Fauna serve to create an intimate, personal atmosphere that draws in the audience affectively and

makes spectators feel part of something real that is happening onstage. But just as the uncanny makes the familiar seem strange and sinister, here too there is something profoundly unsettling about Julia's familiarity with Fauna and the revelation that there is something appropriative about her protective attitude. As Santana asserts, "Through their paternalistic 'good intentions', both Julia and José Luis deny the possibility of Fauna's existence on her own terms" (2018, 72).

The play capitalizes on the interest in the biographical that has emerged across genres of cultural production in the last several decades. Beatriz Sarlo refers to the "subjective turn" to describe the renewed interest in exploring the subjective dimension in cultural studies (2006b, 21). And Leonor Arfuch draws on Phillipe Lejeune's notion of biographical space to discuss the ways in which the subject has been ushered back into discourse through a resurgence of biographical methods, memoirs, and personal interviews (2002, 17). In their definitions of the biographical, these theorists refer to real, existing subjects, yet this new biographical mode is capable of generating a sense of the real when employed in fiction. Throughout the play, Paula encodes the real through fiction to explore the extent to which it is possible to represent a life and to question who has the right to access, transform, and share that story.

Paula explores the boundary between fiction and nonfiction or acting and nonacting reflexively throughout her play, and she does this so inventively that spectators are often unaware that a shift from acting to nonacting (yet always within the theatrical framework) has taken place. For example, the opening scene of the play features Julia on the saddle at the back of the stage reciting Rilke. It is only when the director interrupts her and asks "¿Qué era esto?" (What was that?) that the theatergoers begin to realize that what they had been watching was part of a rehearsal for a film and did not belong to the "real" play. At other moments, as well, the characters' transition in and out of acting and nonacting is so subtle that spectators are only made aware that a change between modes has occurred because of a comment made by one of the characters. For example, a scene in which Julia and Santos are rehearsing a dialogue reveals confusion as to whether they are in acting or "real life" mode:

SANTOS: I knew it this whole time.
ACTRESS: What is it exactly that you knew?
SANTOS: That you were an impostor, "Fauna."
ACTRESS: But didn't you say that it didn't surprise you?
I don't understand.
SANTOS: It's not that it surprises me. It demoralizes me.
ACTRESS: What's happening right now?
SANTOS: What don't you understand? You don't love that man.

ACTRESS: My husband?
SANTOS: That one *(gesturing toward José Luis)*.
ACTRESS: He's not my husband. That's Fauno.
SANTOS: That's José Luis.
ACTRESS: Uh, did we cut already? (Paula 2023, 137)

SANTOS: Yo lo supe todo este tiempo.
ACTRIZ: ¿Qué es lo que supo?
SANTOS: Qué usted era una impostora, "Fauna".
ACTRIZ: ¿Pero no dijo que no le sorprendía? No entiendo.
SANTOS: Es que sorprender no me sorprende, me descoronaza.
ACTRIZ: No estoy entendiendo.
SANTOS: ¿Qué es lo que no entiende? Usted no ama a ese hombre.
ACTRIZ: ¿A mi marido?
SANTOS: A ése *(Señala a José Luis.)*
ACTRIZ: Él no es mi marido. Es Fauno.
SANTOS: Es José Luis.
ACTRIZ: Ah, ¿ya cortamos? (Paula 2013, 57)

Characters onstage stop acting within the inner play but continue to act within the outer play. This dislocation between acting and nonacting onstage contributes to reinforcing that what happens in the outer play is "real."

Paula contemplates truth as flash encounters with love, death, and art: fleeting moments that emerge and break through reality but ultimately remain unrepresentable. She also questions what the role of experience is in acquiring knowledge and performing the life of another. Santos is the character who is most preoccupied with this question. For example, as a preview to his monologue describing the deaths of the mares, he poses the following questions to José Luis and Julia: "Have you ever staged a death? Or even witnessed one? Or is it not necessary in order to imagine it?" (Paula 2023, 102). Santos privileges a kind of knowledge acquired through lived experience and not professional actor training. Experience as an actor, for example, discredits Julia in the eyes of Santos, who calls her an impostor and questions her motives for wanting to represent the life of his mother.

Fauna is about the limits of representation; this is clear through the disagreements over how to represent Fauna and the failed attempt to ever create the film about her life. And it also is clear in the scene in which Santos, Fauna's son, retells the death scene he witnessed of two horses and asks the film director, José Luis, if he knows how to represent death onstage. Translation takes on a variety of meanings here, as a mode of stage reenactment and as an act of

retelling based on Santos's eyewitness account of the horses' deaths. Thus, Paula links questions of the unrepresentable in theater to the untranslatable, through scenes in which death and subjecthood are perhaps not untranslatable but at the very least imperfectly translatable.

Paula also questions the value of experience as it is embodied or disembodied. Throughout the play, Julia strives to embody the experience of Fauna. At another moment she talks about motherhood and confesses that she wishes maternity were a disembodied experience: "Why can't a woman gestate a child outside of her body, give birth to a child without finding out about it? Why must a woman always inevitably know?" (Paula 2023, 124). Knowledge is equally mutable and unreliable in this play. Ironically, although José Luis insists that they are making a fictional film, he is upset when he is forced to admit that his historical knowledge of Fauna is uncertain and throughout the play is often contradicted by new information presented by her children. Santos tells Julia that Fauna made up the story of the amnesiac encounter with her husband. And toward the end of the play, José Luis tells Santos that Julia made up the whole story of Fauna. In the end, there is no concrete and consensual knowledge of Fauna, no certainty that she even existed beyond the changing accounts and multiple reenactments of her life of the four individuals who are brought together because of an idea of her.

Paula's explorations of truth, acting and nonacting, fiction and nonfiction, and biography can all be considered attempts at questioning what is real. I should reiterate that these explorations do not intend to break down the fourth wall; rather, they reveal the ways in which the discourse of the real can be manipulated to legitimize certain perspectives, to unsettle others, to seduce the audience through the cultivation of intimacy, and to call into question what is at stake when the real is invoked. In the play, episodes depicting flashes of sublime, traumatic, and uncanny truth suggest that what is real is ineffable, resistant to symbolic assimilation, and simply "impossible," in a Lacanian sense. But, in addition to considering the real to be flashes of truth, through her playful take on what constitutes acting and nonacting, Paula poses the real as something that is often uncapturable or indistinguishable from fiction. And through a near fetishization of the biographical and identification between Julia and Fauna, the real becomes equated with a sense of personal closeness and the near doubling that takes place between character and fictional figure.

One of the most important questions in the play is how these multiple approaches to the real relate to gender and the fact that the four characters are debating over how to represent Fauna, who over the course of her lifetime dresses like a man and begins going by the name Fauno so that she can participate in the poets' circle at the university. Paula herself affirms that raising ques-

tions relating to gender and expectations of the feminine and masculine in the play is what most inspired her (Rabaina 2013). Paula cites the influence of the Spanish writer Concepción Arenal and the Argentine filmmaker María Luisa Bemberg on early conceptualizations of *Fauna*. Additional influences include Claude Cahun, Dorothea Lange, Katherine Anne Porter, Carson McCullers, and Flora Tristan (Halfon 2013c). In an interview, Paula states that it is impossible to conflate the feminisms of these women, who lived in different times under dramatically different circumstances. For some, Paula contends, feminism was a political act, for others a mode of survival (Halfon 2013c). Of course, Paula is articulating herself from a very specific context as well, one that has been shaped by the progressive laws passed in Argentina to protect marriage equality (2010) and gender identity rights (2012) as well as the feminist mobilizations against gender violence in NiUnaMenos (2015) and the Green Tide (2018) in support of reproductive rights and access to safe and legal abortion, legalized in 2020. Paula commented in a 2020 interview, "We see everything through the prism of 'feminisms'" (de Masi 2020). In *Fauna*, she delinks femininity and masculinity from biological definitions of female and male and critiques the expectations and stereotypes associated with traditional gender roles. Beyond this feminist critique, Paula's play gestures toward an exploration of the fluidity of gender identity within the framework of changing paradigms of gender and sexuality.

In Julia's recollection of seeing Fauna for the first time, gender is portrayed as shifting, unfixed, and impossible to discern as belonging to fiction or reality: "And on this horse, there was something like an effigy, this being, this powerful person wearing a large hat: a stunning, magnificent, inscrutable being" (Paula 2023, 103).[8] Unlike English, the Spanish language uses grammatical gender, so nouns are assigned gender categories that do not necessarily correspond to biological or social gender, though sometimes they overlap. Paula alternates the use of feminine and masculine nouns in her description of Fauna/o, for example, referring to Fauna/o as "este ser" or "esta persona." Thus, when she employs the gendered forms of the adjectives "bella o bello," it remains uncertain whether these adjectives should be interpreted as commentary on how Julia perceives Fauna/o's gender identity or whether "bella" simply refers grammatically to "persona" and "bello" to "ser."[9] Paula leaves this interpretation open for audiences and reveals a case in which grammatical gender has a protective function, enabling the ambiguity that refuses to fix Fauna/o's gender identity. This is important because the play makes it clear that Fauna/o's identity is unavailable to the film crew or even Fauna/o's family.

For Julia, seeing Fauna for the first time constitutes a fantasy that defies both gender categorization and her own sense of reality. As Judith Butler writes, "The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contin-

gent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings elsewhere home" (2004, 29). Paula's character exemplifies this element of fantasy in blending and reconfiguring the masculine and feminine in the figure of Fauna, but as Santana observes, this gender ambiguity also creates discomfort for characters, and especially José Luis, whose own gender and sexual identity are destabilized through rehearsing different roles onstage (2018, 67). Throughout the play, Paula levels a feminist critique at fixed masculine and feminine roles through an exploration of women who aspire to be fathers; men who are more feminine than women; women who make good fathers; and figures, such as Fauna, that defy conventional gender categorization. In one scene, Julia expresses frustration at limitations imposed by stereotypes of femininity: "What determines whether or not I'm a woman and what makes me act this way? Why this obsession with always knowing and understanding what is what and who makes whom? I can't relate anymore to this expectation of weakness" (Paula 2023, 124). And she concludes by stating, "I want to be a father to my children," to which Santos responds, "Fauna was a father to us" (124). Through Julia's desire to be a father and Santos's identification of his mother as a father figure, both characters disidentify and reconfigure associations between gender and parentage. Immediately after Julia proclaims her desire to be a father to her children, she asks José Luis if he will play the role of Fauno in rehearsing a scene in which Ramón professes his love to him. After the scene, Julia tells José Luis that his version of Fauno is more feminine than her own (125). Through introducing multiple role-playing scenarios and blurring the lines between acting and nonacting, at times Paula's play undermines normative gender roles by subsuming them in the multilayered reflexivity of the play.

Argentine theater has long served as a cultural space for the exploration of gender and feminist critique of normative gender roles. *La Nona* (Yer Granny, 1978) by Roberto Cossa and *Y a otra cosa mariposa* (That's All That, 1982) by Susana Torres Molina introduce gender critique through drag as a way of addressing self-censorship and the social construction of gender under dictatorship.[10] Another notable example is the play *Petróleo* (Petroleum), premiered in 2018 by the company Piel de Lava, featuring Pilar Gamboa, Laura Paredes, Valeria Correa, and Elisa Carricajo in the roles of four male oil workers on a remote rig in Patagonia. In the play they cross-dress to explore stereotypes of masculinity prevalent in Argentina in the context of neoliberal processes of extractivism. The play's resounding commercial success is a testament both to the company's extraordinary performances and to a moment of reckoning in which a new gender perspective has urged a reassessment of assumptions and attitudes sur-

rounding gender and sexuality.[11] In *Fauna*, Paula distinguishes between the different kinds of cross-dressing taking place in the play. For Fauna, cross-dressing when considered in a historical context is primarily a mode of access to the male-dominated cultural circles, and for Julia, dressing as Fauno is an attempt to get into character but can also be read as her own exploration of gender and desire.

In the end, the film of Fauna's life is never made; Julia's encounter with Fauna takes the form of a fleeting glimpse from a distance; and rehearsals lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretation of one another's roles. The fantasy of the real in this work remains just that, an unrealizable fantasy of capturing Fauna's identity through filmic representation. Yet, fantasy is multidirectional in this play. Though on the one hand the missed encounters and frustrated anticipation fuel the fantasy of the real, on the other hand the onstage characters' exploration of their own fluid identities and desires reveals a kind of fantasy that is in excess of the real. That is, toward the end of the play they have pushed the limits of their own sense of self; their desires point to the fantasy of something beyond the here and now, signaling the potential of a queer futurity in the "then and there" (Muñoz 2009). Paula, through self-referential play with genre and process, thus demonstrates how performance and the arts can be implicated in divergent projects, at the same time gesturing toward the creation of queer futurity and exposing the fantasy of capturing and fixing the real through representation.

Edición ilimitada (Unlimited Edition, 2020) or the Return of *Fauna*

Fauna returns in Paula's film *Edición ilimitada*, produced by Diego Dubcovsky with Varsovia Films, a project that brought together four writers (Edgardo Cozarinsky, Santiago Loza, Virgina Cosin, and Romina Paula) who are also actors, directors, playwrights, and teachers. Premiered in 2020 at the San Sebastián Film Festival in the Horizontes Latinos section, the film features four chapters, each one directed by one of the artists, that reflect on the relationship between literature and film. The four chapters introduce different approaches and themes: for example, reading as an individual, collective, public, and private act (Cozarinzky); the process of learning how to write literature from an established (and eccentric) author (Loza); and the prospect of public scrutiny after publishing one's first work (Cosin). Paula's chapter features a literary workshop where participants are reading a work in progress (*Fauna*) and providing feedback. In the first part of the chapter, spectators watch the reading of select scenes from the play, and in the second part of the chapter, the teacher (played by novelist, playwright, and theater director Cynthia Edul) and the participants offer feedback.

For readers and spectators familiar with *Fauna*, the short film chapter creates a sense of déjà vu. We have heard this before. The premise of the literary workshop makes us feel like we are traveling back in time to witness the actual process of creating *Fauna*. The short film invites us to indulge in the fantasy of seeing the real documentation of how the play was created. The workshop reading itself is a sort of rehearsal of a work in progress. *Edición ilimitada* thus adds yet another metadramatic layer to the multiplying Faunas. In the short film, the author of *Fauna*, played by Mía Micelli, reads the stage directions; the workshop leader/teacher reads the lines of María Luisa; other participants read the lines of Santos, the director, and Julia. Throughout the reading, several times it seems as though the participant (played by Pablo Sigal) reading the part of the director is slipping out of his role to comment on the text. The same thing happens with the teacher (Cynthia Edul) reading the lines of María Luisa. In this way, Paula, playing with the figures of the director and the workshop leader/teacher, in and outside of the frame of the work, makes us question what belongs to the fictional universe of the play while at the same time highlighting the role of theater practice and rehearsal as collaborative research.

While the short film plays with the idea of going back in time to create a register of the process or provide an inside look at the making of the play, it also serves as an epilogue to the performance of *Fauna*, as it responds to some of the doubts and questions raised by the play. The feedback session/prologue pretends to clarify but ends up reinforcing the uncertainties that make the play elusive and compelling. For example, in the second part of the film, when participants are critiquing the work, one of the participants says he is unclear about where exactly the play takes place and adds that he thinks it's okay if it appears to be a sort of abstract no place that could be anywhere. The author seems to nod in agreement but then affirms that the Littoral region setting indeed is significant for establishing the meaning of the play. This ambiguity multiplies potential interpretations of the play. The overt presence of the river and torrential rainfall allude strongly to this region. Additionally, the literary references to writers who hail from the Littoral region, Juan L. Ortiz and Horacio Quiroga (on the Uruguayan side), whose poems and short stories evoke the region's landscape and culture, suggest that the setting of the play is very much significant in conveying another way of life and daily routines marked by the rivers and humid, lush wetlands of the area. Yet all these allusions fall short of explicitly identifying the setting as the Littoral region, revealing a preference not to name and to maintain a certain amount of mystery, in regard not only to the setting but also to the characters.

In another instance, one of the participants asks the author if the character Fauna really existed, and the author responds that in the reality of the work,

yes. And the participant responds that she meant in the "real reality," revealing a common response to the play and assumption that Fauna's character was based on a real individual. The workshop leader/teacher jumps in to add, "She could have existed but it's just a fiction," to which the author responds, "As far as I know." Thus, questions remain unanswered and maybe even less resolved than after seeing the play. In the end, the workshop leader/teacher, referencing *Hamlet*, offers some final remarks, concluding that it is "through fiction that we find access to reality; fiction provides a channel of access to truth." These remarks reiterate Paula's devotion to fiction in her work, even when in service of the quest for truth. But fiction and the real are not mutually exclusive, and as the Rilke quote from "Death Experience" at the beginning of *Fauna* makes clear, when the stage cracks, it reveals "a flash of the real" (Paula 2023, 9). In the end, fiction is not impervious to the real.

First-Person Narratives of Self and Family in *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again, 2019)

Though Paula's early novels and plays are fundamentally fictional works that are interested in exploring the real through ethnographic style, citation, and references to real events and documentary photography, she has gradually developed a keener interest in documentary and autobiographical modes. In 2019, Paula wrote, codirected (with Rosario Cervio), and acted in her first feature film, *De nuevo otra vez*. The film also marks the first time she worked with members of her family, who play main characters in the film, lending her film an intimate, personal feel and bringing her work into closer dialogue with trends engaging documentary modes, autobiography, and discourses of autofiction. Her turn to filmmaking, a defining moment in her artistic trajectory, has given her new tools and vantage points from which to explore narrative voice and specifically the possibilities of the first person, which is so central to her novels. In this film, the possibilities of the first-person voice are multiplied through her roles as writer, director and actor, as I discuss below.

Paula's extensive experience in theater also means that she can draw on techniques and styles from both media in her work. Much like other films discussed in this book (Arias's *Teatro de Guerra*, 2018; León's *Estrellas*, 2007; Grupo Krapp's *Por el dinero*, 2013; and Pensotti's *El público*, 2020), Paula's film *De nuevo otra vez* borrows from theater in its staging and dialogue. Paula, too, as a creator of theater and film, reflects critically on both processes, and she finds it intriguing that in the cultural imaginary film continues to evoke a realness that seems to surpass the realness conjured by theater: "How is it possible that all of the artifice of film is accepted more easily as a language? Why is theater so uncom-

fortable and demanding? How did it happen that at some moment film became accepted as more closely resembling real life, when it is burdened by all of that artifice" (Paula 2021b). Much like the other artists included in this book, Paula at times seems to side with theater, a defender of the humanness that theater inevitably evokes through congregating human beings onstage and in the audience, together in a shared space, yet she is at the same time drawn to filmmaking. Her subsequent films, the coauthored and codirected *Edición ilimitada* and her future film project, *Gente de noche* (People by Night), suggest that her interest in filmmaking will continue.

Premiered at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam in 2019, *De nuevo otra vez* has since toured on the international film festival circuit and received critical acclaim and awards such as the Premio Horizontes Latinos at the San Sebastián International Film Festival and the Bronze Taiga Award at the Spirit of Fire Debut International Film Festival in Russia. Paula wrote and directed the film, in which she stars together with her real-life mother, Mónica Rank, and her son, Ramón, who at the time was three years old, along with a cast of actors and long-standing collaborators including Mariana Chaud, Denise Groesman, Esteban Bigliardi, and Pablo Sigal. In the film, the main character (Romina Paula) has returned to her mother's home in Béccar, a neighborhood on the northern outskirts of Buenos Aires, where she will stay with her son for a short time. We learn that she is sort of on vacation but that she is also taking a break from her partner because their relationship is in crisis. Over the course of the film, she converses with her mother; she plays with Ramón; she teaches private German classes; she goes out with friends from Buenos Aires; she pursues a couple of romantic leads; and she returns home to Córdoba.

Paula employs a broad range of formal and stylistic approaches to reflect on themes such as motherhood, identity and language, heritage, relationships, feminism, and desire. She uses a documentary style to film the scenes with her mother and Ramón and more classically scripted drama for scenes with her friends. Interspersed throughout the film are lengthy monologues performed by Chaud, Sigal, and Groesman and slideshows with voice-overs. In an interview, Paula reveals an obsession with how to express the first person in film: "Is it a voice over? Is it a subjective type of camera work—Dardennes style—over somebody's shoulder? Being somebody's eyes?" She confesses that she hasn't figured it out but that the only way she could approach the first person in her film was through an exploration of diverse formats ("Romina Paula Introduces Her Film" 2020). The monologues and dialogues in the film reveal her training as novelist and playwright and give the film a theatrical feel. In one scene, we see Paula hiding in the bathroom in her mother's home, listening to a voice message she has recorded for her friend, in which she talks about her young son and the "feeling

Figure 11. *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again). Written and directed by Romina Paula, 2019. Actors: Romina Paula and Ramón Cohen Arazi. Photograph courtesy of Diego Dobcovsky and Romina Paula.

of responsibility" that never leaves. Here we witness a literal manifestation of the "grabador prendido" (voice recorder) style of writing that critics Beatriz Sarlo and Elsa Drucaroff have identified in Paula's novels (Sarlo 2006a; Drucaroff 2011). In the film, Paula brings together multiple forms, styles, genres, and registers to create the sense of "fragmentation" she felt was essential in approaching the first person ("Romina Paula Introduces Her Film" 2020). In her study of first-person documentary cinema, Alisa Lebow notes, "The project of first-person filmmaking (or rather, mediamaking) always carries with it a challenge to the notion of the unified subject" (2012, 5). In her roles as writer, director and actor, Paula articulates the first person from different vantage points, splitting open the notion of the unified subject. The numerous shots framing Romina and her mother together in dialogue threaten the idea of the unified subject even further and suggest, according to Lebow, that the "first person singular 'I' . . . is always in effect, the first-person plural 'we'" (3). Paula confesses that originally she thought she was filming a version of herself and her unique situation but that she realized early on it was also about her mother (Dagatti 2019). This echoes Lebow's observation that many times we find that "first person filmmaking goes further, well beyond the self, focusing its sights on another as the 'protagonist,' the main attraction, and 'subject' of the film" (Lebow 2012, 3).

Throughout her work, Paula exploits the tension between fiction and autobiography. In her novels, Paula's writing approaches autofiction: there are autobiographical elements to be found but they belong to an overarching fictional

framework. Though Paula insists otherwise, readers of her novels are often eager to identify Paula as the narrator, especially since Paula uses first person and all her protagonists are women of a similar age as Paula at the time of writing (Larrea 2020). In her film, Paula deepens her exploration of the autobiographical through the use of documentary techniques and the incorporation of family photos and scenes of herself with her mother and son in her mother's home. Here, too, Paula affirms that even though she, her mother, and her son are on camera and being filmed in her mother's home, ultimately she knows that, in the end, "that's not my life" (Larrea 2020). Paula has discussed how her writing leaves her feeling protected instead of exposed, as if the final product were able to consolidate a safe distance between herself and the representation of herself as other in a work of art. Argentine documentary filmmaker Andrés Di Tella observes, "What is interesting about the autobiographical mechanism is, precisely, that it allows you to see yourself as other" (2008). While this ability to see oneself as other may generate protective distance, as in Paula's case, Di Tella emphasizes the flip side, a different but related aspect of autobiographical filmmaking in the vulnerability that the documentary process entails for the filmmaker and the subjects of the film: "To put into a film autobiographical substance, to sacrifice one's own family, to expose intimacies of experience, all of that is ultimately a kind of public offering" (2008). Paula confesses that when they were about to begin filming, she experienced a level of anxiety that she hadn't felt before regarding the exposure of her family. But she stresses that she found comfort in the idea that the film was an object and that "none of that was entirely us or me" (Riehn 2019). Two of the most frequently used words by critics to describe Paula's film are "honest" and "intimate," words that suggest that as spectators we have been granted special access to Paula's world (Gamberini 2019). What is easy and tempting to forget is that it is a largely fictional one.

The opening scene of *De nuevo otra vez* features a Kodachrome slideshow of photographs of Paula's mother as a child and Paula's grandparents and great-grandparents who immigrated to Argentina from Germany after World War I. The black-and-white photos depict family gatherings, meals together, and Romina's mother as a child running down a hill and riding on the flying swings at the amusement park. The images evoke nostalgia for an elusive past and set the tone for certain aspects of the film, specifically relating to Paula's desire to capture the linguistic and cultural heritage that is central to her family's immigration story and identity in Argentina. Paula relates that she and her siblings went to German school and were raised speaking German even though her mother had been born in Argentina and there was never any plan to go back to Germany ("Romina Paula Introduces Her Film" 2020).

One of the most important motivations for Paula in the film was to capture

Figure 12. *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again). Written and directed by Romina Paula, 2019. Actors: Romina Paula and Esteban Bigliardi. Photograph courtesy of Diego Dobcovsky and Romina Paula.

her mother speaking German to her and her son in her home, particularly since Paula had made the decision to stop speaking German to Ramón and raise him in Spanish (Dagati 2019). The film serves at least partially as an archive of her mother's linguistic heritage, and the film genre here translates the everyday language use among family into a documentary record. Translation as media transfer here thus engages questions of the ephemeral and the archive—the disappearance and the preservation of language. For Apter, "translation studies has always had to confront the problem of whether it best serves the ends of perpetuating cultural memory or advancing its effacement." Specifically, she expresses concern that "a translation studies overly indebted to linguistic ecology risks fetishizing heritage language as it devotes itself to curatorial salvage" (2006, 2). In the intimate setting of Paula's childhood home, the act of "curatorial salvage" takes on a different meaning, as it generates an affective archive that represents an afterlife, on the one hand, but also a coexisting creative transcreation and potential source text for future artistic iterations. The archival feel of the film is accentuated through the slideshows, the staging of family portraits superimposed onto photographs, and Paula's paging through of family albums with her mom and Ramón. Paula confesses that the decision to stop speaking German to Ramón precipitated an urgency to create an archive of the linguistic heritage that had been a part of her family's identity for generations and that would end with her (Riehn 2019). The film captures this significant moment of rupture in

her family story, and at the same time documents the generational continuity through Paula's experience of motherhood.

Paula's exploration of the cyclical (again once again) nature of language and motherhood across generations goes hand in hand with an interest in reflecting on memory and the passage of time. She explains that the inspiration for the film came to her in the form of two audiovisual ideas, as she calls them. One was to film "a middle-aged woman going back to the house in which she grew up, to live with her kid and her mom in the only place on earth where she can still be a daughter." The other was to "film and create a document of [her] mother in her house." Curiously, as Paula points out, she had these ideas before having a child, so what viewers perceive to be autobiographical in the film is something that Paula had first envisioned as fiction ("Romina Paula Introduces Her Film" 2020). Regardless of what came first, the impetus of the film is a return to her mother's house. Paula's physical return and her desire to return to her role as daughter give the film a deeply nostalgic feel.

In an unexpected twist, two years after the filming of *De nuevo otra vez*, the house where her mother had lived for thirty-five years was sold, seeming to justify Paula's vision and the urgent impulse for making the film. In a regular column Paula wrote for *El Diario Argentino* from 2021 to 2023 titled "Una casa y una familia," she tells the story of her childhood home and its construction, and how the whole family collaborated in its creation, spending weekends varnishing beams and shutters and other related tasks (Paula 2022b). After thirty-five years, the house was put on the market, and Paula's mother began the process of going through things: "Years of this house and family, accumulated, came to light: baby books, an infinite number of papers from when the world was registered on paper. . . . The photos! All those physical photos, also accumulated, years and years of family on more paper" (Paula 2022b). The house had become a repository of papers, photographic images, objects, and heirlooms that had accumulated over the years as evidence of Paula's family, testament to the time spent together as a family and documentation of their lives together.

Paula's column gives us insight into the contrary impulses and emotions behind wanting/needing to get rid of this material archive in preparation to sell and her own desire to create an audiovisual archive of her mother and son in the house. She relates that when she saw the video tour of the house the realtor made, she caught a glimpse of the poster for the film *De nuevo otra vez* on the wall, which features her mother and aunt jumping over a sand dune in Villa Gesell, an image taken from a slide. Paula's mother, as a child, is featured on this poster from a film about her life spent in the house that is about to be sold. This "strange play of reflections and mirrors" creates an affective archive and captures different vantage points for appreciating and registering a life, con-

densing moments in time, and superimposing childhood and the present. One year after the premiere of *De nuevo otra vez*, Paula published a collection of short stories in *Archivos de Word* (Word Archives, 2021), which, as the title indicates, shows a similar obsession with curating the past, ordering it into an archive, and bringing into dialogue and coexistence texts and moments over the last twenty years of her writing. Like in *De nuevo otra vez*, in *Word Archives* Paula becomes an archivist of her own life, reassembling the material and exploring various ways of narrating the emotionality of certain moments. In the end, Paula relates, the book comprises a cartography of what it was like to write in and around Buenos Aires in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Toutonian 2022). As Paula notes in the prologue to the collection, all the stories could be understood as forming part of a sentimental education (2021a, 7). Both *De nuevo otra vez* and *Archivos de Word* are deeply personal projects invested in retelling and reordering past events and affects into what Paula calls "a possible map of how to negotiate the present" (Pérez Cotton 2021).

Paula's use of the first person in *De nuevo otra vez* reflects a trend toward increased "subjectivization" in documentary film, which Pablo Piedras attributes to "aesthetic, discursive, social and technological factors" that have taken place over the last several years (2014a, 50). In the context of recent Argentine documentary in the first person, Paula's film in some ways aligns with a group of works engaged in investigating the past in the context of post-dictatorship. Piedras, in his discussion of films such as *Los rubios* (The Blondes, Albertina Carri, 2003), *M* (Nicolás Prividera, 2006), *Papá Iván* (Father Iván, María Inés Roqué, 2000), *Fotografías* (Photographs, Andrés Di Tella, 2006), and others, asserts that what these films have in common "is the presence of a filmmaker who, in front of the camera, organizes his or her materials and directs the investigation by inquiring about the past and the present of family and friends" (40). While Paula does not investigate a traumatic dictatorial past, as many of these filmmakers do, she nonetheless shares an interest in exploring links between memory and family and an acute concern with the implications, possibilities, and limits of the use of first person.

In her film, Paula does not so much aim to uncover or expose secrets; rather, she is interested in preserving a moment in time that captures the interactions between her mother and her son. While the documentary lens is nostalgic in this film, the scripted monologues and dialogues among friends ground audiences in the present. The monologues have an essay feel to them and range from philosophical reflections on the abstraction of nature and the relationship between diachronic and synchronic time to a description of the Argentine feminist movement the Revolution of the Daughters (La revolución de las hijas) and their fight for legal and safe abortion and reproductive health rights. While

at least one critic has argued that the film stands on its own without the monologues, their inclusion reflects the intertextual richness that characterizes the entirety of Paula's work (Hughes 2019). This last monologue on the Revolution of the Daughters movement signals another thread of continuity throughout Paula's work: her interest in exploring feminist thought. References to feminist filmmaker María Luisa Bemberg's film *La señora de nadie* (Nobody's Wife, 1982) and a scene featuring Paula reading from a book on the history of gender normativity, in addition to Paula's reflections on motherhood, all serve to situate her work in dialogue with a range of feminist perspectives.

Paula is an accomplished translator of literary texts, primarily between German, Spanish, and English. She is also a self-translator of her own positionality as she shifts between the roles of writer, film actor, playwright, filmmaker, and director. And she translates themes and motifs across genres, much like other artists discussed in this book. It is no surprise that point of view is an obsession in her work across her novels, plays, and films. Frequent in all her work is the strategy of retelling stories in the first person, which generates a provocative form of embodied intertextuality, in theater and film, as we can see the character telling the story, adding commentary and personal reflections, and drawing self-awareness and theatricality to the task of retelling. In the context of this book, Paula adds a new dimension to the paradigm of the first person. While for most of the artists here, the first person accentuates the autobiographical, as in Biodrama, for Paula, the use of the first person and of the strategy of retelling assures us of a narration that is relatable but inevitably unreliable, destabilizing, and unreal, inviting us into dialogue with multiple texts, genres, and historical periods. Her characters escape categorization through these performative acts of retelling. The trajectory of Paula's work reveals a deepening interest in the first person and a new direction toward autofiction, evidenced in *De nuevo otra vez*. Her interest in translation in this film approaches curatorial salvage as she seeks to capture and preserve a moment of linguistic heritage and her mother speaking German to her son. Here, too, as in León's work, there is an imperative to create a record of the everyday lives of her family, a transcript of the past that Paula nonetheless insists is fiction.

5: Mariano Pensotti

Curating Live Novels and Impossible Films

This chapter situates Pensotti's work at the juncture of coalescing aesthetic trends that have given rise to the figure of the artist-curator: the expansion of the live arts in unconventional theater spaces; the convergence of the visual arts and performance; the shift from object-driven art to time-based exhibits; and a new focus on mobility and networks in the live arts.[1] Pensotti works across genres and art forms to bring the visual arts, literature, theater, film, installation, and urban intervention into dynamic conversations and create innovative frameworks. As artist-curator, Pensotti belongs to a generation that has always been influenced by the "punk attitude of 'do it yourself'" (Sagaseta 2010). As artist-curator, he participates in the creation, production, and conceptualization of his artworks; his artist statements reveal deep reflection on how he situates his works in time and space and imagines the intersection of everyday lives with the grand narratives of history.

As the artist-curator gains visibility across the arts, a parallel shift charts a move away from object-based artwork and toward the exhibition of time-based art and live performance in museums and galleries. As museums attend more to the live arts, curators become more attuned to choreographic and theatrical aspects of performance (Ferdman 2014a; Sellar 2014; Malzacher 2014). Thus, the curator of performance, less common than the curator of visual arts, has emerged as a relatively new and significant paradigm for understanding important trends in performance production (Ferdman 2014a): "Whether it be programming interdisciplinary live encounters, rethinking questions of participation, assembling the public, or bringing a heightened critical awareness to their own practice, these are, essentially, *dramaturgical* concerns" (Eckersall and Ferdman 2021). As a result of the convergence of visual arts and performance, a significant shift referenced throughout this book, a productive overlap is taking place between the roles of curator and artist. Pensotti embodies the artist-curator role and participates in this shift toward curating performance that embraces the visual arts and is conscious of its sitedness and the passage of time.

Pensotti as Artist-Curator

This chapter examines Pensotti as artist-curator in key works ranging from his early performances in collaboration with writer, director, and actor Beatriz Catani, *Los 8 de julio (Experiencia sobre registros de paso del tiempo)* (The 8th of July: Experiences of Registers of the Passage of Time, 2002) and *Los muertos* (The Dead, 2003); to the urban interventions *La Marea* (The Tide, 2005), *Interiores* (Interiors, 2007), and *A veces creo que te veo* (Sometimes I Think I See You, 2010); the theatrical performances *El pasado es un animal grotesco* (The Past Is a Grotesque Animal, 2010) and *Cineastas* (Filmmakers, 2013); and the film *El público* (Buenos Aires, 2021), part of a trilogy with *The Audience* (Athens) and *Le Public/Het Publiek* (Brussels). Drawing on the visual arts, performance, film, and literature, Pensotti's work constantly pushes the boundaries of theater to expand and contract its frame, resulting in an exploration of fiction and the real, past and present, spectator and actor, archive and performance.

I focus on four major areas of innovation in Pensotti's work that exemplify his role as artist-curator: (1) the hybrid, intermedial techniques he employs throughout his work in combining montage and narrative voice to create performances he describes as "impossible films" or "live novels"; (2) the sitedness of his works, both in their Buenos Aires context and as they travel internationally, and how this mobility creates new networks and highlights Pensotti's role as mediator between art and audience; (3) the *dispositivo*/apparatus in his work, such as the carousel in *El pasado es un animal grotesco* or the split screen in *Cineastas*, and how these onstage apparatuses evoke museum objects, installation, and performance remains; and, most important, (4) the exploration of time as duration and measurement of labor and bodily exhaustion. Pensotti's works capture key moments in time throughout Argentina's recent history that have shaped a generation of artists. Throughout the chapter I show how Pensotti curates time through creative play with coincidence, simultaneity, and the double in order to examine the arbitrary and meaningful structuring of time in determining the course of people's lives. Pensotti's work reveals a fascination with how individuals and generations are defined by historical events and influenced by art. In this sense, Pensotti is an artist, ethnographer, and curator of life stories, committed to documenting how people navigate their circumstances and create fictions that are liberating yet reinforce identification with a historical moment.

Though Pensotti trained in film, his career began with theater. In his twenties, Pensotti took courses on cinematography, screen writing, and production and made two films, *El camino del medio* (The Middle Way, 1994) and *Soñar lobos y jirafas* (Dreaming Wolves and Giraffes, 1996). But it was a hard time to make

films, as Pensotti notes, and theater offered him the opportunity to do something more immediate (Prudencio and Moreira 2018, 151). He subsequently took part in theater workshops with directors Rubén Szchumacher, Alejandro Tantanian, and Daniel Veronese. He explains how socioeconomic circumstances determined his mode of work as an artist: "I started to do theater because it was much cheaper than film" (151). It is through theater that Pensotti developed an interest in the live, presence, and time: "There is something about making present the passage of time, through something as fleeting as theater, that seemed very interesting to me" (151). But Pensotti never lost his cinematographic vision, and his works attest to this training.

There is a sitedness throughout Pensotti's work, exemplified concretely in the urban interventions *La marea*, *Interiores*, and *A veces creo que te veo*. Yet even works staged/screened in conventional theater houses and/or cinemas are hybrid forms, transforming into urban intervention after the performance or referencing site-specific fieldwork and preparation that took place before the performances. For example, after the screening of the film *El público* at the Leopoldo Lugones cinema at the San Martín Theater in Buenos Aires, spectators were invited to participate in a street procession down Avenida Corrientes. Yet even works that do not engage tangibly with the built environment as part of the performance are site oriented, such as *Los 8 de julio* or *Los muertos*, cocreated by Pensotti and Beatriz Catani, referencing iconic landmarks in Buenos Aires such as the Plaza de Mayo or the Recoleta Cemetery. The performances of these works, incorporating short videos of interviews and artistic projects created in preparation for the staged performance, are documentaries of sitedness. Ferdman's term "off-site" works well here, in the sense that although the performances are staged/screened in theaters and cinemas, the site-specific elements of these works occur outside of the theater, "off-site," and before and after the performances. The term also applies well to describe the ways in which these performances travel. Through referencing landmarks in Buenos Aires, these performances are mobile concepts that can travel off-site and reestablish localized contexts and audiences in other cities (2018).

Los 8 de julio (Experiencia sobre registros de paso del tiempo) (2002): Serendipitous Encounters with the Real

In the context of Vivi Tellas's first *Biodrama* cycle, in 2002, *Los 8 de julio (Experiencia sobre registros de paso del tiempo)* asks what people born the same day and year share and what connects them affectively. A work of theater cowritten and directed by Beatriz Catani and Mariano Pensotti, *Los 8 de julio* poses the arbitrary coincidence of the performers' date of birth as the point of departure for examin-

ing the real encounters and fictional narratives that structure and give meaning to our lives. From the beginning, Catani and Pensotti knew they wanted to work with Alfredo Martín, Catani's friend, actor, and psychiatrist, born July 8, 1958. Taking Alfredo's birthdate as the starting point and establishing it as a guiding criterion for the project, they then sent out a call for auditions, seeking only individuals (nonactors) born on that same date. Of the twenty-some responses they received, they chose María Rosa Pfeiffer (cosmetology instructor) and Silvio Francini (flight attendant and painter). For the work, Catani and Pensotti asked each of them to perform a specific task over the course of six months: Alfredo's task was to film a stranger (María Rosa) as she went about her daily routine; in turn, María Rosa was tasked with asking strangers to take a series of photographs of her. Silvio was asked to paint the same tree once a month over the six-month period. Silvio's wife, Alicia Francini, stands in for him onstage. The final result was a hybrid performance documenting the work they created during the six-month period prior to the performance, highlighting artistic process and reimagining city spaces (theater, city, plaza) as stages of fictional and real experience. The six months of preparation culminated in a relatively short fifty-minute performance, premiering at the Sarmiento Theater in Buenos Aires.

Pensotti and Catani are curators of time in this work, reflecting on its duration, how it is measured and experienced, and how it structures our daily lives, our interactions with others, and recollection of the past. The six paintings of trees and the series of photographs capture discrete points in time, revealing the change in seasons from summer to winter and documenting María Luisa's pregnancy, which progresses over the six months of work prior to the performance. The primary focus on process reveals the work's preoccupation with duration and the measurement of time but also highlights a concern with how past work is mediated and presented onstage through photography, video, painting, audio, and embodied testimony. As Catani and Pensotti explain, they were interested in creating a performance that showcased presentation (not representation) of the work accumulated over the six-month period (Catani 2007, 206).

The work's treatment of process in relation to the passage of time generates fluid exchange between the past and present and the documentary and fictional registers relevant to the broader conversations in this book. Of specific interest to Catani and Pensotti here is whether being born on the same day in the same year in the same country is arbitrary or whether these spatial and temporal coordinates determine how our lives will unfold. In her review, scholar Cecilia Sosa asks, "What do three people born the same day the same year share? Anything more than an animal and zodiac sign?" (2002). Smoking a cigarette onstage, Alfredo affirms that he and the other performers have something in common: "To have something in common; that's interesting because many times I've

asked myself what separates me from others." And further on he adds, "Maybe I should be asking, what connects me to others?" (*Los 8 de julio*). The premise of shared birthdates invites us to consider a range of questions relating to human connection and the choreography of bodies and encounters that shape everyday lives. In the figure of Alfredo, we witness the ethnographic impulse in Catani and Pensotti's process that runs through the works examined throughout this book. Alfredo asks, "What is María Rosa like? How might I find a clue to understanding? If someone observes me for six months, what could they learn? . . . Might my form of walking give away the fact that I was born in a less hectic place than Buenos Aires?" (*Los 8 de julio*). If our bodies carry the traces of our histories, what do they reveal about time and place and our experience of cities that shape our identities and turn us into spectators and actors on a daily basis? Catani and Pensotti show interest in this question through the tasks they assign the performers. For example, Alfredo's task of filming María Rosa surreptitiously during her everyday life turns Alfredo into a spectator and María Rosa into an unsuspecting actor. Meanwhile, María Rosa's task of finding strangers to take photos of her allows her more agency, a collaboration of sorts, for which she is both subject and author, actor and director. During the performance, Alfredo and Alicia are seated in chairs facing the audience, their backs to the screen showing the videos Alfredo made of María Rosa. Alfredo highlights his own role as creator in his presentation of the videos when he confesses to the audience, "Please forgive the precarious quality of some of the clips; it's just that I'm not a professional" (*Los 8 de julio*). Alfredo's insistence that he is not a professional echoes Biodrama's interest in presenting the real lives of people onstage.

Much of *Los 8 de julio* is concerned with exploring conceptually how spatial-temporal coordinates determine the stories of our lives. Yet at the beginning and the end of the performance, audiences see projected on the back screen a video created on July 8, 2002, at the Plaza de Mayo depicting interviews with anonymous passersby who were asked about how their day was going and what they envisioned themselves doing in five years on July 8, 2007. This urban intervention, filmed and subsequently presented onstage during the performance, adds a contextual component that anchors the performance in the immediate aftermath of the crisis of 2001, a time frame that will be generative for much of Pensotti's later work. Catani and Pensotti explain, "We wanted to present the immediate reality of this year, and not just symbolically. And for that reason, the performance begins and ends with interviews conducted on July 8, 2002, at the Plaza de Mayo" (2007, 206). Catani comments on the difficulty of situating the arts in a context of crisis: though the work is preoccupied with coincidence and synchronicity, in some respects it is also a work that shows postcrisis theatrical representation out of sync and incompatible with conventional representational

practices. What happens to fiction, based on the representation of reality, in a country reeling from crisis, where political and social representation have been fractured? (Pacheco 2002). The birthdate of the three performers, July 8, is also out of sync—just one day shy of July 9, Argentina's Independence Day and the name of one of the most emblematic avenues to traverse the city of Buenos Aires, Avenida 9 de Julio. This birthdate evokes the idea of a generation out of sync with official national identity and forced to reckon with the aftermath of economic crisis individually and collectively, artistically, socially, and politically.

Los muertos (2003–5): Stages of Translation and Resurrection

Los muertos, the second collaborative work between Catani and Pensotti, commissioned by the Goethe Institute in Buenos Aires, brought together Argentine and German artists to create works reflecting on the Argentine crisis in the framework of the provocatively named project Ex Argentina. Premiered at the Hebbel am Uffer Theater in Berlin in 2004, the play had subsequent runs in Buenos Aires at the Camarín de las Musas Theater in 2005 and 2006. The stage, divided into two side-by-side parts, features parallel environments: on one side, actor Alfredo Martín tries to reenact scenes from a stage adaptation of James Joyce's short story "The Dead" (1914) in which he had performed twenty years earlier. Relying on photographs of the production, interviews with audience members, and remains of the original set, Alfredo is in detective mode, excavating the past through personal memory, documents, artifacts. On the other side, actor Matías Vertiz is seated across from an interpreter, Nikolaus Kirstein. On a television/VCR next to him, Matías shows filmed footage of cemeteries in Buenos Aires, displays video clips of famous death scenes from Argentine cinema, and presents statistics on deaths in Buenos Aires, including murders, accidents, and femicides that occurred during the eight-month period of rehearsals for the play. In his artist statement, Pensotti poses key questions: "Is there any similarity between death and theater? Do a cemetery and a stage scene generate theatricality? Is representation possible without actors? Is it possible to make those bodies present? A kind of theater of absentee bodies?"[2] A major concern for Pensotti and Catani here is not only the relationship between death and theater but also how theatrical and urban scenography might resurrect bodies, how fictional and documentary strategies might make present what was absent.

The representation of death and questions of memory, presence, and absence become implicated in the aesthetics of postdramatic theater. For Beatriz Trastoy, death poses the ultimate challenge to a postdramatic conceptualization of theater that is less interested in representation and more invested in the presentation of the artist in real space and time (2012, 233). The question of how

to present death onstage is crucial, as Trastoy notes, for Catani and Pensotti in *Los muertos* and, as we saw in chapter 3, for Grupo Krapp, whose point of departure for this exploration was the loss of their friend and collaborator. For Catani and Pensotti, the impulse comes more from the desire to explore theaters and cemeteries as urban spaces, architectures, topographies, and stages that summon the absent in the present. As in *Los 8 de julio*, what audiences see onstage is the reflection of the past, of what has already transpired, mediated by screens, narration, and, most significantly in this piece, an onstage interpreter.

Throughout the performance, Nikolaus interprets for both Alfredo and Matías onstage, moving between the two sides of the stage in a kind of border crossing that links the two stage environments. Since the work was created as part of an initiative that encouraged Argentine and German artists to work together, the central role of interpretation makes sense. And yet, as Trastoy notes, "the onstage presence of the translator of Catani and Pensotti's performance is linguistically just as unnecessary in Buenos Aires as it was at its premiere in Berlin" (2012, 239). This is, Trastoy adds, because there are so many other available options for translating the language to audience members, including, most prominently, subtitles or surtitles, which are used regularly for works that tour internationally. Because of the relative ease of using subtitles, the rationale for the stage presence of the interpreter in Catani and Pensotti's work must lie elsewhere. I agree with Trastoy, who views the presence of the onstage interpreter in this work as critical to Pensotti and Catani's exploration of interpretation in relation to acting and translating (*intérprete* in Spanish means both "translator" and "actor") (239). *Los muertos* invites audience members to consider translation broadly, beyond a strictly linguistic framework, and as a form of movement from one place to another, an "adaptation, paraphrasing, commentary, parody, rewriting, transformation, appropriation, citation and mediation" (239). While the fluidity of the concept of translation creates a wide range of possible interpretations, in the context of this analysis, what is most interesting to consider is how the presence of the onstage interpreter poses yet further questions about the passage of time and performance, continuing this line of questioning from *Los 8 de julio*.

While *Los 8 de julio* was concerned primarily with the concepts of spatiotemporal coincidence and simultaneity, *Los muertos* explores the time lag between the performer's utterance (in Spanish) and its onstage interpretation (in German) through the figure of the interpreter. As Mónica Berman points out, in the performance, translation creates "a delay, a pause, the essential characteristics of waiting" (2007). The type of interpretation used in the performance is consecutive, not simultaneous, so Kirstein waits until the performers have paused before translating back. The result onstage is alternating speech between performer

and interpreter, a back-and-forth movement that also mirrors and reinforces the back-and-forth travel between the two stage environments. While from the audience's perspective, the side-to-side environments onstage are structurally parallel, the scenes enacted in them are never simultaneous since the interpreter's presence is required for the performance to proceed on either side. As in *Los 8 de julio*, Catani and Pensotti create a sense of time in the work that, due to the presence of the consecutive interpreter, is dislocated and out of sync and always in anticipation of or after the fact.

Consecutive interpreting requires excellent recall and focus and can be likened to an act of improvisation in the sense that interpreters do not usually know what the person they are translating for is going to say before they translate. Yet *Los muertos*, a performance staged repeatedly over the course of several years with the same interpreter, necessarily removes this aspect of improvisation. As the presence of the interpreter demonstrates in this piece, interpreting, in the context of repeated performance, is more akin to acting and reliance on an established script. Nikolaus, onstage, behaves in ways unexpected of interpreters. For example, he rarely looks at the audience but rather translates back to the performer, as if creating an onstage dialogue. The interpreter acquires greater protagonism and even subjecthood here, defying the conventional expectation of interpreters to be neutral figures. An example of this defiance is when Nikolaus questions Alfredo about his use of the word "galoshes," a word that gives the interpreter pause, since it is not used in the short story by Joyce. Alfredo responds by reminding Nikolaus that he is reenacting not Joyce's short story but rather the theatrical adaptation of the play in which he performed thirty years earlier. The interpreter in the performance is both essential mediator between languages, inhabitant of fictional and documentary spaces, and transgressive interlocutor and protagonist.

In *Los muertos* the stage is divided into two sections horizontally, and the action in both alternates depending on where the interpreter is. Catani and Pensotti's use of the divided stage anticipates the "split screen" technique used in *Cineastas*, considered a trademark of the collaborative works by Pensotti and Grupo Marea and specifically with stage designer Mariana Tirantte. Unlike *Cineastas*, where the vertical structure is more suggestive of the transformation of the presentation of the real everyday (below) into fictional representation (above), in *Los muertos*, the divided structure and alternating scenes produce more of a dialogue between the two environments. This dialogical movement, reinforced by the interpreter's migration between the two, links environments that would otherwise not seem organically connected, and at the same time it fosters dialogue between modes of presentation and representation occurring on both sides. As Trastoy notes, on one side we see Alfredo in presentation

mode, narrating a recent personal experience in which his brother had a brush with death, followed by his recollection and presentation of artifacts and photographs of the staging of "The Dead," and ending with his reenactment/representation of some of the scenes from the adaptation (2012, 235). On the other side, Matías presents statistics on deaths occurring in Buenos Aires and shows documentary footage of interviews with a real grave digger and stage technician who discuss their behind-the-scenes work, explaining, for example, why they sometimes need to wear gloves to carry out certain tasks. This focus on the invisible labor behind the "stagings" both in theater and cemeteries lends an ethnographic aspect to the work, emphasizing the documentary feel of this side of the stage, though Matías also shows clips from famous Argentine films representing death scenes, so again, there is constant back-and-forth between modes of presentation and representation, of documentary and fiction.

Los 8 de julio and *Los muertos* share a sitedness in that they engage with real locations and urban landmarks (Plaza de Mayo, Recoleta and Chacarita Cemeteries) that are filmed and presented onstage through video. Pensotti's subsequent works *La Marea*, *Interiores*, and *A veces creo que te veo* are site specific in a more traditional sense, according to Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks's frequently cited definition of site-specific works as "conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations" (2005, 23). Yet these works can also be conceived of as mobile concepts, unhinged from context, as they tour internationally and engage uniquely with cities across Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Specifically, regarding Pensotti's work, Ferdman's concept of "off-site" is useful because it "suggests both a relationship with and an independence from a site. The engagement is as much about dis-locating (the time and space it is removed from) as it is about context (where and when something/someone is presented or represented)" (25). Pensotti's work generates new stories inspired by the productive dissonance of being out of sync and off-site and the constant back-and-forth movement of locating and dislocating experiences and narratives.

La Marea (2005–11): The City as Movie Set

La Marea, Pensotti's first urban intervention in the traditional sense described by Pearson and Shanks, signals important innovations in his work and consolidates concepts, practices, and techniques that are central to later production. The creation of *La Marea* also coincides with the founding of the Grupo Marea in 2005, the interdisciplinary group Pensotti has worked with over the last two decades, bringing together the stage designer Mariana Tirantte, lighting designer Matías Sendón, musicians Federico Marrale and Diego Vainer,

and later producer Florencia Wasser. In interviews, Pensotti explains that what drove him to explore urban intervention was the urgent need to get out on the streets, in public space, as a response to the crisis of 2001. As Silvina Alejandra Díaz and Adriana Libonati note, the "social and political uses of urban space that flourished during this time (*piquetes*, assemblies, protests, artistic-political interventions) found counterparts in theatrical practices that explored aesthetic resignification of social and economic impoverishment." Artists sought out "non-traditional theater spaces such as factories, houses, public transport, streets, parks and staged spaces that alluded, metaphorically and symbolically, to the social situation; the mixture between open and closed, public and private" (2020). These qualities of post-2001 theatrical practices characterize Pensotti's *La Marea*, a performance created for the Fifth International Festival of Buenos Aires as part of Cruce, a project that invited artists to develop performances, installations, or urban interventions in unconventional spaces in the city of Buenos Aires. Pensotti's contribution was *La Marea*, an urban intervention/street performance that took place in the center of the city, on the Pasaje Rivarola, just three blocks from the Corrientes theater district and Avenida 9 de Julio.

La Marea consists of nine vignettes staged simultaneously—in bars, shops, cafés, apartments, on the street—with each lasting ten minutes. Spectators choose the order in which they decide to see the performances, and they can stay for as long as they want. In each vignette actors perform situations with very little spoken dialogue. Rather, screens are set up adjacent to the urban scenes with scrolling text offering intimate glimpses into the personal lives of the characters, their concerns, frustrations, regrets, anxieties, and desires. In *La Marea*, narration becomes further disembodied from the performers, a dislocation that begins in *Los muertos* through the use of the interpreter and continues to develop into the figure of the onstage narrator in works like *El pasado es un animal grotesco* and *Cineastas*. Central to Pensotti's approach is projecting the written word in urban spaces, which, in the form of on-screen text, reveals a literary tone that contrasts with the colloquial, everyday actions performed by actors. Pensotti is interested in thinking about the visual aspects of the written word, "not only the semantic or literary senses of the written word, but rather the word as image" (Sagaseta 2010). The use of past and present tense in the accompanying narratives creates both dislocation and convergence of time and place. For example, in the first situation, "Moto," a man lies face down on the street next to his motorcycle after an accident. The engine is still running, and his CD player is still playing music. On-screen the narrative uses the past tense to describe the events that led up to the accident and the present tense to describe his current state, his injured body: "He left his family, hit the highway, and fled to the Andes. Now he's lying on the ground, and he thinks: *This is a bed of cement. I can't move my*

toes, well, some of my toes, but it feels strange. I have to get up. Did I get up? I don't think so. This isn't blood. Is it blood?" (*La Marea*, 35). Pensotti is fascinated by the attempt to capture the precise moment of convergence between past narrative and present experience. Like in *El pasado es un animal grotesco*, in *La Marea* Pensotti curates the convergence of time and place, implicating spectators in the process of synchronization.

Pensotti exploits the divisions between live, embodied performance and media in this work through constant allusions to film, incorporated in the staging of some of the situations (for example, in the ninth situation, "El Beso" (The Kiss), a movie camera follows the performers as they leave the bar). References to film also can be found throughout the narratives. In the first situation, "Moto," the subtitled narrative reveals that to the man watching his family through the window, "it was as if he were watching a blurry movie screen from far away" (*La Marea*, 36). And perhaps most revealing is how Pensotti described the experience of spectators of the performance: "In a way, it's like a live movie: the audience is the camera as they can choose the angle from which they watch each scene—and the editor—as they can choose the order of the scenes and how much time they spend at each" ("Mariano Pensotti," 2010). Pensotti's *La Marea* transforms the city into a movie set, a site embodying the in-betweenness of city and stage, reality and fiction, spectator and actor, private and public.[3] This transformative potential of site-specific performance is important to Pensotti, who notes: "I want to produce works that might influence or somehow change the ways that people experience their cities and also that are open to be modified and transformed by those specific places." He stresses that he doesn't believe in "just 'placing' fiction within a real context" ("Mariano Pensotti," 2010). For Pensotti, then, site-specific performances do more than juxtapose real context and fiction; they facilitate their mutual imbrication, and in line with Ileana Diéguez Caballero, they intervene directly in the social fabric of the everyday (2007, 118). In this work, Pensotti curates the encounters between actors and spectators in urban space, playing with the boundaries of the theatrical and generating new ways of interacting with and experiencing the city.

Pensotti has said that he creates all his work with Buenos Aires in mind, even though his work is often commissioned by festivals and frequently premieres outside of Argentina first. Urban interventions like *La Marea* or *A veces creo que te veo*, while locally conceived, are nonetheless "portable concepts," a term Lola Arias uses in relation to *Ciudades Paralelas* (Parallel Cities). *La Marea*, which premiered in Buenos Aires, was staged at different festivals over the course of six years in Brussels, Berlin, Riga, Dublin, Rouen, Quebec, Montreal, Yokohama, Girona, Copenhagen, and Vancouver. For Pensotti, the performance of the work by other actors in a different context added "a strange effect" to the play, though

cultural connotations and regionalisms are inevitably lost in the transfer of these mobile concepts (Prudencio and Moreira 2018, 146). But what is gained is a new encounter between site and performance in every city. In an interview with Ferdman, Arias confides that the "portable concept" came about pragmatically, as a way of transporting performance "in the simplest of means" (2014b, 35). Though the impetus for the "portable concept" is largely economic, revealing in part the specific conditions of art produced in post-2001 Argentina, the result is a new way of creating and traveling with work that aligns with the mobility turn in site-specific performance.[4] Mobility characterizes every part of the process of Pensotti's work, from production and programming in international festivals and theaters, to the physical transport of the props and stage architectures that are trademarks of Pensotti's work, to Pensotti himself, who has at times described himself as a nomadic artist.

Interiores (2007): The Spectator as Curator

Following *La Marea*, the recently formed group by the same name created the site-specific *Interiores*, a performance taking place in an apartment building on Avenida Corrientes in Buenos Aires right down the street from the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center and the Cosmos Cinema. In contrast to *La Marea*, which toured internationally for six years and showcased a highly mobile form of site-oriented work, *Interiores* had a relatively short run and was performed in one site only, an apartment building in the center of Buenos Aires. Pensotti views *Interiores* both as a continuation of *La Marea* and as a retreat from the collective tide (*marea*) of spectatorship generated by *La Marea* toward more individualized spectatorship in *Interiores*. While *La Marea* was open to the public and generated audiences of five hundred to one thousand people per night peering through windows to witness scenes and stories unfolding indoors, *Interiores* brought spectators (only forty at a time) inside, into an apartment building, partially inhabited by apartment owners and renters and partially transformed into performance space. During the 2007 run, shortly before the performance, spectators would meet at the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center a couple blocks down the street, where they were given an iPod and headphones and a map of the apartment that indicated the numbers and locations of the apartments that were part of the performance.

Upon entering the building, spectators, with their headphones on, chose their own itineraries to explore the eight situations taking place in different apartments. *Interiores* gives spectators the opportunity to curate their own experiences, much like museumgoers listening to an audio guide while visiting a museum. As in *La Marea*, the situations presented range from the everyday to the dramatic, featuring a young woman preparing dinner in one unit while, in

another, two performers discuss plans for a terrorist attack while playing ping-pong. In another unit, a man stands on his balcony, in existential crisis, looking into the windows of apartment buildings from a distance. In another, a heartbroken teen tries to distract himself while listening to muffled sounds of pleasure coming from next door, where he knows his ex-girlfriend is with his best friend.

Pensotti presents a voyeuristic fantasy through the construction of intimate spaces, the closeness between spectators and performers, the invitation to spectators to touch furniture and objects in the apartments, and the device of the omniscient narrator (Sagaseta 2010). Voyeurism typically refers to the pleasure gained through watching people in situations of pain, trauma, or distress. However, the type of voyeurism Pensotti refers to here is the experience of accessing the thoughts of others, achieved through listening to the omniscient narrator on the iPod offering an account of the inner lives of the characters performing in each situation, a narrative account that often seems unrelated to or out of sync with the action taking place. In Pensotti's exploration of voyeurism, the visual is overpowered by touch and sound. Spectators gain direct access to the inside story behind each situation through their headphones. Placed directly in the ears of spectators, headphones create a seamless continuum between spectators' bodies and the surrounding performance. At the same time, Pensotti heightens the role of the tactile as he invites spectators to open and rifle through drawers, touch objects, sift through photos, and literally feel the performance space as a way of locating experience and getting to know the lives of others.[5] If we think of this performance as a museumgoing experience, it is a subversive one, disregarding the division between fact and fiction, and one in which visitors touch all of the objects on display and learn about the private—not public—lives of subjects belonging to past and present.

A veces creo que te veo (Ciudades paralelas) (2010): Creation as Production in Real Time

Of all Pensotti's urban interventions, *A veces creo que te veo* goes the furthest in allowing anonymous bystanders to act and influence the course of the performance. Pensotti is one of eight artists who was invited by cocurators Lola Arias and Stefan Kaegi to take part in *Ciudades paralelas* (Parallel Cities), a festival of works that intervened in functional spaces of the city, including a factory, a shopping center, a court, a house, a library, a hotel, and—in Pensotti's case—a train station.[6] The project exemplifies the mobility of these interventions across different urban sites, enacted in Berlin, Buenos Aires, Warsaw, Zurich, Singapore, Utrecht, Cork, Copenhagen, and Kolkata. Arias and Kaegi asked artists to create a "portable work" that could be transported to another city but would require artists to engage cul-

turally with each city and recontextualize the work in the community. In this way, Arias hoped to move away from the idea of exporting a local performance abroad and instead re-create it in the specific urban settings of other cities. All the works belonging to *Ciudades paralelas* are prone to the unpredictable, the unexpected, and the uncontrollable. The project is, as Arias notes, "a festival without actors" in which spectators must act for the work to exist: "If there are no spectators, there is no work" (Pitrola 2010). This dependence on spectatorship both showcases the curatorial interest in including audiences prominently in the conception and production of these works and ensures that the unrehearsed and improvised will be a central component of these urban interventions.

Pensotti's *A veces creo que te veo* is faithful to this premise of reliance on spectators. For the performance, situated at a train station (in Buenos Aires, the Palermo Station), he assigned four writers to different posts in the station, located at a remove from the platform so that they did not draw attention to themselves. Armed with laptops, the four writers (in Buenos Aires, Iosi Havilio, Agustina Muñoz, Santiago Gobernori, and Laura Meradi) invented fictional lives for select individuals who were waiting for the train. Large screens set up in the train station projected live what the writers were typing in real time. Writers observed the bystanders and then typed fictional stories about their lives. Bystanders who were reading the screens and realized the text was about them were presented with the unique opportunity of becoming protagonists in the performance and even altering the direction of the story through a gesture, expression, or action (M. González 2013, 734). The text appearing on-screen provided a similar function to a camera, capturing and documenting the actions of the bystanders, though the written text goes further and fictionalizes the lives of the bystanders. As in *La Marea*, Pensotti creates a performance in which subtitles both allude to film practices and provide the function of narrating the everyday and fictionalizing the inner lives of characters. The work stages the cinematic lives of everyday bystanders turned spectators. *A veces creo que te veo*, like *Interiores*, also shares an interest in voyeuristic performance, though, unlike *Interiores*, where spectators are the voyeurs, in *A veces creo que te veo*, Pensotti reverses roles so that spectators are the ones being watched. Artists take on the role of voyeurs here, observing them from afar, inventing stories about their lives.

The inversion of spectator and artist and the conversion of spectator into protagonist are nuanced here, as María Laura González explains in her discussion of the different levels of spectatorship in Pensotti's *A veces creo que te veo*. There are spectator/readers who realize they are protagonists in the stories unfolding on-screen, and according to González, they can choose to play either an active or a passive role (2013, 735). In one scene, also cited by González, Agustina Muñoz narrates the following:

In the year 2013 there will be nothing . . . no station.
Two girls stand in front of the screen and read. . . .
I like the color of their clothes.
One is wearing a red and orange sweater with flowers.
I'm envious of her sweater.
And the other is green, a peculiar green, not just any green.
They study literature.
Together. They spend the whole day together.
Like sisters.[7]

Upon reading the text from the train platform, the two girls look at each other and laugh. In the video of the performance, the camera pans to Muñoz, the writer who is observing the girls, and reveals that she too is laughing after she sees the girls' reaction. Though the girls never see Muñoz, the video of the performance captures both the bystanders' and Muñoz's response, creating the illusion of affective exchange. In addition to spectators whose transformation into protagonists is activated through the act of reading, there are spectators who do not read the text on-screen and do not realize they have been chosen as protagonists of the writers' narratives on-screen. In addition, there are spectators who had found out about the festival and were present on the platform expressly to see the performance. Added to these varying degrees of spectatorship were those who were present on the platform and did not realize there was a performance going on and were not chosen as protagonists for the writers' narratives. Thus, according to Arias's statement, while people who were waiting for the train on the day of the performance became, in a sense, trapped by the performance, there were others who, on a parallel plane, simply went about their daily lives (Pitrola 2010). Pensotti curates multilayered experiences of performance, situated in urban space, that have the power to trap and captivate spectators through fiction, amid unsuspecting city dwellers.

Pensotti describes both *Interiores* and *A veces creo que te veo* as "live novels" combining the experience of embodied performance and spectatorship with narration. While both performances encourage improvisation to an extent (for example, in *Interiores* spectators can choose the order of their itinerary through the eight vignettes/chapters and interact with their surroundings), *A veces creo que te veo* brings improvisation to a new level since the narration that takes place evolves in the context of the performance, in real time, over the course of several hours. The live performance encompasses both its creation and its production, and no two performances are alike. In fact, there are four versions, at least, of each performance, given that four writers are narrating from their individual perspectives the scene and people in front of them, and each narration depends

not only on the writer's imagination but also on the engagement of the bystander with the text. Both *Ciudades Paralelas* and Pensotti's work push at the limits of site specificity, since the festival was intentionally designed to be transportable from city to city, assuming a uniform functionality of sites across cities. In *A veces creo que te veo* Pensotti curates varied audience experiences or community-specific interventions that situate fictional narratives in urban space and expand possible encounters between art and site.[8]

A veces creo que te veo evolves over the course of an undetermined amount of time: there is no preestablished story arc or ending. While *La Marea* and *Interiores* include prerecorded narration transmitted via subtitles or audio, *A veces creo que te veo* captures the moment of creation of narration. In dialogue with previous work, the site of a train station seems ideally suited to deepen Pensotti's exploration of time. Trains, in addition to being a central theme in literature, can also be used functionally to measure the passage of time.[9] They transport people from city to city, which is interesting to consider in the context of *Ciudades Paralelas*, a portable festival transporting mobile concepts from city to city. And the train station is a site where people wait in anticipation, much like spectators for a performance.

El pasado es un animal grotesco (2010): Pensotti's Omnivorous Theater

Premiering in 2010, the same year as *A veces creo que te veo*, Pensotti's *El pasado es un animal grotesco* marks his return to the theater, channeling, in lighting designer Matías Sendón's words, the *desmesura* (excess) of the streets into a constantly evolving, circular stage divided into four equal environments like a spinning pie graph (Gallina 2012, 223). On this rotating disc, often described by critics as a kind of carousel, the four actors perform sixty-eight different scenes over the course of two hours. Described by actor Pilar Gamboa as a "delirious, challenging, and risky experiment," *El pasado* requires "epic effort" on the part of the actors, who must switch in and out of roles constantly to play four characters at different moments in their lives over ten years between 1999 and 2009 (Gallina 2012, 214). Like Pensotti's characters in previous works, Mario, Laura, Vicky, and Pablo are protagonists of minor, everyday dramas that intersect with grand narratives and world events. Mario, a filmmaker, travels the world, experiences ups and downs with his partner, and ultimately finds some success as a documentary filmmaker; Laura leaves her suburban life to follow her dreams of living in Paris, though she returns to Buenos Aires and ends up playing Mary Magdalene in a Bible-themed amusement park; Vicky, a veterinarian, finds out her father has been living a parallel life and has a secret second family; and Pablo, one day

out of the blue and with no explanation, receives a package with a severed hand, which becomes a dominating, grotesque presence in his life. The four actors, in addition to playing the characters over the ten years, take turns playing the role of onstage narrator. For each of the sixty-eight scenes, one of the actors narrates the thoughts of the characters, who barely communicate to one another onstage. As in Pensotti's previous works, dialogue is secondary to narration and to the exploration of contrasting modes of presentation and representation.

El pasado es un animal grotesco both synthesizes and intensifies key explorations in Pensotti's work relating to time, narrative voice, and the conversation between genealogies of film, theater, literature, and the visual arts. As Shannon Jackson notes, "Casting 'the visual' and 'the theatrical' as interlocutors . . . [is] helpfully defamiliarizing, exposing as it does some of the critical assumptions, lingering resistances, and perceptual habits that continue to lurk in the practice of performance criticism and the practice of visual art criticism" (2011, 3). In *El pasado es un animal grotesco* and subsequent works such as *Cineastas*, Pensotti curates this conversation between performance and the visual arts through the creation of theatrical works that resemble onstage installations. Through architectural innovations such as the turning carousel stage in *El pasado es un animal grotesco* and the split screen in *Cineastas*, Tirantte and Pensotti create visually arresting stage devices and spaces for reflection not only on the relationship between performance and the visual arts but also on the comingling energies of film, literature, and music. As critic Mercedes Halfon notes, "We don't know if we're reading a novel, watching a film, or witnessing a strange documentary; the only thing we're sure of is that we're in a theater" (2010). Drawing on other disciplines, theater is, according to Pensotti, "omnivorous," like the grotesque animal from the title of the play, devouring the present in real time before our very eyes.[10]

If Arias's works can be considered "time machines" that transport performers and audiences to the past through performance of shared memories and reenactment, Pensotti's works can be considered omnivores, devouring time as a metaphor and creative process. In *El pasado es un animal grotesco*, the onstage device of the revolving disc, what Tirantte describes as the work's "engine," is crucial to understanding how time is conveyed and experienced in the performance, as duration, successive moments, circular movement, expansion and contraction, and linear chronology (in Gallina 2012, 227). At no point does the spinning carousel stop during the performance, though it does slow down at times, most noticeably toward the end of the performance. The constant motion has led critics to comment on what feels like the durational quality of the work. For example, Sandra Contreras maintains that even though it only lasts two hours, the feeling of incessant movement that the rotating stage creates, the

span of ten years presented within the performance, and the uninterrupted voice-over narration contribute to generating "an impactful and exhausting form of duration" (2012, 152). The work is mentally and physically demanding: the four actors must shift energies constantly to play different roles in successive scenes; they are also in charge of changing props and wardrobe as the sixty-eight scenes progress, and they must do it quickly, when they are on the side of the rotating disc that faces backstage, hidden from the audience. The actors' appearance changes over the course of the performance, from neat and well-groomed to sweaty and disheveled, revealing the effects of the passage of time on actors' bodies (in Gallina 2012, 215). Contreras situates *El pasado es un animal grotesco* in a group of Argentine performances in the early twenty-first century that meditated on duration (2012, 151). Sarlo notes that "'unaccustomed duration'" in performance generates "disconcerting zones, provoked by the layers of time elapsed, the layers of time to come. . . . Time is lived as aesthetic substance" (2004, 13). In *El pasado es un animal grotesco* Pensotti curates an experience of time that, through constant movement and rotation onstage, draws audiences in by centripetal force, creates a sensation of endless motion and momentum, and evokes the passage of days and years.

Pensotti's study of movement and duration is also an examination of the situatedness of fiction in time and place. The narrator begins each scene by announcing the date: "22 de junio de 1999. Es el junio más lluvioso de los últimos cien años" (June 22, 1999. It is the rainiest June in the last one hundred years) (*El pasado*, 133). Pensotti orients us in time by giving us a precise date, like dropping a pin in the past, but also signals a more expansive temporal framework (the last one hundred years). Another example of these overlapping frameworks occurs during a scene when Pablo is on vacation in Brazil. The narrator introduces the scene: "December 4, 2004. A dinosaur theme park. That's where Pablo is. The park is about 90 kilometers away from Río de Janeiro. A million years ago it was a swamp where dinosaurs played around or waited for careless prey to walk by" (169). Throughout the performance, Pensotti finds ways of anchoring us in time and then contextualizing that moment in a much broader, even planetary sense.

The performance captures a moment in the lives of these characters, who are between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, when the potential and uncertainty of a youthful present become a fixed sense of self and trajectory. For Gamboa, this transformative moment, most crucial to understanding the characters in Pensotti's work, is exemplified perfectly by Laura, who in one scene sifts through photos and ponders, "One is the mixture of what one is and what one could have been but is not" (*El pasado*, 216). The scene conveys a feeling of loss and resignation to the inevitable passage of time but also signals survival and

resilience, which not only describe the individual experiences of the characters but also allude to the collective experience shared by a generation of Argentines who lived through the tumultuous years of the aftermath of the economic crisis. As he does in *Los 8 de julio* and *Los muertos*, Pensotti situates performers' experiences in contexts framed by local and global events. In *El pasado* there are references to real events between 1999 and 2009 that affected and shaped the generation portrayed in the work, including the protests of 1999, the crisis of 2001, 9/11, and the ascension of Evo Morales in Bolivia. Other references to context are more subtle, like Dana's clandestine abortion in 2001, which signals to audiences that abortion was at the time illegal in Argentina. We learn that Mario loses his job in 2005 in the wake of the crisis, and he finds himself desperate, both creatively and economically (*El pasado*, 174). It is this desperation that drives him to seek out ways of creating a film with a "bajísimo presupuesto" (extremely low budget). Every day, with his smart phone, he films people in public going about their daily lives, and at home in the evenings he creates voice-overs of fictional narratives of their lives.

The end of the time period covered by the play (1999–2009) and the premiere of *El pasado* in 2010 converge in real time, inviting spectators to experience the ending of the performance as a fusion of real and fictional registers. Pensotti created *El pasado*, as Contreras notes, in the "times of biodrama," a dominant trend in Argentine performance in the early twenty-first century that continues to impact the theater scene today, as discussed in the introduction to this book (2012, 155). In fact, one of the character's lives in the performance is made into a Biodrama (*El pasado*, 184). *El pasado* thus chronicles critical moments of historical importance, milestones in the lives of the four characters, and prominent aesthetic trends and practices that emphasize the biographical in the exploration of fiction and the real. Though Pensotti's work establishes dialogue with Biodrama, like in the case of other artists discussed in this book, his approach to fiction and the real also diverges from Tellas's Biodrama, revealing a deeper interest in exploring fictionalization than in foregrounding a return of the real onstage.

In *El pasado*, time is marked by expansion and contraction but is always compartmentalized into measurable units. Much like Catani and Pensotti's *Los 8 de julio*, where a series of drawings or a series of photographs mark discrete moments in time over a six-month period, a similar fascination is at work here. On the dimly lit periphery, to each side of the stage, banker boxes labeled with the year begin to accumulate, stacked in neat columns by the actors as the performance progresses. As the onstage disc rotates and we see scenes go by and time pass before us, the rotating disc seems to churn out the boxes, turning the present into the past like an archive machine. Audiences witness the precise

moment when the present becomes the past, compartmentalized into a material record and measurable units of time. Outside of the carousel performance, characterized by seamless movement and narration, an archive grows quietly. The play captures Pensotti's interest in exploring how we record and remember the past and presents what seems at first glance to be a simple mechanism for the transformation of ephemeral performance into a material record of the past.

The title of the play reminds us that the past is a grotesque animal, and this simple translation of the present into the past is complicated by the opaque nature of the archive. We never learn what the boxes contain. They are labeled neatly with the year that has recently transpired onstage, but we have no access to the contents of the boxes, and we are perhaps reminded of the first box that Pablo opens onstage, which holds a severed hand. There is thus something unsettling about the growing stack of boxes in the poorly lit corners of the stage. What kinds of fragmented remains do they hold? Meticulously filed documents or body parts? For a generation that came of age in the aftermath of dictatorship, the archive of the past is partially forensic. Pablo exemplifies almost a strange coexistence with the severed hand, which obsesses him and affects every aspect of his life personally, professionally, and creatively.[11]

The body is an overlooked theme in *El pasado*, as it relates to questions of memory, the archive, performance, and film. The treatment of the body in *El pasado* also connects to major questions in performance studies that run throughout the book: for example, how the performing body, bodily traces, and bodily remains enact different forms of repertoire, presence, and evidence. In *El pasado*, key moments in the performance assert the body as a major motif, for example, when Pablo in one scene exclaims, "We are living on top of thousands of cadavers" (*El pasado*, 150). In another scene, Pablo visits a morgue to try to find the origin of the severed hand. An almost casual mention of the exhibition *Cuerpos* in 2007 evokes the unease felt by many Argentines when encountering the display of sixteen cadavers for three months at the Abasto shopping center in Buenos Aires. Ostensibly designed to educate the public on how the body works and how unhealthy habits such as smoking or excess alcohol use can contribute to disease, the exhibition's presentation of cadavers cut into cross-sections situated amid shops and passersby spurred controversy, fascination, and nausea ("Bodies" 2007). The shape of the severed hand, present onstage throughout the performance, might seem familiar to audiences, and that is because it is a near replica of the hands in M. C. Escher's *Drawing Hands* (1948), a lithograph on which two hands, drawing one another, seem to "detach themselves from the paper" (Escher, n.d.). It is a study of dimensionality and the contrast between two- and three-dimensionality specifically, a contrast that Pensotti highlights through his exploration of bodies as they are represented through text, screen, and stage.

Pensotti highlights the prominence of the filmic imaginary and the exchanges between film and theater, installation, literature, and the visual arts in the examination of how narrative and time work in the performance. For Pensotti, the past is like a "film that has been lost forever," the scattered fragments of which can only be recovered through narration.[12] Pensotti employs film language and techniques and makes abundant reference to central figures in film, including Leonardo Favio (Argentina), Jacques Demy (French New Wave), Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Werner Herzog (New German Cinema), and Luchino Visconti (neorealism). Pensotti describes the performance as a synesthetic experience: "a written novel designed to be watched" or a "live reading with moving images."[13] In lieu of making extremely long films with huge budgets and technical demands of filming historically expansive stories, Pensotti and Tirantte create innovative stage devices that convey film themes, grammars, and techniques (Prudencio and Moreira 2018, 153). For example, Pensotti has compared the spinning carousel onstage in *El pasado es un animal grotesco* to a long traveling shot. According to Liliana López, the rotating disc "transfers the logic of film montage to the theatrical stage" (2010). Somewhat ironically, for all its sophisticated overlaps between film and theater imaginaries and practices, *El pasado es un animal grotesco* is not an overtly intermedial performance as are many of the works of Arias, León, or Grupo Krapp. The only screens present in the performance are small TV screens in some of the scenes, showing snippets of French films or, as in one scene, Mario adding voice-overs to videos he filmed during the day. Pensotti in many ways is not interested in the blending of film and theater, as in intermedial work, but instead is interested in approaching theater *as* film, a conceptual experiment that dares to imagine "impossible films." Pensotti's method could be described as synesthetic, attempting to mix senses or, in this case, to curate for audiences the possibility of experiencing one medium through another.

While synesthesia blends perception of media in Pensotti's work, Pensotti exploits synergies with documentary film and the field of translation through his use of voice-over in the theatrical context. Pensotti adapts and explores further his use of voice-over in *El pasado* and subsequent works like *Cineastas*. In *El pasado*, each of the sixty-eight scenes is narrated by one of the characters not enacting the scene at hand. According to Anna Matamala, the use of voice-over has been theorized primarily in film and translation studies. The use of voice-over usually refers to the superimposition of the target language over the source language, either prerecorded and/or scripted (in translation) or live and impromptu (in interpretation) (2019, 65). This distinction is valuable in discussion of Pensotti's work because of his own experimentation with interpretation onstage (*Los muertos*) and his exploration of different forms of oral narration

in many of his works. Pilar Orero discusses the illusion of "authenticity and faithfulness" to the original content that voice-over techniques generate, creating a form of hyperreality or the replacement of the real by the signs of the real (2006, 7). Orero asks why voice-over is associated with the nonfiction genre and the creation of reality, while the concept of "omniscient narrator" is still firmly anchored in fiction (7). These questions engage directly with Pensotti's exploration of the real and fiction in his work through the use of onstage narrator.

Holding a microphone, the narrator describes the scene, narrates the actions of the characters, and exposes the characters' thoughts and feelings. It appears, at times, as though the narrator is reading from a novel, experimenting with different forms of narrative voice, and alternating between direct and indirect speech. When the scene comes to an end, the narrator passes the microphone to the next narrator, as the disc slowly turns to introduce the next scene. The tradeoff between narrators is so fast that the presence of the voice-over seems continuous and uninterrupted. At times the narrator stands to the side, on the threshold between two scenes on the rotating disc. At other times, the narrator is more embedded in the scene, for example, seated next to two characters on a bench while narrating. When narrators uses the third person, or "authorial voice," they convey the illusion of omniscience. In another departure from classic narration styles, the narrators in *El pasado es un animal grotesco* never look at the audience but rather keep their gazes focused on the actors in the scenes. This practice recalls the interpreter in *Los muertos*, who interprets back to the speaking character instead of toward the audience. Pensotti describes the effect in the following manner: "The narrator is more of a documentalist or an entomologist, who is describing the characters' behavior as if they were animals" (Gallina 2012, 206). It seems appropriate here that, in discussion of a grotesque past, the figure of the entomologist, a scientist who studies insects, comes to mind.

Through voice-over, Pensotti prioritizes narration over dialogue. In fact, dialogue between characters is minimal, and if it does happen, it is performative, not informative or communicative, for audiences. Frequently dialogue is muffled so we rely entirely on the narration. Not only is the dialogue hard to hear, but it clearly does not always correlate to the narration, which complicates the function of voice-over. Voice-over (in film) usually refers to a narrator that is not present: "Voice-over is distinguishable by the fact that one could not display the speaker by adjusting the camera's position in the pictured story space; instead, the voice comes from another time and space, the time and space of the discourse" (Kozloff 1989, 3). While "voice-off" refers to speakers who are only temporarily offstage while narrating, Pensotti's narrators in *El pasado* are always present in the scenes, assuming characteristics from in-person interpretation, voice-over, and omniscient narration.

Figure 13. *Cineastas* (Filmmakers), Teatro Sarmiento, 2013. Actors: Javier Lorenzo, Valeria Lois, Marcelo Subiotto, and Elisa Carricajo. Photograph by Carlos Furman.

Cineastas (2013): Theater as Installation

If in *El pasado es un animal grotesco*, we witness how an onstage theater device can be harnessed to create the impression of narrative montage or a traveling shot through the rotating carousel, in *Cineastas*, Pensotti develops this cinematic proposal even further through his use of the split screen technique onstage. Premiered in Brussels at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in 2013, *Cineastas* follows the lives of four filmmakers in Buenos Aires over the course of one year as their lives and the stories in their films unfold and mutually inform one another. Gabriel (Javier Lorenzo) is a famous commercial filmmaker who, in the middle of making a comedy, learns he has a terminal illness, prompting him to shift the tone and modify his film with more autobiographical details. Mariela (Valeria Lois) is an experimental documentary filmmaker who is making a film about the collapse of the Soviet Union while at the same time her marriage is falling apart. Nadia (Elisa Carricajo), a daughter of a disappeared father, has been commissioned to make a film about a disappeared father who returns. And Lucas

(Marcello Subiotto), who at the beginning of the performance is a disgruntled McDonald's employee, steals money to make a low-budget film satirizing multinational companies in the era of neoliberal global capitalism.

As in *El pasado es un animal grotesco*, in *Cineastas*, actors take turns narrating the scenes onstage with a microphone in hand, employing a third-person, "authorial" voice, alternating between direct and indirect speech. Also as in *El pasado es un animal grotesco*, in *Cineastas*, time and space are precisely measured, conceived of as duration and vessel, in a sense containing all the stories taking place within one year's time. The use of narration lends history and context to these individuals' lives, creating, in Leonor Arfuch's words, a highly "biographical space," signaling both the "return of the subject" and the resonance of individual with collective experience (2002, 17). The attention to the language and devices of film in *El pasado es un animal grotesco* continues and deepens in *Cineastas*, though references to famous filmmakers are almost eliminated, except for one significant mention of Eisenstein, discussed later. Mariela, one of the filmmakers in *Cineastas*, is making a film about a generation of Argentines between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five who grew up in the aftermath of dictatorship, a direct reference to the cohort of characters in Pensotti's *El pasado*. The filmic imaginary is central to both *El pasado* and *Cineastas*, though neither work incorporates screens beyond the presence of a small television in *El pasado* and a ubiquitous laptop in *Cineastas*.

In his theater, Pensotti draws on installation, literature, and the visual arts in the attempt to make "impossible films" or, at the very least, works that engage enduring questions about the relationship between time and art: "Is there a kind of cinema that is ephemeral? Could something be built in theatre that actually lasts?"[14] Though Pensotti's work engages film and theater most directly in this piece, his persistent investigation of the ephemeral and the durable (objecthood) situates his concerns alongside studies of performance and the visual arts. As Amelia Jones notes, "Our being in the world unfolds in relation to temporality, embodiment, and experience, phenomena at the intersection of live performance and the visual arts" (2012, 11). The driving question, she continues, is "how the live event or ephemeral artwork gets written into history" (11). Pensotti asks these questions explicitly in the summary of *Cineastas*: "Are works of art time capsules that preserve our ephemeral lives for posterity? Or are our lives actually the vehicles through which works of art become eternal?"[15] In dialogue with Diana Taylor, Rebecca Schneider, André Lepecki, Amelia Jones, and others who continue to be fascinated by this question, Pensotti, through his work, asks what constitutes the archive: the lives we embody or the works of art we create? Despite Pensotti and Tirantte's rigorous attention to form and meticulous

curation of time and space, there is something exhilaratingly unruly about their work, an excess always on the brink of eruption.

Pensotti's collaboration with set designer Mariana Tirantte is fundamental to their artistic creation and creates visually mesmerizing effects. Pensotti and Tirantte originally envisioned *Cineastas* as an installation (Sísaro 2013). Pensotti had conducted a series of interviews with Argentine filmmakers, hoping to explore the connection between the private lives of filmmakers and the films they create. The idea was to work with the split screen technique, juxtaposing existing films on the top half of the screen with documentary film footage of the recorded interviews with the filmmakers on the bottom half. Even though the work ultimately ended up as a theatrical performance, Tirantte's use of space and the architectural framing of the stage transform the work into a hybrid art form. *Cineastas* divides the stage vertically into two sections, and though fiction and the real are never presented as discrete in Pensotti and Tirantte's work, the premise here is that on the lower level audiences witness the daily lives of four filmmakers in the process of creating a film and that the top level shows simultaneously the films they have created. Thus, the performance gives the impression of the elevated status of fiction, though grounded in circumstance and the everyday reality of the artists.

Critics frequently reference Pensotti and Tirantte's use of the *dispositivo* onstage, a word adapted from the French *dispositif*, which translates imperfectly to "apparatus" or "device" and is useful in discussing the revolving carousel in *El pasado* and the split screen effect in *Cineastas*, created by dividing the stage into two equal compartments, stacked vertically and separated by a black line onto which the supertitles/subtitles of the translation are projected. Federico Irazábal has discussed the "teatro-dispositivo" at length, defining the concept as "a type of theater profoundly dependent on space (architectural, stage, and technical) and the stage apparatus, which is present from the starting point of creating the work, and without which the work could never be developed" (2013).

Pensotti and Tirantte's stage devices are live mechanisms, storytelling machines, and objects with agency, traveling from city to city, tasked with shaping audiences' diverse experiences across contexts. During the creation of their work, Pensotti and Tirantte's stage devices precede or emerge in tandem with the story being told. Pensotti explains, "I don't conceive of a performance; rather, I start with a *dispositivo* that functions as an installation. It's something that becomes a protagonist; and if you remove it from the stage everything falls apart" (Irazábal 2013). While Pensotti and Tirantte collaborate in the conception of the stage devices, Tirantte, as set designer, is responsible for implementing their design. Her projects are driven by the visual and an appreciation of textures, col-

ors, and materials. Influenced by architecture more than painting or sculpture, Tirantte's sets create a unique symbiosis between architecture and performance, larger-than-life spaces to be inhabited by performers (Tirantte 2019).

Pensotti and Tirantte's stage apparatuses, according to Irazábal, have become steadily less compatible with Argentina's independent theater production (2014, 15). As Irazábal explains, independent theater in Buenos Aires emerging in the 1990s prioritized realist, dysfunctional family dramas staged in small, intimate venues, with minimalist set and costume design (15). While Pensotti's earliest works benefited from support from Buenos Aires's experimental theater venues like el Centro Cultural Rojas, el Centro Cultural Recoleta, and El Teatro Sarmiento, as he began to deepen the exploration of stage apparatuses with Tirantte, especially starting with *El pasado* and *Cineastas*, the small independent theaters in Buenos Aires were not ideal for the staging of the large, elaborate devices required by these works (Prudencio and Moreira 2018, 146). At the same time, international art festivals, such as the Festival Internacional de Teatro, Música, Danza y Artes Visuales, began arriving in Buenos Aires, initiating a shift in Pensotti's production that prioritized connections with international venues and commissioned work to be premiered first abroad (usually Europe) before returning to Buenos Aires (Irazábal 2014, 18). Like the work of many of the artists included in this book, the work of Pensotti and Grupo Marea is sustained primarily through international funding and support. In an interview, Meiyin Wang, then-codirector of the Under the Radar Festival, revealed that what struck her about *Cineastas* was the thoughtful way Pensotti and Tirantte constructed their sets: "They put a lot of thought into how the sets can be broken down and put back together, so they actually tour very well" (qtd. in Grode 2015). For Pensotti and Tirantte, the development of these onstage devices enables both the stories they tell and their transnational mobility as they travel from city to city.

Several of Pensotti's works include dividing lines, evoking borders between reality and fiction, past and present, object and representation. The split stage in *Los muertos*, the split screen in *Cineastas*, and even the carousel in *El pasado* contain these border lines. The subjects in *Cineastas* are transnational nomads, crossing borders as they create their work, a mode of production that characterizes Pensotti's own process, which he describes as nomadic, as he wrote the entire play while on tour. According to Analola Santana, Pensotti's works resist perpetuating certain tropes and assumptions of Latin American theater by avoiding a "folkloric vision that draws on stereotypes and expects Latin American theater to be drawn from popular forms (street theater, carnival, and dances)." Santana laments, "Even at international festivals, Latin American theater is expected to contain magic realism, some type of Amazonian sensuality, the violence of dictatorships, and the tragedy of social terror" (2015). Avoiding common Latin

American tropes and expectations, *Cineastas* establishes more sustained dialogue with world theater, though because the play also centers so prominently around Buenos Aires, it feels intensely local in some ways. Pensotti even maintains that the work "positions itself as a possible portrait of a city, Buenos Aires, through the particular lens of the stories of its filmmakers."[16] *Cineastas* shows how Pensotti curates a local experience of the city of Buenos Aires that is traversed by transnationalism and the crossing of borders, accentuated by the artist's nomadic process, the performers who travel internationally to stage the performance in cities across the globe, and the use of subtitles in the production of the performance in its international tour.

In the case of *Cineastas*, a felicitous effect of the architectural design of the stage is that the placement of translated text between the two stacked rectangular boxes made the text look like subtitles for a movie happening above (Prudencio and Moreira 2018, 147). The inclusion of the translated text adds a third dimension of signification to the performance, and this combination of two elements to create a third is a crucial concept Pensotti and Tirantte work to convey in *Cineastas*, reinforced powerfully through homage to Sergei Eisenstein's theories of montage. *Cineastas* references Eisenstein's montage theory explicitly, and Pensotti also includes the following in his artist statement on the piece: "The juxtaposition of two ideas, which in turn form a third, was exactly what Eisenstein used for his theory of cinematographic montage. . . . The lives and their fictions also collide, and maybe form a third plane."[17] In his essay "Through Theater to Cinema," Eisenstein elaborated on the idea of the third image/plane/space using various analogies, for example, describing what happens when "a blue tone is mixed with a red tone, and the result is thought of as violet, and not as a 'double exposure' of red and blue" (1977, 4). *Cineastas* is the exploration of this search for this third image, or signification, not only through juxtaposition of frames onstage but also through storytelling, articulated spatially through the montage and split screen technique, and through words, spoken onstage and translated into text and projected as surtitles/subtitles.

Montage is a generative concept for Pensotti and Tirantte because of the way it combines both frame and sequence—a geometrical or architectural concept of space and the passage of time. Roland Barthes, in his essay "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," finds inspiration in Diderot's concept of tableau, "a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges," which, when juxtaposed in succession, describe a "perfect play" (1977a, 70). Barthes goes on to compare Brecht's theater and Eisenstein's film, declaring that both "the epic scene in Brecht and the shot in Eisenstein are so many tableaux" and that "nothing separates the scene in epic theatre from the Eisenstein shot" (71). As Babak Ebrahimian notes, "Juxtaposition is fundamental to the entire montage process. The film we see on

screen is created by frames (or shots), one after another, one juxtaposed with the second and third, and so on. In this light, it is practically impossible to speak about the meaning of a single shot on its own. Each frame speaks, but only in conjunction to its previous shot" (2004, 67).

Renowned for his theories of montage, Eisenstein also theorized the creative flexibility of frame. In a lecture titled "The Dynamic Square," organized by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences in Hollywood, California, in 1930, Eisenstein advocated for the "widest freedom in spatial frame composition" in response to attempts by the academy to standardize a wide-screen format for films (Somaini 2020, 221). I mention this here briefly because it relates so closely to the use of juxtaposed rectangles and the concept of split screen in *Cineastas*. And it also reveals Eisenstein's curatorial instincts in envisioning flexible frameworks that bridged composition and production. In his lecture, Eisenstein proposed the "dynamic square," a "film format that would be *dynamic* in the sense that it could produce different projection formats at any stage during the screening of a film" (Somaini 2020, 222). This dynamic square format would open "a maximum degree of freedom in spatial and figurative composition, without privileging either the horizontal dimension or the vertical one" (223). In *Cineastas*, we see a theatrical staging of this dynamic square in the creation of verticality through the stacked rectangular boxes. Tirantte herself has confessed that she "has a thing for squares," visible in *Cineastas* and evident in the square frame doubling as screen, book, and bed in Arias's *Melancholy and Demonstrations* (Tirantte 2019). Pensotti and Tirantte discussed the option of dividing the space into two boxes placed horizontally side by side, to create the illusion of sequence, or one on top of the another, vertically, to create a sense of superimposition and to mine the metaphorical possibilities of real lives below and the artistic rendering of lives above; ultimately, they sided with the second, vertical option (Sísaro 2013). These creative decisions and the desire to emphasize the verticality of the performance evoke the ideal plasticity of Eisenstein's "dynamic square."

The vertically stacked boxes evoke the split screen technique and the prevalence of multiscreen environments found increasingly in galleries and museums (Talen 2002). Julie Talen attributes the resurgence of the divided screen in the early twenty-first century to the arrival of nonlinear editing systems (Avid, Final Cut Pro, and After Effects) (2002). Instead of creating linear narratives, the split screen aesthetic tells stories spatially through juxtaposition and simultaneity, symmetry, and visual irony (Ingrassia 2009). Talen poses the following question when using the split-screen technique: where is *now*? Which panel is the single shared moment in time that heretofore defined single-channel movies?" (2002). Through their split-screen apparatus in *Cineastas*, Pensotti and

Tirantte create iconic juxtapositions that visually situate the work in dialogue with conceptual art. They construct nonlinear spatial narratives through superimposition and simultaneity. At times during the performance, actions in the lower level and upper level synchronize—for example, when we see Gabriel, in the lower frame, at the doctor's office raising his arms during a medical exam and Tony, in the upper frame, doing the same. These moments of synchronized choreography propose a convergence of real and imagined lives, everyday experience, and artistic representation.

The Audience, El público, and *Le Public/Het Publiek* (2020–21): Arriving and Returning to Film

While Pensotti trained as a filmmaker, for the first twenty years of his career he worked primarily in theater, installation, and urban intervention. Throughout this work, Pensotti's cinematic lens is ever present and intervenes more intensely over the years. Followers of Pensotti's work accustomed to his cinematic approach to theater were perhaps not expecting that he would create an actual film, but this is exactly what he and Grupo Marea did. In 2020 they premiered *El público*, one of a trilogy of films (with *The Audience* and *Le Public/Het Publiek*) that premiered first in Athens, followed by Buenos Aires and Brussels. As Pensotti remarks, the film marked a shift, a moment when theater artists "crossed over to the other side" (Commisso 2022). For Pensotti, this crossing to the other side is also a return to his origins in film.

If the organizing principle in *Cineastas* is film, in *El público* it is theater. *El público* premiered in 2020 in Buenos Aires, before the pandemic, in the framework of the International Festival of Buenos Aires in the Leopoldo Lugones cinema at the San Martín Theater and at the San Martín Cultural Center.[18] This is important because the film was screened in venues used predominantly for theater, located in the heart of the commercial theater district surrounding Avenida Corrientes, where most of the scenes of the film were also filmed. The opening scene of the film reveals an empty theater auditorium as spectators arrive and take their seats. The camera positions us, the spectators of the film, as if we were on the stage, gazing at the theater audience. The scene then cuts to show the spectators leaving the theater as they stream out onto the streets of Buenos Aires. As spectators of the film, we never get to see the play, but the audience members' reflections on the play establish the premise for the rest of the film.

The film consists of eleven stories that unfold in a range of locales across Buenos Aires, including a karaoke bar, a hospital, a movie set, apartments, a shopping mall, and iconic sites like the Obelisk, the Plaza de Mayo, and several landmark theaters. Each of the stories features one of the spectators from

Figure 14. *El público* (The Audience), Teatro San Martín, Buenos Aires, 2020. Photograph by Yarará Rodríguez.

the play from the night before. The first story features two performers, a father and son in real life, who are at the top of the 220-foot Obelisk rehearsing a scene from a famous urban intervention performed in 1989 by the group Organización Negra. Another episode follows a distraught dog owner mourning the death of her pet, as she roams across the city trying to find a place to bury it. In another story, a couple that has recently moved to a new apartment finds a box hidden under the floorboards with notebooks, photographs, and a pistol, items hidden by militants during the dictatorship. And in yet another, a delivery person agrees to play the role of a body double for his photographer friend's project to reproduce the photographs of people who died during protests at the Plaza de Mayo in December 2001. In each of the eleven stories, one of the characters says a variation of the following: "Last night I saw a play about a De la Rúa impersonator." President De la Rúa was famously whisked away in a helicopter on December 20, 2001, from the Casa Rosada amid intensifying economic turmoil and social unrest. The fictional spectator elaborates on a particular aspect of the play that speaks to their own life or the situation they find themself in.

Though diverse, the stories showcased in *El público* (and in all the works of the trilogy) ask the same questions, outlined by Pensotti in his artist statement on the piece: "How are spectators' lives transformed by the experience of going to a play? Is it possible to tell the story of a city through the fictions it produces? What is it like to transform into a character of one of these urban stories?

And what is the effect of transforming spectators into protagonists?"[19] From the opening scene, we, as spectators of the film, are positioned as actors onstage as we watch the audience file in and take their seats. Pensotti creates a mirroring effect between performers and spectators (Trastoy 2022). *El público* also acts as a kind of mirror to previous works like *Cineastas*, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between life and art, though instead of examining how film affects and shapes the course of our lives (through theater), as in *Cineastas*, in *El público* Pensotti is interested in asking how theater shapes our lives (via film).

In its initial run during the International Festival of Buenos Aires in 2020, after the film ended, spectators were led outside onto the vibrant Avenida Corrientes, where they met with a band of musicians with portable speakers who accompanied them to the Metropolitan Theater, right down the street. Taking place in the neighborhood where many of the scenes in the film are set, the street procession creates the illusion that spectators have walked directly into the world of the film, becoming co-protagonists in the process. The framing of the spectators' exit as part of the performance also makes spectators conscious of the fact that, as they leave, they embody the early scene in the film showing spectators as they leave the theater, producing a doubling, repetition, or continuation of the spectatorship/acting experience. This continued framing of the performance in the procession through the theater district of Buenos Aires highlights Pensotti's interest in situating the film in context while curating overlapping fictional frameworks.

Pensotti cites Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* (1987) as a major influence in this work that continues to develop Pensotti's fascination with the city in *El público*. Perec's novel follows the lives of inhabitants of an apartment building in Paris located at 11 rue Simon-Crubellier over the course of several decades. Perec aligned his work with the French Oulipo movement (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), which imposed writing constraints as a way of exploring and testing the bounds of literature. For *Life: A User's Manual*, for example, Perec created forty-two categories he had to include in each chapter, "such as a body position, an activity, a style of furniture, two quotations, clothes, jewelry, a geometric shape, a kind of flower, etc." (Lévy 2004, 52). These constraints prompt writing and reading processes that are challenging and rigorously structured yet designed to nourish creative approaches to literature. Likewise, Pensotti seeks to harness creativity through introducing constraints; in the film, this takes the form of the required prompt in each vignette of a character stating, "Last night I saw a play about a De la Rúa impersonator." The constraint, in many ways, resembles the *dispotif*/apparatus, which delimits or restricts to ultimately expand and push beyond limits imposed by time, genre, space, and narrative voice. Both Perec and Pensotti explore urban spaces and the characters who inhabit them,

integrating their discrete stories into a cohesive whole. The emergent whole, for Pensotti, refers to the city of Buenos Aires and reflects his desire to give an account of the city at a specific moment through the assembly of short films.

Pensotti remarks that he wanted to film all the stories in the center of the city, what he calls "an epicenter for all the important political events in the last 50 years" (Cabezas 2020). The frequent reference to the year 2001 in the film highlights this transformative moment and situates the film in constant dialogue with the past. The year 1989 figures prominently as well, recalling skyrocketing inflation under President Raúl Alfonsín, the election of President Carlos Saúl Menem, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. On December 22 and 23, 1989, artists belonging to the group Organzación Negra harnessed themselves to the Obelisk and performed aerial stunts at the peak of the 220-foot structure. At the height of inflation, when buying theater tickets was prohibitive for many, between twenty thousand and thirty thousand spectators gathered to witness the performance from the surrounding plaza and the Avenida 9 de Julio (Cruz 2021). Operación Negra departed from dominant conventional theater trends and theater spaces and sought to inspire awe in audiences through death-defying stunts. The spectacular images of the performers scaling the Obelisk at the heart of the city remain etched in collective memory. Pensotti's *El público* recovers the lost lineage of this important intervention through an homage to the group in the film's first vignette featuring a father-son duo reenacting the iconic performance of 1989 thirty years later. Father and son rehearse together at the top of the Obelisk, against the backdrop of panoramic views of Avenida 9 de Julio and the River Plate. At one moment we hear the father say, "No me da el cuerpo" (I'm not strong enough/My body is too weak), reminding audiences of the time elapsed since 1989 and signaling the accumulation of bodily exhaustion and aging over thirty years.

The father-son duo represents another example of mirroring or doubling, in this case drawing attention to both the resemblance and the age difference between them. Throughout the film, performers reenact scenes from the past, creating another doubling effect. For example, in one scene a husband sings songs from his past in a karaoke bar and argues with his wife about whether to return to China or stay in Buenos Aires. In another scene, a photographer restages photographs of protesters who died during the riots of December 2001. In yet another, a filmmaker restages the scene of her mother's kidnapping and disappearance during the dictatorship. Another kind of doubling between artist and performer occurs when Pensotti and Tirantte make a brief appearance in the film, seen leaving an apartment building. In a final scene, two housekeepers sweep the debris (remains) off a stage after a theater performance while they converse about the performance. We hear them say, "it hits you harder" ("pega

más fuerte") because it's about real life. Once again, as in *El pasado es un animal grotesco*, Pensotti embeds reference to Biodrama in fictional performance. For Trastoy, Pensotti's *El público* generates a "complex play of meta-artistic or self-referential references" that reinforces the mirroring effect created between film and theater and between the experiences of acting and spectatorship (2022). The doubling of self, reenactments, and conscious reflection on past and present heighten the film's self-referentiality and homage to performance.

Of all the artists in this book, Pensotti is perhaps most voracious in his exploration of the contact zones between performance, film, and the visual arts. Pensotti's approach here, however, is unique in that he is more interested in exploring what happens when a medium is disguised as another or acts like another, for example, when film acts like theater and theater acts like film. The language of his theater is montage, split screen, *dispotif*, and traveling shots; his film comes to life through the language and motifs of theater, performance, and audience reception. His urban interventions resemble installations, his plays are "impossible films" or "live novels," and his films spill into the streets as urban interventions. Devouring, consuming, and producing at the same time, his "omnivorous" plays, films, and installations expand and contract the bounds of performance. As artist-curator, Pensotti imagines performances that bring into dialogue object-based and time-based art through inventive stage *dispositivos*, or apparatuses codesigned with Mariana Tirantte. His work is both an homage to the city of Buenos Aires and a critique of the local conditions influencing artists' lives and their work in the wake of 2001. Sited and global, his work is about Buenos Aires yet conceptually mobile, meditating deeply on time and place and the spatiotemporal constellations that determine the course and stories of our lives.

Conclusion

Deepfake Politics and Fictions of the Real

In October 2024, during the Martin Fierro Film Awards ceremony in Buenos Aires, actor Norman Briski received the Lifetime Achievement Award and remarked, "La ficción es una radiografía de la realidad. Nos están afanando la ficción, está en la (Casa) Rosada la ficción" (Fiction is an X-ray of reality. They're stealing fiction from us; fiction is in the Pink [House]) (2024). There is so much to dissect in this statement. What does fiction stand for here? If it is shorthand for the arts, the statement evokes competing claims and raises the question of the rights to culture and artistic expression. Briski's assertion that fiction has been stolen by Milei's government suggests a critique of fiction when used as a political tool, one that advances fictions in the guise of truths. Should we read the reference to the X-ray as evoking an inner truth, essence, or something that is invisible but real? Does the idea of an X-ray of reality reflect a fundamentally realist paradigm? Briski's statement alerts us to the ways in which discourses of fiction and the real in the arts are always political and engaged in competing claims for their use.[1]

Since Milei came to power in December 2023, cultural resistance to his proposed policies has been strong and has evolved into new coalitions and alliances, for example, between unions and the cultural sector. After just forty-five days in office, in January 2024, half a million people convened on the streets in cities across Argentina in protest of Milei's proposed cuts included in the Omnibus Bill. As Daniel Cholakian notes, this protest was unprecedented because "for the first time in the history of the Argentine workers' movement, the three main trade union confederations called upon cultural organizations to protagonize the march" (2024a, 2). Rallying around the slogan #NoAlApagónCultural (No to Cultural Blackout), a transdisciplinary collective of cultural sectors and union members marched together in solidarity and protest against Milei's proposed cuts to the arts (2). Milei has used social media to retaliate aggressively against protesters, targeting artists and celebrities who have spoken out against him

publicly, for example, in a viral exchange with mega pop star Lali Espósito. When Espósito tweeted, "how dangerous, how sad" (qué peligroso, qué triste) after the presidential election, Milei responded with a series of insulting and defamatory tweets, calling Espósito a parasite and accusing her of stealing from the state. Milei tweeted an AI-generated meme of a fake video showing Espósito holding bags of cash running from starving children (Centenera 2024). Journalists and public figures denounced the exchange between Milei and the singer, pointing out the asymmetry of power relations between the head of state and a civilian and the potential dangers of generating intense bullying via social media that could result in aggression (Sirvén 2024). In another instance of high-profile activism, Lola Arias, in her acceptance speech of the International Ibsen Award in October 2024, began by stating, "Thank you to the jury for shining a light on a woman from Argentina at a time when Javier Milei's far-right government is bent on destroying education, public health, national industry, art, cinema and cultural institutions, and pushing thousands of people to live below the poverty line."[2] Arias draws attention not only to Milei's cultural policies but also to the retrograde policies that have sought to reverse progressive gender rights and return the country to traditional gender roles that historically have oppressed women, trans, and queer people.

In 2024, theater collective Piel de Lava (Elisa Carricajo, Pilar Gamboa, Laura Paredes, and Valeria Correa) premiered *Parlamento* (Parliament) at the Picadero Theater in Buenos Aires. In the play, a tragicomic look into a dystopian future, fascist leaders give speeches and testify incoherently and absurdly, with clear allusions to global leaders on the far right, including Milei. Originally inspired by their observations of women members of Parliament in Europe and an ongoing interest in exploring the "performance of political discourse," Piel de Lava shifted the focus of the project as the political landscape in Argentina changed. They began working on *Parlamento* in 2023 during an artistic residency at Arthaus, a cultural center for contemporary visual arts, film, and performance in the heart of the microcenter in Buenos Aires. Members of Piel de Lava have written, directed, and acted in their performances for over twenty years, an enduring, collaborative practice that exemplifies the spirit of collective creation that is of central importance to the artists discussed in this book. In the end, "one forgets who wrote what" (se olvida quién escribió qué) (Gamboa and Correa 2024). The residency gave Piel de Lava the opportunity to try something different by incorporating feedback from the audiences during a series of preperformances and modifying the work over the course of a year before it officially premiered in 2024 at the Picadero Theater. In an interview, Pilar Gamboa talks about how performing versions of the work from 2023 to 2024 became difficult when politically Piel de Lava felt like they were in the "eye of the storm" (surrounding Milei's

election) and that the dystopian fiction they were performing came closer to representing reality. In the performance, they play four members of a global parliament stuck in a spaceship orbiting earth, which is in flames. From their spaceship, they stream their "right-wing" speeches (*derechosos*) to Earth, but their attempts to convey a coherent message are mired in bureaucratic chaos. At one point, Gamboa's character decides to transmutate from human to virtual being.

If Briski accuses the Milei government of stealing fiction, Piel de Lava shows it is possible to take it back. *Parlamento* offers a powerful example of artists in full command of fiction as a tool of political critique and parody. The group also participates in a dystopian, sci-fi, posthuman/nonhuman turn in fiction emerging at this precise political and planetary moment, influenced by the global rise of the ultraright, climate catastrophe, and AI technologies. From Argentina, the blockbuster Netflix hit *Eternauta* and speculative fiction by Samanta Schweblin and Mariana Enríquez are examples of this turn. Foreshadowing this interest in sci-fi and the nonhuman are works treated in this book, like León and Martínez's film *Estrellas* (2007), a documentary filmed in a shantytown that becomes the set for a fiction film in which aliens attack Earth, and Grupo Krapp's *El futuro de los hipopótamos* (2017), which tests categories of the human through explorations of animal-human hybridity and mortality.

This shift in dominant fictional modes reflects current global preoccupations and has implications for the study of the real, considered vis-à-vis fiction or as fiction disguised or encoded as the real. *Fictions of the Real* has centered its attention on the concept of the real in contemporary Argentine performance in relation to method, with regard to discourse, and as an effect. This book approaches the real through the examination of the documentary archive; the exploration of forms of iconicity, such as site specificity or in-person reenactment; the self-reflexive meditation on real time and performance duration; a focus on the improvised and unpredictable aspects of performance; the use of hypermediacy and exposure of the devices for creation in the frame; and work with children, animals, and nonactors. The works I have examined here, in film and theater, test the boundaries of the performative frame and seek opportunities to transcend the containing function of the frame through experiments with online streaming, film screenings that transform into urban interventions, exploration of museums, site-specific work, and citation of other works. Intermediality—the relationship between media in a work—creates a vital interface between audiovisual media and embodied, live performance in many of the works studied here that can produce powerful effects of "the real," for example, through the recording of Arias's mother's voice in *Melancholy and Demonstrations* or the spectral projection of a video of Luis Biasotto on a back screen in the performance *Réquiem* by Grupo Krapp. Transmediality—the relationship between media across different works—is equally powerful for art-

ists here who work across media platforms on projects, oftentimes with the same actors, in a kind of migration between film and theater that resembles an act of self-translation.

Throughout this book I have examined how documentary work and its intimate reenactments and retellings of stories, the in-person performance, the interruptions of the performative frame, and the baring devices, all strive to bring audiences closer to "the real," a feeling or an effect that is far from uniform. Getting close to the real is a concern for both art and politics, as Javier Milei has made very clear through the prominent role that generative AI has played in his campaign and political agenda. Milei has said that he wants Argentina to become a "global AI powerhouse" (*Buenos Aires Herald* 2024). But Milei's affinity for AI is most known through his use of HeyGen to create an AI video translation of his speech in real time at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2024. The speech itself was inflammatory and stirred protest and much debate, as Milei aligned himself with the global right and made homophobic, misogynistic remarks. Yet what awed spectators even more than the content of his speech was its delivery, an AI-generated translation that was able to translate the content of Milei's speech into English in real time, adopting his accent and tone of voice and making his lips move as if he were speaking English. The effect was "a superb deepfake of reality" (Thomas 2024). Deepfakes come uncannily close to appearing real, though the effect is generated as much through manipulation as through iconicity—in the case of Milei's video through AI voice cloning and lip-synching. When what appears real is deeply fake, ethical questions arise, and discourses of truth, artifice, and credibility dominate in discussions of political representation.

For example, one of Lola Arias's works that does not engage the Argentine context, *Futureland* (2019), shows how AI technologies, in collaboration with intermedial techniques, have the power to unsettle our understanding of the real, to collapse the distinction between the real and fiction, and to alter conceptions of presence, "the here and now," embodiment, character, and acting. *Futureland* premiered in 2019 at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. I was able to see it remotely during the pandemic when it was streamed live by the Maxim Gorki Theater in June 2020. The work follows the lives of eight unaccompanied minors (ages fourteen through eighteen) who came to Germany from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Guinea, and Bangladesh seeking asylum. *Futureland* was inspired by Arias's previous work *What They Want to Hear* (2018), which reconstructed the asylum application process of refugee Raaed Alkour, a Syrian archeologist, who at the time of the premiere of the work had been stuck in bureaucratic limbo in Berlin for four years. In *Futureland*, Arias investigates this process further and focuses on the interviews, or "audition process," the

teenagers must undergo in order to be deemed credible and worthy of asylum (Arias, qtd. in Radosavljević 2020). As Arias remarks in the work's artist statement, "These are teenagers who have landed in a new world where they don't know the rules. They are still in a grace period: they can stay but they don't know for how long. . . . They are in between cultures, in between children and adults, and in between past, present and future, searching for their own identity."[3]

Arias describes the piece as a "science-fiction documentary" and as a "video game piece born out of the imagination of those who have survived and are now inventing their own future."[4] During workshops with the performers, Arias noticed they were all playing the same video game, *PUBG: Battlegrounds* (formerly known as *Player Unknown Battlegrounds*), a multiplayer "battle royale" online game in which one hundred players play against one another to become the last remaining survivor (Radosavljević 2020, 2). The game begins with players parachuting out of a plane onto an island, where they scavenge for weapons and armor and battle each other as the island shrinks in size.[5] In the context of the performance, the video game motif and video game model give the performers a sense of agency and control. The opening scene of *Futureland* closely resembles the opening of the video game in which players parachute out of the plane. Arias collaborated with the 3D video animator Luis August Krawen and the video artist Mikko Gaestel to create the video game aspects and to incorporate AI-generated avatars into the piece. In *Futureland*, the opening scene features a video of the eight performers digitally modeled and animated as 3D avatars. The hatch of the plane opens, and the eight avatars jump out of the plane and parachute down to land. Audiences are thus introduced to the performers as digitally animated avatars who then in the next scene appear onstage in person, embodied, in the flesh. These avatars correspond to the real-life performers in the performance, the teenage refugees: Mamadou, Faiya, Bashar, Sarah, Sagal, Ahmad, Mohamed, and May. Digital animation is used to make the performers look robotic and like video game characters.

Video design was also used to create another set of avatars in the performance to represent the authority figures in *Futureland*, who interview the refugees. Video artist Gaestel describes how he used 3D animation generated live in the Unity game machine to create the avatars. Frequently used to develop video games, in the case of *Futureland*, the platform Unity was used to create AI-generated avatars of bureaucrats, social workers, and tutors who, projected on-screen, ask questions in real time through text-to-speech mouth movement to the performers onstage.[6] *Futureland* is a perfect example of how intermediality and AI technologies (here through text to speech in real time) create an interface between virtual and embodied performance, evoking Haraway's classic definition of a "cyborg" as a "hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of

social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway 1991, 149; Cobello 2021b, 65). For performance studies, the creation of virtual avatars in real time also changes how presence, character, acting, text, and archive are conceived of in performance. It is hard to establish the presence of the AI-generated avatars on-screen. They interact with onstage performers and engage in dialogue, through text-to-voice technologies, but the source of the text comes from offstage. In the case of this set of virtual avatars, there is no difference between actor and character (in contrast to the teenagers who have both embodied and 3D-animated avatar selves). The use of AI technologies to create avatars in performance also raises questions about acting, how it is defined, what it entails, and whether it is the providence of the human. If these questions sound familiar by this point, it is because they are also questions that are central to this book's investigation of the real in contemporary Argentine performance.

There are no signs of waning interest in the real in theater and performance studies. The theme of the annual summer conference sponsored by the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in 2025 was "The Real." A brief synopsis of the conference stated, "A binary opposition between 'real' and 'virtual' is ever more outdated and unnecessary. Theatre and performance have always been both real and representation."[7] This book has sought to move away from the binary structures into which the real is often locked, as if the concept of "the real" were intractably opposed to virtuality or fiction. I instead focus on more constellative formations (as in Fuentes's *Performance Constellations* [2019]) and concepts introduced by the artists, discussed here, that highlight the rich networks and cross-pollinations across screens and stages exemplified by Arias's "living creatures," "time machines," "time capsules," and "stunt doubles"; Pensotti's "omnivorous theater"; or Grupo Krapp's "spectral déjà vu."

This book thus captures a moment of transformation and sustained interest in the real globally and in Argentine performance. A glance at the most recent works from 2024–25 by the artists discussed in this book affirms a continued interest in exploring a range of questions relating to the real in an era of slashed funding under Milei, with a pronounced focus on the use of documentary modes, archival research, exploration of the accidental and unpredictable onstage, and reenactment and reflection on the past. In an interview at the premiere of his performance *A Voracious Shadow* at Festival d'Avignon in 2024, Pensotti sums up the impact of Milei's cuts on the cultural sector: "It's an absolute disaster," he says, in reference to the elimination of state funding of Argentine film and theater. "All that is left is resistance" (Agencia EFE 2024). In chapter 1, I discussed the idea of the stunt double in relation to Arias's work and the perilous choreographies her bold performances demanded; the most recent works by Arias, León, Acuña (Grupo Krapp), Paula, and Pensotti embody this

notion of peril through the themes they explore and the bodily experimentation they propose.

New works produced by these artists exhibit strategies of self-preservation and solidarity that build on accumulated strategies of resistance and survival developed in the wake of 2001, during the NiUnaMenos marches as of 2015, under lockdown during the pandemic, and in the framework of Milei's cuts to the cultural sector. Resistance for these artists is creative and collaborative and is best demonstrated through the emergence of innovative cultural and artistic venues like Paraíso Club, an art collective that functions like a club and a production company. Members pay a modest membership fee to subscribe and have access to performances and social events, podcasts, bulletins, and other club-related initiatives. Most interesting in the context of this book is that members also are invited to attend rehearsals and provide feedback. Members take part in the creative process and the production process, thus granting spectators a joint curatorial role. First envisioned in 2021 during the pandemic by a group of artists led by Cynthia Edul, since 2023 Paraíso Club has grown to become a successful model for encouraging self-reliance, promoting solidarity, and fomenting the performing arts in Buenos Aires. The founding artists of Paraíso Club were interested in questioning conventional models of arts programming. For example, they asked, "Is it possible to avoid the logic of showing finished works?" and "Why do we keep doing performances once a week at the same time and day?" (Laube 2023). The idea of the club came together through conversations about how to create a financially sustainable model of work for artists and cultivate a space for experimentation as a viable alternative to having to leave the country or work in official theater where the timeline for production is much shorter (Laube 2023). For a small subscription fee, members gain access to workshops, talks, and performances created by Paraíso Club. This kind of model focuses on the audience's connection to the creative process. As Edul states, our idea was to move "toward the encounter that was always there, with the audience, to seek out those existing spectators and find others" (Laube 2023).

Paraíso Club now premieres twelve performances per year and has established partnerships with artistic venues in Buenos Aires, including Arthaus. Off the beaten track from the commercial theater district on Avenida Corrientes and the smaller, independent theaters found in the Abasto neighborhood, Arthaus has revitalized the arts scene in the microcenter—like many urban centers left desolate by COVID-19—and is remapping the coordinates of theater and performance in the city of Buenos Aires. Founded by entrepreneur, musician, and art collector Andrés Buhar in 2021, Arthaus is run by a team of artists and curators committed to generating a space for experimentation and research across

disciplines.[8] Together, Paraíso Club and Arthaus represent spaces of resistance and alternative channels of support amid the drastic cuts to state funding of the arts under Milei.

In 2024, Romina Paula, a founding member of Paraíso Club, premiered her play *Sombras, por supuesto* (Shadows, of Course) at Arthaus. The work reunited the members of the theater company El Silencio—Esteban Lamothe, Esteban Bigliardi, Susana Pampín, and Pilar Gamboa—who together had performed in the trilogy of plays *Algo de ruido hace*, *El tiempo todo entero*, and *Fauna*, discussed in chapter 4. At the level of the story, the play is about the investigation into the whereabouts of a missing son, yet on another level, Paula was also interested in exploring what would happen when the actors of El Silencio came together again, whether after ten years their reunion would inspire retrospection or foster the imagining of a new future.[9] At the same time, the play is an homage to Rainer Werner Fassbinder, a filmmaker whose methodology focusing on rehearsal, translation, and repetition was always an inspiration for the group.[10] In the artist statement, referring to the members of El Silencio, Paula asks, "Ten years later, how will their bodies and voices connect to one another in the present? Will they embody and share the bonds they once had?"[11] In this book I have discussed in-person reenactment as a compelling technique of evoking the real. Arias's Children's Trilogy and War Trilogy and Grupo Krapp's *Retrecedida* are all interested in how our past selves ghost our present selves. These are the shadows, of course, of past work that are cast in the present and future, "the remains of performance" that persist and collide with present and future selves (Schneider 2011).

Bailarinas incendiadas (Dancers in Flames), directed by Luciana Acuña, cowritten by Mariana Chaud and Alejo Moguillanksy, and based on archival research by Ignacio González, also premiered at Arthaus in 2024 as part of the Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires. Also interested in reanimating the past, *Bailarinas incendiadas* continues to explore the real through documentary modes and archival research. The work examines a historical phenomenon that took place worldwide in theaters in the mid-nineteenth century when gas-powered lighting systems were introduced for the first time and, in many documented instances, ballet dancers were severely burned or died after their costumes caught fire. This is the premise of the work, and performers onstage all don tutus to evoke this grisly occurrence. The performance incorporates elements of Biodrama in its focus on the real, living person Matías Sendón, famed lighting designer and frequent collaborator with Grupo Krapp, who in this work presents to the audience the history of stage lighting and the advent of gas illumination in nineteenth-century dance. The performance showcases the synergies between

dance, theater, video, and lighting and generates an atmosphere of risk and danger, a perilous choreography that includes members of the audience, who during an intermission are invited to dance along with the performers.

Like *Bailarinas incendiadas*, Pensotti's *A Voracious Shadow* is inspired by a worldwide phenomenon, the melting of ice and snow on mountaintops due to climate change that in recent years has uncovered the remains of the bodies of mountain climbers who died while attempting to climb. In his artist statement, Pensotti describes the work the following way: "Jean Vidal is a climber, son of a famous mountaineer who disappeared trying to reach the summit of Annapurna in 1989, when he [Jean] was a little boy. In 2017, at the age of 40 and before retiring, Jean wants to try to complete the climb in which his father died. But in doing so something absolutely unexpected happens to him and makes his story famous."[12] *A Voracious Shadow*, described by Pensotti as a "fictional documentary," offers a perfect example of a work that is encoded as if it were documentary, though it is almost entirely fictional.[13] The work belongs to a theater series sponsored by Festival d'Avignon called "Itinerant Shows" that promotes outreach of theater and the mobility of works to the greater community. For that reason, the cast is small (only two people) and the technical requirements are minimal.[14] In the play, Jean Vidal (played by Cédric Eeckhout in the French version) is onstage with Michel Roux (played by Élios Noël), the actor who, audiences find out, played Vidal in a film about his life. Very in line with Pensotti's style, the play creates an encounter between a real person and the actor who played him in a film. Pensotti explores the exchanges between film and theater without screens, a trademark of works like *Cineastas* or *El pasado es un animal grotesco*. Designed by Mariana Tirantte, the stage supports a wall that actors scale from opposite sides and is easily transportable, following the criteria for the "Itinerant Shows" series, with premieres in Avignon (2024), Vienna at the Wiener Festwochen (2025), and Buenos Aires (2025). *A Voracious Shadow* shows how Pensotti curates his work across contexts and languages, oftentimes premiering first in Europe and touring internationally before arriving in Buenos Aires, though Pensotti emphasizes that even though his work may be funded by European investors and premieres in Europe, his work always has close ties to Buenos Aires and is very much about Buenos Aires.

This book traces the research trajectory of Arias as it has deepened transnationally, her works frequently premiering in Berlin, where she is based, and traveling the international festival circuit before arriving in Buenos Aires. Her work as a transnational artist has developed in tandem with her interest in the transmedial transfers between theater and film. Her film *Reas* and the subsequent play *Los días afuera* (The Days Out There), which premiered four months later, display the rich transmediality of her work, particularly between documen-

tary theater and film, as we have seen in her War Trilogy. Especially regarding *Reas* and *Los días afuera*, where the latter is the continuation of the story of the formerly incarcerated performers once they are out of prison, the shift from film to theater evokes processes of migration, transposition, and transcreation that open the work artistically and allows the performers to position themselves differently. With an original soundtrack by Ulises Conti and cinematography by Martín Bechimol, whose experience in the music industry gave the musical scenes a glossy, polished music video aesthetic, the film *Reas* highlights Arias's experimentation with documentary modes, here blended with the musical genre, incorporating voguing and cumbia traditions. In this work, Arias used documentary modes and experimentation with the musical genre to create an alternative real that counters dominant tropes of "el realismo carcelario" (carceral realism) (Monteagudo 2024). *Reas* and *Los días afuera* showcase Arias's treatment of her work as a "living creature" that evolves over time; they are works that are created collectively and require a complex level of collaboration with artists but also with external support networks; in the case of *Los días afuera*, lawyers worked with the performers to make sure they all had bank accounts and could get paid. Arias began thinking of *Reas* during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it premiered under Milei, two contexts of extreme conditions for artistic creation and production. *Reas* is a joint production with support from Gema Films (Argentina), Sutor Kolonko (Germany), and Mira Films (Switzerland), and the film was one of the last to receive support from the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts in Argentina before drastic cuts. In her acceptance of the International Ibsen Award in Oslo 2024, Arias publicly called out Milei for destroying Argentina's cultural institutions.

Like Arias's *Reas*, the origins of Federico León's play *El trabajo* (Work, 2025) date back to the pandemic. Workshopped at the Paraíso Club and premiered at the intimate Espacio Zelaya, *El trabajo* tests the boundaries of the performative, attempted variously through autobiographical performance (León in the role of an acting instructor), through the framing of the work as an acting workshop, and through the site specificity of the work, "el espacio hace de sí mismo" (the space represents itself) (Mannarino 2025). León's former home has been converted into his studio, where he teaches acting workshops, and it doubles (triples?) as a performance space. The space itself is a constantly evolving archive of his life and work, a mise en abyme that captures León's interest in replicating and disrupting the performative frame. León continues his experimentation of vulnerability onstage; one of the actors, Beatriz Rajland, a former law professor, is eighty-seven years old and uses a cane. Onstage, a perilous choreography orchestrates the movement and interactions of the three actors: "Things break, props move around, there are disagreements, scenes of terror, music, an impro-

vised bar scene, and much more" (Méndez 2025). Tension, danger, and risk are all related to the uncertain and the accidental in his work. León, more than any other artist here, is fascinated by generating extreme situations in his theater, and since he began in theater, he has been interested in the creative effects of exploring discomfort, doubt, and failure onstage. León relates, "I remember a lot of accidents from the time I was studying [theater]. Acting and injuring oneself were part of the same practice" (León 2025). *El trabajo* introduces a variation on this practice, an attempt to balance the potentially harmful effects of extreme theater with contemplative, intentional acts of self-preservation. León is interested in exploring the possibility of modifying behavior and "working against one's own tendencies" through theater, a new direction in his work that almost seems to combine cognitive behavioral therapy with theater, yet another attempt to stretch (and perhaps break through) the boundaries of the performative.

The artists discussed in this book represent a unique cohort of established theater makers and filmmakers that engage documentary modes in their work. Throughout the book I have analyzed select works by these artists that reveal how the exchanges between screens and stages in their work contribute to generating synergies that accentuate the effects of the real or give audiences a sense of getting closer to the real. This book sought to bring documentary theater and film into closer dialogue through analysis of coalescing interests across media in the subjective turn and the use of the first person, self-reflexive performance, and meditation on the past. I use concepts of intermediality and transmediality throughout the book to support the analysis of documentary film and theater and foster dialogue between screens and stage in and across works. In the context of post-2001, when most of the artists here began working, they started in theater, and over the years they have started to make films, sometimes going back and forth between the two media. The conditions of economic scarcity in post-2001 made the creation of theater more feasible than filmmaking, and artists created work collectively, often using personal objects for props, involving family members, and using homes and personal spaces for rehearsals. The real during this period derived from the artifacts and materiality of real people's lives, linked to the auto/biographical captured by the Biodrama ethos. Local context has contributed significantly to the creation and transformation of the real in Argentine performance since the immediate aftermath of 2001, even as artists have expanded their transnational networks and have shifted to address more global themes in their work. We see another critical inflection point in 2020 with the arrival of COVID-19 and another in 2023 with the election of Milei, the renewed threat to the cultural sectors, and the exploitation of AI and deepfakes as a key political strategy. The ensuing protests and the generation of new coalitions of resistance have reinforced commitment to collective creation and

facilitated newfound efforts to raise funding for artistic production, for example, though Paraíso Club's model of membership that curates the audience experience as a community of friends, co-researchers, and critics.

Over the last several decades in Argentina, artists have developed a savvy understanding of how discourses of the real are created, are circulated, and become caught up in power dynamics; how affectively gripping and mesmerizing the effects of the real can be on audiences; how fiction is encoded as the real through documentary style; and how intermediality can produce an uncanny sense of the real. This book has traced the transformation of the real and its conceptualization by artists at specific junctures in time, spanning from 1998 to 2023—for example, in post-2001 Argentina, when the real reflected the precarious conditions of artistic labor and artists took to the streets and turned toward theater and urban intervention; in 2015 and the years following the explosion of feminism in the NiUnaMenos movement, when the real became linked to collaborative process, a devised model of work, and a self-reflective process braiding theory and practice; and in 2020, when, with the arrival of COVID-19, performances and ideas for performances were delayed, postponed, put on hold, and put online. Pandemic performance, perhaps more than any in this book, marked a moment when the real collided with and interrupted performance creation and practice. And in 2023, with the election of Milei and the introduction of deepfake politics, the concept of the real once again has shifted. Prepared by years of training in the real, combined with robust coalition building and the creation of innovative funding models, multimedia platforms for diffusion, and audience inclusion, artists are ideally poised to disrupt the relations of power and to counter political manipulation with their own evocative fictions of the real.

Notes

Introduction

1. Original Spanish: "Todo este año me pasé preguntándome sobre la eficacia de los procedimientos teatrales; fundamentalmente, sobre la representación, base de la ficción, en un país que vive una crisis tan notable y contundente." This and all other translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

2. See Giunta (2009); Graham-Jones (2014); and Fuentes (2019) for excellent analyses on the impact of the economic crisis of 2001 on the arts in Argentina.

3. Original Spanish: "Es la idea de un territorio donde los personajes aparecen como sobrevivientes de una catástrofe: quedaron un poco a la deriva, no se sabe de dónde vienen ni qué les pasó pero ahí están, en barrios ajenos, en una ciudad con la que no se conectan, como si observaran un mundo que ya no existe. Viven una vida rutinaria, invisible. Cuál es esa catástrofe, no es una pregunta que se traduzca en una respuesta directa." See Alemián (2011).

4. I have benefited from the generative conversations hosted by the long-standing ASTR working group organized by Leticia Robles-Moreno, Marcela Fuentes, and Marcos da Silva Steurnagel. Particularly their 2022 working session, *Persistence: Performing Through Endless Catastrophes*, was helpful in theorizing the accumulation of catastrophic moments.

5. Law 26.485 (2009)—Law on the Comprehensive Protection of Women; Law 26.618 (2010)—Equal Marriage Law; Law 26.743 (2012)—Gender Identity Law.

6. The Omnibus Law is officially known as the Ley de Bases y Puntos de Partida para la Libertad de los Argentinos, Law 27.742.

7. See Mariano Pensotti, "The Dead": https://marianopensotti.com/en/portfolio-items/the-dead-2004-2005/

8. Joanna Page refers to the "intensely communitarian gesture" of this collaborative work (2017, 157). See also Sosa (2024).

9. See Bruzzi (2006); Chanan (2009); Forsyth and Megson (2009); Haddu and Page (2009); Martin (2010, 2013); and Hernández (2021).

10. See Nichols (1991); Bruzzi (2006); Stephenson (2019); and Hunter (2021), respectively.

11. For Jenn Stephenson, these moments or unplanned events erase the gap "between a constructed work of art made safe by the theatrical frame and the non-

constructed realness of reality" to create a blurring between fiction and reality and a sense of insecurity among audiences (2019, 5).

12. In her book *Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism*, Patricia Ybarra wrestles with the pertinent question of "how to render economic violence and its 'real' embodied iterations theatrically without resorting to simplistic metaphors, cheap equivalency, universalism, or over literalism" (2017, x).

13. Scholars of Argentine theater and performance have expressed similar wariness of the concept of the real. See Cornago (2005a); Brownell (2013); P. Page (2017); and Trastoy (2018).

14. Tom Gunning draws on film scholar Christian Metz's discussion of the impression of reality achieved through a participatory effect in film (1974).

15. Organized by Thomas Matusiak and chaired by Antonio Gómez, a two-part panel at the Latin American Studies Association Conference in Bogotá, Colombia, in 2024, titled "Expanded Documentary: Form and Politics of Audiovisual Nonfictions," reveals the growing scholarly interest in expanded, cross-genre approaches. A related two-part panel at the Latin American Studies Association Conference in San Francisco in 2025, titled "Transmedial Documentary: Archive and (Non)Fiction Across Media," and organized by Alejandro Martínez and Thomas Matusiak, was equally generative.

16. In documentary film, see Amado (2005); Sarlo (2006b); Piedras (2014a); A. Gómez (2014); and Matusiak (2022). In documentary theater, see Sagaseta (2006); Margulis (2007); Trastoy (2018); and Hernández (2021).

17. See Blejmar (2016); López Gay (2020); and Fournier (2021).

18. The premium placed on experience as legitimating discourse relates in part to what Elizabeth Jelin identifies as the strong familism present in the composition of human rights groups in post-dictatorship, formed by Mothers, Grandmothers, and Children: "The notion of 'truth' and the legitimacy of the word . . . became embodied in the personal experience" of those affected directly by the violence of dictatorship (2007, 39). In her work, Sosa traces a shift in the arts away from this emphasis on bloodlines and personal experience toward "an expansion of kinship studies to address the constellation of new intimacies that have arisen from a locally situated response to injury" (2014, 3).

19. Soyica Diggs Colbert, Douglas A. Jones Jr., and Shane Vogel highlight new perspectives on repetition in performance studies in their book *Race and Performance After Repetition*, in which they reformulate the concept of restored behavior as "behaved restoration," with a focus on making good or compensating (2020, 5).

20. See Rajewsky (2005).

21. José Antonio Pérez Bowie likewise refers to the bidirectional flows that characterize the dialogue between contemporary Argentine film and theater (2004). Philippa Page expresses a similar sentiment in her discussion of Mariano Pensotti's *Cineastas*: "It is hard to discern whether *Cineastas* uses theatre to undress the filmic process, or whether film is used in order to revitalize theatre" (2017, 5).

22. Films set in and around Buenos Aires include *Teatro de guerra* (Theatre of War, 2018), *Estrellas* (Stars, 2007), *De nuevo otra vez* (Again Once Again, 2019), and *El público* (The Audience, 2020).

23. Works that experiment with live streaming include León's *Las ideas* (Ideas, 2015) and Pensotti's *A veces creo que te veo* (Sometimes I Think I See You, 2010).

Chapter 1

1. I find useful Soyini Madison's elaboration of Dwight Conquergood's concept of co-performative witnessing as an alternative to participant observation because of its emphasis on "active, risky, and intimate engagement with Others that is the expectation of performance" (Madison 2010, 826).

2. See Lola Arias, https://lolaarias.com/lingua-madre/

3. In my analysis of *Melancolía y manifestaciones* (Melancholy and Demonstrations), the third play in the Children's Trilogy after *Mi vida después* (*My Life After*, 2009) and *El año en que nací* (The Year I Was Born, 2012), I also discuss the interactive audiovisual installation *Cadena Nacional* (National Broadcast), one work in a larger multiwork installation called *Doble de riesgo* (Stunt Double, 2016). Other works included in this installation are *Veteranos* (Veterans), *El sonido de la multitud* (The Sound of the Crowd), and *Ejercitos paralelos* (Parallel Armies). The War Trilogy consists of the installation *Veteranos* (Veterans, 2014), the play *Campo Minado* (Minefield, 2016), and the film *Teatro de guerra* (Theatre of War, 2018).

4. See Ignacio González's excellent discussion of the uses of the autobiographical and biographical in *Melancholy and Demonstrations* (2014).

5. See Patricia López Gay's book on autofiction in post-Franco Spain, in which she refers to autofictional works as "fictions of truth," produced by author-archivists in biographical space (2020).

6. In addition to Elvira Onetto, actors included Lola Arias, Mario Aitel, Vicente Fiorillo, Ernestina Ruggero, and Noelia Sixto; dramaturgy and production by Sofía Medici; music by Ulises Conti; live music by Fernando Pereyra and Ulises Conti; video by Nele Wohlatz; live video by Marcos Medici; stage design by Mariana Tirantte; costumes by Sofía Berhaka; lighting design by Matías Sendón; and technical managing and lighting adaptation by Gustavo Kotik.

7. Throughout my analysis I refer to the recording of the performance of *Melancholy and Demonstrations* staged at the Hebbel am Ufer Theater in Berlin in 2013: https://vimeo.com/channels/873480/56369612. Quotes are from the script of the play translated by Daniel Tunnard and revised by Jean Graham-Jones (Arias 2019c).

8. Throughout this chapter I will use Arias/The Daughter to refer both to Arias, the author and subject, and to the Daughter character in the play, her self-fictionalization.

9. See Longinovic (2012) for a thoughtful meditation on Brechtian realism in the use of these distancing techniques.

10. See Gail Bulman's excellent discussion of the trompe-l'oeil in her analysis of Arias's installation *Doble de riesgo* (2017).

11. PAyS (Presentes, Ahora y Siempre / Present, Now and Forever).

12. In addition to *Cadena Nacional* (National Broadcast), the video installation discussed here, the exhibition included three other works: *El sonido de la multitud* (The Sound of the Crowd), allowing spectators to use a karaoke machine to sing popular protest songs that over the years had been sung at the Plaza de Mayo; *Ejércitos paralelos* (Parallel Armies), designed to let visitors sit in a security guard's booth listening to the real conversations of security guards; and *Veteranos* (Veterans), a multiple-video installation featuring Argentine veterans of the Malvinas/Falklands War, which will be discussed further later in this chapter.

13. See Florencia Battiti: https://www.arteinformado.com/agenda/f/doble-de-riesgo-126172

14. See https://parquedelamemoria.org.ar/en/park/

15. See https://www.modernabuenosaires.org/obras/2000s/parque-de-la-memoria

16. During the dictatorship, victims were routinely detained, drugged and dropped into the Río de la Plata during flights referred to as los Vuelos de la Muerte.

17. Arias made this comment as a participant in the performance *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado A)* (Where Do the Dead Go? [Side A], 2011) by the Argentine theater collective Grupo Krapp, discussed in chapter 4. In the performance, members explore the question of how to represent death onstage. The work introduces perspectives from ten artists (choreographers, theater directors, and film directors) via short clips screened during the performance.

18. British playwright and founder of the verbatim theater company Recorded Delivery, Alecky Blythe, observes, "The 'recorded delivery' technique has a further advantage, though. It allows interviewees to share highly personal information while offering a degree of protection for their identities" (Hammond and Steward 2012, 83).

19. *El corralito*, "small corral," refers to the economic measures taken by Economic Minister Domingo Cavallo in 2001 limiting the amount of money Argentines could withdraw from their bank accounts in the attempt to prevent a bank run.

20. Ana Longoni points out, "Thirty thousand is not an innocent number in Argentina; it's the number of disappeared that the human rights movement has been denouncing since 1980, and it's a number that's become the symbol for a long, sustained fight and a number that the new authorities would like to contest" (in Graham-Jones 2019, 152).

21. See https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336228

22. In *The Blonds*, Albertina Carri delivers what Gabriela Nouzeilles calls a "scrupulous but irreverent reading of inheritance," calling into question the "heavy demands on the children of the disappeared imposed by the combination of biological, judicial and political legacies" (2005, 266).

23. The Argentine Navy cruiser *General Belgrano* was shot down by the British on May 2, 1982, resulting in the deaths of 323 people.

24. See Blejmar (2017); Sosa (2017a); Verzero (2017); Finburgh (2017); Maguire (2018); Perera (2018); Delgado (2019b); Teichert (2020); Hernández (2021); and Werth (2021).

25. Throughout the chapter, I quote the script of *Minefield* translated by Daniel Tunnard and revised by Jean Graham-Jones (Arias 2019d).

26. See Techiert (2020).

27. See Exhibit 1.3–4, DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/box/part1_ch3.box16/

28. See Blejmar (2017).

29. See Sosa (2017a); Graham-Jones (2020); and Hernández (2021) for explorations of the ways Sukrim's role contests colonial and linguistic binarism in the project.

30. See Blejmar's critical discussion of the resistance to closure in *Minefield* (2017).

Chapter 2

1. See Robert Wilson and Federico León, "Meetings," https://www.rolex.org/rolex-mentor-protege/theatre/meetings

2. For more on anarchiving, see Springgay et al. (2020); and Waters (2024).

3. Since this chapter focuses primarily on the Argentine context, I will refer to the Malvinas Islands. When citing the perspective of the UK government, I will refer to the Falkland Islands.

4. In late 1981, Argentina's military regime campaigned to reclaim the islands from the British, and on April 2, 1982, Argentine troops invaded the islands. The British Royal Navy forced the Argentine military to surrender after seventy-four days of combat. In the months following the defeat, the ostensible rationale of the war (to recover national territory) became overshadowed by what the public grew to perceive as an attempt by military officials to secure an exit strategy that would detract attention away from the systematic detentions, tortures, and disappearances they had committed during their six years in power (1976–83).

5. For a deeper look at themes of memory and national identity in historical accounts of the Malvinas War, see Gúber (2001); Novaro and Palermo (2003); Rozitchner (2005); and Lorenz (2006).

6. Specifically, here Sosa is referring to Tellas's *Proyecto Archivos*. Original Spanish: "Un espacio donde la frontera entre lo público y lo privado se desdibuja y la biografía, sin perder su singularidad, muestra sus insospechadas resonancias colectivas."

7. Villa 21 is a large informal settlement on the south side of Buenos Aires, on the banks of the Riachuelo.

8. Examples include the film *Bonanza*, 2001, directed by Ulises Rosell; the television shows *Okupas*, 2000, directed by Bruno Stagnaro, and *Tumberos*, 2002, directed by Israel Adrián Caetano; and urban interventions such as *Filoctetes*, 2002, created by Emilio García Wehbi.

9. See Amado (2005); Andermann (2011); and Cortés-Rocca (2014).

10. Ospina and Mayolo (1978b).

11. Vivi Tellas's *El precio de un brazo derecho: una investigación sobre el trabajo* (The Price of a Hired Hand: An Investigation of Work, 2000) also provides a significant intertext to *Estrellas* in its documentation of a scene of "real work." During the performance, which premiered at the Teatro Babilonia in the Abasto neighborhood of Buenos Aires, María Merlino, Susana Pampín and Claudio Quinteros performed alongside an unnamed manual laborer who is doing construction work on the floor onstage throughout the sixty-minute duration of the show.

12. *Portar* means "to bear" or "to carry," so the meaning here describes a person "bearing a certain face."

13. Cortés-Rocca further observes, "Martínez and León's film sustains the contradiction of the main character: the right to act as poor people because they are poor, and the right to act—as poor people or in any other role—because as Arrieta himself maintains in the documentary, 'culture is not a privilege of the few'" (2014, 193).

14. *Tumba* is "prison" in Argentine slang.

15. See Solanas and Getino (1997); Rocha (1989); Stam (1997); A. López (1997); and Schroeder Rodríguez (2016).

16. For further information on the filmmaker Martín Rejtman and his work, see Lucca (2014); Cutler (2015); Delgado (2017a); and Vaughn (2024).

17. Centro de Investigación y Experimentación en Video y Cine.

18. Author's WhatsApp exchange with Cecilia Sosa, June 27, 2024.

19. The tour included the Festival D'Automne in Paris (2015), the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro (Cádiz, 2015), the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts,

Ashkal Alwan (Beirut, 2015), Kyoto Experiment (2015), Festival Mirada (Brazil, 2016), Santiago a Mil (Santiago, 2016), and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, 2018).

20. For an excellent analysis of the relationship between archive and autofiction in post-Franco literature, see López Gay (2020).

21. See Cornago (2005); Pinta (2009); Trastoy (2018); Mauro (2013); and Pinta and Sala (2020).

22. All quotations from the play are taken from a recording of the production on June 29, 2015, at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels.

23. See Longinovic (2020) for an analysis of this episode vis-à-vis Argentina's post-dictatorship memory politics.

24. Original Spanish: "Soñé que la computadora soñaba. Al igual que los seres humanos, la computadora sueña con todo el material que tiene. Una mezcla de las navegaciones que hizo, los textos, los videos, las fotos, la música o como si al final rememoraba toda su vida útil. Los últimos momentos de su vida a toda velocidad. A alguien se le rompe la computadora y pierde todo. Pero el accidente es el punto de partida de una nueva idea. Tengo que escribir todo lo que recuerdo que perdí. Esa es la obra."

Chapter 3

1. See Bishop (2005).

2. See Fortuna and Ahlgren's important discussion on the coexistence and commingled histories of dance and theater (2022).

3. Works by Grupo Krapp include *No me besabas* (You Wouldn't Kiss Me, 2000); *Mendiolaza* (2003); *Olympica* (2007); *Bajo, feo y de madera* (Short, Ugly, and Made of Wood, 2006); *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado B)* (Where Do the Dead Go? [Side B], 2010); *¿A dónde van los muertos? (Lado A)* (Where Do the Dead Go? [Side A], 2011); *Por el dinero* (For the Money, 2014); *África* (2014); *La distancia real* (The Real Distance, 2015); *Cosas que pasan* (Things That Happen, 2016); *Trampa para fantasmas* (Ghost Trap, 2017); *El futuro de los hipopótamos* (The Future of the Hippopotamuses, 2017); *Los que amamos odiar* (Those Who Love to Hate, 2018); *Yo.soy.ella* (I.am.her, 2018); *Rubios* (Blonds, 2019); *Hielo negro* (Black Ice, 2019); and *Réquiem* (2021).

4. Festivals include American Dance Festival (US); Rio Cena contemporánea (Brazil); VEO (Spain); De Vir (Portugal); Festival de Oriente (Venezuela); Latino Cultural Festival (New York); GET LOST (Belgium); Santiago a Mil (Chile); Festival de Danza Contemporánea de Buenos Aires (Argentina); and Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires (FIBA, Argentina).

5. Grupo Krapp chose the term "Retrocedida" for its connotation of moving backward (*retroceder*) and revisiting the past for what was envisioned as a retrospective of their performance work, staged at the Central Cultural San Martín in Buenos Aires in 2013.

6. These are not adaptations or versions of but rather new, affiliated works that continue to investigate a common question or theme with the same actors. For example, the actors in Grupo Krapp's play *Por el dinero* (2013) reappear in the film *Por el dinero* in 2019. The actors in Lola Arias's *Reas* (2024) also act in her subsequent play *Los días afuera* (2024).

7. Lucas Rimoldi and Alicia Monchietti, in their analysis of independent theater in Buenos Aires, have described new artistic cohorts as "creative and social ecosystems" exemplifying new modes of affiliation and production driven by the the "artista-gestor," a term that describes Acuña's role well (2016).

8. For example, Paraíso Club, Arthaus, Federico León's cultural center Zelaya (discussed in chapter 2); Sala Leopoldo Lugones in Teatro San Martín; and the museum MALBA and the art house cinema BAMA (Buenos Aires Mon Amour).

9. In addition to Acuña and Moguillansky, cast members include Matthieu Perpoint and the composer Gabriel Chwojnik.

10. The three cycles that made up the project premiered in 2011, 2012, and 2013 at the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, operated by the University of Buenos Aires. Other notable examples from this project include Mariana Obersztern's play *Si el destino viene a mí* (If Destiny Comes for Me), based on the *Manual de procedimientos de auditoría interna* (Manual for Conducting an Internal Audit), and Vivi Tellas's *La bruja y su hija* (The Witch and Her Daughter), inspired by the *Manual práctico de las manifestaciones espiritualistas* (Practical Manual for Spiritualistic Manifestations), both premiered during the 2012 cycle.

11. Version by Andrés Chazarreta. Recording by José María de Hoyos and his ensemble América.

12. See https://www.folkloretradiciones.com.ar/articulos/clases_danzas/fa_011.htm

13. Original Spanish: "Tres meses más tarde. . . . 14 de enero: Queridos Basia, Tine, Olafur y Cecilie. Estoy desesperado. Es evidente que Argentina es un país complicado para las transacciones bancarias, pero necesito que me ayuden con esto. . . . Me da un poco de vergüenza este mail, pero no puedo hacer otra cosa más que escribirlo. Realmente necesito que me devuelvan mi dinero."

14. *El loro y el cisne* is Moguillansky's third feature-length film, after directing *La prisionera* (The Prisoner, 2006) and *Castro* (2009) and followed by *El escarabajo de oro* (The Gold Bug, 2014); *La vendedora de fósforos* (The Little Match Girl, 2017); *Por el dinero* (For the Money, 2019); *La edad media* (The Middle Ages) with Luciana Acuña (2022); and *Un andantino* (2023).

15. El Ballet Clásico del Teatro Argentino de la Plata, el Ballet Contemporáneo del Teatro San Martín, and el Ballet Folkórico Nacional.

16. For more on the *asambleas* and new forms of grassroots collective action that emerged post-2001, see Svampa (2005).

17. As seen in León's multiplying mise en abymes in *Las ideas* (Ideas, 2015) and Arias's staging of a book in *Melancolía y manifestaciones* (Melancholy and Demonstrations, 2012), Paula's theatrical staging of rehearsals for a film in *Fauna* (2013), and Pensotti's filming of a theater in *El público* (The Audience, 2020).

18. Original Spanish: "En esta última obra ya no importan los roles, ni quiénes somos, ni si lo que hacemos es una obra, una performance, un concierto o qué. Ni tampoco si las personas en escena están vivas o muertas. Estamos todos ahí, despidiendo a nuestro amigo y a nuestro grupo, que siento, al menos yo, que se fue con él."

19. Original Spanish: "Soy portador, cuerpo voz de la compañía Krapp / Esto no es un work in progress / Es un desprendimiento / Muchas escenas que van a ver forman parte de una obra que no existe / Voy a hablar en primera persona / Yo no voy a ser responsable de lo que va a suceder en escena / También soy público / Público que habla a otro público y que dejó un momento de ser público."

20. Original Spanish: "En la oscuridad el grupo comprende que, finalmente y después de tantos años, es el mismo grupo que ha muerto. El grupo se pregunta si la oscuridad es la forma del teatro después de la muerte. Se dan cuenta de que por primera vez ellos y los espectadores están a oscuras en el mismo espacio. Se pregunta por qué el teatro necesita que los espectadores estén a oscuras y los actores en la luz. Se dan cuenta de que la oscuridad hace todo más democrático, como la muerte. Se preguntan en la oscuridad no podría ser que estuviera también ese que murió. El grupo piensa que es absurdo pensar en fantasmas, pero igual piensan en él."

21. See Fundación Teatro a Mil: https://teatroamil.cl/que-hacemos/circulacion-nacional-e-internacional/catalogo/el-futuro-de-los-hipop%C3%B3tamos/

22. See Taylor (2003); Jones and Heathfield (2012); Fuentes (2019); and Auslander (2022).

Chapter 4

1. *Agosto* was translated into English by Jennifer Croft and published by the Feminist Press at CUNY in 2017.

2. The constitutional reform of 1994 in Argentina represented a major overhaul to expand the rights of Indigenous Peoples and gender and antidiscrimination rights and incorporated international human rights treaties.

3. See Martin(2010, 2013); and Hernández (2021).

4. The volume *Fauna: and Other Plays* by Romina Paula includes English translations of the works *Algo de ruido hace* (The Sound It Makes); *Fauna*; and *Cimarrón* (Rewilding), by April Sweeney and Brenda Werth. A fourth play in the volume, *El tiempo todo entero* (The Whole of Time) was translated by Jean Graham-Jones.

5. Romina Paula's *Fauna*, translated by April Sweeney and Brenda Werth, and *The Whole of Time*, translated by Jean Graham-Jones, had back-to-back premieres at Torn Page in the fall of 2022. The cast of *Fauna* included Laura Butler Rivera, Richard Jesse Johnson, Veraalba Santa, and David Skeist. The cast of *The Whole of Time* included Ben Becher, Ana Gabriel, Lucas Salvagno, and Josefina Scaro.

6. Original Spanish: "Pero cuando partías, irrumpió en este scenario / Un haz de verdad a través de aquella grieta, / Por la que te ibas: verde de verdadero verde, / Verdadera luz solar, bosque de verdad" (Paula 2013, 11).

7. Original Spanish: "de repente del verde intenso por la lluvia sale un caballo, con una mujer a cuestas, bah, una persona, no sabía ni qué era lo que estaba viendo" (Paula 2013, 23).

8. Original Spanish: "Y arriba del caballo, que era como un efigie, este ser, esta persona, de sombrero, recia, bella o bello, un ser hermoso, imponente, hierático" (Paula 2013, 23).

9. Original Spanish: Actriz: "Y arriba del caballo, que era como una efigie, este ser, esta persona, de sombrero, recia, bella o bello, un ser hermoso, imponente, hierático" (*Fauna*, 23).

10. For more on drag performance in Argentina, see Salessi and O'Connor (1994); Graham-Jones (1995); Sabsay (2006); and Trupia (2020).

11. See Maria Delgado's excellent review of *Petróleo* (2019a).

Chapter 5

1. In a special issue of *Theater* on curatorial practice in the performing arts, Peter Eckersall and Bertie Ferdman offer an thought-provoking account of the praxis of artist-curators: "They are programming interdisciplinary live encounters, rethinking questions of participation, often staging the audience, and bringing a heightened awareness to their practice, asking what it means to curate" (2021, 5).

2. See Mariano Pensotti, "Los muertos," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/los-muertos-2004-2005/

3. See Andrés Gallina's discussion of liminality in Pensotti's work (2014).

4. See Fiona Wilkie's reconceptualization of site specificity in the context of mobility (2012).

5. For an excellent analysis of the feeling archive and the concept of the "sensichive," see Bulman (2022).

6. Artists participating in *Ciudades paralelas* include Lola Arias, Gerardo Naumann, Christian Garcia, Ant Hampton and Tim Etchells, Dominic Huber, Stefan Kaegi, and Mariano Pensotti.

7. Original Spanish: "En el año 2013 no habrá nada . . . no habrá estación. Dos chicas están frente a la pantalla y leen. . . . Me gusta el color de sus ropas. Una viste un sweater rojo y naranja con flores. Le envidio ese sweater. Y la otra de verde, un verde peculiar, no cualquier verde. Estudian Letras. Juntas. Se pasan todo el día juntas. Como hermanas" (qtd. in M. González 2013, 735).

8. Shifting focus away from the concept of site specificity, Kwon suggests that the terms "audience" or "community specific" might "signal an attempt to forge more complex and fluid possibilities for the art-site relationship" (2004, 2).

9. See, for example, Sarah Misemer's intriguing analysis of trains in the literary imagination of the River Plate (2010).

10. See Mariano Pensotti, "El pasado es un animal grotesco," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/el-pasado-es-un-animal-grotesco-2010-2011/

11. Gallina sees parallels between the Discepolian grotesque at the turn of the twentieth century and the grotesque as it is presented in Pensotti's *El pasado*, both versions of the grotesque that emerge in times of crisis and manifest artistically through representations of the body (2014); see also Anne García-Romero's analysis of grotesque dramaturgies in the Southern Cone (2024).

12. See Mariano Pensotti, "El pasado es un animal grotesco," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/el-pasado-es-un-animal-grotesco-2010-2011/

13. See Mariano Pensotti, "El pasado es un animal grotesco," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/el-pasado-es-un-animal-grotesco-2010-2011/

14. See Mariano Pensotti, "Cineastas," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/cineastas-2013/

15. See Mariano Pensotti, "Cineastas," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/cineastas-2013/

16. See Mariano Pensotti, "Cineastas," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/cineastas-2013/

17. See Mariano Pensotti, "Cineastas," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/cineastas-2013/

18. Due to the interruption of the pandemic, the full trilogy was premiered for the first time in Buenos Aires in May 2022 as part of the film programming at the MALBA.

19. See Mariano Pensotti, "El público," https://marianopensotti.com/portfolio-items/el-publico-the-audience-le-public-het-publiek-2/

Conclusion

1. Many thanks to Cecilia Sosa for the conversation on Milei and the arts and for drawing my attention to Briski's speech.

2. See Lola Arias, Career Awards, https://lolaarias.com/awards/ (accessed July 10, 2025).

3. See Lola Arias, *Futureland*, https://lolaarias.com/futureland/ (accessed July 10, 2025).

4. See Lola Arias, *Futureland*, https://lolaarias.com/futureland/ (accessed July 10, 2025).

5. See "PUBG: Battlegrounds," https://pubg.com/en/game-info/overview (accessed July 2, 2025).

6. See Mikko Gaestel, *Futureland*, https://mikkogaestel.com/stage/futureland/ (accessed July 2, 2025).

7. See "ATHE 2025 Annual Conference: The Real," https://www.athe.org/page/25conf_call (accessed June 1, 2025).

8. See Arthaus, https://arthaus.ar/ (accessed July 1, 2025).

9. See Alternativa teatral, *Sombras por supuesto*, https://www.alternativateatral.com/obra84567-sombras-por-supuesto (accessed May 1, 2025).

10. See Alternativa teatral, *Sombras por supuesto*, https://www.alternativateatral.com/obra84567-sombras-por-supuesto (accessed May 1, 2025).

11. See Alternativa teatral, *Sombras por supuesto*, https://www.alternativateatral.com/obra84567-sombras-por-supuesto (accessed May 1, 2025).

12. See Mariano Pensotti, *A Voracious Shadow*, https://marianopensotti.com/en/portfolio-items/a-voracious-shadow-2024/

13. See Mariano Pensotti, *A Voracious Shadow*, https://marianopensotti.com/en/portfolio-items/a-voracious-shadow-2024/

14. See Festival d'Avignon, "Itinerant Shows," https://festival-avignon.com/en/actions/itinerant-shows-2483 (accessed July 1, 2025).

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A veces creo que te veo (Sometimes I Think I See You). By Mariano Pensotti. Ciudades Paralelas Festival, Halleshes Tor, Berlin, 2010.

Algo de ruido hace (The Sound It Makes). By Romina Paula. Espacio Callejón, Buenos Aires, 2007.

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Cimarrón (Rewilding). By Romina Paula. Teatro Argentino Centro de Experimentación y Creación, La Plata, 2016.

Cineastas (Filmmakers). By Mariano Pensotti and Grupo Marea. HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, 2013.

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Doble de riesgo (Stunt Double). By Lola Arias. Parque de la Memoria, Buenos Aires, 2016.

Edición ilimitada (Unlimited Edition). Codirected by Romina Paula, Edgardo Cozarinsky, Santiago Loza, and Virginia Cosin. Horizontes Latinos, San Sebastián International Film Festival, San Sebastián, 2020.

El loro y el cisne (The Parrot and the Swan). By Alejo Moguillansky. Sala Leopoldo Lugones, Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires, 2013.

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El público (The Audience). By Mariano Pensotti. Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires, Teatro San Martín, 2020.

El tiempo todo entero (The Whole of Time). By Romina Paula. Espacio Callejón, Buenos Aires, 2009.

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