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Cinematic Self in Mariano Pensotti's Cineastas.***

***Latin American Theatre Review 2017, 50(2), 23-48.***

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This is the authors' accepted manuscript of an article that was published in its final definitive form by Kansas State University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, 2017.

**DOI link to article:**

<https://doi.org/10.1353/ltr.2017.0002>

**Date deposited:**

06/05/2016

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***Ceci (n'est) pas une chaise: the treachery of the real and the conspicuously cinematic self in Mariano Pensotti's performance Cineastas/Filmmakers (2013)***

**Philippa Page**

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

Dorothea Tanning, *Birthday*, p.11.

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

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

**Introduction: screen realities**

“The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought,” claims philosopher Jacques Rancière, in a statement that clearly points to their epistemological interdependence, whilst suggesting that art should not be accorded the mimetic function that it was once attributed; it constitutes, rather than represents, reality as it is perceived (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 34). If, as Julio Cortázar imagines in the playfully subversive *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967), nature pales in comparison to its vibrant and sense-tickling renditions in art, then artistic representations can invariably seem more “real” than the referent that they set out to portray. The importance of sensory organization and stimulation is integral to Rancière’s interrogation of the role of aesthetics in politics. “Aesthetics,” he claims, “refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their

relationships” (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 4). “[A]esthetic acts” defined “as configurations of experience” thus contain the potential to “create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity,” a phenomenon he refers to as the “distribution of the sensible” (3). One might conclude, anyway, that in contemporary hybrid worlds the distinction between fiction and reality is nothing more than a false dichotomy, with little relevance to the way in which society experiences the world—or worlds, rather—constantly navigating back and forth across the apparently seamless frontier between virtual and organic spaces. Does our almost constant mobile exposure to screen media mean that we always perceive through some kind of screen—whether real or imagined?

A variation on this debate translates to contemporary theatre studies in Argentina, which foregrounds theatre’s privileged capacity as a form of expression to explore and expose the theatricality inherent in intersubjective relations, and more particularly the image-conscious arena of politics: reality must be dramatized, or performed, in order to be thought (stripped of its theatrical artifice, that is). Prominent theorist and theatre critic, Jorge Dubatti, pays close attention to what he perceives to be the ever-diffuse boundary between theatre and life, a phenomenon he terms “la transteatralización:” a theatricality that transgresses the limits of the classic theatre space and permeates the world offstage. “En los últimos veinte años,” he argues,

el teatro se vio en la obligación de redefinirse por una cantidad de fenómenos. El primer fenómeno es lo que se ha llamado *la transteatralización*: todo es teatro. Es más teatro el orden social que el teatro mismo y, en ese sentido, el teatro ha sido “superado” por el orden de lo real. (“El teatro argentino se lleva bien con la insatisfacción” n. pag. original emphasis)<sup>1</sup>

Such ideas echo the well-established work of the symbolic interactionists, such as Erving Goffman, who approach social interaction from a dramaturgical perspective, positing that intersubjective relationships can only be understood in terms of their inherent theatricality. As Goffman argued in the 1950s, in the *mise en scène* of everyday life, society constantly

transitions between what he termed the “front” stage (the role we perform socially and the desired appearance that this creates) and the “back” stage (the space in which this role is rehearsed and considered in private) (32, 127).<sup>2</sup> More recently, theorists in the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of performance studies have addressed this issue. Coming from an anthropological perspective, performance theorist, Richard Schechner, articulates this debate in terms of the boundary between what he defines as “aesthetic” performance and “social” performance (192-3). He describes theatre as just one node on a continuum of performance types—both social and aesthetic—pointing to certain fluidity between these two categories, which incorporate a range of activities including the categories of “sport,” “play” and “ritual,” alongside artistic forms of performance, although cinema is notably absent from this spectrum and should, I would suggest, be included despite its structure as a deferred presence, rather than an embodied encounter (xvii).<sup>3</sup>

From within the field of theatre studies, as Dubatti’s statement above attests, it is important to note that this exploration of theatricality at large is coupled with a need to reflect upon and redefine theatre’s specificity as a genre and relationship to this broader social theatricality. This perceived “crisis” in theatre’s identity as an art form, as other more popular forms of entertainment encroach, echoes a broader anxiety in millennial theatre studies (Delgado and Svitch 6).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Dubatti’s suggestion that theatre has been “overcome” by the order of the real points to an urgency to redress the imbalance. He articulates this by reasserting the aura of theatrical presence, or “convivio:” “sin convivio—reunión de dos o más hombres [o mujeres], encuentro de presencias en una encrucijada espacio-temporal cotidiano—no hay teatro” (*Filosofía del teatro I* 43). It is the spatial continuity that exists between both performance and spectator and between spectators within the same audience that, he suggests, is not only specific to theatre, but also socio-politically symbolic.

It would be wise, however, to nuance this idea(1) of “convivio” by taking into account sharp criticism of the inertia characterizing theatre audiences reduced to passive onlookers (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 272), as well as the various strategies devised in order to engage spectators across the auditorium’s fourth wall, Antonin Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty” and Bertold Brecht’s “epic theatre” both being paradigmatic examples of this, albeit in radically opposing ways. The former was to evoke a visceral, “primal theatre” that precluded any possibility of distinguishing between theatre and life, whilst denouncing representation as a deferral of experience (Artaud 83); the latter was to employ the *Verfremdung* [Alienation] effect to foster a kind of political engagement that depended on placing the audience at a critical distance (Willet 37). Interestingly, Brecht used screens in order to achieve this (44). Theatrical presence is, then, not enough to ensure political engagement, a point that Rancière makes emphatically in *The Emancipated Spectator* and to which I will return.

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

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

Tellas marks out a clear opposition between experience (as vitally embodied) and simulation. Like Dubatti, she too emphasises the need for innovation in theatrical forms in order to

reengage with the reality of the moment. It is important, then, to locate this conceptualisation of the biodrama series within its context: the disastrous aftermath of the acute economic, political and social debacle of December 2001.<sup>7</sup> Tellas clearly positions her concept in resistance to the simulacrum of affluence that characterised the accelerated neoliberal structural changes of President Carlos Menem's mandate (1989-1999), whilst challenging its aggressive individualism and the premise that lives, like commodities, were disposable in a society in which relations were shaped by the market and its consumer logic of programmed obsolescence.<sup>8</sup> Biodrama hence uses theatre to explore the possibilities of rebuilding a sense of community in what was, at the time of its inception, a severely debilitated post-crisis social fabric.

Such issues find resonance in the work of Mariano Pensotti (Buenos Aires, 1974), one of Argentina's most bold and innovative contemporary theatre practitioners, and the focus of this article.<sup>9</sup> Alongside Beatriz Catani, Pensotti co-created one of the earlier biodramas, entitled *Los 8 de Julio* (2002). *Los 8 de julio* documents (via video and theatrical testimonies) a period of six months in the lives of three people —actor Alfredo Martín, pregnant María Rosa Pfeiffer and pilot/painter Silvio Jorge Franchini— who all share one common attribute: they have responded to an advertisement posted in the newspaper recruiting people born on 8 July 1958. The three protagonists are asked to record their experience via different artistic media: painting, photography and video. The performance used a large screen on the back wall of the set to project the unfolding preparation process, also serving as a window connecting the theatre to the world outside, using documentary footage of interviews with other people born on 8 July 1958 to open and close the performance. Their experiences of the 2001 crisis and its consequences punctuated the interviews. By including these recordings, Catani and Pensotti engaged in a style of documentary theatre that actively pushed the boundary between theatre and life, using audiovisual media to extend the performance to a

broader community on the streets –albeit one with a rather arbitrary trait in common. The performance could indeed be read as an interrogation of the absurdity of modern structures of identity and community (deliberately avoiding the frame of national identity, whilst making obvious reference to it—9 July being Argentina’s Independence Day). *Los 8 de julio* thus employs virtual “convivio,” or what Dubatti calls—not without reservation—“tecnovivio” (*Filosofía del teatro III* 126), to reach beyond the confines of the theatre.

Whilst suggesting that “convivio” and “tecnovivio” can be combined productively on stage, Dubatti nevertheless reasserts the importance of theatrical presence as a kernel of resistance “[h]acia una política de valoración de lo convivial” (128). “El cine admite tecnovivialmente la multiplicación de enlatados y de funciones, algo que lo hace llevarse muy bien con el mercado, pero rompe con el vínculo convivial ancestral.” “Convivio y tecnovivio proponen paradigmas existenciales muy diferentes,” he continues. “Cada tecnología determina cambios en las condiciones del vivir juntos” (126-7). It is these changes that contemporary independent theatre practitioners explore as already integral to everyday life, rather than resisting. This is important in marking Pensotti’s use (rather than rejection) of hybrid theatrical/audiovisual forms as part and parcel of this drive to reengage theatre with its context and the world outside on the street.

In a recent interview, Pensotti located *Cineastas* within the concept of documentary theatre established by Tella’s series, whilst questioning what direction Argentine theatre should take after biodrama: “Desde lo artístico quiero pensar la posibilidad de la ficción después del biodrama o del teatro postdramático,” he explains, pointing to the importance of biodrama in defining independent theatre in millennial Buenos Aires, whilst also suggesting the need to evolve beyond its initial artistic proposition and context (cit. Irazábal n. pag.). This, I will argue, involves looking beyond theatrical presence as a vehicle to recover the real to confront the way in which cinema has transformed the way in which human subjects

perceive live events, along with the possible horizons for imagining time and space. Pensotti seems less interested in shoring up theatre's specificity as a genre, separating it from social theatricality, than exploring the possibility of hybrid productions that are better equipped to explore the way in which contemporary worlds are made by a constant dialectic between virtual and organic spaces. What I will try to demonstrate in this piece is that Pensotti explores how virtual spaces, and the global referents that they invoke, play an important—if disjunctive—role in informing local imaginaries. He confronts the role of cinematic affect in shaping the subjective cartographies that city dwellers map and remap out performatively on a daily basis; an idea that finds resonance in Michel de Certeau's conceptualisation of the city—"the most immoderate of human texts"—as a subjective fabric woven performatively by individual trajectories across the city from below and on foot: "[t]he act of walking," he argues, being "to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered" (92-3). This is, of course, not without a critique of the problems posed by the cultural frontiers implied in transnational circuits of spectatorship, with particular reference to the way in which spectacles of poverty, political upheaval and the "exotic" cultures of Latin America are marketed for European audiences seeking catharsis and comfort from the fact that misery happens elsewhere. His works nevertheless seem to demonstrate a genuine fascination with the way in which individuals conduct their everyday lives as if living inside their own personal film, inspired by the affect produced when watching other films, often set in radically different contexts: identities negotiated both remotely and cinematically. This paper aims to work through these issues by looking primarily at the performance *Cineastas* [Filmmakers] (2013).<sup>10</sup>

**This is *not* a chair: a reading of *Cineastas***



As the lights go up at the beginning of *Cineastas*, the audience is presented with a two-tiered installation composed of a pair of identically sized container-like cubicles located one directly on top of the other.<sup>11</sup> The spectator is then confronted with a fairly mundane brown chair on the lower level of the onstage installation, whilst a painted image of what ostensibly appears to be the same chair stands directly above it on the upper tier. The juxtaposition of the two chairs would seem to invite a Platonic questioning of their respective “chairness.”<sup>12</sup> It might also be read as a citation of Belgian Surrealist painter René Magritte’s iconic positing of the pipe, versus its “treacherous” painted reproduction.<sup>13</sup> The emptying, vacuum-like sound effect that accompanies this opening vignette, along with the narrowly focused spotlighting on both objects, encourages their abstraction into a framing dialectic for the ensuing performance: the object and image-laden lower level of the stage is (in this first instance at least) signified as the space of the real (or the real as represented theatrically), whilst the spartan upper level denotes its representation, in this case taking the form of a simulated cinematic space. Much like Magritte’s challenge to the authority of language and pictorial representation—indeed his allusion to the duplicitous nature of “reality” itself—*Cineastas* uses its daring fusion of theatre, cinema and installation art to progressively unlock a similar multiplication of “intentional ambiguities” (Foucault 15) across this establishing axiom to the performance. Like Magritte, Pensotti challenges the spectator to think about what she or he sees (and consequently understands) when looking into what can be best described as a life-size television set. Strikingly similar to the glass-fronted cubicles inhabited by the automated citizens of filmmaker Jacques Tati’s Paris “of spectacle”<sup>14</sup>—much to the amusement of passers-by mesmerized by the live show (a precursor to reality TV taken to its literal, yet remarkably banal, extreme)—the set seems to suggest a clear metaphor for a society living, as Argentine sociologist Beatriz Sarlo puts it, “en estado de television,” albeit—I shall argue quite significantly—stripped of its giant screens (85).<sup>15</sup>

*Cineastas* is a coproduction between the government-run Complejo Teatral de Buenos Aires, several international theatre festivals and Pensotti's theatre group, Grupo Marea, which he co-leads with scenographer-cum-installation artist, Mariana Tirantte. The pair are seasoned collaborators and Tirantte is the architect of the set for *Cineastas*, which very much takes on the role of protagonist in conceptualizing the spectacle (Irazábal n. pag.). The performance was premiered at the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels, Belgium, in 2013, followed shortly afterwards by its domestic premier at the Teatro Sarmiento later on that year. It has since enjoyed a highly successful run both at home and on the international festival circuit and is Pensotti's most widely circulated work to date. It continues to draw the attention of international festival programmers.<sup>16</sup>

Best defined as a cinematic drama, which innovatively places filmic technique at the service of theatre, the performance recounts the lives of four *porteño*<sup>17</sup> filmmakers as they each work on the production of their respective films over the period of a year. The lives of Gabriel, Mariela, Nadia and Lucas<sup>18</sup> unfold on the lower level of the stage—the performance periodically zapping between each—whilst the split-screen effect created by the separate spaces of the installation enables their films to be played out simultaneously above them, the action in many ways constituting a sublimation of the lives (the film's unconscious, perhaps) happening below. In a tripartite structure of meaning, the performance also explores how this autobiographical tie between auteur and film is symptomatic of context. In this sense, *Cineastas* very much engages with the biographical spirit of biodrama, creating a narrative of individuals' lives in relation to major public events happening concurrently; history recounted from the intimate space of biography. The simultaneous layers of the performance might even be read as a reflexive staging of the very process of turning someone's (auto)biography into a performance.<sup>19</sup> “Hablo de sujetos que tienen mi edad,” states Pensotti, “y que han vivido lo que yo he vivido, en términos sociales y políticos,” reiterating

biography's location at the interface between the private and the collective, whilst also inserting his own narrative into the fold (cit. Irazábal n. pag.). Together, this complex multi-layered and multi-stranded mesh of performative threads maps out the subjective fabric of contemporary Buenos Aires: the performance of a "hypercity," (Presner, Shepard and Kawano 11-14) as refracted through a kaleidoscope of individual lenses belonging to a generation—Pensotti's own—of young thirty and forty-something Argentineans who have grown up under the signs of dictatorship and its neoliberal aftermath, whose lives have been moulded by their consequences.

I chose the opening epigraph to this piece—cited from North American artist, Dorothea Tanning's autobiography and account of her life alongside Dadaist pioneer, Max Ernst—because it seemed, if not to solve, at least capture the conundrums I perceived whilst trying to settle upon an approach to Pensotti's richly intertextual and intermedial performance. For, the beginning is also an impossible place in *Cineastas*. The layers of fiction and reality stack up as this theatrical map of cinematic Buenos Aires is acted out, ephemerally imprinted on the set's blank, whitewashed canvas. Indeed, the key to its production of meaning lies in its aesthetics of intrusion, confusion and multiplicity, in deciphering a sense of the city as a whole that can only be understood as the hypothetical sum of its many disparate parts (never visible to the human eye integrally as a whole); or, as the voiceover narrator suggests, a collage of more than 2,500 cinematic iterations of the city since Buenos Aires first became a film set in 1905, not only representing itself, but the versatility of its different facets providing the *mise-en-scène* for a host of other global cities (as Mariela states at one point).<sup>20</sup>

On a thematic level, as the title unequivocally suggests, *Cineastas* is about authorship: an exploration of how the individual biography of each auteur finds expression in the film that s/he is in the process of making. Pensotti describes how the project for *Cineastas* began

by interviewing filmmakers and indeed the story commences by re-enacting this initial stage in the creative process, as commercially successful filmmaker, Gabriel, is interviewed by a film critic.<sup>21</sup> The interview is, however, somewhat banal and the elliptical responses rather parody the value of the exercise. The spectator gleans very little about the film from the director's responses, save perhaps Gabriel's affirmation about the importance of the city in shaping what he does: "bueno, la verdad es que estoy muy sorprendido. Me estoy dando cuenta de cómo la ciudad influye en lo que hacemos. Para mí, eso es algo totalmente nuevo" (*Cineastas* 2:06 mins). Significantly, this is the response to the very first question the critic asks, establishing a second frame of reference for the ensuing performance: the importance of Buenos Aires as both mise-en-scène and protagonist. Shortly afterwards, Gabriel is shown potential props for his film and is presented with an umbrella. In yet another reference to Magritte,<sup>22</sup> the clouds imprinted upon the umbrella's interior replicate the painter's signature cloud filled skies, often deemed to signify the unconscious. The relationship between auteur and film therefore seems sealed, the space of the Real nestled beneath the space of the film, acting as its unconscious, a biographical thread sewing the two together.

Yet it is also through the figure of Gabriel that Pensotti stages the (quite literal) "death of the Author"<sup>23</sup>—or Auteur, as is the case here—when he finds out that he is terminally ill and has little left to live. Facing his own obsolescence—an important recurring theme in *Cineastas* (derived from biodrama and implicit in neoliberal consumer practices), whether professional, artistic, romantic or commercial—Gabriel desperately tries to use his film to put off death by creating a video record of his life for posterity. This attempt turns into nothing more than a frustrated desire that ends in a rather pathetic recording of the objects in his possession—literally in his own reification—as his changes to the screenplay are met with bewilderment by the other members of the film production team and are ultimately rejected for seeming rather odd.<sup>24</sup> "Como me gustaría ser un gorilita mecánico fabricado en China al

que nunca se le acaban las pilas,” he thinks somewhat desperately—his thoughts communicated by a voice over narrative delivered by the actress who will then play his wife—as his impending mortality leads him to fantasize about the possibility of his own spectral existence as a mechanical reproduction. Cinema, the voice over states, presents the utopian “posibilidad de fijar el tiempo,” but this utopian ideal ends merely in Gabriel’s lament that he is nothing more than “una obra maestra de la simulación” (Burchill n. pag.).

With the death of the auteur comes the birth of the spectator, if this is to be read as a variation on Roland Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), which positions the reader, rather than the author, as the locus of the production of meaning. The opening vignette clearly aims to draw the audience’s attention to its condition as spectator. I would argue, therefore, that *Cineastas* is more about spectatorship than it is about authorship, or at the very least that the two processes conflate. It is also worth pointing to the significance of the polyphonic, anti-*Authoritarian* stance that Barthes’ essay puts forward, within the memory politics of the post-dictatorship context, an issue that is dealt with explicitly in Nadia’s storyline and implicitly in that of Lucas. What I would like to argue here is that, although this opening scene is configured as something of a reverse Platonic cave—Plato’s cave being a seminal point of reference in theories of film spectatorship (see, for example, Jean-Louis Baudry 206-223)—Pensotti by no means positions the audience under the illusion of the spectacle.<sup>25</sup> Instead, he invites them backstage. Neither does he advocate the urgency for their emancipation from “the spectacle,” as Rancière might (2009). For Rancière, “spectatorship is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at a spectacle,” he states—the term spectacle to be read in the Debordian sense—the action of looking entirely passive and devoid of agency. “Theater,” he continues, “is the transmission of the ignorance that makes people ill through the medium of ignorance that is optical illusion” (272). Rancière’s echoes of postmodern angst at the noxious effects of the spectacle seem not to entirely fit within the

contemporary technological landscape. Positioning the audience in front of this giant TV-like installation is indeed a reference to our reliance on screens to mediate experience and intersubjective relationships, but I would argue that Pensotti encourages the spectator to consider—rather than reject—the role that film spectatorship has in authoring our daily trajectories through the city. Society is arguably no longer interested in casting off the spectacle—so integral is it to everyday life that the presence of screens might almost be considered organic—but there is an urgency to explore how individuals perceive and make sense of their surroundings cinematically.

### **Affective cartographies of the cinematic self**

The home page to Mariano Pensotti's personal website is dominated by an image of Argentine plastic artist Jorge Macchi's installation, *Guía de la inmovilidad* (2003, 20 x 30cm).<sup>26</sup> Macchi's guidebook imitates the classic A-Z-style map booklet of Buenos Aires readily available in kiosks—the *Guía T*—but eschews the purpose of this traditional cartographers plan of the city: to provide a precise representation of the physical contours of the cityscape, to-scale, complete with information as to how best navigate a route through its arteries and transit through the urban landscape most effectively. Instead, Macchi cuts away the city's flesh—its buildings, infrastructure and public spaces—to leave only the roads and avenues exposed. As he reduces the city to nothing more than its conduits, one might expect a piece rather more along the lines of *una guía de la hipermovilidad*—a city reduced to flows—but by layering sections of the city on top of one another, he creates a disjunctive, layered mesh of street names that are misaligned in a way that breaks the spatial continuity of the map and prevents movement around the city. The palimpsestic characteristic of Macchi's guidebook also evokes the possibility of multiple time frames. *Cineastas* in many ways echoes this idea, by creating its own performative map of the city of Buenos Aires using a

similar technique of layering, only this time of subjective maps that overlap, but never collide. There is little in the onstage installation—save the sullied whitewash on the walls, which may remind some of suburban Buenos Aires and its sidewalks<sup>27</sup>—to evoke the Argentine capital, but a similar mesh of subjective cartographies is built up as the performance unfolds. It is worth noting here that Pensotti and Tirantte work hard to inject a sense of mobility into their *mise-en-scène*. Recent productions have used a revolving set (*El pasado es un animal grotesco*), two treadmill-style mats moving in opposite directions across the stage (*Cuando vuelva a casa voy a ser otro*) or dynamic movement between spaces on the part of the actors and actresses, as is the case in *Cineastas*. Also noteworthy is the fact that theatre and cinema are often differentiated on account of theatre's stasis versus cinema's inherent mobility (Sontag 362). In his edited volume on cinema and the city, for example, Mark Shiel refers the “telling correlation between the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the city and the mobility and visual and aural sensations of the cinema” (1). Pensotti and Tirantte's dynamic and highly cinematic *mise-en-scène* clearly works to obviate this distinction between theatre's stasis and cinema's mobility.

Many contemporary films that attempt to represent concurrent spaces within a city, or global connectivity, such as Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros* (Mexico, 2001) and *Babel* (USA, Mexico, France, 2006), or Paul Haggis's *Crash* (USA, 2005), use a modular, or thread, structure in order to portray different storylines simultaneously, as well as the contingency governing urban interaction. The way in which such narratives are often recounted anachronically has also drawn observations of their characteristic as memory narratives, collapsing causal chains of logic aligned with linear time, by filtering the past through the lens of the present via analepses and prolepses in the narrative (Cameron 79-112). The thread structure to the performance gives the play a synchronous quality that allows neighbourhoods as disparate as the affluent Puerto Madero and the marginal Villa Lugano to

be performed within the same restricted physical space, much like Macchi's cartographic manipulation of the cityscape. Pensotti profits from the intrinsic spatiality of the three media/genres that he fuses in *Cineastas*—cinema, theatre and installation art—to create a performative map of the city.

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

Many of the recurrent tropes characterizing this generation appear. The figure of Nadia, for example, represents the H.I.J.O.S—children of the 1976-83 military dictatorship's estimated 30,000 disappeared—as she is commissioned by a film company in Paris to make a film in which one of the dictatorship's disappeared, Carlos, returns from hiding and is reunited with his family. The process causes Nadia intense malaise, as she begins to question both the ethics and politics of making a film that might suggest that the disappeared are still alive and waiting to return, effectively negating recognition of the military junta's crimes against humanity on a massive scale. Hence, she starts to imagine that her own disappeared father might still be alive, triggering a series of hazy and fragmented childhood memories. This storyline problematizes the task of representing forced disappearance, whilst also evoking the important role of the H.I.J.O.S and both theatre and cinema as spaces for building a cultural memory from the intimate space of parent-child relationship. It also explores the transnational nature of film production, whereby Nadia is forced to film a screenplay (suffering writer's block, she fails to write her own) that has been imposed on her



from France, without the writer ever having set foot in Argentina. Nadia is the only member of cast or crew perturbed by this, which seems to problematize the “transnational marketing of memory in a new global imaginary” for international audiences, a debate which has been raised by Silvia Tandeciarz (63), in relation to Juan José Campanella’s highly successful and Oscar-winning, *El secreto de los ojos* (2009). To this, one might add Pablo Trapero’s recent box office hit on the domestic market, *El clan* (2015) portraying the crimes of extortion-for-profit brutally committed under the official banner of the dictatorship, the case of the Puccio family curiously capturing the nation’s imagination both as a successful film and a prime-time television series in the same year (“‘El Clan Puccio’: una historia que dio para libro, serie y película” n. pag.). Both films deal with a memory of the dictatorship, albeit obliquely, by characterising the era from the perspective of a broader societal violence, beyond politically defined categories of victimhood and repression.<sup>28</sup>

Lucas’s film draws a clear parallel between violence, human rights violations and the implementation of the neoliberal economic structure, echoing the role of the military dictatorship in instigating the neoliberal turn. In 2004, a stencil on the walls of the *Avenida de Mayo*<sup>29</sup> read: “Los desaparecidos de ayer son los excluidos de hoy,” a graphic version of Eduardo Galeano’s statement, “[p]eople were tortured so prices could be free,” (cit. Idelber Avelar 1999, 231) or Latin America’s “cruel modernity,” as Jean Franco (2013) articulates the relationship between dictatorship and its violent embedding of the neoliberal logic resulting in increasing social divides. As Mariela’s documentary charts the musicals echoing the collapse of the Soviet Union and, by association, the demise of the Left and “post-ideological” (Bell) world (or rather a world increasingly dominated by a single market logic), Lucas stages this embedding of the neoliberal ideology by force. The protagonist of his film is kidnapped, held captive and tortured. He is made to dress up as Ronald McDonald and force-fed cold hamburgers as punishment for an unspecified “crime.” With time, he becomes

so used to dressing up as Ronald McDonald and captivity becomes a “normal” part of his daily routine, that when his kidnappers suddenly disappear one day, leaving the door to his prison cell open, he dare not venture out and take advantage of his freedom.

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

As the performance unfolds, thanks to the work of a nifty stagehand, the lower level is progressively emptied of objects, turning the lower level of Tirantte’s set design into what seems, by optical illusion, to become a reflection of the space above. The ground quite literally becomes disembedded to separate the two spaces: reality and fiction are hence

inverted. The only sign to proliferate—for a while at least—on the lower tier is the unmistakable golden ‘M’ of McDonald’s, carrying the full symbolic weight of the neoliberal ideology in its corporate, globalized expression. Other techniques contribute to the effect of the two spaces bleeding into one another. By the time Lucas is introduced on the lower level, his storyline is accompanied by an extra-diegetic soundtrack. In the early stages of the performance, the front lighting on the upper level, creating shadows on the back wall of the set (again Plato’s cave springs to mind), contrasts with the more uniform, blanket lighting on the lower level. Likewise, the use of coloured lighting on the upper level, in something reminiscent of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le mépris* (1963 – Godard is cited in the performance programme), is eventually replicated on the lower level as fiction invades the Real. *Cineastas* certainly performs the emptying out of the real, but instead of lamenting this loss of the real with a narrative advocating its recovery, I would suggest that Pensotti encourages further questioning of the way in which contemporary worlds are made via our own cinematic lens.

### **Being through cinema**

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

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

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

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

In this sense, we are all directors of our own personal life films, an idea Pensotti develops more explicitly in his short contribution to the literary collection, *Buenos Aires: Escala 1:1. Los barrios por sus escritores*. As the title suggests, the anthology creates a collectively authored map of the city of Buenos Aires. Each chapter is written by a different author about one of Buenos Aires's many neighbourhoods. It is another variation on the idea of a kaleidoscope of voices piecing together a cultural map of the city, as developed in *Cineastas* and evoked in Macchi's urban installations. Pensotti's contribution to this anthology is a short text on the Parque Patricios neighbourhood of Capital Federal entitled *Parque Patricios / Autocine*, a play on words between the drive-through cinema and a kind of “auto (or self-directed) cinema” (77-82). The first-person narrator of this short piece recounts the disappearance of his parents during the dictatorship, as they fail to turn up to pick him up from school one evening and, knowing full well in such eventuality that it is not safe to return home, he seeks refuge in various places around the neighbourhood. The text uses a dual structure, similar to that created by the separate performance spaces in *Cineastas*, by using

block capital typescript to signify the space of the film. As the narrative recounting the aftermath of the disappearance of his parents unfolds, it periodically cuts to seemingly unconnected short descriptions of Wim Wenders' film, *Paris Texas* (1984).

One might question what rural Texas has in common with suburban Buenos Aires, and the intruding fragments seem to be somewhat divorced contextually from the narrator's reality, but the narrator is clearly fascinated by this film and has created his own dialectic between the film and his reality through the common theme of the abandoned child, a recurring theme in Wenders's work.<sup>32</sup> Seeing his own reality through the rose-tinged lens provided by *Paris Texas* makes his life more palatable:

En la película pasa cada cosa que me pasó hasta ese momento. Pero todo es más chistoso, con más brillo, yo soy más ingenioso y las cosas me salen mejor. [...] y yo parezco más lindo, más profunda y sabia mi mirada. Mi película no la ve nadie, claro, pero no hace falta, yo me la proyecto en la cabeza todos los días y a partir de ahí vivo un poco mejor. (181-2)

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

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

Vivimos siempre en varios lugares al mismo tiempo. No importa dónde estés, podemos consultar nuestro correo, leer los periódicos del mundo, seguir la actualidad internacional.

Vayamos donde vayamos, continuamos dentro de un mismo paisaje: el de las comunicaciones. Por eso me pareció atractivo intentar un diario que reflejase dos certezas contrarias. La de que, a través de los medios, solemos pasar más tiempo en otra parte (o en varias partes a la vez, o en ninguna parte) que donde hallamos físicamente. (15)

Several of Neuman's works explore the role of virtual platforms in mediating human relations. He states that he openly acknowledges their integral role in everyday life and shaping contemporary intersubjectivities, rather than seeing them as a threat.<sup>33</sup> Another example is Rafael Spregelburd's recent theatre production, *SPAM* (2015), in which the main character, suffering from amnesia, attempts to reconstruct the string of events leaving him stranded on the island of Sicily, by piecing together information from the e-mails sitting in his inbox. Spregelburd develops an absurd expression of the digital era in which human memory is obsolete and only possible in prosthetic form, via e-mail inboxes or a computer's hard drive. His vision of globalization—equally as absurd—is mediated via the Google translate and the garbled automated translations this online function churns out of his inbox. The performance also includes a conversation by Skype, projected on a transparent curtain that is periodically pulled across the front of the stage, acting as a screen in front of the spectators, who are positioned as computer users across the fourth wall. Recounted anachronically as a sort of theatrical "Rayuela," in an obvious reference to Julio Cortázar's hypertext novel, the exploration of contemporary structures of memory and meaning is clear, if a little more anguished than either Pensotti or Neuman.

Cortázar's influence in *Cineastas* is also apparent. Just like the matryoshka dolls that Mariela collects as part of her documentary project on Russian musicals charting the Glasnost period, the threads of *Cineastas* exist inside one another like moebius strips. The same actor or actress may take on several roles within the same storyline, their transitions often seamless, at times at a speed that defies belief and with minimal or no costume change. This in itself evokes the idea of multiple and interchangeable identities. The constant displacement

of the real onto a prefiguring fiction creates the effect of a *mise-en-abîme ad infinitum*.<sup>34</sup> “No vemos ciudades,” advises the voiceover narrator at one point, “vemos ficciones de ciudades.” This point is important enough to be repeated for emphasis: “No vemos ciudades, vemos ficciones.” The point of origin—of the city, of its population, of a work of art—is presented thus as impossible: “Todo lo que vemos está condicionado por lo que vimos anteriormente,” states the narrator in a rehashed version of the quotation from Godard printed in the performance programme. Mariela’s documentary on Russian musicals is part of her own personal search for her (adopted) roots, a journey which leads her rather absurdly into a televised simulacrum of her adopted family’s town of origin on the Russian steppes, as if she suddenly finds herself inside something akin to her own “Truman Show.”<sup>35</sup> The only plausible origin presented in this performance is arguably cinema itself. Or, I would argue, perhaps theatre as the medium able to evoke cinema’s origin: to strip cinema of its screens and reflect upon cinema’s role in authoring everyday lives and shaping the way in which we perceive the material world around us. This brings me to the final issue at stake in this paper: the nature of the relationship between theatre and cinema within the performance of *Cineastas*.

### **Hybrid identities**

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

an issue that Susan Sontag (1992) has considered in depth. “The history of cinema is often treated as the history of its emancipation from theatrical models,” she argues, citing its liberation

from theatrical ‘frontality’ (the unmoving camera reproducing the situation of the spectator of a play fixed in his seat), then from theatrical acting (gestures needlessly stylized, exaggerated—needlessly, because now the actor could be seen ‘close-up’), then from theatrical furnishings (unnecessary ‘distancing’ of the audiences’ emotions, disregarding the opportunity to immerse the audience in reality). (362)

Sontag’s discussion of the relationship between theatre and film is, in this sense, very similar to Dubatti’s assertion that theatre’s specificity as a genre lies in its presence, or “convivio:” “If an irreducible distinction between theatre and cinema does exist, it may be this,” she continues.

Theatre is confined to a logical or *continuous* use of space. Cinema (through editing, that is, through the change of shot—which is the basic unit of film construction) has access to an allogical or *discontinuous* use of space. In the theatre, people are either in the stage space or ‘off’. When ‘on’, they are always visible or visualizable in contiguity with each other. In the cinema, no such relation is necessarily visible or even visualizable. (Sontag 362-7, original emphasis)

Russian filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, for example, applauded cinema’s capacity to move out of the theatre and into the factories and onto the streets (Mariela’s Russian lover, Dmitri, cites him during one of their conversations). Pensotti’s work does, however, seem to shun these established assumptions about what is specific to film and theatre, but fusing these two performance types together. There is, arguably no point in trying to create a hierarchy of importance between these two genres in *Cineastas*. When Dmitri talks about Eisenstein with Mariela, he provides a clue as to how the relationship between the two spaces in the performance are to be read. He cites Soviet montage theory, outlined in Eisenstein, Pudomn,



and Alexandrov co-signed “Statement on Sound” (1928). Soviet montage theory saw editing as the key to cinematic language, the production of meaning—a third meaning—taking place in the dialectic created between two juxtaposed shots. This seems to suggest that identities are produced in a kind of Kuleshov effect between our material surroundings and the influence of film on the way we perceive them. The dialectic between theatre and cinema thus seems to be the best medium for replicating this organic/virtual dialectic.

There is perhaps one citation, published in the programme of *Cineastas*, which could be read as a reference to theatre’s primacy over film: “Only the ephemeral is of lasting value.” Curiously, Pensotti attributes to Swedish filmmaker, Ingmar Bergman, although it is more often attributed to playwright of the absurd, Engène Ionesco (cit. Kershaw 118), in relation to the mundane and repetitive existence of the married couples in *The Bald Soprano* (1950), whose everyday lives are mechanically reproduced and ultimately devoid of meaning. The statement is clearly more relevant to theatre’s transient structure of performance than that of film’s mechanically reproducible performance. Although better known for his illustrious career as a filmmaker, it is important to remember that Bergman was also extremely active as a theatre director. Like Pensotti, he also dabbled with literature, authoring two autobiographical texts, the second of which—*Images: my life in film* (1994, trans. Marianne Ruuth)—if only for its title has clear resonance with the main theme in *Cineastas*. Might *Cineastas* represent its own creator’s biodramatic fantasy to live out an alternative life via film?

### **To conclude... Identity as intermedial?**

*Cineastas* creates a map of a generation, citing many of the tropes one might expect of the post-dictatorship period in Argentina and also more generally of the postmodern. Few of these references are, however, developed in any depth, which has led certain critics to suggest

that the performance “lacks flesh.”<sup>36</sup> I would, however, argue that the absurd and, at times, seemingly cursory references to these tropes are deliberate. The very colloquial nature of the expression adds to the flippancy at times.<sup>37</sup> Instead of the nostalgic lamenting of the dissipation of the real and a desire for its return (Žižek 10-1; Baudrillard)—a staple, if now rather tired organising principle of the postmodern and a founding idea of the biodrama series—or the need to liberate the spectator from the pernicious effects of the spectacle (Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator”), what I hope to have demonstrated in this piece is how Pensotti casts out existing categories and asks us to consider the more integral role that virtual spaces, such as cinema, play in making contemporary worlds, inflecting both our sense of being in and (dis)belonging to a specific place. The residue of such anxieties remains, but it is insufficient for fully grasping the role of virtual spaces in identity construction. If there is a message to be read in the medium, then Pensotti’s insightful hybrid theatrical-cinematic-installation draws a set of boundaries along which to interrogate the role of screen media—in this case cinema, but this might be extended to other virtual media—in making contemporary worlds. To this, I would add the important role of theatre, as cinema’s precursor in a continuum of performance types, in stripping these worlds of their screens, exploring “back stage” beneath the layers of mediation, taking the audience back to the original cinematic encounter and encouraging each spectator to reflect upon the role of screen media in the construction of identity.

What of the subjectivities and identities that are crystalized in this hybrid experience? The performance’s dialectic between the space of the real and the space of the film, their progressive conflation and interdependence should, I would argue, be read as a demonstration of the dialectic via which contemporary identities are negotiated. *Cineastas*’s hybrid structure is clearly instrumental in finding a medium suitable for capturing the way to better understand processes of identity construction. This could be likened to Sarlo’s argument that

the speculative structures of television and, what she terms “*la posibilidad estructural del zapping*,” shape contemporary social relations (60-1, original emphasis). I, however, prefer to liken *Cineastas* to Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges’s more playful and accepting account of his own hyper- or intertextual subjectivity. Borges’s *El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan* (1945) is cited as a seminal point of reference in the *New Media Reader* (Manovich 13-16), cited repeatedly as the first hypertext *avant la lettre*. Shortly before his death in 1986, Borges captured this idea of a intertextual construction of identity as a product of incorporated fictions: “No estoy seguro de que yo exista, en realidad. Soy todos los autores que he leído, toda la gente que he conocido, todas las mujeres que he amado. Todas las ciudades que he visitado” (n. pag.). *Cineastas* offers a contemporary variation on the same theme: the construction of the cinematic self and his or her hypertextual identities in the making of contemporary worlds.

*Newcastle University, United Kingdom*

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<sup>1</sup> This may seem like a rehashed version of the old adage “All the world’s a stage,” as cited from William Shakespeare’s play, *As You Like It* (1600, Act 2, Scene 7), but as I argued in a previous piece (Page 12) the conflation of aesthetics and politics becomes the object of reflexive interrogation in post-dictatorship Argentine theatre, in the wake of a dictatorship which, as Diana Taylor argues, was characterized by “obvious spectacularity” (273).

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup> On 19 December 2001, the Argentine people took to the streets under the slogan “Qué se vayan todos” [“Out with them all,” referring to the political class], in widespread demonstrations against the restrictions on the withdrawal of savings. Argentina ended up defaulting on its foreign debt payment and the peso devalued dramatically, putting an end to the fixed exchange rate. An economic, social and political crisis ensued that saw unemployment surge and just shy of half the population was classified officially as being below the poverty line. Alternative forms of representation and participation proliferated as

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the country saw five presidents in the mere space of two weeks. See Alejandro Grimson 2004; Mauricio Rojas 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in the introduction to Mariana Obersztern's biodrama, *El aire alrededor* (staged in 2003), Tellas states: "En un mundo descartable, ¿qué valor tienen nuestras vidas, nuestras experiencias, nuestro tiempo? Biodrama se propone reflexionar sobre esta cuestión. Se trata de investigar cómo los hechos de la vida de cada persona—hechos individuales, privados—constituyen la Historia" (Obersztern 46). The Menem mandate is often referred to as the "fiesta menemista," a decade of consumerism unleashed, also characterized by the well-known catchphrase "deme dos" [give me two of everything] evoking its excess. The recent election of President Mauricio Macri, who took office in December 2015 to follow Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's mandate, has revived fears of a return to the unchecked neoliberalism of the 1990s ("Primeros pasos de Macri prefiguran vuelta al neoliberalismo en Argentina" n. pag.). It has yet to be seen as to how independent theatre will react to this. The new regime already represents a threat to artistic spaces in the city of Buenos Aires ("El aumento de luz pone en alerta al teatro"), continuing with a policy that had already threatened to extinguish many independent cultural spaces under his mandate as President of the City of Buenos Aires ("Ola de clausuras culturales").

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Mariano Pensotti: < <http://marianopensotti.com/> > (accessed 21 Feb. 2016).

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup> "Ceci n'est pas use pipe" [This is not a pipe] is the legend written onto the canvass of Magritte's painting *La trahison des images* [The Treachery of Images] (1929). A similar juxtaposition was also established in the composition of his 1966 painting *Les deux mystères* [The Two Mysteries], as part of Magritte's continuing exploration of the relationship between reality and representation. This is certainly no coincidence, given that *Cineastas* was first presented at the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Belgium, whereupon the citation of one of Belgium's most famous painters would have taken on added significance as a wink to the local audience.

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

<sup>15</sup> I am referring here to French filmmaker Jacques Tati's film, *Playtime* (1967). Tati built a huge set to recreate Paris quite literally as a city of spectacle, as the Situationist International



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might have defined it. Its date of release coincided with the publication of Guy Debord's book *The Society of Spectacle* (the eponymous film, directed by Debord, was released in 1973). In Tati's Paris, the only recognizable image of Paris is a brief reflection of the iconic Eiffel Tower on the surface of a freshly polished window. The rest of the city is designed in monotonous grey according to geometric norms, to facilitate the steady uninterrupted flow of traffic, people and capital as businesses market their gadgets to eager consumers. The surfaces are so pristine that it is impossible for M. Hulot, Tati's anti-hero, not to slip and slide clumsily across them, or try to walk through apparently invisible glass doors. The trope of the screen is indeed vital to Tati's rendition of Paris, just as it is—albeit in its notable absence—in Pensotti's performance. The fact that M. Hulot cannot discern where there is glass and where there is not indicates that society is largely oblivious to the role of screens in mediating social interaction.

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

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

<sup>18</sup> Played by Javier Lorenzo, Valeria Lois, Juliana Muras and Marcelo Subiotto respectively. The fifth member of the cast is Horacio Acosta, who takes on various roles within the storylines centred on the four filmmakers. The only other onstage presence is that of a rather active and slick stagehand, who plays an important role in discretely removing all props from the initially laden lower level of the set as the performance unfolds.

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the biodrama series experiments liberally with the unstable frontier between reality and fiction. It is not a series that follows any aesthetic model and each individual biodrama offers a very different approach to Tellas's unifying concept. For more on the biodrama series, see Cornago (2005) and my previous study of the following biodramas (Page 127-60): *Los 8 de Julio* (Beatriz Catani and Mariano Pensotti, 2002), *Temperley* (Luciano Suardi and Alejandro Tantanian, 2002), *El aire alrededor* (Mariana Obersztern, 2003)

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

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

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

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



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

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

<sup>26</sup> For an image of the installation, consult Macchi's website: < <http://www.jorgemacchi.com/es/obras/106/guia-de-la-inmovilidad> > (accessed 21 Apr. 2016). Macchi also has an installation entitled "Buenos Aires Tour," which creates a psychogeographical Subte map of Buenos Aires, whereby the station names are marked by affect, an emotion evoked at each stop, rather than their name. To see how Pensotti uses the image on the home page of his own website, see: < [www.marianopensotti.com](http://www.marianopensotti.com) > (accessed 21 Feb. 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Gustavo Taretto's film, *Medianeras* (2011), as the title suggests, uses the sidewalls of Buenos Aires as a symbol for society's blinkered approach to navigating through the city, coupled with a series of miscommunications and mis-encounters between neighbours, save virtually via online chat forums.

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

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

<sup>30</sup> The use of McDonald's may seem to be something of a stereotype, but it is worth remembering that the economy of the theatrical stage means that props necessarily condense meaning and are required to carry the full symbolic weight of the phenomenon to which they refer. McDonald's has been an important symbol of globalization in its corporate form in Latin American popular culture. Examples are numerous: the *McOndo* narratives (edited by Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez in 1996) fuse the global, urban symbol of McDonald's with reference to the rural narratives of magical realism (Macondo) in order to explore urban living in Latin America under the influence of North American popular culture. Washington Cucurto (the pen name for poet and novelist Santiago Vega) explores the dissonant combination of the seductive allure of McDonald's, coupled with a rejection of the values for which it stands in two poems: "Mac Donald's" and "Mi hijo come su cucurucho." The first consists of satirical praise for McDonald's: "¡Gracias Macsito de Pueyrredón y Juan Perón / por bancarme las mañanitas a cambio de un café! / ¡Gracias bushísima cafetería del mundo

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moderno / por atar mis pensamientos en el vidrio sucio de los locales del Once! / [...] / ¡Gracias Macsito amigo del alma y de las circunstancias, qué pena me da cuando la multitud con banderas del Che vienen a romperte los vidrios y las persianas! / ¡Macsito de la Empresa Bushista viva tu imperialismo de mac combo, medialuna y café!” (71). Two pages later, a second poem makes reference to McDonald’s. This time, it is written in the confessional tone of a father, who recounts—somewhere in between exculpation and resignation—taking his eager son to eat his cone of fries: “¡No se enojen conmigo! / Mi hijo come su cucurucho / en el Mac Donalds ¡esa es la realidad! / Sé que mucha gente no simpatiza / ni menos llevan a sus hijos a un Mac Donalds. / Yo sí y mi hijo va contento: / (somos al fin de cuentas espíritus de la época). / Mi hijo devora su cucurucho como un tiburón...” (73). This very much echoes Lucas’s conflictive relationship with his employer.

<sup>31</sup> See < <http://marianopensotti.com/enciclopedia.html> > (accessed 24 Apr. 2016).

<sup>32</sup> See also *Alice in the Cities* (1974).

<sup>33</sup> In an informal conversation with Andrés Neuman in London in June 2014, I asked him about how he incorporates new media into his literature. He responded explaining that he saw them as a fully integral part of everyday life and thus integrated them freely into his narratives. His intention was to acknowledge their role in mediating relationships, rather than resist it.

<sup>34</sup> Pensotti and Tirante create a similar effect in their previous collaboration, *El pasado es un animal grotesco* (2012), by using a revolving set which is divided into four interior spaces representing the lives of four characters. The performance has a similar thread structure to *Cineastas* and, as the set revolves, the protagonist of the previous space becomes the narrator of the next story, using a roving microphone to create the effect of a voiceover narrative. Hence the stories live inside one another in a moebius-type configuration that is created in perpetuity by the performance’s mobile circularity.

<sup>35</sup> *The Truman Show*, directed by Peter Weir (USA, 1998), is a film about insurance salesman, Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey), whose entire life unbeknown to him is a popular television show. The limits of his world and the limits of the television series are synonymous. By the time *Cineastas* draws to a close, the two spaces—that of the real below and that of the film above—have conflated and Mariela, like Truman, finds herself in a giant television set replicating her origins. Her world has become a giant fiction.

<sup>36</sup> Discussion with Cecilia Sosa on the contribution to this special edition of the *Latin American Theatre Review*.

<sup>37</sup> One example is when Mariela draws inspiration from the musicals she is documenting: “Yo también tengo que ser entusiasta, como esas películas con Lenin encarando a las masas. Esa es la onda.”